
Chapter 5.16

Immorality Among Christians and Morality Among Christians

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- Moral failures of real born again Christians are exaggerated.
- Christian pollsters fail to define real Christians well enough in their research and end up slandering the people of God by accusing them of things that fakes do and believe, but not born again Christians.
- If we studied God's handiwork in His "new creations" of Christians as much as we do His "old creation," the Universe, it would produce similarly convincing apologetic evidence.
- The lack of biblical Church discipline inhibits *virtue apologetics*.
- If observations of the entire Christian sub-culture do not impress someone, their personal experience with a Spirit-filled Christian can.
- Christians are not perfect, but when compared with the millions murdered by Humanists, Marxists, and Muslims, its spiritual superiority is obvious.

A) Immorality in Modern *Christendom*

A.1) The Exaggeration of Christian Immorality

In our defense of *virtue apologetics* for the Christian faith, there has been no intention of suggesting that believers are sinless. All we are claiming is that real regenerated Christians are significantly and noticeably more virtuous and moral than unregenerated humanity. Nonetheless, it needs to be admitted that while the stars in Heaven always faithfully fulfill their apologetic mission and proclaim the glory of God (cf. Ps 19:1-3), Christians do not.

Nonetheless, many Christian leaders greatly exaggerate this failure. For example, the popular Southern Baptist author Henry Blackaby recently told an audience:

The problem of America is not the unbelieving world. The problem of America is the people of God. You see, right now there are just as many divorces in the church as outside the church. There are just as many abortions inside the church [i.e. born again believers] as outside the church [i.e. unregenerate humanity]. There's only 1 percent difference in gambling inside the church as outside the church. George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the church, and he said there is virtually no difference between the two. ¹

Likewise, Gary L. W. Johnson notes:

The research efforts of Gallup, Barna, and Hunter all indicate that evangelicals are, for the most part, as secular in their orientation as non-Christians. . . . The data reveals, among other things . . . 77 percent believe that human beings are basically good and that good people go to heaven regardless of their relationship to Christ, while more than half of those surveyed affirmed self-fulfillment as their first priority. An equal number had a difficult time accepting the concept of absolute truth. I fear that this may be only the tip of a massive iceberg. ²

What can be said in response to such descriptions? Do they obliterate the legitimacy of *virtue apologetics*? We do not think so. First of all, we must deal with the difference between real born again Christians and *Christendom*. *Christendom* is the multitude of people and institutions throughout history and today who have professed to be Christian, but are not regenerated, and therefore, not really Christian. Jesus described the worst element of *Christendom* when He warned:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

¹⁶ By their [moral] fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

²¹ "Not everyone who [claims to be a Christian and who] says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:15-23)

The fact that in 2008 over 75 percent of Americans claimed to be Christian, ³ while far fewer than that actually believe the doctrines of Christianity or obey its commands, reveals the magnitude of *Christendom* in our country. What the above statistics actually reveal is the large number of professing Christians in America, not the moral state of real born again Christians.

This condition is nothing new, as B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) wrote many years ago: "Nowadays men cheerfully abandon the whole substance of Christianity, but they will hardly be persuaded to surrender the name." ⁴ Likewise, Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) wrote some years ago:

From the scriptural viewpoint, not all who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that is especially true in our generation. The meaning of the word Christian has been reduced to practically nothing. Surely, there is no word that has been so devalued unless it is the word "God" itself. ⁵

Accordingly, if one will read the quotes above carefully, it would seem fairly obvious that the majority of the immorality described does not apply to real Christians. Dr. Blackaby's comparison between Americans and "the church" is somewhat obscure as there are all kinds of unregenerate people going to church today. Therefore, it is misleading for him to equate "the people of God" with "the church." Accordingly, Dr. Blackaby's claim that real born again Christians are gambling and having abortions as often as non-Christians amounts to the kind of slander and false accusations that the devil practices against Christians as well (cf. Rev 12:10).

Likewise, Dr. Blackaby's claim that those indwelt with the Holy Spirit (i.e. all Christians) have as many divorces as those spiritually dead (i.e. all unbelievers) has been an oft quoted "statistic" that the

Church has been barraged with for many years now. It's simply not true. The general rate of divorce in America has been put at about 50%. However, contrary to Dr. Blackaby and many others, not even close to 50% of those in whom Christ lives are getting divorces.

For example, the association of churches this writer belongs to conducted an informal survey of the rate of divorce among church members in the last ten years. It was estimated to be 2.5%. That is not because the Christians in these churches are so much more spiritual than other Christians. Rather, it is because these churches simply have a very high percentage of actual born again Christians.

Such a rate of divorce would be what we would expect. Christians are not perfect. Some of them do not live up to the spiritual and virtuous power they have. But they are supernaturally and significantly superior to their unbelieving peers when it comes to love and morality. Accordingly, real Christians, all of whom are new human creations through the fact that God lives in them, honestly have significantly stronger and happier marriages than those who only have a sinful, selfish nature, which is true of all non-Christians.

Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of immorality in modern *Christendom* is the number of Roman Catholic priests who have molested children. None of them have any rightful claim to be a Christian, and we could wish the world could understand that, so that such horrific sins would not be attributed to real Christianity. Another significant example of unregenerated *Christendom* is mainline denominations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. which have approved of ordaining practicing homosexuals to be Pastors. No one can violate God's word so arrogantly and still have a believable claim to be a Christian.

A.2) The Problem With "Christian" Pollsters

As for Mr. Johnson's statistics from George Barna and others, we find it difficult to believe, for example, that "77 percent" of truly born again Christians "believe that . . . good people go to heaven regardless of their relationship to Christ" or that "more than half of" Christians "affirmed self-fulfillment as their first priority."

George Barna, known as "the most quoted man in Christianity" is, of course, famous for pointing out how sinful Christians supposedly are, compared to their unbelieving neighbors. However, Mr. Barna's research primarily serves to demonstrate how difficult it is to obtain good data on real Christians. In fact, studies have shown that Americans significantly exaggerate their spirituality when asked about it in the kinds of surveys the Barna Research Group conducts.⁶ Nonetheless, he attempts to get meaningful statistics by trying to

identify “born again Christians” for his surveys. Unfortunately, what follows is his definition of such a person:

“Born again Christians” are defined as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “born again.”⁷

The value of any study based on such a definition is severely limited by the probability that most, if not all, of the over 75 percent of Americans who claim to be Christians would accept such a definition of themselves. However, who really believes that all of those who would identify themselves with Mr. Barna’s description really are born again Christians? Even his claim that 40 percent of Americans are “born again” is unconvincing.⁸ Especially when he claims that almost half of them believe that satan is merely a “symbol of evil” and “not a living being,” one-third of them believe “that if a person is good enough they can earn a place in Heaven,” 15 percent claim Christ’s resurrection never happened, and 26 percent of Mr. Barna’s “born again” Christian believe, “it doesn’t matter what faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons.”⁹ These are not real Christians Mr. Barna, no matter what kind of “personal commitment to Jesus Christ” they claim to have made.¹⁰

The current President of the Barna Research Group, David Kinnaman, has perpetuated the same flawed approach to researching Christian behavior as the founder. In his book *UnChristian*, Mr. Kinnaman writes: “Eighty-five percent of young outsiders [unbelievers] have had sufficient exposure to Christians and churches that they conclude present-day Christianity is hypocritical.”¹¹ How does Mr. Kinnaman know the “exposure” was “sufficient” for the conclusion he draws? And when the author defines “born again Christian” in the same way as described above, it is obvious his results cannot be trusted.

Likewise, the author bases a great deal of his research on a survey group of “young” unbelievers, “84 percent” of whom “say they personally know at least one committed Christian.”¹² Do we want to trust how an unbeliever would define a “committed Christian”? Perhaps someone who periodically goes to a liberal, spiritually dead church and merely professes to be a Christian would seem “committed” to a young unbeliever.

Because of this flawed approach to research we are not impressed with Mr. Kinnaman’s conclusions on the immorality of Christians. He writes:

In virtually every study we conduct [Barna Research Group], representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians [given the unbiblical definition above] fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives.

For instance, based on a study released in 2007, we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of nonborn-again. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person's back.¹³

And Mr. Kinnaman really thinks these are "born-again believers"? In addition, among his definition of "born again believers" ages 23-41, the following percentages believe the following are "morally acceptable": A man and woman living together before marriage, 59%; sex outside of marriage, 44%; using profanity, 37%; getting drunk, 35%; looking at pictures of nudity or explicit sexual behavior, 33%; having an abortion, 32%.¹⁴ Any truly Christian researcher should know how dubious it would be to confidently call such people born again Christians in the biblical sense of the term. And it is simply slanderous and irresponsible to print such conclusions claiming they are either professional or Christian.

Accordingly, Dr. MacArthur writes:

I have absolutely no confidence in contemporary Christian pollsters, starting with their incorrigible unwillingness to make any kind of meaningful distinction between a heathen who makes a religious profession in the name of Christ, and people who truly seem to believe God's Word, love the Lord, and give credible professions of faith. (That is, of course, the very distinction Christ instructed us to make in Matthew 7:15-20.)

For example, a survey released by the Barna Research group in February 1994 suggested that half of all people who describe themselves as "born-again" had no clue what John 3:16 refers to. Large percentages of professing Christians were also at a loss to explain terms such as "the Great Commission" or "the gospel." A number defined "gospel" simply as "a style of music."¹⁵

Does the Barna Research Group understand the seriousness of the distortions their famous but flawed research? Scripture tells us that the devil slanders Christians (cf. Rev 12:10). Accordingly, erroneous,

widely published research that claims to prove Christians are just as immoral as unbelievers is likewise demonic slander.

Nonetheless, it may be possible to get something useful out of the Barna Research Group if we use some of its data correctly. For example, George Barna defines an “evangelical Christian” as:

In addition to meeting the born again criteria [described above] evangelicals also meet seven other conditions. Those include saying their faith is very important in their life today; contending that they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; stating that Satan exists; maintaining that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not by being good or doing good deeds; asserting that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; saying that the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. ¹⁶

Now we’re getting somewhere to actually identifying real born again Christians. In fact, biblically speaking, you would have to believe, “that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not by being good or doing good deeds” even to be a Christian. Which is why it is foolish to leave this out of a definition of any kind of Christian, which Mr. Barna habitually does.

The likelihood that Mr. Barna’s more narrow definition of an “evangelical” is more accurately reflecting real Christians is made all the more probable by the fact that his surveys indicate, “evangelicals remain just 7% of the adult population.” ¹⁷ That seems about right when we consider that Jesus said that “**many enter**” the “**wide . . . gate and broad . . . road that leads to [eternal] destruction**” but “**only a few find**” the “**small . . . gate and narrow . . . road that leads to [eternal] life**” (Matt 7:13-14).

Accordingly, the relatively few times Mr. Barna has separated out “evangelicals” in his morality studies, they have indeed demonstrated an objective, significant difference in behavior. For example, in a 2008 study, Mr. Barna reports:

Examining people’s faith perspectives revealed that evangelicals were the group most likely to follow traditional morality while atheists and agnostics were the faith segment most likely to reject those ways.

Among evangelicals, profanity (16%) and [exposure to] pornography (12%) were the most common transgressions. Fewer than 5% of evangelicals had engaged in gossip (4%), inappropriate sex (3%), gambling (2%), lying (1%) or drunkenness (less than .5 percent).

In contrast, among skeptics (atheists and agnostics) participation in the eight behaviors ranged from a low of 11%

(retaliating) up to a high of 60% (using profanity). While evangelicals averaged 6% participation in each of the eight behaviors mentioned, skeptics averaged five times that level (29%). Other common acts among skeptics included exposure to pornography (50%), gossip (34%) and drunkenness (33%).

People associated with faiths other than Christianity were twice as likely as evangelicals to engage in the [immoral] behaviors explored. They were most likely to use profanity (33%), view pornography (32%) and lie (18%).¹⁸

It is both [intentionally?] misleading and irresponsible that Mr. Kinnaman does not report these results in a book in which he is trying to prove the immorality of Christians. Nonetheless, he does write:

At Barna we employ dozens of tools to assess the depth of a person's faith [unfortunately, the quantity of their "tools" apparently has nothing to do with their quality]. Let me suggest one for our discussion: a biblical worldview. . . .

A person with a biblical worldview believes that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and he stills rules it today, salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned, Satan is real, a Christian has a responsibility to share his or her faith in Christ with other people, the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches, unchanging moral truth exists, and such moral truth is defined by the Bible. . . .

In our research, we have found that people who embrace these eight components live a substantially different faith from other Americans, indeed, from other believers.¹⁹

Again, we must sift through the researcher's flawed approach to obtain what may be closer to the truth. From a biblical perspective, people without these "components" could hardly claim to be Christian. Nonetheless, in spite of Mr. Kinnaman's opposition to biblical teaching regarding the qualities of real born again Christians, perhaps such research can be seen to actually prove the claim of *virtue apologetics*.

In fact, while Mr. Kinnaman desires to use his research to prove that *virtue apologetics* is a massive failure, some of it actually indicates otherwise. Even he admits: "[M]ost outsiders indicate that present-day Christianity is 'friendly.'"²⁰ Even among the most skeptical group of Americans (age 16 to 29), 71% of them thought Christians were "friendly." In addition, among this group that is the most antagonistic towards Christianity, over half of them believed Christianity was "a faith you respect" (55%), "consistently shows love for other people" (55%), "offers hope for the future" (54%), and that Christians are "people you trust" (52%). The percentages of those

who were favorable toward Christianity in older demographics were even significantly higher.

While Mr. Kinnaman claims his research reveals that real Christians in America are generally immoral, we think these statistics are a remarkable testimony of their virtue, especially when we consider the fact that American youth are constantly bombarded with anti-Christian propaganda. Accordingly, the author exaggerates and contradicts his own research when he states:

Mosaics [born 1984-2002] and Busters [born 1965-1976] rarely see Christians who embody service, compassion, humility, forgiveness, patience, kindness, peace, joy, goodness, and love.
21

On the contrary, a majority of them claimed in Kinnaman's own research to view Christians with these very kinds of attributes. In fact, it is interesting to note that evidently, a large number of the approximately 90% who thought Christians were "antihomosexual" and "judgmental" also thought they were "friendly" "a faith you respect," and "people you trust."

Again, none of this is to suggest that Christians are morally perfect. Still, we would claim that if a sampling of truly born again Christians could be morally compared with the spiritually unregenerate, that the evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit would be more significant and objective than many are willing to admit.

Humans have invested an enormous amount of resources for studying the "old" Creation, and the more they discover, the more they are convinced that it is the handiwork of the one true God. If we were to apply the same effort somehow in researching the phenomena of the "new creations" God is making through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, it would have the same apologetic effect. And we think God would want Christian pollsters like the Barna Research Group to do more of this very thing.

A.3) The Church's Hindrance of *Virtue Apologetics*

Unfortunately, the Church itself has diminished the potential of *virtue apologetics* in several ways. First, the fact that over 75 percent of Americans claim to be Christians is evidence that we have neglected to sufficiently denounce the popular, but unbiblical teaching that someone can claim to be a Christian without living like it. Related to this is the widespread neglect of biblical Church discipline (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-13). God wants to make the difference between His people and mere professors evident for apologetic reasons, but Church leaders are

often unwilling to do their part in the name of tolerance or because of fear.

Unfortunately, a lack of biblical Church discipline blurs the important line between Christianity and Christendom. As we discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter, so much of the immorality charged to the Church occurs in unregenerate, and therefore evil, Christendom, rather than among real born again Christians. Whole eras, nations, and denominations that have claimed to be Christian, are not. Admittedly, this very understandable confusion is perhaps the greatest hindrance to the effect of *virtue apologetics* that God intended.

For example, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) rather famously said:

I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. The materialism of affluent Christian countries appears to contradict the claims of Jesus Christ that says it's not possible to worship both Mammon and God at the same time.²²

Ghandi was both right and wrong. He is right that a person or country devoted to "materialism" or that would "worship . . . Mammon" would thereby "contradict the claims of Jesus Christ." But accordingly, such a country or person would not be able to biblically claim Christ at all. **"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"** (1 John 2:15). You cannot be greedy, materialistic, or worldly and be a Christian. Accordingly, Ghandi and others who wish to judge Christianity would be better to limit such judgments to those who are actually following the teachings of Jesus. Wouldn't this be fair in evaluating any religion?

It should also be mentioned that, while hypocritical "sinners" should be expelled from the communion of Christians, we have a mandate to include "seeking" sinners among us in our desire to reach out to them. Such people can be equated with Christians and therefore bring the claim of superior morality into question. Nonetheless, we are willing to be subject to the same criticism as Christ Who was also known to fellowship with "sinners" (Matt 9:10-13). But they were the seeking kind, not the proud, hypocritical, pharisaical kind, whom He publicly denounced. No doubt, the people observed these very virtues in Christ, and it was an important part of drawing them to Him. The same would be true today.

A.4) Personal Relationships are the Key

Even if we admit that some legitimate accusations can be made against the virtue of Christians today *in general*, this need not inhibit *virtue apologetics* in particular. This is again because its real power

occurs in the personal relationships that Christians have with the unregenerate. If observations of the entire Christian sub-culture do not impress someone, their personal experience with a Spirit-filled Christian can. So much so that experiences with hypocrisy can be negated, and even the unbeliever recognizes mere professors for what they are.

While many still wish to claim that the hypocrites of the world negate the use of *virtue apologetics* in a universal sense, it is still our love and holiness that will be the most powerful and effective way to earn a hearing of the Gospel in our own personal worlds. Lost friends and family may know of fallen “Christians” in the media, but more importantly they know us, and our virtue will speak louder than anything else.

Admittedly, a problem with *virtue apologetics* is that it is conditional on the choices and actions of Christians. As we wrote elsewhere:

[W]e notice in Christ’s prescription for Christian apologetics that it is conditional on our obedience. He says, “**By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another**” (John 13:35). Therefore, disobedience, and a failure to live in the fruits of the Spirit, not only disqualify us to be good ambassadors for Christ, but the world around us is cheated and deprived of the most powerful evidence available for the salvific exclusivity of Christianity.²³

Nonetheless, we maintain that in our own personal real world, one consistently virtuous Christian can make up for the failures of others.

A.5) A Noticeable Difference, Not Perfection, is Needed

While it must be admitted that Christians have not been perfect, it is again important to note that they do not have to be in order for *virtue apologetics* to work effectively. The Bible teaches that even spiritually regenerated humans with Jesus Christ Himself living in them, will still sin (cf. Rom 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8-9). However, we still maintain that the moral *lifestyle* of the truly born again will significantly and supernaturally exceed that of anyone else. And that is all that is really needed in order for *virtue apologetics* to be both legitimate and effective. It is not perfect Christians that are needed, but simply people who exhibit a noticeably higher level of morality than non-Christians.

Even a noticeable difference in love and holiness will have a significant impact on unbelievers around us. They still expect us to be human, and it is in fact sometimes how we handle our failures that also draws people to Christ. Even our sorrow and regret over our sin

is a virtue that unbelievers do not consistently have. Certainly not to the extent of Spirit-indwelled believers. “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28) including our failures.

Pastoral Practices

- Many of the inaccurate statistics of pollsters such as George Barna have unnecessarily discouraged Christians and made them feel defensive and even embarrassed about their faith. Unfortunately, it would appear that Mr. Barna has an agenda as he is now encouraging the abandonment of the local church in his book *Revolution* which may also be based on faulty statistics on what is happening with authentic Christians (see below at section D.5).

If such faulty polling has had a negative effect on your congregation, you might expose some of the probable inaccuracies of them concerning real Christians, and encourage them to live up to their God-given potential for virtue, and not be discouraged by the fakes or the false statistics.

B) The Challenge of Morality Among Non-Christians

B.1) Can Unregenerate People be Virtuous?

Some would argue that the fact that unregenerated humans can perform virtuous deeds negates the value of *virtue apologetics*. First, even if they can, all that is necessary for *virtue apologetics* to be effective is that Christians are significantly superior in virtue compared to the unregenerate, not that Christian virtue is exclusive. This can occur, and does so, even if unbelievers appear at times to be virtuous.

However, the question of whether or not those with only a sinful nature, as is true of all unregenerated humanity (cf. Rom 8:3-11), really can produce virtue, is clearer than some would think. It would seem the Apostle did not believe unregenerated people could do anything God would deem good when he wrote of them: **“the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature [which is all of unregenerated humanity ²⁴] cannot please God”** (Rom 8:7-8). And if they **“cannot please God”** it suggests they cannot do anything truly good, as God alone knows their heart and is the final judge of what is good.

While many argue that the unregenerate can exercise real virtue, there are several arguments against this. Biblical evidence would

include Paul's description of them in Romans 8 as discussed thoroughly elsewhere.²⁵ They have one nature and it is sinful. One thinks as well of God's own description of them in Genesis 6:5 where we read, **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."** (Gen 6:5) There is no room in such a statement for any virtue and one is on shaky ground to suggest unregenerate humans have ever been any different.²⁶ Furthermore, it can be suggested that any actions that appear moral on the part of the unregenerate are actually performed for some self-serving reason.

More than that, as Jonathan Edwards demonstrated in his *Nature of True Virtue*, love for God must be at the core of any real virtue. It is a mistake to judge virtue by how we treat men, instead of how we treat God. Edwards writes:

Natural men have no higher principle in their hearts than self-love. And herein they do not excel the devils. The devils love themselves. . . . And as there is no good principle in the hearts of natural men, so there are never any good exercises of heart, never one good thought, or motion of heart in them. Particularly, there is no love to God in them. . . .

The reason why men are so ready to take these private affections for true virtue is the narrowness of their views; and above all, that they are so ready to leave the Divine Being out of their view, and to neglect him in their consideration

Reason testifies that Divine love is so essential in religion that all religion is but hypocrisy and a "vain show" without it. What is religion but the exercise and expressions of regard to the Divine Being? But certainly if there be no love to Him, there is no sincere regard to Him; and all pretences and show of respect to Him, whether it be in word or deed, must be hypocrisy, and of no value in the eyes of Him who sees the heart. . . . The fear of God without love is no other than the fear of devils; and all that outward respect and obedience, all that resignation, that repentance and sorrow for sin, that form in religion, that outward devotion that is performed merely from such a fear without love, is all of it a practical lie There is never a devil in hell but what would perform all that many a man [has] performed in religion.²⁷

Along these lines, the Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof writes:

When the Pelagians pointed to the virtues of the heathen who "merely through the power of innate freedom" were often merciful, discreet, chaste, and temperate, he [St. Augustine] answered that these so-called virtues were sins, because they did not spring from faith. He admits that the heathen can perform certain acts which are in themselves good and from a lower point

of view even praiseworthy, but yet considers these deeds, as the deeds of unregenerate persons, to be sin, because they do not spring from the motive of love to God or of faith, and do not answer to the right purpose, the glory of God. He denies that such deeds are the fruit of any natural goodness in man.²⁸

And the King made it clear when He said:

[E]very good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.** ¹⁹ **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** ²⁰ **Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.** (Matt 7:17-20)

The context of this statement was discerning Christian Prophets from false, unregenerated ones based on their morality. But Christ's words apply to all humanity. You can also tell who is a Christian and who is not by their morality. In essence then, Jesus is dividing all people into two groups: A "**good tree**" symbolizing born again Christians, or a "**bad tree**," symbolizing the unregenerate. Notice then how black and white He is regarding the morality of the unregenerate: "**a bad tree cannot bear good [moral] fruit [and will be] . . . cut down and thrown into the fire**" which clearly refers to Hell.

Certainly from God's perspective, no unregenerate people do good: **The LORD looks down from Heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.** (Ps 14:2-3)

Several times in Scripture, humanity is divided into only two groups, the good and the bad, and these are synonymous with the regenerated and unregenerated. For example, Jesus said:

[A] time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:28-29)

Christ does not mean to teach here that humans are saved by good works. Neither are the "**good**" and "**evil**" spoken of here, merely so from God's perspective with no distinguishable difference that can be observed by humans. Rather, the saved and regenerate are described as those who have "**done good**" because *goodness will be their general nature and lifestyle* with the Holy Spirit living in them. Likewise, those who have "**done evil**" are all unregenerate who only have a sinful nature, and will, therefore, only have a sinful lifestyle.

The Apostle Paul says the same when he writes:

God "will give to each person according to what he has done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Rom 2:6-11)

Here, actually, the Apostle describes those who do "good" in such a way that clearly distinguishes them from those who do "evil." Only regenerate people will "**by persistence in doing good seek glory** [from God], **honor** [from God] **and immortality.**" Unbelievers will not be "**persistent in doing good**" and probably care more about gaining "glory" and "honor" from humans on Earth, than God in Heaven. Likewise, no regenerate person could be described as "**those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil.**" Again, all of humanity can be divided into those having a moral nature and those having a selfish nature, and those natures will exhibit themselves.

Accordingly, John MacArthur writes:

Jesus said, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same [good]" (Luke 6:33). On another occasion He said, "You then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children" (Luke 11:13). A person apart from God can do humanly good things. But as the Lord points out in both of those statements, the person is still a sinner, still evil by nature, and still operating on a motive less than that of glorifying God.

When Paul and the others were shipwrecked on the island of Malta, Luke reports that "the natives showed us extraordinary kindness" (Acts 28:2); yet those natives remained superstitious pagans (v. 6). ²⁹

It has been the historic belief of the Church that unregenerate people can do no real good, and this is because their ultimate, driving motive is always and in everything selfishness, the essence of sin. St. Augustine's (354-430) memorable dictum come to mind here: the unregenerate are *non posse non peccare*, "not able not to sin"; and the regenerate are *posse non peccare*, "able not to sin." ³⁰

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) wrote:

No one can without [divine saving] grace have charity, through which God is loved above all things, as it says in Rom (5:5): "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." ³¹

Martin Luther (1483-1546) also wrote:

It is therefore true that [unregenerate] man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil [Cf. Matt. 7:17-18]. . . . As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil. . . . Man by nature has neither correct precept nor good will. . . . Every deed of the law without the grace of God appears good outwardly, but inwardly it is sin. This in opposition to the scholastics. . . .

The will which is inclined toward the law without the grace of God is inclined [this way because] of its own advantage. . . . The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the Will, lest it err even in loving God. . . . It [the grace of God] is not given so that good deeds might be induced more frequently and readily, but because without it no act of love is performed.³²

Likewise, Calvin (1509–1564) commented:

The love which the children of the world have for each other is not a true love, but is mercenary [conditional on reward] love because every one of them has regard to his own advantage.³³

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* clearly refuted the idea that at least *God* sees any real virtue in the unregenerate, because He also sees their motives and hidden inclinations (cf. Gen 6:5). More recently, John Stott speaks to this as well when he writes:

Fallen man is not incapable of loving. The doctrine of total depravity does not mean (and has never meant) that original sin has rendered men incapable of doing anything good at all, but rather that every good they do is tainted to some degree by evil.

Unredeemed sinners can love. Parental love, filial love, conjugal love, the love of friends—all these as we know very well, are the regular experience of men and women outside Christ. Even the tax collectors (the petty customs officials who because of their extortion had a reputation for greed) love those who love them. Even the Gentiles (those 'dogs', as the Jews called them, those outsiders who loathed the Jews and would look the other way when they passed one in the street), even they salute each other. None of this is in dispute.

But all human love, even the highest, the noblest and the best, is contaminated to some degree by the impurities of self-interest. We Christians are specifically called to love our enemies (in which love there is no self-interest), and this is impossible without the supernatural grace of God.³⁴

Accordingly, Arthur Lindsey writes:

In his classic study *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah of the University of California at Berkeley had his team interview people throughout the United States concerning their commitment to friendship, marriage, community life and political life. Bellah's striking conclusion was that although many people in our North American society considered themselves committed to other people and community and political life, they had great difficulty articulating why they were committed, except for their own selfish benefit.³⁵

Some supposed acts of virtue may be explained by mere instinct. For example, some people will suggest the following scenario as proof that unbelievers can do altruistic good. Suppose someone sees another person who cannot swim fall into the water. The person watching dives in to save them at the risk of their own life. Isn't this being unselfish? Maybe, but many times such people will admit they did such a thing *without thinking*, as if by some merely instinctive reaction rather than a moral decision.

B.2) Do Not Forget the Appalling Immorality of the Unregenerate

While our point here is probably true in a theological sense, it must be admitted that the difficulty in *humans* distinguishing mere human "love" from the divine love exhibited by Christians could hinder the affect of *virtue apologetics* at times. However, we believe that the selfish nature of the unregenerate will expose itself consistently and obviously over time, demonstrating the superior virtue of those regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

In the above discussion we have addressed the worst moral accusations that can be made against Christianity and have found that even those do not sufficiently support the claims of critics. Even beyond that, as we demonstrated in section 5.7.B, when the two thousand year moral record of Christianity is compared to the record of any other religion or movement in human history, the Christian faith shines like the sun at midnight.

Nothing in the history of even unregenerated *Christendom* comes close to the millions murdered by the abortions of the Humanists, the millions killed and oppressed by the revolutions of the Marxists, and the millions slaughtered and raped by the persecutions of the Muslims.³⁶ Historically and culturally speaking, we are inclined to agree with the Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921) when he wrote: "Wherever Mohammedanism has gone, it has either found a desert or made one."³⁷

And what has Buddhism, Shintoism or Confucianism done for the morality and the spiritual and personal prosperity of the hundreds of millions who languish under them? The history of morality in the Christian Church may not be perfect, but when compared to any other belief system in the history of humanity, is there still any doubt that God has ordained *virtue apologetics* to be the universal and ultimate proof of the superiority of the Christian faith? God will, in fact, hold the unbelieving world accountable for not recognizing the “**children of God**” who have morally shined “**like stars in the universe**” in the “**crooked and depraved generation[s]**” they have lived in, as they have held out, “**the word of life**” (Phil 2:15-16).

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why has the Church historically believed that unregenerate people can do no real good? What Scriptures can this be based on? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) Why do we believe the moral failures of real born again Christians are exaggerated by Christian pollsters. Do you agree or disagree?
- 3) Why does the lack of biblical Church discipline inhibit *virtue apologetics*?
- 4) Why can personal experience with a good godly Christian overcome the impression a person may get from how “Christianity” is perceived in public media?
- 5) What are some reasons that Christians need not be perfect in order for *virtue apologetics* to work?
- 6) In terms of moral virtue, how does Christianity compare with other belief systems including Humanism, Marxism, and even an “ethical” religion like Islam?

Publications & Particulars

¹ Quoted by Woodrow Kroll in *Back to the Bible: Turning Your Life Around with God's Word* (Multnomah, 2000), 131.

² Gary L. W. Johnson, "Does Theology Still Matter?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* John H. Armstrong, ed. (Moody, 1996), 61

³ "American Religious Identification Survey 2008," online at <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/highlights.html>. The 75% professing Christianity in America is a significant decline from the report 18 years earlier in 1990 that stated the percentage at 86%.

⁴ *Selected Shorter Writings* of Benjamin B. Warfield John E. Meeter ed. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 1:48.

⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Intervarsity, 1970), 11.

⁶ Andy Rowell writes in his article "Weekly U.S.A. Church Attendance: The Sociologists Weigh In":

As you will see below, most sociologists stress that (a) self-reporting of church attendance has been relatively stable (around 35%?); (b) that the actual attendance is probably lower than what is reported.

(http://www.andyrowell.net/andy_rowell/2008/11/weekly-usa-church-attendance-the-sociologists-weigh-in.html)

In fact, in a rather well know 1993 study, C. K. Hadaway, P. L. Marler, and Mark Chaves demonstrated that actual church attendance is only about half of what people claim. In other words, people are about twice as likely to *claim* they attend church, than they are to actually attend. ("What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance," *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 741-752).

The researchers specifically illustrated this in the Episcopal denomination. The authors point out that according to self-reporting surveys, there was a 13% increase in the number of people claiming to be members of the Episcopalian denomination between 1967 and 1990. "Instead, the Episcopalian church declined 28%." (742).

Likewise, according to Gallup polls and other surveys, about 35% of Episcopalians claimed to have attended church in the last seven days. In reality it was about 16% (743).

After sharing specifics about their research method and data collection of actual church attendance, the researchers concluded: "Our research suggests that Protestants and Catholic church attendance is roughly one half the levels reported by Gallup." (748)

In followup research in 2005, the authors found the same. They write:

Opinion polls indicate that over 40 percent of Americans attend worship services each week. However, attendance counts in several North American counties and Roman Catholic dioceses suggest that worship attendance may be much lower. . . . The resulting totals suggest that fewer than 22 percent of Americans attend worship services each week. This lower level of attendance provides further evidence that Americans tend to overreport worship participation and are less religiously active than the polls show. (C. Kirk Hadaway, and Penny Long Marler, "How

Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44 (2005): 307-322).

- ⁷ George Barna, online at <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=232>.
- ⁸ George Barna, online at <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=8>.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ For an example that demonstrates significant errors in some of Barna's past research see http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3835/is_200007/ai_n8923977.
- ¹¹ Kinnaman, 42.
- ¹² Ibid., 48.
- ¹³ Ibid., 53.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 50.
- ¹⁵ John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Nelson, 2007), 211.
- ¹⁶ "Annual Barna Group Survey Describes Changes in America's Religious Beliefs and Practices," The Barna Group, 2005-APR-11, at: <http://www.barna.org/>
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ George Barna, "Young Adults and Liberals Struggle with Morality" <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/25-young-adults-and-liberals-struggle-with-morality>
- ¹⁹ Kinnaman, 74-75.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 27.
- ²¹ Ibid., 35.
- ²² Quoted by William Rees-Mogg in *The Times* [London] (4 April 2005).
- ²³ 5.3.B.
- ²⁴ For arguments regarding our claim that Romans 8:7-8 is referring to unbelievers and not Christians see section 4.14.B.3.
- ²⁵ For a moral description of unregenerated humanity see chapter 4.13.C.
- ²⁶ We would suggest that the reason why Noah alone was righteous in God's site was not only because God uniquely chose to look on him with grace ("favor" Gen 6:8), but that the Holy Spirit was uniquely operating in his life. For further discussion regarding this point see sections 4.16.E and 6.7.C.
- ²⁷ Quoted by John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Powhatan, VA: Berea, 1991), II. 249, 266, 267-8.

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- ²⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958, repr. 1998), 433. However, Berkhof makes the unfortunate statement that, "The Bible repeatedly speaks of works of the unregenerate as good and right, 2 Kings 10:29-30; 12:2; 14:3, 14-16, 20,27; Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14-15." (443). A study of these passages reveal no such thing. To suggest that the good deeds of some of the God-fearing Jewish kings demonstrates real virtue in unregenerate pagans is misplaced. Luke 6:33 describes the very selfish kind of morality we are discussing (cf. Matt 5:44-7). Rom 2:14-15 states that all people can live by a moral code, but that does not refute the fact that their motives are essentially selfish.
- ²⁹ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), Eph 2:1.
- ³⁰ Ref. unknown.
- ³¹ Thomas Aquinas, "Commentary On The First Epistle to the Corinthians", para. 714; online at <http://www.aquinas.avemaria.edu/Aquinas-Corinthians.pdf>
- ³² Martin Luther, "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology," in Timothy Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 35-8.
- ³³ John Calvin in *Calvin's Bible Commentaries in The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection*, CD-ROM, (Ages Software, 1998) at Matt 22:39.
- ³⁴ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Intervarsity, 1978), 120.
- ³⁵ Lindsey, 35.
- ³⁶ If one doubts this, they could do some research on what has occurred in Sudan at the hands of Muslims in the last several years.
- ³⁷ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Judson, 1907, 1953), 186.