

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

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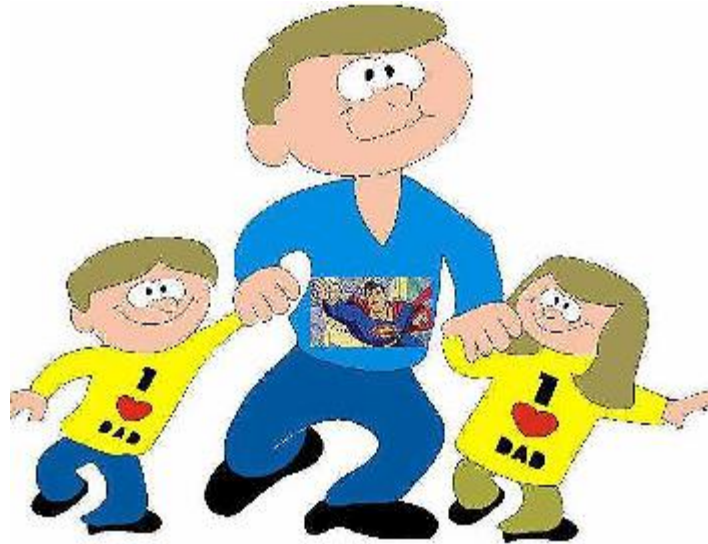
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Right and Wrong: Who Decides?



Recent events have shown the United States and other countries to be deeply divided over such issues as abortion, homosexual rights, drug use, censorship and a host of other problems. When it comes down to issues of morality and individual rights, who should decide wrong or right? Are we able to decide such matters for ourselves? History doesn't provide much encouragement...

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Virtual Christian MAGAZINE Editorial

The Gift of Life

By Greg Sargent

THE CHRISTIAN WORLD recognizes an important event that occurred almost 2,000 years ago in the late spring. Jesus Christ had already risen from the dead. He had instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive a gift from God that was very special.

Little did anyone realize how great and powerful this gift would be. Without it, the world had suffered extreme anguish and devastation for about 4,000 years. For lack of this gift, a number of major catastrophes struck society: Noah's Flood inundated the world. God was forced to confuse the languages of the earth. Sodom and Gomorrah were exterminated in a nuclear-type explosion. And Israel was unable to fulfill its promises to the Almighty. Nations continued to battle against other nations in a never-ending quest for illusive peace.

For lack of the gift Christ promised to His disciples, every individual has suffered from time immemorial. Parenting has suffered beginning with Adam and Eve; marriages have failed; business ventures have gone bankrupt; peace and happiness have been unreachable dreams.

God's gift through Christ was the panacea, the solution for every negative occurrence mankind has ever experienced. Christ told His disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

Power! It's what every contender desires in order to gain victory in his or her personal endeavors. However, the power given through Christ was not for mere mortal accomplishments. Christ understood that our battle is a spiritual one against Satan the devil, "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Satan's goal is to enslave everyone in a prison of despair by causing us to break God's law.

Breaking God's law is a death trap. Satan's devious plan overlooks no one. The apostle Paul explained that all of us were "dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:1-3). The apostle John summarized this truth by stating, "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

God's aim is to release us from Satan's stranglehold. Through Christ, God would destroy the devil's power of death and release us (Hebrews 2:14-15). This is where the promised gift of power comes into play.

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Notice the results or the fruits of this power: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Let's stop and think about what this means. For the entire period of 4,000 years before Christ came, mankind was unable to solve its problems. No doubt thousands, if not millions, of lectures had been given by thousands of eloquent speakers about solving every enigma you could possibly imagine. The result? In Galatians 1:4, Paul called the world "this present evil age." All the books, psychotherapies, 12-step programs, drugs, herbs, meditations, exercise programs or other solutions from the best and the brightest haven't brought any real, lasting relief.

There is a simplicity in Jesus Christ that does not allow us to be corrupted by the craftiness of Satan. His craftiness leads to lawbreaking. Lawbreaking leads to death. Power from the Holy Spirit leads to fulfilling God's laws. You cannot break God's laws when displaying the fruits of God's Spirit. *"Against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5:23). Hate, unhappiness and fighting are opposites of love, joy and peace.

A shallow understanding of salvation through Christ has kept this world locked in the throes of death. Most have not received the promised power from God because they still refuse to obey God's law. The wages of practicing transgression of God's law will always be death (Romans 6:23). No wonder we are instructed to change (Matthew 4:17; Acts 2:38). We are not saved from despair and sin by Christ's death. We are saved by His life (Romans 5:10)! The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brought much more than most have ever imagined.

The gift of God is eternal life! That gift is the power of the Holy Spirit. That power enables us to be changed to an immortal body *and* to keep God's law (Romans 8:4, 11).

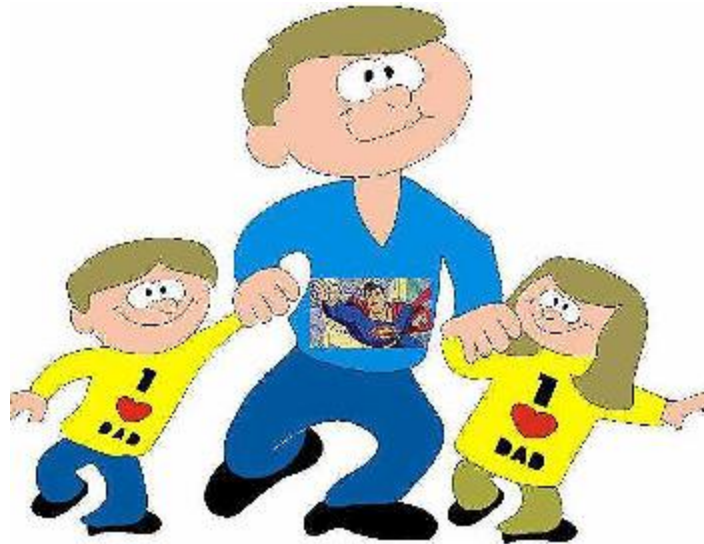
About 6,000 years have passed since the creation of Adam and Eve. Yet mankind has not learned the lesson. Nothing physical can bring happiness. Only the character of God Himself, the fruit of His power through Christ, will end all problems and bring world peace and happiness.



Time to Be a Father

Is your father "Superman"? Remembering your Father and how you and he can strengthen that relationship.

By Tim Waddle



“FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound -- it's a bird, it's a plane, it's Superman!"

We all recognize that phrasing to describe Superman, the man of steel, who has no equals, no fears and no weaknesses except kryptonite.

But let me phrase it a little different and see if you know who this describes: Works hard and long hours to provide for his family, able to leap toys left on the floor or in the driveway, can comfort "owies" and hurt feelings, is limited by time and space and personal weaknesses.

It is important that each of us honors our mother and father as God commands.

Does that description sound like a super hero, like Superman, or does it sound like just plain men? That, as we are well aware, is what we are, just plain men. Each with our own talents and abilities, but without the superhuman power of Superman. With work, family, spiritual responsibilities and all the various things which pull us in so many different directions, it seems we need to be superhuman. Especially if we are parents.

In America this month we will be celebrating a day set aside to honor men who are fathers. Men who along with all their other responsibilities in life also have the responsibility of child rearing.

That often seems like the toughest or most challenging of our jobs.

With Father's Day here, take a moment to reflect on your father or, for you fathers, your own fatherhood.

Time spent together

In our society, it is all too easy to think about the bad aspects of our parents. Today, instead of individuals taking responsibility for their actions, it seems everything is often blamed on bad parenting. I spent time going through dozens of quotes concerning fathers and parenting and at least 80 percent of them dealt with negative aspects.

We all know the Fifth Commandment, which tells us to honor our mother and father. This is still a commandment whether our parents make it easy for us or not.

My dad was not perfect as a father and, if I let myself, I can dwell on the negative. But I try to remember the good. The majority of my best and favorite memories of my father are all associated with time. Time that he spent with my siblings and me. Time with my father, as is often the case, was a prized commodity. Most of my childhood memories of my father consist of one of two things: he was either sleeping or getting ready to go to work. The time that we actually spent together stands out in my memories.

From what I understand, my father was an avid hunter and fisherman as a young man. I have a wonderful memory of the first time he took me and my brothers fishing. There were four of us boys with worms on hooks, lines in the water and anticipation of what might happen next. We had our instructions: to yank the pole if the bobber went under the waterline. As it was, (according to my memory -- there is some debate among the brothers) my bobber went under first. Since my dad cast the line only a few feet from the shore, no reeling was necessary. One good yank from an excited 6-year-old had the small fish flopping on the shore, fortunately with lips still attached.



Unsure what the fish might do to me, I took off running with pole in hand and fish bouncing behind. I was certain it was chasing me, and I continued running until my dad caught up and saved me from what seemed like a boy-eating blue gill.

I am grateful for that memory and others produced from time spent with my father.

Turning hearts

It is extremely important to God that we as fathers turn our hearts to the children so that the hearts of the children will turn to us: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a

curse" (Malachi 4:5-6). The word "curse" actually means "utter destruction."

We know that there are many ramifications to these verses, but one important aspect of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers is to spend time together.

It doesn't matter if a child is actually fatherless or the father just doesn't spend time with him or her. The effects are the same. The lack of an active father leaves a vacuum in a child's life; a vacuum most often filled with anger. Anger which is often directed at any and all authority figures. Along with anger comes discouragement and often depression. How often do we see these effects in our society?

There were four of us boys with worms on hooks, lines in the water and anticipation of what may happen next.

"Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father" (Proverbs 17:6). Children whose friends can see that their fathers love them and spend time with them are envied! Many times children who don't have fathers, or whose fathers don't spend time with them, latch on to the fathers of their friends.

How do we become the glory of our children? By spending time with them and giving them the attention that they need.

On the other hand, it is important, no matter our age and no matter the parenting abilities of our parents, that each of us honors our mother and father as God commands.

There is a growing phenomenon in our society: the elderly are ignored. Many parents who did not spend time with their children and chose to pursue careers or other interests are now put away in nursing homes and forgotten.

But as parents get older, the need for honor from their children becomes greater. Our society is set up in such a way that as we go on with our lives, it becomes difficult to have time with our parents. The cycle that started with parents not spending time with their children reaches full circle.

"To honor" is a very important verb to God: "You shall rise up before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:32).

Make the commitment

Making the commitment to spend time with your children is not the only step in successful parenting, but it is a huge step in the right direction.

Making the commitment to spend time with your father and mother, to honor them when they are old, even if they did not spend enough time with you when you were young, is another huge step in the right direction.

God places great importance on time with family. What is our purpose for existing? Is it not to

be part of God's family in the Kingdom of God and spending eternity with our Father in heaven?



Child Abuse: *What Kids Are Doing to Kids*

Children are hurting each other but what can be done? See how God says we should handle ourselves.

By Lowell Crosby



WHEN WE HEAR THE TERM "child abuse," most of us immediately think of an adult abusing a child or young person in some way, and it makes us very upset or angry. It is a serious problem today, and child abuse should be upsetting to us because of the harm, hurt and damage that is done to a child or young person.

There is one type of child abuse that is very damaging, but often ignored -- how kids abuse other kids! There is a great deal of denial about this type of abuse by parents and young people alike. I want to tell you how devastating this can be -- how tragically kids abuse one another.

The trauma of teasing

A *Kansas City Star* article titled "Teasing Isn't Just Mischief" spoke of a 10-year-old boy who awoke early one morning knowing he couldn't return to school that day.

"Lots of kids teased me every hour of the day," he said. "They really got me to a point where I couldn't hold it in anymore." So he emptied his piggy bank and sneaked bread, potato chips and soda out of the kitchen. "I was thinking about my parents and my dog," said the boy. It might be a long time before he saw them again, he thought. He slipped a photo of his parents into his book bag.

When his mother went to check on him at 7 a.m., he was gone. He had hidden in an abandoned station wagon a few blocks from his home. The next day he was found and returned home. "I love you and Daddy," he told his mother, "but I knew you would make me go to school." The boy is not sure why the kids at school began picking on him. His mother thinks it's because he gets good grades.

He, like other children who ache from school-yard taunts, is a victim of child abuse, says SuEllen Fried, a past president of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse. "It's not what adults are doing to kids but what kids are doing to each other.... There's real denial about this in society," Fried says. "For generations we have said, 'All children are cruel'" and dismissed the subject. Fried says we allow abuse to happen by writing off the name calling. Adults have to step in, Fried says, to support the victims and help children learn to empathize with the child they are tormenting.

The boy went back to school the following Monday, and because of the news reports was treated better by the other children.

All children aren't cruel. They just need someone to remind them how much laughter and name calling hurts.

Understanding why it happens

Are any of you doing these kinds of things, or have you been part of a group that does? Or are you the victim? If you are, you know how awful it is, and how much it hurts. Why do kids abuse other kids in this way?

Let me walk you through some stages young people naturally go through to show you where this "peer abuse" may be coming from, and what you need to be on guard against.

Young children tend to believe every single advertising claim on TV without reservation. But, as you grow older, you begin to discover that things are not always exactly as they are portrayed to be. The toy that looked great on TV, the one you just had to have, turns out to be a piece of junk.

What happens is that preteens and teens naturally and normally begin to look at everything with a critical eye, especially themselves compared to those of their own peer group. All of a sudden you find yourself wanting to be and needing to look perfect.

Through the parents' eyes

Parents, one day your son leaves home for school, but returns home later looking like a strange mixture of Dennis Rodman, Don King and Mr. T. Why did he do this to himself? Because he is at that age, and all of a sudden his need to have a look that's right to him and his peers takes over.

One day your daughter leaves home in a new outfit, only to return home wearing a mix of clothes you've never seen before, having borrowed and exchanged her own with others during the day. Why? Because at this age all at once she has the need to look "perfect."

All of a sudden your children, who never got within six feet of a washcloth in their life, now stand before a mirror scrubbing their faces until they glisten. They shampoo and blow dry their hair a least once a day, and sometimes more, seeking to satisfy this need to look perfect.

How it looks to teens

And young people, this thing that happens to you occurs at just the time when your body is encountering all kinds of physical changes -- skin blemishes, lack of coordination, tongue-tiedness -- just when you are becoming more interested in the opposite sex. And wouldn't you know it, when you and others your age are most interested in the opposite sex, you feel you are at your ugliest and most awkward.

This is a natural thing that happens to you, but in today's society the feelings of inadequacy are heightened by the models displayed in the media. Can you imagine a big pimple on the end of Britney Spears' nose, or one of the N'Sync singers falling over a crack in the sidewalk, as you might do as you try to impress a boy or girl? Well, this is part of the reason many young people don't have good feelings about themselves, trying to equal these perfect, popular people.

Preteens and teens naturally and normally begin to look at everything with a critical eye.

At this "need to be perfect" stage, young people become great flaw pickers. If one of your peers in school or around town happens to be physically different, even in the least little way, then watch out! Things are going to get rough for that person. At the first sign a kid is different, others plant a nickname on him or her -- a negative nickname.

Remembering back when I was a kid, some of the names we gave to other kids in school and around town might have seemed innocent, but they were not.

When you do these things to others, you are trying to make yourself look good, to look bold or macho, to impress your peers, all at some other kid's expense. You are abusing other young people, and you might be really hurting them much more than you realize, so much so that they feel angry, resentful and violent, or depressed, hopeless or even suicidal. This type of abuse can push the victims over the edge.

The biblical answer

The Bible explains how God wants us to act toward others. Romans 15:1 says, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves." James warned against the dangers of the tongue spewing out negative things about others (James 3:8-9) often motivated by envy and self-seeking (verse 16). Paul encourages us to "let no corrupt word" come out of our mouths and to put away "evil speaking," but instead to be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving" (Ephesians 4:29-32). On the other hand, when we have been mistreated by others, Romans 12:17-21 tells us to turn our anger and desire for revenge over to God -- to overcome evil with good. These are the guidelines Jesus used as a young person.

Parents, if you see this being done by one of your children, don't laugh and look at it as, "Oh, it's just kids teasing and name calling." No! It's abuse! You need to stop it and show your children why it is wrong. If your child is the recipient of the abuse and name calling, don't just tell him or her to be tough and take it. This can be devastating to a child. You need to work with your child to help him or her understand the motive of the abusing child, which is often his or her need for peer approval.

Young people also need to do their part. If they are part of an abusing group, they need to stop! Think about how much this sort of thing hurts others. If you are the one being taunted, abused,

called hurtful names, or being abused by being left out of things, please discuss the situation with your parents. Don't just keep it to yourself. Ask for help and maybe some ideas on how to deal with it.

Read Matthew 7:12, which has come to be known as the Golden Rule. Treat other people as you would like to be treated by them. This is the essence of true religion.



Sing a Song!

Can singing better your life or bring you closer to God? Do you have song in your life?

By Lorelei Nettles



DO YOU REMEMBER the song with the refrain, "Just sing, sing a song"? I took that song quite literally as a child. By practicing its lesson I triumphed over some of my greatest fears and got through some very tough times. Sometimes the lyrics or words of the song helped me. Other times it was only the sound of the music. Many times in my life I would sing a song just to praise God.

When I was singing I could overcome certain mental situations. A chorus of "Jesus loves me" would remind me I wasn't alone in the world. Singing a catchy show tune could lift my spirits. Singing the lyrics to a sad song might make me cry because I related my sadness to the song, but I always felt better afterwards. Even as an adult I often use song to ease my mood, sorrow, or just to express joy in the day.

Anywhere, anytime

A song can be sung anywhere, anytime. You can sing with or without music, inside or outside, in front of people or alone. There are no limitations! You don't even need to sing in tune. You'll still enjoy it and, when singing praises to God, He will enjoy it, no matter what you sound like. He even tells us in Psalm 100:1 to make a "joyful noise" (KJV).

Throughout the Bible, people praised God with song. Exodus 15 is an entire song that Moses and the children of Israel sang. In verse 21 Miriam answers their song with, "Sing to the Lord."

In Exodus 32:18 we find that, "It is not the voice of those who shout in victory, nor is it the voice of those who cry out in defeat, but the voice of those who sing

*A song can
be sung
anywhere,
anytime.*

that I hear." 1 Chronicles 16:23 says, "Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day." And the entire book of Psalms shows how important song is to God and His people.

A song can teach

My family has seen the many benefits of song in teaching, since we home school. Want to learn your phone number? Make up a song that rhymes with the last digit. You can learn math, the alphabet, a foreign language and how much God loves us and we Him. A song can bring the simplest of things or the most difficult to light in the brain. It's so much easier to remember a song. Didn't most of us learn our ABCs this way? Singing hymns or other spiritual songs can help us remember lines of Scripture and how much God cares about us.



Song can bring us moments of great joy and positive emotion. I remember my first Feast of Tabernacles in Wisconsin. The congregation stood to sing "God Speaks to Us" accompanied by a small orchestra. The music boomed through and filled the chilly auditorium. I started to weep before the end of the first verse. The sound of the music, the words and all the people singing them together were very moving. It was a moment in my life that I will never forget.

The power of song

I'm always saddened when I see one or two people who aren't joining in the singing of a group. I wonder what keeps them from it. Are they too ill to sing, or are they embarrassed? Do they not know the words to the song or just not know the peace, joy and release it can offer?

We take for granted the power of song. Think how often you sing along with the car radio or have the radio along with you by the pool or at the beach. Even stores know that if they play music you will stay in their store longer, be more comfortable and possibly buy more. As long as we sing songs with good content, we will feel good. If you haven't tried it, you should. It may just change your life. There is a certain release in song.

Read Psalm 9:11: "Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the people."

Song can renew us. Help us get through a hard day's work, soothe us after such a day, make us laugh, cry or make us feel closer to God. Love songs often bring us closer to one another. Silly songs may make us laugh. (We all know that laughter is good for us.) And what is more fun than sitting down with a child and singing out his or her favorite song? That smiling face looking back at you while you share this time together makes it all worthwhile.

We take for granted the power of song.

How many days I have caught myself singing a song about the solar system or some such thing without even realizing it, and then smiling when I've realized it because it was just so much fun. I must admit, sometimes I sing these songs most consciously, because they are just so much fun!

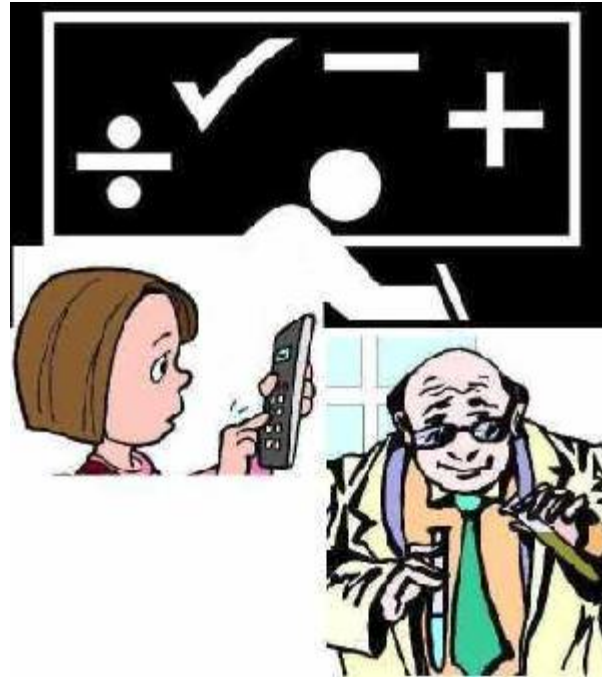
So remember how wonderful song can be in your life--all parts of your life--and take a moment and "just sing, sing a song."



There Is No God?

How was life on earth created, was it all by chance or was there a creator?

By Hector Earle



IF THERE WAS NO CREATOR, then consider for a moment what it would take for life on earth to have begun by chance. For life to have come about, somehow the right chemicals would have had to come precisely together in the right quantities, under the right pressure and temperature with the right amount of other controlling factors maintained over the correct amount of time.

Moreover, these precise conditions would have had to be repeated millions of times.

But how likely is it for even one such event to take place by chance? According to leading mathematicians and scientists (evolutionists and creationists alike), the probability of the right atoms and molecules falling into place to form just one simple protein molecule is 1 in 10 to the 113th power (that's 1 followed by 113 zeros). This number is larger than the total estimated number of atoms in the entire universe.

All evidence points to order and design throughout the earth and indeed

Mathematicians dismiss anything taking place that has a probability of less than 1 in 10 to the 50th power much less anything happening in 1 in 10 to the 113th. But far more than one simple protein is needed for life. Some 2000 different proteins are needed just for a cell to maintain its life, and the chance that all of them will occur at random is 1 in 10 to the 40,000th power.

To the logical mind these calculations wipe out the idea entirely that life originated spontaneously on the earth. All evidence points to order and design throughout the earth and indeed the whole universe. From the study of the tiniest atom to the giant nebulae, one can see logic and order in everything that is taking place. It has already been established that this order is governed by mathematical and scientific laws that are constant and maintained.

If, then, we have a universe that is governed by laws (as everyone admits), we can perceive that there had to be an intelligent lawmaker who formulated and established these laws. And that is just what Scripture declares, "What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:19-20).

Design and order are not only seen in the patterns of the universe but in the workings of living things around us. Take for example the marvels of the human body. How, for example, does the pancreas maintain the correct level of sugar in the blood? Without it we would all fall into a diabetic coma and die. How about the heart that beats for over 70 or 80 years without fail? Or the kidneys that filter poison from our blood, taking out the bad and leaving the good? Also, the eye and ear show such intricate design and complexity that modern medicine cannot fully explain it.

*Who showed the
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Who showed the womb how to receive a tiny egg and help turn it into a complex organism with millions of specialized cells with different functions?

Who designed the animal and plant worlds with their hosts of beautifully interdependent workings? Who created bird and animal migrations and chose which species would migrate and which wouldn't? Who built photosynthesis into plants so that almost all living things can ultimately receive their life-giving energy from the sun?

There is no God? Only a fool would say so.

