

Biblical Ethics

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Source Material:

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Introduction to Biblical Ethics

We live in a divided culture. Recent elections reveal that citizens are almost equally divided on a number of important issues. Two candidates representing entirely different value systems may garner an almost equal number of votes. Conservatives tend to line up behind candidates that stand for traditional values, often centered in a Judeo-Christian understanding of the world. God and His Word present a consistent and unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and morality for such voters. Many people in the US identify with values based on such an understanding.

On the other side of the isle, many today reject the traditional, biblical value system in favor of a “progressive” one. Progressives are defined by the ideals of modernism, rationalism, and subjectivism. To these people truth is more a process than a constant authority. It is an unfolding reality rather than an unchanging revelation. For them, there is no absolute authority or truth beyond themselves. We could call such people liberals.

The result of these two world-views is a culture at war. Those who hold a traditional, biblical view of morality obviously behave and think in ways significantly different than progressives do. On nearly every significant issue, conservatives and liberals disagree. This is because their underlying way of looking at the world is different.

This series, Biblical Ethics, will explore the ways in which our culture is dealing with significant moral issues of the day. Our aim is to learn what the Bible teaches on such matters and encourage students to commit themselves to embrace and uphold biblical values.

Definition: What is “ethics”? Ethics deals with the question of morality—right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, Godly and ungodly. The dictionary definition states that ethics is “the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment.” One scholar suggests that “ethics might be called a system of moral values and duties. It has to do with ideal human character, actions and ends. What ought a person do or refrain from doing? What attitudes and behaviors should be viewed as good? And why should they be considered good? What is the highest good, ‘the chief end of man,’ the purpose of human existence?”¹ Ethics answers the question, “What does God require us to do and what attitudes does he require us to have today?” concerning any situation.²

Ethics is a set of governing rules based on a standard. When you make a choice based on your view of right or wrong, you’ve made an ethical choice. When you talk about whether or not an action is moral or immoral, you are talking about ethics.

¹ McQuilkin.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), p. 26.

Sources for Ethics

Whether or not people know it or admit it, everyone has a value system. Everyone has ethics. The source of one's value system is what makes the difference. How do people make up their minds regarding what is good and bad? People look to several sources for ethical input:

Law – Whatever is legal is acceptable from this viewpoint. If it's not against the law, it's acceptable.

Popular opinion – One simply “goes with the flow.” Take a poll of what the majority thinks and think that way yourself. If the popular people in society are doing it, it must be OK.

Science and Technology – anything that may be useful in advancing the cause of humanity is acceptable. Whatever prolongs or enhances life is good. If it can be done, it should be done.

Self – Whatever seems right to you is right irrespective of what others may think. “Do your own thing” aptly describes this value system. Follow your heart. As long as no one else gets hurt, please yourself. There is no standard outside of the individual. Follow your own thoughts and feelings to determine what is right or wrong. All ethical decisions should be made on the basis of personal benefit.

Love for Others – Whatever causes the most pleasure for the most people is good. Happiness is the greatest good. Whatever produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people is good. As long as an action produces a loving end, it is good. Moral good is seeking the welfare of mankind.

Note: Situation Ethics is based on this idea. This value system holds that in certain situations, doing what would normally be immoral may be the right thing to do. For example, if the truth will hurt someone, then a lie is acceptable. Or if one must steal to feed his family, it is morally acceptable to steal. The morality of an act depends upon the situation and the people involved from this viewpoint.

Duty – Good is whatever duty and responsibility require that one do. It is good to fulfill one's duty, whatever that may be, even if others consider it immoral.

Authority – Whatever your authorities tell you to do is good. Parents, teachers, coaches, pastors, bosses, and government officials set standards of conduct. One must obey them.

Pragmatism – Whatever works best is best. If something works well it must be good.

Rationalism – Whatever makes the most sense is good. Logic is the only test of morality.

Relativism —There are no absolutes, no moral rules that apply to everyone or to every situation. Make up your own morality as you go. Or choose no morality at all.

There are some who reject any kind of ethical system because they reject the whole idea that good and bad exist. They would say that values are simply opinions, and since everyone has a different opinion, it's impossible to make any kind of real moral judgments. One simply cannot claim that any behavior is right or wrong, good or bad. It's a waste of time to think about such things. But even such an idea is an ethical expression.

Followers of non-Christian religions have their own set of values. Sometimes these ethical standards are similar to Christianity (e.g., Orthodox Judaism, Islam), while some are clearly contrary to Christianity (Buddhism, Hinduism).

For many in our society, tolerance of differing opinions (values) is a great virtue. One should never criticize others for their ethical choices. Everyone should have the freedom to behave in ways they think are best, as long as those choices don't hurt others. Lack of tolerance is immoral. "Live and let live." The greatest virtue is allowing people the freedom to do whatever they want. The most immoral act is to force your own value system on someone else. What do we call this philosophy? *Libertarianism. This is why homosexuality is so acceptable in our culture. People desire to let others live the way they choose. They don't live that way themselves, but they think it's virtuous to refrain from criticizing others for their moral choices.*

Christian Ethics

It should be obvious that for Christians, the standard for judging values and morality is the Bible and the character of God. The Bible teaches us, both by direct command and by examples, what we should do and not do in many of life's situations. The Bible is a timeless and unchanging source of ethical standards. This is not to suggest that Christians don't disagree regarding what behaviors are appropriate (e.g., dress, hair length, forms of entertainment, smoking, drinking, etc.). However, in principle, Christians accept the value system taught in the Bible. If the Bible says nothing about a certain issue (e.g., TV, smoking), it likely contains principles that pertain. Further, the fact that Christians are to strive to imitate the character of God (i.e., holy, righteous, loving) helps them make ethical choices.

Christians believe that biblical standards should apply for everyone in every situation. That is, the Bible is not a book of standards just for Christians. Believers insist that the value system taught in the Bible is the one and only legitimate value system for the entire world. There is no other true value system, just like there is no other true God. The Bible is a revelation of God's will for human behavior. As such, it is the highest and final authority. Morality is objective, not subjective. That is, morality is not a matter of opinion or situation, but of obedience to a given standard outside of oneself. God has spoken, and it's our duty to follow the value system He gave us. We don't make it up as we go along.

Because conservatives in general find their ethical values in the Bible and Christianity, and because liberals in general get their values elsewhere, it should be no surprise that hostilities exist between the two groups. We should not be surprised when the ideas we hold most dear are so hated and rejected by those who reject Christian ethics. What we fight for, they fight against, and vice versa. That's because we embrace different world-views.

A Description of Biblical Ethics:

As we've already learned, ethics is a value system, a governing set of rules based on an authoritative standard. Christians recognize the Bible as that standard. The principles of Scripture must govern one's life. Followers of Christ must align their attitudes and actions with the teachings of the Word of God. Those who reject the Bible obviously also reject an ethical system based upon it.

The most basic list of biblical morals is found in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20, Deut 5):

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image,
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honour thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not murder.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10. Thou shalt not covet ... any thing that is thy neighbor's.

Notice that the first four commandments deal with our relationship to God, and the second six regulate our relationships with people. Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments when he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:37-40). Thus the first and greatest moral principle is that one must love God, and the second is that one must love his fellow man. All moral choices must take these two commands into consideration.

There are many other passages that give ethical direction. Christians generally uphold the following moral values:

1. The sanctity of human life – no one but God has the right to take an innocent life. Murderers give up their right to live when they take the life of another.
2. Sexual purity – any sexual activity prior to marriage or outside the bonds of marriage is wicked.
3. Property rights – everyone has the right to own things, and no one should be able to take away what is rightfully owned.
4. Honesty – one should always tell the truth and represent things as they truly are.

5. Submission to authority – one should honor and obey legitimate authority. Because “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom 13:1), Christians should be good citizens and support the government (within certain limits).
6. Love – one should treat others as one would want to be treated. Christians must love their neighbors as themselves. Loving your neighbor can best be defined as “that virtue of mind, emotions, and will which seeks another person’s highest good, according to scriptural standards.”³

God’s moral laws never genuinely conflict. There will never be a situation in which obedience to one ethical standard will require disobedience to, or the setting aside of, another legitimate rule. When standards *seem* to conflict, one must always obey the higher law.

Some moral absolutes require obedience directly to God. God’s commands that relate to Himself and His overall moral standards contain no exceptions or qualifiers. The commands “Thou shalt not lie ... steal ... murder ... commit adultery” etc., are never limited. They apply in all cases to everyone at all times.

Some moral absolutes require obedience to human beings to whom God has delegated authority. Such commands contain built-in limitations. Obedience to men always depends upon whether or not God’s overall moral standards will be upheld. For instance, the Bible commands children to obey their parents. But if the parents command the child to lie or steal, the child is obligated before God to disobey his parents. Why? Because the parents do not have absolute authority over the child; they have delegated authority. God alone has absolute authority over the child. God’s command to the child to obey his parents has a built in qualifier. He is to obey his parents unless their commands conflict with God’s moral standards. The same is true in one’s relationship to government (Acts 4:18-21; 5:27-29), and to church leaders. Sometimes one must disobey men in order to obey God. In such cases, it is not immoral to disobey those you normally obey. You are not breaking one rule by obeying another. In those cases when authorities require immoral behavior, they lose their moral right to command obedience.

Conclusion: Ethics is the study of standards of conduct and moral behavior – right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable. Everyone has a value system. While some people look to other sources of morality, Christians must follow the Bible and imitate the character of God. God’s standards are timeless and apply to everyone in all situations.

Every believer should strive to glorify God by living obedient, holy, and submissive lives. No matter what the situation, every believer must strive to conform to the image of Christ. Love for and obedience to God is the highest priority, followed by love for and obedience to man. This is the heart of biblical ethics.

Discussion:

³ Robert Rakestraw, “Ethical Choices: A Case for Non-Conflicting Absolutism,” *Criswell Theological Review* (2:2, 1988) p. 248.

1. Why is our culture so divided over ethical issues? *Because people accept different definitions of morality/ethics.*
2. Define “ethics.” *A system of moral values.*
3. What are some sources for ethical standards? *The Bible, self, popular opinion, science, others, pragmatism, rationalism*
4. Why are Christian ethics better than other systems of ethics? *Because they are based on ultimate truth—the Bible. Other systems are not rooted in ultimate truth.*
5. What is the most basic list of biblical ethics? *10 commandments*
6. What limitation is understood in delegated authority? *That one must obey God rather than men. I.e., that God’s law is higher than man’s.*

Excursus: Moral Immorality?

As we’ve learned, God’s moral laws never *genuinely* conflict. There will never be a situation in which obedience to one ethical standard will require disobedience to, or the setting aside of, another legitimate standard. However there may be the appearance of a conflict when one set of moral standards seems to come into conflict with another set. This is evident in a couple of cases: not telling the truth and war.

Tell the Truth, ...Usually.

A significant aspect of Christian ethics is truthfulness. The Bible repeatedly and strongly commands believers to tell the truth, to represent things as they actually are. Our God is called “the God of truth” (Deut 32:4; Isa 65:16). God is dependable, truthful and trustworthy. One of the Ten Commandments exhorts us, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Jesus referred to Himself as “the truth” (John 14:6). Falsehood and deceit is normally inconsistent with holiness. Thus, Christians have always held that honesty is the best policy.

However, as one reads the Bible, he finds several instances in which believers told bold-faced lies, and were even commended for it. For example, Rahab told a lie to the city officials regarding the whereabouts of the Israelite spies who were hiding on her roof (Josh 2:3). Rahab is regarded as a woman of faith (Heb 11:31), and the Israelites rewarded her for hiding them. The Hebrew midwives misled Pharaoh’s deputies regarding the birth of Hebrew infants (Ex 1:19-20). In this case, the text says, “God dealt well with the midwives” and blessed them for their deceitful actions. Thus we have a seeming contradiction: we are commanded to be truthful, yet there seems to be occasions when lying is allowed, even expected. How can this be?

The principle of “higher law” comes into play in the cases of Rahab and the Hebrew midwives. Loyalty to God outweighs the truthfulness that is normally due to man. Rahab knew that the Israelites were about to conquer Canaan, and she also recognized that “the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” She had apparently become a believer in the God of Israel. Hence, she understood that in disobeying the king of Jericho and harboring the enemy spies, she was being obedient to God and helping to

fulfill His overall plan. Likewise, the Hebrew midwives understood that their primary loyalty must be to God, even if that required misleading government officials. Peter and the other apostles, when told to stop preaching about Jesus, refused to comply and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). To cite a more modern example, many Protestants hid Jews in their homes during the Nazi Holocaust during WWII. Doing so was against the law and was the source of much deceit and falsehood. Yet such deceit was not immoral; in fact, it was the right thing to do. Thus, in some situations, a lie may serve to advance God’s cause. It may be ethically acceptable to withhold information, to mislead, to misrepresent, or to deceive in any number of ways. Such cases are few and far between, perhaps during war or within a criminal situation. We should never employ deceit unless we are sure that it is necessary—that we cannot both tell the truth to man and obey God. Normally, it is our duty to be truthful in every situation and to hate lying and deceit. *Another example: a robber comes to your house and asks where the valuables are—do you have to tell the truth? A kidnapper asks, “Is this your child?” – do you tell the truth? Your moral responsibility to protect your family outweighs your moral duty to tell the truth.*

War...Spy vs. Spy

There may be other times that normal standards of morality are set aside temporarily. During times of war, it’s certainly not immoral to lie to an enemy in order to hide or obscure information about your own forces. It’s not immoral to try to trick the enemy into believing something that is not true. Neither is it immoral to kill the enemy. God commanded the Israelites to totally destroy all the Canaanite people and even their animals. Israel would be God’s instrument to carry out His judgment on the exceedingly sinful Amorites, whose time for destruction had come (Gen 15:16; Deut 20:8). Thus, although the Bible normally prohibits the taking of life, there are occasions when killing another human is not immoral. *We’ll study more about war later in the series.*

Abortion: Murder of the Unborn

Abortion is one of the most divisive and controversial issues of our day. Just mention the subject and you're likely to have a debate, if not a brawl, on your hands. It's one of those black-and-white issues that most people are passionately for or against.

Those who support the right to abortion focus on the rights of the mother. She has the right to determine her own life, to choose whether or not to have a baby. If she isn't emotionally or financially ready to support a child, she should have the option of "terminating" the pregnancy. Women who conceive a child through sexual abuse (rape, incest) should not be forced to bear that child. It would be better to abort the child than to bring it into a dysfunctional family situation. Further, the fetus is not a person until it is born. Women should be free to enjoy sexual relations without the threat of producing children.

Others focus on the life of the baby, asserting that an unborn child is just as human as one who has been born. The mother should not have the right to end the life of her child just because she doesn't want it. Because an unborn child is fully human, killing it is murder.

History: The practice of abortion has been common throughout history. However, many cultures considered abortion to be a serious crime. Part of the Hippocratic Oath, which most doctors endorse, states in part, "I will not give a woman a [drug] to produce an abortion." The Jewish people were historically against the practice, as were the leaders of the early church. Until a few decades ago, most laws in the US recognized that a woman was "with child" at the moment of conception.

In the mid-1960's, abortion laws became more tolerant in the US. The Supreme Court legalized abortion in the landmark Roe v. Wade case in January 1973. The majority of the court found a "right to privacy" somewhere in the US Constitution that guaranteed a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy if she so desired. After that case, abortion became legal in every state. From that time to the present, over 46 million⁴ babies have been put to death in the US. In the year 2004, there were about 1.2 million abortions performed. While recently some restrictions have been imposed on the practice, abortions are still legal and available in most places in the US and in many foreign countries. Thankfully, the abortion rate has been falling lately.⁵ The US still has the highest abortion rate among developed countries.

Definition: Abortion is the expulsion or removal of a child from the uterus at a stage of development when it is incapable of independent survival, resulting in its death. A "zygote" is a fertilized egg, the earliest form of the baby. "Embryo" refers to a child at

⁴ This number does not include chemical abortions or forced labor abortions. Some believe that as many as 87 million abortions of all types have been performed in the US since 1973.

⁵ The abortion rate climbed to a peak in 1990, when about 1.6 million abortions were performed. The abortion rate has steadily declined since then.

the early stages of development. “Fetus” refers to a baby after the first three months of life. Most abortions are performed within the first trimester (3 months).

The Procedure: Abortion is likely one of the most barbaric and inhumane practices ever devised by sinful man. Normally a surgical instrument of some sort is inserted into the womb. The doctor then uses the instrument to cut the unborn baby in pieces. Sometimes a sharp-tipped vacuum pipe is used to both cut the baby up and suck him out. Another process injects a strong salt solution into the fluid surrounding the baby. The salt poisons the child to death. Perhaps the most gruesome method is the D & E, or “partial birth abortion,” in which the doctor delivers the baby’s body except for the head. He then kills the baby, collapses its skull, and delivers it the rest of the way. The newest method of abortion is in the form of a pill, RU 486. This drug causes the uterus to shed its lining, which dislodges the fertilized egg or embryo, all of which is expelled. RU 486 is more than 95% effective in terminating a pregnancy within the first 7 weeks.

Statistics:

During the next 24 hours, about 3,000 girls ages 15-19 will become pregnant in the US. More than 1000 of them will have abortions. Of those who get pregnant, half give birth, almost half abort, and the rest miscarry.

70% of teen girls think they should have the final choice if she wants an abortion.
57% of teens would advise a pregnant friend to have the baby.

A 1998 New York Times/CBS poll⁶ showed that almost two thirds of American adults believe women should have the legal right to have abortions performed during the first three months of pregnancy.

Social or “birth control” reasons account for approximately 93% of all abortions. That means that the majority of abortions occur simply because the mother does not want the baby. Rape, incest, health of the baby, and threat to the life or health of the mother account for less than 7% of all abortions.

91% of abortions are done in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, 4% after 16 weeks, and only about 1% after 20 weeks. Legal abortions almost never occur after 24 weeks in the US. In the third trimester, after viability, states may ban abortions, except where the life or health of the woman is at stake. Third trimester abortions are illegal in most states. The national standard for viability is 24 weeks.

At current rates, an estimated 43 percent of American women will have at least one abortion by the age of 45. Two-thirds of all abortions are among never-married women. Fifty-two percent of U.S. women having abortions are younger than 25 years old. About 13,000 abortions each year are attributed to rape and incest—representing 1 percent of all abortions.⁷

⁶ Cited on Planned Parenthood web site <http://www.plannedparenthood.com>.

⁷ According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of the nation’s leading abortion provider, Planned Parenthood.

What Americans Think about Abortion:⁸

57% believe that abortion is murder.

67% believe that a woman and her physician should be able to decide to have an early abortion.

85% say abortion is OK if life of woman at risk.

54% say abortion is OK if woman's emotional health threatened.

66% say that abortion is OK if the fetus is at risk of an abnormality.

65% say that abortion should be illegal in 2nd or 3rd trimester.

43% support for Roe v. Wade court decision.

The Ethics of Abortion

The ethics of abortion revolves around the question of when an unborn child becomes a genuine human being, deserving of the normal protections that all other humans expect. Is one a complete human upon conception, or only after being born? In other words, is a fertilized egg (a zygote) a human being in the same sense as is an eight-month-old fetus or a ten-year-old child? Is a zygote a whole human deserving of human rights or is he/she only a human potentially, deserving no special protections until after birth? This is the center of the argument.

Typical "pro-choice" arguments:⁹

- ☐ A woman has the right to choose what happens to her own body. A woman's choice to deliver or abort a baby is hers alone.
- ☐ The fetus is not a human being. It is a glob of tissue, potentially human, but not fully human. The fetus is not an independent person but is totally dependent on the body of the woman for its life support and is physically attached to her. Only after birth can the baby be considered its own person.
- ☐ An unwanted pregnancy would be inconvenient, expensive, and may needlessly endanger the life of the mother.¹⁰ Young women especially are not ready to take on the roll of mother and should not be forced to care for an unwanted child.
- ☐ If unwanted babies are not aborted, they will likely be raised in unloving, abusive families. Motherhood should never be punishment for having sex. Many unwanted babies are abused, neglected and/or battered or even killed by unloving or immature parents. Many women make mistakes in having babies they don't want and can't love or care for. They should not be penalized further by being forced to carry the baby to term.
- ☐ An embryo or fetus aborted in the first trimester cannot feel pain because its nervous system is not yet functioning to that level. Medical researchers and medical literature

⁸ LA Times June 2000 cited a poll conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University polled 2,071 Americans from JUN-8 to 13. 2 Margin of error is 2 percentage points.

⁹ Surf to <http://www.wcla.org/articles/procon.html> for an explanation of the two sides of the debate from a pro-choice perspective.

¹⁰ Bringing a child to birth is far more dangerous for the mother than is an early abortion.

say that the pathways in the brain that permit the sensation of pain develop after 30 weeks. So killing the fetus before that does not cause pain.

- There is nothing immoral or evil in abortion. The Bible does not prohibit the practice. Personhood at conception is a religious belief, not a provable biological fact. The religious community disagrees about the morality of abortion. It's wrong to impose one's own moral/ethical choices on others. Because abortion is a religious issue, one should not try to make it illegal through legislation or the courts.
- Laws have never stopped abortion, but only banished it to back-alley butchers. Abortions will happen whether the practice is legal or not. It's best to make it legal to protect all parties involved.

We will approach this issue on two fronts: biblically and scientifically. We'll first see that biblical principles support the idea that an unborn child is fully human and deserving of protection. Then we'll see that science proves that an unborn child is clearly human well before birth.

Biblical Principles Supporting the Humanity of an Unborn Child

There are several lines of evidence in the Bible that strongly suggest that an unborn child is fully human and just as valuable as anyone else.

1. In the Bible, Personal Pronouns and Proper Names are Applied to Unborn Children.

Genesis 4:1 - *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.*

Psalms 51:5 - *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

Psalms 139:13 - *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

The unborn, even at the zygote stage, is referred to in a personal way. Eve became pregnant with Cain. David was a sinful human from the time of conception, and his body was knit together in his mother's womb.

Luke 1:44 - *As soon as the sound of your voice reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

Human emotion is explicitly attributed to the unborn John. Emotion is an aspect of personality. Thus it would seem that the Bible attributes personality and therefore personhood, to the unborn.

2. The OT Law Views the Unborn as Fully Human Persons.¹¹

¹¹ Along with the sources mentioned above see: House, "Miscarriage or Premature Birth: Additional Thoughts on Exodus 21:22-25," WTJ (Fall 1988); Congdon, "Exodus 21:22-25 and the Abortion Debate," Bib Sac (April 1989), Kaiser, "Exodus," p. 434; Durham, Exodus, WBC, pp. 323-4.

Exodus 21:22-25 – *If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*

There is solid evidence that this text refers not to a miscarriage but to a premature birth. The point of the passage is that both the mother and the unborn child are of equal value. If neither the premature child nor the mother is hurt, a simple fine is levied. However, if either is hurt, the guilty party will be punished in kind, even to the point of death. Thus the Mosaic Law views both the unborn and the adult as equally human, equally valuable. “The text then gives no credence to abortion of the fetus but rather reveals the sanctity of both adult and fetal life.”¹²

3. The Bible Indicates that Humanness is Transferred to the Unborn Child.

Psalms 51:5 - *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

This verse strongly supports the idea that a fetus is indeed an individual human person. A glob of non-human tissue cannot be “sinful.” But David asserts that he was sinful from the time of conception, which could be true only if he were fully human from that point.¹³ Every aspect of the parents’ humanity is transferred to the newly conceived child. The fetus is by nature as fully sinful and as fully human as his parents.

4. God’s Interest in a Person Begins Long Before Birth.

Psalms 139:13-16 *For You have possessed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are marvelous and my soul knows it very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret and skillfully formed in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo; and in Your book all my members were written, the days they were formed, and not one was among them.*

This passage strongly suggests that much more is going on in the womb than just the growth of a bunch of cells. David attributes all the activity to God—God possessed, covered and made David while still in the womb. God skillfully formed the baby’s body. God even saw him prior to birth. His “embryo” (unformed body) and even the course of his life was determined. Hence, in God’s eyes, even an unborn baby is a person.

Jeremiah 1:5 *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*

¹² House, p. 123.

¹³ Because David received his parents’ total depravity at his conception, we find support for the Traducian view of the origin of man – an individual is not directly created by God but rather is a product of procreation reflecting his parentage.

Isa 49:1 Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.

Potential reasons why the Bible says nothing about abortion:

- 1) Abortion was so unthinkable to a Jewish woman that there was no need to mention it in the Jewish law code;
- 2) Children were viewed as a gift from God, not an inconvenience;
- 3) God is sovereign over conception and birth. The inability to conceive children suggested God's curse to the Jewish mind.

The general teaching of the Bible is that a child is human, whether before birth or after. Hence, the taking of the life of an unborn child is murder.

Medical/Scientific Proof that an Unborn Child is Human

Only the most blindly passionate advocate of abortion questions the fact that an unborn child is fully human. There are several facts that strongly affirm that an unborn child is human:

1. At the moment of conception the sperm fertilizes the egg, and a dramatic and instantaneous change occurs. These two cells form a new cell, which has a genetic uniqueness, completeness and wholeness as a one-celled zygote. Such a zygote formed at conception has all the genetic identity and programming to mature into an embryo, a fetus, a baby, a child, a teenager, an adult. The one-celled zygote is fully human life.¹⁴
2. The embryo is genetically distinct from its mother. It has 46 chromosomes, its own DNA, and is kept separate from its mother's system by the placenta. Thus, the baby is clearly not just a part of the mother's body. It's not independent of the mother, but it's not the mother.
3. The heart of the baby is formed and operational very early in pregnancy, around the 20th day. Brain waves begin around the fortieth day. Heartbeat and brain activity are signs of independent life. All biological human functions are present by 12 weeks. The slogan "Abortion stops a beating heart" is true in most cases.
4. It's clear that the baby is able to sense pain very early on in its life. It is able to react to various stimuli, such as sound, movement and temperature.

Nothing magic occurs at birth which suddenly makes an unborn baby human. The baby is the same baby, whether inside or outside the uterus. Every unborn baby is a complete, individual, living human being from the earliest moment of his or her existence at fertilization. Whether or not the baby is able to sense pain or is dependent on the mother

¹⁴ John C. Rankin, "The Corporeal Reality Of Nepes And The Status Of The Unborn," *JETS* 31/2 (June 1988) 153-160.

does not matter. An unborn child is distinct from its mother and is a fully human being who deserves the full protection of the law.

Medical science keeps pushing back the time of viability, i.e., when a baby can survive outside the mother's womb. If killing a born, pre-mature baby is murder, then killing one of the same age, but still within the mother's womb, is no less murder. Currently, the edge of viability is at about 19 weeks after fertilization, and babies born at 22-23 weeks commonly survive (36 weeks is the normal gestation period). At 11 weeks, all organ systems are functioning. The baby could stand on an adult's fingernail. The baby even has eyelids, nails, and fingerprints. The baby has a skeletal structure, nerves, and circulation. From this age on, there is only growth in size and maturation of the organs already present. From a biological point of view, there is little difference between an unborn fetus and a born infant. If killing a child after birth is immoral, killing one a few weeks or months prior to birth is equally immoral.

Quality of Life vs. Value of Life

Since one cannot deny the biological data supporting the human life of an unborn child, abortion proponents have shifted the argument to the value of life rather than the presence of it. If an unwanted child would have a negative impact on the quality of the mother's life, she should abort the child. If the child will be a financial or emotional drain on the parents, they should abort it. If the child will have physical or mental problems, abort it. Individual self-interest demands that unwanted babies be done away with.

"Morality" for abortion supporters consists of giving women the freedom to abort their children if they so desire. Taking away this right to "self-determination" is immoral. They consider access to abortion a "basic human right." The availability of safe and legal abortions is a sign of a mature civilization, they contend.

Biblical ethics demands that all humans hold value. From the very young to the very old, all humans share the image of God and possess the rights common to all people. Once someone tries to determine what lives are "valuable" and what lives are not, humanity starts sliding toward barbarism. Any scheme that attempts to define "worthwhile" or "useful" life may easily exclude the unborn, blacks, Jews, gypsies, the handicapped, mentally ill, infirm aged, or whoever those in political power decide do not meet their standards for human personhood. It's happened many times historically, and abortion proponents want to continue the practice.

The weak and handicapped need special help and attention, not destruction. Further, no one has the right to murder anyone else. Taking away a woman's ability to legally kill her child is not immoral. Society should protect and nurture the innocent, not allow them to be flushed down the toilet.

Conclusion: According to the biblical evidence, God recognizes the humanity of a child long before its birth. Unborn children, at whatever stage of development, are individual persons with all the rights afforded to other humans. Because an unborn child is in the

image of God, we must acknowledge the sanctity of his life. Medically speaking, the unborn child is just as human as a born child is. Therefore abortion is the taking of human life, and is condemned as the sin of murder. Abortion is not the answer to the problem of unwanted pregnancies.

Human life is a gift from God, and its origin in biological terms reflects the order of creation. Specifically, at the point of conception the one-celled human zygote is a person in the fullest theological sense, an image-bearer of God deserving the same respect and protection that we as Christians afford all human beings.¹⁵

Discussion:

1. Abortion is legal in the US. Does that make it morally acceptable? *No, many immoral things are legal—e.g., drunkenness, fornication, lying, etc.*
2. Can God forgive someone who aborts her child? *Yes, God can forgive murder.*
3. What happens to aborted babies? Do they have souls? *The Bible is not explicit on this topic. David felt confident that he would see his son who died shortly after birth.*
4. Is abortion allowable in cases of rape or incest? *No. Two wrongs don't make a right. The woman should give birth to the child and adopt it out. The unborn child is a victim, not the cause of the problem. The fact that the mother had no choice in the conception does not reduce the child's right to life. Historically, many fine people have been conceived thru rape or incest.*
5. Is abortion allowable if the parents know that the child will be physically or mentally handicapped? *No, one's humanity is not based on his physical or mental abilities. Such people have a right to live just as much as anyone else. Also, who would choose the standard of physical or mental "normalness"?*
6. When does a person become a person? *Most likely, at conception (the zygote stage). All the elements for life are present as soon as an egg is fertilized.*
7. What's the problem with a drug-induced abortion like RU 486? *It causes the death of a fertilized egg, which has all the potential for full human life. However, of all the abortion methods, this is the least offensive. Many zygotes are expelled naturally. Only about 50% end up living under normal circumstances.*
8. What are the primary arguments against abortion? *Biblically and medically, there is no distinction between a baby before birth and after birth. Both are equally human and deserve protection. Killing an innocent human is murder.*
9. What are the alternatives to abortion? *If you don't want to get pregnant, don't have sex. Biblical morality prevents abortions. There are various ways to prevent pregnancy. If a girl gets pregnant, she can give the baby up for adoption.*

¹⁵ IBID.

Excursus: Harvesting Human Body Parts

What to do with the bodies of aborted babies has always presented a problem for abortionists.¹⁶ A grisly industry that has arisen as a result of abortion rights is the sale of human body parts for scientific research. Although the dead bodies of aborted babies are of no use to their mothers, scientist around the world are using them for research. And abortion providers are happy to sell the parts to the highest bidder. The distribution of fetal body parts to scientists is a million-dollar industry. One sales brochure includes the following price list:

spleens, ears, and eyes for as little as \$50 (“40% discount for single eye”), to the pricey gonads for \$550, “Intact trunk (with/without limbs)” for \$500, “Intact embryonic cadaver (>8 weeks)” for \$600, and a “Brain (>8 weeks)” for \$999, but “30% discount if significantly fragmented.”

Another organization charges \$150 for the retrieval of a liver and a spinal cord goes for \$325.

Scientists depend on human body parts for research they believe may yield breakthroughs in a number of diseases, such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s, that affect millions of people. The “stem cell” is an important part of this research.

The stem cell is a unique and essential cell type found in animals. When stem cells divide, some of them mature into cells of a specific type (heart, muscle, blood, or brain cells), while others remain stem cells, ready to repair some of the everyday wear and tear undergone by our bodies. These stem cells are capable of continually reproducing themselves and serve to renew tissue throughout an individual’s life. For example, they continually regenerate the lining of the gut, revitalize skin, and produce a whole range of blood cells. The most fundamental and extraordinary of the stem cells are found in the early-stage embryo. These *embryonic stem (ES) cells*, unlike the more differentiated adult stem cells or other cell types, retain the special ability to develop into nearly any cell type. *Embryonic germ (EG) cells*, which originate from the reproductive cells of the developing fetus, have properties similar to ES cells.¹⁷

Scientists have long recognized the possibility of using such cells to generate more specialized cells or tissue, which could allow the generation of new cells to be used to treat injuries or diseases, such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, heart disease, and kidney failure. Likewise, scientists regard these cells as an important—perhaps essential—means for understanding the earliest stages of human development and as an important tool in the development of life-saving drugs and cell-replacement therapies to treat disorders caused by early cell death or impairment. Some hope to grow such cells into bone marrow, or new skin for a burn patient.

Many pro-life advocates object to the use of taxpayer funds for fetal-tissue research. For instance, they say that scientists might become dependent on such tissue simply because of the availability of it. Furthermore, they say, because women who have made a decision to undergo an abortion now may donate their fetus for research, the social, ethical, and

¹⁶ At the Mayfair Women’s Clinic in Aurora, Colorado, abortion workers fed dead baby bodies through an old-fashioned hand-cranked meat grinder and then flushed the material down sink drains. Cited in “A New Growth Industry in Baby Body Parts” By Susan Wills.

¹⁷ Ethical Issues in Human Stem Cell Research, Executive Summary, Sept 1999.

moral stigma attached to the act is reduced because the patients believe they ultimately are doing something good.

This type of research denies the personhood of the unborn child, while acknowledging that his tissue is useful precisely because it is human. Scientists recognize the humanity of the child because of its parts, yet do not acknowledge its humanity when it comes to taking its life. Fetal tissue research in effect says to the unborn, “you can be useful to society, you just can’t be a member of it.”

Although some good can come through fetal tissue research, Christians should stand against the practice. The ends do not justify the means.

Euthanasia: Murder of the Infirm

In April of 1982, an infant was born in Bloomington, Indiana with Down's syndrome and a misformed esophagus, which prevented normal feeding. The parents of the child had refused permission for corrective surgery and had ordered the doctors to withhold all nourishment. Even though ten different couples had expressed interest in adopting the child, the parents refused to give up custody. At an emergency hearing, the justices of the Indiana Supreme Court voted 3-1 to support the wishes of the parents. The Court was, in effect, allowing the parents to starve their deformed infant to death. The baby died on April 15, 1982.¹⁸

Bill is a 67-year-old man with severe heart and lung problems. He began to experience frequent chest pain and he looked progressively worse. After a conference between the doctors and family regarding the medical inability to prevent Bill's heart and lung problems, serious questions were raised about continued treatment. "Should Bill be resuscitated if his heart stopped?" "Should he be placed on a respirator again?" Realizing the suffering both her father and the family would experience, one of Bill's daughters inquired about the possibility of so-called "active euthanasia," utilizing a drug to end Bill's life quickly. Instead, at the prompting of the doctors, the family opted for what the doctor called "passive involvement," i.e., no treatment except to provide comfort. Because of Bill's consistent determination to live, the family felt it was in Bill's best interest not to inform him of this decision. Bill's wife felt that Bill's courage notwithstanding, he would probably in fact appreciate the doctor deciding not to prolong his life. Three days later, Bill's heart stopped beating, and no attempt was made to revive him.¹⁹

Such cases as those described above are quite common. "Seventy percent of those alive in the United States today will at some point be faced with a decision about whether or not to provide lifesaving medical care for themselves or family members. Over two-thirds of all physicians have already been involved in such decisions with their patients."²⁰ Christians cannot avoid the topic of euthanasia. Many of us will be faced with decisions related to it at some time in our life.

Definition: The term "euthanasia," despite the sound of the word, has nothing to do with youth in Asia. It comes from two Greek terms, *eu* meaning "happy, good," and *thanatos* meaning "death." Typically in our culture, the term refers to "mercy killing," the deliberate killing of a person, through active or passive means, who is suffering an illness believed to be terminal. One writer defines it as "withholding or withdrawing treatment for the purpose of bringing about or hastening death, or taking specific, deliberate steps to end a life when that person is not immediately dying."²¹

¹⁸ Cited by Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, p. 158.

¹⁹ John Kilner, *Life On The Line*, pp. 3-5.

²⁰ Kilner, p. 75.

²¹ Mark Blocher, *Vital Signs*, p. 120.

Euthanasia is becoming more common and popular around the world. Recent laws passed in the US make the taking of one's life lawful under certain circumstances. Many people see no reason not to end one's life if it has become painful or useless. If a person is suffering or if he is just a vegetable, why not end such a life? Dr. Jack Kevorkian has earned himself the nickname "Dr. Death" as an advocate of mercy killing. He has made himself famous by inventing a machine he uses to help people kill themselves. He has used the machine to end the lives of about 60 people. Imprisoned in 1999, he is currently serving out a 10 to 25 year prison sentence for second-degree murder in the 1998 poisoning of a man in Michigan. The recent Terri Schiavo case, in which nutritional support was removed from a brain-damaged woman, causing her death, has again brought the issue to the attention of the American people.

As we saw with the abortion issue, the question in euthanasia has become a quality of life issue. Those who support the practice assert that if one's life has become too painful, or if one can no longer function in an adequate way, or for any other reason that makes life unbearable, one should be able to end his life. The issue is not the presence of God-given life, but how well someone enjoys his life. People in our culture more commonly do not recognize that life is sacred and valuable in spite of suffering and difficulty. They do not recognize God's providential hand governing their circumstances.

How should Christians respond to this issue? On the one hand, compassion leads us to end needless suffering. On the other hand, we recognize that God is sovereign over life and death. There are no easy answers to this moral question, but the Bible gives us principles which help us come to acceptable conclusions.

The Four Categories

Euthanasia is usually divided into four categories:

1. Voluntary Passive euthanasia is that form of euthanasia where the medical personnel, at the request of the patient, merely allows nature to take its course. In this case the physician does nothing to extend life or to hasten death. He simply provides care, comfort and counsel to the dying patient. His attention turns from curing the disease to making the patient as comfortable as possible.
2. Voluntary Active euthanasia, also called "mercy killing" and "assisted suicide," involves the patient requesting the physician to hasten his death by taking active measures to accomplish it, such as lethal injection.
3. Involuntary Passive euthanasia occurs in those instances when the patient has not expressed a willingness to die or cannot do so. Typically, the physicians will not go to any extraordinary measures to save the patient, and will withhold treatment and in many cases nourishment, liquids, and oxygen. The intent in this case is to hasten death.
4. Involuntary Active euthanasia involves a physician hastening a patient's death regardless of his wishes. This form of euthanasia is obviously murder.

These four categories answer two basic questions: "Is the patient willing?" and "Is the death intended?" The question of whether or not death is intended determines the

morality of the situation. The most important issue here is the motive of those providing the patient's care. If the caregivers take the life of the patient, they have committed murder. Similarly, if the caregivers take away needed treatment with the intent of ending the patient's life, they are also guilty of murder. Those who consider nourishment, liquids and oxygen to be "treatment," and take them away are certainly committing murder. By so doing they are killing the patient by starvation, dehydration and/or suffocation. However, if continuing treatment is useless and the patient's death is imminent, and the caregivers stop treatment with the intent of providing the greatest amount of comfort to the dying patient, then no sin is involved.

Christian Ethics as Applied to Euthanasia

Here are a few biblical principles that help guide us as we consider this issue:

1. God, not man, is sovereign over life and death.

"Euthanasia has as its philosophical underpinning the notion of a right to die. The belief that every individual has the right to control his own life extends to his right to end it."²² If the phrase "right to die" refers to suicide (which is its meaning within our culture), it is a right that does not exist. It is not a human right for the following reasons:

- ☐ Suicide is, in essence, self-murder which is prohibited by God.
- ☐ God is sovereign and He alone determines the length of our days (1 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 39:4).
- ☐ Because the Christian has been purchased by God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), he is responsible to honor God in his life. He does not own himself. God owns him.
- ☐ Physical life is essentially good, not merely a means to another good. Our bodies are not incidental to our existence; they are an necessary aspect of our being. Thus our physical life in itself is good.

2. Killing an innocent human is wrong no matter how merciful it may seem to be (Gen 9:6; Ex 20:13).

- Man is made in God's image; therefore, life is sacred. God is the only one who has a right to make or take innocent life.
- If one takes the life of another human, he gives up his own right to life.
- Circumstances do not change this principle. That fact that one is in pain, suffering financial difficulties, disabled mentally or physically, or depressed does not warrant the taking of his life.
- God uses pain and suffering for His own purposes. For believers, God causes all things to work together for good (Rom 8:28). To attempt to alleviate the suffering through causing premature death shortcuts God's plan for the individual.

²² Blocher, p. 120.

3. There is a distinction between protecting life and prolonging suffering.

- The Bible commands us to protect the life of the innocent, the helpless, and the suffering. We should provide the ordinary means of sustaining life – food and water, shelter, normal medical care, etc.
- We must make a judgment call between protecting life and prolonging suffering. With today's medical technology, doctors can keep a person's body functioning far beyond the time it would naturally die. In order to do so, extraordinary means are often employed, e.g., organ transplants, mechanical body parts, exotic drugs, electrical stimulation, etc. Such measures extend life, but they may only prolong suffering without offering any hope of the patient returning to a normal lifestyle. This is where the patient and his family must decide the extent of medical services to be applied to the case.

Death has come to be defined as the cessation of brain activity for a period of 24 hours. Previously the cessation of heart activity was considered death. Today, the heart of a person with little or no brain activity may go on beating for years. One's body continues to function with the help of medical aid, but for all intents and purposes, when brain activity has stopped, he is dead.

Possible options when dealing with the terminally ill:

1. Speed the death of those who are suffering from an incurable illness and who desire to die. This is murder.
2. Allow a person to die if death is inevitable. This would include withholding or removing ordinary or extraordinary means (some states will not allow removal, once instituted). This is more difficult to determine. If a person can continue living with intravenous aid, then is removing such support murder? What if a person has little or no brain activity?
3. Use ordinary means to support life. Providing food and water but no major surgery, no resuscitation, etc.
4. Use extraordinary means to support life. Provide all the medical help possible to keep someone alive. This would include transplants, exotic drugs, resuscitation, etc. Some would keep a person alive even if all brain activity had stopped.

General Principles:

1. Because man is made in the image of God, life has dignity and value no matter what other circumstances may come into play. Humans do not have a "right to die." Suicide is self-murder and is immoral.
2. God is sovereign over life and death. No one should seek to "play God" by taking the life of one who would not die naturally. Death is inevitable, yet we must allow it to overtake us—we must not seek it. One should not be considered to be dead until heart and brain activity cease naturally.

3. Christian ethics demand that the infirm be treated in a humane, compassionate way. We should do everything within our power to alleviate suffering, provide comfort and extend life. This would include administering drugs to decrease pain (Prov 31:6).
4. Murder in any form is immoral. It is unethical to hasten the death of a person in most circumstances. One does not forfeit his life simply because he is in pain or because he is no longer a “useful” member of society. We must respect human life even in tragic circumstances.
5. One should not remove food, water and oxygen support from a dying person unless doing so would be in the person’s best interests.
6. God has a purpose for pain and suffering. Although we may never understand why we have to endure tragedy, pain and loss, we can trust that God is working out His plan in our lives. Attempting to kill oneself is a rejection of God’s plan.

Conclusion:

The issue of death and dying is not as cut-and-dried as we would like it to be. “Mercy killing” may seem to be more merciful than prolonging one’s suffering, but biblical ethics teaches us that God is merciful, and that He is sovereign over life and death. We may expect death and prepare for it, but we must not hasten its arrival.

Discussion:

1. Define euthanasia. *Mercy killing; physician assisted suicide. Literally means “good death.”*
2. Is it ever morally acceptable to hasten the death of a suffering person? *No. It’s OK to let nature take its course, but we should not try to speed up the death of a critically ill person, even if they’ll die anyway.*
3. How do we know that the so-called “right to die” is not a legitimate human right? *It has no basis in the Bible. Suicide is sin.*
4. What’s the difference between protecting life and prolonging suffering? *As long as a person is alive, we should attempt to keep him alive. However, if the person is suffering greatly and death is imminent, we should let him die rather than revive him.*
5. What are the evidences of physical death. *Cessation of heart beat and brain activity for 24 hours.*

Genetic Engineering

What is Genetics?²³

The dictionary defines “genetics” as the study of biological variation. It could also be defined as the study of the DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) in a living organism. The DNA code contains all the information, stored in a long chain chemical molecule, which determines the nature of the organism—whether it is an amoeba, a pine tree, a robin, an octopus, a cow or a human being—and which characterizes the particular individual. Unless you are an identical twin, your detailed genetic make-up is unique to you. Individual genes are particular sections of this chain, spaced out along it, which determine the characteristics and functions of our body. Defects of individual genes can cause a malfunction in the body, and are the roots of many genetic diseases, such as Down’s syndrome, sickle-cell anemia, Huntington’s disease, and cystic fibrosis. Even color blindness is a genetic defect. Recent breakthroughs in identifying these genes for possible substitution with healthy genetic material offer amazing new hope for those previously doomed to either an early death or lingering lives of agony.²⁴

What is Genetic Engineering?

Genetic engineering is an umbrella term which can cover a wide range of ways of changing the genetic material (the DNA code) in a living organism. Scientists now have the ability to manipulate—or engineer—the genetic code of an organism to produce a desired effect. For example, scientists can create a strain of corn that resists insect attack through manipulating the genetic code of the corn. They can create plant hybrids that can grow in places that normally could not support such life. In years past, farmers and scientist were limited to selective breeding to produce a desired effect. Today, they can “engineer” the effects they want by directly manipulating the DNA code of the plants and animals.

Some uses of genetic engineering:

- to repair a genetic defect;
- to enhance an effect already natural to that organism (e.g., to increase its growth rate);
- to increase resistance to disease or external damage (e.g., crops—blight, cold, insects or drought);
- to enable it to do something it would not normally do (e.g., getting a micro-organism to produce human insulin for diabetics, or a sheep to produce a human blood-clotting protein in her milk, or getting a tomato to ripen without going squashy);

²³ Much of the material in this section comes from an article at <http://ds.dial.pipex.com/srtscot/geneng1.htm>.

²⁴ Michael McKenzie, *Genetics And Christianity: An Uneasy but Necessary Partnership*, Statement DG125 *Christian Research Journal* (Fall 1995).

- to pick and choose desired qualities (e.g., researchers recently announced a technique that allows them to sort sperm by X and Y chromosome and give parents a 93 percent success rate in choosing the gender of their baby.)

Genetic mapping

Our understanding of human genetic makeup has been greatly expanded by a systematic mapping process known as the Human Genome Project (HGP), carried out internationally with enormous commercial and government funding. Completed in 2003, the international project identified all the approximately 20,000-25,000 genes in human DNA,²⁵ determine the sequences of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA, and stored this information in databases for scientist to use in efforts to treat diseases. Of all the scientific endeavors yet attempted by humankind, historians will probably rank this among the most significant achievements

A genome is the entire DNA structure in an organism, including its genes. How an organism looks, metabolizes food, fights infection, and even acts, is determined by genetic information. The human genome is the sum total of most of the information that makes us human, the information that directs the fertilized ovum to develop into a complete human. Such information is critical in carrying out genetic engineering.

Genes not only separate species, but also affect individuals within a species. We have long known that skin color, hair color, height, weight and other physical traits are genetically based, but now it also appears that many personality traits are rooted in genes. Genes and intelligence are closely linked. The vast majority of human disease is genetically based. Heart disease and cancer are influenced by environment and lifestyle, but rooted in genes. Diabetes, epilepsy, allergies, Parkinson's disease, and a multitude of other sicknesses are gene based. Mental illnesses like depression and schizophrenia have their foundation in DNA. And some social diseases like alcoholism and drug addiction are genetically influenced. Some scientists suggest that criminal behavior may be genetically influenced.²⁶

The ability to detect such genes now means we can use the tests for screening, especially prenatally. Screening for various diseases is not, strictly speaking, the same thing as manipulating or "engineering" them. Many genetic factors for common disease will be found in the next few years. In turn, that will allow a DNA-based determination of individual risk of future illness or adverse drug response, facilitating individualized preventive medicine.²⁷

²⁵ The exact number of genes encoded by the genome is still unknown, but estimates are in the 23,000 range. Oddly enough, that's not much more than the simple roundworm has. Before the project found otherwise, scientists believed the human genome must contain at least 100,000 genes.

²⁶ Rev. Paul Peterson *Genetic Engineering*, Lecture Seven, Christian Bio-Ethics © 1999.

<http://www.bighole.com/church/geneticengineering.htm>

²⁷ Francis S. Collins, <http://www.nature.com/nature/supplements/collections/humangenome/commentaries/0009hgc.pdf>

Recombinant DNA

A new technique known as recombinant DNA, or gene splicing, allows scientists to alter an organism's genes directly by joining its DNA to the DNA of a second organism. The process can be likened to taking a long, thin garment with a constantly varying pattern along its length, snipping out a section of pattern (an individual gene), modifying it and putting it back, or putting in a section with a different pattern (gene) taken from another garment. When introduced into another organism, the resultant recombinant DNA permanently changes the genetic makeup of that organism and alters the proteins that its cells produce. The change is passed on to descendants of the genetically altered organism.

Recombinant DNA has been used to give crops immunity to plant viruses, to make them resistant to frost, and to cause a delay in fruit ripening so spoilage can be slowed. In fish, growth hormone of trout has been genetically transferred to carp to make the carp larger. Recombinant DNA is used to produce bacteria that can be used to decompose garbage or petroleum products.

Recombinant DNA technology is used to produce vaccines by altering the structure of the virus used in them. A relatively safe virus can now provide immunity to more harmful ones, such as hepatitis, influenza, and herpes simplex viruses. Gene therapy, in which a healthy gene is directly inserted into a person with a malfunctioning gene, is under study.

Critics of recombinant DNA fear the accidental production of harmful disease organisms, the incorporation of allergens in food, and the displacement of natural plant populations with genetically altered species.²⁸

Cloning

Cloning is not actually genetic engineering because the genetic material of an organism is copied rather than manipulated. Cloning is the bypassing of natural, random recombinations of DNA in favor of creating a carbon copy of a currently existing genome. Cloning essentially copies the entire genetic contents of a nucleus or a cell. Using a technique called nuclear transfer, technicians remove the nucleus from an egg cell and, with an electric pulse, fuse the denucleated egg cell with a whole cell. The electric pulse also stimulates the egg to start dividing, becoming an embryo. The embryo is implanted in a surrogate mother.²⁹

Cloning has been practiced for many years in species like frogs, and more recently (1997) in the case of Dolly the sheep. While human cloning is not yet technologically possible, it perhaps will be in the foreseeable future.

Stem Cell Research

Embryonic stem cells are special cells which exist just before the embryo begins to split into different types of cells. At this point they have the potential to form any type of cell in the human body, and they can also be kept in the laboratory in a cell culture for very long periods. In November 1998, after many years of research, such cells were isolated

²⁸Encarta® 98 Desk Encyclopedia © & 1996-97 Microsoft Corporation.

²⁹ IBID.

for the first time. In principle, you could now take a human embryo, extract these cells, and chemically direct them into becoming any particular type of human cell—skin, heart, nerve cells and so on.³⁰ As we saw in our study of abortion, scientists are very interested in using stem cells to treat various diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and heart disease. But the harvesting of embryonic stem cells destroys a fertilized egg, thus taking a human life. Further, embryonic stem cells have not yet successfully treated any disease. Adult stem cells are found in many different parts of the body, are currently being used to treat a multitude of diseases, and pose no moral problems in their use or manipulation.

Three Basic Types of Genetic Therapy:³¹

- Somatic cell gene therapy involves injecting healthy genetic material into patients with genetic diseases. This procedure has proven highly successful, and often provides the patient with a chance at complete recovery. Since the reproductive cells of the patient are not involved, the effects of the therapy—either good or bad—are not passed to the offspring.
- Germline therapy, involves the rearranging of the patient's own genetic material in such a way that he or she produces new healthy genes. The complexity of this procedure makes it more risky. Moreover, since it alters the patient's reproductive genetic material, any harmful effects unintentionally introduced into the patient are passed down to offspring. Thus, until risk to both the patient and offspring can be further assessed, we must be cautious about this type of procedure.
- Enhancement therapy, which involves not the healing of disease, but the "improvement" of average or less than average characteristics. Hence, the principle behind this therapy is different from that of the previous two. No longer is it a case of fixing a broken part, but of adding something new to a normally functioning system.

Christian Ethics Applied to Genetic Engineering

The complicated challenges facing modern Christians call for thorough reflection and an unbiased application of enduring biblical principles to a new situation. Christians have what the secular world does not have: infallible and unchanging principles to guide their thinking and behavior.

Like any other technology, genetic engineering offers prospects of both great promise and great peril. For the first time in human history it is possible to redesign existing organisms completely, and to direct the genetic and reproductive potential of all living things. In the wrong hands, such abilities could be devastating.

The following principles should guide our thinking about genetic engineering:

³⁰ *Therapeutic Uses of Cloning and Embryonic Stem Cells*, a Science, Religion and Technology Report from the Church of Scotland.
<http://ds.dial.pipex.com/srtscot/cloning.shtml>

³¹ McKenzie

1. God is sovereign over all life. No matter how sophisticated biological technology becomes, God still controls life and death.
2. Man is totally depraved. Most scientists do not recognize God's authority over them and are thus not interested in the ethics of their activities. Man's wisdom is limited and his morality is corrupted. Most of the time he will pervert and destroy the gifts that God gives him. Hence, we should be very careful and hesitant about allowing fallen man to manipulate the very foundations of life. More than likely, he will make things worse rather than better.
3. Doctors and scientists should focus genetic technology on healing rather than on enhancement. If the goal of genetic therapy is to heal disease, then there is no problem. But Christians should stand against genetic manipulation designed to select or enhance desirable traits to produce a "better" human.
4. Human life, with the image of God and an accompanying ensoulment, begins at conception. We are also responsible for how we treat the most helpless in our society (i.e., what Jesus called "the least of these"). Thus there should be important limitations for prenatal testing, and genetic diagnostics must not be used to pressure parents into abortion.
5. God's Word is clear that humankind—both corporately and individually—is fully responsible for actions the Bible calls "sin." Consequently, Christians should resist attempts to convert all antisocial behaviors into genetic diseases that nullify personal responsibility and accountability. For example, drunkenness is a sin, not a disease.
6. The attempt to create new forms of life, or to significantly change natural life, is at odds with Christian ethics. God created plants and animals in certain "kinds." Redesigning organisms through genetic tinkering trespasses on God's role as creator. It is, therefore, immoral to use genetic technologies as human eugenics and human cloning.
7. An attempt to clone humans would undoubtedly result in the destruction of many human embryos and would likely produce serious genetic accidents. Human cloning, if it ever becomes possible, strays significantly from God's plan for natural human reproduction within the bonds of marriage.
8. Genetic screening of children before birth may be of benefit, as long as parents are not pressured to abort a child found to have genetic defects, like Down's syndrome. Unfortunately, many hospitals and insurance companies do pressure parents to abort such children.
9. Couples who are worried about being carriers for congenital disease may wish to undergo their own genetic screening before conceiving a child in order to assess their chances of a normal conception. The screening results may indicate that adoption is the best choice for such couples.

Other Potential Dangers of Genetic Engineering:

1. Couples could use genetic tests to find out or even pre-determine certain qualities of their children. Children who do not meet expectations would be terminated (aborted). Children who test positive for certain genetic disabilities may be aborted. More and more parents are opting for abortion for a host of reasons, ranging from mild retardation to even sex selection.
2. Technicians could produce many human embryos for research. Most of these would be killed in the process. Genetic study may also employ aborted human fetuses, which tends to support abortion and creates traffic in the sale of body parts. Perhaps it will be possible someday to clone colonies of people simply for the task of organ harvesting.
3. Employers or insurance companies could exercise genetic discrimination. Only those individuals who have the “right” genetic makeup would be employed or covered by insurance. Perhaps if someone had the “wrong” genetics, he would be prevented from having children, working a certain job, or living in a certain place.
4. Some would likely seek to create a genetically superior race of humans, like the Nazis attempted to do during WWII. All those who did not meet the genetic standard would be terminated. Powerful people could impose their idea of genetic superiority on the weak. This practice is sometimes called “eugenics.”
5. Scientist could mistakenly unleash “monsters” into the environment. For example, an organism might inadvertently be given the genetic structure for some disease or virus for which there would be no vaccine. New organisms could cause the extinction of native species. Cloned organisms may be prone to weakness and disease. Dolly the sheep died somewhat prematurely from lung disease.
6. Genetic technologies, and access to them, could further divide society into the “haves” and the “have nots.” Likely only the rich and powerful would have access to gene therapy.
7. Criminals could potentially use genetic information to create all sorts of havoc. For example, if one’s DNA code served as a sort of password to gain access to information, criminals would seek to steal that code and use it for their own purposes. Once genetic manipulation technology becomes more common and user-friendly, all sorts of criminal activity could result.

Conclusion: The mapping of the human genome, cloning, sex selection, designer babies, attempts to create superior races of people through eugenics, and gene therapies to end genetically related diseases and extend life expectancy—none of these things are science fiction. They are the reality we face in the coming decades.³² It’s morally acceptable for scientist to manipulate genetic materials in an effort to eradicate disease or to prolong life. However, Christians should stand against efforts to create new life forms and processes that destroy human life and/or the environment.

³² Petersen.

Discussion:

1. What is DNA? *Deoxyribonucleic acid. It's the building blocks of life, a chemical code that tells a cell what to do.*
2. What is genetic engineering? *Manipulating the genetic code of an organism to produce a desired effect.*
3. How could genetic engineering be beneficial? *By treating genetically based diseases or by creating strains of plants that grow better.*
4. What are some of the dangers of genetic engineering? *Creation of "monsters," destruction of the environment, use of aborted fetal tissue and the destruction of human zygotes, the potential for genetic discrimination and/or eugenics.*
5. What are the pros and cons of prenatal genetic screening? *Pros – the couple find out if their baby will be healthy. Cons – doctors and insurance companies often pressure parents to abort babies with genetic problems.*
6. What should be the Christian response to genetic engineering? *To the degree that it can benefit mankind without trespassing on God's design for creation, it may be useful. We should go slowly and proceed with great care, because man tends to destroy rather than protect.*

The Media

We live in an era commonly called “the Information Age.” Why is that description of our time appropriate?

Information comes to us via the media. More than ever before, we are bombarded with information through various media outlets. Anytime of day or night we can find out what’s going on almost anywhere in the world. We have more information available to us today than ever before. Since we are surrounded by media, we must develop the ability to evaluate the messages that come to us through media.

Media can and does have some positive benefits. Viewers come into contact with ideas and information that they would not otherwise learn about. Media can unify people around major events and ideas. The educational, entertainment and information powers of media are significant and undeniable.

Media also have negative effects on those who access it. Media presents only part of the picture—the part the producers want you to see or read. The values transmitted through the media are often hostile to Christian traditional values. And the media frequently presents an unreal view of the world. Further, the media desensitizes its viewers to pain and suffering. In an effort to capture and keep audiences, media often include explicit scenes of sex, violence and shocking language. The amount of sexual content in media is at an all-time high.

The news media has become a primary shaper of our perspective on the world. Unfortunately, most of those producing news programs are out of step with their audience. Media executives tend to be liberal politically and apathetic morally. The media elite have a liberal, secular, humanistic bias. Most support such issues as homosexuality, abortion, and sexual freedom. One study showed that 93% of those working in the media never attend religious services. Thus, the news tends to come from a secular, urban, liberal perspective that differs significantly from that of the average citizen.

When reading a newspaper or magazine, listening to the radio, or watching TV or a movie, people must be aware that the information they are receiving is most likely biased toward an anti-Christian worldview.

Controlling Ethical Guidelines

Psalm 101:3 *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes.*

Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

Colossians 3:2 *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

1 John 2:15-17 *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the*

world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

From these texts we learn:

- ✓ Don't watch immoral images;
- ✓ Think about positive ideas rather than negative, sinful ideas and/or images;
- ✓ Think about spiritual realities rather than worldly, temporary things;
- ✓ Avoid those things that produce lust and a love for the world.

Unfortunately, much of today's media does the exact opposite. The ideas it presents are worldly, sinful, and tend to stimulate our sinful nature. Television is a perfect example of this. TV is the dominant form of media in our culture, and our ethical approach to TV watching can be applied to most forms of media today.

Television Dominance

Note the Quote: In our culture most people watch [TV] most of the time. After sleeping and working, watching images on a video tube is what we do with consciousness. It is our favorite way to pass time. More than 95 percent of American households have at least one television set, and it is on more than six hours a day. We spend the equivalent of a day a week watching it. Well over eighty million households have this thing as part of their lives, and asked if they would give up the [TV] or a family member, most respond that the [TV] stays. More American households have televisions than have indoor plumbing.³³

Some Startling Stats:

- 96% of American households have one TV, many have more than one.
- Children between the ages of 2 and 12 watch an average of 25 hours of TV each week.
- Nearly half of all 12-year-olds watch an average of 6 hours of TV a day.
- By the time an American child graduates from high school, he will have spent 15,000 hours in front of a TV, compared with only 11,000 hours in the classroom.

Why should we be so concerned about TV? Because it is the most accessible and influential media source for most of us. Much of what comes through the TV screen is unethical from a Christian point of view.

³³ James B. Twitchell, *Carnival Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 195.

Note the Quotes:

Television is thus not simply the dominant medium of popular culture, it is the single most significant shared reality in our entire society.³⁴

TV not only induces addiction to itself: it induces addiction to the sensibility of popular culture—the quest for novel, distracting, and easy entertainment.³⁵

[TV] corrupts consciousness, the work ethic, natural desires, concentration, and culture itself. . . . Television dulls perception, flattens consciousness, manipulates desire, breeds decadence, fosters escapism, insulates the senses, . . . makes us [selfish], passive, and superficial, and also increases aggression.³⁶

Problems with TV:

1. TV glamorizes negative role models. How many truly godly or even respectable characters are there on TV shows?

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scoffers! Psalm 1:1

He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. Proverbs 13:20

Learn not the way of the heathen. Jeremiah 10:2

We ought not to let negative TV characters influence us. Don't talk like they do, dress like they do, act like they do, etc.

2. TV exposes the viewer to immorality.

Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. Ephesians 5:11-12

Probably the best term to describe the content of many TV shows is vulgar, i.e., base, coarse, crude, indecent, unrefined, offensive, in bad taste, shocking, rude, disgusting, and/or repulsive. "To be vulgar is to be crude and noisy, to lack reason, contemplation, and any sense of the transcendent."³⁷ Watch any prime-time action thriller, cop show, or comedy, and you'll likely see a great deal of vulgarity in language and behavior.

TV is infamous for "pushing the envelope." That is, they constantly seek to extend the limits of acceptability. Little by little, they add offensive elements to programming, like profanity, partial nudity, sexually explicit language, vulgar terms, etc. As time passes, things once offensive, shocking and unacceptable become normal and common.

³⁴ Kenneth Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, p. 160.

³⁵ *Shoes*, p. 184.

³⁶ *Carnival Culture*, p. 250.

³⁷ *Shoes*, p. 142.

Quote: “Since it is the purpose of most forms of popular culture to provide exciting distraction, we should not be surprised that over time, television programs, popular music, and other forms become more extreme (and more offensive) in their pursuit of [stimulation].”³⁸

The following are common messages and themes that TV programs promote.

- Any form of sexual expression is morally acceptable and normal. TV programs often depict relationships that rapidly progress to sexual activity. The risks and ethics of promiscuity are seldom addressed.
 - Homosexuality is normal. More and more, this type of sexual perversion is portrayed on TV as completely normal or some sort of valid alternative lifestyle. Many homosexual characters are now part of the TV landscape.
 - Authority figures are incompetent fools. Teachers, preachers, parents and government officials are often portrayed in a negative light.
 - Violence is an acceptable way of handling problems. It has been proven that watching violent behavior tends to influence the viewer to become more violent. Watching gory horror shows numbs one’s normal sympathy toward the victims of violence.
3. TV promotes pleasant fantasy over unpleasant reality.
Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit. 1 Peter 1:13
“Entertainment reaches out to us where we are, puts on its show, and then leaves us essentially unchanged, if a bit poorer in time and money. It does not (and usually does not claim to) offer us any new perspective on our lives or on other matters in creation.”³⁹
TV promotes escapism. It’s very easy to simply “zone out,” become a spectator, and turn off your mental capacities while watching TV. Studies have shown that while watching TV, brain activity is at a very low point. This is very dangerous because it is then that TV has its greatest influence.
4. TV promotes a materialistic viewpoint.
“The salient fact is that commercial television is primarily a marketing medium and secondarily an entertainment medium.”⁴⁰
The primary reason TV exists is to get money from sponsors, who in turn want consumers to see their products advertised. TV promotes consumerism. The real bottom line is money, not entertainment. The entertaining content of a program is simply the means of getting the most people to tune in and receive advertisement messages. Commercials are often the slickest, funniest, and most entertaining moments on TV.

³⁸ *Shoes*, p. 61.

³⁹ *Shoes*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ *Carnival Culture*, p. 206, quoting Peter Andrews, “Peddling Prime Time,” *Saturday Review* June 7, 1980, pp. 64-5.

5. Other negatives associated with TV:
- TV displaces active types of recreation and exercise. It may take the place of music, sports and/or peer interaction. This is especially dangerous for those who tend to be shy and withdrawn. If accompanied by snacking, TV viewing may contribute to weight problems.
 - TV discourages reading. Reading requires more brain activity and thinking than watching TV. A decline in reading scores and vocabulary is linked to excessive TV viewing. Once out of school, almost 60% of Americans never read another book. One writer concludes that TV “eats” books.
 - Heavy TV viewing reduces school performance. TV decreases one’s ability to pay attention.
 - TV fosters a skewed sense of reality, a distorted view of the world. Programs often present a problem or situation and solve it in 22 minutes. Characters and situations on TV rarely reflect true conditions. Children up to age 10 have difficulty separating fact from fantasy; they believe what they see on TV.

Setting Limits on TV Viewing:

1. Limit the time you spend watching. The Bible tells us to use our time wisely. You can almost always find something better to do with your time than watching purely entertainment-oriented TV.
2. Decide on standards of acceptability and unacceptability. Don’t watch anything if nothing worth watching is on.
Psm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.
Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.
3. Mute commercials.
4. Be skeptical. Don’t zone out. Try to pick up on negative messages. Understand that much of what is on TV is trivial, meaningless and superficial. Don’t put a high value on programs or personalities. Don’t let TV become a habit.
5. Discuss the content of TV shows. Analyze the show and talk to others about the messages the show is communicating.

Be an active, aware TV viewer. Don’t just sit there and absorb everything that comes on the screen. React. If something offensive comes on, turn the channel or turn it off.

Remember the goal: we want to reduce or eliminate the negative effects that the media have on us. We don't want to adopt the value system or the way of thinking of the immoral culture in which we live. In order to do so we must use our discernment: make an evaluation based on biblical standards. If a media resource is acceptable, okay. If not, reject it.

Note the Quote: There is nothing wrong with frivolous activity for one whose life is not committed to frivolity. There is no harm in superficial pleasures for one who also has a knowledge of the tragic and of the transcendent. The subjectivism of popular culture is impotent for someone whose life is characterized by rootedness in objective reality. Christians should not fear the idols and myths of our day, as long as they have no reverence for them.⁴¹

Conclusion: Media has many benefits but can have a negative influence on us. We must be discerning about how much exposure to media we allow ourselves because much of it runs counter to Christian values and ideas. We must employ biblical principles and standards when evaluating to what extent we will access media. Christians can enjoy media, as long as they are discerning in their access and follow the guidelines listed above.

⁴¹ Shoes, 87.

Alcohol and Drugs: Use and Abuse⁴²

Habakkuk 2:15 *Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!*

Startling Statistics:

The average age of first alcohol use is 12, and the average age of first drug use is 13.

10% of the adults in the US are alcoholics.

93% of all teenagers have some experience with alcohol by the end of their senior year of high school, and 6% drink daily. Almost two-thirds of all American young people try illicit drugs before they finish high school.

One out of sixteen seniors smokes marijuana daily, and 20% have done so for at least a month sometime in their lives.

60% of teens say concern over drug abuse was their greatest fear—outranking fear of AIDS, alcohol, unemployment, and war.

Over 65% of the nation's seniors currently drink, and about 40% reported a heavy drinking episode within the two weeks prior to the survey.

Alcohol is a factor in 58% of all marital violence, 41% of all child molestation, 60% of all murders, 54% of all rapes, 46% of all theft cases. 46% of teenage suicides had been drinking alcohol before taking their lives.⁴³

The total economic cost of alcohol abuse and alcoholism is about \$85 billion each year.

There is not much difference between teens who attend church and those who don't when it comes to substance abuse. According to a recent study, 88% of unchurched young people reported drinking beer compared with 80% of church youth. 47% of unchurched young people have tried marijuana compared with 38% of church youth. For amphetamines and barbiturates, 28% of unchurched youth have tried them as well as 22% of church youth. And for cocaine use, the percentage was 14% for unchurched and 11% for church youth.

Types of Drugs

☹ Alcohol

Alcohol is the most common drug used and abused. It is an intoxicant that depresses the central nervous system and can lead to a temporary loss of control over physical and mental powers. The signs of drunkenness are well known: lack of coordination, slurred speech, blurred vision, and poor judgment. The amount of alcohol in liquor is

⁴² Much of this material comes from Kerby Anderson's *Moral Dilemmas*.

⁴³ Cited in McQuilkin, p. 97.

measured by a “proof rating.” For example, 45 percent pure alcohol would be 90-proof liquor. A twelve-ounce can of beer, four ounces of wine, and a one-shot glass of 100-proof liquor all contain the same amount of alcohol.

In recent years, debate has raged over whether alcoholism is a sin or a sickness. The Bible clearly labels drunkenness a sin (Deut 21:20-21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-20). Modern science has shown that certain people are genetically predisposed to react strongly to alcohol, and thus tend to become alcoholics. But that does not reduce or eliminate anyone’s responsibility to control himself. Some people are simply more likely to become alcoholics than others.

The social costs of alcohol are staggering. Alcoholism is the third largest health problem (following heart disease and cancer). There are estimated 10 million problem drinkers in the American adult population and about 3.3 million teenage problem drinkers. Half of all traffic fatalities and one-third of all traffic injuries are alcohol-related. Alcohol is involved in 67 percent of all murders and 33 percent of all suicides.

Alcohol abuse is also a prime reason for the breakdown of the family. High percentages of family violence, parental abuse and neglect, lost wages, and divorce are tied to the abuse of alcohol in this country. In one recent poll, nearly one-fourth of all Americans cited alcohol and/or drug abuse as one of the three reasons most responsible for the high divorce rate in this country.

The toxic effects of alcohol are also well known: they often cause permanent damage to vital organs like the brain and the liver. Death occurs if alcohol is taken in large enough amounts. When the blood alcohol level reaches four-tenths of 1 percent, unconsciousness occurs; at five-tenths of 1 percent, alcohol poisoning and death occurs.

- ☹ Marijuana (a.k.a. ganja, hashish, hash, bhang, keif, pot, grass, Mary Jane, Acapulco gold, sinsemilla)

Marijuana is produced from the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*), which grows well throughout the world. Marijuana has been considered a “gateway drug” because of its potential to lead young people to experiment with stronger drugs such as heroin and cocaine. In 1978, an alarming 10 percent of all high-school seniors smoked marijuana every day. Although that percentage has dropped significantly, officials still estimate that about one-third of all teenagers have tried marijuana.

Marijuana is an intoxicant that is usually smoked in order to induce a feeling of euphoria lasting two to four hours. Physical effects include an increase in heart rate, bloodshot eyes, a dry mouth and throat, and increased appetite.

Marijuana can impair or reduce short-term memory and comprehension. It can reduce one’s ability to perform tasks requiring concentration (such as driving a car). Marijuana can also produce paranoia and psychosis. Because most marijuana users inhale unfiltered smoke and hold it in their lungs for as long as possible, it causes damage to the lungs and pulmonary system. Marijuana smoke also has more

cancer-causing agents than tobacco smoke. Marijuana also interferes with the immune system and reduces the sperm count in males.

☹ Cocaine (a.k.a. chalk, paper, milk, flour, salt, ivory, lily, swan)

Cocaine occurs naturally in the leaves of coca plants and was reportedly chewed by natives in Peru as early as the sixth century. It became widely used in beverages (like Coca-Cola) and medicines in the nineteenth century but was restricted in 1914 by the Harrison Narcotics Act.

Some experts estimate that more than 30 million Americans have tried cocaine. Government surveys suggest there may be as many as 6 million regular users. Every day some 5,000 people sniff a line of coke for the first time.

Cocaine is a stimulant and increases heart rate, restricts blood vessels, and stimulates mental awareness. Users say it is an ego-builder. Along with increased energy comes a feeling of personal supremacy: the illusion of being smarter, sexier, and more competent than anyone else. But while the cocaine confidence makes users feel indestructible, the crash from cocaine leaves them depressed, paranoid, and searching for more.

When the popularity of cocaine grew in the 1970s, most snorted cocaine and some dissolved the drug in water and injected it intravenously. Today the government estimates more than 300,000 Americans are intravenous cocaine users.

☹ Crack

Crack is crystallized cocaine that can be smoked. Crack got its name from the crackling sound it makes when heated. A single hit of crack provides an intense, wrenching rush in a matter of seconds because it is absorbed rapidly through the lungs and hits the brain very quickly. Crack is the most dangerous form of cocaine and also the most addicting. Many blame crack for increasing crime rates, devastating families and communities, multiplying health emergencies and the incidence of syphilis and AIDS as users engage in indiscriminate sex.⁴⁴

The cost to an addict using crack is one-tenth the cost he would have paid for the equivalent in cocaine powder just a decade ago. Since crack costs much less than normal cocaine, it is particularly appealing to adolescents. About one in five 12th graders has tried cocaine, and that percentage is certain to increase because of the price and availability of crack.

⁴⁴*The People's Chronology* is licensed from Henry Holt and Company, Inc. Copyright © 1995, 1996 by James Trager. Microsoft Bookshelf '98.

☹ Hallucinogens

The drug of choice during the 1960s was LSD (lysergic acid diethylamid), often called “acid.” People looking for the “ultimate trip” would take LSD or perhaps peyote and experience bizarre illusions and hallucinations. In the last few decades, these hallucinogens have been replaced by PCP (Phencyclidine), often known as “angel dust” or “killer weed.” First synthesized in the 1950s as an anesthetic, PCP was discontinued because of its side effects but is now manufactured illegally and sold to thousands of teenagers. PCP is often sprayed on cigarettes or marijuana and then smoked. Users report a sense of distance and estrangement. PCP creates body-image distortion, dizziness, and double vision. The drug distorts reality in such a way that it can resemble mental illness. Because the drug blocks pain receptors, violent PCP episodes may result in self-inflicted injuries.

☹ Synthetic Drugs

The latest scourge in the drug business has been so-called designer drugs. These synthetic drugs, manufactured in secret laboratories, mimic the effects of commonly abused drugs. Since they were not even anticipated when our current drug laws were written, they exist in a legal limbo, and their use is increasing. One drug is MDMA, also known as “Ecstasy.” It has been called the “LSD of the ‘80s” and gives the user a cocaine-like rush with a euphoric feeling. Ecstasy was sold legally for a few years despite National Institute on Drug Abuse fears that it could cause brain damage. In 1985 the DEA outlawed MDMA, although it is still widely available.

Other drugs have been marketed as a variation of the painkillers Demerol and Fentanyl. The synthetic variation of the anesthetic Fentanyl is considered more potent than heroin and is known on the street as “synthetic heroin” and “China White.”

Biblical Ethics Applied to Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol⁴⁵

With the rampant abuse of alcohol in this country, resulting in shattered lives and tens of thousands of deaths each year, any person with a conscience should be deeply concerned about this issue. The Bible has a great deal to say about alcohol, the most common and most abused drug. Scripture admonishes Christians not to be drunk with wine (Eph. 5:18) and calls drunkenness a sin (Deut 21:20-21; Amos 6:1; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-20). The Bible also warns of the many dangers of drinking alcohol (Prov 20:1; Isaiah 5:11; Hab 2:15-16).

Perhaps the most vivid biblical description of inebriation is found in Proverbs 23:29-35. The writer depicts the drunk as experiencing woe, sorrow, wounds and bloodshot eyes. Drunken people “behold strange women” and “utter perverse things.” Although the experience is like being sick or physically beaten, alcohol has such a hold on the drunkard that he seeks to indulge again as soon as he wakes from his stupor. A wise

⁴⁵ For a fuller treatment of this topic, see the [extra material](#) at the end of the series.

person will avoid wine because at the end it “bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.” Solomon advises his readers not to spend time among poverty-stricken, raggedy “winebibbers.” Perhaps the most well known warning about alcohol abuse asserts that “wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” (Prov 20:1). The Bible conclusively condemns the abuse of alcohol.

What about the word “wine” in the Bible?

The word “wine” occurs about 230 times in the Bible. The word can refer to fermented wine or to fresh grape juice containing little or no alcohol. The alcoholic content must be determined by the context in which one finds the word. The fact that wine is often used in a context of getting drunk (or making merry) indicates that in general the word “wine” refers to an alcoholic beverage. Even “new” or “sweet” wine had the power to cause intoxication (Hos 4:11; Acts 2:13).

Was Bible wine fermented?

Since the process of distillation⁴⁶ was not discovered until the ninth century AD, any alcoholic beverage mentioned in Scripture would be so by natural fermentation. Ancient people were able to prevent fermentation through various processes, but most people did not bother. Freshly squeezed grape juice (called *must* or *mustum*) was often available and was a popular drink in Bible times. But generally speaking, wine was fermented.

In Bible times wine was usually served mixed with water. Common mixture of wine with water was in ratios of 20:1 down to 3:1. They mixed wine with water because pure wine was almost like syrup after being stored and fermented for very long. Also, water was scarce and often impure. One easy way to purify water was to mix it with wine because the alcohol in the wine killed the germs in the water. It was considered barbaric to drink wine unmixed with water. It often took a great deal of drinking to get drunk because the alcohol content of wine was so low.

Alcohol is the result of sugar decomposing (i.e., fermenting). Refrigeration was not available in biblical times, making the preservation of fresh juice a difficult project. It is very likely that the wine Jesus made from water⁴⁷ and the wine he served at the Last Supper⁴⁸ was regular fermented wine. Jesus himself was accused of being a “glutton and a drunkard,” literally “one given to wine” (Luke 7:34).⁴⁹ It’s clear that the Corinthians were using fermented wine when they celebrated (inappropriately) the Lord’s Supper because they were getting drunk (1 Cor 11:21). Thus, biblical wine, for the most part, was fermented and was capable of causing intoxication.

⁴⁶ Distillation is the process of heating a material and condensing the vapor that comes off. Liquors like whisky and gin are distilled.

⁴⁷ Remember that the master of the celebration noted that the wine Jesus made was better than what they had been drinking. The guests were by this time “well drunk” (i.e., they were feeling the effects of the alcohol), and it was normal for the host to bring out a weaker, less intoxicating wine for his guests by this time. The fact that Jesus’ wine was better than the first wine suggests that it was at least as strong as, if not stronger than, what they had been drinking.

⁴⁸ In fact, the typical Jewish practice was to drink four glasses of wine during the Passover meal. If the Last Supper followed this custom, they likely drank a good deal of wine. Also, the Jews did not consider wine to be leavened. The rules called for unleavened food, not drink.

⁴⁹ In this context it’s interesting to note that Jesus, unlike John the Baptist, ate and drank like normal people. Since John, as part of his Nazarite vow, did not drink wine, the text suggests that Jesus did.

Strong Drink

Twenty-two times the Bible uses the word “strong drink,” which comes from a root meaning “to drink deeply,” or “to be drunken.” Strong drink refers to intoxicating drink of any sort not made from grapes. Various concoctions made from pomegranates, apples, dates, barley, etc. were known to the ancients and must have been used in Palestine also. Isaiah denounces those that “rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!” (Isa 5:11). He expresses his contempt for the priest and the prophet who “have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way” (Isa 28:7). Isaiah assails the “greedy dogs” who say, “I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” (Isa 52:12-13). Most of the alcoholic drinks of our society today would be considered “strong drink” by biblical standards because of their high alcohol content. Many modern wines have been strengthened (fortified) to increase their alcohol content and thus contain more alcohol than the wines of biblical times would have, especially once mixed with water.⁵⁰ Strong drink presents a danger, but it is not uniformly condemned in the Bible. A clear statement giving permission for the drinking of wine and even strong drink is found in Deuteronomy 14:26: “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.”

Should Christians drink alcohol?

The abuse of alcohol is clearly sinful. One should never get drunk. On the other hand, one must admit that several texts of Scripture seem to allow for and even commend the use of wine and/or strong drink (Deut 14:26; Ps 104:14-15; Prov 3:9-10; Ecc 9:7; Joel 3:18). Wine and strong drink are not evil in and of themselves. They do not cause drunkenness just as the presence of food is not the cause of gluttony. All sin proceeds from the sinful heart of man, not from part of the created order. The general tenor of biblical teaching is that wine, like any good gift from God, is easily abused: in this case, abuse involves addiction and drunkenness.

Paul’s instructions that Timothy “use a little wine” for his stomach’s sake argues that wine was used as a medicine (cf. Luke 10:34). Many modern medicines contain alcohol.

Some Christians feel they have the right to enjoy alcohol in moderation. They argue that the Bible condemns the abuse of alcohol (drunkenness) but not the moderate enjoyment of it. We must admit that the Bible does not absolutely prohibit the consumption of alcohol for the believer. However, to avoid all of the serious problems associated with alcohol, the best policy when it comes to wine, beer and other alcoholic drinks is total abstinence. If one wants to live a holy, righteous, blameless lifestyle, abstinence from alcohol is a wise commitment to make. Refraining is not a biblical mandate but a choice to avoid the dangers, compromises and associations that alcohol represents. Drinking may be lawful, but it is not profitable (cf. 1 Cor 6:12). For one’s own sake and for the sake of others, the best practice is to abstain from alcohol use.

⁵⁰ Modern winemakers typically add yeast to help the fermentation process, which in turn develops a higher alcohol content. Pure alcohol is added to fortified wines like port and sherry.

Other Reasons for Abstaining from Alcohol

- ✓ America is an alcoholic culture. Drunkenness and the accompanying tragedies are common. In biblical times, drunkenness was not a major problem, especially in Jewish society. Drinking wine was more common but did not present much of a problem for most people.
- ✓ Abstinence is the safer policy. If one never drinks, he does not run the risk of becoming addicted to alcohol. The risk of a casual drinker becoming a problem drinker is significant—one drinker in ten becomes an alcoholic. It's best to avoid the whole issue by not drinking at all.
- ✓ Abstinence is the more consistently Christian policy. We are to avoid even the appearance of evil, to avoid tripping up weaker believers, and strive to be a godly testimony in a wicked culture. Because alcohol use and abuse is so closely tied with many sins, voluntary abstinence is the best policy for those who want to be above reproach.
- ✓ There is no good reason to drink alcohol. Paul's advice to Timothy to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake" argues for the medicinal use of alcohol, but not for drinking it as a beverage. In Bible times, wine was considered a staple food item, and only a few other options were available. With all the non-alcoholic choices at hand today, there is simply no good reason for Christians to imbibe.

Questions to Ask Oneself

The following questions may be helpful when considering the issue:⁵¹

- (1) Is there a danger that a drinker may be brought into bondage? Alcohol has a capacity to influence and control even strong believers. Those who abstain can never be enslaved by alcohol and will never be personally influenced by it;
- (2) Will it lead oneself or others to stumble or sin? Alcohol use affects the drinker and others associated with him. If a drinker ever becomes drunk, violates the law while under the influence, offends others or otherwise significantly errs in judgment, he should abstain, at least temporarily;
- (3) Is alcohol use necessary for one's enjoyment and relaxation? If one's joy flows from a bottle, or if he needs alcohol to relax, he cannot claim to be merely a recreational user. One might argue that consuming wine was indeed necessary in the ancient world to purify polluted water or as a basic medicine, but modern conveniences have rendered such uses for wine obsolete. People drink today because they want to, not because they need to;
- (4) Does drinking associate one with sinful elements of culture? Alcohol use is often associated in modern western culture with all manner of immoral conduct, and alcohol abuse is responsible for immense destruction, disease and death. Christians should not affiliate themselves with such corruption;
- (5) Will drinking harm one's Christian testimony? One should not imbibe if doing so besmirches his reputation in the church or in the community. Unbelievers typically do not expect mature Christians to drink, and fundamental Baptists in particular have a reputation for abstinence. Spending time in a tavern or liquor store, or even buying

⁵¹ MacArthur, *Living in the Spirit*, 15-24.

alcohol at a grocery store could easily undermine one's reputation in the eyes of many, and it could sully the testimony of one's church;

- (6) Is drinking something one can do "of faith" according to Romans 14:23? If one's conscience is at all bothered about drinking, or if one doubts that it is acceptable behavior, he should refrain.

Note the Quote: [W]hile wine is not condemned as being without usefulness, it brings in the hands of sinful men such dangers of becoming uncontrolled that even those who count themselves to be strong would be wise to abstain, if not for their own sake, yet for the sake of weaker brethren (Rom. 14:21). If it is argued that there are many other things which may be abused besides wine, the point may be immediately conceded, but wine has so often proved itself to be peculiarly fraught with danger that Paul names it specifically at the same time as he lays down the general principle. That this principle has application within the setting of modern life is beyond dispute among those who take their Christian responsibility seriously.⁵²

Drugs

Drugs were an integral part of many ancient Near East societies. For example, the pagan cultures surrounding the nation of Israel used drugs as part of their religious ceremonies. Both the OT and New Testament condemn sorcery and witchcraft. In those days, drug use was associated with sorcery (the word translated "sorcery" comes from the Greek word from which we get the English words *pharmacy* and *pharmaceutical*). A witch or shaman prepared drugs. They used drugs to induce an altered state of consciousness that allowed demons to take over the mind of the user. In our day, many use drugs merely for so-called recreational purposes, but we cannot discount the occult connection.

Galatians 5:19-21 says:

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and **witchcraft**; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

The word *witchcraft* (*pharmakeia*) here is also translated "sorcery" and refers to the use of drugs. The Apostle Paul calls witchcraft associated with drug use a sin. The non-medical use of drugs is considered one of the acts of a sinful nature. Using drugs, whether to "get a high" or to tap into the occult, is one of the acts of a sinful nature where users demonstrate their depraved and carnal nature.

The psychological and potentially demonic effects of drug abuse should not be discounted. A questionnaire sent to marijuana users documented some disturbing findings. One-fourth of those who responded reported that they were taken over and

⁵²Fitzsimmonds, "Wine and Strong Drink," n.p.

controlled by an evil person or power during their drug-induced experience. And over half of those questioned said they have experienced religious or “spiritual” sensations in which they met spiritual beings.

Further, drugs like marijuana, cocaine and crack are illegal substances. The use, possession and sale of these drugs is against the law. Law-abiding citizens should not participate in the use of illegal drugs.

Conclusion: The Bible both commends wine as a gift from God and warns us about the dangers of drunkenness and addiction. The safest and most consistent policy for Christians is abstinence. Illegal drugs are a curse on our society and cause untold damage. Christians should have nothing to do with them. Those who totally abstain from both alcohol and mind-altering illegal drugs have great potential to shine as a good testimony to a wicked culture.

Discussion:

1. Is drunkenness a sin or a sickness? *Whether it's a sickness or not, it's still sin. If it's a sickness, it's the only one that comes in a bottle. Some may indeed be prone to alcoholism; however, that fact does not diminish one's responsibility.*
2. What are some of the physical dangers associated with alcohol abuse? *Pure alcohol is toxic. Alcohol often causes permanent damage to vital organs like the brain and the liver. Death occurs if alcohol is taken in large enough amounts. When the blood alcohol level reaches four-tenths of 1 percent, unconsciousness occurs; at five-tenths of 1 percent, alcohol poisoning and death occurs. Also drunk driving, child abuse, other kinds of violence, etc.*
3. How common is drug abuse among people that you know?
4. T F The word “wine” in the Bible usually refers to unfermented, non-alcoholic grape juice.
5. T F The Bible always condemns the use of wine and strong drink. *It condemns the abuse if it, not the use of it.*
6. Why would one have to drink a lot of wine to get drunk in biblical times? *Because it was mixed with water and the alcohol content was quite low.*
7. What should be our position regarding alcoholic beverages and illegal drugs? *Total abstinence.*

Gambling

Oscar is a 35-year-old Christian auto mechanic. Every week he spends \$2.00 on the state lottery and \$2.00 on scratchoff cards. He occasionally visits a casino just for the excitement. He rarely loses more than a few dollars, and he even wins once in a while. Is there anything wrong with this? *Yes. Gambling is unethical, as we shall see.*

Do Christians really gamble? Some do. Some see it as just another form of entertainment. But we'll see in this lesson that there are other issues involved in gambling.

Startling Statistics

- ☹ Gambling is legal in 47 states.
- ☹ The total amount of money gambled has increased 3,000 percent since 1974.
- ☹ The average compulsive gambler has debts of around \$80,000.
- ☹ Compulsive gambling increases between 100 and 550 percent when legalized gambling is brought into an area.
- ☹ More money is wagered on gambling than is spent on primary and secondary education.
- ☹ Two million adults (1% of the population) meet the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling. Another 4-8 million adults (2-4% of the population) can be considered problem gamblers who are experiencing direct problems as a consequence of gambling.

Although the Bible does not directly address the issue of gambling, it is clear that gambling is not consistent with the Christian life.

1. Gambling is the result of covetousness and discontentment.

Covetousness — an inordinate (wrongful) desire to possess something that is not yours. To lust after. To want more. Greediness. The biblical word normally has a negative connotation.

Texts:

Ex. 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Luke 12:15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Heb. 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Covetousness is sin. What is the opposite of covetousness? *Contentment. We should strive to be genuinely glad when others do well instead of comparing ourselves with them and being discontent.*

Life is more than accumulating things. It's easy to get depressed when you see what others have in comparison to you. Life should be lived without covetousness. What is contentment based upon? *The fact that God is with us, knows what we need and will provide enough for us. Matt. 6:23.*

2. Gambling ignores God's commands.

1 Thes 4:11 *Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.*

A. Man is to work for his living. Gen 3:19; 2 Thes 3:10-12; Col 3:23-24

Work is prefall, not part of the curse. Man is designed to work to earn his living. The Bible teaches the benefits of disciplined work habits, thrift, and prudence, and that hard work merits reward. Working, saving and investing are the biblical means of achieving wealth. Gambling destroys the work ethic.

B. Man does not own anything. He is a steward. James 1:17; 1 Cor 6:19-20.

Gambling is poor stewardship of God's money.

Question: Does the excuse "it's only a few bucks" hold water? No. A few bucks add up quickly. Hard-core gamblers start with "only a few bucks." Also, a waste is a waste whether it's a lot or a little.

C. The Bible emphasizes God's providential control over all things. A gambler bases his success on chance and "luck," which ignores God's plan.

3. Gambling may be addictive/uncontrollable. 1 Cor. 6:12

Organizations like Gamblers Anonymous, etc. Read story "[Frightening Addiction](#)"

4. Gambling evidences a "get rich quick" attitude. 1 Tim 6:9

Gambling fosters a "something for nothing" mindset. Gambling plays on the carnal emotions of greed, covetousness and selfishness. It also works against disciplined work habits, thrift, saving, and working for reward.

5. The social and economic costs of gambling are enormous.

Family neglect, chemical abuse, theft, organized crime, and deception are just a few of the problems associated with gambling. Problem gamblers often spend the

money that their families need for food, clothing and shelter. Although some gamblers do make money and the gambling industry is booming, statistics show that the overall cost of gambling to society is greater than the money generated by gambling. Society would be better off without it.

6. Gambling is just plain stupid.

Who usually gambles the most? Those who can least afford it. Rich people got rich because they are smart. They know that the best way to make money is hard work and good investments, not gambling. Studies have shown that the poor and minorities spend a greater percentage of their income on gambling than others. Why do you suppose this is? *They see gambling as one way to “make it big.” What is the legitimate or proven way to “make it”? Thru hard work, discipline, planning and saving.*

What are your chances of winning? *Very bad. In order for the gambling industry to make a profit, most people have to lose. So the odds are stacked against you. You have about 9x better chances of getting hit by lightening than you do of winning the lottery.*

Gambling absorbs money that would have been spent on consumer goods (e.g., food, clothing, appliances, automobiles, etc.), investments and loans. Money that could be invested, loaned, and recycled through the local economy is instead risked in a legalized gambling scheme. Gambling often devastates local economies near gambling establishments. Gambling is just plain stupid, for those who lose their money and for all of society.

Conclusion: Gambling, even for “penny ante” stakes, has no place in the life of a Christian. Gambling is the product of greed and covetousness, and supplants work and discipline as the legitimate means of creating wealth. Gambling contributes to family break down, crime, and abuse, and is a stupid way to waste the resources God has entrusted to you. Christians should not gamble and they should stand against all forms of gambling.

Discussion:

1. Why do you think gambling has become so popular and widespread? *People no longer see it as immoral. State governments see it as an easy way to make money. People see it as harmless diversion.*
2. Does gambling have the negative stigma it once did? *No, lots of “respectable” people gamble. Why do you think this has changed? The influence of Christianity has decreased. Philosophies antithetical to Christianity have increased. Gambling has become common, accepted.*
3. Why is gambling not just another innocent form of entertainment? *Gambling is not innocent. There are lots of sinful activities and attitudes connected with gambling, unlike other forms of entertainment.*

War

War

What is it good for?

Absolutely nothing

War is something that I despise

For it means destruction of innocent lives

For it means tears in thousands of mothers' eyes

When their sons go out to fight to give their lives

War

It's nothing but a heartbreaker

Friend only to the undertaker

War is the enemy of all mankind

The thought of war blows my mind

Handed down from generation to generation

Induction to destruction

Who wants to die?⁵³

Satan introduced violence, and all other sin, into human existence when he convinced Adam and Eve to take of the forbidden fruit. It wasn't long until Cain committed the first murder. From then on, war has been the rule rather than the exception. In the last 35 centuries of recorded history, only one year out of fifteen has been without war. There has been an average of 2.6 wars per year on earth for the last 5500 years. Since 1900, almost 100,000,000 people have died in about 100 wars.⁵⁴

Is war always morally evil, or may it sometimes be morally acceptable? Should believers ever be involved in war, or should they be conscientious objectors and/or pacifists?

The Bible seems to present war as an unavoidable part of man's sinful nature revealed in his dealings with one another.

War in the OT

The Bible, especially the OT, is full of war. In the OT, God's people were the nation of Israel. God directly commanded the Israelites to engage in war as they invaded Canaan, the Promised Land.

Deut 3:2-4 And the LORD said unto [Moses], Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; ... So the LORD our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining. And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them.

⁵³ Bruce Springsteen

⁵⁴ Cited in McQuilkin, p. 333.

Deut 7:2 *And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.*

The OT is filled with references to war, warfare and fighting. In fact, many of the great leaders of the OT were warriors: Saul, David, Moses, Joshua, etc. The OT clearly shows approval of Abram's deliverance of Lot through warfare (Gen 14), of Moses' war against Midian (Numbers 31:27), and of Joshua's military conquest of Canaan (Dt 3:18). However, warfare condoned by God was always for righteous ends.

Some truths about war in the OT:

War seemed to be necessary to prevent Israel from being polluted by the depraved behavior and pagan religions of the nations they overthrew. God told Israel to totally annihilate the Canaanites lest Israel follow their bad example (cf. Ex 23:31; Josh 9:24, 11:20). Israel failed to do so, and the Canaanite traditions (Baal worship, immorality, etc.) had a very negative effect on Israel (cf. Ex 23:33; Num 33:52-56).

The conquered nations were given time to repent. Some individuals, like Rahab and apparently the Gibeonites, did turn from paganism to the God of Israel.

God uses various instruments in his judgment against sin. In the case of the Canaanites, God used the Israelites to punish them. Later, God used the Babylonian army to judge Israel.

War in the OT was waged under the direction of special revelation. That is, God was in direct control of Israel's every move. The same conditions do not apply today.

There's a significant difference between the OT people of God, Israel, and the NT people of God, the church. Israel was a nation, an ethnically distinct people, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Being a Jew was both a nationality and a religion. Also, they conducted war in response to the direct revelation from God. However, in the NT, God's people, the church, have no national or ethnic limitations. Christians come from all nationalities and backgrounds. Whereas God commanded physical war for Israel, he commands spiritual warfare for the church (Eph 6:10f). So the NT people of God cannot look back to Israel as an example of how to function politically. We do not conduct religious "crusades" (or jihad) to enforce the Christian way of life.

War in the NT

Jesus predicted that wars and rumors of wars would be common prior to his return. He seemed to accept war as a part of the present world order. In fact, he promised that his coming would not bring peace, but "a sword" (Mat 10:34), clearly a prophecy of armed struggle. In addressing soldiers who had come to John's baptism, Jesus told them "to do no violence, nor accuse falsely, and be content with their wages" (Luke 3:14). Paul frequently uses military comparisons to describe the Christian life (cf. Eph 6:11f; 1 Thes 5:8; 2 Tim 2:4). The NT refers to various military officers, but never criticizes such an occupation or suggests that military service is out of bounds for Christians.

James 4:1-2 indicates that warfare is a direct result of man's sin nature. Thus warfare usually comes about because of man's failure to practice principles of righteousness declared by God.

General Biblical Principles Regarding War

- Christians are responsible to submit and obey legitimate authority, such as governments (Rom 13; I Peter 2:13-15). However, when governmental authority and biblical principles conflict, one must follow the Bible.
- Both Old and New Testaments allowed a believer to serve its country's armed forces, and to be involved in the taking of human life. Paul even uses warfare as an analogy for Christian service.
- While the Bible condemns murder (the planned killing of an innocent person), it does not directly forbid killing in war.
- David in Psalm 144:1 gave credit to God for his military ability and strength in battle.
- A "warmonger" is one who profits financially from war. While war may be a necessary means of achieving righteous ends, it is possible to become a "blood thirsty" person who loves and promotes war. Jesus spoke of such in Mt 26:52. He is not condemning those who serve their country in a legitimate war, but those who promote, encourage and for the wrong reasons choose to be involved in warfare.

Pacifism or Non-resistance

Some believe that Christians should never be involved in war because of Jesus' statements such as "turn the other cheek," "resist not him that is evil" and "love your enemies." Further, following the example of Christ, Christians would never willingly take another human's life. "What would Jesus do?" Since one could not imagine Jesus shooting or stabbing anyone else, neither should disciples of Jesus. Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world. Believers are not to use physical means to force Christian morality upon anyone. For pacifists, war is wrong in all cases, even if it means that they experience injustice, slavery, injury and death. Christ does not require that one live in a free country; he does require that his disciples love their enemies.

However, both Protestant and Catholic traditions have supported the idea of a just war. In certain cases, warfare is morally acceptable as a means of achieving a greater good. Jesus' commands to turn the other cheek, resist not the evil and love your enemies are found in a context of personal interaction, not national political struggles. That is, they apply to individuals and their personal relationships, not directly to countries or soldiers serving their countries. Thus, Jesus' commands are limited to a context of personal relationships. There is no universal or absolute command that all people turn the other cheek or resist not evil in every single case.

Further, Paul asserts that the "powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom 13:1-7). God has authorized governments to guarantee the peace and safety of its citizens. If another country threatens such peace and safety, the government has the right to resist and/or attack another country.

Thus, the NT seems to authorize governmental force and legitimate political authority. It also teaches that individuals should seek to "turn the other cheek" and "resist not the evil" in their own individual relationships. Hence, there is a distinction between a believer's responsibility to the government and his responsibility to his fellow man. Under governmental authority, he may be required to kill other people, yet in his personal life killing or injuring another is immoral. Christians are to be loving, sacrificial and

non-violent in their personal relationships, even to the point of allowing themselves to be injured. But under the authority of government, they may be required to participate in war, where injury and killing are morally acceptable. Believers are citizens of heaven, but they are also citizens of earth.

The Idea of “Just” War

Christians have long held that most wars are immoral and unjustifiable, but that some wars are morally acceptable, legitimate or “just.” The following must be true for a war to be just:

- The cause must be just. Aggression, revenge, economic gain or the taking of territory are not legitimate causes for war. Only defensive wars are just.
- The intent must be just. The only legitimate intent for war must be to secure peace and safety for citizens.
- War must be the last resort. All other solutions to the hostilities must be tried first. Only when negotiations and compromise have failed is war permissible.
- War must be formally declared by legitimate governmental authority. War is not the prerogative of individuals but of governments.
- War must have limited objectives. One side should not attempt to thoroughly annihilate the other side.
- Warfare must employ only necessary force. Weapons and tactics must fit the context and use only what is needed to repel aggression and secure peace.
- Noncombatants should normally be immune from war. Civilians, POWs, medical workers and other noncombatants should not be targeted. However, the industries that drive a country’s war-making capacity (e.g., transport, oil, communications, etc.) are legitimate targets.
- If an attack is imminent and certain, a preemptive strike may be justified as the best way to defend yourself.

Most would agree that WWII was a just war. The Axis Powers were clearly in the wrong, and the Allies were attempting to prevent evil and promote good. The justness of other conflicts, like Korea and Viet Nam, are more debatable.⁵⁵

Values and War

Peace is normally preferable to war. But peace is not the highest moral value. There are times that one must sacrifice peace in order to assure higher values like freedom from oppression and defense of one’s own country. War may bring about a greater good.

Groups of people (nations) are more significant than individuals. When nations or large groups are threatened or oppressed, war may be the means of providing relief for the suffering.

Order is of more value than freedom. Rights and freedoms are valuable, but rights and freedoms must exist in an orderly environment. The Bible has much to say about order and responsibility but says little about individual rights and freedoms.

⁵⁵ Technically, both the Korean and the Viet Nam conflicts are not considered official wars but police actions or conflicts of other types.

Personal hope and inner peace should not stem from the freedom of conflict. One's hope should be in God, not in any governmental powers.

Except in the case of the Rapture, all people will eventually die. Only the time and manner of death are in question. The saving or extending of human life is not the ultimate value in the world. Some things are worth dying for.

War and God's Sovereignty

Although God commanded war in the OT, one can never blame God as the cause of war today. War is caused by the sinful activities of sinful people. Human beings are responsible for their behavior and will stand before God in judgement. However, God is ultimately in sovereign control of all things, even wars. No malicious act of sinful man can change or thwart God's plan. He will bring his purposes to a successful conclusion, whether through human activity or through direct divine intervention. Justice and righteousness will eventually triumph, and in this confidence God's people can rest, whether oppressed or free.⁵⁶

Nuclear War

The world has been under the threat of nuclear war since 1945, when nuclear weapons were used in WWII to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. After WWII, during the "cold" war, the number and destructive capacity of nuclear weapons increased dramatically. Today, if the nuclear arsenals of several countries was employed, it is possible that all human life on the planet would be wiped out. For example, a nuclear exchange between the US, China, Russia, and Europe could destroy most if not all human life.

Given these realities, some have suggested that any use of nuclear arms would be immoral because such a war would likely escalate, with the possibility of destroying all human life becoming greater and greater. To avoid such a scenario altogether, nations should agree to control, limit, and eventually destroy all nuclear weapons.

However, given the fact that "nukes" exist, it is wise for civilized governments to have them on hand in order to prevent hostile nations from attempting invasions. Mutually assured destruction, the fact that in a nuclear war both sides would be destroyed, helped keep the peace during the cold war. If responsible nations destroy their nuclear capacities, it is likely that "rogue" states will use nuclear technology to threaten or even destroy their enemies. So it's wise for the leading nations of the world to maintain at least a minimum nuclear arsenal. Hopefully nuclear weapons will never be used. But it's prudent to keep some on hand as a preventative measure.

Conclusion: What is war good for? In the OT, it was God's means of giving his people Israel a land of their own. War may be morally acceptable in certain circumstances, and believers may participate in wars without violating their consciences. Until the return of Jesus, the earth will be filled with wars and rumors of wars. The sinful selfishness of mankind will guarantee that.

⁵⁶ McQuilkin, p. 344.

Discussion:

1. Does the OT give modern believers the right to use violence in order to enforce their worldview? *No. The OT situation with Israel's conquest of Canaan does not apply to NT believers today.*
2. Who is responsible for war, God or man? *The ultimate cause of all things is God. However, God holds man accountable for his actions, and wars are the result of man's sinfulness.*
3. Does the NT permit believers to participate in the armed services? *Yes. None of the NT writers criticize or condemn soldiers. Paul even uses warfare as an analogy for Christian service (e.g., the whole armor of God, fight the good fight of faith, no man that wareth entangleth himself with the things of this world).*
4. Is it immoral for a believer to take a human life during war? *No.*
5. Is it possible that one believer may kill another during a war? *Yes.*
6. Under what situation(s) should a believer refuse to participate in war? *If it's an unjust war. One has to decide if in obeying one's government he is disobeying biblical principles. One must obey God at all costs even if it requires disobeying governmental authority. The believer must be assured that the cause is just. Many believers refused to participate in Viet Nam because of this.*

Wealth and Poverty⁵⁷

1 John 3:17 *But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

Most folks living in the US are pursuing the “American Dream” – a nice house in a good neighborhood, a couple of cars, a boat or RV, and maybe a summer cottage by a lake. For many people, these goals are attainable through education, hard work, saving and wise investing. But should believers be pursuing such goals? Should one live in a mansion just because he can afford it? Should a believer drive a Ferrari when all he needs is a Ford? Should a Christian be wearing Armani when JC Penny will do? Why are people poor, and what are the responsibilities of believers to them?

A biblical view of wealth is necessary if we are to live godly lives, avoiding asceticism on the one extreme and materialism on the other. Further, a biblical view of poverty is essential if we are to fulfill our responsibilities to the poor.

A Biblical View of Wealth

Americans, for the most part, are a very materialistic bunch. Our culture encourages people to buy, spend and accumulate material wealth. Glamorous media stars and “successful” business barons testify to our society’s materialistic values, values that many Christians have adopted. But is financial “success” really a biblical value?

Some groups teach that God wants believers to be wealthy. The “health and wealth/prosperity” message is very common and popular in churches today. Others suggest just the opposite, that Jesus and many of the OT prophets were poor, so believers should be, too. What does the Bible teach?

1. Wealth is not sinful. For example, we read in Genesis 13:2 that Abraham had great wealth. In Job 42:10 we see that God blessed Job with material possessions after he had lost everything. In the OT, wealth is seen as evidence of God’s blessing (Deut 8:18, 28:1-14; Ecc 5:19).
2. The Bible condemns rich people for the sinful means by which they obtained their riches, not for the riches themselves. The OT prophet Amos railed against the injustice of obtaining wealth through oppression or fraud (4:11, 5:11). Micah spoke out against the unjust scales and light weights with which Israel defrauded the poor (6:1). Neither Amos nor Micah condemned wealth per se; they only denounced the unjust means by which it is sometimes achieved.
3. Christians should be concerned about the negative effects wealth can have on their lives. We read in Proverbs 30:8-9 and Hosea 13:6 that wealth often tempts us to forget about God. Wealthy believers may no longer look to God for their provision because they can meet their own basic needs. We read in Ecclesiastes 2 and 5 that

⁵⁷ Some of the material in this lesson is directly from Kerby Anderson. © 1992 Probe Ministries.

people who are wealthy cannot really enjoy their wealth. Even billionaires often reflect on the fact that they cannot really enjoy the wealth that they have. Moreover, Proverbs 28:11 and Jeremiah 9:23 warn that wealth often leads to pride and arrogance.

A Biblical View of Poverty

1. God cares about the poor.

Ps 113:7 *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;*

Ps 140:12 *I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.*

2. Israel was supposed to care for the poor.

The OT mentions helping the poor quite frequently. The gleanings of the harvest were to be left to the poor (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22). As farmers reaped their crops, they would leave the corners of their fields unharvested, and anything that fell to the ground was left for the poor.

If a person fell into abject poverty, it was expected that his family or the community as a whole would help him (cf. Lev 25:25, 35; Deut 15:7, 11). A poor person could even sell himself as a temporary bondservant to get himself out of debt (Lev 25:39).

3. Jesus cared for the poor.

Lk 14:13-14 *But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

4. The early church cared for the poor.

We find many scriptural admonitions calling for Christians to distribute their resources to others compassionately (Matt. 25:35-40; 2 Cor 9:7; 1 Tim 5:9-10; 6:18; James 1:27).

Ro 15:26 *For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.*

Ga 2:10 *... we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.*

5. Wealth or poverty is no indication of one's spiritual condition. Mature, godly believers may be wealthy, poverty stricken, or somewhere in between. Ungodly, immoral people may enjoy great wealth or suffer grinding poverty. The content of one's bank account has little to do with the content of his character.
6. The Bible classifies the causes of poverty into four different categories. The cause of poverty may be a combination of these elements.

- A. Oppression and/or fraud: In the OT (e.g., Pro 14:31; 22:7; 28:15) we find that many people were poor because they were oppressed by individuals or governments. Many times, governments established unjust laws or debased the currency, measures that resulted in the exploitation of individuals.
 - B. Misfortune, persecution, or judgment: In Job we learn that God allowed Satan to test Job by bringing misfortune upon him (1:12-19). Elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Ps 109:16; Isa 47:9; Lam 5:3) we read of misfortune or of God's judgment on a disobedient people. When Israel turned from God's laws, God allowed foreign nations to take them into captivity as a judgment for their disobedience.
 - C. Laziness, neglect, or gluttony: Proverbs teaches that some people are poor because of improper habits and apathy (10:4; 13:4; 19:15; 20:13; 23:21). It's probably not wise to "bail out" those suffering in poverty because of their own laziness or lack of initiative. They should feel the full effects of their bad choices until they are willing to make positive changes.
 - D. A culture of poverty: Proverbs 10:15 says, "The ruin of the poor is their poverty." Poverty breeds poverty, and the cycle is not easily broken. People who grow up in an impoverished culture usually lack the nutrition and the education that would enable them to be successful in the future.
7. Promises for those who give to the poor
- A. No lack Prov 28:27
 - B. Blessing Ps 41:1
 - C. Reward Mt 19:21

Poverty and Government

Unfortunately, the track record of government programs combating poverty is not very impressive. Before the implementation of many of the Great Society⁵⁸ programs, the percentage of people living below the poverty level was 13.6 percent. Twenty years later, the percentage was still 13.6 percent. The "war on poverty" was never won.

However, government can do a lot to reduce poverty. Government must first establish laws and policies that prohibit and punish injustice. These laws should have significant penalties and be rigorously enforced so that the poor are not exploited and defrauded. Government must also help those who slip into poverty through no fault of their own.

We need a welfare system that emphasizes work and initiative and does not foster dependency and laziness. If people have true needs, we should help them. But when they are lazy and have poor work habits, we should admonish them to improve. Our current welfare system perpetuates poverty by failing to distinguish between those who have legitimate needs and those who need to be admonished in their sin.

Note: We should be careful not to draw a direct parallel between the system required by the Law of Moses for Israel in the OT with how our government operates today. Israel

⁵⁸ The Great Society was a set of domestic programs proposed or enacted in the United States on the initiative of President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969). Two main goals of the Great Society social reforms were the elimination of poverty and of racial injustice. New major spending programs that addressed education, medical care, urban problems, and transportation were launched during this period. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Society

was a theocracy, a nation ruled by God through human leaders; there was no separation of church and state. The biblical admonitions to care for the poor applied specifically to Israelites and those associated with them, not to any and all people. We must recognize a distinction between Israel, the church, and the civil (secular) government, and how God calls each to deal with the problems of poverty.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

One of the causes of poverty is the culture of poverty. People are poor because they are poor. An individual who grows up in a culture of poverty is destined for a life of poverty unless something rather dramatic takes place. Poor nutrition, poor education, poor work habits, and poor family relationships can easily condemn an individual to perpetual poverty. What can churches do?

- ✓ Recognize that poverty is more a spiritual problem than it is an economic problem. Sinful choices, laziness, waste, apathy, greed, and lack of self-control are all spiritual issues that poor people must overcome through submission to God and His Word. In many cases, people are poor because they fail to implement biblical guidelines for living. The real solution to poverty is salvation and sanctification. Being born again can improve attitudes and family relationships. It can give new direction and the ability to overcome handicaps and hardships.
- ✓ Leaders must call people to their biblical responsibilities. Proverbs 6:6 says, “Go to the ant, you sluggard, observe her ways and be wise”; we see here that we are to admonish laziness and poor habits that lead to poverty. In the NT, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their church rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thes 3:10). Christians should gently but firmly counsel those whose poverty is the result of poor work habits and bad choices to begin taking responsibility for their own lives.
- ✓ Christians may use their gifts and abilities to help those caught in the web of poverty. Doctors can provide health care. Educators can provide literacy and remedial reading programs. Businesspeople can hire needy people and/or impart job skills.
- ✓ The church can help those addicted to alcohol or other drugs to overcome their dependencies. Christians can work to heal broken families. Dealing with these root causes will help solve the poverty problem.
- ✓ The church must maintain a balance between compassionate relief and stern admonition. Some poor people who approach a church for help are confirmed sluggards who have no desire or intent to change. All they want is a handout, and they’ll bilk a church out of as much as they can get before moving on to the next victim. On the other hand, a church should be sensitive to those who are genuinely needy. The primary relief resources of a church should be directed to “poor saints” (Rom 15:26; Gal 6:10), and especially members of that church.

The Christian Lifestyle

What, then, does this biblical view of wealth and poverty have to say about the way Christians should live? A brief survey of Scripture shows godly people living in a variety of different economic situations. For example, Solomon lived a very lavish, pampered lifestyle as a king. Joseph went from the bottom of the economic heap (slave) to the top (Prime Minister) within just a few days. Daniel served as secretary of state in pagan administrations and no doubt lived an upper-class lifestyle. Ezekiel lived outside the city in what might have been considered a middle-class lifestyle. Jeremiah certainly lived a lower-class lifestyle. Jesus, as a common laborer, probably was near the bottom in economic terms. Paul experienced both great abundance and grinding poverty. Which person best honored God with his lifestyle? Each man honored God and followed God's leading in his life. Yet each lived a very different lifestyle.

There is no ideal lifestyle for Christians. One size does not fit all. Instead, we must seek the Lord to discern His will and calling in our lives. As we do this, there are some biblical principles that will guide us.

Believers should acknowledge that God is the Creator of all that they own and use. Whether rich or poor, Christians must acknowledge God's provision in their lives. They are stewards of the creation, not owners; the earth is ultimately the Lord's (Ps. 24:1). Believers should "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

Christians must recognize and avoid the dangers of wealth. "Labor not to be rich" (Pr 23:4). Those who desire to be rich "fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. . . . [Such people] have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows" (1 Tim 6:9-10). Greed is not an exclusive attribute of the rich, nor is covetousness an exclusive attribute of the poor. There is nothing wrong with owning possessions, as long as possessions don't end up owning us.

Conspicuous, prideful display of wealth is clearly sinful (1Tim 2:9; Jam 2). Believers ought not to not live in opulent mansions or drive expensive luxury cars, even if they can afford to do so. A flamboyant exhibition of wealth is simply not in keeping with a Christian value system. There are far better things to do with one's money than to live in the lap of luxury.

Christians must recognize the freedom that comes with simplicity. Life is more than the accumulation of things (Luk 12:15). A simple lifestyle can free us from the dangers of being owned by material possessions. It can also free us for a deeper spiritual life.

How to become more Sensitive to the Poor

1. Eat sensibly and eat less. This includes not only good nutrition, but also occasional times for prayer and fasting. Use the time saved for prayer and meditation on God's word. Give the money saved to those in genuine need.
2. Dress modestly. Avoid the temptation of having to purchase new wardrobes as styles change. A moderate and modest wardrobe can endure the drastic swings in fashion.

3. Avoid the temptation to buy the best and newest things. Develop an attitude of contentment and gratitude for what you have.
4. Give all the resources you can to those in genuine need. Charles Wesley's admonition to earn all you can, save all you can, and give away all you can is appropriate here.

Conclusion: Most people in the US enjoy a lifestyle far above the poverty line. True poverty is relatively rare, and many of the poorest are in such a condition because of their own bad choices. For those willing to work hard, the American dream still is available. Many are able to drive new cars, buy the latest styles, enjoy expensive vacations and hobbies, and live in desirable neighborhoods. However, Christians should recognize that life is far more than the accumulation and enjoyment of material objects. God commands us to use our wealth for His purposes. That often means helping those in genuine need, especially other Christians. Look for opportunities to bless others with the resources God has entrusted to you.

Discussion

1. T F It's sinful to be wealthy.
2. T F If you are wealthy, it's a sign of God's approval and blessing.
3. T F God is not concerned about how Christians spend their wealth.
4. What are several causes of poverty. *Oppression/fraud; misfortune/persecution; laziness/neglect; being born into a culture of poverty*
5. What should the government do to aid the poor? *Set up programs to prevent their oppression and insure justice; emphasize work and initiative; help only those who are truly needy (not the lazy).*
6. What should churches do to help the needy? *Be compassionate. Set aside funds to help those in need, especially for those within the church. Work with or establish evangelistic programs that help the poor (e.g., Rescue Missions). Also teach people the necessity of hard work and how to be a good worker, etc.*

Homosexuality

It is unfortunate that we even have to discuss the topic of homosexuality. In times past, such an issue was not the subject of polite conversation. But today this issue is in the forefront of our culture. The homosexual community is active and powerful in the media, politics, and even in religion. They strongly demand equal rights and special protections. Homosexuality is clearly a moral issue.

What is Homosexuality?

Homosexuality is sexual desire for a member of the same (*homo*) sex. Homosexuals seek sexual satisfaction with members of the same sex. “Gay” is a general term that can refer to men or women. “Lesbian” refers to homosexual women⁵⁹.

Key Texts:

Lev 18:22 *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.*

Lev 20:13 *If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.*

Jdg 19:22-23 *... suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!” But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage.*

Rom 1:26 *For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.*

1 Cor 6:9-10 *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

The general teaching of Scripture is that homosexuality is a serious sin. Those who practice such behaviors are clearly unrighteous and unsaved. A homosexual lifestyle and Christianity are mutually exclusive ideas—you can’t be both at the same time.

The Causes of Homosexual Behavior

The pro-homosexual community asserts that homosexuality is a biological phenomena. Homosexuals are simply born that way; it’s a natural condition that one should not try to

⁵⁹ The word “lesbian” is derived from the Victorian interpretation of the poems of the Greek poet Sappho, whose poetry was taken to mean sexual love rather than emotional or Platonic love between her and other women. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesbos_Island

change or deny. Some point to evidence suggesting that homosexuals have different brain biology than do heterosexuals.

Others suggest that the primary cause of homosexuality is early psychological influences in their environment. That is, if one had a strong mother and no father in the home, he is more likely to be homosexual. Or if one had early homosexual experiences forced upon him, he is likely to become homosexual later in life.

While it is true that both biology and environment can influence behavior, neither of these causes is the ultimate factor. The biblical view of the cause of homosexuality assumes two things.

- All sin flows from a depraved and debauched heart. Man's inner control center is wicked, deceitful and morally corrupt (Jer 17:9).
- A sinful environment can have great influence upon one's actions. *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."* (1Co 15:33).

Therefore, the Bible clearly acknowledges that homosexuality is the result of a corrupt heart working in combination with evil influences. The ultimate cause is the sinfulness of man, but psychology and environment also play a role. People are not born homosexuals; they are born sinners. From man's sinful nature flows rank appetites that he spends his whole life trying to satisfy. Sometimes the combination of depravity and environment moves man to lying, stealing, gossip and/or murder. Sometimes the combination of depravity and environment moves man to a homosexual lifestyle. Even if a person was biologically prone toward homosexuality, that fact would not reduce his sin. Every person is bent toward sin (Rom 3:10f), but that does not excuse one's sin.

In Mark 7:21-23 Jesus said, *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*

Is Homosexuality Normal?

"As recently as 1989, an episode of the television show 'thirty-something' showing two gay men talking in bed cost ABC \$41 million in advertising revenue. But [by 1996], two lesbian characters on the NBC sitcom 'Friends' married with barely a protest from network affiliates."⁶⁰ There are currently several popular TV shows with homosexual characters. Homosexuals are now common in almost all segments of modern culture.

Society is doing its best to portray homosexuality as normal and acceptable behavior. But according to the Bible, a normal person is one who is like Christ.

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. Eph 5:1-4

⁶⁰ Katia Hetter, "The New Civil Rights Battle," in *U.S. News & World Report* (June 3, 1996): 30.

As homosexuality becomes more “normal” and acceptable in our culture, criticism of such behavior may become dangerous, even criminal. Perhaps in the future speaking out against homosexuality may be outlawed as hate speech. Currently, those who refuse to acknowledge homosexuality as acceptable are labeled homophobic, ignorant, and even racist.

Christian Homosexuals??

As strange as it may seem, some homosexuals actually think of themselves as Christians. They claim to believe in Christ, and they don’t believe that the Bible condemns their sinful behavior. There are even churches that cater to the homosexual lifestyle. They offer the following arguments:

- The homosexuality prohibited in the Bible was ‘unnatural,’ while what is practiced today is ‘natural.’ For heterosexuals to experiment with homosexuality is sin, but for the individual who is born as a homosexual, and oriented toward it, it is not sin.

Biblical Response:

Never does the Bible make a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable homosexuality. Heterosexual sexual involvement, for instance, can be either acceptable or unacceptable, depending upon one’s state of marriage. But the Bible never suggests that any form of homosexual behavior as acceptable. It is always treated as sinful activity.

- The homosexuality prohibited in the Bible did not involve commitment. The Bible prohibits casual, unloving sexual relationships of all kinds. But as long as the relationship, whether heterosexual or homosexual, involves two people who are committed to each other and who genuinely love each other no sin is involved.

Biblical Response:

The biblical passages do not simply condemn the wrong attitude of some homosexuals, but the homosexual act itself — “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind” (Lev 18:22). OT and NT authors knew what sexual perversion was. They were not naïve to homosexual lifestyles, whether casual and committed. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a hint that homosexual behavior of any kind is morally acceptable. If love is the issue, adultery could also be viewed as acceptable to God if it happened in a loving relationship. The Bible, however, never views sex outside of marriage as acceptable no matter how much love exists in the relationship.

- The homosexuality prohibited in the Bible is part of the OT Law that does not apply to us today.

Biblical Response:

While it is true that the Mosaic Law does not have direct application to believers today, the fact that prohibitions against homosexuality appear in the NT as well demonstrates that the OT prohibitions are not simply confined to the Law. God’s hatred for homosexuality is part of His eternal moral ethic. It violates God’s holy character and will never be anything but sin.

- God has made homosexuals that way, so to be any other way is to deny God's sovereign design for their lives.

Biblical Response:

Even if there was some direct correlation between one's biological make-up and his sexuality, "biology is not destiny." In other words, one's sexual behavior is too complex to reduce simply to biology. Biology can't make us sin. If homosexuality is connected to one's biological make-up, the Christian response should still be that of resistance and avoidance. Because we are born sinful creatures we are "naturally" sinners, yet the Bible commands us to flee from our lusts and pursue godliness. Homosexual desires, like any other lust which flows from man's depraved nature, must be resisted. One should never entertain or gratify his depraved desires, even though they may be natural and biologically based.

Scripture clearly teaches that one cannot be a practicing, unrepentant homosexual and a Christian at the same time. Christians with a homosexual background may struggle with temptations just like heterosexual people do. They may even occasionally backslide and engage in homosexual sins. Those who repent of such sin and seek to change have evidence that their profession of faith is genuine. But those who embrace and condone a homosexual lifestyle are thereby rejecting biblical Christianity.

How Should Christians Treat Homosexuals?

The homosexual community presents a great challenge to biblical Christianity. Many homosexuals promote an anti-Christian agenda. We cannot afford to be naïve about this. When ministering to homosexuals, we need to be careful, realizing that the very person whom we are trying to reach for Christ may be looking for any opportunity to sue, discredit and/or destroy the church or its families. So be very cautious.

Nevertheless, we cannot simply exclude ministry to homosexuals. The biblical commands to love and witness to the unsaved does not allow us to pick and choose who will be the recipient of our ministry. Paul often ministered to those who could have potentially caused him problems (and many of them did). Jesus spent great amounts of time conversing with and teaching those who were His sworn enemies. We are commanded to love and give the gospel to everyone, regardless of the types of sin they commit. Therefore, when we encounter a homosexual, we must show him kindness and respect, make every effort to build a God-honoring relationship with him, and give him the gospel. If we do not, we are disobeying and dishonoring the Lord.

Can Homosexuals Change?

Homosexuality is a sin like any other in that it flows from man's depravity. This fact produces hope for the homosexual. Because that is true, it is possible, through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of God's Spirit, for the homosexual to abandon his sinful behavior. Homosexuality is not something into which one is born. It is a sinful practice that is the result of sinful decisions. These decisions can be changed, and a different life direction can result. Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 that through faith in Christ, homosexuality, like every other sin can be abandoned.

1 Co 6:9-11 *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

How does one conquer immoral desires?

- Believe that God's Word is sufficient. (2 Peter 1:3)

Homosexuality is a sin, not a genetic, hormonal, or mental problem that handcuffs the individual leaving him no opportunity to change. Homosexuality is listed in Scripture with other learned behaviors (i.e., greed, lying, drunkenness). Christ died for all sins, and the Holy Spirit can empower one to change.

- Understand and apply biblical sanctification.

One abandons and controls the sins of homosexuality the same way other sins are — through transformation produced by the renewing of the mind such that God's will can be accomplished.

Romans 12:2 *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

By studying the Scriptures and learning through a biblical local church ministry, the homosexual can sanctify himself through God's truth ("Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." John 17:17). This sanctification includes the idea of the sinner gradually becoming holy. As he learns and applies God's truth, his mind will slowly become new and his life will be transformed. The homosexual may do battle with this sin for his entire life, but through the Spirit's use of the Bible in his life, he can be victorious in that battle.

Sanctification involves "putting off" sinful habits and practices.

- ✓ Don't allow yourself to be influenced by people who tempt you to sin. Determine to separate yourself from friends, co-workers, fellow students and others who provide opportunities for sin.
- ✓ Stay away from places that provide temptations (e.g., stores that make pornographic material easily accessible, other locations that have proven to have lead to sin in the past).

- ✓ Get rid of pornography, TV, internet, and the phone itself if necessary. Sanctification involves “putting on” righteous living.
- ✓ Develop a disciplined mind. (Matt 5:28; 2 Cor 10:5)
- ✓ Yield control of your life to the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18).
- ✓ Commit yourself to studying, pondering and responding positively to the authority of the Word of God. (Eph 5:18-19)
- ✓ Practice other spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, fellowship and church participation. (Acts 2:41-46)
- ✓ Make yourself accountable to someone in the church, perhaps a pastor or deacon. Meet regularly to discuss how well you are handling temptation. (Gal 6:1)

Conclusion: The Bible strongly asserts that homosexual behavior is sinful. One cannot claim to be both a Christian and a practicing, unrepentant homosexual. One may overcome homosexuality, like any other sin, through salvation and by implementing biblical sanctification.

Discussion:

1. What is the homosexual agenda? *To make homosexuality seem normal, OK, common, not bad*
2. If scientist could verify that homosexuality is biologically based, would that fact make such a practice less morally evil? *No. All sin is natural in a sense. Heterosexual sin is certainly biologically based, but that's no excuse.*
3. What is the cause of homosexuality? *The ultimate cause is the sinfulness of man's heart. There may be a biological aspect and/or an environmental aspect as well.*
4. Is there any form of homosexual behavior that is morally acceptable? *No.*
5. How do we know that one can overcome homosexuality? *Because it's just like any other sin. If heterosexuals can overcome sexual sin, so can homosexuals.*
6. What should be our attitude toward homosexuals? *Kindness and respect; look for an opportunity to witness; don't call names or ridicule them. Think of how Jesus acted toward the woman caught in the act of adultery.*

Pornography⁶¹

Like many of the topics discussed in this series, the issue of pornography is rather unpleasant and offensive even to consider. Most godly people find pornography repulsive and repugnant. But we cannot deny that pornography is having a significant negative impact on our society, and many Christians are ignorant of its influence and apathetic about the need to control this menace.

Pornography involves books, magazines, videos and “adult toys.” Pornography has moved from the outer edges of society into the mainstream through the renting of videos, sales of so-called “soft-porn” magazines, and the airing of sexually explicit movies on television. To some, pornography is nothing more than a few pictures of scantily-clad women in seductive poses. But pornography has become a 10 billion dollars-a-year business that traffics in the most disgusting and degrading material imaginable. Consumer demand is so strong that it has seduced some of America’s biggest brand names, and companies like General Motors, Marriott and Time Warner are now making millions selling erotica to America.⁶²

Nearly 1000 theaters show pornographic films in the U.S., and more than 15,000 adult bookstores and video stores offer pornographic material. Adult bookstores outnumber McDonald’s restaurants in the United States by a margin of at least three to one.

The popular culture in the U.S., as displayed in media, advertising, music, entertainment, etc., is becoming increasingly pornographic. Sexually explicit images and ideas are far more acceptable today than in the past. A trip to the grocery store can take you past the book aisle with suggestive covers on romance novels. Advertisements for beer, cars, and movies all use sexually-charged images to sell their products. Radio stations readily play songs and talk casually about subjects that were banned from the airwaves decades ago. A trip to the mall takes you past store displays that would make your grandmother blush. Your home is invaded with sexually explicit images over the TV and your computer. Unwelcome mail enters your home selling well-known sex magazines. The U.S. is quickly becoming a pornographic culture.⁶³

Definitions

The 1986 Attorney General Commission on Pornography defined pornography as material that “is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal.” The average person will be influenced to sexual lust by viewing or reading pornographic material—that is the intent of it. Hard core pornography “is sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose.”

⁶¹ Much of the material in this lesson comes directly from Kerby Anderson.

⁶² Steve Kroft, “Porn in the USA” CBS News 60 Minutes report. Sept 5, 2004.
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/11/21/60minutes/main585049.shtml#top>

⁶³ Ray Bohlin, “Sexual Purity,” Probe Ministries

Another important term to define is “obscenity.” The current legal definition of obscenity is found in the 1973 case of *Miller v. California*. According to the Miller case, material is obscene if all three of the following conditions are met:

1. The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to base and offensive interests.
2. The work depicts or describes, in a clearly offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state (or federal) law, and
3. The work taken as a whole, lacks serious, artistic, political or scientific value.

The law is clearly violated when children are portrayed in sexual situations or when sex is connected with violence. However, images that are clearly pornographic may or may not be legally obscene. The court system in the U.S. has tended to defend pornography as protected free speech. Organizations like the ACLU defend pornographers’ rights to distribute such material. Thus, much material that is technically obscene is readily available to anyone who wants it.

Sources of Pornography

One source of pornography is adult magazines. These are primarily (but not exclusively) directed toward an adult male audience. The magazines which have the widest distribution do not violate the current legal standard of obscenity and thus can be legally distributed. But other magazines which do violate these standards are still available in many adult bookstores. According to recent studies approximately 70 percent of the pornographic magazines sold end up in the hands of minors.

Another source of pornography is videos. These are rented or sold in most adult bookstores and even in many “family” video rental outlets. People who would never go into an adult bookstore or theater obtain these videos through bookstores or in the mail and watch them in the privacy of their homes. These videos often display a high degree of hard core pornography and even illegal (obscene) acts.

A third source of pornography is cinematic movies. Ratings standards are being relaxed and many pornographic movies are being shown and distributed carrying R and NC-17 ratings. Many of these so-called “hard R” rated films would have been considered obscene and rated X just a decade ago.

A fourth source of pornography is television. As in motion pictures, moral standards for commercial television have been continuously lowered. Cable and satellite television provides the average person with easy access to pornographic material. Most hotels and motels make pornography available to their customers through the TVs in the rooms.

A fifth source of pornography is cyberporn. Pictures, movies, online chat, and even live sex acts are available for viewing to almost anyone through the internet.

Another source of pornography might be called audio porn. It includes “Dial-a-porn” telephone calls, which are the second fastest growth market of pornography. These businesses continue to thrive and are often used by children.

A final source of pornography is the “adult entertainment” industry — adult bookstores and theaters, strip clubs, massage parlors, prostitution, etc.

Social and Psychological Effects

Defining the social effects of pornography has been difficult because experts disagree about how pornography affects people. One view is that it actually performs a positive function in society by acting like a “safety-valve” for potential sexual offenders. Many people think that pornography is relatively harmless, and that adults should have the right to view whatever they like in the privacy of their own homes. Pornography has no “victims” according to this view and has little or no negative influence on thinking or behavior. Freedom of speech insures that people can view whatever they want.

However, statistics suggest that pornography does have profound negative social consequences. Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography prior to and during their assaults. In fact, pornography viewing is one of the most common characteristics of serial murders and rapists.

Research shows that brief exposure to violent forms of pornography can lead to anti-social attitudes and behavior. Male viewers tend to be more aggressive toward women, less responsive to pain and suffering of rape victims, and more willing to accept various myths about rape. Exposure to violent pornography can produce an array of undesirable effects such as desensitization to sexual violence and trivialization of rape. There is an undeniable connection between hard-core pornography and all kinds of crime and other social evils.

Dr. James Dobson interviewed Ted Bundy, one of this nation’s most notorious serial killers. On the day before his execution, Bundy said that the “most damaging kinds of pornography are those that involve violence and sexual violence. Because the wedding of those two forces, as I know only too well, brings about behavior that is just, just too terrible to describe.”

Those who view the non-violent forms of pornography tend to view women as sexual objects to be conquered rather than as people to be valued. Pornography emphasizes image over substance, so viewers of pornography tend to value those with a sensual, sexy image. Pornography clearly has a negative impact on a culture’s thinking, values and behavior regarding sexuality, women and the home. Pornography destroys spiritually all who involve themselves with viewing or producing it, and its corrupting influence spills over into the entire life of the society that tolerates it.⁶⁴

Viewers of pornography often find that the images they formerly found stimulating are no longer as exciting as they once were. Thus, they seek more and more shocking and debase images to achieve the same level of stimulation. This is how pornography hooks and drags down those who partake of it.

⁶⁴ McQuilkin, p. 225.

Censorship and Freedom of Speech

Attempts to regulate and outlaw pornography within a community are frequently criticized as censorship and a violation of the First Amendment. But the Supreme Court clearly stated in *Roth v. United States* (1957) that obscenity was not protected by the First Amendment. Federal, state, and local laws apply to the sale, display, distribution, and broadcast of pornography. Therefore, communities can prohibit pornographic material if it meets the legal definition of obscenity. Unfortunately, local governments are usually not interested in enforcing such laws.

A Biblical Perspective on Pornography

Texts:

Mt 5:28 *But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

Phil 4:8 *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

Eph 5:3 *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;*

Eph 5:12 *For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*

2 Tim 2:22 *Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Rom 13:14 *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

God created men and women in His image, and commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:27-28). The one-flesh relationship between a man and his wife was God’s invention and intent. But because of sin in the world (Rom 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom 1:24-25). Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. Intimate physical contact between a man and his wife should be an expression of love, not the subject of a video recording. Pornography distorts God’s gift of sex, which should be shared only within the bonds of marriage (1 Cor 7:2-3). Further, Scripture generally maintains a basic modesty towards a man’s or woman’s body. It is immoral to describe or view sexual activity outside of one’s own marriage relationship. The physical relationship between a man and a woman is a private thing, not one that should be broadcast or discussed publicly.

Moreover, Scripture specifically condemns the practices that result from pornography such as sexual exposure (Gen 9:21-23), adultery (Lev 18:20), bestiality (Lev 18:23),

homosexuality (Lev 18:22 and 20:13), incest (Lev 18:6-18), and prostitution (Deut 23:17-18).

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned as sinful (1 Cor 6:13-18; 1 Thes 4:3). Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned (Matt 5:27-28). We are to make “no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14).

Further, Christians must realize that pornography can have significant harmful effects on the user. These include: a comparison mentality, a feeling that only forbidden things are sexually satisfying, increased guilt, and obsessional thinking.

Christians, therefore, must do two things. First, they must work to keep themselves pure by fleeing immorality (1 Cor 6:18) and thinking on those things which are pure (Phil 4:8). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov 23:7). Christians must make no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14). Pornography will fuel the sexual desire in abnormal ways and can eventually lead to even more debase perversion. We, therefore, must “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Second, Christians must work to remove the sexual perversion of pornography from society.

Steps to Combat Porn

First, parents must teach a wholesome, biblical view of sex to their children. Many books and other aids are available for this task. Parents must set a good example of proper modesty and decency when it comes to physical relations between men and women. They must also closely monitor their children (especially teenage boys) to insure that they are not accessing pornography.

Second, all Christians must evaluate their exposure to media (magazines, TV shows, videos and music), which increasingly contain inappropriate sexual themes. Parents should set a positive example for their children, and take time to discuss these stories, programs, and songs with them. Don't allow pornography of any sort into your home. This would include the swimsuit issue of sports magazines, many health and fitness magazines, art and photography books, and even some catalogs (e.g., Victoria's Secret, Abercrombie & Fitch)

Third, pastors should warn their congregations about the dangers of pornography and instruct them in a proper view of sexuality. Like Joseph in the Old Testament, we should flee immorality which can entice us into sin. Messages should also be given to build a strong Christian home. Those who have trouble with sexual temptations or sins should receive personal counseling.

Fourth, parents should block internet cyberporn with software. There are many commercial services as well as special software that can screen and block areas children may try to investigate. These programs will block out sexual hot spots on the internet and can detect an offending phrase that might be used in an online-chat room. Parents should also try to be around their kids when they are on the internet and ask them questions about online computing. Parents should know how to track what sites and services their kids have been using.

Fifth, individual Christians should get involved with a local decency group which is organized to fight pornography. These groups have been effective in many localities in ridding their communities of the porno plague.

Sixth, we should express our concern to local officials (through letters and petitions) about adult movie houses and bookstores in the community.

Finally, Christians should not shop at local stores that sell pornographic materials (e.g., convenience stores, gas stations, etc.) or buy products from companies that use sexually-charged advertising (like A&F). They could also tell the managers of the stores in their neighborhood that pornographic materials are offensive to them.

Conclusion: Pornography is dangerous and damaging. Christians must stay away from it and work to limit and/or prevent pornography from influencing others.

Discussion:

1. Why is pornography so appealing? *It appeals to our lower nature, our base sensual desires. Men especially seem to have a natural desire to view that kind of material.*
2. Why is pornography so damaging? *It has been linked to sexual crimes, it debases women, it's ungodly, and it leads to all sorts of sexual perversion.*
3. What are some sources of pornography? *Magazines, TV, movies, internet, telephone*
4. How does culture change our value system? *By exposing us to higher levels of sin. As the culture becomes more immoral, our value system tends to follow it.*
5. How does freedom of speech impact this issue? *Images are considered to be speech. Thus, people are free to view pornographic images if they want to. However, there is a law against obscene material. But such laws are often not enforced in the US.*
6. Would it be OK for a man and his wife to view pornography in order to enhance their own physical relationship? *No. It's never OK to watch the sexual activities of other people.*

Promiscuity⁶⁵

You and me, baby, ain't nothin' but mammals;
So let's do it like they do on the Discovery Channel.⁶⁶

Sexual temptation has been a constant struggle for men and women. Throughout the pages of the Bible, we find characters who gave in to such temptations (e.g., Samson, David, Solomon). Today, sexual temptation is everywhere in our society. As we learned in the lesson on pornography, our culture is becoming increasingly tolerant of sexual immorality. It should be no surprise, then, that men and women are becoming increasingly promiscuous in their sexual behavior. Sexual purity is a rare and often scorned virtue in modern culture.

Definition: Promiscuity is frequent, casual sexual contact. A promiscuous person is indiscriminate in his or her choice of sexual partners.⁶⁷ One may be considered promiscuous if he or she has frequent, casual sexual contact with a variety of people.

Ideas that Drive Promiscuity

As the song says, since people are nothing but animals, what should prohibit them from acting like it? With no moral foundations, personal emotions, ambitions and desires become motivating factors. Sex promises physical pleasure and excitement. Thus, many people see sex as little more than a means of personal gratification with no moral implications. The idea of what is taboo has shifted dramatically. What is considered wrong is not sex outside bounds of marriage but interfering with the choice and pleasure of others. People want to be free to satisfy their every inner impulse.

Our culture exalts freedom of choice and personal fulfillment as the ultimate virtues because for many people, sex is just a physical act that fulfills a basic need and instinct. People should be free to pursue whatever sexual expression they choose. Sexuality is just our fundamental drive to reproduce and spread our genes into the next generation. In the naturalistic worldview, sex becomes simply a basic need and marriage just a relative cultural tradition.

The feminist movement is also partially responsible for increasing promiscuity. For the last few decades, society has emphasized the independence and equality of young women. The traditional notion of protecting their innocence is seen today as “sexist,” a confining restraint on sexual liberty and a sign of female weakness that modern culture rejects.

⁶⁵ Much of this material taken from Raymond G. Bohlin “Medical Reasons for Sexual Purity” © 1995 Probe Ministries International

⁶⁶ from “The Bad Touch” by The Bloodhound Gang. Cited in Christianity Today, July 10, 2000 “Losing Our Promiscuity”

⁶⁷ Excerpted from The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition © 1996 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from INSO Corporation; further reproduction and distribution in accordance with the Copyright Law of the United States. All rights reserved.

Today's cultural influences also drive promiscuity. Media and sports stars exemplify the promiscuous life. TV and music portray promiscuity as normal and healthy. Those who determine to remain pure until marriage are considered prudes, psychologically repressed, and/or religious fanatics. Our culture tells us that everybody's doing it, and it encourages those not doing it to start as soon as possible.

Startling Statistics:

- More than half of women and almost three-fourths of men are sexually active before their 18th birthday. First sexual contact for men generally occurs around 16 years old, and for women around 17 years old.
- About 3,000,000 teens get a STD each year.
- Nearly 80% of young Americans who had their first child before age 20, were unmarried, and did not finish high school live in poverty.
- 52% of all mothers receiving public assistance (welfare) had their first child as a teenager.
- A 1994 study found that 75% of teen mothers are unmarried.
- Homosexuals are especially promiscuous. In 1978, a study done by two homosexual doctors revealed that over 80% of homosexuals had 50+ partners in their lifetime, over 70% had 100+, almost 60% had 250+, 41% had 500+, and over 20% had more than 1000 partners. 79% noted that over half their sexual contacts were total strangers.⁶⁸ However, the presence of AIDS has curtailed the promiscuity of some homosexuals.
- 10% of women and 15% of men were under the influence of alcohol when they experienced sex for the first time.

How Common is Promiscuity?

Teens and college students seem to be increasingly promiscuous. One journalist studied a group of kids in an upper-class town in Georgia, and found that many of them had between 20 and 50 sexual partners. PBS broadcast a program that studied the sexual behavior of dozens of teenagers, mostly middle-schoolers, again affluent and well-educated, who pursue random sex that is casual, mechanical, something to escape to on weekends. One college-age woman said that couples often "hook up" for casual sex. Both parties realize, supposedly, that the relationship is based solely on physical attraction, with no risk of attachment or commitment to either party. "You're under no obligation to date each other or call.... nor should you expect to be called or dated." Hooking up is greatly aided by large quantities of alcohol that help to shed any remains of inhibition.⁶⁹ It's common in some colleges for men and women to spend the night in each other's dorm rooms. In such a culture, it's no wonder that promiscuity is on the increase.

⁶⁸ Bell, A.P. and Wienberg, M.S. "Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women" New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978.) Cited at http://www.cprmd.org/Myth_Fact_002.htm.

⁶⁹ from "Losing Our Promiscuity"

Biblical Principles Regarding Promiscuity

The biblical word “fornication” is *porneia*, which means, “to engage in sexual immorality of any kind.”⁷⁰ The Bible forbids sexual contact outside of marriage (Lev 18 & 20; Matt 15:19; 1 Cor 6:9-10, 18; 1 Thes 4:3).

God’s intentions for marriage were clearly stated right from the beginning. Genesis 2:18-25 makes it plain that God’s design was one man and one woman for life. Jesus used this passage as the basis for His teaching on divorce in Matthew 19: “What God has joined together, let no man break apart.” As Creator, God has every right to tell us what He wants.

God employed the marriage union as an analogy for His relationship with Israel in the OT and the Church’s relationship with Jesus in the NT. Isaiah 1:21, Jeremiah 2:20, 3:1-10, and especially Ezekiel 16:15-34 accuse Israel of playing the harlot, chasing after other gods and ignoring her rightful “husband.” God’s union with Israel was to be forever. He was faithful, but Israel was not. The Lord judged the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah. In Ephesians 5 Paul tells husbands that they are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church. Elsewhere, Jesus is spoken of as the bridegroom and the Church as His bride, another relationship that is to be forever. Marital and sexual relationships are to mirror the Lord’s special relationships with Israel and the Church.

Scripture repeatedly commands believers to refrain from sexual sin.

Ro 13:13 *Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.*

1Th 4:5 *not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;*

1Co 6:18 *Flee sexual immorality [porneia]. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*

2Ti 2:22 *Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Medical Consequences of Promiscuity

Significant negative physical consequences of sexual immorality should persuade people not to be promiscuous. In the 1960s there were only two sexually transmitted diseases: syphilis and gonorrhea. Today there are over 25, and 1 in 5 Americans between the ages of 15 and 55 has a viral STD. That number is 1 in 4 if bacterial infections are included. There are 12 million new infections every year with 60% of these among teenagers. Chlamydia and gonorrhea can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease which often results in sterility. Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) frequently produces genital warts which can develop into cancer. The fact is, if you are sexually active outside of marriage, it is almost guaranteed that you will contract at least one STD.

The Emotional Pain of Promiscuity

⁷⁰Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:770.

With irresponsible, illicit sex, all the worst possibilities in human relationships take shape and form: hurt, betrayal, jealousy, rejection, a growing inability to trust. The combination of casual encounters and significant bonds—made and broken, many times—produces a measure of loss and regret that one simply cannot ignore. Inherent in intimate contact is trust, true love and commitment. Sex without such emotional attachments is empty and joyless. The “love ‘em and leave em” mentality clearly produces many negative side effects. No one who engages in promiscuous sex gets away with it unscathed.

Steps to Take

We should desire and take steps to remain pure. Purity affirms who we are; we are made in the image of God. Purity affirms our relationship to Jesus Christ as His Bride. Purity affirms women as a treasure God created as man’s companion and helper and not as an object to conquer. God designed sex to be a powerful bonding force, one meant to help “glue” a man and a woman together for a lifetime. Outside that context, the power turns destructive. Thus, we must take steps to safeguard purity.

Pray and ask forgiveness for any involvement in sexual behaviors, pornography, sexually explicit movies, and lustful thoughts. Ask God to help you remain pure.

Stop any kind of immoral activity you are currently engaged in, including viewing pornography or sensual images. Get rid of all immoral material.

Install filters on internet connections.

Break off any relationships that are causing or tempting immoral behavior.

Stop going to places that provide temptations, e.g., friends’ homes, book stores, video outlets, internet sites, etc.

Decide beforehand what to do about sudden temptations.

Commit yourself to purity before marriage. Don’t engage in any kind of sexual behavior before marriage.

Ask for help. Make yourself accountable to someone else who can help you overcome temptation and remain pure.

Memorize Scripture passages that apply to purity.

Submit to your parents’ wishes regarding any dating relationship.

Conclusion: Christians must not give in to the pressure to be promiscuous. Sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage only. Until you get married, commit yourself to purity. Also, Christians must insist on civility and respect within their dating relationships.

Discussion:

1. Define promiscuity. *Frequent, casual sexual contact.*

2. Why are people promiscuous? *They have no sense of morality; they think of themselves as little more than animals; modern culture pushes the idea that it's cool to be promiscuous.*
3. How common is promiscuity among the teens you know?
4. Why is promiscuity so dangerous? *Physically – STDs; emotionally – regret, guilt; spiritually – sin, judgment.*

Capital Punishment

The issue of capital punishment continues to divide our country. Some say that murderers should be put to death for their crimes; others suggest that they should spend the rest of their lives in prison so they can think about and agonize over what they have done. Some see capital punishment as barbaric and even anti-Christian. Others see it as the only way to preserve justice and social order. What does the Bible have to say about the issue?

I. The Biblical Basis for Capital Punishment

A. OT passages clearly command it.

1. Gen 9:6 – “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”

Murder is wrong because it is destroying one made in God’s image. Capital punishment is based on the Genesis account of creation. Note that God stated this principle very early in human history, shortly after Noah’s flood. It is a universal principle that still applies.

This principle applies to premeditated murder, what the Bible describes as “lying in wait.” It does *not* apply to unintended deaths due to accidents or mishaps.

2. Ex 21:24f – “But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

Under the Mosaic Law, many offenses besides murder were to be punished by the death of the criminal: rape, adultery, fornication, disrespecting one’s parents, witchcraft, cursing God, leading others to worship false gods, and giving false testimony, to name a few. Note that in a capital case, two or three eyewitnesses of the crime were required for conviction (Deut 19:15). Circumstantial evidence was not sufficient grounds for death, nor was the testimony of a single individual.

B. NT passages clearly expect it. NT authors presuppose the same basic view on capital punishment as the OT presents.

1. Rom 13:1f – “... he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrong doer.” Rulers are ordained by God to carry out justice. At the time Paul wrote this, capital punishment was a common practice, and he doesn’t take issue with it. Bearing the sword implies the right to take the life of the criminal.
2. Jesus also recognized the power of governmental authorities over the lives of citizens. John 19:10-11 – “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

God's system of moral justice is the same in both testaments. While the Mosaic Law is no longer directly in force, the general principle given to Noah is, and it requires capital punishment for murder. The NT, including the teaching of Jesus, does not overturn this principle, but supposes its continuing validity for all societies.

Note: Justice is the primary reason for capital punishment. Murder and other offenses disturb proper order and only the death of the murderer can restore that order. Restitution is not possible for murder, and reformation can at best only guarantee that the same act by the same man will not occur again. But nothing can satisfy justice in regard to murder except the death of the murderer. Whether or not capital punishment deters crime is really not the issue.

II. General Principles Supporting Capital Punishment

- A. God has the power and right to take human life. God was involved, either directly or indirectly, in the taking of life as a punishment for the nation of Israel or for those who threatened or harmed Israel. In the case of Noah (Genesis 6-8), God destroyed all human and animal life except that which was on the ark. God destroyed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19). He took the lives of the Egyptians' first-born sons (Exod. 11) and destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exod. 14). There were also punishments such as the punishment at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13-14) or the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16) against the Jews wandering in the wilderness. The Old Testament is packed with references and examples of God taking life. In a sense, God used capital punishment to deal with Israel's sins and the sins of the nations surrounding Israel.
- B. God has extended legitimate authority to human government (Rom 13). One aspect of this authority is the power and right to punish evil doers.
- C. Capital punishment is based on the biblical principle of the sanctity of human life. Since man is made in the image of God, man's life has value and purpose. To take an innocent human life is immoral.
- D. Some suggest that the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" rules out capital punishment. However, capital punishment is not the same as murder. Legitimate governments can put convicted criminals to death without being charged with murder.

III. Some Objections to Capital Punishment

- A. Jesus and the case of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11f).

The OT requirement for adultery is death for both parties involved (Lev 20:10). Yet it seems that in this case Jesus did not enforce the punishment that was proper. Hence, some argue that Christians should be more interested in forgiveness and mercy than in a just punishment for crime.

But note the following facts:

1. According to the OT Law, the death sentence could be carried out only if two or three witnesses testified to the crime. In this case, no one brought any charge against the woman (.10-11). Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the Law of Moses but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). He followed it quite strictly. If the witnesses would have testified against the woman, the people would have had every right to stone her (and her partner).
 2. This scenario was a trap the Jews set up, hoping that Jesus would upset either the Romans or the Jewish people. If he insisted on the death penalty as required by the Law, he would be ignoring Rome's authority, which reserved the right of execution for itself. If he failed to enforce the death penalty, he would be breaking the Mosaic requirements. Jesus' actions in this case avoided both potential problems.
- B. Forgiveness and Grace: Some argue that capital punishment is unchristian because it ignores God's forgiveness through Christ's death. Christ fulfilled the Law for all men, and He died on the cross for all sin. Thus, men are no longer punishable for their sins or crimes.
- This objection is evidence of a misunderstanding of grace and forgiveness. Forgiveness does remove the penalty of sin, but not always the consequences of sin. God may forgive a drunk driver for his sin, but He won't necessarily give him back his driver's license or heal an injury that resulted from his drunkenness. Thus God may forgive a murderer (as He did in David's case), but the natural consequences of the sin remain (as they also did in that case).
- C. Jesus tells us to "turn the other cheek" and not seek revenge.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking to individual Christians. He is telling Christians that they should not try to replace the power of the government. Jesus does not deny the power and authority of government, but rather He calls individual Christians to love their enemies. He is not overturning capital punishment.
- D. Capital punishment is prone to abuse. Some say that it's inevitable that innocent people will be put to death.
- While the above argument is true, the fact that mistakes will be made is not a good argument for doing away with it completely. Doctors, airline pilots, army generals, and presidents all make mistakes, often with fatal results. Yet no one suggests getting rid of these professions. Imperfect judgment does not eliminate the need for men to exercise good judgment in applying moral and social justice. Further, with advances in technology like DNA testing, the justice system can be quite sure about the guilt or innocence of the person in question.
- E. Capital punishment is racist. A high percentage of ethnic minorities (Blacks, Hispanics, etc.) are on death row.
- We can and should acknowledge that some discrimination does take place in the criminal justice system. However, this is not really an argument against capital punishment. It is a compelling argument for reform of the criminal justice

system. It is an argument for implementing capital punishment carefully and without respect to ethnic or financial factors.

- F. Capital punishment is barbaric, inhumane, and has no place in civilized society. We should be more interested in rehabilitation than in vengeance.

Such a sentiment is simply a rejection of biblical morality and justice. The person who committed the crime was barbarous, not the justice system that makes the criminal pay for his crime. In fact, the death of the criminal is good for society. While experts disagree, studies show that capital punishment is a deterrent to some criminals. If nothing else, at least the criminal won't commit any more crimes. Also, modern methods of execution, such as lethal injection, are a humane means of taking a life.

Conclusion: Capital punishment implies a very high regard for innocent human life. Man is so valuable as an individual that anyone who tampers with his sacred right to live must face the consequences of losing his own life.

The death penalty protects society from the hardened murderer and is an appropriate and fitting punishment for the most heinous of crimes. As we've seen, the Bible as a whole supports the practice. Any argument brought forward to end capital punishment either rejects or ignores biblical truth.

Discussion:

1. Where is the first biblical mention of capital punishment as a principle? *Gen 9:6*
2. What are some of the capital crimes mentioned in the OT? *Murder, rape, adultery, fornication, disrespecting one's parents, witchcraft, cursing God, leading others to worship false gods, and giving false testimony*
3. T E Jesus overturned the OT Law's teaching regarding capital punishment.
4. T E Paul overturned the OT Law's teaching regarding capital punishment.
5. What is the primary purpose for capital punishment? *Justice*
6. How many witnesses had to come forward under the OT Law before capital punishment could proceed? *2-3*
7. Jesus told us to "turn the other cheek." Why doesn't this rule out capital punishment? *Jesus was speaking about personal interaction, not the authority of governments.*

Ethical Absolutism or Relativism?

In our study of Biblical ethics, we've taken the position that morality is rooted in unchanging, eternal truth—God's own character and His revealed will. Christians can have moral certainty because their values are based on an unchanging, absolute, eternal standard.

Many people today are hesitant to label anything as “right” or “wrong” because they have no basis for such judgments. They would say that values are simply opinions, and since everyone has a different opinion, it's impossible to judge. One simply cannot claim that any behavior is right or wrong, good or bad. What one person thinks of as wrong may be perfectly acceptable for another, depending on a number of factors. Such a position reflects a philosophy known as relativism. This idea asserts that there are no absolutes, no moral rules that apply to everyone or to every situation.

For many in our society, tolerance of differing opinions (values) is a great virtue. One should never criticize others for their ethical choices. Everyone should have the freedom to behave in ways they think are best, as long as those choices don't hurt others. Lack of tolerance is immoral. “Live and let live.” The greatest virtue is allowing people the freedom to do whatever they want. Right and wrong do exist, but one should not impose his value system on anyone else; in fact, it's immoral to do so. Such a position reflects a philosophy known as libertarianism.

An absolute position on moral absolutes is increasingly unpopular in our society. As tolerance for “alternative lifestyles” and diverse viewpoints become the norm, anyone standing for traditional moral values can expect opposition and ridicule. Those who take biblical morality seriously must renew their commitment to standing firm for absolute truth in spite of our culture's hostility toward that viewpoint.

This lesson will examine the differences between moral relativism and moral absolutism.

I. Moral Relativism

- A. As noted above, relativism asserts that moral values are “relative” to the person who holds them. Morality has no solid foundation but is dependent upon individual opinion, feelings, and experiences. There are no objective, transcendent moral norms. There is nothing objectively outside one's own context by which to measure goodness or badness. There is no such thing as absolute truth. The “truth” of a statement is always dependent on the context in which it is made. In other words, an individual, a family, a society, or a culture determines the “truth” of any statement.
- B. Relativists insist that it is impossible for one to overcome his biases, whether personal or cultural. One's own viewpoint prohibits him from seeing things “as they really are.” Hence, all one is left with is how things appear to the individual. Every human experience and all knowledge is ultimately subjective, known only to the one experiencing it. Personal experience is the only real source of “truth.”

There are no further facts about morality beyond the preferences of groups or individuals.

- C. Moral or ethical statements do not reflect absolute and universal moral truths, but instead make claims relative to social, cultural, historical or personal circumstances. Morality is a strictly human invention, a social construct, mere custom. Moral values change from society to society throughout time and throughout the world. No universal standard exists by which to assess the truth or falsity of an ethical statement. Moral values are applicable only within certain cultural boundaries or in the context of individual preferences. Differing value systems have equal validity, with no standard for judging among conflicting beliefs. There is no objective way to judge morality. When one makes a moral statement there is always an extra clause that ties it to a particular context (“according to...”) and is true or false depending on that context.
- D. Some relativists disavow all rules of logic, asserting that such objectivity imposes sexist, bigoted, and racist rules designed to oppress women, non-Christians, and minorities. Logical statements of fact or claims of “truth” are products of Western culture that powerful people have always used to oppress the weak. Claims to absolute truth are nothing more than an imposition of power.

75% of American college professors currently teach that there is no such thing as right and wrong. Instead, they treat the questions of good and evil as relative to “individual values and cultural diversity.”⁷¹

- E. Implications of moral relativism:
 - 1. One should never assume that his views of morality are any better or worse than anyone else’s views. Everyone has his own opinion, and each opinion is equally valid.
 - 2. One should never exercise moral judgment. No one has the right judge anyone else’s behavior.
 - 3. One should never force his moral views on anyone else. It is no use trying to convince anyone else that his moral choices are wrong because it’s impossible to say what ought to be.
 - 4. Toleration is the greatest moral value. “Live and let live.”
 - 5. Public morality is really only social convention, a set of rules that citizens agree to follow, but with no connection to absolute truth (which does not exist). Morals do not exist; only customs do.
 - 6. Rules of social conduct must continually evolve and change. Traditional standards must give way to new ideas. The only constant is change. Values must be fluid and flexible, and people must be willing to change their views as society evolves. People must overcome the old taboos and embrace alternative patterns of behavior. There are no general, commonly

⁷¹ Bill O’Reilly, citing a Zogby poll, 2002 Fox News column.

accepted principles to guide human behavior. Everyone should be free to push the limits of acceptability.

7. One must create his own value system and be willing to modify it as needed. Children especially must be encouraged to develop their own value system based on their own ideas, beliefs and experiences. They should be challenged to reject their parents' values.
8. The only reasons to be moral would be to avoid punishment, to gain praise, to attain happiness, to be dignified, or to fit in with society. There is no transcendent reason for morality.

F. Failures of relativism

1. Relativism is self-contradictory. Without a foundational sense of right and wrong, one could never say that anything "ought to be" one way or another. Relativism does not allow for a higher law or set of standards that apply universally. Those advocating relativism clearly believe their position is "good" and "right," yet they disavow any standards of "good" or "right." They want to convince others that their opinion is best, yet they repudiate any way of judging what is "best." Hence, a moral relativist has nothing to say to anyone. He should keep his mouth shut.
2. Relativism does not work. Relativism offers no way to choose among competing values. What would be the outcome in society if everyone followed his own sense of morality? *Chaos, brutality and carnage. Only the strongest would survive. Eventually, people would demand a set of rules/laws to govern behavior.*
3. Relativism leads to absurdity.

Evaluate the following quote: "Like most parents, I think that a sense of moral responsibility is one of the greatest gifts I can give my child. But teaching morality doesn't mean imposing my moral values on others. It means sharing wisdom, giving reasons for believing as I do—and then trusting others to think and judge for themselves.

My parents' morals were deeply rooted in religious conviction but tempered by tolerance—the essence of which is respect for other people's views. They taught me that reasonable people may differ on moral issues, and that fundamental respect for others is morality of the highest order. ...

When others try to inflict their views on me, my daughter or anyone else, that's not morality; it's tyranny. It's unfair, and it's un-American."⁷²

Contradictions:

- *She says it's wrong to impose moral values on others, yet she's trying to impose that value on the reader.*
- *Respect for others is morality of the highest order—says who? Her parents. She's arguing against adopting the value system from others.*

⁷² "Self-Definition: Morality," by Faye Wattleton, former president of Planned Parenthood.
<http://www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=6223>

- *We should respect all viewpoints, but if you differ with me, you are immoral, un-American and tyrannous. If you disagree that all viewpoints are equally valid, then your viewpoint is invalid.*
- *She advocates toleration for all viewpoints, then shows her lack of tolerance for some viewpoints.*

Jud 21:25 *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

II. Moral Absolutism

- A. Moral absolutism holds that morality is objective, depending on something other than one's own personal feelings, ideas, and experiences. Morality is absolute in the sense of being based on a true and unchanging standard—God Himself. Morality is ultimately based on the existence and character of God. Since God never ceases to exist, and since God's character does not change, basic moral standards are also timeless and universal. God's value system is supreme. All genuine morality must be related to God and His will.

Le 18:4 *Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God.*

Le 20:7 *Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.*

Le 24:22 *Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God.*

Eze 20:19 *I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them;*

- B. The existence of genuine, objective truth drives moral absolutism. One does not make up truth; he receives it. God reveals truth to mankind. God has revealed not only truth about Himself; God has revealed Himself. This revelation is true, objective, and real. Morality must rest on this revelation.
- C. Christians believe that moral absolutes must be rooted in the revealed will of God as given in the Bible. The only genuine source of moral guidance is God, and the only place one can discover God's moral will is the Bible.⁷³ God's laws are designed to govern human behavior.
- D. Moral rules stand outside of people; they are discovered rather than invented. They apply to everyone equally in the same situation. Morality is absolute in that in any given situation it applies equally to everyone in that situation.⁷⁴
- E. God has the right to demand that humans follow His value system. God is the designer, creator and owner of all things, and He has the right to tell his creation how to behave.

Le 19:36 *Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.*

⁷³ Creation bears witness to the existence of God and reveals some information about his power and goodness (Ps 19:1-4). However, general revelation says little about the creator's moral will.

⁷⁴ Gregory Koukl, "When Absolutism is Relative" <http://www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5698>

Nu 15:41 *I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.*

F. Implications of moral absolutism:

1. Humans can normally be certain of the morality of any particular situation or choice. Specific biblical laws or general principles pertain to almost any situation that humans encounter.
2. Objective standards (i.e., the rule of law) are necessary for societies to function. Where the rule of law end, chaos and anarchy soon follow.
3. Objective standards are necessary for conditions to improve. If one has no sense of what “ought to be,” it’s impossible to make improvements.
4. One does not create his own value system; he receives and implements the one that God supplied.
5. One can be sure that his views on morality are correct. To the degree that one’s value system reflects God’s value system, he can be sure that he is right.
6. One should feel free to encourage others to adopt God’s value system and discourage others from violating it. Biblical morality is the only correct ethical system, and people should recognize it.
7. Laws governing society should reflect divine values. “Higher” law must trump merely human laws. Any human laws that contradict God’s law are illegitimate and invalid.
8. Moral judgment is possible because the standard of judgment is available to all. One can state with confidence whether a particular behavior is good or bad, proper or wicked, just or unjust.
9. Toleration has limits. When a person’s behavior becomes extreme, external restraints should be imposed. Certain behaviors should not be tolerated.
10. True morality is more than mere human custom or social construct.
11. Enforcing basic morality is in the best interests of everyone. Those violating primary moral standards should be penalized.
12. Rules of conduct may vary somewhat as time goes by, but basic moral principles are timeless. How a person or a society applies biblical morals will vary.

G. The strengths of moral absolutism

1. Moral absolutism is non-contradictory. Morality follows a consistent system of standards based on God’s unchanging character.
2. Moral absolutism provides individuals, families, and societies with recognized, universal standards by which to order themselves. God’s value system applies to all people in all circumstances.
3. Moral absolutism works. Applying consistent standards of morality leads to order and stability within any context. Chaos and anarchy reign where people reject standards of morality.

Conclusion: The ultimate question in morality is, Do we live by the value system God gave us, or do we make up our own?

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE CHURCH

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Introduction

“We further engage to walk circumspectly and watchfully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; ... [and] to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage.” So states the church covenant of Liberty Baptist Church in Antigo, Wisconsin. Similar language prohibiting alcohol consumption within the membership is contained in most church covenants within independent Baptist fundamentalism. Churches are free to include any stipulations within their covenants that they see fit. However, implementing such prohibitions raises some complex questions. For example, should a church refuse membership to an individual who is genuinely saved and desires baptism and church membership, but who is not convinced of the need to absolutely abstain from all forms of alcoholic beverages? Is coming to an abstinent position a matter of spiritual growth, and if so, should the church allow individuals to be baptized and join the church even if they have not yet adopted an abstinent position? Must a new convert achieve a certain level of sanctification before baptism and church membership? Further, why do church covenants include language forbidding alcohol consumption? Such documents typically do not list all the other dangerous or unhealthy behaviors church members are to avoid, so why is alcohol consumption targeted for special attention? Enforcing a consistent position of absolute abstinence from the sale and use of alcohol is somewhat problematic.

The intent of this paper is to propose a biblical and practical position a fundamental, independent Baptist church ought to take on the issue of alcohol consumption within the membership. In coming to this conclusion the writer will examine what the Bible teaches regarding alcohol and discuss the arguments historically proposed for an abstinent position. The conclusion will be a synthesis that both recognizes the biblical teaching on the issue and the dangers of alcohol use and abuse.

What The Bible Teaches Regarding Alcohol Consumption

Baptists have historically asserted that the Bible is the “complete and infallible guide and standard of authority in all matters of religion and morals.”⁷⁵ What matters, then, is what the Bible teaches on the subject. Other considerations have validity only to the degree that they are consistent with biblical teaching. The Bible provides no systematic treatment of alcohol use and abuse, but one may draw some reasonable conclusions from the available data, of which there is no lack.

⁷⁵Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1949), 11.

Texts Prohibit Drunkenness and Limit Consumption.

Drunkenness is clearly outside the realm of acceptable behaviors for Christians. The Bible repeatedly condemns the practice of drinking alcohol to the point of inebriation. Many Old Testament examples reveal the destructive results of drunkenness. Noah exposed his nakedness while in a drunken stupor,⁷⁶ Lot's daughters encouraged him to become drunk so they could engage in incest with him,⁷⁷ and Elah's drunkenness aided Zimri's assassination attempt.⁷⁸ Eli thought that Hannah was drunk, but she denied it, resenting the idea that she was "a daughter of Belial."⁷⁹ Nabal displayed his foolishness by becoming "very drunken" at a feast.⁸⁰ The examples of drunkenness in the Old Testament should warn one of the dangers of excessive drink.

The Old Testament also contains direct teaching prohibiting drunkenness or describing the negative effects of it. Perhaps the most vivid biblical description of inebriation is found in Proverbs 23:29-35. The writer depicts the drunk as experiencing woe, sorrow, wounds and bloodshot eyes. Drunken people "behold strange women" and "utter perverse things."⁸¹ Although the experience is like being sick or physically beaten, alcohol has such a hold on the drunkard that he seeks to indulge again as soon as he wakes from his besotted stupor. A wise person will avoid wine because at the end it "bites like a serpent and stings like an adder."⁸² Solomon advises his readers not to spend time among poverty-stricken, raggedy "winebibbers."⁸³ Perhaps the most well known warning about alcohol abuse asserts that "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."⁸⁴

The Prophets show equal condemnation for drunkenness. Isaiah denounces those that "rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!"⁸⁵ He expresses his contempt for the priest and the prophet who "have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way."⁸⁶ Isaiah assails the "greedy dogs" who say, "I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."⁸⁷ Hosea asserts that "whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart."⁸⁸ He decries "princes ... [who] have made him sick with bottles of wine."⁸⁹ Joel records God's displeasure over the sinfulness of people who "sold a girl for wine, that they might drink."⁹⁰ Habbakuk laments one who "transgresseth by wine, . . . a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people."⁹¹ He also expresses woe upon one who "giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and

⁷⁶Gen 9:21.

⁷⁷Gen 19:30-36.

⁷⁸1 Kgs 16:9-10.

⁷⁹1 Sam 1:13-17.

⁸⁰1 Sam 25:36.

⁸¹Prov 23:33.

⁸²Prov 23:32.

⁸³Prov 23:20.

⁸⁴Prov 20:1.

⁸⁵Isa 5:11.

⁸⁶Isa 28:7.

⁸⁷Isa 52:12-13.

⁸⁸Hos 4:11.

⁸⁹Hos 7:5.

⁹⁰Joel 3:3.

⁹¹Hab 2:5.

makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!”⁹² The prophets are not sparing in their derision of drunkenness.

The New Testament also clearly condemns alcoholic intemperance. Paul castigated the Corinthians for being drunk while participating in the Lord’s Supper.⁹³ Believers are no longer to walk “in reveling and drunkenness” like they did before salvation.⁹⁴ Addiction to wine disqualifies a man from spiritual leadership. One qualification for pastors and deacons is that they not be “given to wine.”⁹⁵ Unsaved Gentiles engaged in “lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings”⁹⁶ and the like, but believers are to no longer live that way. Paul commands his readers to be filled with the Spirit instead of being drunk with wine⁹⁷ and to separate themselves from drunkards.⁹⁸ He advocates abstaining from wine if drinking causes one’s brother to stumble.⁹⁹ Geisler mentions the following negative effects of overindulgence reflected in various biblical texts: a slowing of the thinking processes, stupor, sickness, staggering (loss of balance and mental control), arrogance, forgetfulness, confusion and delirious dreams, sleepiness, lack of feeling, bloodshot eyes and poverty.¹⁰⁰ “Drunkenness in the Bible is always associated with terrible things—unrestrained living, immorality, dissolute behavior, and reckless, wild behavior.”¹⁰¹

Certain people in responsible positions should not consume alcohol, at least not while on duty or while they need their wits about them. God told Aaron and his sons not to drink alcohol when performing the duties of a priest: “Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.”¹⁰² Those taking Nazarite vows and those selected for special tasks were not to drink alcoholic beverages.¹⁰³ King Lemuel’s mother taught him a wise proverb: “It is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.”¹⁰⁴

One can make a strong biblical case that alcohol consumption is a dangerous and potentially disastrous occupation. Several prominent examples give sober testimony to the tragic results of drunkenness, and numerous direct imperatives and wisdom sayings warn the reader about the wounds, bites, and sorrows that alcohol can inflict upon those who are deceived thereby. It is no wonder, then, that serious Christians of all sorts advocate abstaining from alcohol altogether.

Texts Present Alcohol in a Positive or Neutral Light.

Those who have been taught that the only biblical position is total abstinence may be surprised to learn that the Bible contains a plethora of texts that present moderate alcohol use in a favorable way. John MacArthur notes the following in this regard:

In *Exodus 29* and *Leviticus 23* the people were told to bring drink offerings of wine to the temple for God. According to *I Chronicles 29:19* it is very likely that a supply of wine was kept in the temple for the drink offerings. *Judges 9:13* and *Psalms 104:15*

⁹²Hab 2:15.

⁹³1 Cor 11:21.

⁹⁴Rom 13:13.

⁹⁵1 Tim 3:2-8; Titus 1:7

⁹⁶1 Pet 4:3.

⁹⁷Eph 5:18.

⁹⁸1 Cor 5:11.

⁹⁹Rom 14:21.

¹⁰⁰Normal L. Geisler, “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking,” *BSac* 139 (1982): 48. Version 2.1b. 2000-2004.

¹⁰¹John MacArthur Jr., *Living in the Spirit: A Look at Wine, the Word and Songs* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981), 4.

¹⁰²Lev 10:8,9.

¹⁰³Num 6:1-3; Judg 13:7.

¹⁰⁴Prov 31:4.

mentions a special wine that cheers and makes one happy. In *Isaiah 24:9* the drinking of wine was accompanied with singing good songs. In *Isaiah 55:1,2* wine is equated with salvation. “*Come, buy wine,*” is really an invitation to salvation. In *John 13* our Lord drank wine and ordained the Lord’s Supper. Paul told Timothy, in *I Timothy 5:23*, to drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake. When the Good Samaritan found a man on the side of the road, he got him all fixed up and poured wine in his wounds (*Luke 10:34*). In *Proverbs 31:6,7* it says when somebody gets old and sick and about to die, to give them wine as a sedative to ease the pain.¹⁰⁵

Additional examples are not hard to find. Boaz’s “heart was merry”¹⁰⁶ after eating and drinking, which suggests that what he drank had some alcoholic content. The Israelites offered wine as part of their worship in the temple, and the Levites consumed it regularly. God gave them “all the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD.”¹⁰⁷ A clear statement giving permission for the drinking of wine and even strong drink is found in *Deuteronomy 14:26*: “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.” Esther drank with the king,¹⁰⁸ Job’s family drank wine,¹⁰⁹ and Daniel drank wine unless he was fasting.¹¹⁰ Jesus confirmed that, unlike John the Baptist, he came “eating and drinking,” for which the Pharisees criticized him as a “gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”¹¹¹ This suggests that our Lord drank wine in the normal course of his life. Jesus and the disciples consumed wine at the Last Supper.¹¹² Thus, one cannot deny that in some cases the Bible presents the moderate use of alcohol in a positive light. Even the merry-making, sensory-deadening capacities of alcohol enjoy biblical approval in some cases.

The imagery of the vineyard, wine making and wine consumption is closely associated with positive ideas. The increase of corn and wine is closely associated with gladness of heart.¹¹³ Wisdom personified invites the simple to “drink of the wine which I have mingled.”¹¹⁴ Those who honor the Lord with their offerings can be assured that their “presses shall burst out with new wine.”¹¹⁵ In Jotham’s allegory, the personified vine states that its “wine ... cheereth God and man.”¹¹⁶ The psalmist commends “wine that gladdens the heart of man.”¹¹⁷ Oil, bread and wine are often mentioned together and seem to be mainstay foods in Jewish culture.¹¹⁸ Isaiah describes the blessings of God as “a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”¹¹⁹ God describes the “well-beloved” nation of Israel as a “vineyard in a very fruitful hill” that he planted with the “choicest vine” and also “made a winepress therein.”¹²⁰ Jeremiah describes the messianic kingdom as a time “for wheat, and for

¹⁰⁵MacArthur, *Living in the Spirit*, 9. Emphases his.

¹⁰⁶Ruth 3:7.

¹⁰⁷Num 18:12

¹⁰⁸Esth 5:6; 7:1-2

¹⁰⁹Job 1:13.

¹¹⁰Dan 10:3.

¹¹¹Luke 7:34.

¹¹²Luke 22:20.

¹¹³Ps 4:7; 104:15.

¹¹⁴Prov 9:5.

¹¹⁵Prov 3:10.

¹¹⁶Judg 9:13.

¹¹⁷Ps 104:15.

¹¹⁸2 Kgs 18:32; 1 Chr 12:40; Ps 104:15; Hag 2:12.

¹¹⁹Isa 25:6.

¹²⁰Isa 5:1-2.

wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all.”¹²¹ Through Joel, God promises to “send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith.”¹²² Micah foretells of a future day in which everyone will sit “under his vine and under his fig tree.”¹²³ Jesus’ first miracle occurred at a wedding party where he turned water into wine—lots of it.¹²⁴

This miracle portrays not only the joy Christ brings into a person’s life but also the *abundance* of joy. The Lord made between 120 and 150 gallons of wine! . . . Surely the vast supply of wine portrays both the abundance of the kingdom age and the fullness of joy in the individual Christian’s experience.¹²⁵

Further, Jesus compares himself to a vine, his Father to a vintner and his disciples to branches which he expects to bear fruit.¹²⁶ During biblical times, the whole wine-making and wine-consuming process was closely associated with prosperity, peace, and God’s blessing, and is thus a positive motif. No wonder that an old Jewish saying asserted, “Without wine there is no joy.”¹²⁷

This being the case, it stands to reason that the Jews associated the absence or scarcity of wine with God’s displeasure. When the Lord brings about the promised judgment on Israel, “they shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.”¹²⁸ During this time the new wine will mourn, the vine languish and the normally merry-hearted will sigh. Because the vine is “dried up, . . . joy is withered away from the sons of men.”¹²⁹ A sure indication that “the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob” is that destroyers have “marred their vine branches.”¹³⁰ Tragedy has befallen the nation when “the sons of the stranger [are drinking] thy wine, for that which thou hast laboured.”¹³¹

Paul’s discussion of wine drinking in Romans chapter 14 is very informative to the debate. Here the apostle categorizes the drinking of wine with other non-essential issues that believers may disagree about, and which should not cause any divisions within the body. Whether one eats all things or just vegetables, whether one regards one day as special or all days the same, no one should judge his brother for such personal choices. In this context, Paul asserts “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”¹³² By listing eating foods with drinking wine or doing anything else, Paul surely is implying that wine drinking is in the same category as food choices, namely, a non-essential matter that each believer must determine for himself. The eating of flesh and the drinking of wine is clearly allowable for believers, as long as one’s eating and drinking are non-offensive. Paul had no better opportunity to prohibit alcohol use than in this context. He certainly limits it, but he does not forbid it.

What is the sincere Bible student or the typical church member to make of the biblical data? On one hand, the abuse of alcohol is severely denounced, while on the other hand the moderate use of alcohol is allowed and even condoned, at least in some cases.

¹²¹Jer 31:12.

¹²²Joel 2:19.

¹²³Mic 4:4.

¹²⁴John 2:9.

¹²⁵Stanley D. Toussaint, “The Significance of the First Sign in John’s Gospel,” *BSac* 134 (1977): 45. Version 2.1b. 2000-2004. Emphasis his.

¹²⁶John 2:1-11, 15:1-9.

¹²⁷B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (1881; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 36.

¹²⁸Isa 24:7,9.

¹²⁹Joel 1:12.

¹³⁰Nah 2:2.

¹³¹Isa 62:8.

¹³²Rom 14:21.

These two aspects of wine, its use and its abuse, its benefits and its curse, its acceptance in God's sight and its abhorrence, are interwoven into the fabric of the OT so that it may gladden the heart of man (Ps. 104:15) or cause his mind to err (Is. 28:7), it can be associated with merriment (Ec. 10:19) or with anger (Is. 5:11), it can be used to uncover the shame of Noah (Gn. 9:21) or in the hands of Melchizedek to honour Abraham (Gn. 14:18).¹³³

Typical Jewish people who lived during the times of the biblical authors were certainly not tea-totalers. They drank alcoholic wine and even strong drink at times. There was no doubt in their minds that drunkenness was immoral, but they consumed alcohol to encourage celebration and to ease pain. They thought of wine as a gift from God and an indication of his blessing. Certain people at specific times did not indulge, but beyond the given limitations, the general populace enjoyed the fruit of the vine and described its consumption in very positive terms. The overall teaching of the Bible is that alcohol consumption is allowed as long as one does not become drunk, fail to carry out his responsibilities or cause others to stumble.

Abstinence Arguments Examined

Even a cursory reading of the Bible proves that God's people have historically produced and consumed wine and strong drink. Old Testament and New Testament believers enjoyed the fruit of the vine as an indication of God's blessing. They knew that drunkenness was immoral, but they did indulge, at least occasionally, to the point of becoming merry-hearted. Unfortunately, some of them abused alcohol and suffered severe consequences. Why then is total abstinence the rule in the typical fundamental Baptist church? One would think that those who take the Bible as their only rule for faith and practice could easily discern the clear Scriptural guidance on the matter.

Several arguments in favor of total abstinence find currency in Baptist churches. Some of these point to the biblical statements regarding the dangers of alcohol use and of drunkenness as listed above. Others are not based on the biblical data per se, but on an analysis of the processes involved in wine and strong drink production. Since biblical descriptions of the dangers of drunkenness have already been examined above, it may be fitting to consider some of the other arguments for abstinence.

Wine Used was Unfermented and Nonintoxicating.

William Patton explains in some detail the physical processes involved in wine making. He drives a distinction between new wine and fermented wine. While new wine is "a real blessing" and "essential to the comfort and well-being of man,"¹³⁴ fermented wine is "the most direct cause of the wretchedness and woe in this life, and of eternal ruin the the future."¹³⁵ New wine was freshly squeezed, directly from the press, and thus not fermented. All the biblical commendations of wine apply to new wine, not fermented wine. However, as Williamson notes, "a careful study of the Hebrew and Greek terms reveal no such distinction in Scripture."¹³⁶ Interestingly, Hosea 4:11 employs both terms: "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart." If both wine and new wine "take away the heart," one cannot help but conclude that they both have alcoholic content.

¹³³F. S. Fitzsimmonds, "Wine and Strong Drink," n.p., *NBD*. Version 2.1b. 2000-2004.

¹³⁴William Patton, *Bible Wines or The Laws of Fermentation* (Little Rock: Challenge Press, n.d.), 55, 59.

¹³⁵Patton, *Bible Wines*, 60.

¹³⁶G. I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and in the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1976), 10.

A third word, sometimes translated ‘new’ or ‘sweet wine,’ has often been regarded as unfermented and therefore unintoxicating wine, but an example such as Ho. 4:11, together with the usage of the Talmud, makes clear that it is capable of being used in a bad sense equally with the others. . . . The term ‘new wine’ does not indicate wine which has not fermented, for in fact the process of fermentation sets in very rapidly, and unfermented wine could not be available many months after the harvest (Acts 2:13). It represents rather wine made from the first drippings of the juice before the winepress was trodden. As such it would be particularly potent and would come immediately to mind as a probable explanation of what seemed to be a drunken state. . . . [T]he Bible in employing various synonyms makes no consistent distinction between them.¹³⁷

Geisler admits that there is no reason to think that the wine Jesus and the disciples drank during the Lord’s Supper was anything other than fermented.¹³⁸ Paul criticized the Corinthians for getting drunk before taking communion at their church, which implies that their wine was alcoholic. Interestingly, in that context he does not prohibit alcohol use but exclaims, “What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?”¹³⁹ What they were drinking was alcoholic wine. The idea that biblical wines were nonintoxicating does not follow the evidence.

Fermented Wine was Leavened.

Perhaps one of the most common arguments against the use of wine is that fermented wine is leavened and thus would not have been used either in Old Testament temple worship or in the Lord’s Supper. Certainly Jesus never would have consumed or made leavened wine. Leaven symbolizes evil and wickedness, and God would have not accepted such corrupted elements. Patton reflects such reasoning, asserting that “leaven was forbidden as an offering.”¹⁴⁰ He is right; God forbade the presence of leaven in the sacrifices.¹⁴¹ It has yet to be proven, however, that prohibition against leaven applies to alcoholic wine. In fact, it does not.

A drink-offering of wine was presented with the daily sacrifice,¹⁴² and also with the offering of the first-fruits,¹⁴³ and with various other sacrifices.¹⁴⁴ The fact that wine was used at the celebration of the Passover is telling. If the traditional practice of observing the Passover is any indication of how the Jews historically celebrated the event, wine was a significant part of the ceremony. “The Paschal supper proper . . . included the symbolic elements of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, some minor condiments and four cups of wine at specified points.”¹⁴⁵ The use of wine at the Passover is significant because there was to be no leaven consumed during this time. The law stipulated that during the feast,

[s]even days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.¹⁴⁶

It is mighty curious that wine would be included in the Passover ritual with such clear-cut prohibitions against leaven. Yet they did drink wine—four cups of it, in fact. And it will not do

¹³⁷Fitzsimmonds, “Wine and Strong Drink,” n.p.

¹³⁸Geisler, “Christian Perspective,” 49.

¹³⁹1 Cor 11:22.

¹⁴⁰Patton, *Bible Wines*, 60.

¹⁴¹Exod 23:18; 34:25; Lev. 6:17; 7:12; 10:12.

¹⁴²Exod 29:40, 41.

¹⁴³Lev 23:13.

¹⁴⁴Num 15:5, 7, 10.

¹⁴⁵Fitzsimmonds, “Wine and Strong Drink,” n.p.

¹⁴⁶Exod 12:17-20.

to suggest that the wine they drank was also unleavened. As shown above, both regular wine and new wine were fermented and thus leavened. The only reasonable explanation is that the Jews did not consider fermented wine to be prohibited by the regulations against leaven.

Leaven is almost exclusively associated with bread in the Bible. The fermentation process produced leaven which bakers used to leaven their bread. Unleavened bread became significant because it was an important element of the original Passover and Exodus events.

The earliest Mosaic legislation (Ex. 23:18; 34:25) prohibited the use of leaven during the Passover and the ‘feast of unleavened bread.’ . . . This was to remind the Israelites of their hurried departure from Egypt, when without waiting to bake leavened bread they carried dough and kneading-troughs with them, baking as they wandered. . . . The prohibition on leaven, as that on honey (Lv. 2:11), was possibly made because fermentation implied disintegration and corruption, and to the Hebrew anything in a decayed state suggested uncleanness. Rabbinical writers often used leaven as a symbol of evil and of man’s hereditary corruption (cf. also Ex. 12:8, 15–20).¹⁴⁷

One of the words for “leaven,” has the basic meaning of “that which is leavened” or “to become fermented or sour.”¹⁴⁸ Numbers 6:2-3 employs the word when it declares that a Nazirite “must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink.”¹⁴⁹ Note that the text implies that wine is a fermented drink—it is leavened. One might easily conclude, then, that wine was off limits for use in the sacrificial system. After all, the command is clear: “No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the LORD made by fire.”¹⁵⁰ But such prohibitions did not apply to the use of wine in the offering. Numbers 28:14 indicates the use of wine as an element of the sacrifice: “And their drink offerings shall be half an hin of wine unto a bullock, and the third part of an hin unto a ram, and a fourth part of an hin unto a lamb: this is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year.”

The practice of offering drink offerings (i.e., libations) predates the tabernacle system and continued at other altars even after the tabernacle and temple were available. . . . It was specifically legislated that libations along with grain offerings should normally accompany any burnt or peace offering (Num. 15:1–5).¹⁵¹

The point is that fermented wine was a constituent part of the sacrificial system, being commonly used in the burnt offerings and peace offerings. One could suggest, as Patton and others do, that some wine was “good” and other wine was “bad.” The good, unfermented wine was appropriate for use in the sacrificial system, while the bad, fermented kind was “the emblem of God’s wrath and of eternal ruin.”¹⁵² However, as noted above, both new wine and regular wine were capable of intoxicating the drinker—both contained leaven. Both new wine and regular wine were likely used in the sacrificial system. Thus, commands such as “Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven”¹⁵³ simply did not apply to the leaven in wine. The Jews did indeed offer wine with their sacrifices and consumed it during the Passover without violating the command prohibiting leaven. The argument asserting that wine, because it

¹⁴⁷J. D. Douglas, “Leaven,” n.p. *NBD*. Version 2.1b 2000-2004.

¹⁴⁸Livingston, “חֶמֶץ,” n.p. *TWOT*. Version 2.1b. 2000-2004.

¹⁴⁹NIV.

¹⁵⁰Lev 2:11.

¹⁵¹Richard E. Averbeck, “Offerings and Sacrifices,” n.p. *EDBT*. Version 2.1b. 2000-2004.

¹⁵²Patton, *Bible Wines*, 61.

¹⁵³Exod 34:15.

is leavened or fermented, is unsuitable for use in worship or for consumption by believers is not convincing.

Biblical Wines Were Not Potent.

Another argument for abstinence suggests that wine made in biblical times had a lower alcoholic content than current wines do. Modern wines typically contain about 10% alcohol, but biblical wines would have contained far less than that. Further, wine was normally mixed with water, which greatly reduced its overall alcohol content.

[W]ine in Homer's day was twenty parts water and one part wine (*Odyssey* 9.208–9).

Pliny referred to wine as eight parts water and one part wine (*Natural History* 14.6–54).

According to Aristophanes, it was stronger: three parts water and two parts wine. Other classical Greek writers spoke of other mixtures: Euenos—three parts water, one part wine; Hesiod—three to one, water to wine; Alexis—four to one: Diocles and

Anacreon—two to one: and Ion—three to one. The average was about three or four parts of water to one part of wine.¹⁵⁴

At that rate, one would have to consume a vast quantity, rising up in the morning and continuing until night, before achieving a drunken state. This accords nicely with Peter's indignant response to those who thought the disciples were "full of new wine" on Pentecost, which was quite impossible, seeing it was "but the third hour of the day."¹⁵⁵ MacArthur comments that "the wine that they consumed in those days was either completely non-alcoholic (being mixed from a syrup or paste) or was subalcoholic according to today's standards."¹⁵⁶ Modern wine, some argue, should be thought of as strong drink because of its high alcohol content.¹⁵⁷ The preponderance of strong drink texts express the dangers of its use, so a familiar argument asserts that modern wine, being strong drink, is off limits.

Such arguments begin losing credibility, however, as one notices texts in which wine and strong drink are found together and in parallel.¹⁵⁸ What is true of one is true of the other. One could get drunk on wine as well as on strong drink. Both were dangerous if not consumed in moderation. In other words, one cannot legitimately argue that wine drinking was acceptable but consuming strong drink was not, because both caused drunkenness in those consuming too much. Geisler inexplicably seeks to draw a distinction between wine and strong drink by appealing to texts that assert the inebriating capacity of both. He claims, "Strong drink is one thing, wine is another thing."¹⁵⁹ But in this writer's mind, the parallel use of wine and strong drink in those texts suggests similarity, not distinction. The warning is against both wine and strong drink because both have the same capacity to make one drunk. They are, no doubt, two different things, but two things of the same sort. If drinking mixed wine was so harmless, how did people ever get drunk on it? Why do the biblical authors warn against it if the mixture was non-alcoholic or sub-alcoholic? And if it had the capacity to make one drunk, how is it intrinsically different from strong drink? Wine and strong drink are mentioned together so often because people used both of them to achieve the same result.

The Jews apparently consumed both wine and strong drink. There is no condemnation found for those who drank one or both in moderation at appropriate times. Neither the presence

¹⁵⁴Geisler, "Christian Perspective," 50.

¹⁵⁵Acts 2:13,15.

¹⁵⁶MacArthur, *Living in the Spirit*, 15.

¹⁵⁷Geisler, "Christian Perspective," 51.

¹⁵⁸Lev 10:8-9; Deut 14:26, 26:9; Judg 13:4; Prov 20:1; 31:4,5; Isa 5:11, 24:9; Mic 2:11.

¹⁵⁹Geisler, "Christian Perspective," 51.

of alcohol nor the strength of it were determining factors. Perhaps drunkards achieved inebriation more quickly with strong drink than with wine, but beyond that, wine and strong drink are two things of the same sort. The fact that biblical wine had a low alcoholic content did not prevent people from getting drunk on it. Drunkenness, or lack of self-control, is the primary issue, not how long it takes to intoxicate oneself. Both wine and strong drink could cause drunkenness, so to drive a wedge between the two, asserting that one was acceptable while the other is not, fails to be convincing. The terms wine and strong drink “are frequently used together, and they are employed irrespective of whether the writer is commending wine and strong drink as desirable or warning against its dangers.”¹⁶⁰ Arguments based on a distinction in potency between wine and strong drink add little to the abstinence cause.

Authorities Should Not Drink

A very common argument against drinking asserts that “God has lifted up certain people to a higher level of commitment,” those certain people being priests, kings, princes, Nazarites, and church leaders.¹⁶¹ Closely following is the assertion that all serious Christians should adopt the same high standards, which would preclude the use of alcohol for any believer. However, a few textual details may derail this train of thought. In Leviticus 10:8-11, the prohibition against drinking obtained only when the priests and Levites were on active duty within the temple precincts. Otherwise, no such ban applied. The fact that God commanded temple leaders not to drink while serving in the temple suggests that it was normal for them to drink at other times. If they did not normally imbibe, the prohibition makes no sense. Thus, the text contains no blanket proscription on drinking for priests or Levites other than when directly engaged in temple duties. Further, the degree to which Old Testament temple regulations apply to New Testament church leaders or laymen is a matter of dispute. Christians typically do not seek to apply the many other rules regulating the lives of priests and Levites in the temple, so why should they fixate on these? Many more rules regulating Levitical life exist, and few suggest that pastors or anyone else should follow them.

Lemuel’s mother’s advice against alcohol consumption for kings and princes¹⁶² is set in a context commending alcohol use for the terminally ill and for the poverty stricken. This motherly counsel prohibits drinking to the point of incapacitation, whereby the drinkers forget the law and pervert judgment. Moderate drinking produces neither lawlessness nor injustice. If this is a blanket condemnation of the use of wine, it hardly fits the broader context, which commends wine production and use. In fact, the archetypal virtuous woman “planteth a vineyard” with her own hands, surely a positive allusion to wine production.¹⁶³ Also, strictly speaking, the advice applies only to kings and princes, not the general populace. Lemuel’s mother’s admonition is a warning against drunkenness and the abuses associated with it, not moderate use.

Nazarites, according to Numbers 6:1-8, are to separate themselves from various things including wine and strong drink. All genuine believers should step up to a similar level of commitment, it is commonly argued. However, the Nazarite’s commitment level went far beyond abstaining from alcohol. He could not even touch a grape or a raisin, nor could he cut his hair or touch a dead body. If one advocates abstaining from alcohol, he should also demand avoiding all contact with grapes, raisins, vinegar (no ketchup!), haircuts and corpses. Further, in

¹⁶⁰Fitzsimmonds, “Wine and Strong Drink,” n.p.

¹⁶¹MacArthur, *Living in the Spirit*, 18.

¹⁶²Prov 31:4.

¹⁶³Prov 31:16.

most cases the Nazarite vow was completely voluntary and temporary. And at the completion of the time of the vow, the Nazarite had to cut his hair and burn it on the altar. There was much more to the Nazarite vow than merely abstaining from alcohol, and it is illegitimate to seize upon one aspect of the practice while ignoring the other requirements. It is rarely wise to drag an obscure Old Testament practice into the church age.

Church leaders are to be characterized as those “not given to wine.”¹⁶⁴ That is, a pastor should not be a “wine-biber, tippler or drunkard.”¹⁶⁵ The prohibition here is against drunkenness or addiction to wine, as the standard dictionaries define the word *πάροινος*.¹⁶⁶ It says nothing about the moderate use of alcohol. If Paul was demanding total abstinence for all church leaders, he certainly contradicted himself when he prescribed moderate wine consumption for Timothy’s stomach problems.¹⁶⁷

One may legitimately argue that all believers should seek the level of sanctification required for leaders. Yet the above texts, when they are at all applicable to New Testament believers, prohibit only drunkenness and addiction, not the moderate, careful use of alcohol. And one should not forget that Jesus himself, the ultimate prophet, priest and king, the shepherd and bishop of souls, both produced and drank wine. He clearly did not think the prohibitions from Leviticus applied to him, even while actively involved in ministry. He seemed to have no qualms ignoring Lemuel’s mother’s advice. Jesus was certainly not “given to wine” although he made it and drank it. If one wants to impose abstinence on spiritual leaders, he sets a standard that Jesus did not attain for himself or require of others.

A Proposed Position Suitable for Independent Baptist Churches

After reading so much argumentation in favor of allowing the consumption of alcoholic beverages, one might expect a conclusion endorsing the moderate intake of wine and strong drink. In fact, this writer is somewhat drawn to that position given the biblical data, in spite of the fact that such a practice would put him well outside the mainstream of independent Baptist thought. “All things in moderation” as applied to alcohol consumption has strong biblical support. In the words of Daniel Wallace,

[t]he general contours of biblical teaching are that wine is a blessing from the Lord, something to be enjoyed. But like any good gift from God, it can be abused: in this case, abuse involves addiction and drunkenness. But whenever we condemn others who are able to enjoy God’s good gifts in moderation as though they were abusers, we misrepresent biblical Christianity.¹⁶⁸

One could end the discussion right there and simply exhort people to be moderate and careful if they decide to drink. However, this writer has not yet presented his best case for abstinence. Fitzsimmonds proposes perhaps the most biblically defensible argument in favor of refraining from alcoholic drinks:

[W]hile wine is not condemned as being without usefulness, it brings in the hands of sinful men such dangers of becoming uncontrolled that even those who count themselves to be strong would be wise to abstain, if not for their own sake, yet for the

¹⁶⁴1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7.

¹⁶⁵Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *The Pastoral Epistles*, n.p. NTC. Version 2.1b. 2000-2004.

¹⁶⁶BAGD 634c.

¹⁶⁷1 Tim 5:23.

¹⁶⁸Daniel B. Wallace, “*The Bible and Alcohol*,” Biblical Studies Foundation, 1997. No pages. Cited 3 July 2004. Online: <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/alcohol.htm>.

sake of weaker brethren (Rom. 14:21). If it is argued that there are many other things which may be abused besides wine, the point may be immediately conceded, but wine has so often proved itself to be peculiarly fraught with danger that Paul names it specifically at the same time as he lays down the general principle. That this principle has application within the setting of modern life is beyond dispute among those who take their Christian responsibility seriously.¹⁶⁹

In other words, given all the biblical warnings about the dangers of alcohol abuse, and given the fact that sinful men tend to corrupt even good things, the wisest course of action for serious Christians is to abstain from alcohol use. There is no compelling reason to drink. Refraining is not a biblical mandate but a choice to avoid the dangers, compromises and associations that alcohol represents. Drinking may be lawful, but it is not profitable. For one's own sake and for the sake of others, the best practice is to abstain from alcohol use.

Of course, this shifts the focus of the argument from "What does the Bible teach about alcohol?" to "Are there legitimate reasons to avoid alcohol use even though the Bible does not prohibit it?" Is it valid to prohibit something allowable just because of its negative associations and its potential dangers? Can a church forbid what the Bible allows? Some would answer affirmatively. They prohibit alcohol use, not because the Bible demands such, but because of other considerations like associations and dangers. However, such a position is based on potential problems associated with a practice, not on the biblical teaching regarding it. Thus, while prohibitions are not called for, care and moderation certainly is. One cannot force abstinence in such cases, but one can argue that abstaining is the wisest choice that will preclude many negative outcomes.

Putting such a philosophy into practice in a fundamental Baptist church may be problematic. The suggestion "you can if you want, but it is better if you do not" probably will not go over well in an atmosphere where most issues are black and white and/or where people crave absolute rules to guide their behavior. Also, abstinence is the traditional position in most fundamental Baptist churches, and most pulpits preach that the Bible forbids alcohol use altogether. But the Bible seems to live with the tension between the dangers and the blessings of alcohol use, so perhaps such should not be foreign to the church.

Typical fundamental Baptist churches go beyond merely teaching that alcohol use is unwise; they strongly contend that it is unbiblical and sinful. Alcohol use is so inappropriate that abstinence is often written into the governing documents of the church. The bulk of this paper has argued that such a position lacks biblical support. There can be no doubt that drunkenness is sinful and that wine and strong drink destroy many. However, neither is there any doubt that alcohol may be consumed without creating serious problems for those who imbibe moderately and carefully. Thus, one's position on alcohol use is a matter of wisdom and conscience. "The Bible neither condemns drinking per se nor promotes it. Drinking alcoholic beverages is . . . a matter of one's personal conscience."¹⁷⁰ Such a choice should be left as an issue that each individual believer must decide for himself after prayerful consideration.

This is not to suggest that churches should take an casual position on the issue. Church leaders should strongly warn their members about the dangers of alcohol abuse. The destructive, corrupting influence of alcohol on modern society is plain for all to see, and the church should aggressively decry such debauchery. But given the biblical data, a church has no mandate to impose an absolute moratorium and the sale and use of intoxicating beverages for its members.

¹⁶⁹Fitzsimmonds, "Wine and Strong Drink," n.p.

¹⁷⁰Wallace, "The Bible and Alcohol," n.p.

There is not the least hint in the New Testament that abstinence should be required for church membership. Instead, a church should guide its members toward an abstinent position rather than impose such upon them forcefully. An abstinent position is a result of thoughtful consideration and spiritual growth. It is a wise position that avoids all the negative potential outcomes associated with alcohol use. But a church should recognize that some genuine believers have not adopted such a position even though they are saved. Thus, those not yet abstinent should still be allowed to be baptized and join the church.

When a drunkard gets saved the church should exercise caution before pursuing baptism and membership for the individual. This would obtain for anyone saved out of a lifestyle of substance abuse. But for drinkers who are not enslaved to alcohol, nothing should preclude them from baptism and church membership. The moderate use of alcohol is not necessarily sinful, although it may not be the best practice. A church has the right to include language in its documents preventing all drinkers from joining, but it has no compelling biblical authorization to do so. A church should certainly publish and preach its position on alcohol so that prospective members understand the church's beliefs on the issue. Perhaps a policy requiring abstinence for officers may be appropriate in keeping with those texts urging a higher standard upon those serving in certain official leadership capacities,¹⁷¹ even though, as noted above, such is certainly not required. Church members should recognize that the use of alcohol is a matter of conscience and that users should be given time and opportunity to make a decision for abstinence as they progress in their level of sanctification. If an individual determines that moderate alcohol use is within the parameters of godly Christian conduct, others should not look down upon him for that decision. As long as one's use of alcohol is not causing anyone to stumble, no one should become agitated about it. Use or non-use should be left as a non-essential that believers may come to different conclusions about.

How can a church teach the dangers of alcohol use and the wisdom of abstinence? The best course of action is always a full-orbed, apolitical exposure of the biblical data. Truth is not something to be afraid of, especially for Baptists who claim the Bible as their sole rule for faith and practice. Pastors and teachers should communicate the full biblical scope of the issue and then lead their audience toward a wise, balanced position. What they cannot do, however, is absolutely prohibit a non-essential matter, which is what alcohol consumption is.

Besides examining the above biblical texts that reveal the teaching regarding alcohol use, the following questions may be helpful in motivating people toward an abstinent position:¹⁷² (1) Is there a danger that a drinker may be brought into bondage? Alcohol has a capacity to influence and control even strong believers. Those who abstain can never be enslaved by alcohol and will never be personally influenced by it; (2) Will it lead oneself or others to stumble or sin? Alcohol use affects the drinker and others associated with him. If a drinker ever becomes drunk, violates the law while under the influence, offends others or otherwise significantly errs in judgment, he should abstain, at least temporarily; (3) Is alcohol use necessary for one's enjoyment and relaxation? If one's joy flows from a bottle, or if he needs alcohol to relax, he cannot claim to be merely a recreational user. One might argue that consuming wine was indeed necessary in the ancient world to purify polluted water or as a basic medicine, but modern conveniences have rendered such uses for wine obsolete. People drink today because they want to, not because they need to; (4) Does drinking associate one with sinful elements of culture? Alcohol use is often associated in modern western culture with all

¹⁷¹Lev 10:9; Prov 31:4; 1 Tim 3:3.

¹⁷²MacArthur, *Living in the Spirit*, 15-24.

manner of immoral conduct, and alcohol abuse is responsible for immense destruction, disease and death. Christians should not affiliate themselves with such corruption; (5) Will drinking harm one's Christian testimony? One should not imbibe if doing so besmirches his reputation in the church or in the community. Unbelievers typically do not expect mature Christians to drink, and fundamental Baptists in particular have a reputation for abstinence. Spending time in a tavern or liquor store, or even buying alcohol at a grocery store could easily undermine one's reputation in the eyes of many, and it could sully the testimony of one's church; (6) Is drinking something one can do "of faith" according to Romans 14:23? If one's conscience is at all bothered about drinking, or if one doubts that it is acceptable behavior, he should refrain.

Of course, one could answer all of the above questions in such a way that moderate alcohol intake is still an option. After all, Deuteronomy 14:26 encourages Israelite families to consume wine or strong drink "before the LORD thy God" and to rejoice while doing so. Paul seems to authorize drinking within one's own home.¹⁷³ One could say that moderate wine drinking can be done "of faith" and in such a way that it offends no one and avoids all the potential negatives mentioned above. Thus, one's position on alcohol must remain in the realm of non-essentials that individual believers must decide upon for themselves. A church may and should discourage its use, but it has no biblical basis to absolutely prohibit it.

Conclusion

The biblical data reflect both the dangers and blessings of alcohol. Drunkenness is sin. The moderate use of alcohol, however, is never denounced but often commended. The typical arguments for absolute abstinence either fail to account for all the biblical data or cannot be applied consistently. The Bible simply does not demand total abstinence from alcohol. One's position on alcohol use is a matter of personal conscience, like other non-essential issues. However, this writer has argued that abstinence is still the best option for those desiring to live a holy life and to separate from the dangers and corruptions associated with alcohol use and abuse. Churches have no mandate to withhold membership from those who drink moderately, but they should warn them of the potential dangers of alcohol. That fact that one drinks should not prevent his baptism or addition to a fundamental, independent Baptist church, and church documents should reflect this.

¹⁷³1 Cor 11:22.