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Can a Nation Commit Suicide?



Scott Ashley
Managing editor

Having an intense interest in the ancient world, I've walked among the ruins of a number of ancient empires—Egyptian, Greek, Israelite, Roman and Byzantine, plus a number of lesser-known kingdoms.

All had one thing in common—they never imagined that they would fall until it was too late. Sometimes destruction came slowly, sometimes virtually overnight. But come it did, and their world collapsed around them in a whirlwind of death, destruction and disaster.

It's sobering to stand on the walls of these ancient cities and to wonder about the last thoughts of the terrified inhabitants as they saw the enemy hordes approach. What prayers did they utter for deliverance before their gods proved powerless in the face of foes mightier than they? At what point did they realize their world was about to end, that it was past the point of no return?

Sobering thoughts indeed.

It's also sobering to realize that disaster doesn't always come from the outside, but can as easily come from inside. One of America's best-loved presidents, Abraham Lincoln, recognized this long before the bloody Civil War that brought him to fame. While still a young man he proclaimed his concern for the future of his country:

"At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined . . . could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

"At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer: *If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us . . . If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher.* As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide" (emphasis added throughout).

Could a nation really die by suicide? Abraham Lincoln certainly believed so. This speech of warning launched a political career that ultimately took him to the White House.

His warning was also eerily prophetic, since a generation later the nation would tear itself apart as state fought against state and brother against brother. The country came perilously close to dying "by suicide." It paid a terrible price, with more than 600,000 young men dying in battle or from disease. The scars of this conflict remain with us to this day.

Another famous American president was Thomas Jefferson, one of the nation's founding fathers and principal author

of the Declaration of Independence. He also understood the lessons of history and issued his own prophetic warning about the nation:

"Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? . . . *Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever.*"

Today the United States stands at a crossroads, bitterly divided not only over its future but also over its past. A cultural war is underway in which clear battle lines have been drawn.

Does a nation where millions are eager to rewrite the past to erase God from the picture have a future? When a nation once viewed as a shining city on a hill becomes

more and more like Sodom and Gomorrah, rotting in immorality and murdering a million of its unborn every year for the sake of convenience, what does the future hold? When much of a nation pursues self-destructive paths as those analyzed in this issue, what can it expect?


In His Word, God asks an all-important question to a nation that once knew and had been greatly

blessed by Him but then turned its back on Him: "'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, *but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* Turn, turn from your evil ways! *For why should you die, O house of Israel?'*" (Ezekiel 33:11).

God also knows that a nation can commit suicide. He's seen it! When nations that at one time knew Him choose to turn *from* Him rather than *to* Him, they willingly choose to die rather than live!

Since the end of World War II we have seen the strength of the once-great British Empire diminish in its territorial scope, and even the mother country itself is wracked with cultural disintegration and division as it has chosen this self-destructive path. The United States is following closely behind.

Abraham Lincoln's warning was and is crucial. I also reflect with deep concern that America's own people could be the "author and finisher" of their own national destruction. And with Thomas Jefferson "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever."

These are sobering thoughts to contemplate. May you wake up to the growing danger before it's too late and choose to turn to God and live! 

"If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide."
—Abraham Lincoln





What's Behind the Growing **CULTURE** **WAR?**

Powerful, dangerous forces are executing an all-out war in America, as in other Western nations. They are striving relentlessly to transform the culture into something previous generations would never recognize. You need to know not only what is happening and why, but what you can do about it.

by John LaBissoniere



popular patriotic song in the United States is “America the Beautiful.”

Written as a poem in 1893 by Katharine Lee Bates, a professor of English at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, it was combined with music in 1910 by New Jersey church organist Samuel Ward. The first two stanzas

highlight both God’s blessings on this unique nation as well as its imperfections.

*America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea! . . .*

*America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!*

While the United States has had its faults, it was established on a sincere and genuine reverence for the Creator and the constitutional rule of law—as opposed to the arbitrary exercise of governing authority. For centuries these twin principles were highly regarded and readily observed by the vast majority of the American people. But today it’s a different story. Honor for God has dwindled, and the

America is under assault from within by extreme forces in an all-out war to transform its foundational culture into something previous generations would neither recognize nor condone.

rule of law is not esteemed as it once was.

Many Americans have completely abandoned worship of and obedience toward their Creator and are wholly unthankful for His marvelous protection and abundant blessings (2 Timothy 3:1-5). The prophet Jeremiah described the wayward people of Israel and Judah in terms that fit a large and growing number of unwise and arrogant individuals today: “These people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned aside and gone their own way” (Jeremiah 5:23, New English Translation; see also Isaiah 1:4-6).

As a result, America is now under assault from within by extreme forces in an all-out war to transform its foundational culture into something its founding fathers and previous generations would neither recognize nor condone. We see this struggle taking place in other Western nations as well.

The recent political campaigns leading up to elections for control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives presented starkly different views of and visions for the nation. Although overly simplified, it could be said that one view proposed a national path rooted in the best principles

of America’s past and Constitution, while the other offered a very different and opposite path veering sharply from long-held American values and traditions. The level of hostility in recent elections has verged on near-warfare—and on some occasions has led to outright violence.

While there are many battlegrounds in this war for the heart and soul of a nation, this article will expose and examine six of them from the standpoint of Holy Scripture and perceptive secular sources. These six theaters of war include hostility toward Christianity, denigrating and rewriting the nation’s past, media bias, immigration/open borders, the homosexual/transgender agenda and socialist wealth redistribution. All of these are the “front lines” in today’s culture war.

1. Growing hostility toward Christianity

In the July-August 2018 issue of *Beyond Today* we discussed in detail how deep respect offered to God originally formed the bedrock of American culture and provided major benefits to the nation’s people for generations (see “What’s Behind the War on God?” in that issue). In addition, the positive influence of basic Christian standards, such as integrity, responsibility and morality, generated highly positive outcomes throughout society.

While individuals and families had been aided substantially in previous centuries by their worship of and obedience to God, profound changes have occurred in recent years to turn people away from those critical principles.

Distrust and disdain toward Christianity has been growing consistently—being fueled by the menacing spiritual powers of Satan the devil and his demons (Ephesians 2:2; 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8). Christian

institutions and individuals have been subjected to increasing attacks and restrictions on their freedom to venerate and obey God.

This includes Supreme Court rulings declaring prayer, Bible reading and posting the Ten Commandments in public schools to be unconstitutional—effectively prohibiting the teaching of righteous values.

With God and the Ten Commandments kept out of schools during children’s most formative years, it should be no surprise that detrimental results have arisen throughout society. This is seen in increasing family breakdown, sexual promiscuity, pornography, violence, drug and alcohol addiction, crime and other evils. Indeed, a systematic effort is at work in America and other Western countries to expel God and His commandments from public and private life, striking at the very foundation of the culture.

2. Denigrating and rewriting national history

Further assault comes from the rewriting of history or “historical revisionism.” Significant efforts are underway



to focus on and magnify the nation's errors while minimizing its successes or recasting them as wrong. The purpose is to influence citizens to feel personal humiliation and guilt for the country's past, particularly if they are not part of an identifiable "victim group."

In his 2015 book *The Snapping of the American Mind*, journalist David Kupelian, managing editor of WND.com (formerly WorldNetDaily), described this culture war plan as including "manipulating Americans' historical national guilt over slavery and segregation, persistently keeping the fires of guilt and shame alive in present-day Americans for sins committed generations ago by people long since dead" (p. 76).

One consequence of this movement has been the tearing down or removal of historical monuments in public places such as parks and town squares. According to a Fox News article posted on Aug. 21, 2018: "More than 30 cities across the United States have removed or relocated Confederate statues and monuments amid an intense nationwide debate about race and history . . . Many of the controversial monuments were dedicated in the early twentieth century or during the height of the Civil Rights Movement" (Christopher Carbone, "Which Confederate Statues Were Removed? A Running List," Aug. 21, 2018).

In commenting on this specific effort to rewrite history, Ken Blackwell, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission and senior fellow for Human Rights and Constitutional Governance at the Family Research Council, wrote:

"When the City of Baltimore recently removed several Civil War-era statues, it took down one of Roger Taney, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He remained loyal to the United States. His earlier opinion in the *Dred Scott* case deserves to be reviled, but at the time seven other justices agreed with him. And his career was much more than one case. Taney served almost 30 years as the nation's most important jurist . . .

"During the Civil War, he defended civil liberties, including the Doctrine of Habeas Corpus, a bulwark against unjust imprisonment. Before joining the high court he served as Secretary of War, Secretary of the Treasury and Attorney General. But now, because of that one opinion, he is an historical persona non-grata . . .

"It is appropriate to reassess history and address practices now recognized as unjust . . . However, that doesn't mean eradicating the past, even those parts that most challenge us. Instead, we should seek to understand and place in context those who did great deeds while simultaneously tolerating and sometimes supporting what we now see as great evil" ("Historical Revisionism," HuffPost, Aug. 18, 2017).



Protesters demonstrate for and against the removal of a Confederate statue in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Many American cities have removed or relocated Confederate statues and monuments amid an intense nationwide debate about race and history.

In another troublesome attempt to amend history, a new Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. history course was introduced in high schools in 2014 that virtually eliminated references to America's founding fathers while highlighting the nation's faults. In remarking on the curriculum, Dr. Ben Carson, former presidential candidate and current Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), said this in a speech at the Center for Security Policy's National Security Action Summit on Sep. 29, 2014:

"I am a little shocked quite frankly looking at the AP course in American history that's being taught in high schools across our country right now. There's only two paragraphs in there about George Washington . . . Little or nothing about Martin Luther King. A whole section of slavery and how evil we are . . .

"This is what we are doing to the young people in our nation . . . We have to stop crucifying ourselves. Have we made mistakes as a nation? Of course we have. Why? Because we are people and all people make mistakes" (quoted by Warner Huston, "Dr. Ben Carson Slams New Anti-American AP History Curriculum," Breitbart, Oct. 2, 2014).

In commenting on the same history course, Dean Kalahar, an educator for 31 years and author of several books on economic and educational issues, described how it eviscerated U.S. history:

"Most concerning is the anti-historical emphasis on social justice, globalism, environmentalism, race, class, and gender victimhood that undermines Western ideals, the Constitution, capitalism, and American culture . . . Facts now show not only intent, but a vision and mission that bring schools face to face with forces bent on instilling a false shame [in] America's past for the purpose of establishing a global collective" ("Hell-bent on Rewriting America's Past," *American Thinker*, Oct. 9, 2014).

It's not surprising, then, that a recent poll showed that nearly four in 10 American young adults do not agree that "America has a history that we should be proud of" and nearly half believe that "America is more racist than other countries."

We find this revisionism in other Western nations as well. Writing in the British *Telegraph*, historian Zareer Masani writes: “A pity that the Royal Historical Society has fallen into the trap of confusing historical diversity with the narrow political correctness of a vociferous loony left lobby in our universities. It’s a laudable aim to root out racism in the recruitment of academics or students, but that has nothing to do with the absurd goal of a recent RHS report to ‘promote and embed racial and ethnic equality in UK-based history.’”

“History is not some race equality project, but the study of complex and often contradictory realities about our past, which rarely lend themselves to simple ethical stereotypes. Those who profess to ‘decolonise’ the curriculum are fighting a dangerous battle to purge the past of the iniquities they dislike and present us with a sanitised version, censored according to the values of the present” (“The Left Is Degrading the Subject of History With Its Anti-Western Political Correctness,” Oct. 23, 2018).

The legitimate study of the past requires an assessment based on facts and a broad overview—not a selective view that promotes some current agenda. The Bible tells its readers that *truth* is what matters—always (see Isaiah 59:14; John 8:32; 2 Thessalonians 2:10). The Eternal God inspired His prophet Zechariah to write: “These are the things you shall do: speak

show that most Americans believe it is now harder to be well-informed and to determine which news is accurate. They increasingly perceive the media as biased and struggle to identify objective news sources . . . Today, 66% of Americans say most news media do not do a good job of separating fact from opinion. In 1984, 42% held this view” (“American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy,” Knight Foundation, Jan. 15, 2018).

What is the reason for this? Katherine Kersten, a writer, attorney and senior fellow at the Center of the American Experiment, draws attention to what Emmy-winning American journalist Bernie Goldberg explained in his 2001 book *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*:

“Goldberg argues that journalists’ political and social leanings strongly influence the way they report the news. It’s not that reporters conspire to slant their stories, he insists. The problem is more subtle, and thus more serious. Goldberg maintains that most journalists share an ideological worldview. Generally, they support abortion rights, affirmative action, gun control, gay rights and environmental regulation, and oppose school prayer and the death penalty. Moreover, they tend to surround themselves with friends and colleagues who think the same way.

“The result, says Goldberg, is that most journalists don’t view themselves as political liberals. They simply believe that all reasonable and humane people think the way that they do. In their own eyes, they are politically middle-of-the-road. According to Goldberg, most journalists divide Americans into two kinds of people: moderates like themselves and right-wing nuts” (“Goldberg’s Revelations About Media Bias Should Come as No Surprise,” Center of the American Experiment, June 27, 2014).

This out-of-touch viewpoint is also evident in journalists’ enmity toward people who hold Christian ideals and convictions. In 2013, World News Group’s vice president Warren Smith and chief editor Marvin Olasky coauthored a book titled *Prodigal Press: Confronting the Anti-Christian Bias of the American News Media*. The book points out that in the 19th century many of America’s most distinguished daily newspapers reported news from a Christian perspective. However, over the following 150 years, a liberal progressive worldview gradually infiltrated America’s mainstream media and now plays a dominant role in society.

Although many of today’s print, internet and television journalists claim to be neutral, they increasingly report news and information from an anti-Christian outlook—which includes support for same-sex marriage, abortion and other societal ills that have corrupted and degraded American culture. The Bible explains that people often make foolish and destructive choices by doing what “seems right” in their own eyes (Proverbs 12:15; 14:12; 16:25; 21:2; 30:12). (For more on this subject, be sure to read “The Battle Over What You Think” beginning on page 21.)

4. Immigration and open borders

The contentious debate over immigration in the United States has continued for decades as political parties, govern-



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each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace” (Zechariah 8:16).

3. Media bias designed to reshape people’s thinking

We turn next to the battleground of *media bias*—that is, “a political bias in journalistic reporting, in programming selection, or otherwise in mass communications media” (Definitions.net).

While citizens of the United States believe that the media has a critical role in its democracy, “results of the 2017 Gallup/Knight Foundation Survey on Trust, Media and Democracy

ment entities and business institutions continue grappling with conflicting security and economic concerns. Walter Russell Mead, a distinguished fellow at the Hudson Institute, described why the combative debate over immigration continues to rage:

“What makes immigration radioactive? Partly it’s that no other issue, not even economic inequality, drives such a deep wedge between elite and mass opinion. Elites almost always support immigration on both economic and moral grounds. But many voters worry their neighborhoods will be exposed to the social consequences of mass immigration, and that their wages will decline as immigrants compete for jobs” (“Immigration Is Still Radioactive,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 22, 2018).

The social consequences of illegal immigration include unlawful cross-border drug, weapons and sex trafficking by criminal organizations as well as the threat of terrorist infiltration. Unlawful immigration has resulted in increased violent crime, including murder, sexual assault and aggravated assault and other offenses perpetrated by thousands of Central American “MS-13” gang members now operating in at least 22 states.

Steven Camarota, Center for Immigration Studies research director, explained that 21 percent of people convicted of crimes in the United States were illegal aliens, which is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times their portion of the population:

“The biggest problem with studying immigrant crime is that states and localities do not systematically track the country of birth, citizenship, or legal status of those they arrest, convict, or incarcerate. But the federal government does track the citizenship of those it convicts.

“New data from the U.S. Sentencing Commission shows that of those convicted of federal crimes between 2011 and 2016, 44.2 percent were not U.S. citizens—21.4 percent, if immigration crimes are excluded. In comparison, non-citizens are 8.4 percent of the adult population” (“Non-Citizens Committed a Disproportionate Share of Federal Crimes, 2011-16,” Center for Immigration Studies [CIS.org], Jan. 10, 2018).

Even in the face of such upsetting statistics, immigration activists and leftist politicians continue advocating for “open borders” and, most recently, the elimination of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a government agency that enforces federal laws governing border control, customs, trade and immigration (Andrew Arthur, “Abolish ICE?” CIS.org, July 6, 2018).

So, should nations remove all restrictions on people crossing into their borders? Should everyone have unhindered access to enter the United States or any other country they choose? Clearly not. National governments are charged with maintaining the rule of law and protecting their nations’ citizens.

The Bible describes an ancient time when people came together to build the Tower of Babel for their own aggrandizement and defiance of God. God intervened then to change history’s direction by giving different languages to different ethnic groups, which led them to move to distant locations where they developed separate societies (Genesis 11:9).

God does not support “open borders” nor illegal immigra-

tion since, as Deuteronomy 32:8 explains, He “set the *boundaries* of the peoples.” (For more on this important subject be sure to read “The Illegal Immigration Crisis—No End in Sight” beginning on page 11 and “Immigration: What Does the Bible Say?” in our May–June 2017 issue.)

5. The homosexual/transgender agenda

For decades social activists have pushed for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights, such as redefining marriage to include same-sex couples and the extension of non-discrimination laws to embrace people’s sexual orientation and gender identity.

Over time, activist pressure and moral decline led to vari-

For decades activists have pushed for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights, such as redefining marriage to include same-sex couples.

ous state statutes and court rulings, such as those outlawing sodomy, being overturned or struck down. Then on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 ruling required all 50 states to perform and recognize marriages of same-sex couples on equal terms and conditions as those of opposite-sex couples.

In the years leading up to that decision, many Americans’ belief in God and His biblical moral teachings tumbled further as the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle accelerated. A Pew Research Center poll published May 12, 2015, revealed that the belief in God’s existence fell precipitously over the previous decade (“U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious,” Pew Research Center, Nov. 3, 2015).

Plus, a May 2018 Gallup survey showed that 67 percent of Americans endorsed same-sex marriage, which is a staggering 40 percent increase in support since Gallup first polled on the issue in 1996 when only 27 percent of those surveyed said they approved of homosexual marriage (Aamer Madhani, “Poll: Approval of Same-Sex Marriage in U.S. Reaches New High,” *USA Today*, May 23, 2018). Of course, acceptance of the homosexual agenda was aggressively pushed by Western news, entertainment media and educational institutions, contributing to such widespread acceptance.

The homosexual/transgender agenda, along with the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s, transformed America’s moral standards. Many think of this as a positive change to a more enlightened perspective. However, just because more people believe same-sex marriage to be appropriate, and legislatures pass laws or judges rule in favor of such change, that does not make it inherently good.

The only way to grasp what is truly correct is by examining everything in the perfect bright light of God’s Word. In fact the Bible labels homosexual activity as explicitly sinful (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10). Of course, compassion needs to be shown to those who struggle with same-sex attraction and the homosexual lifestyle and are striving to overcome these with God’s help. Nevertheless much research

demonstrates how destructive this lifestyle really is.

For example, on March 9, 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services posted the following on its website: “Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) have been rising among gay and bisexual men, with increases in syphilis being seen across the country. In 2014, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men accounted for 83% of primary and secondary syphilis cases where sex of [the] sex partner was known in the United States. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men often get other STDs, including chlamydia and gonorrhea infections” (“Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” CDC.gov).

More recently pushed to the fore in this arena is the matter



of transgenderism, “relating to a person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person’s biological sex assigned at birth” (Dictionary.com). Even though some may think they are of the opposite gender from which they were born, the inescapable fact is that God created human beings with each having distinct sexual identity as either male or female (Genesis 5:2). Good psychiatric science understands that even though people may feel they have a different sexual identity, these are actually abnormal feelings and are symptomatic of deeper psychological problems.

In referring to his 40-year study of people who had gender confusion issues, Paul McHugh, M.D., former chairman and distinguished professor of the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, wrote: “Gender dysphoria—the official psychiatric term for feeling oneself to be of the opposite sex—belongs in the family of similarly disordered assumptions about the body, such as anorexia nervosa and body dysmorphic disorder. Its treatment should not be directed at the body as with surgery and hormones any more than one treats obesity-fearing anorexic patients with liposuction” (“Transgender Surgery Isn’t the Solution,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014).

He went on: “The treatment should strive to correct the false, problematic nature of the assumption and to resolve the psychological conflicts provoking it. With youngsters, this

is best done in family therapy.”

Yet transgenderism is being promoted at all levels of society in America and other Western countries, including to children in schools, sometimes without the consent of parents. In a sad example from the Vancouver area in Canada, “this little girl came home in tears because the teacher had told her that she was playing with some toys in the class that were deemed to be masculine in nature; that she was likely a boy in a girl’s body,’ [an area pastor Kevin] Cavanaugh said. ‘She came home in tears and said ‘Mommy, Mommy—I don’t want to be a boy!’

“The mother went to the school the very next day and instead of having any tolerance or support or understanding, she was actually called names, she was told she was a homophobe, a bigot,’ he said” (Wendy Griffith, “Mommy, I Don’t Want to Be a Boy!’ Little Girl’s Reaction to Radical Sex Ed Program Says It All,” CBN News, Jan. 14, 2018).

These are certainly dark times. To learn more about what’s happening in this arena and the heart of the matter, we encourage you to read “The War on Marriage and Family” in our November–December 2018 issue.

6. Socialist wealth redistribution

The Gallup organization reported the following in a poll conducted July 30 through Aug. 5, 2018: “Americans aged 18 to 29 are as positive about socialism (51%) as they are about capitalism (45%). This represents a 12-point decline in young adults’ positive views of capitalism in just the past two years and a marked shift since 2010, when 68% viewed it positively” (Frank Newport, “Democrats More Positive About Socialism Than Capitalism,” Gallup, Aug. 13, 2018).

Left-leaning and openly socialist politicians like Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who came close to winning the Democrat Party nomination for the 2016 presidential race, often trumpet Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) for their socialist economic systems. However, in operating their welfare-state programs these nations do so by means of underlying capitalist economies, and they have never nationalized the means of production—meaning expropriating private assets to turn them into public assets (“Scandinavia Isn’t a Socialist Paradise,” *TheFederalist.com*, Aug. 11, 2015). They’ve also not needed massive defense spending over past decades.

Socialist political parties, common in Europe, are gaining ground in the United States. In the recent U.S. midterm elections, two female Democratic Socialists of America party members won election to the U.S. House of Representatives. When one of these won the Democrat primary for her district several months previously, Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez proclaimed that she “represents the future of our party.”

Do people who are inclined toward socialism understand what can be expected from a *truly* socialist economic system? In a recent survey, six in 10 Americans were as unaware of the horrendous economic crisis and human rights abuses in socialist Venezuela as they were of the definition of socialism itself (Marion Smith, “Forty-Four Percent of Millennials Prefer Socialism. Do They Know What It Means?” *VictimsOfCommunism.org*, Nov. 2, 2017).

One dictionary definition of socialism is: “a theory or



system of social organization that advocates the vesting of the ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, of capital, land, etc., in the community as a whole” (Dictionary.com).

A more encompassing perspective comes from Andres Malave, communications director at Americans for Prosperity whose family fled socialist Venezuela:

“Socialism assumes that government officials are more qualified than individuals to decide how much a person should earn, which products and services are necessary for that person to live and how much that person should have to pay for them. Socialism deprives individual choice and crushes ambition in pursuit of a uniform, unfulfilling and arbitrary definition of ‘equality’” (“How Socialism Failed Venezuela,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Jun. 6, 2016).

Venezuela, once Latin America’s richest economy, has become a failed state. It is now in the midst of a societal and economic meltdown due to years of crushing socialist policies that began after a political coup by Hugo Chavez in 1999. As part of Chavez’s socialist agenda to redistribute the nation’s wealth, in 2007 he began nationalizing major sectors of the country’s economy, including the petroleum, steel, banking, manufacturing, agribusiness, health and food industries.

Due to fiscal mismanagement on a globally historic scale, Venezuela’s economy has since all but collapsed—with a 2018 annual hyperinflation rate of 40,000 percent (Gina Heeb, “Venezuela’s Inflation Rate Tops 40,000 Per Cent for First Time Ever,” *The Independent*, July 1, 2018). Most of the country’s 30 million citizens have become desperately poor and are suffering from massive unemployment, food and medicine shortages, malnutrition, starvation, rioting, violence, murder and rampant crime. Millions have fled the country in a desperate bid for survival.

Dr. Thomas Sowell, an American economist, social theorist and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, wrote this about wealth redistribution:

“The history of the 20th century is full of examples of countries that set out to redistribute wealth and ended up redistributing poverty. We have all heard the old saying that giving a man a fish feeds him only for a day, while teaching him to fish feeds him for a lifetime. Redistributionists give him a fish and leave him dependent on the government for more fish in the future” (“The Fallacy of Redistribution,” Creators Press, Sept. 19, 2012).

Similarly, renowned British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once wryly noted: “The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of Socialism is the equal sharing of miseries” (House of Commons speech, Oct. 22, 1945).

Forced redistribution of wealth—government taking from one person to give to another—is essentially a form of theft and a violation of the eighth of the Ten Commandments. God’s Word supports a society and economy based on private property, freedom of choice, personal initiative and free enterprise as well as unselfishness, generosity and compassion. (For more on this, be sure to read “Why the Growing Popularity of Socialism?” beginning on page 15.)




What is the solution to this culture war? People need to repent of their sin, honor God and obey His commandments!

“Silly children” in need of understanding and repentance

The United States—along with other Western nations—is experiencing a destructive war over foundational values. Many citizens no longer honor God or respect the rule of law, in contrast to previous generations. In this regard, the words of God’s prophet Jeremiah are certainly applicable to a growing number of Americans and other Westerners today: “For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jeremiah 4:22).

What is the solution to the problems being faced in this culture war? The basic answer is that people need to deeply repent of their sins, honor God and obey His commandments (2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 1:16-19). If they do not, punishment, adversity and sorrow will be the sad and dreadful result (see Deuteronomy 28:15-28; Isaiah 1:20; Ezekiel 12:20).

So where does that leave *you*? Will you be among those who drive the culture farther away from God? Or will you stand for what is right? Although the people of America and other nations as a whole are not choosing to turn to God, *you* can. Will you? He awaits your response! **BT**



LEARN MORE

Abraham Lincoln echoed the words of Jesus Christ when he stated, “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (see Mark 3:25). Where is today’s great cultural divide in the United States taking the nation? Be sure to read *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.
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THE **Illegal** **Immigration** **Crisis**—NO END IN SIGHT

As debate between those who want secure borders preventing illegal immigration and those who want open borders rages on, the crisis continues to grow.

by Michael Kelley

Nothing paints the divide of the culture war more starkly than the debate over illegal immigration. People in the United States and many other nations debate this issue continually, ideologically split into one of two camps—those who feel that unrestricted immigration is good for their nation and those concerned that it's being inundated by waves of people skirting the rules in coming into the country illegally, saddling the nation with enormous and unsustainable costs.

As polarization over the issue increases, so does the rhetoric. U.S. President Donald Trump, whose 2016 election resulted in part from his strong stand on immigration, shocked many with his recent announcement that he is considering an executive order that would end automatic unrestricted “birthright citizenship” for babies born to illegal immigrants on U.S. soil (a practice allowed in fewer than one in five countries around the world).

On the other side, the radical left in America has reacted to strong enforcement actions by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) division of the Department of Homeland Security with calls to abolish it.

The changing face of immigration

There's no denying that the United States was built on immigration. The ancestors of the vast majority of people in America came to its shores from many other nations, seeking economic and religious freedom and a better life. Regardless of whether they stepped off 17th- or 18th-century sailing ships onto the Virginia or Massachusetts shore, or passed through Ellis Island in the 19th or early 20th century, they arrived legally. In time, many came through a process that required they learn English, understand America's form of government and pledge allegiance to the U.S. flag.

For legal immigrants, that process continues. But the past 40

or so years have witnessed millions coming to the United States illegally, bypassing a legal immigration process developed over a long time.

Drawn to a land of peace instead of turmoil, one governed by the rule of law rather than the whims of despotic dictators, with a rich economy offering opportunities not available in their native countries, illegals unwilling to “go to the end of the line” cross into the United States relatively easily through thousands of miles of virtually unprotected borders. After arriving, they soon avail themselves of many social services on offer and find menial jobs in America's vast underground economy.

Making matters worse is the prospect that some could be terrorists or potential terrorists driven by a fanatical hatred of the nation extending to them the hand of security and opportunity. (Keep in mind that Islamic terrorists have killed more than 3,000 Americans in nearly 20 attacks on U.S. soil.)

The immigration issue has stoked the growing fires of division. Many feel compassion for the pitiful plight of millions oppressed in nations around the world and want to open the gates wide to any and all comers. Others see this as a tidal wave threatening to undermine and sweep away the very freedoms and opportunities that have always drawn in immigrants from abroad.

Of course it's right to want to help, but the concerning threat here is very real—not only to America but to other countries around the world, such as Britain, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Germany, Italy, Greece, Russia, India, Brazil—and the list goes on.

Former U.S. president Ronald Reagan warned more than 30 years ago, “A nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation.” Governors of several southwestern U.S. states recognize the threat, with former Arizona governor Jan Brewer echoing Reagan: “A nation without borders is like a house without walls—it collapses. And that is going to happen to our wonderful America.”



A costly problem

No one really knows how many illegal immigrants are in the United States. Estimates run between 11 and 13 million, making the illegal segment about 4 percent of the population. However, a Yale University study released in September 2018 puts the number much higher—between *16 and 30 million*. Either way, Census Bureau and Department of Homeland Security figures show the number has increased rapidly from about 8 million in 2007, peaking around 2016. Stepped-up border enforcement and deportation efforts by Immigration and Customs Enforcement have tamped down increases since then.

Many illegally entering the United States view the country as “the Promised Land,” so to speak, where they can get government-provided food stamps, free health care and free or subsidized housing. These services, of course, *are not free*. The most recent figures from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) put total federal and state costs of providing for illegal immigrants at *more than \$134 billion per year*.

The estimated \$19 billion per year illegals pay in federal and state income taxes does little to offset this cost. Put in simpler terms, *each illegal immigrant costs U.S. taxpayers almost \$8,000 per year*, year after year.

Then there is the cost of educating millions of illegal immigrant children. These children can attend public schools, and if those children can’t speak English the government will pay for them to learn it. FAIR puts the annual tally for these costs at nearly *\$44 billion per year*, costs borne mostly by taxpayers at a time of ballooning national budget deficits. And these costs greatly drain resources and funds that could be better spent educating America’s own native-born students, who generally perform poorly in comparison to their peers in other advanced nations.

To these direct costs must be added the hidden costs of working Americans losing out on jobs going to illegals working for less and the result of lower wages for millions of other American workers. Some economists contend that the large number of illegal workers in some industries drives down labor costs to the point of discouraging technological innovation. Becoming labor-intensive versus capital intensive, these industries lose long-term competitiveness.

Differing priorities

The problem is compounded because most on the left and even some on the right actually want more illegal immigration, but for very different reasons. Some Republicans, sympathetic to businesses, see illegals as a source of inexpensive labor, especially in agriculture and construction. Many Democrat politicians want more illegal immigration because it creates more people dependent on government assistance—and because when these people are given U.S. citizenship and the right to vote, they will support Democrat candidates and their ever-expanding government programs.

This puts liberal progressives, who make up most of the Democratic Party, in a contradictory situation. They have routinely called for higher wages, salaries and benefits for American workers. Yet their constant call for open borders and unrestricted immigration goes directly against that. Economists know that flooding the labor market with unskilled workers only drives down wages while contributing to higher unemployment among the unskilled. Progressives can’t have it both ways.

Yet it must be pointed out that huge sectors of the U.S. economy have become dependent on illegal immigrants for their work forces. In many larger cities young Hispanic men make up the bulk of framing, roofing and drywall crews. Hard workers, they find hot afternoons and sometime long workdays less objectionable than many young American workers do.

The progressive mindset runs into the same problem with



their claim to championing the causes of women. While calling for greater rights for women and freedom from sexual harassment, they go out of their way to defend the “rights” of certain Middle Eastern and African immigrants to come to the United States, including many who abuse women or treat them as second-class citizens or worse.

Refusal to assimilate

Sociologists and other observers also note the resistance to assimilation by immigrants today. Centuries of legal immigrants gladly assimilated into American life, embracing American values. They learned English and happily waved their U.S. flags as they wrote back to relatives in their home nations about their pride in being American citizens.

In their desire to build new lives in this nation of opportunity, they worked, they produced and many grew rich in the process. When America found itself at war, young men among the immigrant population enlisted in the U.S. armed forces by the hundreds of thousands to protect the American way of life and the values they had come to cherish.

This does not seem to be the case with an increasing number of immigrants today, who want access to the jobs, economic benefits and government programs that America has to offer, but refuse to adopt American values and the American economic system. Many don’t bother to learn English, as they often don’t need to.

Immigrant enclaves can be found in hundreds of U.S. cities, where immigrant families huddle together to eke out a living. Here, they retain their native languages, their cultures, their values, trying their best not to be involved in the rest of society. A drive down the streets of these cities shows many business signs in languages other than English.

However, there is one aspect of America that many do learn all too quickly—how to game the U.S. system of economic handouts to get free or subsidized food, housing, education

and medical care. Of course, this has also been a problem with many native-born Americans, but the problem is greatly exacerbated by thousands and thousands of newcomers.

Taking back the Southwest?

In the southwestern United States, the huge influx of immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and other Central

Huge sectors of the U.S. economy have become dependent on illegal immigrants for their work forces.

American nations has changed the character and culture of cities, counties and even states. People of Hispanic origin now make up more than a third of the populations of California, Texas, Florida and New Mexico. A number of major U.S. cities are now majority Hispanic, such as Anaheim and Oxnard, Calif. (53 and 73 percent) and McAllen and El Paso, Tex. (60 and 81 percent).

Moreover, illegal immigrants are bringing new children into the world at prodigious rates. As reported in *The Washington Examiner*, nearly 300,000 children were born to illegal immigrants in the U.S. during 2014 alone, the equivalent of another Cincinnati every year (Paul Bedard, “Shock Report: US Paying More for Illegal Immigrant Births Than Trump’s Wall,” Oct. 9, 2018).

California accounted for more than a fifth, or about 65,000, with Texas accounting for 51,000, Florida with 16,000, Illinois with 14,000, Georgia with 13,000, New York with 12,000, and New Jersey and North Carolina with 11,000 each. Typically between two-thirds and three-fourths of these births are likely paid for by taxpayers (ibid.).

The contrast of these birthrates with U.S. native birthrates at barely replacement levels presents a stark demographic picture—that of the eventual takeover of the American Southwest by pure numbers.

Hispanic American leaders are very aware of this trend, and some have been encouraging it for a long while. Said Los Angeles City Councilman Richard Alatorre back in 1996: “They’re afraid that *we’re* going to take over the governmental institutions and other institutions. They are right, we will take them over . . . We are here to stay” (Latino summit conference in Los Angeles, September 1996).

Augustin Cebada, leader of the militant Brown Berets of Aztlan, an offshoot of MEChA (Movement of Chicano Students of Aztlan), was more strident earlier that same year: “Go back to Boston! Go back to the Plymouth Rock, Pilgrims! Get out! We are the future. You are old and tired. Go on. We have beaten you; leave like beaten rats. You old white people, it is your duty to die . . . *Through love of having children, we are going to take over*” (Rally at Federal Building in Westwood, Calif., July 4, 1996).

The decade before that, it was stated in the Mexican national newspaper *Excelsior* that the American Southwest “seems to be slowly returning to the jurisdiction of Mexico without firing a single shot” (Carlos Loret de Mola, “The Great Invasion: Mexico Recovers Its Own,” July 20, 1982).

California—now officially 39 percent Hispanic and where Hispanic births now account for half of all births—will within

a few years become majority Hispanic. Mario Obledo, co-founder of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and a former California Secretary of Health and Welfare, stated in matter-of-fact terms back in 1998 that California is going to become a Hispanic state and that anyone who doesn’t like it should leave and go back to Europe (Ray Briem and Tom Leykis radio talk shows).

Hispanic activist leaders with such sentiments aim to correct what they see as a historical injustice. They maintain that the United States illegally took Texas and the American Southwest from Mexico more than 150 year ago, and they now see a way to reverse that perceived wrong by sheer force of population. Truly did Moses write more than 3,000 years ago: “The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower” (Deuteronomy 28:43).

Immigration from the Middle East

While attention tends to focus on the large numbers of Hispanic immigrants, both legal and illegal, turmoil in the Middle East and other factors have prompted a growing tide of immigrants from Muslim nations. How many have come to America is uncertain, since the U.S. Census Bureau does not ask questions about religion. But the Pew Research Center estimates there were about 3.45 million Muslims of all ages in the U.S. in 2017, making up about 1.1 percent of the population.

Rather than spread out, Muslims tend to cluster in communities where life centers around the local mosque. Many Americans are aware of cities such as Dearborn, Michigan, whose population of 100,000 is now majority Muslim.

A growing number subscribe to the concept of sharia law, an interpretation of the Quran that calls for the execution or maiming of criminals, “honor killings” of daughters that besmirch the family name, the stoning of homosexuals, and legitimacy for polygamous marriages, even to girls as young as 12.

Growing opposition to border enforcement

A tougher stance on illegal immigration has led to a surge of new arrests. Between 2016 and 2017, apprehensions of undocumented immigrants jumped by a third. In 2017 the Trump administration deported more than double the number of illegals the previous administration had deported in 2016. So effective has recent ICE enforcement of immigration laws been that, as mentioned earlier, many on the left want to abolish it.

Ironically, the left calling for the abolition of a federal government agency presents another contradiction to the progressive mindset, as it typically sees the answer to any national problem to be the setting up of another federal agency!

Thumbing their noses at federal enforcement of immigration laws, some states and cities have declared themselves “sanctuary cities” that refuse to cooperate with federal officials. In such refuge areas, illegals can flout the law, knowing they won’t be deported or handed over to federal officials even if they commit criminal acts.

The July 2015 San Francisco shooting of Kate Steinle by an illegal immigrant, Jose Garcia Zarate, shocked the nation. Yet more than a year later Zarate was acquitted of murder and involuntary manslaughter charges, as well as assault with a deadly weapon—which many found outrageous. Prior to the

shooting, San Francisco had repeatedly refused to turn Zarate over to federal immigration officials for deportation, in spite of his having a prior criminal record.

Said then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, “I urge the leaders of the nation’s communities to reflect on the outcome of this case and consider carefully the harm they are doing to their citizens by refusing to cooperate with federal law enforcement officers” (Dept. of Justice press release, Nov. 30, 2017).

But stronger enforcement has raised the fear level in immigrant communities that in the past thumbed their noses at U.S. immigration laws. “Quite frankly, illegal immigrants are supposed to be afraid of detection,” says Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies, a group working for stronger immigration controls (quoted by Haley Edwards, *Time* magazine, March 8, 2018).

Of course, border enforcement—or lack thereof—is also inextricably linked to drug trafficking. The same Mexican crime lords who smuggle drugs across the southern border also smuggle human beings. Most illegal drugs sold in the United States come from Mexico, and heroin is making a huge comeback. In 2017, the last year for which figures are available, *more than 72,000 Americans died of drug overdoses*—that’s nearly 200 a day and *more than all U.S. deaths from the Vietnam and Iraq wars combined*.

What’s behind all this?

As in many other countries, the clash of values in America forms the basis for the problem of illegal immigration. Strident calls against a border wall, for the abolition of ICE, for unrestricted legal and illegal immigration, for immediate full citizenship for those who are here illegally—all result from a trend toward growing lawlessness that has come over America.

Today, millions of Americans reject the concept of absolute law. As a nation, we have largely thrown out the Bible, which teaches that respecting and living according to the law of God is the path to peace and prosperity. We have replaced that law with humanistic thought that imagines man can solve all of his problems without some higher power. We have embraced a relativistic view that rejects all absolutes, that says situations define ethics and morals.

This mode of thinking now wants to abolish America’s borders and the rule of law based on the U.S. Constitution and other founding documents. But as has been pointed out repeatedly in the immigration debate, *without law and secure borders we have no nation state*.

Biblical principles provide guidelines

The fact is, we do need God to help us see and resolve our problems. And His Word gives us guidance concerning immigrants. The Bible lays down laws dealing with immigration and naturalization and provides guidelines for dealing with this issue. A beginning point is that *foreigners who enter the country lawfully and accept its values and way of life should be treated with respect*.

Before they were a nation, the biblical Israelites were themselves strangers in a foreign land. The Egyptians forced them into slavery—hardly a welcoming situation. When they became a nation, God commanded Israel in Leviticus 19:33-34: “And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat

him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

God further laid down another principle in requiring all citizens to adhere to the same law. Leviticus 24:22 states, “You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country.” Despite the claims of many on the left, American law is based on Judeo-Christian ethic. Those who come from another land should be educated in this fact.

And those who violate the law, who sneak into the country illegally, some committing horrendous crimes against U.S. citizens, must be punished by the same law that applies to everyone in the country.

Truly following a biblical ethic would mean we do not follow laws that contradict God’s laws—as Paul stated in Acts 5:29, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Immigrants are not



A tougher stance on illegal immigration has led to a surge of new arrests. Between 2016 and 2017 apprehensions jumped by a third.

entitled to live by laws that are contrary to the laws of their adopted country. If they insist on doing so, they should never be allowed to enter or should be deported to the lands from which they came.

Of course, we must not lose sight of the fact that most immigrants come to build a better life for themselves and their families. As Christians we should extend the hand of friendship and help as long as these people are law-abiding, are willing to live peaceably amid the culture and seek to contribute to society rather than merely take what the country has to offer. Be sure to read more about this subject in our lead article, “What’s Behind the Growing Culture War?” beginning on page 4. **BT**

LEARN MORE



Why are the United States and other Western nations seeing so many growing problems? This was prophesied in your Bible centuries ago! You need to read our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Download or request your copy today!

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Photos, from left: Adrees Latif/Reuters/Newscom, zumamaamericastwentyone506696



A young Venezuelan mother and her child are among the millions reduced to poverty by the failed socialist policies imposed in the country.

Why the Growing Popularity of **SOCIALISM?**

In spite of its failures, socialism has been advancing in the West and is attracting a growing number of admirers in America, the world's bastion of economic freedom. What vital understanding is missing from their thinking?

by Don Hooser

The culture of a society rests on the foundation of its ideologies—the ideas, views and beliefs of the people. The ideological foundation of the United States of America is being radically corrupted at an accelerating and alarming pace. A dark cloud is overshadowing the country, as it is given over to competing ideologies or “isms.”

With Bible-centered religion waning and the nation's Judeo-Christian heritage being increasingly rejected, one “ism” that is becoming more and more prevalent is *socialism*, as are its intimately related cousins—humanism, materialism, evolutionism, environmentalism, radical feminism, etc.

In what follows, the word “socialism” is used in a general sense to refer to governments imposing more and more control over their citizens by legislating expensive *non-essential* programs. “Essential” government activities are those that provide safety for the citizens—protection from dangers from within (crime) and from without (attacks and invasion).

America began with a very low degree of socialism, but as history would predict, government has been legislating an increasing amount. For a while, the transition was slow—America had *creeping* socialism. Today socialism is *leaping* forward.

This typical trend is described in a popular quote from Scottish historian Alexander Fraser Tytler: “A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist

until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse [financial benefits] from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury with the result that a democracy always collapses.”

Such “democratic socialism” is difficult to reverse. Once a welfare program has been enacted, the recipients greatly resist any effort to end it, so very few politicians will dare suggest a cancellation. (See “Socialism: A Warning From History” on page 19.)

Many Americans are embracing socialism

Sadly, more and more Americans, especially the relatively young (and politicians pandering to them), are embracing socialism even while the U.S. administration has been moving in the opposite direction of reducing stifling regulations and taking other practical steps to ensure personal freedoms.

As is also noted in our lead article (“What's Behind the Growing Culture War?” beginning on page 4), a recent Gallup poll found that Americans 18 to 29 years of age “are as positive about socialism (51%) as they are about capitalism (45%)”—a huge change from just a few years ago. And 57 percent of all Democrats view socialism positively (Frank Newport, “Democrats More Positive About Socialism Than Capitalism,” Gallup, Aug. 13, 2018).

The United States has long been hailed as a bastion of

liberty in the world. Yet liberal progressives pushing socialist measures have viewed the country as primarily a land of privilege and greed that needs true “liberation” into more socialist policies—of redistributed wealth, “free” college education, price and wage controls, universal “free” health care, government control of various industries, etc.

This is declared to be the real liberty America should aspire to—along with, as many liberal progressives also support, casting off traditional moral restraints and imposing a new morality more in line with their values. Yet this is certainly not true liberty.

Some may consider such a discussion to be “too political” for a magazine that stands above human politics, as *Beyond Today* does. But *Beyond Today* promotes what the Bible teaches, which is often diametrically opposed to liberal progressive ideology.

And this discussion is not a mere domestic issue for the United States. It applies to all the world, as many nations have suffered under the ravages of socialism and its related “isms” communism and fascism. But since America is the world’s most powerful nation, its example has a great impact on the rest of the world.

We ask the question, then: Why is socialism growing in popularity despite its catastrophic results in times past and in various nations even today?

One reason is the high percentage of socialist-minded people in positions of powerful influence in media, politics, Hollywood, college faculties, high-tech providers of social media, etc. Another factor is the prevalence of opportunists who realize they can gain personal power by promising wonderful benefits to naïve voters who will support them. Then there are the true believers in socialism, who want, with good intentions, to heroically lead their fellow citizens into their dream of an easier and better life for everyone.

Another major reason for socialism’s rise in popularity is the fact that countless people lack the understanding to recognize the fallacies in socialistic proposals and promises. Wishful thinking about how the world should be often leads them to readily accept fantasies over facts. *Many people do not understand the essential realities of life* that disprove the validity and value of socialism. Following are 10 vital subjects where there is a serious lack of understanding.

1. Lack of understanding *charity vs. socialism*

Many passages of Scripture teach the essential importance of love, kindness, mercy, sympathy, compassion, charity and generosity. Beyond certain requirements to contribute to and participate in the mission of God’s Church, the Bible teaches that we should be voluntarily giving to people who really need help, whether temporarily or permanently. This can be done by individuals or in people working together in churches and charitable organizations.

But the Bible never advocates state-run welfare programs. According to biblical principles, compulsory and confiscatory taxation to “redistribute” wealth from income earners to those who are not earning, with an unfair “graduated” income tax and other methods, is *legalized stealing!*

Whether or not socialists are stingy with their own money,

their primary “solution” for problems is to support new or expanded government welfare programs. Sadly, history proves that the more such programs government runs, the less people give to churches, charities and needy individuals.

2. Lack of understanding *influences on people’s thinking*

More and more people are either *uninformed* (lack knowledge) or *misinformed* (have false “knowledge”). A



The Bible teaches the importance of love, mercy, compassion and generosity, and that we should **voluntarily** give to people who really need help.

deceived person may be sincere—yet he doesn’t realize he is deceived. He doesn’t know what he doesn’t know.

For each person, the “*way that seems right*” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25) is based on his past experience, education and environment, including the views of parents, teachers and friends. That “way” seems “normal” to them.

When journalists engage in biased reporting and “fake news,” it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. And like computers, we are programmed by the input into our minds. (Regarding the dangerous problem of media bias, be sure to read “The Battle Over What You Think” beginning on page 21.)

It’s tragic that the quantity and quality of what is learned in schools has deteriorated terribly. For example, more and more public schools in the United States are no longer teaching civics (the study of government and the responsibilities of citizens).

Especially appalling is the fact that many university and college professors have embraced humanism, “political correctness,” macroevolution, environmentalism, immoral lifestyles, radical feminism and, yes, socialism. As a result, many students in higher education become indoctrinated in those views, especially since young people often lack the maturity and experience to recognize the fallacies.

Many young people are so absorbed with TV, video games and other trivial pursuits that they have no time or inclination to be seekers of truth.

The Bible contains passionate exhortations to *seek knowledge, understanding and wisdom!* While many people

today seek technical knowledge, relatively few seek true wisdom. It's ironic and bizarre that self-identified intellectuals embrace philosophies that defy facts and common sense! People believe what they want to believe.

3. Lack of understanding *socialism vs. freedom*

Maximum personal freedom under the guidance of God's Word and His law is the ideal. *Total* or *absolute* "freedom" in the sense of having no restrictions at all is not true freedom. That would, horribly, allow murder, stealing and lying, which would soon *destroy everyone's* freedom and security. If your neighbor could legally take your life or property, you would not be free—and neither would he, as you or someone else could do the same to him.

Tragically, all too many people want near-absolute freedom, allowing them to commit all kinds of immorality, including killing unborn babies. Maximum freedom can be achieved when the primary law of the land is God's law as summarized in the Ten Commandments. That law *safeguards liberty*, which is why the apostle James called it "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25; compare 2:12).

Thankfully, most of America's founders believed in the necessity of obedience to the Ten Commandments and acknowledged that this new country would not long survive if the citizens rejected the authority of those commandments.

Some people end up with a mindset of dependence and fear freedom. We can see this in the complaining of the Israelites following their Exodus from Egypt. After God delivered them from their enslavement there, some Israelites actually begged to go back! (See Numbers 11:5-20; 14:2-4; 21:5.) "In their hearts they turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:38-39). In Egypt, they had food and shelter and probably didn't have to cope with a lot of changes or surprises.

As they submitted to God, the Israelites would continue to have maximum freedom, while ruled directly by God as their King. Then during the judgeship of Samuel, the leaders said, "Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have" (1 Samuel 8:5, New Living Translation; compare 12:12).

God told Samuel He would let the people have their wish, but Samuel warned the people of the things they would suffer under oppressive, big-spending governments levying taxes and confiscating people's wealth. Nevertheless, the people still clamored for a worldly government. The significant and prescient story is recorded in 1 Samuel 8:4-22.

4. Lack of understanding *economics*

Economics is defined as "the social science that deals with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services . . ." (TheFreeDictionary.com). Yes, it is a science with economic laws!

Socialism doesn't work because it *defies* those laws! What works is a free enterprise system—that is, one that allows individuals to engage in private business ventures and free exchange in a free market, also known as capitalism. However, some influential socialists including Karl Marx (father of "Marxism") and John Maynard Keynes (father of "Keynesianism") have had a poisonous influence on the thinking of countless people.

Most modern nations are operating with a combination

of personal freedom and socialism. If such a nation is fairly prosperous, the credit belongs to the parts that are free or to the wealth that was accumulated before the institution of socialism (or, horribly, sometimes to their predation of other societies).

Countless excellent books on economics have been written. It's tragic that most people don't read such books. Many people think of socialism in only one way—a system that offers lots of "free stuff!" Never mind that these handouts are never really free. They are paid for by higher taxes, printing more money (thus devaluing it, leading to inflation), and/or going into further debt (borrowing). Another major cost is loss of freedom.

The fruits of freedom are fabulous. Personal freedom unleashes the ingenuity and entrepreneurship of creative people. The usual result? Greater prosperity all around!

In spite of the consistent failure of socialism, proponents come along who promise success with their "new" and "better" variation of socialism, and there are always many who are naïve enough to believe those fairy tales. (Again, see "Socialism: A Warning From History" on page 19.)

5. Lack of understanding *history*

A popular form of a famous saying tells us, "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." Wise people study history to learn what has worked and what hasn't.

Another witticism informs us that "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Since socialism has always failed, isn't it insane to keep adopting it?

Tragically, world history and American history have been taught less and less in U.S. schools and colleges. And history classes often denigrate and disparage America's past instead of teaching it accurately.

Most of America's founding fathers respected and read the Bible and wanted their new country to be founded on biblical principles. The American Declaration of Independence contains these famous words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

According to the Bible, these words do indeed express important truths. God *did* create human beings and *did* provide those rights. First is the right to live (unless one commits a capital crime incurring the death penalty as laid out in Scripture). Second is the right to have liberty as opposed to being wrongly imprisoned. Third, the right to pursue happiness, is not about pursuing entertainment or hedonistic pleasures. It concerns the right to decide for yourself what realistic goals and occupations you want to pursue in life because you think they will bring you the most satisfaction.

The problem with increasing socialism is that instead of *you* making your own decisions, more and more decisions about your life are *made by big government*—which has *its* interests, not yours, at heart. Rather than government serving you, *you end up serving the government*—just as God warned (as noted earlier in 1 Samuel 8:4-22).

6. Lack of understanding *human nature*

Many people believe human nature is basically good, while many others see it as basically bad. God of course understands



human nature perfectly, and the Bible makes it clear that human nature has been corrupted and is basically self-centered, selfish and evil. (See these clear scriptures that verify this: Genesis 6:5-6; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:18-19; Mark 7:20-23; Romans 7:14-19; 8:7; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-7.)

Thankfully, many people experience lots of good influences that help to tame, elevate and refine their corrupt natures to some degree. The influences can include those of parents, family, friends, teachers, pastors, law enforcement and the fact that people are often automatically rewarded for good conduct and automatically punished for bad conduct.

Those who believe that people are naturally good don't see much need for God. As a result, they are too trustful of human government and so are willing to let human leaders wield great power. They expect government to be a benevolent "big brother" that will protect and provide for them.

But what is the reality? Since corrupt human nature is lazy and lustful, getting income without working for it can be appealing. Since human nature is greedy and jealous, imposing a higher rate of taxes on higher-income people can be appealing. And since human nature is selfish and short-sighted, people tend to think, "I'll get mine while the getting is good and not worry about future generations."

Why should we assume big government would curb the problem? After all, it's made up of many, many people with corrupt human nature. Is it any surprise that politicians who work for any length of time in government often leave office much wealthier than when they went in?

Because America's founders understood human nature, they rightfully feared big government. They designed the U.S. Constitution to try to protect the rights and freedoms of individual citizens and to prevent any part of the government from becoming too powerful.

But we should also keep in mind that the Bible has lots of *good news*, including God's revelation of how human nature can be gradually replaced by a godly nature through the process of spiritual conversion! (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

7. Lack of understanding **God**

From the Bible, we see clearly that God loves liberty and loves to liberate people! God identifies Himself not only as Creator but also as Deliverer from bondage—our Liberator! It is not His nature to be controlling and micromanaging.

Notice that God obviously loves variety. Consider the seemingly infinite combinations of talents, interests and personalities among the people of the world! Obviously God never intended for everyone to have the same occupation and set of avocations. God desires for every person to have the freedom to choose the paths he or she wants to follow.

God created man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27), referring to a resemblance in appearance but also in mind. We understand from the rest of the Bible that God accomplished this by giving people a spirit that imparts intellect to the human brain, creating the awesome human mind that far exceeds that of animals (see Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11). This gives each human being incredible freedom of thought and a unique personality.

When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He

told them "to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15, New International Version). But there is no evidence that God told them *how* to do this! He gave them the freedom to plan, make decisions and take the actions that seemed best to them. (Tragically, they abused their freedom and ate of the one tree God had forbidden.) When God later allowed the Israelites into the Promised Land, there is no evidence of His micromanaging at that time either!

God knows that micromanaging people has bad consequences, but egotistical human beings think otherwise! They imagine they can solve a nation's problems with big government and without God.

The official U.S. motto is, "In God We Trust." Yet it has become all so much lip service, with more trust being given to the money it is printed on or to "almighty government" that supposedly gives us our rights and our money. Some even want to eradicate this motto and all references to God in government.

The fact is, we human beings need to trust in God to teach us to think like He thinks (see Isaiah 55:8-9). God loves freedom, and we should love it too!

8. Lack of understanding **the Bible**

The Bible is God's revelation of ultimate truth (Psalm 119:160; John 17:17). It should be the foundation and standard by which all ideas are judged for their truthfulness. Tragically, most people today ignore that filter and foundation or they reinterpret it to fit their errant notions.

Freedom and liberty are major themes in the Bible! Most people are unaware of the Bible's impact on world history. For example, it has inspired more efforts to achieve freedom than any other book by far.

What about *equality*? The Bible teaches spiritual and legal equality, and it declares laws from God that protect private property and prevent financial extremes, but the Bible never advocates efforts to try to force uniformity, such as financial equality.

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them freedom of choice in how to conduct themselves—"free moral agency," though telling them the way they should choose and to not disobey Him. God gives commandments and promises rewards for obedience and penalties for disobedience, but He lets people know they have the freedom to choose. Again, though, He tells them to choose wisely! (See Deuteronomy 30:15-20.)

God told Adam and Eve that He was giving them and their progeny "dominion" over all the creatures of the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28). "Dominion" means *authority* and *rulership*! That's a lot of freedom and a lot of authority under God's overall sovereignty!

From the Bible, we know God regards private property ownership as fundamental to freedom, prosperity and happiness. The whole world belongs to God (Psalm 24:1), but God has always wanted families to have some land to regard as their own. The importance of protecting private property is clear from the Eighth Commandment ("You shall not steal") and related biblical laws.

When God led the Israelites to the Promised Land, He gave them a great start with a generous variety of property and assets (Deuteronomy 6:10-12). All of that came with no property taxes and apparently no regulations, restrictions or requirements other than the relatively few spiritual, civil and

agricultural laws God gave for their benefit.

Promoters of socialism often try to entice people to their way of thinking by criticizing financial inequity and declaring the riches of wealthy people to be obscene—and thus in need of redistribution. One irony here is that many wealthy people in entertainment, media and government promote socialism while living lavish lifestyles. Another is that when socialists take over, the leaders of the system and those they favor always seem to share the wealth while the common people share only impoverished misery. Socialism is certainly no solution to perceived inequities in wealth!

Interestingly, the Bible does not speak against the possession of money and wealth itself. God has used many wealthy people in His service, including Abraham, the father of the faithful (Genesis 13:2; 14:23; Romans 4:11). Of course God condemns the misuse of money and any wrong attitude about material wealth, including setting one's heart on it or coming to trust in it. Notice the correct wording of 1 Timothy 6:10: "For *the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil . . ." (emphasis added). "Love of money" implies lust and covetousness. There's nothing inherently wrong with money or wealth itself.

In some of Jesus Christ's parables, He used free enterprise business stories to teach spiritual lessons. In the parables of the "talents" and "minas," the master gives his servants some money and tells them to do their best to *make some profit* with

the money (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). Today those stories could be called stories of capitalism!

Socialism is an ideology that seriously conflicts with the Bible in numerous ways. The Bible clearly teaches personal freedom and free enterprise and exchange. Most of America's founders understood this and did their best to write the U.S. Constitution to be in harmony with the Bible.

The Bible promises a peaceful new world order, but that will come only after Christ returns to the earth (Micah 4:1-4; Revelation 20:4-6). History has shown that ideal conditions can never be achieved merely by the efforts of human beings.

America has drifted far from its founding. Its people have shown less and less interest in learning, loving and living by the Bible. Sadly, although many Christian churches truly help people through effective charitable programs, too many others misinterpret the Bible and misapply scriptures to support their "social gospel" emphasizing human efforts—including massive government programs—to transform society. Many churches are forsaking the Bible on this subject, partly because they want to gain the approval of mainstream society.

To summarize, most people are uninformed and misinformed about the Bible—even many who claim to live by it.

9. Lack of understanding *the influence of Satan the devil*

Satan the devil and the other evil angels he rules over, the

Socialism: A Warning From History

As more and more politicians demand their countries take a more socialist path (where everything is "free"), what are they not saying? The lessons from history are obvious. Writing at The Daily Signal, Patrick Tyrell and Anthony Kim point out serious dangers of this path:

"What are the costs of adopting socialism? It's a good question, and one not asked frequently enough. But a new report by the Council of Economic Advisors at the White House does ask the question. The answer? Socialism destroys lives and societies. The historical record is clear: Everywhere it has been tried, socialism has done harm. It's a cautionary tale that should be taught to every new generation.

"American socialists like Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez overlook the misery socialism has wrought in countries like the U.S.S.R., North Korea, and Venezuela. They maintain that they want socialism without dictatorship or state brutality. But even if that were achieved, socialism would still fail.

"As the White House report points out:



'Peaceful democratic implementation of socialist policies does not eliminate the fundamental incentive and information problems created by high taxes, large state organizations, and the centralized control of resources. In a socialist country, most of the wealth created by workers is controlled by the government, not by those who toiled to create it. The incentive problem is obvious: If what you earn is going to be spent by the government instead of by you, why bother to earn it in the first place?

"Secondly, as pure-hearted as govern-

ment bureaucrats might be, are their spending choices likely to be as beneficial for workers as if they had made the decisions for themselves? That's a big leap, even if you discount completely the possibility of bureaucratic greed or corruption. Again, the historical record is instructive. When small family farms were taken over by the government and repackaged in giant government administered cooperatives in China and the U.S.S.R., less food was produced, not more, and both countries suffered mass starvation . . .

"Kay Coles James, the president of The Heritage Foundation, recently wrote: 'From Albania and Angola to Vietnam and Yemen, socialism has produced little but violence, starvation, and misery . . . Contrast that with the experience of those who live in capitalist societies, where rights are protected, life spans are longer, and people enjoy a higher standing of living.'

"The allure of socialism is a mirage that each new generation will be tempted to run toward—unless they are told the truth about its legacy of failure" ("The Empty Promises of Socialism," Oct. 25, 2018).

demons, are very real. God is allowing Satan to be “the ruler of this world” until Christ returns (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Today “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

The influence of Satan and his demons is the number one cause of every kind of evil—sin, misery, confusion, corruption, deception, destruction, perversion and poverty. They confuse people into thinking that evil is good and good is evil.

Satan hates God, he hates the Bible, and he hates human beings. He is constantly scheming to deceive, control and destroy us. When they have the opportunity, demons sometimes actually “possess” people, which means taking total control of them. God has never done that. God wants everyone to have the freedom to make his or her own decisions, choices and plans.

Satan wants nations to establish powerful governments because he also knows he can more easily influence a whole population when it’s already under a big centralized government.

Bible prophecy tells us that Satan will achieve his greatest power shortly before Christ returns. Satan will influence world leaders to give their support to a worldwide government led by an evil dictator, the Bible calling this great political power and its leader “the beast” (see Revelation 13 and 17). The world will experience totalitarian government control just before Jesus Christ returns, and then Christ will lead the world into the immense relief of true freedom!

The insidious influence of Satan and the demons is another major reason that more and more Americans are embracing socialism. (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*)

10. Lack of understanding *the world after Christ's return*

Some people might imagine that when Jesus Christ returns to the earth as King of Kings, He will be a dictator—a loving dictator but a totalitarian dictator nonetheless. They imagine Him to be very controlling and micromanaging, like a “helicopter parent,” prescribing to everyone what, when, where and how to do everything.

Not so! The Bible contains many prophecies about the wonderful reign of Christ to come, and none describe a domineering government. In a worldwide society based on the Ten Commandments, the “law of liberty,” people will be able to enjoy maximum liberty! The prophecies describe a free, fertile, fruitful and flourishing society, “like the garden of Eden” (Ezekiel 36:35).

With no crime, wars, militaries, dangerous animals, earthquakes or extremes of weather, and with hardly any other dangers, maintaining a safe society will cost almost nothing! And since the overall government will be administered by spirit beings (Jesus Christ and the saints, His spiritually converted followers from this age then transformed into glory with Him), there will not be a need to fund government on the massive level that exists today! So there won’t be any confiscatory taxation!

One fundamental fact is that everyone will be granted private property. Micah 4:4 says that “everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them

afraid.” “His” vine and “his” fig tree means it will be “his” land. What a person does with his land will be up to him. He can use it for a farm, ranch, orchard, vineyard, cottage industry or business. He can sell all or part of it and invest the profit in another enterprise. As the vineyard owner in one of Jesus’ parables rightly said, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?” (Matthew 20:15).

The Bible has many exciting descriptions of the world under Christ’s leadership when peace, prosperity, liberty and love will flourish. Some of the most inspiring descriptions are found in the book of Isaiah (see 2:1-4; 11:6-9; 35:1-10; 65:21-25).



Thanks to the Bible, we know that genuine good times will come. Someday the whole world will be a free, peaceful, prosperous and joyful place!

We have a wonderfully awesome future ahead of us! (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

Why the growing popularity of socialism?

There are many factors that shape people’s views of socialism. Many influential people want to lead the way into socialism and many others are all too willing to follow their lead. And the fact that a growing percentage of people do not understand some of the fundamental realities of life explains why so many people naïvely think of socialism in positive and optimistic ways.

When people can vote for legislation or for a candidate that promises them personal benefits they don’t have to pay for, many voters will support that legislation or candidate. Since America has a government that is “by the people,” much of what happens depends on who gets elected to public office. Hence, nations with democracies usually degenerate over time into increasing socialism with all its related problems.

The Bible informs us that “in the last days, perilous times will come” (2 Timothy 3:1). It’s heartbreaking for anyone to contemplate the decline and fall of his or her beloved homeland. But thanks to the Bible, we can see into the future and know that good times will follow the bad times. Someday the whole world will be a free, peaceful, prosperous and joyful place! May that day come quickly! [BT](#)



The Battle Over What You Think

For decades a battle has raged—a battle not for territory, but for hearts and minds. Whether you realize it or not, you and your loved ones are a target of this battle, and the stakes couldn't be higher!

by Scott Ashley

How many locks do you have protecting your property? For most of us, that probably includes locks on our front and back doors, any side doors, the garage door, a number of windows and any outdoor shed or outbuildings we might have. You probably also have locks on your fence, if you have one. And of course locks are built into every door of our vehicles, many of which also have alarms.

You may have alarms in or on your house too. I recently installed a video camera so I can see anyone approaching my front door. And like just about every other house in my neighborhood, I have a fence around my property, especially since it backs up to a community common area.

Why do we have fences, alarms and locks? The answer is obvious: We feel a need to protect our property—our homes, our loved ones, those things that are valuable to us. And we rightly go to considerable effort and expense to protect them.

But how much effort and expense do you put into protecting something far more valuable—*your mind*?

How important to you is protecting your thinking and that of your loved ones, including your children if you're a parent?

We would never knowingly feed our families poison or let anyone else do so. But would we—and *do we*—allow others to poison our own minds and thinking as well as that of our fam-

ilies and loved ones? The issue is truly that serious!

The importance of what and how you think

The Bible has much to say about what and how we think. This is important because what and how we think ultimately determines who and what we are.

Proverbs 4:23 states it this way: “Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts” (Good News Translation, emphasis added throughout). Proverbs 23:7 similarly tells us, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

There's a clear connection between what we allow into our minds, how that shapes our thoughts and how that becomes what we are. A popular saying from several decades ago put it this way: “Watch your thoughts, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become character. Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

For this reason the apostle Paul gives this counsel in Philip-
pians 4:8: “And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (New Living Translation).

If we do this, it will clearly impact our thinking and perspective for the good.



Living in a world of lies

The problem—and it’s a huge one—is that *we are living in a world of lies*. The Bible reveals that this world is dominated by the influence of an enormously intelligent and powerful spirit being known as the devil or Satan (meaning “enemy” or “adversary”). His influence is so great that he “*deceives the whole world*” (Revelation 12:9).

The primary way he does this is through lies. Jesus Christ said of him, “When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44, English Standard Version). In referring to Satan as “the father of lies,” Jesus is saying that the devil is the originator of lies and the act of lying (having lied in the Garden of Eden to Eve and, before that, likely to other angels in the rebellion he led against God).

Satan has been doing it since the dawn of time, and he’s very good at it! As a result of his lies and having “deceive[d] the whole world,” blinding them to the true knowledge of God, “*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19, ESV).

The tragic result, says God, is that “There is *no truth or mercy or knowledge of God* in the land . . . *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4:1, 6). People have been deceived about God. They’ve been deceived about the Bible. They’ve been deceived about God’s laws and instructions. They’ve bought into Satan’s lies instead. And as a result, *they’re being destroyed*.

Massive changes in media in recent decades

Why are we covering so many hot-button topics in this issue of *Beyond Today* magazine? Because the simple fact is, *people are being lied to*. They’re *being deceived*. They don’t know what God and the Bible say about these issues, because our news media won’t cover that. But *we will*, because *our job is to tell you what God thinks about these issues*. Our perspective is unapologetically biblical, and therefore far out of step with what you’ll see and hear from others on these subjects.

News media have changed from reporting facts to reporting *opinions masquerading as facts*. Let me give a little historical background: I’ve worked in mass media for nearly all of my adult life. In college I minored in journalism while working one year in a print shop and two years at a newspaper. After graduation I mostly worked on a variety of magazines for more than 40 years. For 23 years I’ve been managing editor of *Beyond Today* and its predecessor *The Good News*.

I’ll bluntly state that I’m stunned and ashamed at how news media have changed over that time. My first newspaper editor drummed into his employees the highest regard for accuracy. “You have to *love* the truth,” he would often say. He continually instilled in us the need to report the facts and leave out personal opinion. He demanded high standards and settled for nothing less.

Today what passes for impartial “news reporting” is

The Mesmerizing Spell of Self-Absorbed Entertainment

The apostle Paul wrote of a major trend in the last days in which mass media plays a major role.

“But mark this,” Paul wrote shortly before his death, around A.D. 67: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, New International Version).

Does this sound familiar? Each of these awful traits can be found in the daily menu of American entertainment devoured by two billion minds focused on televisions around the world. Welcome to the age of crude amusements and pandering to lust—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Lust for violence, self-glorification, sex without the commitment of marriage, vicarious indulgence in forbidden fruit without the consequences—these are the themes of the comedies, soap operas, dramas and talk shows that constitute the moral equivalent of a sewer flooding human minds. It’s reminiscent of the sated

ancient Roman crowds all over again watching the doomed die in the Colosseum.

The motive for so much filth is simple—



money. Delivering eyes to advertisers is the primary objective of network executives. Programming that most effectively hooks the largest audience features fast-paced

content centered on a mesmerizing diet of sex, lust, greed and irreverent and profane humor. It’s a sure bet to keep an audience glued to the tube. Produce such material and you make money.

If you own the movie and TV production rights to sex, lust and greed, you make *more* money. If you own cable and satellite systems, online video distribution systems and magazines, you make even more money—*lots and lots* of money. It’s no wonder we’ve seen so many mergers in recent years as media providers seek greater control over what consumers see, hear and read.

God says to any who are caught up in the end-time materialistic system, mindset and culture that pervades the world, “*Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues*” (Revelation 18:4).

The way to come out is to recognize where our materialistic, self-obsessed entertainment and media are leading us. Turn off the consumption; turn away from the self-obsessed way of life promoted by our global media system. Instead, turn to God and His Word, the Bible. Remember, God recorded these warnings to us for a reason!

—Jerold Aust

embarrassing. Most publications and TV news programs no longer even make a pretense of hiding their bias. Several years ago I canceled my local newspaper after I got fed up with its steady stream of praise for illegal immigrants, transgenders, homosexual “families” and churches with homosexual leaders, intermixed with endorsements of drug legalization, tax hikes and far-left political stances that went against everything I held as Christian values.

After subscribing to a popular U.S. newsmagazine for almost 20 years, I canceled my subscription when the magazine made its leftist bias so obvious I could no longer ignore it. The magazine ran a story on a popular conservative media figure with the cover headline asking if he was “good for America?”—to which the answer was a definite no. Then, less than a month later, its cover story extolled Fidel Castro as “The Lion in Winter”—rather than a ruthless communist dictator ruling over an island prison where thousands had died for opposing him.

Highly biased media reporting

In Western societies today we’re surrounded by a 360-degree “echo chamber” of news programs, TV entertainment, cable TV, movies, music, newspapers, magazines, educational institutions, think tanks, government bureaucracy, cultural movements and Internet giants like Google and Facebook that all promote the same secular, liberal worldview—one that completely leaves God out of the picture and advances causes that are diametrically opposed to God’s instruction (see, for example, the articles in this issue on socialism, immigration, abortion and the culture war).

This is reflected in studies that show highly biased news reporting. To illustrate, a Harvard University study of media coverage of U.S. President Donald Trump’s first 100 days in office (during which he pursued a clear and unapologetic conservative agenda), revealed that the coverage was 80 percent negative and only 20 percent positive. In comparison, in the first 100 days of previous President Barack Obama, news coverage was 60 percent positive and only 40 percent negative.

Slanted as that coverage was, it managed to get even worse. During the four months of June through September 2018, leading up to U.S. midterm congressional elections, TV broadcast reporting on President Trump was “the most hostile coverage of a President in TV news history” at 92 percent negative, according to a new report by the Media Research Center. At the same time, highly positive news such as the nation’s booming economy and lowest unemployment rates in half a century received less than 1 percent of network news time.

The American public seems to be catching on. An October 2018 Morning Consult poll found that almost two out of three voters—64 percent—saw the media as having done more to divide the country than to unite it. It further found that only 14 percent of voters had “a lot” of confidence in newspaper outlets, and only 13 percent said this of television news.

What’s the thinking of those who tell us what to think?

These results above should not be surprising, as a Center for Public Integrity study of political donations from journalists and news organizations between January 2015 and August 2016 (leading up to the November 2016 presidential election) found that 96 percent of the total amount donated went to

Types of Media Bias to Be Alert For

Media bias takes a number of forms. The job of reporters and editors is to present an objective and balanced story or report, but few do—resulting in bias or slanted stories. With careful attention, you can train yourself to spot the most common types of bias. Here are brief descriptions of some to help you recognize biased reports:

Spin: This occurs when a report or story provides only one view or interpretation of a story and omits all others. The reporter presents only one side, wanting and expecting you to accept his or her view by excluding other perspectives. To determine if it’s spin, see if the overall thrust promotes a liberal or conservative agenda to the exclusion of the other.

Editorializing: This happens when a reporter injects personal opinion into his or her reporting. Reporters should objectively report the news and leave personal opinions to the opinion pages or newscast opinion sections. Today’s reporters often blur those lines, presenting personal opinion as fact.

Story Selection: Many media outlets present a pattern of emphasizing news reports that support one side of an issue over the other. For example, most media outlets give extensive coverage to abortion-rights marches and protests while ignoring pro-life marches. Similarly, most outlets give illegal immigrants sympathetic coverage while failing to cover immigrant crime and the high cost to taxpayers for providing housing, food, health care and education to immigrants.

Story and Important Information Placement: It’s common for newspapers and TV news reports to give prominent placement to events that support their worldview and/or agenda and to downplay items that don’t support those views. This also happens within the stories themselves, where a preferred viewpoint is given prominent placement and other views are buried deep within the story or not included at all.

Selection of Sources: Reporters should include a balanced, objective mix of sources to inform readers and viewers. Biased reporters instead use biased sources, often failing to identify them as such. To use a recent U.S. example, several women who accused Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh of decades-old sexual misbehavior were never identified by most media outlets as liberal activists intent on preserving abortion rights. An unbiased reporter would’ve noted this relevant background in repeating their claims. A variation of this is to label some sources as liberal or conservative, but to fail to identify others, leading readers and viewers to assume they are neutral and objective—when their views are far from it.

Omission: This involves covering one side or view and leaving out other pertinent views or information. It’s common to see this in individual articles as well as in overall coverage of a topic over time. Common U.S. examples are the positive media coverage given to socialist political candidates advocating “free” college and health care, while omitting any serious discussion of the enormous costs and how to pay for them, and obscuring the religious motivation behind the many jihadist terrorist attacks.

—Scott Ashley (adapted from *How to Identify Liberal Media Bias* from the Media Research Center)



A Startling **New York Times** Admission of Its Own Bias

The *New York Times* isn't just any newspaper. With the largest weekly circulation in America, it is the nation's most influential newspaper, regarded as America's "newspaper of record." But it is also a news organization, owning 18 other newspapers, a radio station and more than 50 websites. Its *International Weekly* standalone supplement is shared by 34 newspapers in 25 countries. Its syndicated articles and opinion pieces appear in hundreds of regional newspapers around the country and the world.

No matter where you live or travel, a glance at the local newspaper may reveal articles, editorials and opinion pieces generated by *New York Times* staff. That wouldn't be a problem if the *Times* (and other news organizations) did their job of simply reporting the news. The danger is when they *selectively* report the news or slant it to promote their own social agenda that opposes biblical values.

In that light, the following are surprising admissions from Daniel Okrent, then the *Times*' public editor (whose job is to identify and correct errors and omissions and implement proper journalistic ethics and practices), in a July 25, 2004 column titled, "Is The New York Times a Liberal Newspaper?"

"Of course it is," he begins (emphasis added throughout).

"The fattest file on my hard drive is jammed with letters from the disappointed, the dismayed and the irate who find in this newspaper a liberal bias that infects not just political coverage but a range of issues from abortion to zoology to the appointment of an admitted Democrat to be its watchdog. (That would be me.) . . .

"For now my concern is the flammable stuff that ignites the right. These are the social issues: gay rights, gun control, abortion and environmental regulation, among others. And *if you think* The *Times* *plays it down the middle on any of them, you've been reading the paper with your eyes closed . . .*

"If you are among the groups *The Times* treats as strange objects to be examined on a laboratory slide (devout Catholics, gun owners, Orthodox Jews, Texans) . . . a walk through this paper *can make you feel you're traveling in a strange and forbidding world.*

"Start with the editorial page, so thoroughly saturated in liberal theology that

when it occasionally strays from that point of view the shocked yelps from the left overwhelm even the ceaseless rumble of disapproval from the right . . .

"In the Sunday magazine, the culture wars applause-o-meter *chronically points left . . .* The culture pages often feature forms of art, dance or theater that may pass for normal (or at least tolerable) in New York but *might be pretty shocking in other places.*

"Same goes for fashion coverage, . . . where *I've encountered models who look like they're preparing to murder (or be murdered), and others arrayed in a mode you could call dominatrix chic . . .*

The next time you contemplate reading a newspaper, keep in mind that many news outlets take their cues from *The New York Times*.

"In the Sunday Styles section, there are gay wedding announcements, of course, but also downtown sex clubs and T-shirts bearing the slogan, 'I'm afraid of Americans.' . . . The front page of the Metro section has featured a long piece best described by its subhead, 'Cross-Dressers Gladly Pay to Get in Touch with Their Feminine Side.' . . .

"Newspapers have the right to decide what's important and what's not. But their editors must also expect that some readers will think: 'This does not represent me or my interests. *In fact, it represents my enemy.*' So is it any wonder that the *offended or befuddled reader might consider everything else in the paper—including, say, campaign coverage—suspicious as well? . . .*

"The gay marriage issue provides a perfect example. Set aside the editorial page, the columnists or the lengthy article in the magazine . . . that compared the lawyers who won the Massachusetts same-sex marriage lawsuit to Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King . . .

"For those who also believe the news pages cannot retain their credibility unless all aspects of an issue are subject to robust examination, it's disappointing to see *The Times* present the social and cultural aspects of same-sex marriage *in a tone that approaches cheerleading.* So far this year, *front-page headlines have told me that 'For*

Children of Gays, Marriage Brings Joy' . . . ; that the family of 'Two Fathers, With One Happy to Stay at Home' . . . is a new archetype; and that 'Gay Couples Seek Unions in God's Eyes' . . .

"Every one of these articles was perfectly legitimate. Cumulatively, though, *they would make a very effective ad campaign for the gay marriage cause. You wouldn't even need the articles: run the headlines over the invariably sunny pictures of invariably happy people that ran with most of these pieces, and you'd have the makings of a life insurance commercial.*

"This *implicit advocacy is underscored by what hasn't appeared.* Apart from one excursion into the legal ramifications of

custody battles . . . *potentially nettlesome effects of gay marriage have been virtually absent from The Times* since the issue exploded last winter . . .

"In *The Times*, I have *learned next to nothing about these issues, nor about partner abuse in the gay community, about any social difficulties that might be encountered by children of gay couples or about divorce rates (or causes, or consequences) . . .*

"On a topic that has produced one of the defining debates of our time, *Times editors have failed to provide the three-dimensional perspective balanced journalism requires . . . Readers with a different worldview will find The Times an alien beast."*

These admissions are startling and true—perhaps too true, as the author was gone from the position less than a year later (and *The New York Times* has since eliminated the public editor job).

The next time you contemplate reading a newspaper or newsmagazine, or accepting what you're told on TV, keep in mind that many news outlets take their cues from *The New York Times*. And considering these admissions from the individual responsible for identifying and eradicating bias from *The Times*' content and implementing proper ethics, can you—and *should* you—trust and accept what they're feeding you?

—Scott Ashley

liberal candidate Hillary Clinton, while only 4 percent went to Donald Trump.

This also illustrates how media reporters and editors are far out of step with the values and views of the American public. The 1986 book *The Media Elite* reported on a major study of 240 journalists at leading media outlets, finding that 80 percent or more consistently voted for liberal (Democrat) candidates—and studies of journalists' voting patterns since then have confirmed that pattern.

The authors also reported that only 8 percent of journalists attended any religious services weekly and that 86 percent never or seldom attended. Further, 54 percent didn't regard adultery as wrong, and only 15 percent felt strongly that extramarital affairs were wrong. A 2001 follow-up study reported that 97 percent of media elites believe that abortion should be legal, and 75 percent agreed that "homosexuality is as acceptable as heterosexuality."

The Los Angeles Times conducted an exhaustive study in 1985 comparing attitudes of 3,000 reporters and editors with a similar number of members of the general public on such issues as abortion, hiring homosexuals, affirmative action, income inequality, school prayer, the death penalty for convicted murderers, gun rights, defense spending and government regulation of business.

What did the study reveal? On every issue but one, *the responses of the press were more liberal than the general public—often markedly so*. An overwhelming majority—from 81 to 89 percent—supported abortion, affirmative action and hiring homosexuals. And that was more than 30 years ago!

A final statistic here—out of dozens that could be cited—is that of the 59 major U.S. newspapers that endorsed a 2016 U.S. presidential candidate, only two endorsed the eventual winner, Donald Trump. The others overwhelmingly supported liberal candidate Hillary Clinton.

What do we learn from these and other studies of the attitudes and outlook of those telling us what to think? A brief summary would be that they overwhelmingly support abortion, larger and more intrusive government, socialist redistribution of wealth, unrestricted immigration, special rights for homosexuals and transgenders, lighter criminal punishment and greater sexual permissiveness.

We see this in what they say, which is slanted, but also in what they choose to cover or not cover. For example, it's very difficult to find news reports on the enormous costs incurred by illegal immigration and progressive platforms such as universal health care and "free" college tuition, illegal immigrant crime or illegal immigrants as a source of diseases long vanquished in the West, the high health risks associated with homosexual lifestyles, the high suicide rates among transgenders, or the persecution of Christians around the world (sometimes by Western governments!).

In light of all this, why should we let such people tell us what to think? We should heed God's warning in Isaiah 5:20, which in many ways is a perfect description of so much of today's media: "*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil!*"

A powerful unseen influence behind the scenes

Who or what is really behind these anti-God, anti-biblical trends in our mass media? Who is trying to shape your mind

and opinions—to tell you what to think? Is something at work that few people realize or understand? We touched on this briefly above, but much more needs to be said.

The Bible gives us information that we could not otherwise know. And it reveals the malevolent influence of an enormously powerful unseen presence hard at work trying to influence every person on earth to a different way of thinking—a way of thinking built on rejecting God and accepting a worldview built on lies.

The apostle Paul calls this unseen spiritual force "*the god of this age*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The apostle John refers to him as "the great dragon . . . that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 12:9).

The devil is not some cartoonish figure in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork. He is very real and far more successful at his work than most people could imagine. How successful has Satan been in his deceptive work of manipulating and shaping the thinking of all mankind? John gives us the answer: "*The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*" (1 John 5:19). And again, this evil being "*deceives the whole world*" (Revelation 12:9).

Of course, Satan isn't so foolish as to present his ways as they really are—harmful and self-destructive, bringing suffering to all who fall for his lies. (This is spelled out in greater detail in our free study guides *Is There Really a Devil?* and *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*) Instead, Satan "*transforms himself into an angel [messenger] of light*" (2 Corinthians 11:14)—as one whose ways are appealing.

Satan *presents* his lies as "enlightened" and "wise" when in reality they are *the exact opposite*. He knows how to appeal to our human way of thinking, which is hostile to God and His laws (Romans 8:7) and mostly concerned only with satisfying selfish and self-destructive desires (Galatians 5:19-21). It's because Satan appeals to these baser instincts that he is so successful in influencing people to follow his ways rather than God's!

God does not allow the devil to directly destroy mankind, but Satan has devised countless ways to influence human beings to *destroy ourselves*. He leads nations into wars in which thousands and millions die. He deceives vast numbers of people into self-destructive habits such as substance abuse, leading to millions of premature deaths each year. He has convinced millions of women that it's acceptable to kill their own unborn children. He leads others into harmful lifestyles, condemned in Scripture, that commonly lead to serious diseases and other afflictions that drastically shorten their lifespans.

These are only some of the deceptions. False religions, the theory of evolution, naturalism and other such belief systems have enslaved humanity in darkness for centuries. Satan understands that if he can't kill off mankind through war, self-inflicted disease and destructive lifestyles, then he can shift his focus to keeping mankind deceived.

The apostle Paul tells us the devil has successfully "*blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel*" (2 Corinthians 4:4, New International Version). He is determined to keep human beings deceived and confused, filling their minds with destructive and corrupting biases that separate them from God and cut them off from right knowledge and ways of thinking.



In Ephesians 2:2 Paul calls Satan “the ruler of the *power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient” (New Revised Standard Version). Here, many centuries before the invention of television and radio, Paul showed that this evil being transmits what we might call a “spiritual broadcast” of attitudes and moods to which human minds are naturally tuned and that are rebellious toward God (see Galatians 5:19-21).

Of course, as “the god of this age” and the being who “deceives the whole world,” Satan is also the ruler and manipulator hard at work behind the scenes utilizing the world’s media—TV, movies, music, news, the Internet, books, magazines, games, you name it—to promote thinking and behavior that is directly contrary to God’s instructions.

This is how he has drastically reshaped the opinions of people the world over about behavior and lifestyles that were widely recognized as sinful and harmful only a few years ago. This is how he has deceived the whole world and brought it

under his destructive influence.

But we are not helpless pawns. By surrendering our lives to God, repenting of accepting Satan’s deceptions and filling our minds with God’s Word, and sincerely asking for God’s help, we can follow the sound teaching of James 4:7-8: “*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*”

May we all listen to and heed that instruction! **BT**



LEARN MORE

Is Satan the devil a real being? If he is, what does the Bible reveal about him? What does he do, and does it affect your life? You need to read our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?* Download or request your free copy today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets

What Can You Do to Guard Your Heart and Mind?

Because God created us, He knows what makes us tick, how we best learn and what is mentally healthy for us. The world’s media outlets are a means of communicating information. However, the way they are used, and the *content* they carry, can be helpful and positive, neutral or enormously destructive.

Paul said we should be aware of conditions around us (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8). However, before you accept an important headline or story as gospel truth, question it and reserve judgment—and maybe even take time to research it on the Internet if it pertains to an issue that’s important to you. Compare it with other sources and perspectives on the same subject.

With some digging you may find other media sources, such as better-researched newspaper and magazine articles, that can supply you with a more-accurate perspective on the story. Some Internet sources (free as of this writing), such as Media Research Center (MRC.org), TheHill.com, Newsmax.com, NationalReview.com and WeeklyStandard.com often cover stories ignored by most media outlets and present alternative perspectives on many major stories and situations.

Major TV networks such as ABC, NBC, CBS and CNN, and major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, do at times present stories that are unbiased. But when it comes to stories that bear on moral values and ide-

ology—and these are the *most important* stories—the major networks often present them with a liberal or ungodly spin that does not well serve their audiences. Fox News is currently the only conservative-leaning major television news network, though its reporting and commentary cannot always be trusted either.

Of course, your best source for the unbiased truth as it relates to the world we live in is your Bible. It is the source that shapes the perspective of *Beyond Today*. This magazine’s tagline, *A Magazine of Understanding*, is there for good reason. Our primary purpose is to help you see major trends and events through the perspective of the Bible, helping you see them as God views them. It is our goal to make it the most biblically relevant and revealing publication on earth. But we encourage you to check the Bible references—to make sure we accurately present what God has to say.

Who is telling you what to think? It should be God through His Word, not misguided human beings motivated by their social or moneymaking agendas. God alone possesses the wisdom we need to give us a clear perspective of what’s going on around us in these dangerous times. Jesus, in praying to our Heavenly Father, said, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). He also says to us, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

More and more, modern media direct

us away from the truth of God and toward Satan’s deceptions. What can you do? You can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to open your eyes to His truth, to set you free from the subtle darkness that envelops “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). God promises to answer those who sincerely set their hearts to find Him (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

You then need to allow God to instruct you—first and foremost through your own study of His Word, the Holy Bible. The publishers of *Beyond Today* offer biblically based media sources—such as this magazine, our Bible Study Course, study guides on many topics and our *Beyond Today* television program—to help you see and understand things from God’s perspective as revealed in Scripture. We also offer commentary on current events and many other topics on our website—ucg.org/beyond-today.

With our individual cooperation, God can teach us what to think and do and how to avoid seduction by the harmful messages of the modern mainstream media.

As you consider whether to accept the newspapers’ or television news programs’ version of the truth, or whether to view the violence and vulgarity on television and movie screens, or hear the seductive, suggestive lyrics of many songs, be sure to ask yourself who is telling you what to think—and whether you should listen!

—Jerold Aust

Thinking of Getting an Abortion?

Don't Do It!

If you're faced with an unwanted pregnancy, please read at least the beginning of this article.

by Vince Szymkowiak

Did you know it's a crime to destroy an eagle's egg in the United States? Yet killing an unborn child is permitted. Society today is completely mixed up!

And the scourge of abortion is worldwide.

It was reported several years ago that "nearly a third of pregnancies in Europe end in abortion" (Claire Bates, *Daily Mail*, Jan. 19, 2012). In China the number is an unthinkable 23 million per year ("China Commits 'Staggering' 23 Million Abortions Per Year, According to US State Dept.," LifeSiteNews, April 15, 2016).

How does ending life in this way find such widespread acceptance? Many in favor of abortion make the woeful argument that what is growing in a woman's womb is not really a human being.

But an unborn child *is* a human being. It's not a piece of tissue. "A baby's heart beats in 22 days, hiccups begin [at] 52 days, organs function 8 weeks after conception—in short . . . abortion kills a human" (Keith Riler, "Thirty-Six Couples Wait for Every One Baby Who Is Adopted," LifeNews.com, July 9, 2012). The unborn can even hear and respond to music!

For those facing an unwanted pregnancy, abortion is the wrong answer. We must all learn to seek direction from God—and His forgiveness where we have gone astray—learning to value precious human life as He does.

What does the Bible say?

Society may call the unborn mere "tissue," but Scripture makes it clear that the unborn is a child. Exodus 21:22-23 says regarding expectant mothers: "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give *life for life* . . ." (emphasis added throughout). This meant the death penalty if the woman or the unborn were killed. Some will dispute that, but notice further that the unborn here is called a child.

Now consider Luke 1:1-2, which contains the story of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Mary, pregnant with Jesus, encountered her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John: "And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe [John] leaped in her womb" (Luke 1:41). Elizabeth said: "For indeed, as soon as the voice

of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (verse 44). The Greek word translated "babe" here is the same word we find in Luke 2 referring to Christ as "the *Babe* . . . in a manger" (verses 12, 16).

Again, the baby John leapt for joy in his mother's womb. Clearly he was already a real person while in the womb—as was Jesus. Would it have been okay for John or Jesus to have been aborted then?

So both the Old Testament and the New Testament affirm that the unborn are indeed tiny babies! They have every right to human life!

Disaster at the U.S. Supreme Court

One of the most tragic decisions ever handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court was the January 1973 landmark ruling of *Roe v. Wade*, which allowed women across the country the "legal" right to abort the young life in their womb. This ruling has been interpreted to mean that the unborn do not have constitutional rights.

How horrific and sad! If the unborn have no constitutional rights, then *who* will protect the unborn?

The argument that every woman has the right to decide what is best for her own body is quite shallow. Do children in the womb have no rights concerning what is done to their bodies—whether to live or die? Who will speak for them?

Amazingly, "Jane Roe," the plaintiff in *Roe v. Wade* whose real name was Norma McCorvey, later had a complete change of heart and came to regret her role in legalizing abortion. She became a Christian pro-life advocate in the mid-1990s and remained involved in campaigning to make abortion illegal until her death in 2017, stating "that her role in the landmark court case was the biggest mistake of her life" (Alexandra Desanctis, "Little-Known Facts About *Roe v. Wade*," *National Review*, Jan. 23, 2017).

Not just the woman's sin

Abortion is so often labeled the sin of the woman ending her pregnancy. But men who've fathered the children being aborted have their share of the guilt as well—many encouraging and even paying for abortions. Teen girls and young adult women often acquiesce to pressure put on them by boyfriends, afraid of losing that relationship. And many husbands are complicit in their wives getting abortions out of



convenience, not wanting extra mouths to feed.

And then there are the doctors and facilities actually providing the abortions—along with the industry and political groups behind them. Indeed, society at large stands guilty in this sin as well.

In America, there is such a disdainful and presumptuous attitude over this spiritual cancer. One abortion clinic counselor went so far as to film her own abortion in order to “eradicate stigma surrounding pregnancy decisions and fight for the right of all people to carry out those decisions without shame, stigma or coercion” (Lindsey Beaver, “New Jersey Abortion Clinic Counselor Explains ‘Why I Filmed My Abortion,’” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2014).

How sick this society has become! With such widespread promotion of abortion, it’s clearly not just the sin of each woman who has one.

I had an abortion. Can God forgive me?

While some women have seared consciences and feel justified in having had one or more abortions, many others have great heartache, regret and guilt. Many remain haunted at having made the biggest mistake of their lives. Frightened and scared at the time, they fell for the lie that abortion was the best way out of their difficult situation. Looking back later, they see things differently. After months or years, some wonder: “Will God forgive me?” “Can God ever forgive me?”

Some of us have done some pretty bad things. Some of us can’t seem to forget a past that haunts us to this day.

Can God forgive adultery? Yes! Can He forgive murder? Yes! Can He forgive abortion? Yes!

Let’s read about God’s willingness to forgive in the words of Micah 7:18-19: “Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

The patriarch Job said in Job 14:17: “My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and You cover my iniquity.” Hebrews 8:12 states, again within the context of repentance, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

As long as we respond properly to the grace of God, there is no sin He cannot forgive!

God wants us to respond to His mercy. He wants us to fall



As God’s children, we should determine to preserve the lives of the unborn, who are also His children, at all costs.

under His mercy, not under His condemnation.

On the other hand, don’t go to the other extreme and think, “Well, okay, I’ll go ahead and have that abortion and then ask God to forgive me.” Romans 6:1-2 says: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

Please, please do not take God’s grace for granted.

Repentance is the path to forgiveness

Some sorrow over their sins to the point of despair. The apostle Paul mentioned the need to expel from church fellowship a man who had been sleeping with his stepmother

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(1 Corinthians 5:1-5). But after this man repented, Paul told the congregation to “forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow” (2 Corinthians 2:7).

Paul knew of the healing process of repentance and forgiveness. He stated, “I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (verses 10-11). One thing that stands out here is that we must accept God’s forgiveness for our horrible sins lest Satan take advantage of us through doubt and discouragement. Yes, God is willing to forgive the sin of abortion, as long as one repents.

King David, writer of most of the Psalms, admitted his sins to God. He said in one: “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). In his lifetime, David had committed the sin of both adultery and murder, yet he clung to the realization that God removes our sins from us “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12).

Our study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* explains true, biblical repentance as follows: “The Greek and Hebrew words translated ‘repent’ both refer to a change of heart, a significant shift in our thinking, a transformation of purpose with emphasis on modifying one’s conduct . . . Thus, when we repent we must turn away from the sins we are guilty of committing and we must unconditionally surrender our will to God.” (We encourage you to download or request this free study guide at ucg.org/booklets.)

Repentance also means that a person will remorsefully say in effect, “If I had to do it all over again I would never do it.” And to be forgiven you must fall upon God’s mercy, accepting the shed blood of Jesus Christ who laid down His life for you and is willing to cover your sin.

No one likes to face their own sins. No one likes to admit they must repent. Indeed, true repentance is the most painful inner experience a person can go through. It is also the most healing of human experiences. Again, David said of the truly repentant: “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2, New International Version).

All of repentant humanity can be forgiven of any and all of our sins. The repentant person can cry out with the trusting plea of Jeremiah the prophet: “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise” (Jeremiah 17:14).

Value life!

If you are considering an abortion, *don’t do it*. Seek help, for indeed help is out there. Find a pro-life minister and his wife for advice, or a pro-life Christian counselor. And if you’ve already had an abortion, know that God stands willing to forgive you. Receive the encouragement and exhortation our living Savior gave the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11, saying, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

God our Father is the great Giver of life. As His children, let’s determine to preserve the lives of the unborn, who are also His children, at all costs. **BT**

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Trouble ahead? America's diminishing military strength

A recent report from the National Defense Strategy Commission describes the recent decline in America's relative military strength throughout the world (*Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission*, Nov. 14, 2018). The report identifies several causes, including the development of specific countermeasures by other major powers, the field-leveling effect of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and cyber warfare, and America's focus in recent decades on smaller conflicts with specific needs that has diverted resources away from the type of military development needed for all-out conflict with another major power.

On this last point Eric Edelman, co-chair of the commission, said in an interview with CBS News that America's enemies have "learned from what we've done . . . And while we've been off doing a different kind of warfare, they've been prepared for a kind of warfare at the high end that we really haven't engaged in for a very long time."

As a result, the report suggests that the United States "might struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China or Russia." The report concludes on an even more somber note: "U.S. military superiority is no longer assured and the implications for American interests and American security are severe."

While past reports have warned of the possibility that American military dominance would begin to ebb if strengthening action is not taken, this is the first such report to speak of it as a current reality. In other words, this is where America *already is*—not where it's headed—in the opinion of the authors.

It remains a fact that the United States allocates more money to defense spending than the next seven countries combined. Only time will tell whether the recent report from the National Defense Strategy Commission is indeed an accurate analysis of our diminished might or a mere fundraising tool intended to rake in even more defense spending from Congress.



Over recent decades U.S. military forces have retooled for smaller missions.

However, as students of the Bible, we must give consideration to the fact that America does not feature as a great superpower nation in the final events before Christ's return described in Bible prophecy. Instead, such prophetic books as Daniel and Revelation focus on a government system known as "the beast," which will hold undisputed military and economic dominance over the entire world (Revelation 13:7-8, 16-17). A careful study of prophecy and history reveals that this end-time regime will be a resurrection of the Roman Empire, most likely fulfilled by an as-yet-unformed coalition of European countries.

We at *Beyond Today* believe the absence of America as a world power from the final days of the end-time prophetic picture means that the United States will decline and fall before the return of Jesus Christ. This must happen for the beast power to ascend to the level of control and influence found in prophecy. The decline of America for that purpose appears to have already begun. (Sources: U.S. Naval Institute News, CBS News.)

Worst wildfires in California history cut path of death and destruction

In early November, two horrific wildfires ripped across California, causing unprecedented levels of devastation. The Camp Fire, in Northern California's Butte County, killed 88 people, destroyed nearly 19,000 structures and scorched around 400 square miles. It became the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in the history of California.

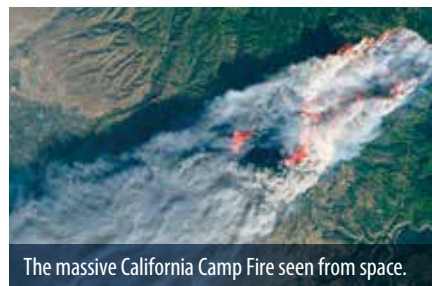
Hundreds of people were missing for weeks, and the intensity of the fires left some victims' remains completely unidentifiable.

"What we're looking at here is potentially remains, or remains—it's kind of a cremated remains state," said Brian Ferreira, rescue squad officer for California Task Force 4" (Amir Vera, Holly Yan, "With Rain on the Way, California Fire Evacuees Brace for Relief and Danger," CNN, Nov. 20, 2018).

The town of Paradise, Calif., was hit especially hard: "The Camp Fire ignited Nov. 8 near Pulga, a tiny community in Butte County nestled in the Plumas National Forest. The blaze exploded as strong winds fanned the flames southwest, enveloping the town of Paradise, a bucolic community of 27,000 people in the Sierra Nevada foothills. The fire has virtually decimated the entire town."

"Melissa Schuster, a Paradise town council member,

said her house was among those leveled by the Camp Fire. 'Our entire five-member council is homeless,' Schuster said . . . 'All of our houses have been destroyed'" (Morgan Winsor, "Relentless California Wildfires Leave



The massive California Camp Fire seen from space.

82 Dead, Nearly 700 Unaccounted For," ABC News, Nov. 20, 2018).

The second fire, the Woolsey Fire, also started Nov. 8, moving south from Ventura County to Los Angeles County. It eventually burned about 97,000 acres.

"The wind-driven flames jumped the 101 Freeway before sweeping through the celebrity enclaves of Malibu and Calabasas. The entire city of Malibu and a sprawling naval base near the seaside city of Oxnard were among the areas under mandatory evacuation orders . . ."

The air quality throughout California was dramatically affected by the vast amount of smoke from the large fires. Air pollution grew so bad that a non-profit that tracks air quality, Berkeley Earth, declared San Francisco, Stockton and Sacramento to be the "three most polluted cities" in the world.

"Even Californians who never saw the flames could be affected by the wildfires' health hazards. Smoke from the Camp Fire hangs heavy in parts of the state, forcing schools to close and shutting down some public transportation" (Amir Vera, Holly Yan, "With Rain on the Way, California Fire Evacuees Brace for Relief and Danger," CNN, Nov. 20, 2018).

Californians were warned to cut down on the amount of time spent outside due to air pollution. By mid-November, the smoke from these two wildfires could be seen on America's East Coast.

Is there a big-picture reason America is seeing such severe and deadly weather events? Unprecedented wildfires appear to be just one element pointing to a time Jesus described in His prophecy given on the Mount of Olives recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21—a time of never-before-seen global problems that would precede and eventually culminate in Jesus' triumphant return. (Sources: ABC News, CNN.)

Astronomer predicts “bumpy ride” for man in 21st century

Will humanity survive the 21st century? This is the question being asked by Sir Martin Rees, a prominent British astronomer who recently published a book exploring the fatal mix of problems that could potentially wipe out mankind in this century. For example, the world’s population is predicted to grow to 9 billion by the middle of this century. Can the earth’s limited resources sustain that large of a population?

“Humanity is under threat. At least according to Sir Martin Rees, one of Britain’s most esteemed astronomers. In his new book, ‘On the Future,’ Rees turns his focus closer to home, examining the existential threats

that face humanity over the next century. From cyber-attacks to advances in biotechnology to artificial intelligence to climate change, Rees, Britain’s astronomer royal, says we are living at a critical juncture—one that could define how the human species fares” (Denise Chow, “Will Humanity Survive This Century? Sir Martin Rees Predicts ‘a Bumpy Ride’ Ahead,” NBC News, Nov. 8, 2018).

Rees told NBC in an interview, “This century is crucial because, if you are very pessimistic, you can imagine that we will misuse powerful technology and snuff ourselves out.” Finally, he emphasized the importance and necessity of fixing problems on our planet as opposed to attempting to colonize other planets, like Mars.

“There is the idea that we should despair and evacuate this planet and go somewhere else. That’s a dan-

gerous delusion. I know it’s been promoted by Elon Musk and also by my late colleague Stephen Hawking, but I think there’s no Planet B. The world’s problems can’t be solved by escaping from the world. They’ve got to be tackled here” (ibid.).

Mankind’s problems are worsening, but will it “snuff itself out”? What does the future hold for humanity in the decades and centuries to come? Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus spoke of horrible conditions that would occur just before His return. But He also foretold that God would not allow mankind to completely destroy itself: “Unless those days were shortened [that is, cut short of running their course], no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

The Bible shows there is hope for mankind, but only through God’s direct intervention. (Source: NBC News.)

France and Germany seeking to bypass Iran sanctions

France and Germany still want to trade with Iran regardless of the economic sanctions the United States has imposed on the Middle Eastern nation in response to its nuclear program. Their plan appears to be to funnel money privately through a corporation to circumvent the sanctions.

“France or Germany will host the corporation that would handle the payments channel, the diplomats said.

If France hosts it, a German official will head the corporation and vice versa. Both countries will help fund the corporation” (Laurence Nor-

The plan appears to be to funnel money privately to circumvent the sanctions.

man, “France and Germany Step In to Circumvent Iran Sanctions,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 26, 2018).

“The payments channel, known as a special purpose vehicle, or SPV, would use a system of credits to facilitate compensation for goods traded between Iran and Europe—allowing some trade to proceed without the need for European commercial banks to make or receive payments to Iran.”

These sanctions were placed on Iran to pressure it into renegotiation of the nuclear deal made in 2015. The U.S. recently pulled out of that deal seeking to establish stricter enforcement on Iran’s nuclear and missile development, which Iran is attempting to avoid.

This is an interesting development, knowing that Europe and the Middle East are key regions in end-time events. European nations extending a friendly hand to a Middle Eastern nation seeking to go nuclear could prove dangerous for them. To learn more, download or request our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Women’s most dangerous place—their homes?

A new study has just come out reporting that half of the world’s female homicide victims are killed by a family member. “Research published by the U.N.’s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that of the approximately 87,000 women and girls intentionally killed in 2017, about 58 percent died at the hands of someone who was either an ‘intimate partner’ or a relative,” as reported by *USA Today* (Kim Hjelmgaard, “The Most Dangerous Place for a Woman? Her Home, UN Study Shows,” Nov. 26, 2018).

The report continues: “Africa and the Americas were the regions where women are most at risk of being killed by intimate partners or family members, the study found. In Africa, the rate was around 3.1 victims per 100,000 female population. In the Americas, it was 1.6 victims. The lowest rate was found in Europe, with 0.7 victims per 100,000 female population.”

This is a sad reality. In contrast, the vast majority of men are killed by strangers, according to the report.

As more women have been emboldened to share personal stories of sexual abuse, a light is being shone on the deep-seated devaluation of women prevalent in cultures all over the world. The ultimate culmination of that evil attitude is domestic abuse and murder. This is not just a sad state of affairs for a certain country or culture, but for the whole world.

When God made the first man Adam, He stated, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18).

In no way did God value Eve less than Adam. God created her and loved her. He created her to be with Adam because Adam was not complete without her. Somewhere through time and with the influence of sin, a mindset has emerged that has disparaged the value of half of humankind. As we draw close to the end of this age of human misrule, we must remember that God’s plan, those for whom Jesus Christ died, and eventual membership in the family of God include those He created female as well as those He created male. (Source: *USA Today*.)

How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today’s dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You’re probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That’s one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. These eye-opening presentations offer you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God’s Word. Visit us at ucg.org/beyond-today/daily/





A thank-you for the Nov.-Dec. issue on marriage

Beyond Today magazine has literally changed my way of thinking (and my life) completely for the better! I especially want to thank you for the Nov.-Dec. issue (“How You Can Have a Lasting Marriage”). It could not have come at a better time if I personally asked God Himself to send me this copy! My wife and I have been going through some difficult times. When I read these articles (which touched me deeply) I knew I was not ready to give up. Thank you so much for all this insight. When I shared this with my wife and we discussed our marriage further, we decided to stay married. You very well may have saved our marriage from becoming one more to add to the statistics list. I am forever grateful to you for reaching out to all the souls like me who need you and your publications!

Reader in New York

“Grandparents Who Are Grand”

I would just like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for printing this article. I cried as I read it and applauded the author for bringing the subject to light, for how she sensitively dealt with the matter. So much more from a very real personal point of view could be said if time and space were permitted about the absolute joy, heartache, burden, turmoil, isolation and a deep sense of utter sadness in the situation as a grandparent.

Subscriber in Northern Ireland

Thankful for material produced by *Beyond Today*

I am writing to request more of your Bible study guides. I have just finished *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and enjoyed it a lot. Your booklets have been answering all my questions and have helped me in making better choices, for which I thank you very much.

Reader in New Zealand

I just wanted to say how much I am enjoying your streaming radio broadcast. It has very good information on all sorts of topics and is well presented. May God bless this endeavour.

Listener in Canada

I’ve been listening to UCG Radio–Australia, and wow, what a professional and interesting assortment of inspiration! In 40 minutes I listened to part of a great sermon, some fabulous music, an interview

with a man from the church in Zambia, and some chapters of the Bible. Excellent job to all those who have assisted or contributed.

Listener in Australia

Thank you so much! For those who haven’t heard, our members at United Church of God–Australia have begun streaming United Church of God content on a free online “radio” station available worldwide, 24/7. Check it out at ucg.org.au/radio.

I have studied the Bible for 50 years and read a lot of Christian literature. I have never found any other literature that was like reading a simplified version of the Bible, with so much more precious information. God bless you for writing truth and being true servants of God.

Reader in Canada

I am very keen on learning more about the Word of God, and would like to humbly request your in-depth Bible study guides to help me and my family grow spiritually. I sincerely appreciate your kind help and pray that our Lord continues to bless your work.

Reader from the Fiji islands

Looking for a Church congregation

I have read various issues of your magazine, and you preach the truth about Scripture. But I live in a small town where there are no churches that teach the same things. I am currently looking for a gathering place nearby. Thank you for your work and the articles that spoke to my heart.

Reader in South Africa

Do y’all have a church within commuting distance of Athens, Georgia? If so, please provide me with the name, address and phone number of the church, and the name and phone number of the pastor.

From the Internet

We have congregations in many places around the world. You can find the one closest to you at ucg.org/congregations.

Please accept my donation

I really appreciate the opportunity to subscribe to your *Beyond Today* magazine. I think it is amazing. I borrowed the September-October 2018 issue, and I have to return it. I was just wondering if you have an extra copy of this issue? I will do my best to contribute to keep your fantastic work expanding and helping to reach others.

Reader in Canada

Please accept this donation, which I would like to put towards the cost of the study guides you have been sending me. They are most appreciated. I was in hospital for a long time last year and stumbled on your program when I couldn’t sleep. I have been watching it ever since.

Viewer in Australia

We are grateful for your donations and thrilled to hear you find them so valuable. Thanks so much for your support.

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *Beyond Today*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail BTinfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

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Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Beyond Today* magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Beyond Today* magazine Facebook fan!

I really enjoy Beyond Today magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

—K.T., Facebook fan



Search Facebook for *Beyond Today* magazine

Q. From what I've seen, you are aligned with the conservative movement and conservative politics. You condemn "the left" as you describe it. I can't stand your bigoted views. Can a liberal be a member of your church?

From the Internet

A. Jesus Christ said His Kingdom is not in or of this world (John 18:36). But that's not to say that God doesn't have definite opinions about major cultural issues that divide people today. God's opinions are defined by His law and His Word, the Bible. These reflect His thinking, His mind and His character.

God doesn't support a particular political party or parties. However, views on many major cultural issues often either *align with* or *directly oppose* God's laws as spelled out in His Word. This is crucial to understand. God's support is of the *issue*, not of a political party. The same goes for His support of any person, including government leaders or presidents. As the apostle Peter said: "God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness [alignment with His laws] is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

There are no saviors among political leaders or parties. *Beyond Today* magazine and its publisher, the United Church of God, are not aligned with any political party, government official or news network. Our articles, *Beyond Today* TV programs and sermons given in our Sabbath services are to reflect *the Word of God*—no matter what side of the political or social spectrum that may fall on.

As an example, let's consider two major issues that are very divisive in American society and politics today—abortion and the removal of God from public life.

The toll of legalized abortion

Abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973 in the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision. This decision struck down a Texas law banning abortion and effectively legalized the procedure across the United States. Before this decision abortion had been illegal in much of the country.

What is God's view of abortion? He declares, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Aborting the unborn is the taking of innocent human life. (To learn more, see "Thinking of Getting an Abortion? Don't Do It!" beginning on page 27.)

God addressed this issue long before there were any political parties. Every civilized society recognizes that murder is a crime and treats it as such. Yet people have come up with various reasons to excuse the murder of the most innocent of all—the unborn.

God is neither Democrat nor Republican, but He is very pro-life. God wants to give billions of people eternal life (1 Timothy 2:4), for them to live with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Of the two major American political parties, one is more conservative and pro-life (opposed to abortion) while the other, claiming support for women's rights, is more liberal and fiercely dedicated to keeping abortion legal—even though the practice kills hundreds of thousands of female babies in the nation every year.

How must God view this large-scale killing of the unborn—close to a million a year in the United States alone? And how must He view those who support it? No one who calls himself or herself

Christian should support a heinous practice that is so utterly contrary to God's nature and character and His desire for mankind.

Removing God from public life

Over recent decades conservatives and liberals have argued whether religious displays could be placed on government property—a clear violation, some liberals say, of the separation of church and state. But is this factual?

The phrase "separation of church and state" has been repeated so often and so frequently that many people assume it is part of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Those who endlessly repeat it want to see God, the Bible and references to them removed from all aspects of public life and even from America's history. But the simple truth is that the words "separation" and "church" appear nowhere in the text of the U.S. Constitution or its amendments ("state" appears only when referring to the individual U.S. states, foreign nations, the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms and the presidential state of the union address).

In 1962 the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional any school-sponsored prayer in public schools. The following year it expanded its ban to include any school-sponsored Bible reading. This was in spite of the First Amendment's clear wording that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . ." These rulings, while emphasizing the first part of the First Amendment, ignored the second part.

In 2005 the Supreme Court ruled against the display of the Ten Commandments in court buildings or on government property, even though the Supreme Court building itself prominently shows Moses holding tablets bearing the Ten Commandments.

Again we have a major cultural issue where one political party has consistently pushed for removing God, His laws and religious freedom from public life, while the other has tried to preserve them.

How must God view this? In the very first of God's Ten Commandments He says, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). But today society exalts many things above God, ignoring Him and His instruction for us. He warns of the consequences of choosing our own ways above His: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

God does give us the choice as to whether we will obey Him. He tells us: "Today I have given you the choice *between life and death, between blessings and curses* . . . Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20, New Living Translation).

God presents a simple choice. Obeying and honoring Him leads to life and blessings; disobeying and ignoring Him leads to curses and death. When we at *Beyond Today* examine social and cultural issues, our goal is also simple—to explain *what the Bible says* on the subject. Today, many want to remove God from public life. When Jesus Christ returns, God will remove *such corrupt and misguided thinking* from public life. Only by so doing can God bless and save all human beings who honor and follow His "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25).

To learn more, read our free study guide *The Ten Commandments*.

Get a Spiritual Grip

Sometimes life can be so challenging as to be overwhelming. It's easy to fall into the trap of putting off change, blaming others and blaming God. When that happens, God tells us we need to "get a grip"!

by Robin Webber

Jesus stated that He came so that people "may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). I love this stated purpose of bringing life-giving abundance along with His invitation to "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19). And I cling to this happily—until life throws a wrench in my gears and I come to a grinding halt.

Has anyone ever told you to "get a grip"? I'm sure most of us, at one time or another, have either offered or been offered this blunt advice.

Usually, when that phrase pops up, it means matters aren't happening the way we thought they would. But a starting point of wisdom is to realize everyone will be confronted with a measure of unexpected challenges not written out in our personal calendars. So here's a big question to tackle: How much space have we allocated for our Heavenly Father to mold us—even in adversity—into the image of Jesus Christ?

How can we establish spiritual breakthroughs rather than remaining down in the dumps when life throws a curve at us? (And it will!) Let's consider four specific action items that will help us to keep moving forward in response to Christ's invitation to "Follow Me."

1. Don't wait—start making good changes today

Now is the time, *today* is the day, to start doing whatever must be done to mend your spiritual relationship with God.

Think of where you are in life right now. Think for a moment about what you're reaching for or holding onto—whether it's self-serving feelings or ageless, divinely oriented values. It may involve your marriage, another family relationship, your job or lack of one. Maybe there's a situation that seems impossible to resolve—an impregnable barrier before you. Thinking you can't really deal with it, you put off doing so.

Where I live in California, we say *mañana*—tomorrow. Tomorrow is one of the most hopeful words in the dictionary, but it can also be troublesome. There's a double edge to it. Sometimes it's better to wake up tomorrow and approach a problem with fresh perspectives that enable wise decisions not based on haste but *patience*. But sometimes you keep going to bed night after night with no results in heart or hand. You never come to a resolution as to how you are going to glorify our Father above, live like Jesus Christ and be a blessing to other people.

What are *you* putting off?

Notice James 4:13-15: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.' Whereas you do not

know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills we shall live, and do this or that.'"

Get a grip! Look at the time—it's ticking away. As the apostle Paul tells us: "Act like people with good sense and not like fools. These are evil times, so make every minute count" (Ephesians 5:15-16, Contemporary English Version). None of us can do time over, but we can do it better as we live our lives before God the Father and Jesus Christ.

2. Stop blaming others for your problems

Let's look at a story in 1 Samuel 30 concerning David before he became Israel's king. We read, "Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites [longtime enemies] had invaded the South and Ziklag" (verse 1). The account describes how the Amalekites totally laid waste to the city.

This was a devastating blow to David and his companions. Their families had been taken captive. David's own wives were taken. The tragedy had a terrible effect on the people: "Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved" (verse 6). This is a classic case of fault-finding brought on by difficulty. When things aren't going well, it's human nature to lash out and blame others. It's certainly against our nature to want to take the blame.

Let's be honest: At one time or another we've all had our personal "stoning parties." Throwing rocks at others, so to speak, is sometimes a way to make us feel better and to not have to bear guilt. Just ask the first man Adam, who effectively blamed God for making his wife Eve, and Eve who in turn pointed to the serpent (Genesis 3:9-13). When will we ever learn that, as an old adage points out, when we point a finger at others there are three fingers pointing back at us?

Of course, you can blame other people all day long, and some people do. Yet, while it's not easy, owning up to our mistakes and giving our burden over to God and letting go is the only real solution. God isn't going to simply *take* our frustrations and hurts and self-created problems from us. We have to *give* it all over to Him! In order to get a spiritual grip on life, we must move on and give God authority to rule our hearts and lives.

3. Stop blaming God—take responsibility for your life

The truth is, *God* can sometimes be the target of our "stoning

parties.” After all, He’s in charge, isn’t He? Yet when we blame God, we’re not only assigning fault to Him but are implying that He doesn’t truly care about us. Blaming God is very dangerous spiritually. It ignores God’s great care and removes any personal responsibility from ourselves. How convenient!

Until we look at ourselves and recognize our corrupt nature as defiant of God, bent on blaming Him rather than ourselves, and until we take responsibility for our lives, God cannot actively work in us to help us as He wants to.

Let’s notice something from the story of Job, where things were not going as planned. Life became unbearable as one calamity after another struck. “Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!’” (Job 2:9). This was blurted out in desperation, but it seems that Job’s wife placed blame on him and God.

Job was a man who worked to overcome corrupt human nature, however. He said to his wife: “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (verse 10).

This is a powerful example for us. If we’re going to get a

God has not chosen to create new conditions for us to live in at this time. When we wake tomorrow, the world will be much the same as it is today —*Time to get a grip!*

spiritual grip, we must look ourselves square in the face and recognize that we need to examine ourselves first and not last. Don’t blame others. Don’t blame God. The English poet Robert Browning summed it up this way: “When the fight begins with himself, a man’s worth something.”

4. Cast your cares upon God, for He cares for you!

Perhaps at times you feel God has gone tone-deaf to your prayers. That’s why it’s important to persist in seeking Him in prayer. Once you begin reaching for God and ask for His sustaining grace to be involved in your life, God does hear.

Allow God to create a new story—His story as personified by the Son of Man, Jesus Christ—in you by “humbling yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

“But,” you might reply, “you don’t realize the mess I’ve created for myself and others!”

Let’s stop right here! Sometimes we feel that we have to be perfect before approaching God. Just ask Samson, who cried out to God in a tight squeeze, or ask the thief on Golgotha, who spoke to Christ and received a blessing. Consider David’s repentance before God in Psalm 51 after being confronted with his terrible sins. Perfection isn’t a prerequisite for asking God to give you the rope to hold onto Him. God is there during all the trials and seasons of life.

Psalm 23, also written by David, addresses these varied seasons of life. It’s not just soothing words—*it’s life!* Notice the anchoring statement in verse 1. This psalm starts with a masterful Shepherd in whom we “shall not want”—shall not lack—depicting His

perfect ability to personally minister to our needs.

It takes us through the green pastures—the good times. It takes us through the still waters—the peaceful times. But it also takes us through the valley of the shadow of death—the dark and troubling times. Yet at the very end, it echoes what we’re talking about right now.

David wrote, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (verse 6). He maintained faithful trust and kept a “knowing grip” on the eternal lifeline even in the hardest of times.

Your Creator knows exactly where you are at this moment, and He knows what you need. In yet another psalm of David, Psalm 18, he wrote: “It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of [a] deer” (verses 32-33). “Deer” is a translation that doesn’t capture the sense of David’s understanding. The imagery describes the stunning grip of a mountain goat or bighorn sheep on a high crag, standing on a narrow, precarious ledge but never falling.

The psalm continues: “He sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war” (verses 33-34). God gives us the ability to be champions within His faith and succeed in the hardest of times. His love and care are what enable us to “get a spiritual grip” on life and make it work.

“You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up; Your gentleness has made me great” (verse 35). God sincerely desires for you to have an abundant relationship-oriented existence with Him forever. He has earnestly extended His hand to you to help you get a grip on what He’s offering beyond our moments of frustration.

Today, right now, God has not chosen to create new conditions for us to live in. When we wake up tomorrow morning, the world will be much the same as it is today. But God is creating new people today through His Spirit. These are men and women who by God’s sustaining grace embrace the realization expressed by author Victor Frankl, holocaust survivor, that “you cannot control what happens to you in life, but you can always control what you will feel and do about what happens to you” (*Man’s Search for Meaning*, 1946). And, may I add, you are not alone in facing whatever happens!

The priceless invitation of Jesus Christ to “*Follow Me*” remains as we follow not only His footsteps, but also His “heart steps,” as we declare in thought, word and deed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). **BT**



LEARN MORE

What are some of the tools you can use to get your spiritual life on track—and stay on track? We’ve prepared a useful study guide that reveals key spiritual tools found in the Bible. Download or request your free copy of *Tools for Spiritual Growth* today!

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TEN BIBLICAL PURPOSES FOR THE Sabbath

Many people view the biblical Sabbath day as an obsolete burden. Some even view it as an absolute curse! But what does the Bible really say? What does it tell us about the purposes of the Sabbath?

by Mario Seiglie

One of God's signature characteristics is how He can create multipurpose objects. Consider, for example, a tree. It fulfills many different goals—it provides fruit or seeds to eat, shade from the sun, wood for building and shelter for birds, while it also offsets erosion, fertilizes the soil with fallen leaves, humidifies the air, absorbs carbon dioxide, gives off oxygen, acts as a windbreaker and adds beauty to the world.

Let's consider another of God's creations that is not so tangible. It too fulfills many purposes for the benefit of mankind. This creation, a recurring period of time, is the Sabbath day that ends every week. We'll look at 10 of the reasons found in the Bible for God's creation of the seventh-day Sabbath.

At the beginning of Genesis, where the Sabbath is established, we find three of those purposes spelled out by God. Genesis 2:2-3 states: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God *blessed* the seventh day and *sanctified* it, because in it He *rested* from all His work which God had created and made" (emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted).

Let's take a closer look at the purposes of the Sabbath mentioned here and others given later in Scripture.

1. "Then God *blessed* the seventh day" (Genesis 2:3).

The first purpose is found in the fact that the Sabbath is

a day *blessed* by God—it was intended to be a blessing. And a blessing by God in the Bible is not merely good wishes. It means miracles in our lives to make them better—physically and spiritually.

Isaiah 56:3-7 describes such joyful promises and blessings: "Don't let foreigners who commit themselves to the LORD say, 'The LORD will never let me be part of his people.' And don't let the eunuchs say, 'I'm a dried-up tree with no children and no future.' For this is what the LORD says: I will bless those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath days holy and who choose to do what pleases me and commit their lives to me. I will give them—within the walls of my house—a memorial and a name far greater than [having] sons and daughters could give. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!

"I will also bless the foreigners who commit themselves to the LORD, who serve him and love his name, who worship him and do not desecrate the Sabbath day of rest, and who hold fast to my covenant. I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (New Living Translation).

God also promises great blessings now and in the future. As Isaiah 58:13 says, "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own

pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will *cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth*, and feed you with *the heritage of Jacob* your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Remarking about these physical and spiritual blessings, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* states: “By putting God first and not seeking to do as he wished, a person would have joy, not only in spiritual salvation (*ride on the heights*) but also in prosperity (*feast on the inheritance*). All this was certain because *the LORD has spoken*” (note on Isaiah 58:14, emphasis in original).

2. “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (Genesis 2:3).

The second purpose for the Sabbath is its *sanctification*, meaning it is a day set apart by God for holy use. God says it is *His day* and calls its occurrences “*My Sabbaths*.”

As He says in Leviticus 19:3, “Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and *keep My Sabbaths*: I am the LORD your God.”

This principle is enshrined in the Fourth Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day, *to keep it holy*. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work . . . For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and *hallowed it*” (Exodus 20:8-11).

God alone is the source of holiness, and He is the only One who can make something holy. Likewise, only God and not man can nullify what He previously declared holy. As Revelation 15:4 says: “Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? *For you alone are holy*. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (New International Version).

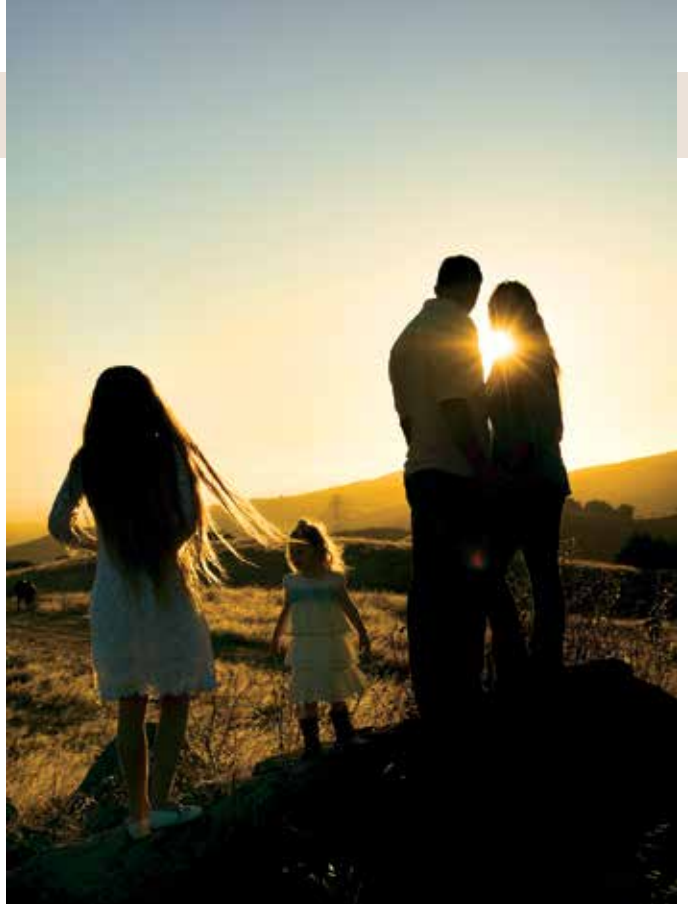
3. “And on the seventh day . . . He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3).

The third purpose of the Sabbath found in Genesis is that it’s a day of *rest*. Here is the first time the Hebrew word *shabbath*, meaning “rest,” is found. “It is from this root [of *shabbath*] that the noun for *Sabbath* originates, a word designating the time to be set aside for rest” (Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 2003, p. 1098).

It’s a day of rest to be refreshed from toil. As God explains in Exodus 31:17: “It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He *rested and was refreshed*.”

Similarly, God wants us to be refreshed, to recuperate on that day from our labors, as He declares: “Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger *may be refreshed*” (Exodus 23:12).

Throughout the Bible, the Sabbath as God’s Holy Day of rest and worship is reinforced. For example, Jesus Christ kept God’s



The Sabbath honors the *past* (remembering God as our Creator), the *present* (God as our Redeemer) and the *future* (anticipating God as our ruler in the Kingdom of God on earth).

Sabbaths. As Luke 4:16 tells us: “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And *as His custom was*, He went into the synagogue *on the Sabbath day*, and stood up to read.”

4. “It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever” (Exodus 31:17).

A fourth purpose of the Sabbath is that it is a covenant sign between God and His people. It is the only one of the Ten Commandments singled out this way as a sign or a marker.

As Exodus 31:16-17 says: “Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is *a sign* between Me and the children of Israel forever.”

The Hebrew word *oth*, here translated “sign,” means “a signal as a flag, beacon, monument” (*Strong’s Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*, No. H266). Just as a flag identifies a people, and a beacon draws attention and a monument points to a special place, person or occurrence, so God set the Sabbath as a sign to identify His people. It is also a perpetual covenant or lifelong agreement and relationship between God and the person who keeps the Sabbath.

5. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them . . .” (Exodus 20:8-11).

The fifth purpose of the Sabbath is as a reminder of God

as our *Creator and Maker*. The word translated “made” here means “fashioned” or “set in order”—as God reformed the world and its environs in the course of a week. This was after having initially created everything out of nothing. Thus, the Sabbath is a monument to God’s awe-inspiring power to have brought into existence all we see around us—including ourselves!

Too many people simply take so much for granted—life, food, water, air, light, heat, seasons, animals, birds, trees and flowers—things that sustain and delight us.

As Psalm 92, a hymn dedicated to the Sabbath, proclaims: “O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this” (verses 5-6).

6. “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

The sixth purpose of the Sabbath is about *redemption*, the paying of a ransom for a slave. This is a key biblical concept that deals with physical and spiritual salvation. So God is not only our Creator, but also *mankind’s Redeemer*—by making salvation possible through His Son’s sacrifice so as to release us from spiritual slavery.

He began His plan of salvation with one nation, Israel, but has now extended redemption to all people who respond. They can all be part of Abraham’s inheritance through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

As Paul said, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and *heirs according to the promise*” (Galatians 3:26-29). It’s noteworthy that Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, further showing it to be a day of liberation.

7. “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:3).

The seventh purpose of the Sabbath is as *an appointed* time to gather together for worship. It is interesting that God calls the Sabbath one of His Feasts “which you shall proclaim at their appointed times” (Leviticus 23:4).

The term “appointed times” in Hebrew means setting a date to meet, just as today we have an “appointment” with a doctor. It is important to note it is *God* who sets up the appointment and sends out the invitation. Whoever answers the invitation will then show up at this appointment. And whoever ignores it ignores the divine appointment God has set to meet with us!

8. “The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:2-3).

The eighth purpose of the Sabbath is to *fellowship* with others of God’s people. The term “convocation” means a *commanded assembly*. So, when possible, we are to meet

together on the Sabbath and not remain alone on that day.

Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us about the importance of having fellowship when gathering together: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

For more about this, see “The Church: Help for Greater Growth” in our free study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.

9. “One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue . . .” (Luke 13:10, New Living Translation).

The ninth purpose for the Sabbath is for us to *receive instruction from God’s Word*. So the Sabbath day is not only for fellowship but for *spiritual learning*.

In addition to Jesus teaching on the Sabbath day, we see the apostle Paul teaching on the Sabbath: “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth . . . And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks . . . And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:1, 4, 11). Assuming that Paul continued to teach literally “every Sabbath” he was there, this would have meant Paul taught during more than *eighty Sabbaths* while at Corinth!

10. “So that there is still a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9, Bible in Basic English).

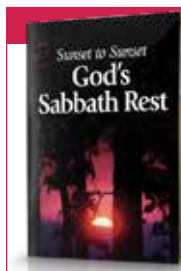
A 10th purpose for the Sabbath is as a reminder of the glorious future rest and restoration of the earth.

In the book of Hebrews, one of the arguments made for the Hebrew Christians to remain faithful in the Church was for them to remember the coming Kingdom of God, which the Sabbath portrays.

As Hebrews 4:8-11 tells us: “For if Joshua had given them rest [in entering the Promised Land], God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore *strive to enter that rest*, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” (English Standard Version).

Sabbath-keeping, therefore, also points to the future and not just the past or the present. It is a reminder of the *past* as we honor God for His Creation. It reminds us in the *present* of God as our great Redeemer. And it looks to the *future* as we anticipate the coming millennial reign of the Kingdom of God on earth—with Jesus Christ as King of Kings.

So God reveals in Scripture at least 10 purposes for the Sabbath. Let’s be thankful for each of them and use this wonderful gift from God for the many purposes He intended! **BT**



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The Bible has much to teach us about God’s special day and gift to mankind, the Sabbath. How much do you know about it? We’ve prepared a special study guide, *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*, to help you understand. Request your free copy today!

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