



Challenges Of Christian Living

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Titus 2:11-14 reads, “. . . the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” What a magnificent and noble calling! But let’s admit it, “living righteously and godly, while denying ungodliness and worldly desires” can be a real challenge. Most of us are strong in many areas, but struggle with something else. 1 Corinthians 10:12 reads, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” It may seem that the scriptures are somehow inadequate to deal with modern day challenges, but the timeless principles of godliness still “hold promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” 1 Tim 4:8c

The objective of this publication issue is to address some real world challenges of Christian living. We’ve selected nine challenges for your consideration. Many of the articles address age-old challenges that still vex God’s people today. Some of the topics are sensitive, perhaps even controversial, and some may not be suited for younger children. We recommend that parents read this issue before your children and determine what is best to share with your children.

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Why Do Bad Things Happen?

Ephriam Davis

The worldly minded person is very quick to blame God for everything that happens. When natural disasters occur, (hurricanes, tornados, ice storms, droughts, floods, etc.), we often hear emotional responses like: "It was an act of God!" "Oh my God!" or even "Why did God let this

happen to me?" Indeed by definition the mechanisms for most natural disasters are designed into God's creation. For example, He caused the first rain to bring the flood in the days of Noah, but note it was because of sin. (Gen 6:5-7; 7:4) *"Shall we indeed accept good from God, and not accept adversity?"* Job 2:9 It's interesting to note, that we rarely ever blame Satan when bad things happen. Regrettably, even weak Christians often fall into this same snare of the devil when, **not if**, bad things happen in their lives. In fact, atheists in order to support their argument that God does not exist, frequently attempt to use the false premise that essentially states, "If God exists, then bad things won't happen." But of course, bad things do happen. In this article, we will look at three bible characters to substantiate the fact that there is real purpose when bad things happen, even though it may not be understood at the time the events occur.

First, Joseph suffered as a result of wicked plot of his own brothers. They'd become envious of him because of their father's favoritism toward him and his dreams. They hated him so much that they sold him into Egyptian slavery. (Gen 37:1-11; 17-28) His brothers probably thought this was the end of Joseph, however the LORD was with him. Joseph was successful and found favor in Potiphar, his Egyptian master's sight. He was given charge over his entire house, until he was wrongfully accused by Potiphar's wife of attempted rape, and thrown into prison. (Gen 39: 1-20) However, again we observe that the LORD was with him, and gave Joseph favor in the sight of the prison guard. The guard came to trust Joseph and placed all of the prisoners under his hand. (Gen 39:21-23) The LORD gave Joseph the

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ability to interpret dreams, which he did for two of Pharaoh's servants. (Gen 40) Eventually Pharaoh had two dreams, which none of his magicians could interpret, however, the chief butler remembered Joseph's ability. Pharaoh brought up Joseph from prison and he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams concerning he need to prepare for the great seven year famine. (Gen 41:1-36) So once again the LORD was with Joseph and he found favor in the sight of Pharaoh, and was given charge over Egypt and his entire house. (Gen 41: 37-44; Acts 7:11) Joseph directed the preparation for the famine so that Egypt had a surplus and all countries came to Egypt to buy grain. (Gen 41:47-57) Joseph's family came from Canaan and ultimately fulfilled Joseph's earlier dreams. (Gen 42:1-9) Clearly God allowed bad things to happen to Joseph, but we find no evidence of any specific sin in his life being the cause for his trials. However it is evident that God was with him and controlled every aspect of his circumstances to not only sustain him, but to ultimately sustain his entire family and give birth to the nation of Israel. Is it safe to conclude that God's purpose was to help Joseph learn to totally trust in Him? To contrast the heart of Joseph with that of his brothers, when Joseph revealed himself to them, they fully expected retaliation for all of the evil they had done to him. But instead Joseph said to them,

"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God, but as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."
Gen 50:19-20 NKJV

Second, Job suffered as a direct result of Satan as he was used as an instrument to test the faith of this man of God. Other than Jesus, perhaps there is no bible character described by God Himself as a blameless and righteous person who suffered more than Job. (Job 1:1, 8) In just one day he lost all of his live stock, servants, and all ten of his children. (Job 1:13-19) The loss of just one child is perhaps the most horrible, unthinkable tragedy any human can experience. We all expect to someday bury our parents, but never do we expect to bury a child, much less to bury all of our children. And when we do hear of any such event, our mindset is that it only happens to someone else. At least that is until....the event strikes home, with no warning and no time to "get prepared." It is possible that we might even ask, "Why me?" Please note Job's immediate response:

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. Job 1:20-22 NKJV

This biblical response helps compel the faithful to instead ask, "Why **not** me?" This author, now having experienced this event first hand, is extremely thankful to God for having the forethought and wisdom to provide the example of Job. Like most reasonable responsible parents, everything possible was done to protect and keep the child safe. The raw truth is, we are not in control, no

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Government & The Christian

Ron Gray

matter how we might think otherwise. Throughout all of Job's suffering we know that God was still in control of the situation; Satan's powers were restricted. (Job 1:12, 2:7) Being familiar with Job in the context of the rest of scripture is the only thing that sustains a grieving parent. Try as they may, others may attempt to offer human words of comfort, but like Job's friends, they would have done their very best, had their actions stopped at end of Job chapter 2. Again, if for no other obvious reason, is it safe to conclude that God's purpose was to help Job to learn to totally trust in Him?

Third, Jesus according to predetermined plans would suffer and die for the sins of all mankind. Because all have sinned and the wages of sin is death, Jesus is the promised Lamb who came to take away sin. (Rom 3:23; 6:23; John 1:29) Being God in the flesh, (John 1:1, 14) *"according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."* Heb 9:22 He is the perfect sacrifice who sympathizes with our weaknesses in that in all points he was tempted as we are, but did not sin. (Heb 4:15; 9:23-26) Even He learned obedience by the things he suffered. (Heb 5:5) While this was a bad thing that happened, it was a necessary good thing that *"Christ willingly died for the ungodly," "having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."* Rom 5:6-9 As we submit ourselves to His will, we need to be fully aware that "... all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" 2 Tim 3:12 so that we might glorify God. (1 Pet 4:16)

Every citizen of every nation on earth is subject to the government in the area in which he resides. We count it a blessing when those governments are not repressive. Some brethren around the world are not as fortunate to live within the framework of freedom that we often take for granted. They suffer hardships as citizens and often greater hardships as followers of Christ. We will take a look at some Biblical examples and commandments concerning our responsibilities and freedoms under our government.

Some may see a conflict between the words of the Lord's prayer *"for yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever."* Mt.6:13 and *"honor the king."* 1 Pet 2:17 Did Jesus not come to set up His kingdom? If so, why would Christians need to live under any other king?

Many of the Jews believed that the Messiah would come to restore the kingdom of Israel and to reign as David's heir upon his throne. When Jesus came preaching the Gospel rather than overthrowing the oppressive Romans, these people were skeptical and disappointed to say the least. Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies concerning Himself; so why was there a disconnect?

Even when the risen Lord was speaking His final words to His beloved apostles, they asked, *"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Acts 1:6 Notice His response. He did not explain, but refocused the apostles telling them what they must do. They should have known by this time the na-

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ture of His kingdom; thankfully the Spirit would guide them to the right conclusion.

One of the most telling actions of the Lord involved how He selected these very apostles. He did not “cherry pick” a dozen men who were alike in every way. In fact He chose men from different walks of life: common fishermen, a collaborator with the Romans (Matthew the tax collector), a Zealot who sought the ouster of the Romans from Israel (Simon), and even one who would betray Him (Judas). If Jesus wanted to set up an earthly kingdom, why would He choose such a diverse group? His kingdom was not just for a select few and for a brief lifetime. He explained it in His own words: *“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all peoples to myself.”* (John 12:32) and *“my kingdom is not of this world.”* John 18:36

Jesus was not concerned with earthly governments or a kingdom on earth for Himself. In Matthew 4:8-11, Satan offered Him all the earthly kingdoms, but Jesus sent him away with a rebuke. The perceived power of those kingdoms could not prevail against Jesus or His kingdom. Can you imagine a government, a time, or a place more hostile to the establishment of a new kingdom than Israel under Roman rule at the time of Christ? His kingdom’s success and longevity attest to the words of Jesus to His Father, *“for yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”* Mt 6:13

God is able to use any government, any head of state, any regime to do His will. We see that frequently in the Old Testament.

After God had placed Joseph (sold into slavery by his brothers) as second only to Pharaoh, He provided for His people there in

Egypt with food, good land and blessings. Even when the Egyptians feared the Israelites’ great numbers and enslaved them, they flourished, baffling their taskmasters! Then God humbled the mightiest nation on earth with ten plagues, freeing His people. Egypt in a last act of defiance toward God, brought out all of its chariots striking fear in the hearts of the Israelites. Gathered by the Red Sea, Moses told them, *“Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord...”* Ex 14:13 They witnessed the utter destruction of that mighty army in the sea.

To the Jews taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon, God said, build houses, plant gardens, raise your families. *“Seek the peace of the city... pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.”* Jer 29:5-7

God is able to deliver His people out of bondage, but is also able to bless them under oppression. His people may suffer under the weight of the government, but living in faith, they can never be broken.

We as Christians may have concerns about our government and the directions in which it is heading. What would God want us to do about that?

Jesus tells us, *“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”* Mt 22:21 This seems to be about more than just taxes. A Christian should *“seek first the kingdom of heaven...”* Mt6:33 We should also remember who we are. The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20, *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”* As citizens of heaven; *“we are ambassadors for Christ...”* 2 Cor 5:20 Paul told

Timothy, *“No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits (‘the affairs of this life’ – ESV), since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”* 2 Tim 2:4

“Seeking first” does not prohibit exercising our rights as citizens. The only limits on our rights as Americans are set by the Word of God. Walking in the light of His word, we cannot fail. The apostle Paul is one of the best examples of a true Christian, but he freely used his rights as a Roman citizen to avoid scourging since he was not condemned. (Acts 22:24-29). Also, he used his right to appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11).

Finally, we should take a look at Romans 13:1-7, here are the rules for the Christian concerning his responsibilities to the government. Summarizing each verse:

- Be subject to authority. They are appointed by God.
- Resisting government is resisting the ordinance of God, bringing judgment on themselves.
- Rulers are not a terror to good works. Do what is good.
- He is God’s minister for good, bears not the sword in vain, punisher of evil.
- Be subject not just out of fear, but for conscience’ sake.
- Pay taxes to God’s ministers so they may attend to their work.
- Render to all their due: taxes, customs, fear, and honor.

Our God has always seen his children through hard times and good, with amazing grace. *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* Heb 13:8

Pornography & The Internet

Mark Gray

The basic premise of pornography is some sort of media that is sexually suggestive and viewed in order to become sexually aroused. Most of the time that media is a picture or a video of a woman (or man) in various stages of undress engaging in some sort of sexual activity. There is no mention of pornography in the Bible. No commandment says, “Thou shalt not look upon pornography.” So it must be a harmless indulgence then? I believe other scriptures will prove otherwise.

The bible specifically forbids “cheating” on your spouse: *“You shall not commit adultery.”* Ex 20:14 One rarely if ever comes into actual physical contact with the people in these pornographic pictures, so there must be no adultery looking at a few pictures. Jesus tells us, *“I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* Mt 5:28 One must lust after the person depicted in order to achieve the arousal goal of pornography. Married men are commanded to *“love your wives, as Christ loved the church... let each one of you love his wife as himself.”* Eph 5:25; 33 God told Eve, *“Your desire shall be for your husband.”* Gen 3:16 If you love your wife enough to lay down your life for her, then why would you have a mental affair with a video clip? You have committed adultery with that image in your heart. Ladies your desire is to be for the

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man you married.

For all of us, both single and married, Paul concludes the letter to the Philippians with this exhortation: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* Phil 4:8 Does pornography meet any of these criteria? Is there honor in watching other people engage in sexual activity? Is it just to view these things? Many of the “actresses” in these films are drug addicts and victims of human trafficking (a euphemism for sexual slavery). There is nothing just about either of those. Paul tells Timothy not to *“take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.”* 1 Tim 5:22 Watching others commit sin for your own gratification is most definitely taking part and defiling your own purity. Is there anything commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy about porn? The worldliest among our neighbors would look at porn in a private place. Pornography does not meet any of the standards for things we should think upon.

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes declares, *“What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”* 1:9 Surely he could not have anticipated photography and film and internet streaming — over your phone! Perhaps the medium has changed but pornography has been around for a long time. There is a sculpture of a man and a woman engaged in intercourse attributed to Germanic tribes and dated to 5200 BC. In 79 AD Vesuvius erupted and buried Pompeii with lava and ash. When excavations began in the

late 18th century sculptures and frescoes were uncovered by the hundreds that depicted sexually explicit scenes. History goes forward with various carvings, sculptures, and paintings (not to mention explicit stories and writings, but I am focusing on images) up to our present day. There is no reason to believe that this type of image could not be found by any of the peoples during the centuries while the Bible was being written.

Our problem today lies with the readiness of the internet and the abundance of pornography that it has. We do not have to go to a store on a lonely stretch of interstate to buy a video or magazine anymore. Plus, no longer is it bound to a desktop computer. I have the entire “world wide web” in my hip pocket. Thousands upon thousands of images and video clips are just a few keywords away. What should we do when we are *“lured and enticed by [our] own desire?”* Jas 1:14 Parental controls and settings do not just have to be on “children’s” devices. Set your device so that these images will be blocked. Perhaps having to change the settings will give you time to strengthen your resolve. The desktop computers my family has are in full view of the entire family. This can be a way to curtail some temptations. Your phone or tablet does not have to be different. Try leaving it in a different room if you tend to look upon these types of things when alone. If you have it with you and you feel weak, open your photos and find a picture of your spouse or kids and get your mind back to the “things” Paul tells us to think on. Put an encouraging scripture on your “lock screen” to encourage yourself to *“walk [and stay] in the light as He is in the*

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light" 1 Jn 1:7 Say a prayer when you are weak. When you ask for strength to overcome, you also remind yourself that you serve Almighty God, not your fleshly desires. Sometimes our temptations are stronger than our will to overcome them. Give a brother or sister a call or a text so we are able to *"bear one another's burdens"* Gal 6:2 Sometimes letting someone else know you feel weak will give you instant strength. We are all sinners and we all struggle, but Satan wants us to think that we are the only one. I am the weak one. Everyone else in the pews around me is so strong. They have strong faith and would never be weak like me. That is NOT the case! There are probably several sitting around you that have the same issues. This is a brotherhood, we are heirs with Christ Himself (Rom 8:17), and no one has to stand alone.

GAMBLING

Brian Orf

Someone may ask, "Where in the Bible does it say that gambling is wrong? In fact, where does the Bible ever address gambling?" Certainly, we are to be men of the book. We are to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. However, we also understand that one way the Bible speaks is through biblical principle. Like many subjects considered in this publication, while the Bible may not address the subject specifically, it does address principles that are applicable.

What Is Gambling?

According to World Book Encyclopedia,

"Gamblers usually bet money or something else of value as a stake on the outcome they predict. When the outcome is settled, the winner collects the loser's stakes." From this description, three elements can be observed in gambling: 1) An uncertain event. 2) A stake: a wager or bet that is deliberately chanced. 3) A Winner and Loser. In gambling, in order for one to win, another MUST lose!

Is This Relevant?

As we begin to address this subject, some might think, "I never go to the boat. I've never been to Las Vegas. The only time I come into contact with gambling is when I have to wait behind the guy at the convenience store to buy his lotto scratchers. This doesn't affect me." Maybe that has been true in times past. In times past gambling, much like pornography, was well understood to be base and done only in dark corners. Today, this is not exactly the case. Gambling is much more socially acceptable; even charities and churches participate in forms of gambling. It is not uncommon to get a request to buy raffle tickets for a local cause, or pay to play bingo for a church fundraiser. At work filling out brackets and playing fantasy football for money has become commonplace. Wanting to get along with people and bosses in your company, may cause you to feel the pressure to "ante up." ESPN now showcases the world series of poker. Sports center and ESPN radio advertises "daily picks." With the advancements of the Internet and mobile apps, the opportunities are now endless. One study issued by the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions relayed that 80 percent of Americans gamble every year. The subject of gambling is absolutely relevant.

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And for the Christian, there needs to be an understanding of where the Bible stands on such a matter.

People have a hard time putting their finger on exactly what is wrong with gambling. The way I see it, there are many relevant factors and then, there are core issues.

Relevant Factors:

Gambling often puts an individual around unsavory characters. Gambling establishments are hosts to many other corrupting vices. Typically, places that allow gambling promote drunkenness and encourage sensual lifestyles (casinos are high traffic areas for prostitution). In the first three years after Atlantic City legalized gambling, it went from 50th to 1st in the nation among cities in per-capita crime (www.library.ca.gov). Christians are to avoid such environments. When God lists things that He hates, one thing specifically mentioned is *“feet that make haste to run to evil.”* Prov 6:18 In 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 Paul writes, *“But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”* While this may be relevant, there are several ways in which one can gamble without having to go to the casino. As recently mentioned, online sites and office pools can be places where gambling is commonplace.

Addiction is another relevant factor. The existence of “Gamblers Anonymous” implies that gambling can be addictive! According to the University of New York, as many as 750,000 young people, ages 14 to 21 have a gambling addiction (www.addictions.com). A study from the University of North Caroli-

na at Wilmington estimates that six percent of American college students struggle with gambling problems (www.addictions.com). Commercials and advertisements now offer disclaimers acknowledging this danger. Much like alcohol commercials, they give caution to “gamble responsibly.” “Set a time and limit” is the warning. Of course the addiction is not out of concern for those who continue to win, but for those who lose everything from gambling: “games should be played for entertainment purposes only and should not be played for investment purposes.” Given that gambling, by definition, is a game of luck and chance, there is a very real factor of risk. While addiction and risk are certainly relevant, I would argue that these are not the core issues. While some might develop addiction, these statistics indicate only a small percentage. While risk is a defining factor in gambling, we do many things that involve risk. God tells us that chance is part of life; *“time and chance happen to all.”* Eccl. 9:11 There are some that do well to eliminate risk and ensure a profitable outcome. You may have heard of the phrase “the house always wins.” Casino owners and operators would not stay in business if there was a chance that they could lose; the odds are always in their favor.

These are relevant factors that are noteworthy. Then there are core issues.

These things are all adverse effects of gambling however these factors are not what makes gambling inherently wrong.

The Heart of the matter

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At the heart of gambling is greed. For someone to gamble there is an inherent desire to have more. Although many may say that they just gamble for fun and entertainment, you don't have to make money wagers to play cards or to enjoy a sporting event. The concept of greed cannot be ignored! Over and over again, the Bible warns about the love of money (1 Tim. 6:9-10; Heb. 13:5; Matt. 6:24). Not only does gambling include a desire to have more, but a desire to have more regardless of how it impacts others. This leads us to another core issue.

Gambling does not allow us to fulfill the second great command: *"love your neighbor as yourself."* Mt 22:39

We have noted that when someone gambles there is a winner and a loser! You win at someone else's expense. Luther observed: "No one gambles with another in order to give away to the other what is his own (for he could do that without gambling), nor in order to lose what is his own, nor in order to seek the gain of the other man as though it were his own. This is why gambling is always contrary to love and is motivated by greed because a man seeks, to the harm of another, what does not belong to him."

Conclusion:

When it comes down to it, I think the question we need to be asking ourselves is not what makes gambling wrong but how does it glorify God? How can I be seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33) while I am gambling? How can I glorify God when I am gambling? This is our ultimate goal! If there is any activity

that does not allow us to glorify God and seek first His kingdom and righteousness, then we do well to abstain!

Social Media

Michael Parks

Social media is a relatively new form of communication in the modern world. If you give pause to consider its impact on society; you would very quickly see that social media's ability to connect family, friends, and strangers in the open and free exchange of communication globally is unparalleled. What this means is that the great power of global communication outside of your own immediate sphere of direct personal contact has been put into the hands of any willing participant. In times past, this privilege was reserved for only those in positions of power in traditional media outlets. This power is something that an individual could use incorrectly, and in a sinful way. It is also a power that can corrupt our hearts through that misuse by others. Needless to say we need to be very circumspect in the way we handle social media.

The Christian understands that we have a calling to speak properly. Paul described the manner of our speech as *"always with grace, seasoned with salt..."* Col 4:6 Communication that is gracious is one that acknowledges there is power in words to build up or tear down. For example, God's grace seeks our wellbeing. Surely our own speech would be the same. Thusly, gracious speech means the

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wellbeing of others through words. Communication that is seasoned is one that acknowledges there is power in our words to benefit the hearer. Solomon taught in Proverbs 25:11 that a word fitly spoken was valuable and useful. If you are a user of social media, find active ways to encourage and build up others. The surrounding verses to this proverb talk about gossip. Christians are explicitly told to abstain from gossip and slander (2 Cor 12:20). The power we carry in these social media outlets cannot be understated, as we carry a tremendous responsibility to draw others to Christ. Simply put, when a Christian is online in a social media outlet communicating and espousing Christian morality through their lives, this communication will have a tendency to glorify Christ and bring others to Him. However, when a Christian is online espousing unchristian behavior through mean-spiritedness, or other immoral behavior then this will have a tendency to confuse and mislead believers and unbelievers alike.

When Jesus sent the twelve apostles out in Matthew 10:16, He told them that they as sheep were in the midst of wolves. He went on to talk about how they would be delivered up to persecution. He instructed them to be wise. What this essentially meant to them, was don't be naive! There are those who reject you, and seek actively to destroy you! Make no mistake that social media, although an avenue for great good, can also be an avenue for great evil! I've come to realize through the years as I've raised my children, that an active war is being fought out in social media to snatch your child's mind away from you. This rang-

es from the filth of the world in pop culture, to filthy language, to bad attitudes. We as parents need to be engaged in social media WITH our children, or keep them out of it altogether. A parent wouldn't assume their toddler knows how to properly cross a street without getting hurt. Equally a parent shouldn't assume a child knows how to deal with social media. It would be entirely appropriate for a parent to know who your child adds to their friends list in these social media outlets, and what the exact dialogue is that goes on publicly and privately in these outlets. The idea that a child should have privacy (code for not your business) in such a potentially dangerous environment is ludicrous. Fathers be manly, you carry the burden (Eph 6:4). If you want to be involved in your child's life, then you have to be where he/she is. Paul didn't teach you to delegate this to your wife, nor to ignore it as harmless. If you need help with the technology, and tracking what is happening with your child in the digital world, then seek help and talk to others about it. There are a number of brethren, who would be happy to help you create accountability in your home for what is read and posted on the internet. Be vigilant, for the adversary seeks to destroy your family.

Social media can also become a great waste of time, distracting us from important work. Paul taught Christians in Ephesus (Eph 5:16), to redeem the time because the days were evil. I feel pretty certain the days are still evil. Men and women alike everywhere seek perversion, and every evil thing. We as individuals, have but a brief span on this

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earth. During our pilgrimage as exiles on this earth, Peter taught us to realize our time here is fading and to be focused on that which endures, realizing our home is laid up in heaven (1 Pet 1:22 – 2:12). We must be focused on ensuring that the lion's share of our time is spent wisely with a view to heaven, and not wasted in distracted and ungodly living. If you are using social media, make sure you are using it for good to bring a proper view of Christ, in keeping with the attitudes and behaviors of those who are His.

Women's Role In Church

Alyssa Johnson

The transformation of a woman's role in American society has caused many Christians to re-think a woman's role in the church. The current messages we hear in schools, at work, in the media concerning women's role/value, such as, "The thing women have yet to understand is nobody gives you power. You just take it," "Don't ever let them silence you, girl," "When men are oppressed, it's a tragedy. When women are oppressed, its tradition," have begun to echo within congregations to the extent that God's will is being pushed aside for what many think is a better more equitable way. But is it – let's take a look at God's viewpoint towards women and their role in the church.

A common theme in the feminist rhetoric is the liberation of women and a call for equality. Women have been blessed in our culture with expansion of our rights and privileges as citizens of the United States, including property and voting rights, and equal pay

for equal work. Even with these, we still have poverty, sickness, pain, war, and death – because we live in the world.

When we shift our perspective from the earthly and temporal to the spiritual and eternal only then can we experience true freedom. All of mankind is enslaved to sin. We are all, men and women alike, living in bondage to sin without hope of life. God is our liberator without regard to gender in the most critical and enduring part of our lives. We have freedom and eternal life through Jesus!

When God adds us to His church, what does He see? In Galatians 3:28, God says, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* God views all of His spiritual children as one body with many members. We each have a role to play within that body. Please read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. God specifically discusses how each member of the body of Christ must operate in unity to His glory. He cautions against looking to the role of another member and saying, *"because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body."* Focus on vs. 5, *"God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose."* God emphasizes the necessity of mutual respect and care that all the members must have for one another and the roles we play in verses 21-26. Now let's explore some of the God-assigned roles of women:

During Jesus' ministry, Luke 8:1-3 tells us that a group of women followed and served Him during His ministry and provided for Him and the apostles out of their means. Many of these same women were at His cru-

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cifixion. *“There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.”* Mk 15:40-41.

I Timothy 2:9-15 discusses characteristics and behavior of Christ-like women and also discusses some roles God does not want them to fill. *“Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”*

What are key words we can focus on from this passage? Modesty, self-control, godliness, good works, faith, love, holiness.

1 Peter 3:1-6 continues along these same themes instructing wives to be subject to their husbands with respect and pure conduct. God wants our *“adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”* Notice how God views this woman – VERY PRECIOUS.

We also have a view into the role of women in the church by studying the qualifi-

cations for widows who could be supported by the church. Please read 1 Timothy 5:9-16. In these passages, God encourages devotion to good works, bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of saints, caring for afflicted, household management.

God adds to this picture in Titus 2:3-5 with instructions both to older and younger women. *“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”*

Women also labored side by side with evangelists. In Philippians 4:2-3, Paul entreated, *“Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”* Additionally, we have the example of Pricilla, who along with Aquila, shared the gospel with Apollos.

One of the tenets of the Women’s Rights movement is spelled out in the name, “rights,” but is the exertion of our rights what God wants us to focus on in our lives? In Mark 9:33- 37, Jesus exhorts the apostles, *“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”* And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever re-*

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ceives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” Praise God that he has given to each of us a role of service.

Others who would embrace roles outside of those prescribed by God would say, “God has provided me with these talents and he would want me to use them to His glor.” Yes – God creates each person with their own uniqueness and abilities (Psa 139:13-16); Yes – God wants us to use these blessings for Him (Mt 25:14-30). However, God’s word is filled with examples of men and women who decided for themselves how their way was better than God’s way and it resulted in their destruction (Lev 10:1-2; Num. 16: 3-40; 2 Sam. 6:6-7; Acts 5:1-11). God is truly glorified when we ask God for the wisdom to use the talents He has given us within the boundaries of His word.

Boundaries & The Sexual Revolution

Phil Lumpkin

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them, and God blessed them and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . .’” Gen 1:27-28a
Years later, Jesus restated these words, *“Have you not read, that ‘He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?’ Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”* Mt 19:4-6 God not

only created us male and female, but also established the sanctuary within which we are to “be one flesh,” that is, one man and one woman in the lifelong, heterosexual, monogamous relationship of marriage.

Adam and Eve were blessed to live in the garden of Eden, where God raised up beautiful trees good for food and enjoyment; including the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:8-9) Notice God’s “boundary” concerning what they could and could not eat. *“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”* Gen 2:16-17 The Creator had every right to establish boundaries and set limitations to govern the activities and behavior of His creation.

Positive biblical authority reveals what God authorizes, what pleases Him and what is actually best for us. Scripture abounds with crystal clear prohibitions, negative biblical authority or boundaries, concerning sexual relations outside of marriage. For instance, the seventh commandment given to Moses states, *“You shall not commit adultery.”* Ex 20:14 In fact, sexual relationships outside of marriage were punishable by death under the Old Law, *“If there is a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”* Lev 20:10 Homosexual relations were also punishable by death, *“If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman,*

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both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them." Lev 20:13 God exercises His right to establish boundaries and set limitations to govern the activities and behavior of His creation.

Joseph is an example of someone who respected God's boundaries. He was a handsome young man who caught the roving eye of Potiphar's wife. She repeatedly enticed him and eventually, caught him by his garment saying, *"lie with me."* We remember that *"he left his garment in her hand and fled."* (Gen 39:7-12) Boundaries, however, are often the object of push-back. We all remember the account of David and Bathsheba. King David saw a beautiful woman bathing. This "man after God's own heart" knew God's law and His boundaries regarding illicit sexual activities. Even so he willfully chose to ignore God's boundaries; he sent for her, took her and lay with her. (2 Sam 11:2-4) Verse 5 continues with, *"and the woman conceived and she sent and told David, and said, 'I am pregnant.'"*

Historically, wholesale premarital and extramarital sexual activity outside of God's divinely established boundaries has been deterred by various factors. Perhaps the most powerful of these factors has been the fear of unwanted pregnancy. Bearing a child out of wedlock has historically been a shameful occurrence, something that's particularly hard for women to hide. What should be a blessed event becomes an open testimony of not knowing about or disregarding God's boundaries. Another factor is the potential of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Historically hideous forms

of highly contagious and often incurable venereal diseases have served as a powerful deterrent.

However, in the 20th Century many such "natural deterrents" began to fade and an openly promiscuous, sexual revolution ignited into a conflagration. After World War II, the increasing availability and affordability of antibiotics, particularly Penicillin, significantly reduced the consequences of sexually transmitted diseases. Abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy has been around for millennia, but the risk of complications was high and the potential to adversely affect a woman's health, especially her future reproductive health, was unacceptably high. But modern, surgical procedures, conducted in sanitary conditions made abortion a so-called "medically viable option in the eyes of many" to "terminate an unwanted pregnancy." The Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court ruling of 1973 effectively made abortion legal in the United States, but obviously failed to address the unthinkable spiritual, moral and social implications of murdering unborn children. The widespread appearance of "the birth control pill" in the 1960s was undoubtedly the biggest contributor to this revolution. For the first time in history, a woman had enormous control over her body; for the first time she could reliably manage the inextricable link between her sexual activity and her reproductive biology. Rapid demographic changes in the U.S., such as more women in the workforce and mass migration from farms to the cities, also contributed to the atmosphere of change.

These and other factors converged to produce the social environment of the 1960s

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and 1970s which proved to be the perfect cauldron for melting down centuries old boundaries of sexual restraint. This was the era for protest (especially against the Vietnam War), for free “love,” for women’s rights, for “gay” rights, for hippies, for drugs, for civil rights – it was a time for radical, social change. The slogan, “make love, not war” aptly characterized the mood to tear down boundaries. Hollywood did its part by producing increasingly sexually explicit movies, the music industry contributed with defiant and suggestive lyrics. Pornography began to openly emerge and homosexuality increasingly came “out of the closet and acceptable,” especially as the movement convinced many that “they were born that way.” Today the moral erosion continues, for instance with the recent media sensationalism about so-called “transgender or bisexual rights.” We would do well to acknowledge God’s boundary regarding such behavior, *“A woman shall not wear man’s clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.”* Deut 22:5

Throughout history, God has steadfastly maintained His standards, His boundaries, His precepts – rock solid and unchangeable. These standards and boundaries brought order and happiness to Adam and Eve, and still bring order and happiness to mankind today, as well as bringing honor and glory to the Lord. On the other hand, mankind’s constantly creeping boundaries are sliding inexorably downhill toward Sodom and Gomorrah at an accelerating pace. Not long ago, divorce in our society was rare, today every

other marriage fails. Not long ago, an unwed pregnant teen would have quietly dropped out of school; today she’s celebrated. Not long ago, homosexuality cowered quietly “in the closet,” today many celebrate and flaunt their so-called liberation – in your face. Once the forces of restraint are unleashed, moral decay is hard to stop. But, like Joseph, each of us can let our light shine by honoring the Lord’s legitimate and honorable boundaries. Judges 21:25b records, *“everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* We face the same choice today; there is no middle ground. Will you joyfully submit to the Creator’s honorable boundaries or will you push-back and honor self?

Addiction

Craig Sweet

Addiction is a word typically used to describe a person being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming. Though traditionally used in relation to the abuse of alcohol or drugs, people also use addiction to describe an unhealthy focus on other areas such as tobacco, caffeine, chocolate, exercise, gambling, lying, spending, shopping, eating, sexual activity, power and even the workaholic.

Addiction is one of the costliest public health problems in the United States. Over 40 million Americans ages 12 and older (1 in 7) have addiction involving nicotine, alcohol or other drugs which is more than heart conditions (27 million), diabetes (26 million) or cancer (19 million). By the eighth grade, 52% have consumed alcohol, 41% have smoked

tobacco, and 20% have smoked marijuana. It is estimated that 4 million Americans over the age of 12 used prescription pain relievers, sedatives, and stimulants for "nonmedical" reasons during one month.

What does the Bible teach about addiction? Even in Bible times, addiction was something that had to be addressed. For example, *"an Elder must not be addicted to much wine."* 1 Tim 3:3; Tit 1:7 Paul told the Corinthians that he will not be enslaved by anything (1 Cor 6:12). Peter addresses addiction as *"... passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul."* 1 Pet 2:11 In addition, addiction in the Bible can be easily described as a form of idolatry. Paul wrote to the Colossians, *"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."* Col 3:5 If we develop an addiction to some type of behavior or drug, then our devotion to that addiction has taken the place of God. That is the basic definition of idolatry. Throughout the scriptures, idolatry is condemned by God.

With an addiction, a person's sole objective is to serve the addiction. That person is the one who Paul describes as *"...indulging in the desires of the flesh..."* Eph 2:3 Whenever we are addicted to something we are effectively saying, "Yes master, whatever you say I will do." We must remember that Jesus taught, *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."* Mt 6:24 So, we need to do everything we can to protect ourselves from this world where addiction is so easily tempting.

But, what if it is too late? What is an addict to do in order to be pleasing to God? The Bible is clear about finding help for addictions. This help ultimately comes from God as we replace old habits with new ones. Paul discusses this with the Colossians, *"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."* Col 3:8-10 (ESV) This is all well and good if a person can come to the realization of the addiction and take steps with God's help to eliminate it. But, what about the person who needs help to overcome their addiction? Most often, an addict cannot even realize they are in a situation that can be corrected because they are so busy feeding the addiction.

So, other brethren should want to help. Paul to the Galatians says, *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* Gal 6:1-2 James adds, *"My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."* Jas 5:19-20 We have an obligation to help our brethren when they need our assistance.

But, how do we help someone who doesn't want help or think they need it? First of all, we have to realize the addict

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must want help. If they do not desire help and are forced to get help, there is a high likelihood that they will return to their addiction at some point in the future. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* We will answer for our actions.

Secondly, we have to understand that we cannot control or “fix” another person so we must not try! Our job is to assist the addict in helping themselves overcome their addiction. One of the best ways to help is to show them some ways to look for an escape from a temptation; *“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”* 1 Cor 10:13

Thirdly, we need to understand the difference between “helping” and “enabling” an addict. Consider, *“For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load.”* Gal 6:3-5 When we help them do things, we are enabling them and not really helping them. Each person must face all the issues and consequences and we cannot take any of that burden away from them. That is enabling them.

Finally, we need to be strong and say “no” to the addict’s pleas when recovery becomes very challenging. This is not a time to

be weak and give in to the addict. There will be times when the pain is so great for the addict, you will want to help relieve it. You will want to show compassion like Jesus did several times. However, this is a time for tough love. The need is to get them through the transition from being addicted to not being addicted. This process is crucial to their recovery.

So, in summary, Paul told the Galatians: *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household*

Cloning

Steven Baxley

One of the modern questions that Christians wonder about has to do with the relatively new science of cloning. Does God’s Word help us at all in understanding how we are to view cloning from a Christian perspective?

What is cloning? Cloning is the process of creating a new organism which has the exact DNA (genetic code) of another organism. It is an identical copy of the “original” organism from which it is produced. Cloning has been used for years in horticulture, and only more recently in the animal world. The most fa-

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mous clone is probably Dolly the sheep. Dolly was born in 1996. She was an exact clone of the “parent” sheep from which DNA was taken. Dolly herself lived about 6.5 years and produced her own offspring during her life. Since that time, other animals have been cloned, including pigs, deer, horses and bulls.

The announcement of Dolly’s existence ignited a huge discussion concerning the potential of using cloning technology to produce human clones. Several countries have banned some aspects of human cloning, the legal situation in the United States is complicated, since it involves not only federal funding of research, but also laws passed by individual states.

Animal cloning and plant cloning are for all intents and purposes the same as selective breeding, and therefore are not an issue from the standpoint of the Scriptures. Animals and plants were created to fill man’s needs and purposes. This is why we as Christians don’t philosophize over the morality of eating a carrot or a chicken. Both have been given to mankind as food and for our use (Genesis 1:29; Genesis 9:3; Acts 10:9-16).

Human cloning is another matter entirely, primarily because the Scriptures teach that mankind is created in the “*image of God*” (Genesis 1:27). As such, humans are endowed with a fundamental dignity given to them by their Creator. This dignity forms the basis for God’s prohibitions against murder (Exodus 20:13). It also forms the basis for the “Golden Rule” (Matthew 7:12) as well as the commandment to love:

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the

commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Romans 13:8-10

Since man is created in the image of God, what one man does to another man and why he does it, is very much of concern to the Creator of all.

When Dolly was finally produced, it was only after 276 failed attempts, including the death of several defective clones. It involved a great loss of life to produce one organism. Any attempts at human cloning, especially but not limited to the development stage, would involve the death of many “attempts” before reaching the desired goal of a viable clone.

This places the topic of cloning well within the discussion of artificial reproduction methods which involve the creation of multiple embryos, some of which in the end will be destroyed (killed) since they are neither needed nor desired. For the Bible believer who believes that human life begins at the point of conception, such methods involving the culling and destruction of human life are unacceptable, just as much as abortion is unacceptable, being the murder of a human being created “*in God’s image.*” God fashions us long before we are born:

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully

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and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:5

That these discarded embryos are never implanted into a human womb changes nothing concerning their humanity. If science were to progress to the point that human beings could develop entirely without ever being inside another human being, it would in no way diminish their humanity and their being *"in the image of God."*

Cloning also raises troubling issues concerning the "why" of this developing technology. One of the reasons given for the development of cloning technology involves organ donors and transplants. A cloned human being might be produced for the purpose of being able to provide a much-needed organ transplant to the original from which the clone is produced. Lest we think such could not happen, it already does in the case of families having another child in the hopes of producing a suitable donor. Please note the following, written by Gina Kolata and published in the New York Times on June 4, 1991:

At about 8 o'clock this morning,

doctors at the City of Hope Medical Center in Duarte, Calif., plan to transplant bone marrow into Anissa Ayala, a 19-year-old girl who is dying of leukemia.

The marrow will come from her baby sister, Marissa. Their parents say they conceived Marissa to provide bone marrow to save Anissa's life.

Doctors and ethicists say this is the first time a family has publicly admitted conceiving a child to serve as an organ donor. But many others have done so privately. Parents have had babies to provide bone marrow for siblings and relatives or even, in one case, a kidney. Some parents have sought prenatal diagnosis to insure that the fetus had genetically compatible tissues necessary to serve as a donor, intending to abort it if not.

From a Biblical standpoint, other people do not exist to serve us, we exist to serve them. Since this is the case, producing another human being solely to benefit the needs of another human being lowers the basic human dignity of the person thus produced. In the end, cloning involves processes and intents that are incompatible with the Biblical teaching concerning the nature of man, his relationship to God, and his relationship to his fellow man.

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