



**The**  
**Good News**

July-August 2002

A M A G A Z I N E O F U N D E R S T A N D I N G

# Marriage And Sex: What's the Purpose?

Living Together: What Aren't They Telling You? • America's Child Sacrifice  
God's Test Commandment • Sex Outside of Marriage: What's the Big Deal?

## Does Marriage Matter?

**T**he *Good News* magazine is dedicated to showing solutions to our problems. No doubt some of our greatest challenges lie in today's marriages and families. Almost everywhere you look, the family is in trouble.

You can tell something is seriously wrong when the U.S. president proposes spending \$100 million to *promote* marriage and, as happened several months ago, is soundly criticized by various individuals and groups declaring that whether people marry is nobody else's business.

But does marriage matter? Is it the government's business—or anyone else's—whether people marry or whether they stay married?

Several key statistics reveal why some national leaders think it's crucial to promote marriage to successfully battle poverty. Notice these sobering numbers about the state of marriage and the family in the United States:

- About half of first marriages, and up to 60 percent of second marriages, end in divorce.
- Single women as a whole are five times more likely to be poor than those who are married.
- Children living in single-parent homes are four times as likely to live in poverty than those in two-parent families.
- Compared to those raised in two-parent families, children of single-parent households are twice as likely to drop out of school, three times as likely to have an illegitimate child and far more likely to use drugs and engage in other antisocial activities.
- One third of American children are born out of wedlock.

You'll find many more disturbing numbers elsewhere in this issue, including some from other countries showing that the family is rapidly becoming an endangered institution throughout much of the Western world.

Civilizations, like most other structures, are constructed piece by piece. Marriage is the basic building block of the family. The family is the building block of the community. The community is the building block of the city. The city is the building block of the state or province. The state or province is the building block of the nation. The nation is the building block of civilization.

If any of these building blocks are faulty, the entire structure begins to falter and, if not shored up, will eventually collapse.

Sadly, as the statistics cited above show, the cracks that started to appear in earnest a generation ago are steadily widening. Crime, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual perversion, child abuse and the like are among the bitter fruits we're reaping. No community, nation or civilization can survive if such problems continue to worsen.

Just what changed in recent decades to bring about such profound shifts in attitudes toward marriage and family? One major change has been the loss of stigma surrounding divorce and illegitimate children. A generation has been brought up on the idea that absolute good and evil don't exist and that the only real sin is to suggest that someone else is living the wrong way and that his actions will cause harm to himself and others in the long run.

Thus the traditional family modeled in classic TV programs like *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie and Harriet* are out and *Sex and the City* and *Temptation Island* are in. Movies, TV and music undermine marriage but push promiscuity, assaulting the very foundations of society.

But it doesn't have to be that way for you and your family. Be sure to read the articles in this issue to discover the real solutions to some of the many problems threatening today's families.

—Scott Ashley

# The Good News

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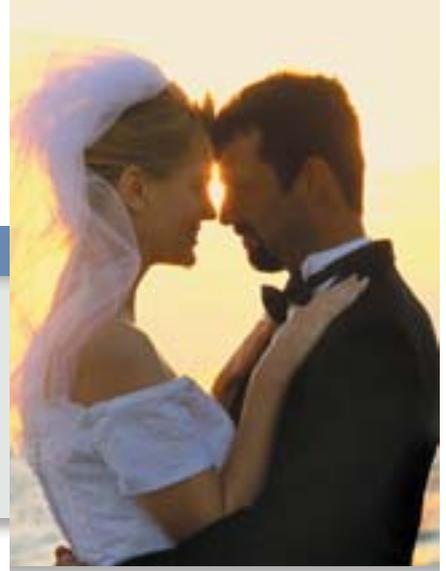
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We live in a world saturated with sex. But are we missing an unrealized dimension when it comes to sex and marriage? When and how did sex originate—and why?

# God's Purpose for Sex and Marriage

By Noel Horner

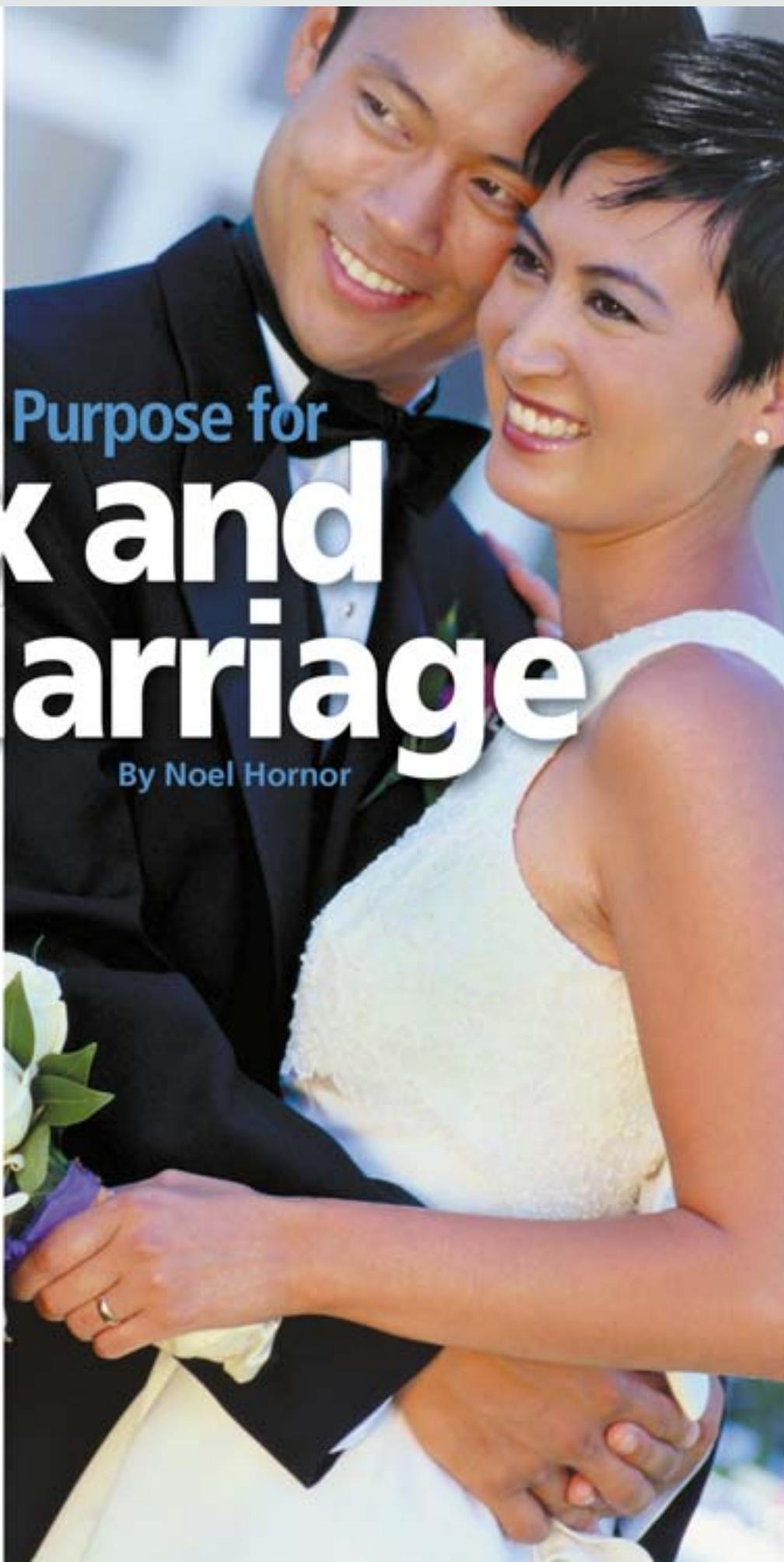
**H**ow would you describe our age? Sociologists have used various labels to define the mood or mentality of the world we live in. For example, some say that an “age of anxiety” followed World War II. That era was followed by an “age of melancholy.” More recently we hear terms such as the “computer age” or the “information age.”

If we define an era by what people have most on their minds, the most accurate description of our time is the age of *sex*. None of us can remember a time when sex has been more openly flaunted with so many people obviously obsessed with the subject.

Sexual awareness has always existed. It is natural in the human mind. But today it is incessantly stimulated by sex-saturated news and entertainment media. Sexual content is not only blatantly displayed, but objects that have no sexuality are labeled as sexy—from cars to computers and beverages to body lotions.

Is this the way we should treat sexuality?

We're in a kind of sexual wilderness,



lacking right directions and guidelines. Sadly, this situation has cost societies dearly in many major ways—in financial losses, health crises, marriage and family breakdowns and a lack of sexual fulfillment and happiness.

Few understand the purpose of sex. They are told that sex is an evolutionary accident. Therefore they assume that *anything goes* as long as it occurs between consenting adults. But that approach is naive. It is an unsubstantiated assumption that avoids candidly addressing the question of where sex and marriage came from.

The simple and often overlooked answer is that *God reveals that He created both sex and marriage*. His reasons for doing so are nothing short of wonderful. Ignorance of God's purpose for sex has brought about enormous problems.

## The first command God gave Adam and Eve was to begin an intimate sexual relationship and reproduce.

Why did God create sex and marriage? Let's consider the reasons.

### The first purpose

Perhaps the most obvious of God's purposes for sex and marriage is for the reproduction of the human species. Notice the first statement in the Bible about God's creation of man: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; *male and female He created them*" (Genesis 1:27, emphasis added throughout).

The statement that God created them male and female is the first reference to human

sexuality. *God* created the sexes; it wasn't an evolutionary accident. (If you'd like to read proof that God exists and Darwinian evolution is but a modern-day myth, be sure to request the free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*)

Next we read: "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, '*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it . . .*'" (verse 28). The statement that men and women are to *reproduce* is part of the blessing that God pronounces in this verse.

An air of sacredness permeates the process described here. God gave a blessing to the creation of children through a loving sexual relationship. God sanctified sexual relations between married men and women, in that the first command He gave Adam and Eve

was to begin an intimate sexual relationship and reproduce!

God essentially repeats His command in Genesis 2:24, adding another crucial thought: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." In speaking these words, God formally created the institutions of *marriage* and *family*. Since God created and commanded these relationships, marriage and the family are *holy* institutions, not mere creations of human society.

We see here God's obvious intent that children should be conceived and born into

a *family* relationship, a family consisting of a husband and wife.

Historically this has been the norm. But the last several decades have produced a drastic departure from God's pattern. People have tried to redefine the family in all kinds of ways.

Make no mistake: God's Word reveals it is a serious blunder to profane sex and marriage in this way, even as societies are already experiencing the bitter fruits of people trying to do things their own way. God's reasons for creating sex include the purpose of reproduction. But His specific intent is that it should occur *within* the divine institution of marriage.

### Part of God's plan

Though God created our sexuality and ordained sexual relations between married men and women to populate the earth, this was only the *first* part of God's ultimate vision for humanity. God desires to fill the earth with human beings who can eventually *enter His own spirit family*. The physical human family, brought about through marriage, is a *model* of God's spirit-composed family of the future.

God sent His Son into the world so all could eventually have eternal life through Him. ". . . The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). His Word reveals that "the Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). All men are appointed to die once (Hebrews 9:27), but afterward all who will repent of their sins can receive eternal life through a resurrection.

Those who are given life through a resurrection will be the *children of God*,

## Sex Is Intended for Pleasure

**A** loving sexual relationship is one of the benefits of marriage. God approves of sexual relations between married partners and views the married sexual relationship as beautiful.

The final verse of Genesis 1 is a summary statement of how God views His creation: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was very good*" (Genesis 1:31). This was shortly after God had created the first two human beings as male and female (verse 26). God pronounced sexuality, the male and female bodies and sexual relations as *very good*. In the account of creation the only thing God said was *not good* was for the man to be alone. So God created a woman to be with him (Genesis 2:18).

Though the English word *sex* is not found in the Bible, the Bible is prolific with references to sexuality. Some references show that harmful consequences result from sex's misuse, but many others illustrate that God created sex to provide exquisite pleasure for married couples.

Notice these words of instruction to a young man: "Drink water from your own well—share your love only with your wife. Why spill the water of your springs in public, having sex with just anyone? You should reserve it for yourselves. Don't share it with strangers. Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth . . . Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love" (Proverbs 5:15-19, New Living Translation).

The Song of Solomon is a joyous account that uses poetic language to romantically describe the sexual interaction and the endearing words exchanged between devoted mates and includes a tasteful description of the sex act itself.

The old attitude of prudery that surrounded sex—especially in medieval religious circles—once caused scholars to search for alternate explanations for the purpose of this book. This has changed. "Only in the 20th cent[ury] has it [the Song of Solomon] come to be accepted again as a love song celebrating the sensual aspect of human life" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1988, Vol. 4, "Sex," p. 435).

**Some have wondered why this book about physical love should be in the Bible. It does not expound religious themes, and it contains no obvious references to God.** *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* adds: "The Song [of Solomon] is a song in praise of love for love's sake and for love's sake alone" (J. Stafford Wright, 1991, Vol. 5, p. 1207).

Some have wondered why this book about physical love should be in the Bible. It does not expound religious themes, and it contains no obvious references to God. Yet it is most appropriate to include in the Bible a love story that shows how sexual relations should be, in view of the fact that "history began with a wedding (Gen 2:18-25) and will climax with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-10)" (ibid.).

God created sex and marriage. He created both for the purpose of love. The former should be reserved for and experienced only in the latter. When this happens, sex and love become the blessing that God intended them to be.

possessing eternal spirit life, as God is spirit (John 4:24). Those who now repent, are baptized and receive God's Spirit (Acts 2:38) are actually called children of God at this time, though not yet immortal. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16, King James Version).

Hebrews 2:10 tells us that God's ultimate purpose is to bring "many sons [and daughters, 2 Corinthians 6:18] to glory." This "glory" will include immortal spirit life as children of God.

God designed human reproduction through sex as a means to populate the earth. But His eventual intent is to bring as many of the billions who have been born—those who will repent—into His family as spiritual children. In a sense He, too, is reproducing Himself.

Therefore, we can see that reproduction of human beings has two purposes—to give physical life now to our posterity and to provide the potential for many children of God to receive eternal spirit life.

The human process of reproduction is a *physical* type, a *model*, if you will, of what God is doing on the *spiritual* level. This grand design is the marvelous purpose

and sexual appeal in human beings. This in itself is a healthy trait of the human mind and is triggered by hormones that God designed the body to produce.

But why? God created this sustained interest in sex as a means for men and women to *express love in marriage*.

This is one of the great purposes for sex that many have failed to understand. A look at history reveals that we're no further along in understanding this aspect of God's design than were many bygone cultures.

Some men in ancient Greece seem to have viewed marriage with distaste and submitted to it primarily to have a housekeeper and produce progeny. The idea of having deep love for one's wife seems to have appeared foreign to many Greek men. Demosthenes, the Greek orator of the fourth century B.C., illustrated his opinion of the low social status of wives this way: "Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for daily attendance upon our persons and wives to bear us legitimate children and be our housekeepers" (quoted by Morton Hunt, *The Natural History of Love*, 1994, p. 25).

Marriage and sex in the Roman Empire bore many similarities to Greece. Money

of the Christian religion advocated views that caused marriage and sex to be held in low regard. Augustine, of the fourth century, wrote: "I have decided that there is nothing I should avoid so much as marriage. I know nothing which brings the manly mind down from the heights more than a woman's caresses and that joining of bodies without which one cannot have a wife" (*Christian History*, 2000, Vol. 19, Issue 3, p. 36).

Augustine made this comment shortly after his conversion. Eventually he rose to a high position in the Catholic Church, and it wasn't long before his views and those of others resulted in marriage and sex being regarded as a less-honorable state than celibacy. The church came to erroneously teach that the sole purpose of sex was reproduction.

But was this all that God intended? Certainly not! God designed the male and female bodies to provide pleasure in marriage. Regrettably, one of the tragic results of distorted religious views stipulating that sex was given solely for reproduction was that it often caused enormous guilt in married couples who engaged in sexual behavior as an expression of their love for each other, as God intended.

It's long been a common practice among men to manipulate women just to obtain sexual favors from them. Women in turn manipulate men so they can get something in return. Sadly, this practice is still common even in the relationship between some husbands and wives. When such selfish attitudes persist in a marriage, at least one and possibly both mates use sex to *get something*, even if it is nothing more than sensual gratification, rather than to *give and express love*. Genuine love, as God designed it, is an act of *giving*. In marriage it is cherishing one's mate. It is an eagerness to please, help and encourage.

As we noted earlier, God's first command recorded in the Bible is that man should "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In Genesis 2:24 we see another command: that, after leaving the families of their birth and forming their own family through marriage, they should "become one flesh" (verse 24). God's directive that they should become one flesh means specifically that they should become one through sexual union, although the expression also has spiritual implications affecting every aspect of married life.

Next the Bible states that "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (verse 25). This shows that the sexual relationship, as God created it, was intended as completely pure and wholesome. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, sexual intercourse is described as "knowing." This is because there is no more

## Some have **mistakenly believed** that, after Adam and Eve sinned, purity was removed from marital relations.

God is working out on earth.

This plan is sometimes referred to in the Bible as the "mystery" of the Kingdom of God. It is a mystery because only a tiny minority of humanity presently understands it, the majority being ignorant of what the Bible reveals on the subject. (You can learn much more by requesting our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

### Showing love in marriage

Sex in the human and animal kingdoms serves the purpose of reproduction, but in virtually all animal species reproduction is the *only* purpose. In observing the habits of higher animals, we can see that, except for those periods in the female's cycle when she is susceptible to fertilization through the sexual act, only a very few species of animals ever engage in sexual intercourse at all.

With human beings, however, sexual interest between men and women isn't restricted to the woman's fertility period, either on a monthly basis or over the life of the human being. Typically humans develop a strong interest in sex beginning at least by puberty and may, if they remain healthy, stay sexually active long after their reproductive years.

God created a *continuing* sexual interest



and power were often motives for marriage. "Roman love as it emerged in the second and first centuries B.C. involved a variety of possible unions, all of them outside of marriage. The only illegal one was adultery, but up-to-date Romans favored it above all others, regarding it much as modern man regards cheating on his income-tax return" (Hunt, pp. 66-67).

The degeneration of sex and family life contributed significantly to the decline and eventual collapse of the empire.

### Distorted views of sex and marriage

Some of the leaders in the early centuries

# What Is True Love?

“What Is This Thing Called Love?” is a popular song by the late Cole Porter. Love is the most popular theme of songwriters and poets. Yet, as the title of Mr. Porter’s song suggests, many—perhaps most—do not know what love really is.

The word has a multitude of meanings and linguistic usages, at least in English. We may speak of loving a particular food. We might love our job. Or we could love a particular song or movie.

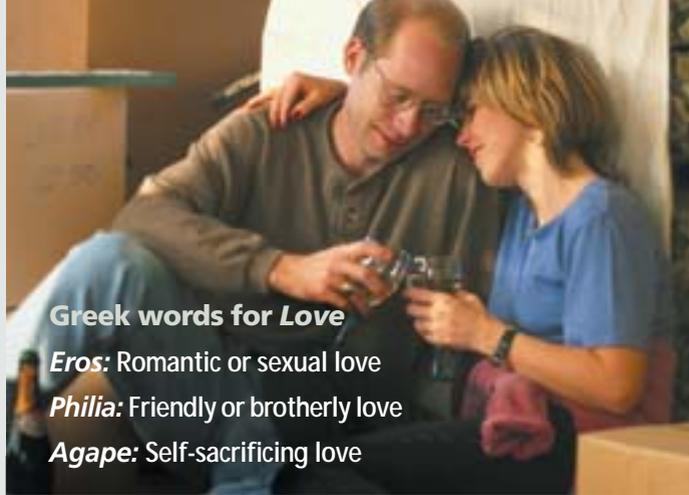
We frequently use *love* to describe relationships between two people. But here again the meaning can vary widely. The word can refer to a relationship of tender affection or apply simply to the physical sex act. Using the latter definition, the word can be used to describe an orgy, and it has been so used. But an orgy is not *love* but *lust*. It is indulged in as a result of an inordinate desire for sensual pleasure, to gratify the self.

The original Greek of the New Testament contains three words translated “love.” One is *eros*, a love that is romantic or sexual in nature. *Eros* is different from lust, though, because the Greek language has other words for lust.

Another Greek word for love is *philia*, or the related word *philadelphia*. These refer to brotherly love or friendship. Companionship, communication and cooperation are hallmarks of this kind of love.

The third Greek word translated “love” is *agape*. This is the word used to describe God’s love (1 John 4:8), the love He expresses toward mankind. This kind of love is listed as a fruit—a characteristic product—of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

*Agape* (pronounced a-GAH-pay) is used in the New Testament as an outwardly focused form of love that includes a willingness to give of oneself, sacrificing for the benefit of others (see John 3:16-17; 15:13). It is a way of living that is based on *giving*, on concern and care for others, rather than on *getting* and pleasing the self. Many



## Greek words for Love

**Eros:** Romantic or sexual love

**Philia:** Friendly or brotherly love

**Agape:** Self-sacrificing love

marriages, particularly the made-in-Hollywood versions, lack *agape* love. These marriages are largely based on external beauty and physical attraction. They may last a month or they may last five years, but rarely longer—at least among celebrities.

A good marriage will have all three kinds of love. The husband and wife will experience romantic or erotic love, they will be good friends, and they will manifest the self-giving, self-sacrificing love that is the highest of all loves.

Jesus Christ is our model for this kind of love (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29). It involves a conscious commitment that can enable a married couple to endure and work through life’s inevitable reversals and hardships. This love is best nurtured by first establishing a relationship with God that includes obedience to His Commandments—providing stability in one’s outlook and values.

intimate act than the sexual act, and, by its nature, it can greatly enhance understanding of one another’s emotions and feelings and promote exquisite companionship and unity.

Some have mistakenly believed that, after Adam and Eve sinned, purity was removed from marital relations. This is refuted by many scriptures supporting marriage, including Jesus’ reaffirmation in Matthew 19:4-6 that men and women should marry and become one flesh.

## Sex: designed to express love

That sex is a means of expressing love is made plain in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her, . . . that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies . . . For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:25-31).

What does Paul say is the purpose of marriage and of becoming one flesh through sex? The purpose is *love*.

Sex, like any gift of God, can be misused. The tendency among human beings through the ages has been to succumb to the pull of sex appetites outside the bounds of marriage.

However, this is a misuse of the gift of sex that God clearly labels as sin. Many in society see no harm in premarital or extramarital sex. But the Bible calls these actions fornication and adultery, offenses serious enough to deserve the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10;

compare Romans 6:23). The Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14) forbids such behavior, and the Bible states elsewhere that “fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

Many are aware that marriage should be a relationship built on love. One thing many people do not realize is that the relationship between a husband and wife should provide a mirror image of the loving relationship between Christ and His Church. After speaking of a man and his wife becoming one flesh in Ephesians 5:31, Paul said, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning *Christ and the church*” (verse 32).

Jesus Christ had a totally self-sacrificing love for the Church, a love so deep that He died for her. Marriage is supposed to be a picture of this great love. Human marriage is imperfect, to be sure. Nevertheless Jesus’ love for the Church is the kind of loving relationship marriage is intended to portray.

In the physical realm a man and woman become one flesh in marriage. In a Christian’s relationship with Christ, he or she becomes spiritually “joined to the Lord [and] is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17). The genuinely loving “one flesh” relationship of marriage parallels the close “one spirit” relationship we are to have with Christ.

Paul calls this marvelous truth a “great mystery.” The word for “great” in Greek is *mega*. It expresses the magnitude or the profound nature of the mystery. It is called a mystery because so few understand this truth.

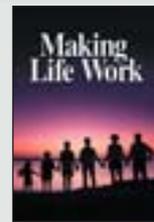
When we comprehend God’s incredibly

high view of marriage as revealed in the Bible, it should inspire us to treasure marriage as never before. We should commit ourselves to continually improving our marriages, striving for a relationship that seeks to emulate—on the human level—the deep, timeless love Christ has for the Church.

We should also strive to be completely faithful to our husband or wife in mind and body. No one should ever become one flesh with anyone else but his or her marriage partner. This alone produces a wholesome relationship fit to engender and rear healthy and happy children (see Malachi 2:15). This alone produces the kind of marriage and family life God wants us to experience. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

How can your marriage be successful? What can you do to make your marriage work? Discover many vital biblical principles in our free booklet *Making Life Work*. You’ll also find timeless guidance on family relationships, dating, parenting, friendships, finances, health and your job and career—all to help your life work better. Also request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments*, a practical, down-to-earth guide to living by the basic rules our Creator handed down to us so we can lead happy, productive and successful lives. Be sure to request your free copies of both booklets today.



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# Living Together: What Aren't They Telling You?

Millions of people choose to live together outside of marriage, thinking that will bring them happiness and a stable relationship. The truth, however, is far different.

by Noel Hornor

It used to be called living in sin. At one time every U.S. state had laws against it. Some believe that rising rates of sexually transmitted diseases have applied a brake to the sexual revolution, but cohabitation—unmarried couples living together—is one trend that has not slowed.

The 2000 census figures for America show that “3.8 million households . . . were classified as unmarried-partner households.” This figure is probably lower than the actual number of unmarried partner households because, in an interview, some couples “may describe themselves as roommates, housemates, or friends not related to each

Wallerstein: “What can we do when . . . the most common living arrangement nowadays is a household of unmarried people with no children? These numbers are terrifying. But like all massive social change, what’s happening is affecting us in ways that we have yet to understand” (*The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 2000, pp. 295-296).

## Widespread practice

Living together while unmarried is trendy in other Western nations too. “In Sweden . . . nearly all couples cohabit before marrying . . . and about half of all births occur to cohabiting, unmarried women” (Andrew Cherlin,

marry. However, research has shown that this idea is a fallacy. “Although most theories of marital choice predict that cohabitation would increase the stability of later marriages for those couples who marry, evidence to date suggests the opposite; *couples who cohabit before marriage seem to end their marriages at significantly higher rates than couples who never lived together before the wedding*” (*Demography*, August 1995, p. 438, emphasis added).

Some studies put the divorce rate at 50 percent higher for couples who cohabit; others put it as high as 80 percent.

One factor that seems to be different among American cohabitants and Europeans is that a larger proportion of the latter eventually marry. In America roughly 40 percent of cohabiting couples break up before marriage. Many couples apparently move in together intending to marry later. “One study revealed that 70 percent of women moved in with a man with marriage on their minds” (Ben Young and Dr. Samuel Adams, *The 10 Commandments of Dating*, 1999, p. 110).

## Taking the romance out of it

We shouldn’t be surprised, however, that American men are less likely to have marriage on their minds when they set up house-keeping than do women. Many men simply choose this option for the availability of easy sex. In a national sex survey of married couples and unmarries living together, “men who were cohabiting scored lower on commitment than anyone else in the survey” (Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 2000, p. 85).

Many of those who choose to live together before marriage show they are reluctant to commit to a relationship and want to keep their options open. Apparently they value their autonomy and individuality. However, these temporary living arrangements subject any children involved to an unstable home life. “Over a quarter of unmarried mothers are cohabiting at the time of their children’s birth, and many other cohabiting families have children from other

A distinct advantage to marriage over cohabitation is the higher degree of **emotional commitment** in marriage.



other” (*America’s Families and Living Arrangements*, June 2000).

*U.S. News & World Report* noted that “in America . . . cohabiting couples make up . . . about 7 percent of the total” of couples living together (March 13, 2000). This was a seven-fold increase from 1970, during the heart of the sexual revolution (*Information Please Almanac*, 1997, p. 434).

Although living together without the benefit of matrimony carries virtually no social stigma, some still worry about it. Says psychologist and divorce researcher Judith

*Public And Private Families: An Introduction*, 1996, p. 245).

“. . . Unmarried couples . . . make up about 30 percent of couples sharing households” in Sweden (*U.S. News & World Report*). “France is somewhere between the extremes of the United States and Sweden” (Cherlin, p. 245). And “in Britain . . . three-quarters of all couples now live together before they marry” (*The Economist*, Feb. 14, 1998).

The reason given by many couples who cohabit is that they believe they will increase the chances of success when they eventually

unions” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 38).

Some believe—erroneously—that children do well as long as they live in a home in which there is a male and female, whether married or not. But the evidence doesn’t support this. “Children living with cohabiting partners and in stepfamilies generally do less well than those living with both married biological parents” (*The American Prospect*, April 8, 2002).

Some people are serial cohabitants, living with several partners in succession. Their living patterns magnify the risk inherent with the cohabitation lifestyle. The children involved must adjust to a progression of adult partners whom their parents select. The risk of spreading deadly sexually transmitted diseases is also higher among this group.

In spite of these troubling facts and figures, many American singles still seem to believe that a marital test drive is the preferred choice before committing to marriage. An NBC poll found that “66 percent of young people ages 18 to 32 believe that you should first live together before you get married” (Young and Adams, pp. 104-105).

Young people who entertain romantic notions about cohabiting should think twice. Compared to married couples, there is “more cheating by both partners [as well as] more domestic violence and a higher incidence of depression” among those who simply live together (*U.S. News & World Report*).

How bad is the sexual unfaithfulness among those in cohabiting relationships? “The National Sex Survey found that cohabiting men were about *four times as likely* as husbands to report infidelity in the past year. Women were more faithful in general, but still cohabiting women were *eight times more likely* than wives to cheat on their partners” (Waite and Gallagher, pp. 92-93, emphasis added).

A distinct advantage to marriage over cohabitation is the higher degree of *emotional commitment* in marriage. Popular media often present the view that sex outside of marriage is much more exciting and thrilling than married sex. But the *opposite* is true. Research shows that, because married couples are generally more committed to each, they enjoy a *higher* level of sexual satisfaction.

“Emotional commitment improves one’s sex life . . . For example, sex with someone you love literally doubles your sexual pleasure: You get satisfaction not only from your own sexual response but from your partner’s as well. Emotional commitment to a partner makes satisfying him or her important in and of itself.

“Demanding a loving relationship before having sex, using sex to express love, and

striving to meet the sexual needs of one’s partner all increase satisfaction with sex. Love and a concern for one’s partner shifts the focus away from the self in a sexual relationship and toward the other person. This selfless approach to sex, paradoxically, is far more likely to bring sexual satisfaction to both men and women” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 89).

### Devaluing marriage

Part of the boom in cohabitation rates is fueled by a growing bias against marriage. Various authorities speak of marriage as an institution that robs individuals of freedom, describing it as an oppressive state, especially to women. A college textbook even claimed that “marriage has an adverse effect on women’s mental health” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 1).

As a result, in some quarters simply using the word *marriage* is passé. “A strange embarrassment or reluctance to use the word *marriage* is visible all over the Western world. The Marriage Guidance Council of Australia recently changed its name to Relationships Australia; Britain’s Marriage Guidance Council metamorphosed into Relate” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 8).

That which is presented as a right—the freedom to have sex outside of marriage whenever we want, however we want, with whomever or whatever we want—is a perversion of our Creator’s intention for humanity and a plunge into moral degradation. Regrettably, the concept of sex as something special to be saved for marriage has largely become outdated for many singles.

“Carelessly, thoughtlessly, casually, sex—in the short space of a single generation—went from being the culminating act of committed love to being a precondition, a tryout, for future emotional involvement” (Danielle Crittenden, *What Our Mothers Didn’t Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman*, 2000, p. 30).

Sex outside of marriage is a sin against God. “. . . A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). God said a man should be joined to his *wife*, not simply another person or a live-in lover (Exodus 20:14). But human beings refuse to admit that the very Creator of male and female sexuality knows what’s best for us. It is He who created the institution of marriage to develop a morally and socially sound relationship.

Cohabitation represents a threat to societal stability. History demonstrates that marriage and family are the building blocks of strong societies. Those who ignore the lesson of history place their happiness—and their nation’s future—in peril. **GN**

## Who’s Behind The Good News?



Who’s behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **To proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43, 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all mankind’s problems. Through the pages of *The Good News* and various booklets (also free) we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten the very survival of humankind.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God’s purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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# Sex Outside of Marriage: What's the Big Deal?

The sexual revolution of the '60s encouraged us to liberate ourselves from old sexual taboos. Millions did. What have we learned?

by Noel Horner

**O**f all the gifts God has given mankind, one of the most beautiful and meaningful is the gift of sexuality. Yet it's also one of the most abused.

Sex plays a vital part in God's plan for human beings. The first command recorded in the Bible that God gave to Adam and Eve was to have sexual relations (Genesis 1:28). He essentially repeated the command in Genesis 2:24-25: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

One aspect that should leap out at us from verse 24 is that God created sex *for marriage*. But the 20th century brought dramatic changes in attitudes toward what is considered to be proper sexual behavior.

The sexual revolution of the '60s resulted in a drastic relaxation of sexual mores and—aided by easy availability of birth-control

pills—created the notion that freewheeling sex had practically no consequences. The idea of sex with no repercussions led to slogans such as "If it feels good, do it!"

Advocates of sexual freedom said that, since sex is enjoyable, we should shed our inhibitions and jump in. What they *didn't* say, however, is that sex is never consequence-free, and sex outside of marriage is heavily laden with negative repercussions, especially for girls and women.

The audible furor that accompanied the sexual experimentation of the '60s is no longer as loud, but the revolution was successful in that to a considerable extent the *extreme* behaviors of that time are now *commonplace*.

The results have been monumental—and devastating in many countries. As former Harvard University professor Pitirim Sorokin observed about changes in sexual standards: "Any considerable change in marriage behavior, any increase in sexual promiscuity, and illicit relations, is pregnant with momentous

consequences. A sex revolution drastically affects the lives of millions, deeply disturbs the community, and decisively influences the future of society" (*The American Sex Revolution*, 1956, p. 7).

The sexual revolution was not just an American phenomenon. Europe experienced its own upheaval. In fact, much of the world joined in throwing off sexual restraint. Why are millions of Africans infected with the AIDS virus? "The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s in the West spread globally and penetrated Africa . . . We know of many cases where young people, children really, are already sexually active" (*Christianity Today*, Feb. 7, 2000).

## The shocking numbers

The level of premarital sexual activity in Western nations is extraordinary. Establishing exact data can be elusive, but one report states that the "median age of first intercourse for American boys [is] 15.5" and "for American girls [it is] 16" (S.I. McMillen, M.D., and David Stern, M.D., *None of These Diseases*, 2000, p. 141).

Circumstances are similar in Britain, where "the average age for both sexes to lose their virginity is 16" (*The Observer*; Dec. 2, 2001).

Premarital sexual activity among French girls is also extremely high. "Whereas it used to be the case that for 50 per cent of French women their first sexual partner would be the man they would marry, by the 1990s it was only true for 10 per cent" (Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century*

## Divorce's Devastating Impact on Children

**C**hildren of divorce often experience the same hardships suffered by children born out of wedlock. Because divorce typically slashes the mother's financial resources, "mothers and children in families that were not poor before separation suffered an average decline in income after divorce of 50 percent" (Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture*, 1996, p. 93).

The consequences of divorce on children are far-reaching. One detailed study found that, "five years after the divorce, more than a third of the children were experiencing moderate or severe depression. At ten years a significant number of the now-grown young men and women appeared to be troubled, drifting, and underachieving. At the fifteen-year mark, many of the thirtyish adults were struggling to establish secure love relationships of their own . . . Cruelly, the experience of parental divorce damaged many young adults' ability to forge strong attachments of their own, in both their work and their family lives" (Whitehead, p. 99).

A 25-year landmark study of 131 children of divorce demonstrated some alarming facts. "Adolescence begins early in divorced homes and, compared with that of the youngsters raised in intact families, is more likely to include more early sexual experiences for girls and higher alcohol and drug use for girls and boys" (Judith Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 2000, p. 299).

The study also found that "one in four of the children in this study started using drugs and alcohol before their fourteenth birthdays" (p. 188). Cohabitation rates were high among the group. Several of the single young women felt that simply moving in with a man "was safer than marriage because escape was easier if they needed to get out or if the man left" (p. 289). Their reasons boiled down to a distrust

of men that resulted when their parents divorced.

Many children of divorce rush into cohabitation or early marriage in young adulthood. "Being alone raises memories of lonely years in the post divorce family and feels like the abandonment they dread. They're trapped between the wish for love and the fear of loss. This amalgam of fear and loneliness can lead to multiple affairs, hasty marriages, early divorce, and—if no lessons are gleaned from it all—a second and third round of the same" (pp. 31-32).

The results of the study indicate that, when marriages end in divorce, often the children experience difficulty in relationships, including an increased likelihood of divorce and promiscuous sex.

Not as well publicized is the much-higher rate of delinquent behavior among children of single-parent or otherwise divorced households. For example, "a study of Stanford University's Center for the Study of Youth Development in 1985 indicated that children in single-parent families headed by a mother have higher arrest rates, more disciplinary problems in school, and a greater tendency to smoke and run away from home than do their peers who live with both natural parents—no matter what their income, race, or ethnicity" (Daniel Amneus, *The Garbage Generation*, 1990, p. 215).

A far more extensive study of Bureau of Justice statistics of 25,000 jailed juveniles found that "72 percent of them came from broken homes" and "a child growing up in a single-parent home (usually female-headed) is seven times as likely to be a delinquent" (Amneus, p. 179).

In light of these debilitating consequences, we shouldn't be surprised when God thunders that He "*hates divorce*" (Malachi 2:16).

*Sexuality: A History*, 1999, p. 212).

Although these figures are bad enough, even more shocking is the rampant promiscuity among so many. For example, among Britain's 16- to 24-year-olds, "19.7 percent of men and 14.6 percent of women have already had 10 or more partners" (*The Guardian*, Nov. 30, 2001).

### The telling consequences

The consequences of premarital sexual involvement are damaging on many levels. On an emotional level they often include a profound sense of guilt, shame and regret.

During the '60s and '70s many young people were "liberated" to believe that one-night stands were not only acceptable but desirable. This dogma was badly flawed. Wendy Shalit describes how such an encounter can affect many a young woman: "A young girl spends 'the rest of the night crying and bleeding' after she loses her virginity to a guy she barely knew" (*A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*, 1999, p. 57).

In recent years a new term, "hooking up," has sprouted on American college campuses for what used to be called "quickie" sexual interaction. A hookup may involve a range of intimate activities from kissing to forms of sex and usually involves alcohol. It is sex without commitment or emotional involvement, usually between people who know little if anything about each other and expect

before we get married so we can know if we are sexually compatible."

None of these rationalizations is realistic. It's important for young women to realize that their motives for having sex are often quite different from those of a man. Women often consider that intercourse will solidify a relationship with their partner, but to a young man it often represents something different—a coming of age or, in too many cases, simply another conquest. Males are constructed differently emotionally and psychologically and often pursue sex purely for pleasure's sake, with no thought to a relationship.

When a woman has a casual sexual relationship, later she will often regret it, especially when hopes for an enduring relationship are dashed. Her male partner may feel



**Advocates of sexual freedom said that, since sex is enjoyable, we should shed our inhibitions and jump in. What they *didn't* say, however, is that sex outside of marriage is heavily laden with negative repercussions.**

nothing more from each other than the gratification of that lone encounter.

According to a survey by the Institute for American Values, "40 percent of college women have hooked up at least once, and 10 percent more than six times" (*Christian Century*, Aug. 15, 2001). The empty ritual leaves many young women feeling used, disillusioned and burdened with emotional confusion.

### Different motivations for sex

Whether the setting is a one-night stand or sex within a relationship, the pressure on young women to engage in illicit sex relations is intense. Premarital sexual involvement is perhaps most apt to occur when a couple begins dating steadily. Couples use various rationales to justify sex, such as "It's okay if you're in love," "Everybody's doing it" or "We need to sleep together

like a *victor*; but she often feels like a *victim*.

And indeed she is. If a girl dates someone whom she thinks is "the one," she usually does not enhance her chances of maintaining a relationship by giving in sexually.

Often, after he has had his way, he will simply discard her. Such an action demonstrates that he was not the one after all. If a man jilts a woman because she will not surrender sexually, she is not losing much. Such men are interested in using a woman's body for their own gratification rather than being interested in her as a person or pursuing a lifelong relationship.

Girls who take a stand and refuse to consent to sexual relations before marriage are wise. When they surrender their bodies in premarital sex, they lose a precious part of themselves that they can never regain.

By holding fast to her virginity, a girl will, in the long run, win the respect of many

## Illicit Sex: The Threat to Children

The major consequences of sex before marriage include the problems of disease, premarital pregnancies, single mothers and fatherless children. Since 1960 in the United States, "out of wedlock births have skyrocketed 511 percent, and the percentage of single-parent families has more than tripled" (*Human Life Review*, Spring-Summer 2000).

In Europe "the proportion of French babies born out of wedlock rose from 3 percent in 1975 to 33 percent in 1996. In England and Wales 28 percent of all births in 1990 were extramarital" (Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History*, 1999, p. 213).

Life is much more difficult for teen mothers who have babies. The fathers of those infants are generally not in the picture, having abandoned the girl or providing little or no help. "Having a baby outside marriage makes getting married later much more difficult and much less likely. Having a baby before finishing high school makes parenthood and education a bigger challenge" (Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 2000, pp. 199-200). One result is that single mothers and their children are far more likely to live in poverty.

When teenage boys (and young men, as is often the case) take advantage of teenage girls and the girls become pregnant, bitter seeds are sown at an immature age. The girls are then forced to deal with pregnancy, devastating emotional consequences and often abandonment before they have even begun to experience some of the best life has to offer. Their own children are in turn at greater risk for out-of-wedlock pregnancies. One reason for this is that they, too, typically begin having sex at a much earlier age.

Also disturbing is a study of the female prison population in the United States that found that "more than half are single mothers living on welfare" (Daniel Amneus, *The Garbage Generation*, 1990, p. 224).

Children born out of wedlock are also at greater risk for abuse. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that "children of single parents had a 77 percent greater risk of being harmed by physical abuse, an 87 percent greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect, and an 80 percent greater risk of serious injury from harm or neglect than children living with both parents."

For children of unwed mothers, live-in boyfriends and other sexual partners can prove deadly. The Heritage Foundation recently reported that, of the 2,000 children killed each year, more than a fourth are victims of live-in boyfriends. Many, however, are not killed outright. Each year thousands more suffer life-changing, crippling injuries.

Again, many of the most heinous incidents occur at the hands of a mother's boyfriend in what has come to be known as shaken-baby syndrome. This is a term used to describe the injuries that result from the violent shaking of a child or infant, often resulting in brain injuries from the baby's head being jerked and snapped back and forth. The damage inflicted can range from relatively minor injuries to mental retardation, coma and death. An estimated 20 percent of such injuries are inflicted by live-in boyfriends.

males. As a university student explained, “. . . In the real world, the more casual that women allow their physical relationships with men to become, the less respect they earn” (Danielle Crittenden, *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us*, 2000, p. 33).

### Less-obvious consequences

Though in some respects a girl who experiments with premarital or extramarital sex may suffer more severely than a male who does so, men are also damaged by illicit sex. In addition to their own later feelings of guilt for having used young women, they often find it hard to build and maintain a long-term relationship with one other person.

Any sexual experimentation outside of marriage is a mistake. A man will never be the same in the sense that he has surrendered



a part of himself that he should have reserved for his bride. Premarital sex may provide momentary gratification, but the result is a loss of the purity that God intended. Each conquest robs him of some of the care and tenderness he should be cultivating for just the right girl.

Much of the attraction of sex outside of marriage is based on its illicit nature. The attitude that “stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Proverbs 9:17) has been around for a long time.

Sometimes couples find sex to be intense and gratifying before they marry but after marriage discover it is not as exciting to them. Once they have devalued their respect for each other through premarital sex before marriage, rarely can they find the same attraction and respect shared by couples who marry without premarital sex.

Many couples who have sex before marriage find that it actually dampens the feelings they have for each other and, as a result, dampens their long-term sexual enjoyment. Their violation of God's law in succumbing to premarital sexual activity removes some of the beauty and splendor their married sexual relations could have had.

There is another danger in succumbing to sexual temptation, even if getting married is your intent. The possibility always exists that you may for some reason decide against marrying this person. When this happens you have, through sexual involvement, given a part of yourself to someone other than your spouse, a part you should have saved for your future wife or husband.

When two people become “one flesh” in a sexual relationship (see 1 Corinthians 6:16), a bonding occurs between them. If, after they become sexually involved, one partner severs the relationship against the wishes of the other, the separation has a wrenching effect, especially for the jilted person, who is left feeling mentally and emotionally burned.

Sex counselors and schools push contraceptive devices as a means of assuring

## Sex counselors and schools push contraceptive devices as a means of assuring “safe sex,” but no device can protect a person's heart.

“safe sex,” but no device can protect a person's heart. When the heart is assaulted, defensive patterns develop that will affect any future relationship.

### Permanent injury

The hazards and negative consequences of adultery are numerous. Extramarital affairs also generally bring intense feelings of guilt and shame. When discovered—as affairs often are—the result is often permanent injury or destruction of the marriage, with severe damage to relationships between other family members and friends.

Some couples can put their marriages back together when one mate has had an affair, yet the infidelity inflicts a wound that is difficult if not impossible to heal. The betrayed wife or husband will likely never feel completely secure again. The quality of the marriage will suffer because trust has been violated. Even if the wound can heal, the scars remain.

Divorce proceedings are rarely cordial, but those that occur because of marital infidelity are among the most hostile. When sexual betrayal from one whose love was expected to last for life occurs, it creates bitterness and resentment that may never heal.

When children are involved, the two parties' lives generally remain interlocked because of visitation rights. In such cases there is no escaping the continuing hard feelings. When children sense the tensions and animosities, they are often emotionally scarred as a result (see “Divorce's Devastating Impact on Children,” page 10).

The Bible states that premarital and extra-

marital sex are sin and therefore to be avoided completely. Why is God so adamant on this point? *To protect us from the inevitable harmful consequences.* Notice Paul's warning to Christians in the sex-saturated city of Corinth: “Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18, New Living Translation).

God created sex to be a blessing and benefit of a committed marriage. When you cheapen your body by giving it freely outside of marriage, you treat your body with disrespect.

In the King James and New King James versions of the Bible, sexual intercourse in the Old Testament is referred to as “knowing.” Sexual relations within the context of a loving, committed marriage enable two people

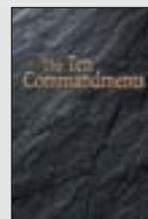
to know each other in the most intimate and personal way.

Loving sex in this context is deeply satisfying and creates a unifying of two lives. It is much more than simply the coupling of two bodies. The couple becomes one flesh as God intended (Genesis 2:24). *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* describes this kind of knowledge as “not just cognitive, but always experiential and deeply personal; and sexual intercourse is never just physiological, but always involves mystery and touches the whole person” (1988, Vol. 4, “Sex,” p. 433).

It is partially the mystery about the opposite sex that makes relating to one another so special. That mystery is destroyed and lost forever when human beings hook up as casually as many species of animals do. Our sexuality is a gift God gave us. It is so special that it should be protected and saved for marriage as God intended. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What are the reasons behind God's laws about premarital and extramarital sex? Does our Creator simply not want us to have fun, or is there something deeper, something life-transforming, about His laws and instructions? You need to read our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*. Both are yours for the asking.



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## The Dark Shadow Over Illicit Sex

Those who advocated premarital sex in the '60s assured us that premarital sex was healthy and good for us. Liberated sex was not only pleasurable; it was even supposed to be beneficial. But now, 40 years later, what is the track record of free-sex relationships? Besides the fact that promiscuity *causes* relationship and emotional difficulties—rather than *solving* them—the physical results of casual sex have proven dangerous and destructive. Rates of sexually transmitted diseases have gone through the roof. What are we doing to ourselves? Consider:

- “Worldwide, estimates hold that there are more than 300 million cases of STIs [sexually transmitted infections] annually” (*Johns Hopkins Family Health Book*, 1999, p. 861).

- “Heterosexual intercourse is the fastest growing way to catch HIV. Around the world, over 90 percent of AIDS cases are spread by heterosexual intercourse” (S.I. McMillen, M.D., and David E. Stern, M.D., *None of These Diseases*, 2000, p. 111).

- “In America more children lose a parent to AIDS than to motor vehicle accidents” (McMillen and Stern, p. 115).

- “Worldwide in the next few decades AIDS is expected to kill almost 300 million—more than the population of the entire United States” (McMillen and Stern, p. 116).

- “Dr. Susan Weller of the University of Texas reviewed every study on condoms and STDs. Then she concluded in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*: ‘Results of HIV transmission studies indicate that condoms may reduce risk of HIV infection by approximately 69 percent. Thus efficacy may be much lower than commonly assumed.’ . . . The world is placing its hope for AIDS prevention in a method that fails about one-third of the time . . . There’s nothing safe about it . . . An article for doctors in *Patient Care* admitted the condom’s ‘effectiveness against STDs’ is only ‘30-60 percent’” (McMillen and Stern, pp. 144-145).

- “An estimated 45 million people in the U.S. are infected with genital herpes, and 1 million new cases occur every year. Sexually transmitted disease rates in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world . . . One in five sexually active adults may be infected with genital herpes” (*Psychology Today*, January-February 2002).

- “Nearly one in five U.S. adolescent females has an undiagnosed infection . . . Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States, affecting an estimated 13 percent of women” (*Women’s Health Weekly*, June 28, 2001).

- Chlamydia, which causes pelvic inflammatory disease, is “the most common curable STD and a major cause of infertility in women,” and “10 percent of healthy young men carry silent infections” of the disease (McMillen and Stern, p. 123).

- In the United States “about 30 percent of young adults carry the venereal wart virus . . . HPV. From 1969 to 1988, annual doctor visits for genital warts jumped tenfold . . . Today Pap smears from thirteen-year-old girls frequently



show dysplasia—a sign of HPV infection” (McMillen and Stern, p. 122).

- Many women infected with human papillomavirus (HPV) develop cervical cancer. “The disease has claimed the lives of more women in the U.S. than has AIDS” (*Women’s Health Weekly*, Sept. 6, 2001).

- “Over the past five years notable rises have been observed in the United Kingdom in the incidence of genital chlamydia infection (76 percent), gonorrhoea (55 percent), and infectious syphilis (54 percent) . . . The highest rates of sexually

transmitted infections occur among 16-24 year olds” (*British Medical Journal*, May 12, 2001).

- In the U.K., sexually transmitted infections have increased across the board from 624,000 in 1990 to almost 1.25 million in 1999 (*The Observer*, April 8, 2001).

- “The Children’s Aid Society estimates that one in every four sexually active American teenagers catches an STD every year” (McMillen and Stern, p. 141).

- Do not be fooled into thinking that you are safe from STD transmission if you use a condom. “Condoms, long the mainstay of the safe-sex public-health model, do not protect against the spread of nearly all sexually transmitted diseases . . .” (*Women’s Health Weekly*, Sept. 6, 2001).

Sometimes the consequences of sex before marriage do not surface until after marriage. For example, a man can be a silent carrier of herpes. When he marries he can pass the virus on to his new bride. She may be startled, sometimes within days of first having intercourse, to find her genital area invaded by unsightly, painful sores. The herpes virus can also spread to the brain and cause encephalitis. When a woman who has genital herpes gives birth, the baby can get herpes or suffer brain damage.

The only way to practice safe sex is for both partners to abstain from sex outside of marriage as God instructs. This provides the only sure shield against STDs.

## The Transforming Power of Forgiveness

The religious leaders had caught a woman in the very act of adultery. They brought her to Jesus, reminding Him that the law stated she deserved to die.

Yet Jesus knew they were also sinners and hard-hearted men who lacked compassion and mercy for others. He also recognized that they were trying to trap Him into making a mistake so they could condemn and discredit Him. The woman was merely a tool they were using for this purpose.

Jesus refused to take the bait. He told them that yes, they could stone her to death—and whoever was innocent among them should throw the first stone. After Jesus said this, they all slunk away, condemned by their own consciences. He then turned His attention to the fearful woman. He asked her if anyone were still accusing her, and she said no. Jesus responded: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:3-11, emphasis added).

Many who have violated God’s laws of sexual conduct have come to see the kind of damage such sins have brought on themselves and others. They rightfully wonder what they can do next. Jesus’ words provide clear direction.

This event may have been a life-changing experience for the woman. Here was a man who was interested in salvaging her life rather than using and abusing her. Essentially, Jesus told her that if she made a clean break from her past sexual sins she would be completely forgiven.

This is the essence of what the Bible calls *repentance*—to recognize our sinful ways,

to determine to leave that sinful life and, with God’s help, to *change*, to replace our greedy, selfish nature with a godly nature focused on obedience to Him.

Some believe that sexual immorality is less forgivable than other sins. This is not true. God forgives *every* sin upon repentance. Jesus, as the Son of God, had authority to tell the woman she could be completely forgiven. As the Son of Man, He provided compassionate understanding and support.

Upon repentance, we should also strive to *forgive ourselves* so that guilt regarding past sexual sins doesn’t carry forward in a negative attitude towards God’s gift of sex and jeopardize a happy, joyful, loving intimate relationship in marriage.

Once forgiven, we need to see ourselves as God sees us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “some of you” were formerly “fornicators, . . . adulterers, . . . homosexuals, [and] sodomites,” but they had been washed and sanctified—made *holy*—through the forgiveness made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Though some physical penalties may have persisted, the spiritual penalty of their sins was completely removed.

If you have made past mistakes, rest assured that God will clear your record if you seek Him in heartfelt repentance. He promises us that, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

To learn more about repentance and overcoming guilt and sin, please request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.



# World News and Trends

## An Overview of Conditions Around the World

By John Ross Schroeder and Melvin Rhodes

### Right-wing movement sweeps Europe



The winds of political change are blowing across Europe, including upheavals in the Netherlands and France. Dutch rightist and party leader Pim Fortuyn was assassinated on May 6, not long after his party's surprising showing at the Dutch polls. It came second in a country whose governmental structure usually embraces a coalition of parties.

In France, extremist party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen came in second in the French presidential race, consigning socialist Prime Minister Leon Jospin to third place and paving the way for his ouster from government. This left France in a state of shock, producing a national scare that in turn engendered the overwhelming victory of incumbent President Jacques Chirac in the runoff.

These headline-grabbing changes are indicative of what is taking place a little more quietly in much of Europe. According to *The Economist*: "A pattern may now be emerging across the EU [European Union]. Centre-left and social democratic

governments are losing power to centre-right governments. In the past year the left has lost power in Italy, Denmark, Portugal and now the Netherlands. In France, the Socialists' candidate [Leon Jospin] failed to reach the final round of the presidential election."

Germany's Social-Democratic chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, faces a tough challenge from the farther-right Edmund Stoiber in September's elections. Jörg Haider's right-wing Freedom Party is gaining ground in Austria's ruling coalition. Racially extremist National Front movements are on the rise in both Britain and France. Said Claude Allègre, former education minister in the socialist Jospin government: "We are witnessing a Europe swinging back towards the right, and sometimes towards the extreme right. And France is no different. Why should it be? Pink Europe is finished."

*The New York Times* succinctly sums up the current situation: "From Spain to Scandinavia, European politics is drifting to the right. As the economy slows, political parties stressing law and order and stricter controls on immigration are gaining ground, and mainstream conservative politicians

are becoming more popular."

At the heart of the problem is the westward refugee movement from Eastern Europe. The iron curtain and Berlin Wall are no more. People pour into the nations of Western Europe demanding asylum amid a climate of high unemployment (on the Continent) and strained social and financial resources. Often the citizenry resents the sudden presence of these refugees, however compelling their individual cases may be.

Margaret Thatcher's observations are instructive in her new book, *Statecraft*. "During my lifetime most of the problems the world has faced have come, in one fashion or the other, from mainland Europe, and the solutions from outside it" (2002, p. 320).

From time to time since the era of the Roman Empire, the European continent has been host to damaging revolutionary movements that periodically repeat themselves, devastating the land with pain and death. The worry is that a European superstate may lead the next wave. Our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* shows where these trends fit in Bible prophecy. (Sources: *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor* [electronic edition], *The Economist*, *Statecraft*, *The Sunday Times* [London].)

### Outside powers to occupy Middle East?

Writing in the British *Independent* newspaper, diplomatic correspondent Robert Fisk commented on the continuing Mideast conflict, which has contributed to the division between the United States and the European Union.

Titled "There Is a Solution to This Filthy War—Foreign Occupation," Mr. Fisk's article calls for international action and predicts that "in time, we will close down the Middle East war. With Russian and EU and UN support, there will, eventually, be American and NATO troops in Jerusalem. There will be a western protection force in the West Bank and Gaza—and in Israel. The Israeli and Palestinian armies will have to return to barracks. Jerusalem will be an international city."



Bible prophecy shows that Jerusalem will be a focus of world conflict immediately before the return of Jesus Christ. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near . . . Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:20, 24, New Revised Standard Version). (Source: *The Independent* [London].)

### National malaise grips France

A *Sunday Times* feature article contained an element of surprise. It was the sort of news one is used to seeing in print about North America and Britain but rarely mentioned about France. It said in an on-the-spot report: "France has a sickness that pervades its politics and corrupts the bourgeoisie. Decadence now rules in a morally rudderless society."

The reporter, Matthew Campbell, observes: "Les Chandelles is the most exclusive *boite échangiste*, or wife-swapping club, in Paris. Such places have never been so well frequented. Talk around polite dinner tables about which are the best *échangiste* clubs to

Once pretty much the preserve of the elite, this sort of behavior has spread to all levels of French society. Novelist and university professor Michael Ermin echoes the general thought: "The country is in the grip of a hedonistic, licentious and frivolous mood. People are as confused in their intimate lives as they are in their politics." (This issue of *The Good News* contains a special series of articles showing the futility of adultery and promiscuity as a way of life—illicit practices that cause intensive suffering and seriously mar the marital happiness God intended for us.)

Not surprisingly, theft is on the increase as well. As one author put it, "The French crisis over law and order has already cost the prime minister [Leon Jospin] his political career."

### "France has a sickness that pervades its politics and corrupts the bourgeoisie. Decadence now rules in a morally rudderless society."

frequent is one gauge of how widespread the habit of collective romping has become." There are an estimated 50 such clubs in Paris and perhaps 200 throughout the rest of the country.

Jean-François Mattei, a professor at the Institute of Political Studies in Aix-en-Provence, recently stated: "There's been a retreat from political life in France in favour of personal pleasure. It's a decadent society dedicated to sex and pleasure. We are swimming in hedonism: nightclubs, wife-swapping, magazines for men, magazines for women. It's the pursuit of pleasure all around."

Causes are not hard to come by. "Sociologists and criminologists attribute much of the rise of crime in cities and rural areas to youths who have dropped out of the education system and are unemployed. Unlike Britain, where the age profile is more even, France has more unemployed young." Young people with too much leisure time on their hands sometimes get into trouble with the law. The way out of many of these social problems is addressed in our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*. (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Times Magazine* [both London].)



## Russia becomes NATO partner

Not many years ago it would have been unthinkable, but now it's happened: Russia has become a NATO partner.

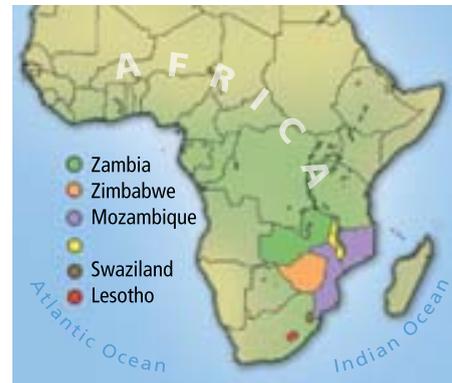
Russia will not have voting rights as a full partner, but a Russian representative will be present at NATO meetings, thereby all but eliminating the possibility of a conflict between NATO and its old enemy, formerly the linchpin of the communist Soviet Union. One Russian opposition member of the Duma, interviewed on the BBC World Service, interpreted this development as America losing interest in Europe.

After the NATO-Russia deal in Rome, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, stayed on for more discussions with EU leaders to promote closer ties between the two. The European Union remains Russia's biggest trading partner and largest investor.

Although seen as a triumph for the West, the new security arrangements come at a time of increasing tension between the United States and its Western European allies over the war on terror, Israel, trade issues and other conflicts. (Source: Associated Press.)

## Southern Africa: Hunger may affect millions

The following summary was included in a report from Maseru, Lesotho, to *The Independent on Sunday*: "The World Food Programme is warning that it may soon have to feed up to 8 million people in Southern Africa as famine stalks a region wracked by drought, floods, economic mismanagement and political instability." Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland are all experiencing a



cocktail of crises, both natural and man-made. This includes much of the geography of Southern Africa.

When fact-finding missions report their discoveries affecting some six countries, the figure of eight million may soon double or even triple. Some estimate that at least 20 million people may be at serious risk from famine, and this may be the worst food shortage in some 60 years.

Starving children scavenge for berries in drought-ridden and politically chaotic Zimbabwe. Convoys of food aid have already been hijacked by pro-Mugabe thugs and distributed exclusively to their political supporters. In Malawi the average life expectancy is about 37 years, with a literacy rate of 56 percent. It is estimated that "in Malawi alone, at least two million of its 11 million population will die."

Truly the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are already riding high in this area of Africa. However, U.S. officials are preparing a major response to cope with this huge food crisis. "What's unfolding in Southern Africa is very big," acknowledged one official from a U.S. agency for international humanitarian assistance. Thankfully, since God has blessed North America and the Western world with abundant food resources, these countries can help other nations in time of need. (Sources: *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Daily Mirror* [all London], Reuters, *USA Today*.)

## Africa: Four out of 10 HIV-positive

AIDS continues to claim a devastating toll in southern Africa. Botswana, the world's worst-hit country, has an HIV infection rate of 38.5 percent. In neighboring poverty-stricken Zambia, dependent on its copper mines for 90 percent of its income, mining companies "have to train four people for each skilled job in the knowledge that three will die." Other nations in southern Africa are similarly affected.

Why is this region of the world suffering more than others?

One reason is its migrant-labor system. Many of the region's peoples have homes in their ancestral homeland but spend most of the year living in hostels near their places of work, leaving their families behind. Almost all of these workers are men who frequent prostitutes or have girlfriends, two groups with high rates of HIV infection. In this region of the world, AIDS

is almost exclusively a heterosexual problem.

"A typical pattern is as follows. One of southern Mozambique's 40,000 migrants to the Rand (South Africa's mining belt) comes home on leave. He may have been infected by a prostitute (surveys suggest 80 percent of these are HIV-positive) or perhaps by a local girl in a nearby township with whom he has been having a longer-standing affair (60 percent infection rate). He probably knows about condoms; indeed, they are generally dished out free at the mine. But with his township girl he does not use one, nor with his wife. She then becomes infected. In due course a child is born who is probably infected at birth or, if not, through breast-feeding.

"The father is usually the first to die. Then, in Mozambique and Zambia, the father's brother will often step in to help look after the children. He will, by tradition, take the mother as a second wife. He will then be infected too. In due course, she will die"

Most poverty-stricken countries have no social-security system other than the extended family

system. "The social security system is the family, and this is now in ruins." In some villages all the people of reproductive age (15-45) are dead, leaving elderly grandparents to raise young children, with little or no support.

Although intensive educational programs warn people of the dangers from HIV, and condoms are readily available, little progress has been made in dealing with the problem. Ignorance and superstition add to the problem, with many placing their faith in traditional witch doctors or taking a fatalistic approach to the problem. Others believe that sex with a virgin is a cure, resulting in babies as young as 3 months being raped.

The Bible shows that the only solution is for sexual relations to be confined to a couple in a committed heterosexual marriage. The Seventh Commandment sums it up: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Any sexual relationship outside of marriage is a sin. Simple obedience to God's laws in this area would soon stop the spread of AIDS in southern Africa and everywhere else. (Source: *The Economist*.)

## Nuclear conflict would derail anti-terror war

Concerns are growing about the inevitability of a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. In the 55 years since independence from Britain, the two countries have fought each other on three occasions. Now that both have nuclear weapons, another conflict would have serious international repercussions. At the very least the coalition partners fighting the war against al-Qaeda in the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan would have to be withdrawn.

This appears to be the intent of the Islamic fundamentalist terrorists who have operated from Pakistan

in neighboring Indian-controlled Kashmir. Their aim is to stop Western moves against their terror network. They also seek the overthrow of Pakistan's military ruler, President Pervez Musharraf, who has sided with the United States against Islamic extremists.

The overthrow of Pakistan's government could also begin a modern-day version of the domino theory. Instead of one country after another falling to communism, a ripple affect could begin throughout the Islamic world, with the fall of governments to the forces of Islamic fundamentalism. The fall of Pakistan alone would give fundamentalists control of nuclear weapons, posing a grave threat to what remains of the peace and security of the world.

India has three quarters of a million troops massed

on the border with Pakistan, which has only one third of that number opposing Indian forces. With a population much smaller than India's, Pakistan seems likely to be the first to use a nuclear weapon. Estimates are that a limited nuclear exchange would immediately kill or injure 12 to 19 million people, with millions more dying within months from the aftereffects.

"Wars and rumors of wars" certainly abound at this time, but Jesus adds that Christians should not be alarmed (Matthew 24:6), "for this must take place, but the end is not yet" (NRSV). Our focus should be on being spiritually prepared for Christ's return. "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" (verse 44, NRSV). (Source: *The Telegraph* [London].)

# What Do You Know— And What Will You Do About It?

While America slept, the nation was caught unprepared for the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Some have questioned how much advance information the government had—and whether that could have prevented the attacks. But a larger question to consider is: What does it take for a people to awaken to the urgency of the times?

by Darris McNeely

It was inevitable that, in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, many would ask how such an atrocity could be planned and carried out without catching the attention of the CIA or the FBI, America's vaunted intelligence agencies.

CIA director George Tenet was having breakfast at a Washington hotel when he learned of the attack. Like everyone else, he was taken by surprise. In spite of the nearly 10 years of attacks on American interests here and abroad, including the 1992 bombing of the World Trade Center, the country was caught unawares by the audacity of men willing to commit suicide for their cause while taking thousands of innocent lives with them.

That questions would arise, either trying to pin the blame or make political capital out of the tragedy, is part of the wartime scenario. It happened after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attack on the Hawaiian military base that led to America's entry into World War II.

The May 27 issue of *Newsweek*, in an article titled "What Went Wrong?," compared the process of gathering and analyzing intelligence to "taking a metal detector to a city dump." The amount of information that comes in each day from around the world is staggering. In addition to the FBI's and the CIA's sophisticated operations, each branch of the armed services maintains separate intelligence-gathering operations. Unless the information is properly processed and analyzed, it is worthless. Analyzing it properly takes a combination of skill and intuition to connect the dots and develop a clear picture.

## An intelligence breakdown

It appears that a counterterrorism expert

in the FBI's Phoenix, Arizona, office made a connection last summer regarding the significant number of young Middle Eastern men taking courses in how to fly airplanes. The long memo describing this connection, and raising the possibility that Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network had infiltrated American flight schools, did not attract sufficient attention to ring alarm bells. It was transmitted to the Washington FBI headquarters, but was ignored at higher levels.

Mr. Tenet had issued warnings that Osama bin Laden was "the most immediate" threat. Sadly, those were also ignored. His warnings had been so frequent, and nothing had happened, that he was not taken seriously—like the proverbial boy who cried wolf too often.

The Stratfor Intelligence Service made an insightful analysis in a recent Internet posting. It observed that "the U.S. intelligence system is overwhelmingly geared toward the collection, rather than the analysis, of information. The result is inevitable: a huge amount of information is gathered, but it is never turned into intelligence."

Commenting on the FBI's failure to analyze the memo from the Phoenix field office, it concluded: "Some administrator in the FBI decided that the Phoenix report was not worth pursuing. The facts are not in on this, but it is highly likely that no one provided him with any guidance as to what was significant and what was not, and it is almost certain that he did not have an appropriate context for drawing judgments himself . . . Information collected but not analyzed is the same as information that never existed" (Stratfor, "Sept. 11: What Did Bush Know and When Did He Know It?," May 20).

Of course, such matters could be debated

for years. Yet *Newsweek* put the focus on the right question when it said: "At issue is not whom to blame for the past, but how to learn from it to safeguard the future."

## Warnings to wake up

Again we ask: How much warning does it take for a people to awaken to the urgency of the times? Considering the years of attacks by terrorists on American interests abroad, the question is vitally important amid the many recent predictions from officials that another major terrorist attack is simply a matter of time.

Although the American government has reacted with increased security measures at airports, nuclear plants and major sporting events, it is left to the individual to consider the right response to the threat of future events. From God's perspective the individual has the weighty responsibility to heed a warning and react.

Jesus Christ used two examples of His day to illustrate this important point. Notice the strong message of warning in Luke 13:1-5. The passage begins, "There were present at that season some who told Him [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." Some worshipers at the temple were singled out by the Roman governor and killed for no apparent reason.

Christ's reaction to the event was to make a sobering point: "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but *unless you repent* you will all likewise perish" (emphasis added throughout).

It was fruitless to speculate about whether some were worse sinners than others. He added another well-known tragedy of that time and drew the same lesson.

“Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but *unless you repent* you will all likewise perish.”

He warned that, unless they repented, they would also be subject to a sudden and violent end—“you will all *likewise* perish.” Many hear of tragedies and go on to live out a normal life and die a normal death.



But many who heard Christ’s words suffered a horrible fate at the hands of the Roman legions who came to subdue the Jewish nation several decades later. Those who heeded Christ’s warning were able to escape the worst of the devastation of Jerusalem.

Christ could foresee the times the world was moving into following its rejection of Him and His message. Today we are again living in those “perilous times” the apostle Paul spoke of in 2 Timothy 3. Christ’s words are once again a grave warning for our generation.

Jesus expected all who heard Him to look soberly at such tragedies and make changes in their lives. Unless we heed the warning and repent, He said, we are also subject to meeting the same kind of pointless and futile end.

However, if we are jolted to the stark reality of godly repentance, come to understand the ultimate goal of life and move toward that purpose with unswerving determination, then we will have achieved the highest realm of understanding in life.

### Discerning the times

Christ spoke these words on His final

journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-53). He was moving toward the final fulfillment of the purpose of His life in the flesh: to die for the sins of every member of the human race. His face was “set” for the journey, and His teaching reflected a no-nonsense approach to the business at hand.

Earlier He had admonished: “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching” (Luke 12:35-37).

Watching and discerning the times make up but one part of the equation. We must then *act* on the knowledge we gain and move with understanding to avoid a time of trouble or the consequences of wrong decisions.

Christ scolded those who seemed to understand they were living in troubled times but could not or *would* not take the right action to avoid trouble. “Then He also said to the multitudes, ‘Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, “A shower is coming”; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, “There will be hot weather”; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you *do not discern this time?*’” (verses 54-56).

God is merciful in that He provides a warning for people to change and escape from impending trouble. He is also perfectly patient, giving us time to let the message sink in and move us to change. God is willing to wait many seasons before we wake up and see the need to do something about our lives. But there will ultimately be a time of judgment, both on the world and on the individual.

Christ added a parable to make this point: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’”

“But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

God’s words of warning act like a two-edged sword, opening our minds to

understand the real issues of life. These are laid bare—leaving us with a choice to repent and live righteously before our Creator or to continue stumbling blindly forward toward an abyss.

### The message of Ezekiel

The Bible shows that God’s pattern has been to send a message of warning before a time of judgment. He is patient and merciful in His desire and effort to save humanity from suffering the consequences of sin. Ezekiel’s picture of a watchman on the walls of Israel urging his countrymen to see the sword coming upon the land is a powerful scene from Israel’s history.

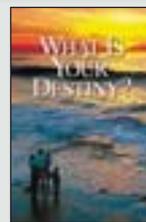
Ezekiel 33 clearly shows the dual responsibility of the watchman and those he is warning—the citizens of the nation. “When he [the watchman] sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his [the citizen’s] blood shall be on his own head” (verses 3-4). However, if the watchman fails to do his job, then he will bear a severe judgment for failing in his duty (verse 6).

God makes clear the individual’s responsibility to repent, to act on the knowledge of coming trouble. God shows that judgment and trial follows in the wake of sin and iniquity. This is a hard concept for the modern mind to grasp. We have been conditioned to ignore the true cause of our world’s problems, which is the violation of the fundamental relationship with our Creator. Until that link is realized, we are destined to suffer tragic consequences greater than any in the past.

*Continued on page 27*

### Recommended Reading

Be sure to request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* to better understand the transforming power and future available to you. To better grasp the significance of world trends, particularly those affecting the United States and the Western world, request your free copies of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.



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[www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)

# America's Child Sacrifice

Child sacrifice is horrifying to even contemplate. Yet it remains with us, practiced millions of times every year.

by Melvin Rhodes

**A**lthough almost 14 years have passed, the picture remains a vivid memory in my mind.

A policeman stands outside a courtroom holding in his left hand the head of a 6-year-old boy, decapitated in a ritualistic child sacrifice.

The gruesome murder took place in West Africa. The perpetrators of this heinous act, including at least one close relative of the boy, were caught, tried and executed within a few weeks. But the reality of child sacrifice continues to this day.

Child sacrifice—to most people in Western nations—conjures up vague memories of school classes on ancient history. Of course we all know it took place once upon a time, but surely not now, not in our civilized, contemporary world.

In biblical times, yes, children were murdered in this way—and the God of the Bible strongly condemned the practice. In 2 Kings 3:26-27 we read that, “when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, . . . he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall . . .”

In Jeremiah 7:30-31 we read of God's condemnation of child sacrifice: “‘For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,’ says the LORD. ‘. . . They have built the high places . . . to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.’”

It's not a pleasant subject to think about. But the reality is that child sacrifice is still around—and far more common than you think.

## Child sacrifice continues

Children can, of course, be sacrificed in many ways. Another West African nation, Sierra Leone, was recently wracked by a vicious civil war in which tens of thousands of the soldiers were children, teens and pre-teens. One of the methods soldiers used to intimidate the opposing side was to cut off their limbs. The result is thousands of children with missing hands, arms and legs.

West Africa is not the only part of the world that presses children into warfare.

Palestinian terrorists train young men and women, some of them teenagers, to

be suicide bombers, then send them into Israel to blow up Jewish children. Islamic-fundamentalist terrorists have no qualms about murdering children. To them, their goal justifies the means.

Two months after the decapitation mentioned above, Libyan terrorists blew up a Pan Am airliner over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, killing 270 people, including several children. A picture in one of the newsmagazines showed a young girl who had died on the plane. Someone who had met her at the airport before the fatal flight left flowers for her, accompanied by the simple inscription: “Little girl, you didn't deserve this.”

At the time of that bombing, my wife and I were living in West Africa in a country that was friendly with Libya. My wife had returned home to Detroit on Pan Am via London the same day as the Lockerbie atrocity, the downed plane also en route to Detroit via New York from England's capital city. Hers was an earlier direct flight from the United Kingdom. Friends had been calling to see if she had been a passenger on the fatal flight. I'm grateful to say she wasn't, but she could just as easily have chosen that flight as the other one.

I remember expressing my horror at this appalling terrorist act, voicing my contempt for the inhumanity of anyone who could so easily blow up hundreds of blameless people, including innocent children.

But one person's response shocked me—and reverberates to this day: “You Americans make such a fuss about the loss of a few children killed by terrorists. Yet you murder millions of your own children every year.”

He was talking about America's child sacrifice: *abortion*.

## Children not valued

Of course, abortion is not just America's plague. Every Western nation allows abortion. The former communist countries of Eastern Europe encouraged it to such an extent that women in the Soviet Union were reported to have had around seven abortions for every child that survived to birth.

Russia paid a heavy price for that devastating policy. Eventually the Russian population dropped so low that the Russians

themselves could not maintain control over other areas of the Soviet Union that began to outnumber them.

Something similar is happening in the West, where the birthrate is so low that millions of people from other nations have to be imported each year to keep Western economies from going under, and a growing elderly population must be financially supported by proportionately fewer and fewer younger workers.

In spite of the occasional barbaric child sacrifice and gruesome wars involving child soldiers, peoples in most poorer countries generally value their children far more than many in the West. One reason for this is economic. In countries with no effective social-security programs, children are security for old age—they will provide for their parents when the parents are too old to take care of themselves. That's the way it was in Western countries until fairly recently.

Additionally, in poorer countries infant-mortality rates are higher than in the West. This means couples must have many children to ensure that at least some make it to adulthood. Also, religious values and tradition often prohibit the use of birth control, while family pressures ensure most women give birth frequently. The extended family helps in bringing up children, who are treasured as members of the wider family unit. All these factors mean that poorer countries' birthrates are often five or more times higher than those of wealthier nations.

The discrepancy between these birthrates has led to one of the greatest migrations in history—a massive movement of peoples from the poor nations of the world to the rich Western nations, a movement that some warn could result in the death of the West. If so, abortion will be a major contributor to the decline and fall of Western civilization. Since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, authorities estimate that 42 million children have been aborted in America alone.

Consider this: After the events of Sept. 11, many have warned of a growing conflict between Islamic fundamentalism—appealing increasingly to young people in poor countries with high birthrates—and the irreligious West, with its falling numbers.

If an all-out military conflict were to happen, America alone would be short more than 15 million men—all those of military age aborted in the last three decades.

### A matter of convenience

Part of the problem in the West is that children generally are no longer valued as they once were. One reason is that governments have taken over the role families used to play. Now that social-security systems have usurped the traditional family role in taking care of the elderly, there seems no need for parents to have children

for the phone number of the closest abortion clinic. They don't want needy kids disrupting their lifestyles.

Ironically, falling birthrates in the wealthier countries mean that there won't be enough young workers to pay the social-security bill a few decades from now. The proposed solution in many countries is simply to import more foreign workers. But will people of different cultures be content to pay taxes to pamper rich white people in their old age? And could the resultant cultural mix in high-density European countries lead to further racial and religious

alter public attitudes until abortion became acceptable to most people. Now abortion is a nonissue in most European countries.

Why the change? Sixties liberals thought abortion would reduce the numbers of unwanted pregnancies. Ironically, more children are born out of wedlock today than before abortion laws were gutted—and 30 percent of all pregnancies already end in a visit to the abortion clinic.

Abortion is now the most common surgical procedure in Western nations. Along with the birth-control pill, first used in 1960, the legalization of abortion radically transformed the morals of Western youths, who could now indulge in sex with little thought to the consequences.

Interestingly, the Bible says that children are a blessing from God—who, as the Creator of men and women, set the reproductive process in motion at creation. Yet some professing Christians describe themselves as “pro-choice” and limit the numbers of their children through abortion.

When establishing the Israelites as a nation, God also gave His chosen people a choice. They could obey Him and reap unparalleled rewards or blessings, or they could reject Him and His laws and reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7) in the form of inevitable negative consequences the Bible calls curses. These blessings and curses can be found in Deuteronomy 28.

One of the promised blessings for obedience was many children. “Blessed shall be the fruit of your body . . .” (verse 4). One of the prophesied consequences of disobedience was the reverse: “Cursed shall be the fruit of your body . . .” (verse 18).

A further warning follows in verse 62: “You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars in heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.” (Of course, this does *not* mean that married couples who have no children or few children are under a special curse from God. Many Christian couples, though having God's favor, are unable to have children.)

It's not just that children are a blessing

*Continued on page 21*



to take care of them in later years.

Compounding the problem, the high taxes that are required to pay for the old-age pensions and medical care of elderly people living longer mean that most mothers find themselves working full time, driving the birthrate down even further and encouraging more people to opt for the convenience of abortion.

And let's be honest. *Convenience* is what we're talking about, isn't it? Admit it. Children are an inconvenience, aren't they? They require so much time, and time is short, especially with all the recreational diversions and electronic gadgets available to entertain us, all of which cost money, which means we have to work more hours, which means that children are even more inconvenient. No wonder so many reach

conflict, already a problem for many?

Perhaps the West has got it wrong. Maybe there needs to be a cultural rethinking here.

### Children are a blessing

There was a time when our ancestors considered children a blessing. In Victorian times, on both sides of the Atlantic, families had many children. As a result, Britain and America expanded and prospered. Today the descendants of 19th-century Britons and Americans are in numerical decline.

Forty years ago, at a time when more citizens were more biblically aware than they are today, most people in Western nations opposed abortion, at that time a crime. There was no national clamor in the Western democracies for a change in the law, but a steady shift in laws on abortion helped

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# America's Values War

The war on terrorism, uncertainty in the economy, worries over unemployment. Every day it's more bad news. In recent months people have begun to reconsider some of the values they thought archaic not that long ago—values like courage and personal sacrifice for the good of others.

by Gary Petty

**T**he political ideology and culture wars of the last few decades have produced a wasteland of relativism. The result is a culture that promotes the notion that all ideas are equal. Although many adults have become polarized over issues like abortion, homosexuality and political philosophies, many young people have learned to see compromise and tolerance as the only solution to problems. These young adults, raised in a climate of multiculturalism, have become known as the ambiguous Generation X.

A change in the attitudes of Americans of all ages has come about since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Patriotism, an attitude that was rare among many before the war on terrorism began, is infectious throughout the country. The New York City firefighters and police who gave their lives to save others on that fateful morning have replaced the greed-driven, glitter stardom of athletes as children's heroes.

People are talking again about the values of courage, personal sacrifice and teamwork. Many are agreeing that the United States has suffered a values crisis over recent decades.

Are Americans serious about reevaluating the questionable values that still rest as the pillars of much of the conventional wisdom in their country? Do they have the courage to question and change these values?

Here are six concepts we must reevaluate if the United States is to renew its spirit:

## • The worship of nature while devaluing human life

Conserving and taking care of the environ-

ment is an important concept for any responsible person. But environmental concerns have often gone beyond renewing resources and not scarring the land. For many children raised in postmodern secularism, Mother Nature has replaced God and Jesus Christ as the center of spirituality.

The dichotomy is widest in discussions about abortion. The fertilized egg of an endangered species of bird can warrant federal-government protection as precious life, but the fertilized egg of a human being is a disposable mass of tissue.

It's common for news commentators and politicians to picture terrorists who use their bodies as human bombs as people who don't value life. Yet Americans live in a society in which the average child has seen thousands of violent acts on television, where tens of thousands of people are murdered every year and lawmakers debate euthanasia.

The only way to understand the value of human life is to return to the Creator of life as revealed in the pages of the Bible. We have to pay more than lip service to Christianity's basic tenets like "Do unto others as you want them to do unto you" or "Love your neighbor as yourself" to see every human being as a potential child of God.

## • Promotion of "family values" while destroying traditional marriage

The nuclear family, in which mother and father marry for life and are committed to making the marriage work, is the biblical model. The family is devalued by the concepts of legal same-sex unions, no-fault

divorce and sexual freedom outside of marriage. Is the United States, a nation in which many profess to uphold the Christian Bible, willing to support biblical standards on marriage and sexuality?

## • Purposeless materialism at the expense of personal character

America is a blessed country with wealth beyond the comprehension of most people living in Africa, Asia or South America. Wealth isn't evil, but, when material things become more important than God, honesty, family, friendships and character, our lives become nothing more than the sum of the things we own.

Jesus spoke of a man with this approach to life in Luke 12:17-21 when He said:

"The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'"

"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Jesus doesn't mean that spiritual malaise can be cured by simply giving more money to a charity. Christianity isn't just about a set of beliefs, belonging to a church or doing good deeds. It is a way of thinking, a way

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of responding to God, a way of dealing with others, a way of putting material things in proper perspective, a way of life.

### • The promotion of individual rights without promoting a sense of duty toward others

When individuals are engrossed in enforcing their personal rights in every situation, they find it difficult to develop a concept of duty toward others—duty based on the belief that we should show respect and courtesy, duty as the concept that there are times we must sacrifice our self-interest in the interests of other people.

For a nation to have justice, it must have a set of fair laws that are enforced evenly for

religion, we want God's help and comfort in time of crisis, but we don't want anyone interfering with our personal lives. When we hide behind a facade of occasionally attending church services while denying God's right to govern our lives, we treat the Creator of the universe like a genie in a bottle instead of worshiping and submitting to Him as our Father and Ruler.

### • The promotion of good deeds without morality

The apostle Paul makes a startling statement in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Before we read these verses we need to understand that the word *love* is here translated from the Greek word *agape*, which Paul uses in this

## We want God's help and comfort in time of crisis, but we don't want anyone interfering with our personal lives.

all. Justice can't be just for the rich or poor but must include the rich, poor and minorities. Although the American judicial system is better than most, at times it experiences glaring miscarriages of justice. When people see failure of justice, it tends to reinforce their belief that they had better get theirs while they can. Concern for neighbor disappears as everyone tries to climb the ladder of success at the expense of others. Justice is replaced with revenge and greed.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah proclaimed a message from the Creator that rings out to us today. Notice what God says in Isaiah 1:16-20: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together . . . Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword . . ."

God wants to forgive us of our sins. He also wants us to cease doing evil, learn to do good and seek justice. The only way any nation can have real justice is to return to the laws of God—starting with the Ten Commandments. The only way we can protect everyone's individual rights is to be concerned for the welfare of others instead of being consumed with selfishness.

### • The promotion of religion without recognition of God's sovereignty

This is the most dangerous difficulty facing Christianity today. We want feel-good

context to encompass the character of God.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."

The point is that, if we work in the local soup kitchen for the poor but our lives are filled with immorality, greed, envy and hatred, then our good deeds are largely empty. We can practice good deeds to *feel* religious while remaining unchanged in personal character. God demands good deeds from His children, but actions must come *from our hearts*—not because we use them to salve our consciences or as a badge of spirituality.

### A clarion call

Christians must make a stand in the values war. Jesus will return to establish God's Kingdom on earth. We have no time to expend our energies in the insignificant, valueless details that consume our lives. Instead, we must return to the values of the God of the Bible.

There is a big difference between grasping your future and simply going on the way you have been. The choice is up to you. **GN**

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# Abortion

Continued from page 19

from God. Every child in the womb has the potential of eternal life in God's Kingdom. The Scriptures demonstrate clearly that fetuses are human beings—and that ripping one apart in the womb in an abortion is, therefore, murder. Note the following scriptures:

God said to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5, New International Version).

In reflecting on how he should treat his servants, Job concluded: "Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?" (Job 31:15, NIV).

### Precious lives in the womb

In the New Testament we see that Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was pregnant with John the Baptist at the time Mary was carrying Jesus. "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41, NIV). In verse 44 she tells Mary: "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." The baby Elizabeth was carrying was clearly a separate human being at this point, even though still in her womb.

In considering Mary, we need to remember that she "was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18). It is doubtful anybody at the time believed this to be the true source of her conception. To family, friends and neighbors—even to Joseph himself for a while—she was simply an unmarried expectant mother. Today many would no doubt encourage her to have an abortion.

We should remember that God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26). Every human being has the potential for eternal life. God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" that they may receive eternal life (2 Peter 3:9). Even children yet unborn deserve this opportunity.

Is God pro-choice? As we have already seen, God does give us a choice. But He tells us *what* to choose. The choice He wants us to make is best summed up in Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

Choose life. That is God's command! Abortion—today's child sacrifice—should never be an option we'd consider. **GN**

# What's So Special About Families?

Some suggest a family should be redefined as any group of people living together in the same household, irrespective of blood connection or sexual orientation. But is such definition warranted? Before we throw away our traditional view, maybe we should consider what we would lose in the process.

by David Treybig

**W**ithout a doubt you've heard that families today come in all shapes, sizes and configurations. Because divorce is so common, it's no longer unusual for children to be raised in households apart from their biological parents and with siblings who are their half brothers or half sisters or with teens or other children who have no biological relation to them at all.

Likewise, it's no longer unusual for people to have several marital partners during their lifetimes. Some believe such arrangements are simply the product of enlightened individuals seeking happiness. Many justify this casual attitude toward divorce, saying: "It's better for the kids to see us happy rather than fighting. The kids are strong and resilient. They'll get over the divorce and eventually have a new family." But rarely do they realize the full cost of divorce.

They too often assume that families are only *temporary relationships* until happiness ends or something better comes along. This, of course, is a monumental change from previous generations, which generally viewed families as fixed and stable for life.

It used to be commonly understood that, while new inventions would undoubtedly come along and change our lives, we could count on our families to remain stable. We would always have each other—for better or worse. But now the idea of *disposable* family relationships—lasting only as long as everyone in the relationship is happy—threatens to overwhelm the former perspective.

Humanly speaking, changing the definition of *family* may look like a logical decision to match the realities of our modern world. But this reasoning overlooks the teaching of the One who *created* families. God Himself is the originator of families, and His intent was that they remain the continuing source of happiness and support for married adults and their offspring throughout their lives.

Let's see how He did this and what He has in mind for families. Let's see what He says about brothers and sisters getting along.

## God gives Adam a family

At humanity's earliest beginning, there was

only one human being, Adam. As a single male, living alone, with no other human being around to share his life, he was not in what His Creator considered a good environment for him (Genesis 2:18). In resolving this problem, God gave Adam a family that included one wife, Eve, and, later, sons and daughters (Genesis 5:4).

God's intent for the children of Adam and Eve was that, as they grew up, they would

providing immediate happiness.

## What marriage teaches us

In writing to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul told husbands and wives to love each other and treat each other respectfully—just as Christ treats the Church. In concluding his discussion on marriage, Paul then made an astonishing statement: "This is a great mystery, but [in speaking of marriage here] I speak



**God is calling us to be part of His family for eternity. And, as any good parent, God expects us to get along with our spiritual brothers and sisters.**

marry and form new families. As God said: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). God wants people who marry to *stay* married. He hates to see divorce—for a husband or wife to leave and divide the family (Malachi 2:16). Further, God, in the Seventh Commandment, forbids adultery (Exodus 20:14), an important safeguard for protecting family relationships.

From the instructions He gave, it is clear that God wanted marriages—and the families created by them—to last. Surprisingly, however, God's purpose in demanding stable families is for *far more* than just

concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Previously, in this same letter, Paul spoke of God the Father having a "family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:15).

Paul explained that the human family is similar to our spiritual relationship with Christ. In this analogy, Jesus is the Husband, the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23), and the Church is the wife, the Bride (Revelation 21:9). Jesus died to make it possible for us to become part of God's family (John 1:12; Romans 8:14, 19). This has been God's purpose and plan from the beginning.

Just as God intended marriage to be a relationship of continuity and trust, so should our

relationship with Christ be. In His relationship with the Church, Jesus will never abandon the Bride He deeply loves or betray that relationship (Hebrews 13:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). His Bride, the Church, is to be composed of individuals who are likewise faithful (Revelation 2:10; 17:14). God's eternal spiritual family will not be a temporary, disposable relationship.

A human marriage built on the same principle of trust gives its participants a small taste of this relationship with Christ. Family, as designed by God with inherent trust and happiness, was planned to give us a foretaste of an even greater relationship with God in His future kingdom.

### Foretaste of our spiritual family

Given that families serve as workshops for insight into spiritual principles, how can we fulfill God's desires for us in our families? For starters, we can obey the Fifth Commandment, which tells us to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12). In learning to honor our physical parents, we indirectly learn to honor our spiritual Father.

If we are blessed with parents who love each other and are faithfully committed to each other, we see firsthand how to build and sustain mutual respect and love for others. Such families are safe harbors in a dangerous world of false values, deception and misinformation. The coming Kingdom of God, in the simplest of terms, is a large, happy family that will last forever. (For more articles on how parents and teens can have better relationships, check out the July-September 2002 issue of *Youth United* at [www.youthmagazine.org](http://www.youthmagazine.org). This E-magazine is especially for young people, and this issue focuses on family relationships.)

Though most young people have disagreements and fights with their siblings as they grow up, having to learn to get along with brothers and sisters is good experience for later in life. For all the supposed hassle of brothers and sisters, relationships between

siblings often turn out to be the most enduring. After all, family is family, and family members remain family. We may disagree with each other at times, but we remain members of the same family.

God is calling us to be part of His family too, not just for the rest of this physical life but for all *eternity*. And, as any good parent, God expects us to get along with our spiritual brothers and sisters.

I was the oldest child in my family, with a younger brother and sister. Although I didn't always treat them as respectfully as I should have, my life today is richer and more complete because of them. They remain among my closest friends.

### Family generations

Time has a way of altering our perspectives. Now that my own children are grown, I have a deeper appreciation for, and agreement with, my parents' emphasis on everyone getting along and showing respect for all members of the family. I guess I'm just following in their footsteps.

Through the years my family and my wife's family have been sources of stability, love and encouragement to us. I appreciate long-lasting family relationships because they reassure me that God offers us the same kind of relationship.

So what about the new idea that families can be just any combination of adults and children? God says the *ideal* family unit is a man with his wife and children committed to an enduring relationship (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4). This is the model to strive for.

Having been blessed with the great joys of a traditional family as our Creator intended, I have no desire to see the definition of the family, as He created it, corrupted. When I compare my experience to that of the many dysfunctional families and unhappy relationships we see all around us, it's obvious that God's way, as shown in the Bible, is by far the best.

But what if your parents have divorced and remarried and you find yourself in a blended family with a stepparent and new brothers or sisters? Are you and your family doomed to failure? Of course not! God makes provision for us to learn from our mistakes and the mistakes of others and to have the opportunity to do things better the next time.

Your best course of action is to do the same thing any person should do—make every effort to make your new family work. Honor your parents as God tells you to do, respect your brothers and sisters—old and new—and remember your Creator. If we follow this approach, we can eventually be part of the greatest family of all, the family of God. **GN**



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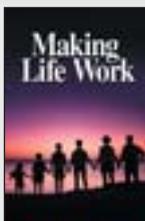
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# God's Test Commandment

God described one of His commandments as a “test” command. Which command is that? What was He testing? How has mankind fared with that test—and what about you?

by Scott Ashley

**D**oes it matter whether we obey the Ten Commandments? Most Christians would certainly say yes. But what about the Fourth Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”? (Exodus 20:8). Does God really expect us to set aside one day of the week on which we are not to work? (verses 9-10). Is it realistic in today’s world to take a whole day off each week? Is God really a stickler on this particular commandment, as He seems to be on the other nine?

If we are to keep the Sabbath day holy, we first have to know what day that is. Like most people, I commonly assumed the Sabbath was Sunday, since that was the day on which my friends and relatives went to church rather than to work. But then I found out that some people observed Saturday as the Sabbath. Which is the true biblical Sabbath day? And does it really matter?

Look around you. It’s obvious that most people don’t think too highly of the Fourth Commandment. Saturday and Sunday alike, people fill amusement parks, movie theaters, shopping malls and sports stadiums, with more than a few also using that time to mow the lawn, wash the cars or catch up on other chores if they’re not at their regular job that day.

Clearly the Sabbath seems to be the most ignored of the Ten Commandments. The one that God said to *remember* is easily the one most people *forget*.

## Examining the Fourth Commandment

Let’s take a closer look at the Fourth Com-

mandment to better understand what it says: “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: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 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).

Let’s notice several important points in these verses:

• **“Remember the Sabbath day . . .”** The Sabbath is something to *remember*. Many assume this is the first time God expected anyone to observe the Sabbath day. But the fact that He commanded the Sabbath to be *remembered* should help us to realize that it already existed before the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

Indeed, He had revealed it to the Israelites earlier, in Exodus 16. But its origins go much further back, as we will see. It is in that regard that the Sabbath was to be observed as a *remembrance*—a memorial of something of great importance.

• **“... To keep it holy.”** The Sabbath is to be *kept holy*. *Holy* means set apart for *God’s* use and purpose rather than our own.

• **“... The seventh day is the Sabbath . . .”** The Sabbath day is the *seventh* day of the week (observed Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, as the Bible counts time; compare Leviticus 23:32). Most people go to

church on Sunday—which is the *first* day of the week, as shown by most calendars and almost any encyclopedia. (To learn when, why and how this was changed, see “From Sabbath to Sunday,” page 26).

• **“... Of the LORD your God.”** The Sabbath belongs to *God*, not to the Jewish people, as many people assume.

• **“In it you shall do no work . . .”** One aspect of keeping the Sabbath holy is to do no regular work on that day.

• **“... You, nor your son, nor your daughter . . .”** The Sabbath is to be kept by all members of the household, as well as employees and guests. Even animals were given the day to rest.

• **“... 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.”** Here is what the Sabbath memorializes. It is linked to God’s creative acts in Genesis 1, thus pointing to Him as the true God, the Creator, as distinct from the false gods of human invention.

After creating Adam and Eve on the sixth day, God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 1:27-2:3). He instituted the Sabbath at that time in the presence of the first two human beings—long before there was a nation of Israel or a people known as the Jews. And, in resting on that first Sabbath, God set us an example to emulate.

• **“Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”** Again we see that *God* established the Sabbath day and hallowed it. *Hallow* means to *make holy*. By definition, *God alone* can make things holy,

## The Sabbath in the Scriptures

**M**ost people have given little thought to what God says about the Sabbath in His Word. Here are some highlights:

• The Sabbath is mentioned 117 times in the Bible (King James Version)—61 in the Old Testament and 56 in the new. None of these mentions refers to Sunday, the first day of the week, but all to the seventh day of the week (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset).

• The Sabbath is mentioned 45 times in the four Gospels—far more than the number of times it is mentioned in the five books of Moses.

• The Sabbath was made *for man*, not for any particular group, race or nationality (Mark 2:27).

• Jesus Christ’s custom was to keep the Sabbath (Luke 4:16).

• Jesus expected His followers would be keeping the Sabbath at the time of the end (Matthew 24:20).

• Several decades after Christ’s death, Luke described the Sabbath as a

commandment (Luke 23:56).

• The apostle Paul taught both Jews and gentiles on the Sabbath, never hinting that they didn’t need to observe it (Acts 13:42-44; 17:1-4).

• After Christ establishes His Kingdom on earth, “from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship” before Him (Isaiah 66:23).

• Out of 117 times the Sabbath is mentioned in the Scriptures, not a single one so much as hints that the Sabbath has been changed to another day or abolished.

• The Bible nowhere gives man authority to change what God has commanded and made holy (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).

• Nowhere in the Bible is there a commandment to remember or observe Sunday as the Sabbath.

• God wants the Sabbath to be a delight to mankind (Isaiah 58:13-14). Those who condemn it or criticize its observance obviously have a view that differs from God’s.

dedicating them for His use. Man cannot make anything holy, nor can he make *unholy* anything God has made holy—an important consideration when we examine whether we should still observe the Sabbath and, if so, on which day.

### “I will test them . . .”

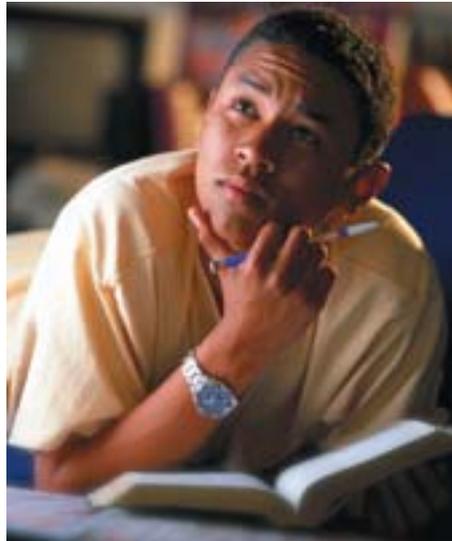
As touched on already, a telling event is recorded in Exodus 16, several weeks *before* God personally spoke the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The Israelites began to complain about the lack of food some time into their desert journey after leaving Egypt. Notice God’s words to Moses when He announced that He would provide manna to sustain them during their journey:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, *that I may test them*, whether they *will walk in My law* or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.’” (verses 4-5, emphasis added throughout).

Here we see several other points that relate to the Sabbath. First, we see that God will *test* them. On what? “*Whether they will walk in My law or not.*” The fact that God here

gather up more manna than they could use in one day, “it bred worms and stank” (verse 20). Only on the days when they were to gather up enough to carry them through the Sabbath did the manna remain fresh.

Was it important that they observe the Sabbath on the correct day? Absolutely, because to not do so would mean they would have suffered from real hunger. God reinforced the importance of the Sabbath, and of keeping it on the seventh day, through mira-



The Sabbath is **God’s day**, not yours or mine. It is a time He wants to meet with you, a time for reading His Word, for fellowship with other believers, for your family—but, most of all, a time for **God’s presence with you.**

announced that He would test whether the Israelites would obey His laws—several weeks before He inscribed the Ten Commandments in stone at Mount Sinai—tells us that His divine laws *already existed* (compare verse 28; Genesis 26:5). He would soon reveal them anew at Mount Sinai.

Continuing the story in verses 15-30, we see that God provided manna on every day of the week but one. On the sixth day of the week, what we would today call Friday, each household was to gather up twice as much as on the other days, because no manna would be provided on the Sabbath and no one was to violate the Sabbath by working to gather it. The Sabbath would not be simply any day they chose. It was a *specific day* of the week.

Over a 40-year span God performed recurring miracles to reinforce which day was the Sabbath. Every week for 40 years (verse 35)—more than 2,000 times in all—God provided manna on every day of the week but one. Every time the Israelites tried to

cles repeated literally thousands of times throughout the 40 years in the wilderness.

### A test of faith

Through providing manna on six days of the week but not the seventh, God was testing His people. But *how* was He testing them? As noted in verse 4, God was learning “whether they will walk in My law or not.” Would they choose *God’s way*, or *their own way*? Some immediately failed the test (verses 27-29).

God wanted to see whether the Israelites would really *believe* Him. Did they accept that He really meant what He said? Would they take Him at His word? Would they learn to trust Him to provide for their needs and sustain them?

Would they believe God was really acting in their best interests through the laws He revealed to them? Time and time again God stated that His laws would bring blessings and benefits if obeyed. For example, immediately after giving them the Ten Command-

ments, God exclaimed: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, *that it might be well with them and with their children forever!*” (Deuteronomy 5:29; compare 4:5-8; 7:12-15; 28:1-14).

God wanted the Israelites to have a heart of obedience, to recognize that His laws are an expression of His holy, righteous, loving character (1 John 4:8, 16). He wanted them to recognize that His laws reveal a way of life based on love (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14; 2 John 6) and that by living that law they would develop character like His. God also told the Israelites that the Sabbath would be “a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (Exodus 31:13). It would be a sign that they were God’s people.

### Failing the test

Regrettably, the Israelites failed the test. Looking back on Israel’s history centuries later, God lamented: “I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, ‘which, if a man does, he shall live by them.’ Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

“Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, ‘which, if a man does, he shall live by them’; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them” (Ezekiel 20:10-13).

That first generation that left Egypt died out in the wilderness. God, however, remained faithful. Regardless of their failings, He brought those Israelites’ descendants into the Promised Land and established them as a nation.

Yet they ultimately were just as faithless. By Ezekiel’s time centuries later God was punishing them, too, through a devastating national defeat and captivity. Why? “Because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols” (verse 16).

Is the Sabbath important to God? He specifically stated that one of the Israelites’ most flagrant sins that led to their national downfall and captivity was profaning the Sabbath (Ezekiel 22:26; Jeremiah 17:21-22, 27).

### Misunderstood purpose of the Sabbath

The Israelites never properly understood

the purpose of the Sabbath. They failed to understand that God earnestly desires a *sincere, loving relationship with mankind*.

In Isaiah 59 God tells us that our sins have separated us from Him (verse 2). But, in this discussion, He also tells us how to be reconciled to Him—through humility and calling on Him (Isaiah 58:1-12). But then He reveals another aspect of building that kind of right relationship between God and man:

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, *then you will find your joy in the LORD . . .*” (verses 13-14, New International Version).

Why is the Sabbath important to God? Because God wants us to have a *proper, loving relationship with Him*. To do that we must *spend time with Him*. He wants us to surrender one of our most precious possessions—our *time*—so He can teach us through His Word, the Bible, and through the ministry of His Church. He wants the Sabbath to be a time and a way to “find your joy in the LORD.”

### A divine appointment

Notice another aspect of what God says about the weekly Sabbath day and His other

annual festivals: “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are *my* appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies’” (Leviticus 23:2, NIV). God plainly says these are *His* feasts, *His* “sacred assemblies.”

The Hebrew word *moed*, the plural form here translated “appointed feasts,” means “appointed time” or “meeting” (Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Biblical*

## Why is the Sabbath important to God? Because God wants us to *have a proper, loving relationship with Him*. To do that we must **spend time with Him**.

*Words*, 1985, “Feast/Festival”). The word *assemblies* is translated from the plural form of *miqra*, denoting a summoned gathering. In other words, God says His Sabbath is a *divine appointment* that He commands His people to keep through their gathering before Him to build their relationship with Him and other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Notice that *He* is the one who sets the appointment, *not us*. He is the one who determines the time—His weekly Sabbath and annual festivals.

That raises an interesting question: If we don’t come before Him at the time He commands, either by not coming at all or coming on a different day, are we really keeping

an appointment with Him?

If someone makes arrangements to meet with you next Wednesday but decides to show up on Thursday instead, would you think he had kept the appointment? Of course not. So why should we think God would find it acceptable if we decide to assemble on a day different from the one He commands?

The Sabbath is *God’s day*, not yours or mine. It is a time He wants to meet with you,

a time for reading His Word, for prayer, for fellowship with other believers, for your family—but, most of all, a time for *God’s presence with you, especially* as you are taught at His commanded assembly.

### A test for you?

By now perhaps you’ve realized that most of mankind has failed the test when it comes to God’s Sabbath. Much of humanity ignores God altogether and couldn’t care less about setting aside a day to honor and worship Him.

Maybe you’re one of the many who’ve been told that the Sabbath command has been transferred from the seventh day of

## From Sabbath to Sunday

In the New Testament we see Jesus Christ (Luke 4:16), His closest followers (Luke 23:56) and the apostle Paul (Acts 13:42-44; 17:1-4) continuing to honor and uphold the Sabbath. We find no record of the Sabbath being abolished or changed in the New Testament (though some scriptures are alleged to do so, these arguments are thoroughly refuted in our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*).

So when did Sunday, the first day of the week, come to be seen as a substitute for the seventh-day Sabbath?

In brief, as waves of anti-Semitism swept the Roman Empire as a result of the two Jewish wars in the first and second centuries, members of the early Church began to distance themselves from practices that were commonly viewed as Jewish. At the same time, false teachers arose within the Church introducing new teachings and beliefs. Over time the Church drifted from the teachings and practices of Christ and the apostles (the story is spelled out in more detail in our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*).

In the third and fourth centuries, as the Catholic Church rose to prominence in the Roman Empire, it increasingly incorporated customs adapted from pagan worship practices. Among these was the elevation of Sunday, the day devoted to honoring the sun god, a deity extremely popular among the Roman masses.

Meanwhile, those who held to the original teachings of the apostles were increasingly persecuted. By A.D. 365 an edict by Catholic leaders at the Council of Laodicea declared: “Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather, honouring the Lord’s Day [Sunday]; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ [i.e., excommunicated]” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 19, p. 148, emphasis added).

Sunday-keeping came to be enforced and Sabbath-keeping ruthlessly suppressed. While some doctrinal reform occurred as a result of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Protestant churches as a rule continued to follow the lead of the Catholic Church in regard to Sunday worship.

Not until the Reformation period was the idea born that Sunday worship was instituted originally as a direct replacement for the Fourth Commandment Sabbath. The Catholic Church took strong exception to this Protestant argument, saying the Catholics’ reason for dropping strict Sabbath observance was to avoid appearing Jewish, not to

**“You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday . . .”**

change the Fourth Commandment. In fact, the Catholic Church continued honoring the Sabbath as a consecrated day—though reduced in importance and altered to a day of fasting—for several centuries after Sunday observance became prominent.

Most Catholic and some Protestant theologians are willing to admit that Sunday observance cannot be justified from the Scriptures. Notice what James Cardinal Gibbons, archbishop of Baltimore, wrote in *The Faith of Our Fathers*:

“. . . Is not every Christian obliged to sanctify Sunday and to abstain on that day from unnecessary servile work? Is not the observance of this law among the most prominent of our sacred duties? But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify” (1917, p. 89, emphasis added).

He goes on to explain that this, like other practices “nowhere found in the Bible,” was instituted by the Catholic Church on its own authority.

To learn more, request our free booklets *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest* and *The Church Jesus Built*.

the week, Saturday, to Sunday, the first day of the week. Or maybe you've been told that it's no longer necessary to keep it at all.

Sadly, traditional Christianity has for the most part turned its back on the Fourth Commandment—considering the Sabbath obsolete, fulfilled by Jesus Christ, replaced by Sunday or somehow negated by the dozens of arguments that have been marshaled against it over the centuries. However, we shouldn't be surprised at this widespread disdain for the Sabbath day, since God's Word tells us that "the sinful mind is hostile to God" and "does not submit to God's law" (Romans 8:7, NIV).

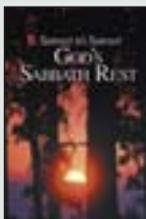
What about you? What's your view of God's most-ignored commandment in light of the clear instructions in His Word? The simple fact is that nowhere in the Scriptures will you find that the day God established at creation as the proper day of rest and worship has been changed or abolished. Most religious groups don't have a problem with the other nine commandments, but few are willing to submit to God's will on the Fourth.

Rarely will a church organization change its beliefs. But, with God's help and guidance, you as an individual can change yours and begin patterning your life according to His instructions. You would do well to ask yourself: If God made the Sabbath holy at creation, if He made it a part of the Ten Commandments, if Jesus Christ, the apostles and the early Church kept it (as the New Testament and history shows they did), doesn't it make sense that He would want you to keep it?

Will you pass the test? Are you willing to surrender a portion of your time to build the kind of relationship God wants to enjoy with you? **GN**

## Recommended Reading

The Bible has far more to say about the Sabbath. Why is it so important that God enshrined it as one of the Ten Commandments? How did Christ keep it? What does the book of Acts say about the early Church and the Sabbath? How can you use the Sabbath to build a right relationship with God? You'll find these questions and many more addressed in our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. To discover how many biblical teachings have been changed over the years, request your copy of *The Church Jesus Built*. Both are yours free for the asking.



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# What Will You Do?

Continued from page 17

The core of God's admonition to mankind is found in Ezekiel 18. The key to healing the breach between man and God is found in transforming your life by turning from sin, the very thing that severs our relationship with God. "... If a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, 'and not that he should turn from his ways and live?'" (verses 21-23).

This section concludes with this stirring call: "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord GOD. 'Therefore turn and live!'" (verses 31-32).

## Read the writing on the wall—and act

God wants us—His creation—to live abundantly, not destructively. But, until a revolution in thinking occurs, we will witness only more suffering.

History shows that nations are unable to read the handwriting of warning on the walls of their times. The Babylonians partied the night away while the Persians slipped in under the gates of Babylon. Before World War II, the most devastating conflict in history, England and America slept while their foes armed themselves in preparation for war. And 12 years ago no one foresaw that Iraq would invade Kuwait, thus setting off the first round of the Persian Gulf War.

In spite of the information, including years of attacks on American interests abroad (and a warm-up attack on the World Trade Center several years earlier), no one could put together a clear picture of an impending catastrophe like that of Sept. 11. How much warning does a nation need before it will make a change and avoid additional sorrow?

History is not encouraging, for its record offers little hope. But you can do something. You can choose to change your life and make a difference within your world.

The real question after Sept. 11 is not what the president or other government officials knew and when did they know it. The most important question is: What do you know, and what will you do about it? Only you can

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## 'You Are Gods'

Jesus stunned His listeners in proclaiming His own divine identity. But He went even further, quoting a verse that tells human beings, "You are gods." Indeed, as many passages show, God is a family.

by Tom Robinson

In the last article in this series we saw that the Jews of Jesus' day accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God: "Because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33).

His response is intriguing: "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law [in Psalm 82:6], 'I said, 'You are gods''? If He [God] called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God''?" (John 10:34-36).

In other words, said Christ, "if Scripture outright called human beings *gods*, why are you upset when I merely state that I am God's *Son*?"

Yet are human beings actually gods? What did He mean?

In Psalm 82:6, from which Jesus quoted, God says to human beings: "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.'" The Hebrew word translated "gods" is *elohim*, which literally means "gods" or "mighty ones"—although it is often rendered as "God" (that is, the true God) in the Bible. That's because, although plural in form, the word *elohim* is often singular in usage.

Some have argued that the word in this context should be translated "judges" ("mighty ones" being seen by some here as simply powerful human beings). But the original New Testament manuscripts translate Christ's quotation in John 10 using the Greek word *theoi*—"gods." Indeed, it is obvious that Jesus must have meant "gods." If He had meant only "judges," His logic would not follow. Notice: "If Scripture called them judges, why are you upset that I claim to be the Son of God?" That makes no sense. Only when the word is rendered "gods"—and understood to *mean* that—does Christ's logic follow.

But, again, can human beings legiti-

mately be referred to as gods, as Jesus said? How are we to understand this?

### Terminology of family

The key here is the word *children* in Psalm 82. We must understand that God is a *family*. There is *one* God (the God *family*) comprising *more* than one God *Being*. (This is thoroughly explained in our free booklet *Who Is God?* Send for your copy today, or download it from our Web site.)

As explained in the previous article in this series, the God family from the beginning comprised two divine Beings—God and God the Word (John 1:1-3). The Word became flesh as the Son of God, Jesus Christ (verse 14). And, after His human life and death, He was resurrected to divine spirit existence as the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18) and "firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Thus Jesus was spiritually born in the resurrection as the *first* of many "brethren" or children to follow later.

Indeed, from the beginning God intended to add many children to His family. In Genesis 1, after creating plants and animals to reproduce each "according to its kind," God said, "Let *Us* make *man* in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness" (verse 26, emphasis added throughout)—showing that man was created according to the "*God* kind." To help us understand the parallel with God creating man *in His image and likeness*, Genesis 5:3 says that the first man Adam later "begot a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth." So God was essentially *reproducing Himself* through humanity.

The apostle Paul told the men of Athens, "... As also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" (Acts 17:28).

Psalm 82 is much easier to understand in this light. In verse 6 the word *gods* is equated with "children of the Most High." That makes perfect sense. When any entity bears offspring, its offspring are the same

kind of entity. The offspring of cats are cats. The offspring of dogs are dogs. The offspring of human beings are human beings. The offspring of God are "gods."

But we must be careful here. Human beings are not *literally* gods—not yet, at any rate. Indeed, people initially are not literally even God's children, except in the sense that He *created* humanity and did so in His image and likeness.

God is eternal spirit. Human beings are mortal flesh, albeit with a spiritual component—the human spirit that gives us understanding. This is an important distinction and helps us see what God was actually saying in Psalm 82.

The human beings He addressed stood in the place of God in judgment as *elohim* (verse 1). God, however, challenges them for their wrong judgments and lack of understanding (verses 2-5). Yet in verse 6, the verse Christ quoted, God confirms that they are indeed *elohim*. Verse 7: "But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." Thus, being physical and subject to death, they were *elohim* in only a very limited sense—the sense of being created in God's image and likeness as well as having the ultimate *potential* of becoming the same kind of beings the Father and Christ now are.

In fact, God often "callesth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17, King James Version)—looking on His purpose as already accomplished. Amazingly, God intends to *exalt us* from this fleshly existence to the same level of divine spirit existence that He has, as we will see.

### Development—but into what?

This involves a process of *spiritual* reproduction in which God fathers us as His children. It starts with *His* Spirit joining with our human spirit: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16, KJV). Through this miraculous

union, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Thus the Spirit-begotten Christian is a child of God, an actual member of *elohim*, the family of God—but not yet in an ultimate sense. There is still a *development process* we must go through in this life. And at the end of this life, in the resurrection at Christ’s return, true Christians will be changed into divine spirit beings like the Father and Christ.

The apostle John wrote: “Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). We will receive the divine glory of the Father and Christ (Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Colossians 1:27).

As coinheritors with Christ, we will receive dominion over all things, including the entire vast universe—dominion just as Christ has (Romans 8:17; Hebrews 2:5-9; Revelation 21:7). To truly exercise dominion over all things requires the omnipotent power of God.

What about our minds? As human beings, we couldn’t count all the individual stars of the universe in a trillion lifetimes. But God, in a passing remark, says He knows all the stars by name (Psalm 147:4). Amazingly, Paul states, “Now I know in part, but then I shall know *just as I also am known* [that is, by God]” (1 Corinthians 13:12), showing that we will possess the omniscience of God. And why not, for we will have the Holy Spirit, the mind of God, in full?

Indeed, at that time, like Jesus, we will at last be “filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19; compare Colossians 1:19; 2:9). How can someone be filled with all the fullness of God and be anything *less* than God? Therefore, at our ultimate change, we too will be divine—though the Father and Christ will forever be greater than us.

## The teaching of deification

This wonderful truth will surely come as quite a shock to those who have heard only the traditional view of mainstream Christianity regarding the ultimate reward of the righteous. Yet those who might be quick to assail this teaching will perhaps be even more surprised to learn that many early “church fathers” of mainstream tradition—not so far removed from early

apostolic teaching—*did understand* this incredible truth, at least in part.

Notice paragraph 460 of the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995), footnotes in brackets:

“The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ [2 Pet. 1:4]: ‘For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God’ [St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 19, 1: PG 7/1, 939]. ‘For the Son of God became man *so that we might become God*’ [St. Athanasius, *De inc.*, 54, 3: PG 25, 192B]. ‘The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us share in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, *might make men gods*’ [St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57:1-4]” (pp. 128-129, emphasis added).

This teaching is even more prevalent in Eastern Orthodox tradition, where it is known by the Greek term *theosis*, meaning “divinization” or “deification.” However, it is wholly unlike the New Age concept of “I am god”—looking to the self as supreme. Notice the remarkable explanation of the early Catholic theologian Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200:

“It would be impossible that another God could be admitted, when it is permitted to no other being to possess anything of God. Well, then, you say, at that rate we ourselves possess nothing of God. But indeed we do, and will continue to do so. Only it is from *Him* that we receive it, and not from *ourselves*. For we will be even gods, if we deserve to be among those of whom He declared, ‘I have said, “You are gods,”’ and ‘God stands in the congregation of the gods.’ But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us. For it is He alone who can make gods” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 480, quoted in “Deification of Man,” David Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 1998, p. 200).

Of course, Christianity is not a polytheistic religion. There is but one God. The term *gods* is really meant to distinguish multiple God *Beings* constituting the one God—the one God meaning the one God *family*. As mentioned before, there are at present two fully divine members of that family—two distinct Beings—God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. And, as incredible as it sounds, there

will be more to come.

In fact, there are many more who are already members of the God family. Having a small *measure* of the divine through the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, they are in the *process* of deification. However, they are not yet themselves truly divine. But one day, if they remain faithful, they *will be*. And ultimately all of mankind—that is, those who are willing—will follow in the same course.

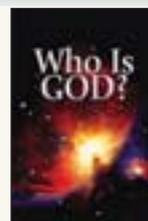
“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). And He means it. God will not forever kid Himself into thinking we are His children when we really aren’t. No, the Father intends to produce us as His full children, to transform us into the very kind of beings that He and Christ now are—though, again, forever subject to Their loving authority.

Indeed, even though saved human beings truly will be elevated to existence at the God level as real children of God and full members of the God family, they will never challenge, individually or collectively, the preeminence of the Father and Christ as leaders of the family. Truly, all will be subject to Jesus, except the Father, and Christ will Himself be subject to the Father (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Their positions at the top of the family will never be challenged or threatened by even the addition of billions of divine children.

This, then, is the ultimate potential destiny of all mankind. It is the awe-inspiring purpose for which we were created. As Jesus quoted, foreseeing our destiny reached, “I said, ‘*You are gods.*’” Let us all, then, be ever thankful. For it can’t get any higher than that. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

This article has touched on only a few of the scriptures showing that God is a family. To learn more about the nature of God and Christ and our future destiny with Them as revealed in the Bible, we encourage you to be sure to request our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *What Is Your Destiny?* Both are yours for the asking.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)



# Letters From Our Readers

## Clear perspective on current events

Let me first thank you for the free educational service you provide in the public interest. My biblical knowledge has grown by leaps and bounds, and, not only that, it is now accurate. Thank you especially for *The Good News*. I subscribe to several magazines that cover the news of Christianity, and yours was the *only* one to respond to our national crisis with the Bible's perspective about current events.

I followed with interest what Billy Graham had to say. I was disappointed because he basically said he did not know why these events had transpired. Your articles hit the nail on the head. They restored my confidence in Scripture. If nothing else, this issue has prompted me to contact the local congregation [of the United Church of God] here, and I began attending services.

V.V.G., Mobile, Alabama

Your literature transforms the reader, making him or her understand the daily news, local or global, from a deeper point of view. My congratulations and thanks for a job well done.

M.B.S., Miami, Florida

As a regular subscriber to *The Good News*, I have come to enjoy and appreciate your articles for the accurate, concise and easy-to-read stories in each issue. When I read an article, I know that I can turn to the Scriptures and cross-reference and study them and find your interpretation to be fairly close to what the writer of the Scriptures meant.

R.B.H., West Valley, Utah

## Complaints about our coverage

I have been reading *The Good News* for quite a long time and enjoy it. But I am not comfortable with the coverage. You dwell much on America and Europe. Why can't you cover more of the world where there are more conflicts? Your examples dwell much on America, especially the Sept. 11 attack. Be reminded that most readers are in Africa, Latin America and Asia, where they are experiencing more conflicts.

P.M., Malawi

*Although the majority of the world's population lives in Africa, Latin America and Asia, more than 80 percent of our readers reside in*

*the United States. However, we do try to cover major issues that affect people in all areas of the world. Because of the main focus of biblical prophecy, we feel it especially important to address events in the Middle East and Europe, as well as report on declining values in the English-speaking world. Our free booklet The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy will explain why. By the way, there is a "World News and Trends" item about Malawi and southern Africa on page 15 of this magazine.*

## The rebirth of English Catholics

Your March-April *Good News* was most interesting, with many worthwhile and studied articles. But there is a suggestion in the article "The Rebirth of English Catholics" ["World News and Trends"] that the Catholics of England are a threat or a menace to English society. I think this way of thinking is unfortunate. In the past there were dreadful times of intolerance with a lack of charity among different believers. Queen "Bloody Mary" Tudor reigned for five years and was the cause of 300 Protestant leaders to be burnt to death, much against advice. Likewise 360 Catholics were put to death by hanging, decapitation or left to starve in prison. These times have passed, and we must respect different Christian views.

Dr. J.C.M., Durban, South Africa

*We did not intend to suggest that individual members of the Roman Catholic Church in England are a threat or menace to British society. However, religious persecution is far from over in the world. Currently Christians are experiencing intense persecution in several areas of the world. Our free booklet The Book of Revelation Unveiled explains how this will greatly intensify in the future.*

## Observes the seventh-day Sabbath

I am 70 years old and have been an ordained minister. I was a Sunday-keeper for many years but started asking myself: How come the Bible says that Saturday is the Sabbath? Eventually my wife and I realized that Saturday is the true Sabbath. As a result of my acceptance of the seventh-day Sabbath, I discontinued my association with the group that ordained me. I was impressed with what I read on your Web site and would like to know more about you. My wife is Hispanic, so could you please send me information in Spanish also.

N.C.C., Hardin, Montana

*You may want to obtain free copies of our booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest and the companion publication *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Together they explain the biblical reasons for observing the weekly Sabbath day (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) and God's seven annual festivals—expounding the foundational scriptures undergirding the worship services of the United Church of God. We publish these booklets in Spanish as well.**

## Young reader

Thank you so much for making your Web site available. I was so scared of death until I read the booklet *Does God Exist?* After reading it I felt in a way relieved because now, when I go to sleep tonight, I will not fear that morning will not come. Basically, you saved my life as I am only 15 years old.

J.D., Internet

## Italian reader

I really appreciate *The Good News*. We saw it on the floor of a shopping mall in New York City. My wife and I decided to look it up on the Net, and ever since we have learned so many truths in the Word of God. *The Good News* really sees into the future, even before the events become reality.

K.M., Italy

## Bible Study Course

I have just received my first lesson. I got it yesterday and was so glad that I read the whole thing. I hope the rest to follow will be just the same or even better.

A.D., Brazil

I have thoroughly enjoyed Lesson 4 [about suffering]. With it, through the Holy Spirit, I have come to understand the value of choices. I know now that wrong choices can bring grave consequences. Man must learn from his mistakes or he will never come to receive his inheritance. That is a certainty.

G.S., Umatilla, Oregon

*Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254, U.S.A., or E-mail [ginfo@ucg.org](mailto:ginfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).*



# Questions & Answers

**Q: In reading a recent issue of *The Good News* I discovered that someone made an error in regard to the Fourth Commandment. It stated that the Fourth Commandment is “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” In my catechism, the Fourth Commandment is to “Honor our father and mother.” The Third Commandment is to “Remember the Sabbath Day.” Please correct this error.**

**P.R., Morristown, Minnesota**

A: No one disputes that there are a total of 10 Commandments in number (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4). They are listed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. However, another method of numbering developed some time after the biblical canon was complete.

In the fifth century, Augustine (a Roman Catholic bishop of Hippo) selected a newer way of presenting the Ten Commandments, which became the preferred arrangement in the Catholic Church. This arrangement dropped the Second Commandment, divided the Tenth against coveting into two separate commands, one against coveting a neighbor’s wife and another against coveting anything else belonging to a neighbor, thus renumbering the list of 10.

Yet the prohibition against coveting is given as one thought in one basic sentence. In contrast, having other gods and worshiping images are stated quite distinctly as two separate “thou shalt nots.”

Notice that the apostle Paul expressed the commandment against coveting as a single commandment in the New Testament. “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Romans 13:9; compare 7:7). Clearly one basic principle is involved, and one fundamental commandment governs it.

The most direct proof of this comes from comparing the listing of the Ten Commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy, both books having been written by Moses. In Deuteronomy 5:21, the prohibition against coveting a neighbor’s wife is given first, before the command against coveting a neighbor’s house and other possessions.

But in Exodus 20:17 the proscription against coveting a neighbor’s wife and house is mentioned in the opposite order. Obviously, Moses was not switching around the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. Rather, he understood these to be different aspects of the same Tenth Commandment.

So why was another arrangement of the commandments chosen? Augustine said that by this method the commandments were divided into the biblically significant numbers three and seven (claiming three commands on relating to God and seven on relating to neighbor—as opposed to four and six in the proper arrangement).

But there may be another reason that the three-and-seven arrangement arose in the first place—to allow the use of images in worship. The First Commandment forbids the worship of other gods. The Second Commandment forbids bowing down to, serving or using images in worship. By combining the Second Commandment with the First, it could appear that there is only one commandment against idolatry—and that the forbidding of images merely means that we are not to bow down to images of other gods. Yet, by having a separate commandment against images in worship, it is clear that what is forbidden is not just images of other gods, but of the true God as well.

For a more-complete understanding of the great spiritual principles behind all 10 of the commandments, please request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

**Q: In *The Good News* (January-February 2002) is an article titled “Isn’t It About Time You Read the Book?” That article refers to the Bible “in its original form” as the absolute truth. What is the Bible “in its original form”? Is it some version of the King James translation, or is it a pre-King James publication? Where can one find the Bible in its original form that has been translated into English?**

**F.V., Riverdale, Georgia**

A: The publishers of *The Good News* firmly believe that all the books of the Bible were written under divine inspiration. The evidence we base that conviction on is summarized in our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*

As the apostle Peter succinctly put it: “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but

holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The apostle Paul adds that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:15).

It is infallible in the original written form. However, these original writings are no longer available—as we might expect for a book whose youngest portions are about 2,000 years old. We also believe that extra-biblical evidence adequately confirms that God involved Himself in the preservation and translation of the Bible.

In the world of biblical translation, the term *autograph* refers to the original writings as God inspired them in the Hebrew and Greek languages. For instance, an autograph of the book of Revelation would be John’s original writing in Greek.

A *manuscript* is a handwritten copy of an *autograph*. Often a manuscript is several times removed from the original. As an example, people made copies of John’s original autograph of Revelation, then others made copies of these copies, and so on.

In spite of their rigorous training in this profession, as scribes made copies from older copies at times they made errors, mostly minor. Common among the types of errors that are found in biblical manuscripts are misspellings of names and slight errors in numbers. These errors are comparatively few, and many have been corrected simply by comparing manuscripts. There are between 4,000 and 5,000 copies of the New Testament in Greek and many copies of the Old Testament in Hebrew.

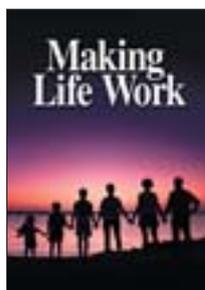
These minor copyist errors have had little impact on the original inspiration God gave. Carefully trained scribes employed the most rigorous methodology in carrying out their profession, but they were still human. Their errors were mostly of a technical nature with minimal impact. The Bible as we know it is totally reliable in matters pertaining to our salvation and God’s plan for mankind.

However, this does not mean that all modern translations are completely free from error. Although none is completely accurate, some versions are more reliable than others. *The Good News* generally uses the New King James Version when quoting Scripture. A helpful discussion of the relative merits of various Bible translations can be found on pages 12 and 13 of our free booklet *How to Understand the Bible*.

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