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a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

First Threads

The Origin and Impact of Clothes

Internet Pornography:
A Cultural Plague

Unintended
Consequences
vs. Intended
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Jesus Christ: Divine Savior
or Gnostic Nobody?

We Can Trust the Bible

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What's It Worth to You?

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A Challenge to Evolution—
On the Beach!



Opinion vs. Fact

“Thanks for sharing your opinion,” said the man after I had answered his question about the Bible. His response caught me completely by surprise. I was speechless. I wasn’t expecting him to label the answer as simply my opinion. After all, I had shown him what God specifically said in His Word—the Bible. As a minister, having studied God’s Word for many years, I had tried to be as biblically accurate as possible and to keep personal opinions out of it.

Perhaps I shouldn’t have been so surprised. After all, people today are encouraged to give their opinions on just about everything. And many place a greater degree of trust in their feelings—regardless of the facts—than they do in what anyone else has to say. Some have a higher opinion of their own opinion than of anything else in the world! Consider how this plays out.

Yet as much as people wish that all choices would lead to happy lives, it just isn’t so. Researchers have discovered that those who have sex prior to marriage are less likely to have happy, long-lasting marriages. Research also shows that married people who commit adultery often find their marriages falling apart and ending in divorce. All actions have consequences. Not all choices are equal. Not all opinions are equally valid.

When it comes to sexual morality, many think everyone should just decide on a personal basis what is right for oneself.

Through the Bible, God has given us a record of the choices made by others—and

the consequences of those choices—over a span of approximately 4,000 years from Adam and Eve through the New Testament. With this instruction we can readily see what works best and what doesn’t work at all. But sadly, secular humanists today falsely teach that God is simply a human invention and that mankind has outgrown its need for such a notion. The Bible—God’s Word—is considered to be historical literature but certainly not a proper guide for human behavior. This conclusion is the height of ignorance and invites heartache.

When it comes to dress and appearance, people have widely divergent opinions. Styles vary and some like one better than another. Some like one color better than another. Some allow wealthy fashion designers to dictate what is fashionable and what isn’t. Others have a harder time believing that one style or shade of color that was in style only a few months ago is now out of style. Some think skimpy, revealing clothing is sexy and fun. Others say such dress is immodest. Is it really just a matter of opinion?

When it comes to sexual morality, many think everyone should just decide on a personal basis what is right for oneself. This is why so many people have premarital sex and affairs when they are married. They believe they should be free to make whatever choices they want and have an inherent right to feel good about their choices and be happy.

In the current issue we take a look at why we can believe what the Bible says and what it teaches regarding modesty. We’ll also consider its sound advice to avoid pornography and premarital sex. Following this advice will make your life happier and more fulfilling. And, by the way, this isn’t just my opinion. It’s what God Himself promises.



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First Threads

The Origin and Impact of Clothes

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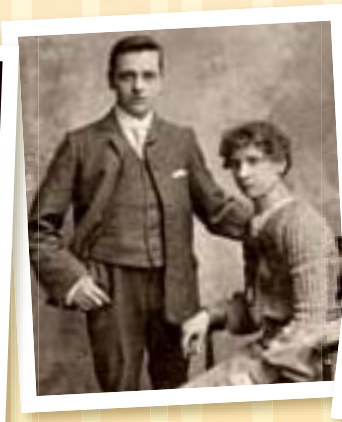
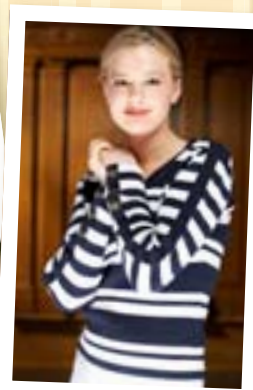
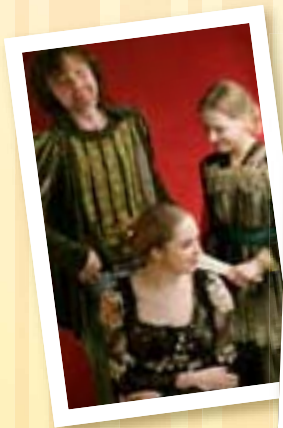
by Kristin Yarbrough

“Do any of you like to shop?” my economics professor asked, scanning the room of students. Several students raised their hands, but none higher than a scantily clad blonde in the fifth row. “Really?” the professor asked, his full attention now focused on the girl. Whatever his initial point had been, it was long gone. “Do you like shopping for clothes?”

“Yes!” she gushed in response.

“Then why don't you wear more of them?” he growled.

Clothing has caused strong feelings almost since people started wearing it. As far back as the book of Genesis, Joseph's brothers were jealous of the coat their father gave to him. Marie Antoinette, the 18th-century French queen, was hated for her lavish wardrobe (among other things) and eventually beheaded by her own subjects during the French Revolution. Today, countless blogs mercilessly criticize celebrities' more unfortunate apparel choices.



Images: iStockphoto.com, Photos.com

A Modest Past?

Since clothing has always been controversial, it's easy to dismiss criticism from people like my economics professor as mere opinion. He's just an old-fashioned prude, right? Or perhaps he's missed too many issues of *InStyle* or *Lucky*. Not according to the experts.

The effect of clothing on women

The constant parade of sexualized images of young girls and women in the media is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development, the American Psychological Association (APA) determined following a recent study.

The Feb. 19, 2007, report from the APA's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls gave the results of its research on the content and effects of media, including television, music videos and lyrics, magazines, movies, video games and the Internet. The task force defined sexualization as basing a person's value predominantly on sexual appeal or behavior.

Adult women aren't immune to these images, the report concluded. Its authors linked the onslaught of sexualized images to three of the most common mental health problems among both girls and women over the age of 18: eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression.

Some in the fashion industry have even recognized this link. Last fall, the Spanish Association of Fashion Designers banned models with a body mass index of less than 18 from appearing on runways at the prestigious Madrid fashion week. Spanish officials cited a desire to set a more positive, healthy example of beauty for youth, and estimated up to 30 percent of would-be models missed the mark because they were too thin.

"Fashion is a mirror, and many teenagers imitate what they see on the catwalk," said regional official Concha Guerra in a Sept. 13, 2006, report by the BBC. And the promulgation of these looks doesn't negatively effect girls only.

The effect on guys

The APA's study concluded that the barrage of sexualized images sets narrow standards for female attractiveness. As a result, some men can have a hard time finding "adequate" partners among real women, according to the study. In fact, experiments quoted in the study showed that looking at pornography leads men to consider their female partners less attractive.

Have people in history always dressed modestly? The past is sometimes presented as an example of fully covered, "proper" fashion, and the present is portrayed as one of overly exposing formerly covered parts of the body. Is this really true?

The present has many immodest trends with clothes that exhibit too much of everything, especially for women. But the challenge to dress respectfully toward God and fellow man is as old as human history. Ancient cultures and even fairly recent societies were not always good examples of modest dressing. Consider the following:

- **Egypt:** The Israelites spent a significant amount of time enslaved to this society and faced the influence of the fashions of their captors. The popular silhouette of this kingdom was, well, pretty bare. Clothes, for both men and women, were very sheer and tightly fitted, exposing most of the body. Men usually wore kilts or loincloths and women wore a variation of the same, leaving the upper body exposed.

- **Napoleonic Haute Couture:** Fast-forward a few thousand years and being a well-dressed lady in France from the mid-1700s to the early 1800s required court dresses with voluminous skirts, tight-fitted bodices and plunging necklines. A piece of cloth called a *fichu* was placed across the bust to avoid exposure.

Things got worse into the early 1800s when women's clothes changed dramatically to a closely fitted, high-waisted garment called an empire dress because of its popularity among women in Napoleon Bonaparte's French Empire. Made of sheer fabrics and with plunging necklines, court ladies would often wet down their dresses with water to make them even more revealing.

Wearing too little clothing can be immodest, but wearing too much adornment (such as excess jewelry, robes, stockings or other paraphernalia) can also defeat the humility that is a part of modesty. Well-made clothes, tasteful jewelry and a nice appearance are positive attributes, but taking it to the extreme isn't so pleasant. Consider:

- The French and English and much of Europe in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries had a variety of fashion fads from large, frilly starched collars worn by men and women to stockings that were stuffed with straw to make men's leg muscles appear larger.

- Fur trim, fabrics and certain colors were regulated according to your wealth in much of Europe in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, and you could be punished for wearing clothes above your financial station in life.

No matter what the age, choosing to dress modestly has often been a challenge. But facing down the ungodly trends of society and making decisions based on God's law requires a strength of character and dignity that looks better on an individual than anything the world of fashion dictates. —Amanda Stiver



Threads for Vertical Thinkers

Given the impact clothes can have on both guys and girls, how can a young person look fashionable while also modeling and promoting godly thinking? Based on scriptural instruction, here's a plan:

- Instead of wearing clothes featuring ungodly sayings or actions, select items that promote godly values (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
- Instead of wearing immodest

(overly revealing) clothing that invites others to sin through sexual lust, choose outfits that demonstrate that we respect and practice God's standards of sexual morality (Matthew 5:28).

- Instead of cheap fabrics that will quickly wear out, choose better quality materials that will look better longer. Even Jesus wore a good quality coat while here on earth (John 19:23-24).

● Instead of a defiant spirit directed against anyone questioning our individuality, strive for "a gentle and quiet spirit" that is appreciated by God and others (1 Peter 3:4; also Romans 12:18).

When our appearance and attitudes promote biblical values, we are letting our light shine as Jesus asked His followers to do (Matthew 5:14-16).

—David Treybig

Boys also are sexualized in the media, the task force acknowledged, in underwear ads and catalogs for some popular teen clothing stores. The study focused on girls, however, because the media objectifies them so much more frequently. In fact, a 1997 study in the journal *Sexual Abuse* showed that 87 percent of ads sexualizing children featured girls.

Marketing to girls

The emphasis on girls may be because girls are encouraged to focus on their appearance at increasingly earlier ages. Last holiday season, several consumer Web sites listed Bratz products as among the top 10 gifts, some recommending them for girls as young as 6. Trademarked under the catchphrase "the only girls with a passion for fashion," these dolls often sport sultry eye makeup, dark lipstick, embellished jeans, short skirts and belly-baring tops.

For the same age group targeted by Bratz—roughly 7 to 12—\$1.6 million was spent on thong underwear alone, according to a Feb. 20, 2007, special report in *The Washington Post*. In one popular store, graphic tees sized for these "tweens" are emblazoned with phrases like "D is for Diva," "Flirt" and "High Maintenance," on a shelf around the corner from hot pink low-rise panties that read "ooh la la."

Combined with objectification in the media, this type of marketing can lure young girls into an unhealthy focus on their appearance, according to psychologists quoted in *The Washington Post*. And once the girls are hooked, it's a never-ending cycle. They simply graduate from child-sized thongs to push-up bras and the low-cut tops marketers encourage them to buy.

Being preoccupied with appearance can hold women back even after they reach adulthood, according to *The Washington Post*. Research quoted in the report suggests that women college students who were overly distracted with their looks scored worse on tests than other students. And everyone knows that guys are also distracted when girls wear overly revealing outfits—tight-fitting to accentuate the feminine figure or showing too much skin. This type of dress invites lust—which is a sin (Matthew 5:28).

The Bible on clothes

Not surprisingly, advice found in the Scriptures about healthy attitudes toward clothing backs up what many experts have determined. The first biblical reference to clothes appears in Genesis 3, shortly after Adam and Eve ate the fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9). They suddenly were aware that they were naked and immediately sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves (3:7).

Adam said that he hid from God because he was afraid for Him to see him naked, indicating a newly discovered sense of shame (verses 9-10). This was wrong, as there should be no shame in nakedness before God or between a husband and wife (see 2:25). However, nakedness is not appropriate when other people enter the picture. Immediately after noting that other human beings would come through Eve, the Bible says that God made clothes out of animal skins to cover the first couple (Genesis 3:20-21).

Concerning attractive clothing, it is perfectly fine to wear—indeed, it's good to make ourselves presentable before others, as we are able. Yet Jesus warns His followers not to overly worry about this aspect of their appearance (Matthew 6:28-29). Here, Jesus also says that not even Israel's richest king was dressed as beautifully as wild lilies, which do nothing to achieve their good looks.

What is most important in this regard? Ezekiel 16 makes it clear that there isn't anything inherently wrong with wearing nice clothes. Here we find the figurative story of God providing clothing and accessories for His bride, ancient Israel. This passage tells us that God dressed His wife in fine linen, costly garments and ornate jewelry. Yet we also should learn from Israel's example later in the chapter, when God chastises His bride for trusting in her own beauty and straying from His ways.

The Bible teaches us that our focus must not be solely on our outward appearance. According to 1 Peter 3:1-4, we are to focus more on developing the timeless beauty of a "gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

Kristin Yarbrough works at the Home Shopping Network as a copywriter. She lives with her husband Sean and their daughter Katie in Brandon, Florida.

Internet Pornography

A Cultural Plague

by Sean Yarbrough

Along with all the wonderful uses of the Internet, there is another use that has been growing ever faster—that of commercialized pornography. But what are the effects of viewing sexually explicit pictures? Is it harmless? Is there any culturally redeeming value in the viewing of pornography?

Uncensored pornographic material is available today to anyone with Internet access. Some sites offer pornographic newsletters that are deposited a few times each week into one's electronic mailbox. With the advent of restriction-free, Web-based e-mail services, such material can be delivered into the in-boxes of anyone—young or old—without being detected.

In his book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, Judge Robert Bork comments on how this type of “entertainment” tears down society. After documenting some despicable tales offered on an Internet newsgroup featuring instructions for would-be child molesters, he notes that “such things can only tempt those who verge on such acts to take a greater interest in them” (p. 136).

Pornography—whether in print, on video or on the Internet—may push those who are having sexual problems over the edge. It is by the Internet, however, that the greatest damage seems likely.

With the advent of digital movies, the likelihood increases that such material will be consumed at a much higher rate. This is made apparent when one recognizes the explosion of pornographic films and profits at the time videocassettes began enabling customers to avoid adult theaters.

With the ability to download digital pornographic movies in the privacy of their own homes, those hooked on pornography can escape the potential embarrassment of being seen in public leaving an adult theater, browsing through X-rated films or facing a clerk.

Pornography is a sin

Driven by their lust for pleasure and



Pornography isn't just a problem for those who succumb to its addictive influence. According to Jesus, the viewing of pornography is a sin.

given the privacy and means with which to seek it, more and more people will give in to sexual weakness and addiction. This, in turn, will destroy many relationships and prevent meaningful relationships from developing. It will impoverish and warp many who can't stop themselves from seeking more and more perverse porn to try to satisfy their deepening addiction.

But pornography isn't just a problem for those who succumb to its addictive influence. According to Jesus, the viewing of pornography is a sin.

Early in His public ministry, Jesus explained that “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). The seventh of God's Ten Commandments says, “You shall not commit adultery,” and the 10th tells us not to covet, which includes extramarital sexual lust (Exodus 20:14, 17). And let's be honest. People view pornography because it does create lust.

Radical individualism (unrestrained selfishness) is at the heart of today's culture war. For decades America has been evolving into a materialistic, unrestrained, hedonistic society that puts selfish lusts above life and morality. The concept of liberty, upon which the United States was founded, has unfortunately been used to promote the corruption of moral standards and the degradation of the institutions that support them. The reason for this is simple: The push for unrestricted personal freedoms has no final goals. It simply moves away from restraint with no conceivable end.

This was not the intention of the founding fathers of the United States. When they wrote about liberty, they assumed that order and morality would be practiced and protected by the states with minimal intrusion by the federal government. And it was, until the recent attacks on our cultural institutions including marriage, family, religion, education and law. Today, these attacks on traditional institutions are occurring around the world.

Judge Bork explains: “The constant underestimation of their [i.e., traditional institutions'] value and the continual pressure for more individual autonomy necessarily weakened the restraints on individuals. The ideal slowly became the autonomous individual who stood in an adversarial relationship to any institution or group that attempted to set limits to acceptable thought and behavior. That

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“**G**irls in their first and second years of college are coming to me with difficult questions regarding sexuality,” said a women’s counselor for a college near my home. “They feel enormous pressure to have sexual experience—they don’t want to be thought of as the last virgin on campus—yet from talking to other girls, they also know that their hearts are going to be broken after even just a one-time experience. They don’t know what to do.”

This conversation with a fellow passenger on a recent airplane flight alerted me to an issue researchers have recently confirmed: Sex creates an emotional bond.

The emotional aspect of sex also affects youth in high school. A team of University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) researchers reported that they had studied ninth and tenth graders at two California high schools between 2002 and 2004.

Of the 618 students surveyed, 44 percent reported having had oral sex or intercourse by the end of the 10th grade. The numbers indicate that “teen sexual activity overall is declining and more teens are delaying sexual activity, compared with a decade ago.”

The researchers also found that approximately 40 percent of those who had sex felt bad about themselves or felt guilty (Ilene Lelchuk, “UCSF Explores Teens’ Post-Sex Emotions,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 15,

2007). Other studies have shown even higher percentages.

In addition to feeling bad about having had sex, almost the same percentage felt that they had been manipulated. Again, what these young people discovered is that there are often emotional consequences that accompany sex.

God, we should understand, created sex to be an emotional experience that would bind a husband and wife together. “Casual” sex, then, is not so casual as people think. And it is this emotional aspect of sex that many educators now believe young people need to understand in addition to concerns about pregnancy and STDs.

Similar to the UCSF study, “sex therapist Darcy Luadzers, author of two new advice books for teens about how to navigate the sexual world, said she sees the emotional toll firsthand

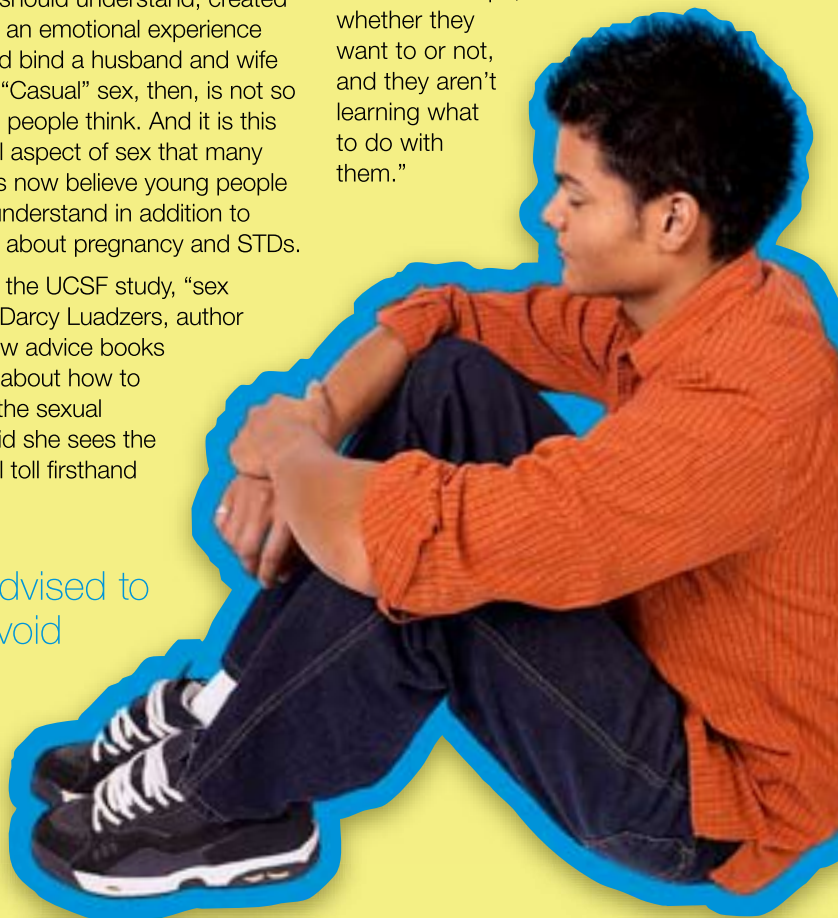
in her practice. The adults she treats have problems that often date back to regretful teenage experiences, she said. Also, in collecting adolescents’ stories for her books *Virgin Sex for Girls* and *Virgin Sex for Guys*, she found most of them were regretful about their first experiences.

“We just don’t talk about the emotional consequences enough,” Luadzers said” (ibid.).

A closer look at the emotional effects

While God tells everyone to refrain from premarital sex (1 Corinthians 6:18), the effects of this type of sex are particularly devastating to girls. Laura Stepp Sessions, author of a new book titled *Unhooked*, says, “Girls can have feelings even from the most casual hook-ups, whether they want to or not, and they aren’t learning what to do with them.”

Most young people have been advised to forgo premarital sex in order to avoid pregnancy and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases). Now, according to new reports, there are more reasons for following this godly advice.



Unintended Consequences

Stepp, in her book—subtitled “How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both”—further explains that casual hook-ups create bad habits that make it harder to sustain the commitment required in marriage. Additional consequences include finding it harder to trust, to share and to solve the problems that arise in marriage (Barbara Meltz, “Hooking Up Is the Rage, but Is It Healthy?” *Boston Globe*, Feb. 13, 2007).

Women in particular, it seems, just aren’t emotionally designed for uncommitted sex. “What young women don’t count on is oxytocin, a chemical produced in the brain to promote feelings of connection and love. Oxytocin is most commonly associated with breast-feeding; it’s what helps a mother bond with her infant. But it’s also produced to lesser degrees during sex. The more intense the sex, the more oxytocin. Males also get a dose of it from sex, but they get a bigger dose of testosterone, which suppresses the oxytocin” (ibid.).

While some boys don’t seem to have the same emotional misgivings as girls from uncommitted sex, boys likewise suffer consequences. Many of them have commitment problems that can be traced to random sex. In this shallow mind-set, the question seems to be, Why should I get married if I am already getting sex? By contrast, the Bible teaches us that we should marry to enjoy our God-given gift of sexuality.

As 1 Corinthians 7:2 (King James Version) explains, “to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.”

Another problem for boys who have premarital sex is that when they do marry, they often compare their wife to former

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lovers and thus find it easier to end the relationship. After all, that’s what casual hook-ups prepare them to do—that is, to routinely break up with one partner and find another.

Charting a better course

Some vertical thinking quickly brings wise young people the world over to the conclusion that there has to be a better way to navigate life than the free sex approach advocated by much of today’s media.

One doesn’t suffer the emotional consequences of random sex if one doesn’t have random sex. Girls don’t get the human papillomavirus or HPV infection—which one quarter of U.S. teen girls and 44.8 percent of women ages 20 to 24 have according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—if they and their future husbands don’t have premarital sex (Will Dunham, “HPV Infections Seen in Over Quarter of U.S. Women,” Reuters, Feb. 27, 2007).

The biblical instruction, “Do not arouse, do not stir up love, before its own time” (Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5, New American Bible), is good advice for people of all ages everywhere. Why not save your sexuality for the place where it belongs—in your marriage? Why not reap the rewards of intentional behavior that conforms to God’s instructions instead of receiving unintended consequences?

By following what He says, you can avoid guilt and having your heart unnecessarily broken. This course of action also gives you the best opportunity for a happy, long-lasting marriage.

David Treybig is the managing editor for *Vertical Thought* and pastors United Church of God congregations in St. Petersburg and Tampa, Florida.

The numbers indicate that “teen sexual activity overall is declining and more teens are delaying sexual activity, compared with a decade ago.”

by David Treybig

Costs vs. Intended Rewards



“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:2-3)

W

Who was Jesus of Nazareth? A figment of the imagination of a group of men from Galilee? A good man? A teacher or prophet of God? Or was He truly a divine being made flesh? The answer to that question is the most vital piece of

information anyone can have, yet it has been debated and argued for 2,000 years!

In recent years there have been several-high profile media efforts attempting to discredit the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Leading the way was *The Da Vinci Code* as both a book and movie. This was followed up by the supposed lost *Gospel of Judas* and, early in 2007, another book titled *The Jesus Family Tomb*.

Do you know for certain that Jesus was God in the flesh, or is there a nagging question in your mind about whether some of these modern claims may have some basis in fact? Could it be that perhaps Jesus wasn't really who He claimed to be, that He was just an ordinary man? Your answer affects your eternity, so you'd better be sure!



A fragment of gnostic writing from the *Gospel of Judas*.

Secret knowledge

Many Bible commentaries, *Expositor's* included, connect the mistaken belief that Jesus wasn't really God in the flesh with the beliefs of gnosticism.

The term gnosticism is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge.” Gnostics believe they have secret knowledge about God, unknown to others, and according to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, modern scholars now trace the movement back to ancient Middle Eastern religious roots (www.newadvent.org/cathen/06592a.htm). As gnosticism came in contact with various religions, it appears to have “borrowed” terminology from them to describe its basic tenets—that the material universe is evil and that people are divine beings trapped in a material world by an evil spirit, the demiurge.

According to gnostic teaching, in order to free themselves from the evil, material world, human beings need special knowledge, including spells and magical incantations. There

Jesus Christ Divine Savior or Gnostic Nobody?

by Ken Treybig

The modern questioning of the identity of Jesus follows the pattern established by the gnostics of the late first century. Around A.D. 90, the apostle John wrote to Christians warning that “every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:2-3).

The issue here was the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ—whether He was really God made flesh. Concerning John's statement, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says, “The clause ‘that Jesus Christ has come’ reflects the author's clear view of the preexistence of the Son, who came from the Father and from the moment of his historical birth, was Jesus Christ in the flesh.”

is a wide range of competing ideas within this religious grouping, but since gnostics generally considered the material universe to be evil, they rejected the idea that God would manifest Himself in a fleshly body. Therefore, when they came in contact with teaching about Jesus Christ being God in the flesh, the Savior who died for our sins, they rejected that and taught that He was only a “good person” or that He only “appeared” to be in the flesh—but was really just an apparition.

Jesus discusses His identity

Debate about who Jesus was is not new. In fact, Jesus brought the question up Himself

People have been discrediting Jesus as the Son of God for a long time. Recent attempts claiming to be based on new or suppressed information aren't actually new. In reality, they are the same unjustified and discredited gnostic claims from years gone by.

among His disciples. Matthew 16:13-17 records the event and says the disciples told Him that some thought He was John the Baptist or another of the famous prophets of God come back to life.

But Peter answered that he knew Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then told Peter that he was blessed and that God the Father in heaven was responsible for Peter’s understanding of the fact that Jesus was indeed the Son of God in the flesh (verses 16-17).

Some of the Jewish religious leaders even asked Jesus for proof of who He was, requesting some kind of miraculous sign to prove His identity. Jesus called them evil and said the only proof He would give is that, just like Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, He would be three days and three nights in the grave (Matthew 12:39-40).



A roll stone forms the door to a tomb thought to be similar to the one from which Jesus rose.

the soldiers reported the resurrection to the religious leaders who then bribed the soldiers and instructed them to say that Jesus’ disciples had stolen His body (Matthew 28:11-15).

Guarding the tomb

After Jesus’ death, these leaders remembered that He had said He would rise from the dead after three days. So they requested a military guard be posted at His tomb so the disciples would not be able to steal His body away and claim He had risen from the dead (Matthew 27:62-66).

But surprise! Jesus rose anyway. And after Jesus rose from the dead,

Gnostic flair

So theories and lies about how Jesus was just an ordinary human being, and not God in the flesh, began to circulate immediately after He was resurrected. It is no wonder, then, that the first century gnostics would add their own flair to Jesus being a nobody—just another human being. Maybe He was a nice person—maybe a teacher of good things—but in their way of thinking, He was just another human being or just a vision. Their teachings could not conceive of God actually coming in the flesh.

While many today would protest that those behind the modern media efforts to discredit the divinity of Jesus Christ are not gnostic by religious persuasion, the method of discrediting Jesus is the same—to claim secret knowledge about Jesus being only human and not our divine Savior.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all the deficiencies of the claims of these modern theories. However, if you are interested in reading more, you can visit www.ucg.org/commentary/tomb.htm for a brief commentary on the United Church of God Web site or <http://abr.christiananswers.net/articles/article70.html> for an article on the Associates for Biblical Research Web site about “The Jesus Tomb,” which was discovered in 1980 and examined by archaeologists, who determined it was not of special interest.

Also, see www.ucg.org/commentary/code.htm for a short review of *The Da Vinci Code* and <http://www.ucg.org/commentary/judas.htm> for a commentary on the *Gospel of Judas*. Additionally, a half-hour video production on “Jesus, Judas and Da Vinci: What Is the Truth?” is available from *Beyond Today* television at www.beyondtoday.tv/programs/archive/?ProgramID=bt024.

Was Jesus really the Son of God in the flesh, or just a regular person—a nobody—as taught by the Roman guards, the gnostics of the first century and some modern media efforts of our day? You cannot afford to be unsure of the answer.

The Bible reveals that many of His family and followers willingly gave their very lives for the truth that He was indeed the Son of God. The fact that He was resurrected from the dead exactly three days and three nights after He was placed in the grave, just as He stated, is clear evidence of Jesus’ identity.

Ken Treybig is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas.

◀ An ossuary, or bone box, similar to the ones found recently and speculated to hold the remains of Jesus and His family.



We Can Trust the Bible

Many today question the accuracy of the Bible, but consider a few facts and quotes about this amazing book.

by Mike Bennett

Dozens of biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled, helping to confirm the validity of the Bible and of its prophecies for the future. Here are some fulfilled prophecies and resources that describe them in more detail:

- Soon after the kingdom of Israel split from Judah in 931 B.C., God began warning that Israel would be taken into captivity “beyond the River” Euphrates if they didn’t end their idol worship (1 Kings 14:15). God’s patient warnings continued for nearly 200 years through prophets such as Micah (approximately 735-710 B.C.), who foresaw the destruction of the capital, Samaria (Micah 1:6).



A clay cylinder recording Cyrus King of Persia's decree that the Jews return to Jerusalem.

Events That Happened Just as God Foretold

These prophecies were fulfilled when Assyria took Israel captive in successive invasions culminating about 722 B.C. (*You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, p. 12).

- The people of Judah were also warned of impending captivity for their sins. Jeremiah even foretold the length of their captivity. They would “serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jeremiah 25:11).

Even more amazingly, Isaiah recorded the name of the ruler—Cyrus, king of Persia—who would, many decades in

the future, permit the Jews’ return (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-4). These prophecies were fulfilled down to the last detail (*You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, pp. 12-13).

- Daniel 11 records the Bible’s most detailed prophecy. Much of the prophecy has already been fulfilled, as can be verified by a study of the Persian and Greek empires. No man could foresee such fine historical detail (*Is the Bible True?* pp. 19-21).

The Jewish New Testament lists 52 prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ’s birth, life and death as stated in 81 Old Testament passages (pp. xxv-xxix). Some of these include:

- He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1).
- The price of His betrayal would be 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15).
- The 30 pieces of silver would buy a potter’s field (Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:3-10).
- Wicked people would pierce His hands and feet (Psalm 22:16; Luke 23:33; 24:38-40). David wrote this some 800 years before the Romans adopted crucifixion as a form of punishment for criminals.

(See *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, p. 6, and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*, pp. 26-28, for more details.)

- The prophecies that descendants of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob and Joseph would become a great nation and a great company of nations (Genesis 35:11) have been fulfilled, though most do not realize it. The biblical and historical details are presented in our well-researched, full-color booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.
- The prophecy that humanity would be able to annihilate itself (Matthew 24:21) was not possible with bows and arrows or even automatic weapons, but began to be possible when nuclear weapons were developed in 1945. Thankfully the other part of that prophecy—the promise that the time of tribulation will be cut short and humanity will be saved by Christ’s return—will also come true!

To Help You Get the Most Help Out of the Bible...

The Bible is a big book written long ago, and it can be challenging to explore and understand. Our free resources can help you find the answers you are looking for. Here are a few of the things you can find in the literature library at www.ucg.org.

Booklets: *How to Understand the Bible*, *You Can Understand Bible*

Prophecy, Is the Bible True?

“The Bible and Archaeology” series (these 24 articles are not in print, but can be downloaded as PDFs).

Bible Study Course (the first lesson is “Why the Bible Is the Word of God”).

“Has the Bible Been Preserved Accurately?” article reprint.

Teen Bible Study Discussion Guide:

“The Authority of the Bible” (www.ucg.org/teenstudy/authoritybible.htm).

The Good News Bible Reading Program.

If you have other biblical questions, you are welcome to send them in to be answered by ministers who help in our Personal Correspondence area (info@verticalthought.org).

The book about relationships and real-life issues

Is the Bible relevant to your life today? Though written thousands of years ago, its wisdom and advice is amazingly up-to-date. Consider what it says about these modern issues:

Dadlessness: Forty percent of American young people live in homes without their father. God says we can come to Him—He is a Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5) and He encourages the Church to be a supportive family to the fatherless and widows (James 1:27).



Peer pressure: In a recent poll on the drug habits of British young people, 22 percent said they tried drugs because of peer pressure (www.teachernet.gov.uk). The Bible has advice about choosing friends carefully, the effects of controlled substances and not following the mistakes of others (Proverbs 4:14-15; 12:26; 14:7; 20:1; 23:20-21, 29-35; 27:12).

Sex: The vast majority of teenagers who have had sex, 72 percent of girls and 55 percent of boys, admit regret over early sexual activity (www.cwfa.org/brochures/cwa_abstinence_brochure.pdf). The Bible teaches the blessings of saving sex for marriage and warns of the allure of illicit sex (Song of Solomon 2:7; Proverbs 4:23; 5:3-23; 6:24-35; Hebrews 13:4).

Big decisions: Facing choices of college and career? How can you achieve success? Consider these verses: Proverbs 3:5-6; 15:22; 18:17; 21:5; 22:29.

Stress: One third of U.S. teens say they feel stressed out on a daily basis, reports Reuters Health. What can you do when the worries and pressures are mounting? Check out Matthew 6:25-34; 11:28-30; Hebrews 13:5-6; and 1 Peter 5:6-7.



These few verses are only a starting point. To find more on these and other sub-

jects, do a search on the VerticalThought.org Web site. Also, the book of Proverbs is full of relevant advice. You can find a subject index for Proverbs at www.ucg.org/brp/pdf/brp0611.pdf.

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Want to read more about the Bible? Go to our Web site at: www.VerticalThought.org



A reliable book

"Altogether about forty persons, in all stations of life, were engaged in the writing of these oracles, the work of which was spread over a period of about 1,600 years" (*Sidney Collett, All About the Bible*, 20th edition, p. 11).

In spite of all those authors and all that time, the Bible "is found to contain in itself a well-considered plan throughout, showing that each part belongs to, and contributes towards the beauty and perfection of, the whole" (p. 159). This we see as a tribute to God's inspiration.



Gleason Archer, a scholar of biblical studies, also wrote about the trustworthiness of the Bible: "As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by

man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself—or else by objective archaeological information" (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 1982, p. 12).

The Bible claims to be true and inspired by God (see John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16) and millions of people through history have embraced that claim.

Sir Isaac Newton said, "There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history."

George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Napoleon said, "The Bible is no mere book, but a Living Creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it" (quoted in *Halley's Bible Handbook*, 1965, pp. 18-19).

In spite of many attempts to destroy it through history, today the Bible is the most widely published and widely translated book in the world. For more evidence of the Bible's validity download or request *Is the Bible True?* (www.ucg.org/booklets).



The European Union (EU) is seen by many as one of humanity's greatest achievements and one of the best hopes for achieving peace and prosperity. Preserving peace between the major powers in Europe is unquestionably important, given Europe's bloody history.

In our troubled world, international institutions such as the EU and UN seem to be humanity's best hope—apart from God. And currently the EU is quite apart from God. Its driving philosophy is secular and humanistic.

The committee that drafted the proposed constitution for the EU was challenged about the lack of reference to God in its documents. A French member of the committee explained, "We don't like God" (quoted by Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream*, 2004, p. 211).

Another member of the drafting convention argued, "The only banner that we have is secularism" (*ibid.*). As more nations seek to join today's secular and prosperous EU, modernists feel that God is a quaint concept of the past. Beyond the EU, this wave of humanistic thinking seems to be sweeping the Western world.

Humanism basically says that man can discover on his own the truth he needs to survive and prosper.

The Bible Deflates

Only a fool says in his heart that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). Yet man seems determined to try to live apart from God. This is like holding your breath to prove you don't need air.

by Larry Greider

Can a humanist make it rain?

But is it really possible for nations to continue to flourish without God's help? Mortal man must be sustained by the fruit of the land and, regardless of one's politics, without food man won't be around to argue for very long. Can man bring the rains so necessary for our crops?

The Bible tells us the true source of rain and the food we depend on: "Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are You not He, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait for You, since You have made all these" (Jeremiah 14:22).

The Bible makes many claims that more and more people discount or even ridicule. Is there any evidence to suggest that there is a great plan being worked out here on earth? Yes, there is clear evidence, as we show in each issue of this magazine. Still, one of the greatest challenges for young people today is to think vertically—that is, to think in terms of what God reveals about man and his future.

The alternative is to think horizontally, butting heads

with just about anybody who disagrees with your ideas. Sadly, this is the way many people operate. It has been said that if you get five modern scholars together, you will get six opinions on just about everything.

In the book of Isaiah, God challenges mankind by stating, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me" (Isaiah 45:5). The passage continues, "For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: 'I am the LORD, and there is no other'" (verse 18).

Humanism: It's not working and never has

If the new age of postmodern humanism is the wave of the future, what are the fruits of this direction? When you watch the nightly news, do you really see a world that lives in peace, where cooperation and respect is growing among nations and races? Is the United Nations, the European Union, the United States or any other nation or group of nations really discovering the way of peace?

Jim Nelson Black's book *When Nations Die: America on the Brink: Ten Warning Signs of a Culture in Crisis* (1994) lists areas that historically have led nations to diminish.

These include the crisis of lawlessness, the loss of economic discipline, the rise of bureaucracy, the decline in education, the weakening of cultural foundations, the loss of respect for tradition, the increase in materialism, the rise of immorality, the decay of religious belief and the devaluing of human life.

The joke is told of a professor who once challenged his students in class about the existence of God. He taunted them: "Have any of you ever seen God? Have any of you ever touched, tasted or heard God directly? If you answer 'no,' then you must agree that God doesn't exist."

One of the students stood up and quickly asked, "Professor, since I haven't seen, touched or tasted your brain, does that mean it doesn't exist?"

Humanism vs. revelation

The arguments will no doubt rage on until mortal man reaches the end of his short tenure on earth. The Bible describes the major obstacle all mankind faces:

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

The solution is revelation from an eternal, creating God who inhabits eternity. "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except [by] the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of

Secular Humanism

If you analyze these major areas, you will realize that mankind now and in the past has never known the way to peace. "The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way [the way apart from God's truth] shall not know peace" (Isaiah 59:8).

Is the Bible true?

Those who argue that God is dead and that man is more than able to take care of himself will challenge your beliefs that there is a God. What will your counterarguments be?

In a recent baptismal counseling I asked several young people if they had ever proved that God exists. We read in the Scriptures, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

My challenge to these young people was to write a paper demonstrating, at least to themselves, that God exists! For many new Christians, this is something that is often taken for granted. Yet God is eager for you to know for certain that He is there as part of your building a genuine relationship with Him.

God except [by] the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-11).

How do you plan to spend your life? Will you, like an increasing number of moderns, live according to your own thinking? Or will you subscribe to the revelations of the all-wise Eternal God who made all things?

You could be stubborn and hold your breath to demonstrate your independence. Or if you already know that doesn't work, you might enjoy reading, "Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it" (Isaiah 42:5).

So take a deep breath and thank God for it. And, for some vertical thoughts on these subjects, download or request our well-researched, full-color, free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*, *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and *Is the Bible True?* (www.ucg.org/booklets.)

May God grant you the vision and desire to think vertically.

Larry Greider is the national director of the United Youth Camps and Challenger II programs. He also pastors the United Church of God congregation in Los Angeles, California.

Did God Give Animals Rights?

What is the difference between human beings and animals? Why did God make animals? How should a vertical-thinking person treat animals?

by Randy Stiver

If our society were full of common sense, the question of whether animals have rights like people do would never come up—because people would know. Animals are animals and human beings are human beings. That is, if our society had common sense.

The animal rights movement

The modern animal rights movement charts its origin from a book titled *Animal Liberation* printed in 1975. It was written by Australian-born Peter Singer, now a professor of philosophy in America at Princeton University. His book proclaimed that animals, in essence, are morally equal to people. Animal rights and other elements of Dr. Singer's philosophy of ethics were recently presented as the topic of an international conference during April of 2007 at the University of Sydney in Australia.

As a young person, you have almost certainly come in contact with the animal rights movement—most likely at school or university. Animal rights activists have heavily targeted the education system to carry their message, which *sounds* good because, being human, we tend to love animals—especially cute, furry or feathery ones.

Many initially lump animal rights with animal welfare programs (like animal shelters, etc.)—but these are not the same, as animal rights activists Tom Regan and Gary Francione clarify. “Not only are the philosophies of animal rights and animal welfare separated by irreconcilable differences . . . the enactment of animal welfare measures actually impedes the achievement of animal rights” (“A Movement’s Means Create Its Ends,” *The Animals’ Agenda*, January/February 1992, pp. 40-42)

The philosophy that spawns the concept of animal rights doesn't come from God. The founder of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), Ingrid Newkirk, made the now-famous core statement in *Vogue* magazine in 1989: “A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.”



“Not only are the philosophies of animal rights and animal welfare separated by irreconcilable differences . . . animal welfare measures actually impede the achievement of animal rights.”

That statement summarizes the animal rights movement. It says that a human boy is morally the same as any other animal. But is that true? Who legitimately decides the moral value of a person or an animal—Peter Singer, Ingrid Newkirk, Tom Regan, Gary Francione or who?

Actually, the greatest ethicist and moralist in the history of ethics and morals decides—the Creator God, of course. But you knew that. God establishes value for all parts of His creation, and He did so from the beginning.

The first chapter in the entire Bible records the creation of all plants, bugs, fish, reptiles, mammals and mankind. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in

Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26).

Seven keys

There are seven critical keys to understanding the man/animal controversy.

1. God made man in His image. None of the animals in the creation were made in the image of God—only human beings. Bodily we are described as looking like God. Intellectually we reflect (albeit poorly) the divine mind. Of all God's creatures, only people have God-consciousness: “He has put [a sense of] eternity in their hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

2. God gave man dominion over all the animals. That mankind was the apex of God's creation is proven by the fact that God placed all the other creatures and the rest of creation under his rule and care.

Have people always taken good care of the animals? No, certainly not. Some have and do mistreat animals, including some in greed-driven, factory-farming methods employed in the mega-agriculture industry. God is not pleased about that. But the wrong actions of human beings do not elevate the moral standing of animals. People are still people in need of redemption, and animals are still animals.

3. God promises only human beings eternal life as His divine children in His Kingdom. Animals live here and now. Humanity is unique compared to all animals and even to the angels. Of Christ the Bible says: “For to which of



The six syllables of anthropomorphizing mean ascribing human attributes or characteristics to nonhuman animals, plants or things. This is the logical fallacy of the animal rights movement—it tries to make animals into pseudohumans.

the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You?’ (Hebrews 1:5). Amazingly, Christ calls us His brothers! (see 2:11).

4. God gave human beings a mind vastly greater than that of any animal. Beavers build dams, but none ever developed the technologies to build a Hoover Dam or Aswan High Dam. Weaverbirds in Africa build beautiful, complex, community nests, but none has ever constructed the simplest apartment building.



Unlike the animals, man has a mastery of the creation. And no wonder, because God gave him a spirit essence in his mind that makes it possible. “For what man knows the things of a man except [by] the spirit of the man which is in him?” (1 Corinthians 2:11). Animals do not have the spirit in man that gives us such dynamic minds with God-consciousness and profound self-awareness.

5. God made animals for the provision and enrichment of human beings. People were created to be children in the spirit family God is forming. Everything in the creation on earth, including the animals, He made for our provision, such as clothing and food; for our enrichment, through enjoyment of their beauty and variety; and for helping us develop the qualities of divine character. Animals are powerful teaching tools in the hands of God.

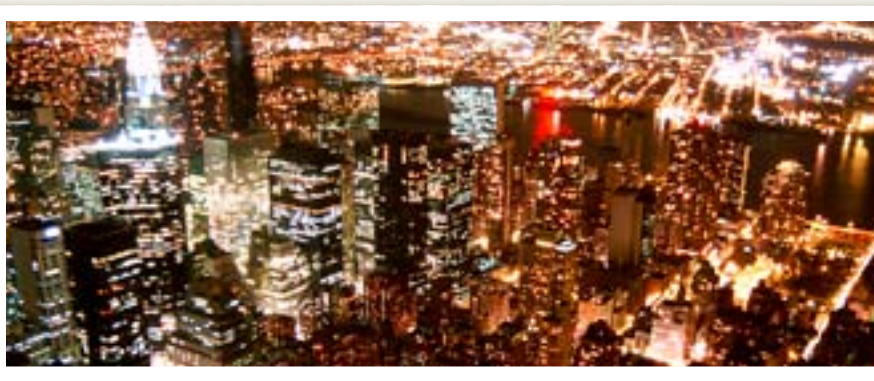
6. The Bible doesn’t talk about “animal rights.” But God did give human beings responsibilities concerning animals. He commands and expects people to take care of animals as good stewards of His creation. “The godly are concerned for the welfare of their animals,” but the wicked are cruel (Proverbs 12:10, New Living Translation).

The six syllables of *anthropomorphizing* mean ascribing human attributes or characteristics to nonhuman animals, plants or things. This is the logical fal-

rights movement? Perhaps it’s because they are seeking meaning and purpose for their lives. Strangely, they’re looking for God, but they just don’t know it. Thus, they spend themselves in a vain cause based on wrong values.

You, too, need meaning and purpose for your life. You need a cause, but *first* you need the truth.

Today God is calling people—young and old—to understand His plan and purpose for mankind. God loves animals, bugs, birds and reptiles too—



lacy of the animal rights movement—it tries to make animals into pseudo-humans. Cartoonists also personify animals, but their cartoons are funny because *almost* everyone knows that animals don’t think and talk like human beings.

7. God alone defines true moral and ethical values—no matter how many philosophers conduct how many international conferences in how many universities. Because it rejects God’s divine revelation as found in the Bible, human ethical philosophy draws wrong conclusions and has no moral authority. The animal rights movement has arbitrarily proclaimed artificial ethics. Like virtually all other human philosophy, it lacks vertical thinking skills.

Human destiny

So why do so many young men and women devote themselves to the animal

after all, He made each of them. But He loves people more for they are His children. Those who choose His way and His cause He will resurrect to divine spirit life (yes, higher than the angels) in His Kingdom forever.

This sorry, confused world desperately needs the sound thinking and good news of that soon-coming Kingdom of God. To be a living, breathing, talking example of that way of life is the most worthy cause for which you can spend yourself.

To learn the specifics of God’s purpose for you, personally, request or download and read your free copy of *What Is Your Destiny?* Then take good care of your animals and shoulder your God-given responsibilities.

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio, and is a regular guest on the *Beyond Today* television program.

A story of valor and courage makes us think about what is actually important.

by Doug Horchak

On April 14, 2004, Jason Dunham proved that he valued the life of his friends as much as his own.

On that fateful day in the spring of 2004, Cpl. Dunham was leading his patrol near Husaybah, Iraq, investigating an attack on a U.S. Marine convoy. His patrol was intercepting vehicles suspected in the attack when an individual in one of the vehicles attacked Dunham. During the fighting, an insurgent dropped a live grenade to kill all of the U.S. Marines in Jason's convoy.

In an effort to save his fellow soldiers from certain death, Jason Dunham threw his helmet and body on the grenade, taking the impact of the blast. Cpl. Dunham died eight days later from his injuries. His buddies all lived. Jason Dunham was 22 years old.

While war is not the answer to man's conflicts, it is often an arena in which people's character, depth and values are forged and even tested. Jason Dunham valued the lives of others above his own that day.

What about you? What is it that you value?

Many people will tell you they love their car, their job, their dog—or even their laptop or MP3 player! And many will say how much they enjoy good music and certain movies. Others will even talk about how important certain friends and family are. But honestly, what is really important to you?

Values clarification

A person's values are formed through all he or she has experienced or learned in life. Parents and family, religious affiliation, friends and peers, education, jobs or careers and books we read are all involved in defining what we value.

Wise people recognize these influences. They try to identify and develop a clear, concise and meaningful set of values, beliefs and priorities.



WHAT'S IT WORTH TO YOU?

◀ **Honoring Cpl. Jason L. Dunham**, the Dunhams have keepsakes displayed in their living room in a six-foot-tall wooden cabinet. Inset: Deb Dunham holds the boot-camp picture of her son.

Once defined, *values* impact every aspect of our lives. Whether we know it or not...

- We demonstrate our values in action in our behavior, decision making and interpersonal relationships.
- We use our values to make decisions about priorities in our daily work and home life—our general use of time.
- In the end, our goals and pursuits are grounded in what we value.

So what do your values consist of? Rather than just getting a piece of paper out and writing down the “things I value in life,” let me offer a few questions for you to answer. Whether you are 15, 25 or even older, answering these five questions can likely help you assess what your values really are right now.

1. What do I do with my time? How do I spend my time throughout the day? Do I listen to music? How much time do I spend in front of the television? How much time do I spend on my cell phone, doing homework, reading novels or even reading the Bible or praying?

2. What do I wish for? We all have hopes and wishes, especially when we’re young and have our entire lives ahead of us! Is it better looks, no pimples, more money for better clothes? Is it friends and opportunities to make a difference in the world?

3. What upsets me? What troubles me these days? My clothes not being new enough? What people think about me? When people make fun of what I believe? Not having enough hot sauce in the refrigerator for my nachos?

4. What makes me happy? Do I thrive on attention from others, particularly those of the opposite sex? Does money, wealth or things (new phones, MP3 players and the like) really excite me? Or is it helping other people and seeing a need fulfilled in a person’s life?

5. What do I think about? Do I daydream? If so, what’s the topic of my mental wanderings? Boys? Girls? The next thing I want to buy? The next movie I want to see? Or do I think about God and His plan? Do I think about the troubled world we live in? Do I pray and talk with God about these things?

What makes me tick?

The apostle Peter told the Church in 1 Peter 2:9 that they were “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...” God considers us very special! But what does that mean to Him? Peter continued the thought saying “...that you may proclaim the praises [excellence] of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Clearly, God expects His people to live a life that shows honor toward Him and all He stands for. The only way this is going to happen is if what we *value* in life is good, meaningful and purposeful.

One of the wealthiest men who ever lived asked a basic question about life: “What profit has a man from all his labor

in which he toils under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Israel’s king Solomon was questioning whether life was more than just the things one acquires.

In chapter 2 of Ecclesiastes he went on to list all of the things that he did, wanted and had! This passage shows that he had it all—mansions, great wine vineyards, gardens, pools, maids and butlers, horse stables, gold and silver and a lot of bling (flashy jewelry), and even live music performers (verses 4-8).

These things were important to Solomon at the time. He *valued* them all very much. But as the years drew on, he realized these things he valued did not bring *real* happiness! Solomon learned the hard way that he *valued the wrong things*.

Our values affect our future

As was mentioned earlier, what we *wish for*, what makes us *happy*, what we get upset about, what we *do with our time* and what we *think* about are all indicators of what we value right now in our lives.

God is preparing for a world to come in which real peace will prevail. He is preparing a small group of people now to help usher in this new age. Does that include you?

If it does, it bears asking this question: Are your thoughts, wishes and dreams made of the things and ideals that speak to this new world, this new future for mankind? Many of you have the *knowledge* of this soon-coming Kingdom and the way of life it will represent. God encourages us to seek this way of life and future—and not allow the physical things of life to so distract us that we lose sight of this incredible future!

He tells us that the things of real value and worth are seated in the plans and throne of God (Matthew 6:19-21). Christ tells us that if we focus on those things of spiritual value, God will take care of us. If our choices, use of time and what we think about are focused on the future Kingdom of God, He promises to provide the physical things we need to sustain our lives, be content and happy (Matthew 6:33).

Jason Dunham, mentioned at the outset, gave his life to help his comrades. On April 14, 2004, he valued the life of his friends at least as much as his own. Eight days later, he died, proving what he valued. Jason’s actions resulted in his posthumously receiving the highest honor for bravery in his country, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

We are all given a chance to fight a spiritual battle that will secure a lasting peace exceeding the outcomes of all the wars in our world. God gives each of us the chance to be a part of something much more lasting than the temporal peace the armies of mankind may bring.

However, our active part in that future government depends, to a large degree, on what we value now. Right values enable us to represent the government that will bring peace to all. They also help us prepare to assist our elder Brother, Jesus Christ, in His administration.

Are these things worth it to you?

Doug Horchak, husband, father, and coordinator of the United Youth Corps program, pastors congregations in Dallas and Sherman, Texas.

A Challenge to Evolution— *On the Beach!*

by Mario Seiglie

“Hey, look at the surf!” Aaron exclaimed, as the beach party was winding down that night. A number of us approached the seashore and were awed by a beautiful green luminosity flashing through the crashing waves. This phenomenon, called bioluminescence, is caused by millions of tiny bacteria lighting up their cells as they are tossed by the surf.

Little did I imagine I was witnessing evidence against the theory of evolution.

Off the coasts of Hawaii, the bobtail squid uses this type of luminescent bacteria as a flashlight to hide its shadow from its predators and to feed. The amount of light from the bacteria, kept in an organ on the underside of the squid’s body, is controlled by a lens. The squid can sense the intensity of light from the sky and modify its glow, so that the animal, seen from below, matches the background.

It is one of creation’s most remarkable examples of symbiosis—the living together of two dissimilar organisms in a mutually beneficial relationship—something that gives evolutionists major headaches.

How a squid developed its complex ability to capture and use tiny luminous bacteria exactly on the right part of its body, create a lens for it and even regulate the light is something scientists cannot explain. One group of experts admitted, “[Since] most animal-bacterial associations cannot be experimentally initiated, the mechanisms underlying the processes...have not been explored” (“Competitive Dominance Among Strains of Luminous Bacteria...in Squid-Vibrio Symbioses,” University of Hawaii, June 22, 1998).

There are many factors that have to be exactly right to achieve what the squid can do. Evolution, in contrast, insists animals have evolved in a step-by-step process through the blind forces of random mutation and natural selection.

Yet squid, as other animals, operate

on instinct—a programmed mode of behavior and survival. They are not conscious of what they are doing. They simply do it—to our utter amazement.

This particular squid remains buried in the sand during the day and comes out to feed at night. That’s when its amazing ability literally shines in the darkness. How does it do it?

Shortly after birth, the squid begins to accumulate the right type of bacteria (*Vibrio fischeri*) from the thousands of organisms present in seawater.

As one scientist wrote: “The ability of the bobtail squid to shine its light organ... hinges on the luminescence of the symbiotic bacteria *Vibrio fischeri*. Among the thousands of creatures swimming in the ocean...*Vibrio fischeri* bacteria and bobtail squid apparently only have eyes for each other. The squid allows one particular bacteria to colonize it while excluding all other types” (John Roach, “Squid’s Built-In Light to Inspire New Gadgets,” *National Geographic News*, Jan. 8, 2004, online version).

Hmm—very interesting. A squid knows exactly which bacteria to choose from the thousands out there. How could this have happened by chance? Does cre-



This Hawaiian bobtail squid (*Euprymna scolopes*) has silvery tissue around and across its eye. This reflective, silvery tissue of the eye and skin is made of the same unusual proteins that help make the squid’s flashlight work.

ation or evolution make more sense in this example?

Furthermore, it is amazing how these bacteria light up only when a sufficient number come together—and we are talking about millions of them! A single bacterium produces only a tiny flash of light that would be useless to the squid. But through a process called *quorum sensing*, once a critical mass of these organisms has been reached, they communicate to synchronize this powerful burst of light—precisely what the squid needs to camouflage its shadow on moonlit nights.

So the squid benefits from this bacteria and, in turn, the bacteria benefit from the squid by being fed precisely the right elements they need—carbon and nitrogen in the form of proteins and peptides. Now, how did the squid learn through mindless evolution what the bacteria eat? Did it try out different foods until, by accident, the bacteria were finally satisfied and agreed to stay? This sounds utterly ludicrous—but you won’t hear evolutionary scientists

How a squid developed its complex ability to capture and use tiny luminous bacteria exactly on the right part of its body, create a lens for it and even regulate the light is something scientists cannot explain.

admitting the inherent dilemma.

Beyond this is another factor here that makes evolutionary explanation even less believable than it should be anyway. The squid has what might seem to be a problem in that it feeds too many bacteria every day. This is resolved by special vents it has that flush out 95 percent of the bacteria each morning! While this loss would seem to be another problem, it turns out not to be because the bacteria reproduce precisely the same number during the day and therefore are ready to become the squid's reliable flashlight for its nighttime forays.

Everything fits hand in glove—each stage is as carefully orchestrated as a ballet.

All of this clearly shows purposeful behavior—that two completely different creatures were literally meant for each other and need each other to survive. Yet so many steps had to be in place *at the same time* for this vital partnership to work. Just one missing component would send the whole delicate process crashing down.

Again, the question is: what makes more sense as the means of producing this incredible symbiosis—creation or evolution?

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Cultural plague

Continued from page 7

process continues today, and hence we have an increasingly disorderly society” (p. 64).

A symptom of decline

Pornography contributes to America's overall pattern of moral decline. Society increasingly rejects the self-discipline needed for education and marriage and instead embraces practices such as social (rather than scholastic) advancement and no-fault divorce. Sexual self-discipline is rejected as well, which can only lead to the lust for more self-gratification and indulgence.

Some maintain that government has no right to restrain individuals who are satisfying themselves—yet we all have to live with the effects of the people who engage in such acts. Although no one has “dropped dead” from viewing such material, Bork says it best when he responds, “No one ever dropped dead reading ‘Der Sturmer,’ the Nazi anti-semitic newspaper, but the culture it served caused six million Jews to drop dead” (p. 144).

The porn industry degrades women and men, destroys normal relationships, creates false expectations and perverts the true meaning for sex and family life.

Pornography is a sin in direct conflict with the value, in letter and in spirit, of monogamy and fidelity in marriage. Since marriage and family are the building blocks of any healthy society, pornography is clearly a disease that threatens our civilization. Protect yourself and your future by avoiding this cultural plague!

For more information on the causes and effects of pornography, see our article in *The Good News* at www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn69/liberalism.htm.

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Too Much Coffee Culture?

Teens and college-age young adults are consuming extreme amounts of caffeine from coffee and caffeine drinks. Because the caffeine content is not labeled, many consumers are not aware of the intensely high caffeine levels in energy products produced by soft-drink companies. But some are seeking even more—increasingly strong prescription stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin, drugs commonly prescribed to counter Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Students are using the stimulants to increase their time awake in order to complete school, job or leisure activities.

Caffeine, especially in coffee, has benefits including pain reduction for migraine sufferers and clearer thinking, but in excessive amounts it can cause heart palpitations and complications and extreme nausea.

Coffee shops like Starbucks, which has more than 9,000 locations across the United States, have become “the 21st-century version of the 1950s malt shop. It’s where kids go to meet friends and socialize,” says Joseph DeRupo, director of communications for the National Coffee Association (Nancy Shute, “Over the Limit? Americans Young and Old Crave High-Octane Fuel, and Doctors are Jittery,” *U.S. News & World Report*, April 23, 2007).

31%

The number of 18- to 24-year-olds who drink coffee daily. Up from 16% in 2004. — Nancy Shute, *U.S. News & World Report*, April 23, 2007.

>In the News<

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

Banning the Tanning Booth

The U.S. states of Utah, Virginia and South Dakota, along with others, are seeking to put limits on the amount of time teens can be under the glow of the tanning bed. Concerns over skin cancer and other hygienic issues are at the root of new legislation. The restrictions vary. Some states ban tanning bed use completely for those under 18, while others require a parent present or a doctor’s prescription (“27 States Now Restrict Use of Tanning Beds by Teenagers,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, March 30, 2007).

Redefining Style

The flood of immodest clothing available in stores has led to a growing number of designers and retailers specializing in modest clothing. From a variety of religious backgrounds, entrepreneurs are creating new options in the fashion marketplace.

Chelsea Rippy, founder of Shade Clothing, which specializes in covering clothes, noted her reasons for starting the company: “Fashion took a sharp turn for the worse. Pants were crazy low, and shirts were crazy short. Modesty aside, I didn’t feel cute in anything.”

Even the mainstream fashion retailers have noted the need for more modest choices. “The customer is starving for a fashionable, covered product. There’s a real market out there,” says Jeff Genette, CEO of Macy’s Department Stores, Northwest region.

Wendy Shalit, author of several books on the modest lifestyle, including the forthcoming *Girls Gone Mild*, and founder of a blog on modesty (<http://blogs.modestlyyours.net>) says that women are “tired of the expectation that they present themselves in a sexual way...Girls are discovering that showing their belly button to strangers is not as empowering as they have been led to expect” (Kimberly Palmer, “Anti-Britney: The New Look,” *U.S. News & World Report*, April 23, 2007).

This trend shows that looking stylish and being adequately covered don’t have to conflict.



Rap Wraps Up

The rap music genre (also known as hip-hop) is suffering a decline in sales as well as criticism from inside the hip-hop world about its messages and their negative influence on society.

Rap music sales fell 21 percent from 2005 to 2006, and a rap album was not among the top 10 sellers of the year. In a recent study by the Black Youth Project, a majority of young people saw rap as too violent. And in an Associated Press and AOL-Black Voices poll of black Americans last year, 50 percent called hip-hop a negative force in American society.



C. Dolores Tucker is a black activist criticized in the past by young fans of rap for crusading against the degradation of women in the lyrics of rap music. She is now being joined by women who were formerly rap fans but are now older and understand the negative cultural implications of degrading language (Nekesa Mumbi Moody, “A Bad Rap: Genre Seems to Be Losing Luster,” Associated Press, March 5, 2007).

Monitoring what music we listen to by noting the lyrics and choosing songs with messages in line with God’s way of life allows us to fill our minds with the positive and forgo negative influences.

Multitasking Impacts Revenues

Multitasking, often presented as a virtue of the digital age, is turning out to be what many people initially thought it was—a productivity-damaging distraction. One expert, Jonathan Spira, chief analyst at Basex, estimates that interruptions created by multitasking cost the U.S. economy nearly \$650 billion a year. Companies as large as Microsoft are feeling the financial effects.

The problem stems from the fact that human brains were designed to work efficiently on one task at a time, using a hundred billion neurons and hundreds of trillions of synaptic connections. We can multitask if necessary, but we function better on a single task. “Multitasking is going to slow you down, increasing the chances of mistakes,” said David Meyer of the University of Michigan (Steve Lohr, “Slow Down, Brave Multitasker, and Don’t Read This in Traffic,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 2007).

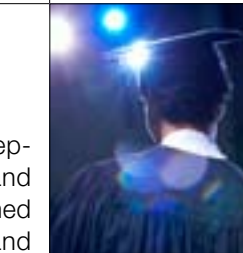
Graphic Novels Targeting a Female Audience

The industry of graphic novels is targeting the underrepresented female readers. Traditionally comic books and their upper-end cousins, graphic novels, have been aimed at boys and young men. Now more artists, authors and publishers want to focus their attention on providing subject matter for female readers.

Superheroes have been the traditional themes of American graphic novels, until the mid-1990s when more serious storylines also became popular. A variety of subjects is planned to appeal to female audiences (Bill Eichenberger, “Not Just for Boys: Graphic Novels Explode in Popularity, Thanks to Broadening Fan Base,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, April 15, 2007).



A Japanese style of graphic novel, called *manga*, is rising rapidly in popularity, especially among girls.



“This is the first generation of American-born men who don’t have substantially more education than their fathers’ generation,” says Lawrence Katz, labor economist at Harvard University.

At the beginning of the 20th century most Americans received eight years of schooling, but by the 1920s more than 50 percent of teenagers were going to high school. The trend toward more education extended to college, but in recent years things have leveled off. Even though more jobs require a degree, only 30 to 35 percent of young Americans graduate from college.

Some experts blame the American education system and its allowances for those who fail repetitively—causing students to put off pushing themselves to higher achievement (David Wessel, “Lack of Well-Educated Workers Has Lots of Roots, No Quick Fix,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2007).

75% Amount more employers are paying four-year college graduates than high-school grads—David Wessel, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2007.

Oversexualized Culture Destructive to Girls

A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) on cultural trends finds that American girls are sexualized in almost every medium and product—advertisements, video games, clothing and cosmetics, among others. This, in turn, contributes to other trends among girls like eating disorders, low self-confidence and depression (www.apa.org/releases/sexualization.html).

The study found, strangely enough, that college girls who took math tests in a bathing suit received a lower score than those fully dressed. As the executive summary stated, “thinking about the body and comparing it to sexualized

cultural ideals disrupted mental capacity.” There was no difference in test scores for young men whether they were wearing bathing suits or were fully dressed (www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualizationsum.html).

Columnist Kathleen Parker noted: “It can’t be coincidence that girls’ self-objectification—looking for male attention in all the wrong ways—has risen as father presence has declined. At last tally, 30 percent of fathers weren’t sleeping in the same house as their biological children” (“Dads Are Key to Giving Girls Reality Check on Sexuality,” *The Orlando Sentinel*, Feb. 28, 2007).

For more information on developing the right understanding of marriage, sex and family, request or download *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* (www.ucg.org/booklets).



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It Pays to Stay in School

The United States has a shortage of educated workers. Employers are paying four-year college graduates 75 percent more than high school graduates, while 25 years ago college graduates only received 40 percent more.

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