Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

*"But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit."*—Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NLT)

Volume 12 Number 5 June 2010

## Morality is the Secret

By Walter Hawk *Page 3*



*Many of America's Founding Fathers were inspired by Christian principles. Is there anything we can learn from them?*

## Why Preach the Gospel (When Most People Don't Want to Hear It)?

By David Palmer *Page 9*



*It's a challenge, but one well worth the effort.*

## Justify

By Joe Sanchez *Page 11*



*People often try to justify the wrong things they want to do in their lives. Could we fall into this way of thinking?*

## The Empty Nest

By Robert Berendt *Page 15*



*Society has changed a great deal ever since farming stopped being the norm for families. But how has the family dynamic changed as a result?*

## It's Only… It's Just…

By Lorelei Nettles *Page 18*



*They are used again and again in our own lives. Our children especially use them, and we only hurt ourselves when we allow them to control us. What are they?*

---

***Virtual Christian Magazine* Staff**

**Lorelei Nettles** - Managing Editor
**Lorelei Nettles** - Issue Editor
**Mike Bennett** - Editor
**Angela Cardoz** - Editor
**Gayle Hoefker** - Editor
**Jada Howell** - Editor
**Patrick Kansa** - Editor
**David Meidinger** - Editor
**Suzanne Morgan** - Editor
**Amy Stephens** - Editor
**Debbie Werner** - Editor
**Eric Evans** - Reviewer
**Don Henson** - Reviewer
**Don Hooser** - Reviewer
**William Miller** - Reviewer
**Gerald Seelig** - Reviewer
**Jeremy Lallier** - Proofreader
**Chris Rowland** - Web Design

Copyright 2010 United Church of God, an International Association

---

# Morality is the Secret

By Walter Hawk

*Many of America's Founding Fathers were inspired by Christian principles. Is there anything we can learn from them?*



THE FOUNDING OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA was an amazing revolution for the establishment of personal freedom based on a written constitution, which in turn was largely based on the principles taught in the Bible. Let's take a look at the dedication of those founders and learn some lessons that we can apply in our Christian lives.

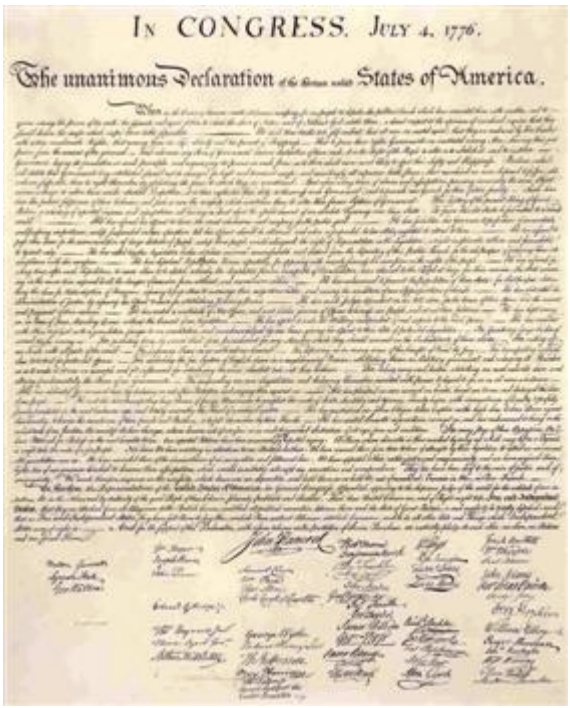
If you looked at what is written at the close of the American Declaration of Independence, you would see this sentence: "And for the support of this Declaration with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

*Freedom of religion was as important to our forefathers then as it is to us today.*

Now let's change this statement and make it read this way: "For the support of God's work, for which I am called, with a firm reliance on the protection of His divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other and to God our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." You should also ask yourself, "Do I have the dedication, commitment and resolve necessary to pledge to God my life, my fortune and my sacred honor?"

During the writing of the Declaration of Independence, a total of 86 alterations were made to the proposed draft. After three days the vote was taken by the colonies. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted and was signed in Philadelphia on August 2.

The full title of the Declaration of Independence is "The Unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America," and it starts with this:


IN CONGRESS. JULY 4. 1776.
The unanimous Declaration ... States of America.

"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect theirs and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which thy are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security."

## The Bill of Rights

From this declaration came the United States Constitution, which contains the Bill of Rights. Let us take a look at the first two Amendments, as these are the two that we hear a lot about. As you hear these words, think about where the Founding Fathers got the inspiration for these "laws." (You may also want to read Deuteronomy chapters 4 through 31.)

> Amendment 1: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Freedom of religion was as important to our forefathers then as it is to us today. They did not want the government to tell them who, what or how to worship. Therefore, we have the First Amendment, which was intended to allow worship without establishing any particular religion as the only one acceptable.

> Amendment 2: "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

You must understand the reason for the Second Amendment is to make sure that the people of this country never find themselves in a situation where they are unarmed against a government prone to tyranny. Patrick Henry is remembered for these words: "An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us. But we shall not fight our battle alone. There is a just God that presides over the destinies of nations. The battle sir, is not to the strong alone. Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death."

*We should examine the commitment to this country by these men, and compare it to our commitment to God.*

## Christian leaders

Was Patrick Henry a Christian? In 1776, he wrote, "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians: Not on religious, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here." But what of other American leaders?

> "I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator and, I hope, to the pure doctrine of Jesus also."
> (Thomas Jefferson, from the front of his Bible)

> "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: It connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."
> (John Quincy Adams, sixth U.S. President)

And it has not been just single leaders espousing this view. In 1782, the United States Congress voted this resolution: "The Congress of the United States recommends and approves the Holy Bible for use in all schools."

## Changes

However, 1947 saw a radical change of direction for the Supreme Court. It required ignoring every previous precedent set by the Supreme Court in the past 160 years. For the last 60+ years, there have been multiple court challenges opposing the influence of religion, and especially anything Bible-based. The opposition is usually characterized as upholding "separation of church and state," an ambiguous and misleading phrase. In the ways intended by the founding fathers, the United States has always practiced separation of church and state. Some of the legal changes that have taken place have been beneficial, but it is tragic that acknowledgment of God, the Bible, etc. have been completely pushed out of the classroom in the name of "separation of church and state."

It has been said that our founding fathers created the constitution as a living and adaptable document, which would allow the changes that came about in 1947. But total prohibition of all things religious would seem to contradict what we know of those early patriots. What kind of men were the 56 signers who adopted the Declaration of Independence and who, by their signing, committed an act of treason against the Crown? Most of us know little of the signers. Who were they? What happened to them?

Ben Franklin, at 70, was the only truly old man there. Eighteen were under forty and forty were in their twenties. Of the fifty-six, twenty-four were judges and lawyers, eleven were merchants, nine were landowners and farmers, and the remaining twelve were doctors, ministers and politicians. With only a few exceptions, these were men of substantial property. All but two had families. The vast majority were men of education and standing in their communities. They had economic security as few men had in the 18th century. It was Ben Franklin who noted, "Indeed we must all hang together; otherwise we shall most assuredly hang separately."

## Setting an example

We should examine the commitment to this country by these men, and compare it to our commitment to God. The penalty for treason was death by hanging. These men wanted equality with the mother country, beginning with the principle of taxation with representation. As Christians, we too want to be a part of something better, ever committed to following the path of our savior Jesus Christ at any cost.

Of those 56 who signed the Declaration of Independence, nine died of hardships during the war. Five were captured and imprisoned, and each case dealt with brutal treatment. Several lost wives, sons or entire families. One lost his thirteen children. Two had wives that were brutally treated. All were, at one time or another, the victims of manhunts and driven from their homes. Twelve signers had their homes completely burned. Seventeen lost everything they owned, yet not one defected or went back on his pledged word.

When you were baptized, what kind of a commitment did you make to God? Because of what we know from the Bible prophecy about end-time persecution, all these things could happen to each one of us—and maybe will in the not too distant future. When you were baptized, you really pledged to the service of God your life, finances and your sacred honor.

The 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence proved by their every deed that they made no idle boast when they composed the most magnificent curtain line in history. "And for the support of this Declaration with a firm reliance of the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." Why would these men do that willingly? Why did you willingly become baptized and make a commitment to God for His work?

## America's responsibility

*In this Satan-blinded world, we as God's people are responsible to be examples of God's law in action.*

Some look to the United States, seeking answers to painful and bitter questions. Americans have rarely been so confused about right and wrong, about what is acceptable and what is to be forcefully condemned. We are learning the hard way that a self-governing nation must consist of self-governing individuals. Violence, crime, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and out-of-wedlock births all undermine the blessings of liberty and prosperity. Galatians 6:7 tells us we reap what we sow.

If America makes the economic, political, and moral changes necessary to move forward in the years ahead, then the rest of the world has a much better chance of getting it right. America got a great start because of God's blessings. Therefore, we carry a special responsibility to honor and

obey God and to be a light to the rest of the world. God will hold us as a nation and individuals accountable for our failure.

Freedom is the presence of justice tempered with mercy (Micah 6:8). Freedom is following God's laws, which insure the success of these things. That's why James called God's law the "law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12). Freedom is a priceless treasure that the state is supposed to safeguard, because human beings have an intrinsic right to be free that comes not from the state but from God. To the Founding Fathers, this was a "self-evident" truth.

The Founders believed that man's place in the universe was no accident; that man himself and the world in which he lives were created and sustained by a just and loving God. George Washington wrote, "It is impossible to account for the creation of the universe without the agency of a Supreme Being and it is impossible to govern the universe without the aid of a Supreme Being." James Madison put it this way: "The belief in a God All Powerful, wise and good, is so essential to the moral order of the world and to the happiness of man, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from many sources."

## Statements from the Founding Fathers

Our forefathers and leaders made various statements which when put together, give a message. These are great thoughts from great Americans and they have a lot of meaning for us today.

> "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."
> (Abraham Lincoln)

> "The choices you make in moral and religious questions determine the way America will go. The choice before us is plain: Christ or chaos, conviction or compromise, discipline or disintegration. I am rather tired hearing about our rights and privileges as American citizens. The time has come; it now is, when we ought to hear about the duties and responsibilities of our citizenship. America's future depends upon her accepting and demonstrating God's government. It is just as plain and clear as that."
> (Peter Marshall)

> "History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual awakening to overcome the moral lapse or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster."
> (General Douglas MacArthur)

> "We have staked the whole future of American civilization not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self government; ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."
> (James Madison)

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; the order of these rights, first life, then freedom, and then the equal opportunity to pursue ones own happiness, was written with great care and precision. The founders understood the need to balance man's right to be free with man's responsibility to be honest, just and fair. Switch the order of these fundamental human rights putting the pursuit of happiness before liberty, or liberty before life and you end up with moral chaos and social anarchy. Deny the God-given nature of these rights and you open the door to tyranny.

> "Can the liberties of a nation be sure when we remove their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people, that these liberties are the gift of God?"
> (Thomas Jefferson)

> "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."
> (John Adams)

Modern liberalism rejects absolute moral standards and has abandoned the proper ordering of man's fundamental rights. As a result, modern liberalism has undermined a long-held American principle: that the law should protect the weakest among us, not just the strong, the healthy, and the rich. Liberalism wrongly insists on parents' freedom to choose an abortion while simultaneously denying parents' freedom to choose the schools their children may attend. Its moral confusion over the sanctity of human life and the vital importance of the traditional family has consequently reshaped American law and society.

In this Satan-blinded world, we as God's people are responsible to be examples of God's law in action. We are to let God's light shine through us to a dark world, showing the world that Satan will not win. Are we willing to accept the responsibility God has put on us—to demonstrate to America as well as to the world, that God's way to live brings happiness, freedom, and productive life?

Each one of us needs to affirm, "For the support of God's work, for which I am called, with a firm reliance on the protection of His divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other and to God our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

### Further reading

Ask to receive the following free booklets for more information: *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, *Who is God?* and *The Ten Commandments*.

# Why Preach the Gospel (When Most People Don't Want to Hear It)?

By David Palmer

*It's a challenge, but one well worth the effort.*



WHY IS IT THAT IF AN INDIVIDUAL who believes in the teachings of the Bible speaks out about the tenets of his or her faith, he or she is often castigated as being a "bigot" or a "hatemonger"?



Our society cries out about shootings, home invasions, gang crimes and corruption at high levels of government and business, yet is not willing to listen when we remind them that this land has literally turned its back on God.

Has society forgotten that this country was founded on basic biblical principles? In society's mad dash for freedom from any sort of moral restraint, the tide of "anything goes" promiscuity is sweeping America into chaos.

Following the tragic school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado and the copycat incident in Lethbridge, Canada, there was an email floating around that contained the following imaginary prayer: "Dear God, why didn't you save the little girl killed in her classroom? Sincerely, Concerned Student." The reply given was, "Dear Concerned Student, I am not allowed in your schools. Sincerely, God."

Well-known radio commentator Paul Harvey once made the statement, "I don't agree with Darwin, but I didn't go out and hire a lawyer when my high school teacher taught his theory of evolution."

*Our country has become secularized to the point where political correctness has replaced the Ten Commandments.*

The Bible tells us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Now a handful of people and their lawyers are telling us to cease praying! Our country has become secularized to the point where political correctness has replaced the Ten Commandments.

So why do we preach the gospel? Because even though society doesn't recognize it, God's truth is a message we all need. While very few will accept biblical truth in this day and age, our mission is to preach that truth regardless of how many individuals will respond.

The United Church of God (UCG) accepts the responsibility given to believers by Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago (Matthew 28:19-20) and reemphasized by the apostle Paul, who wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

*Preaching the gospel to a society that doesn't want to hear is not an easy task, but it is our collective responsibility.*

Preaching the gospel to a society that doesn't want to hear is not an easy task, but it is our collective responsibility. "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

And so, with the prayers and support of those who desire to see God's Kingdom on this earth and with God's blessing, UCG will continue to reach out through the doors God opens, whether by television, magazines, internet campaigns, or personal evangelism, in order to preach the gospel and prepare a people.

### Further reading

To learn more about UCG and its members, please request our free booklet, *This Is the United Church of God*.

# Justify

By Joe Sanchez

*People often try to justify the wrong things they want to do in their lives. Could we fall into this way of thinking?*

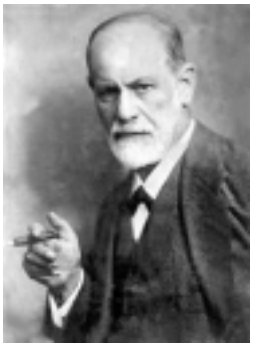


HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED why people try to rationalize some really wicked things? Why is it some of the most educated people spend countless hours to study, research, and prove ideas we as Christians can clearly see are contradictory to the Bible? For instance, they might try to prove that it's fine to commit adultery, or that homosexuality is an equally legitimate lifestyle with heterosexuality. Why do people want to prove such ideas? Is there an ulterior motive to their studies? Could we also fall into this same situation trying to disprove God's Word?

How is it that people hold so many beliefs diametrically opposite from the Bible? Why is it that so many of the highly educated and astute thinkers of today go out of their way to disprove the Bible and destroy the moral fiber of our country through their studies and research?

## Intellectualism or Deception?

Dr. Gunter Schmidt, German psychologist made this statement in the academic publication *Journal of Homosexuality* about pedophiles: "Each individual case must be looked upon on its own merits…the threat to make all pedophile acts punishable by law can barely be labeled civilized…it implies discrimination and persecution of a minority and should be abolished" (Vol. 20, Nos. 1/2, 1990). Dr. Schmidt continues in his study trying to prove that child molestation is not always bad for the child and should be looked at on an individual basis.



Is this where our intellectualism has led us? Will we as a society take the word of people who are claiming to represent "science" over the Word of God, even when it's as obvious as the subject of child molestation? Why would someone want to legitimize such an abomination? Clearly, these people are deceived, as it says in Revelation 12:9, "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world…" So many times people believe Satan's lies simply because they fit their situation.

Here is a scenario: A person is tempted—let's say to steal from his employer. Then, he gives in to the temptation and commits the act. He sins. At this point, the individual can choose one of two options: He can acknowledge his sin, repent and try to do better, or he can justify his actions. He can try to ignore the situation for a short time or pretend it doesn't exist, but eventually he will have to choose.

Proverbs 21:2 states, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes." Notice the scripture says "*every way*." If the wicked did not feel their actions were right, that would be great! The first step toward repentance is to realize when we are doing wrong. Alternatively, if a person does something he thinks is incorrect, his actions will seem right either by changing his mind or justifying and rationalizing what he did.

## Man's Self-Justification

This pattern of self-justification is very apparent in today's society of moral decline, especially among our leaders and social reformists. A person who is highly respected in his field might, though various "unbiased" studies, try and prove that something is right in a way that disproves God. And, because that person thinks he has superior intellect, education and experience he or she wants you to believe the studies he or she has done are indisputable.

*Will we as a society take the word of people who are claiming to represent "science" over the Word of God, even when it's as obvious as the subject of child molestation?*

Are they indisputable? Are their studies unbiased? The answer is a definite NO!

One interesting example lies in the early twentieth century research of anthropologist and social reformer Margaret Mead. Her 1928 book, *Coming of Age*, was widely accepted, not only by scientific communities, but also by millions of other readers. Her work had a big impact on our culture and most likely was a large cause of the sexual revolution which followed in the United States.

Margaret Mead's studies took her to the small Samoan Islands, located in the South Pacific, and were focused primarily on the sexuality of adolescent women in the islands. The significance of these islands, to her, was their isolation and lack of influence from Western society. In this setting, according to Mead, men and women were uninhibited by the jealousy, taboos, and moral constraints common in our Western culture.

Conclusions drawn from her works have contributed to our problems with sexual promiscuity. She expressed that the problem was not their promiscuity, but our reaction to their lifestyle. Margaret Mead painted a false picture of a magical place where people were untainted by the harsh rules and stigmas of our Christian society—where men and women were free to break God's Law with no consequences. Her point was that we need to open our minds to the freedoms of the Somoans!

*At this point, the individual can choose one of two options: He can acknowledge his sin, repent and try to do better, or he can justify his actions.*

Unfortunately, many people took her work as doctrine and it took its toll on America. *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead*, written by Derek Freeman, does an excellent job of exposing many of the inaccuracies and deceptions in her work. The most interesting point was that Margaret Mead was herself having an adulterous affair during the very time she was compiling her book! Freeman shows she didn't just happen to come up with this conclusion about adolescent sexuality through an unbiased study of the Samoan people. She was, in fact, trying to excuse her own actions. Her way had to seem right in her own eyes.

## God's Answer

Notice what God inspires Paul to say in Romans 1:22-32 about those who become deceived by the work of Satan and their own carnal minds. The verses begin, "Professing to be wise, they became fools" and end with these strong words: "who, knowing the righteous order of God, that those practicing such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but have pleasure in those practicing them."

God Himself allows these people to be deceived. Why? Because they took pleasure in the sins they were committing. Knowing the truth is not enough. Knowledge alone will not grant you grace in the sight of God. There must be an active response to the knowledge we are given. When we stumble (and we all do), we must acknowledge our sin and repent. Because if we do not, the the only alternative is to justify our actions.



An excellent example of how we should react when we are being confronted with our sin is shown by King David. Most of us are familiar with David's affair with Bathsheba and his attempt to cover it up. In 2 Samuel 12:1-4, God sends Nathan the prophet to confront David about his sin. Now, Nathan does not come right out and tell him. Nathan starts out with telling him a story. The story is that of a rich man and a poor man who each owned lambs. The poor man owned only one lamb, and it was like a member of his family. A traveler came to the rich man, and the rich man did not want to slaughter one of his own lambs, so he took the lamb of the poor man and slaughtered it for his guest.

David quickly takes the bait and pronounces a sentence upon himself: "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity" (2 Samuel 12:5-6). Nathan quickly responds, telling him, "You are the man!" (verse 7). Nathan then proceeds into a short speech telling David what a scoundrel he was and the curses he will receive because of his actions.

What was David's reaction? He was the king—a leader with much more power than the American president today has. He was the top leader of the nation and he was tricked into pronouncing judgment upon himself. Did he make excuses? Blame it on someone else? Try and call it normal? In verse 13 he says, "*I have sinned against the LORD*."

After Nathan's speech, David quickly and immediately chose to acknowledge his sin and repent. We must do the same. We must quickly repent, realize our sin and allow God to justify us. Only through repentance can we truly be justified.

Christ expounds on this idea with a parable in Luke 18:10-14. He says, "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, *this man went down to his house justified* rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

*Either we allow God to justify us, or we try to justify ourselves.*

The only true way we can be justified is by not making excuses or trying to reason around the problem. We cannot be as Margaret Mead, who tried to prove it is society's fault that adultery does not work, or as others who try to persuade people into believing what God condemns is natural and acceptable.

God put a conscience in us, but we damage its effectiveness if we resist its guidance. Every man's actions can seem right in his own eyes. God forces us to make a decision. Our human nature makes us choose. Either we allow God to justify us, or we try to justify ourselves. The only way to be truly justified is to acknowledge we are wrong, repent and change.

Let's pick God's option quickly and immediately as David did. Let's choose it every single time.

### Further reading

For more on the subject of justification, see our article "What Does It Mean to Be Justified?"

# The Empty Nest

By Robert Berendt

*Society has changed a great deal ever since farming stopped being the norm for families. But how has the family dynamic changed as a result?*



AS LITTLE AS FIFTY YEARS AGO, a large proportion of people lived on farms and in small communities. Each family consisted of parents with about four children, and parents looked forward to leaving their lives' work to their children. Farmers hoped at least one of their sons would take over the family farm. That meant that the other three children would be somewhere else (girls, for instance usually married and moved to wherever their husbands lived). The farm always remained "home" to all of the children—a gathering place. There were many small towns around and school was within walking distance. The development of huge pieces of farming equipment and the ability to work far more land than any ten farmers could handle in the past has changed the landscape of our society. People have flocked to larger and larger cities, and small towns are dying out and the family farm is quickly disappearing.

*People have flocked to larger and larger cities, and small towns are dying out and the family farm is quickly disappearing.*

In the modern world, there is often no farm to take over and thus all of the children will often leave the family home and live elsewhere. Parents are left with an empty nest, and since the average family has dropped to two or less children each, parents battle loneliness. Just as in the past almost 70% of people lived in small towns and on the land, today 70% live in large cities. Many factors have changed the demographics of our world. Huge industrial complexes beckon the young into careers that often take them far away. Educational opportunities in foreign lands and distant cities are appealing.

A growing international interaction has made the whole world almost like our back yard. Added to this scene is the requirement for years of schooling to obtain a good job. Young people are putting off starting their marriages and families until they are well settled in a career, and that means until they are 30-something years old. The result is that many parents rarely see their own children. Parents who are growing old and who ought to be enjoying the fruits of their labors are left to wonder if their children are well, seeing their grandchildren only on rare occasions and for short periods of time. The grandparents often have little impact on the grandchildren, and visits

to their children's homes can be strained. Only parents who have experienced the empty nest will truly understand what I mean.



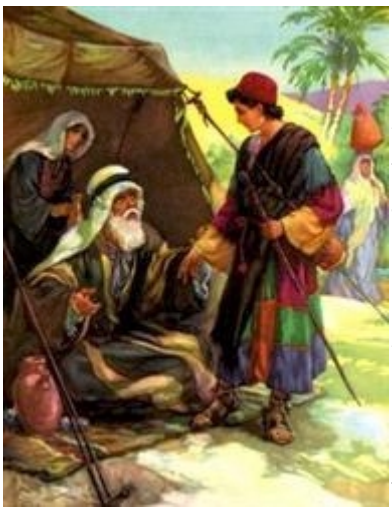
Psalm 128 is a wonderful enumeration of the blessings God wants people to enjoy. To see your own children grow up like olive plants around your table (verse 3) and then watch your children's children grow (verse 6) are about the greatest blessings any parent can have. Proverbs 17:6 says that children's children are a crown of old men (and women, I might add). The glory of children is their father. Words like this from our Creator show us why so many adults have an empty feeling within themselves. They yearn for interaction with their children and grandchildren. As a matter of fact, God includes as one of His great Ten Commandments the admonition to "Honor your father and mother." I can see no way on earth that you can do this from a great distance if you never go home. The nest is still empty and the hurt is there.

We live in a world of reality. And reality is that jobs exist in cities, which are not always, of our own choosing. Our children marry others from another area of the land and, in many cases, another nation. What are the solutions? Children who become adults and develop a nuclear family are also at risk of missing out on rewarding spiritual values that God has developed. Loneliness is a mental condition, brought on by the sense of loss and longing. "The best things in life are free" is an old saying. That is true. You cannot buy love, friendship, trust, concern, hope or truth. These are outgrowths of living according to the directions of our Creator. Honoring your parents is a deed or act that brings about love, appreciation, contentment and the spiritual gifts we all truly treasure. God does indicate that in marriage we are to leave our parent's home (Ephesians 5:31). There are times when we have no choice. Wars, famine, economic factors and the will of God all play a part.

*As a matter of fact, God includes as one of His great Ten Commandments the admonition to "Honor your father and mother."*

Running after the physical gains and spurning the spiritual is a mistake that we feel in the inner core of our beings. Considering the self above all others is a source of true unhappiness. All humans focus on their personal needs, but the scriptures admonish us over and over again to avoid doing that to the exclusion of others—and especially to the exclusion of our parents and grandparents. It would be better to take a slightly lower paying job and stay within reach of home than to reach for the highest income and disregard the nest we grew up in. Yet, we must live and care for a family.

There are two wonderful stories in the Bible about men who had to leave their homes and families. The stories of Jacob and Joseph tell of long periods of time in which they were far from home and out of contact with their parents. Times were very different then. No telephones, poor highways and slow travel, no postal services and no means of recording the movements of others. If a person moved, it was rare that anyone knew where he or she finally ended up. Families lost members all too often. Jacob was forced to leave due to his own act of deception towards his brother and betrayal of his father. He must have suffered within himself all the years he was away. He faced the danger of his brother Esau's wrath by returning to the land of his father Isaac.



God instructed Jacob to do this (Genesis 31:3,13), and though Jacob returned with fear and trepidation that was well-grounded, both he and his brother Esau could not restrain themselves from rejoicing together after a twenty-year separation (Genesis 33:4). No doubt there was great jubilation as the wandering member returned to the nest. Joseph had somewhat of a different story. One wonders if God was reminding Jacob of the pain he caused his own father when God allowed Joseph to vanish for many years. Jacob was heartbroken and God did not whisper one word of encouragement to him. The story that unfolds is one that brings tears to the eyes of parents who have children living a long way from home. Joseph's question in Genesis 45:3 was, “Does my father still live?” One can readily see the emotion and deep love that existed in the family. This was an unusual family to be sure, but the events of life reminded them that they were indeed family.

Empty nests are often our own design. Loneliness along with the pain of the loss of this love stays with us and only fades with time. God indicates it ought not to be this way!

### Further reading

For more interesting information on the family, request or download our free booklet *Marriage & Family: The Missing Dimension.*

# It's Only… It's Just…

By Lorelei Nettles

*They are used again and again in our own lives. Our children especially use them, and we only hurt ourselves when we allow them to control us. What are they?*



THERE ARE WORDS WE MAY TEND TO USE REGULARLY, whether saying them aloud or only to ourselves. They are words like: "But it's **only**," "I know the difference," "Others do it," "It won't hurt me" or "It's not real, so what's the big deal?" We use them when we are making excuses for what we are allowing into our life and minds; making excuses for things we might openly accept as wrong.

*The mind cannot compartmentalize the real from the fantasy.*

A mother related the following story after a conversation with her son: "One day I walked into the room while my son was watching a popular television program that I don't approve of. It's not a terribly horrible program, but I feel it gives a bad impression of the family. When I expressed my disappointment at him watching the show his reply was, 'Mom, it's **only** a cartoon.'

"I explained to my son that what we allow into our minds affects the way we think about things; that what seems innocent can really be making certain things seem acceptable to us when they really are not. We continued to talk about it for a minute or two when he suddenly told me that there should be a sermon on the subject. That's when I knew he was beginning to understand the importance of what I was saying."

We can all make similar excuses for what we will allow into our lives and minds. We can be so willing to brush aside objections to what we know not to be right or wholesome solely because of the way in which it is presented. We often make excuses without even thinking about it. We might say things like, "Well, other people at church watch this program," "My friends watch this and I want to discuss it with them" or "I know the difference between right and wrong, so it won't even affect me."



There are several television programs and movies out right now that are about the occult, the dead being alive in one form or another, wolves, vampires or very sexual or mystical characters. Some are presented as very innocent or even humorous, which often leads us to disregard their underlying messages. Not all programs are bad, but we must be wary of what we are allowing into our minds.

## An ancient issue

Similar things were happening in Moses' day. Without really thinking about it, Israel returned to idolatry and turned from God. Did it happen quickly and did they do it with clear minds? Not likely. God had warned Israel to steer clear of those who worshiped other gods, but they did not listen and soon allowed pagan foreigners back into their lives. With them came their idols and idol worship (see 2 Kings 17:7-12 and Psalms 106:35-36).

By allowing pagan worship and rituals to be practiced among them, the Israelites slowly came to accept them. It began to seem normal and everyday after a while; nothing to get upset about. Then gradually over time, they started to adopt more and more of the idol worshipers' ways, adapting them into their own culture. I am sure that in the beginning they told themselves it was no big deal; it was **only** something those other people did. It didn't affect how the Israelites ran their lives. To them it was just an innocent acceptance. They probably thought things like we do today: "How can we dislike them for what they believe? They have always been that way. It's not their fault, it's **just** not fair to separate ourselves from them." How easy it is to delude ourselves into this way of thinking.

## The problem areas

The Internet is another issue that needs to be addressed. There are sites that are set up solely for the purpose of posting videos that too often share more than one should see or hear. Sexual content has become common and vulgarity disguised as humor is the norm. Trying to get a reaction is often the goal and getting caught up in all of it can come so easy. Voyeurism has also been linked to dysfunctional relationships and even violence towards women.

People can find themselves glued to computer screens for hours on end without anything to show for their time at the end of the day. What a waste! While the Internet can be a good tool, we must be careful not to let it overtake us.



Video games can either be a fun activity or create a mind that is numb, especially to violence. Games that are about stealing or killing do little to build our minds. I have heard this argument for one such game, "It's not killing if they aren't people, they are **only** aliens!" Does that matter? Is taking a life any different within your brain? I wouldn't think so. If the creature walks upright and looks similar to a human, can your brain differentiate between them?

The mind cannot compartmentalize the real from the fantasy. The mind learns to adapt to the sight of continual killing and can become silently compassionate and/or tolerant to a theft or a murder. How many movies have

you seen where you find yourself rooting for the bad guy and how many games have been played where the character (you) is stealing or killing?

**Questions to ask ourselves:**

- Are the characters I see or use acting in a way that God would approve of?
- Do I find myself making "It's only…" excuses?
- Is there a message here that is detrimental to my family, spouse, children or friends?
- Is there a chance that I am allowing my mind to be gradually changed in ways that might harm my character and my resolve to follow God's ways?
- How will this affect my mind in the long run?

## Not just visual

It is not only what we watch that can change our way of thinking, but also what we listen to. Have you ever been listening to the radio and become excited because an old song you love was coming on? You may be singing along with it, when suddenly and maybe for the first time, you actually listen to the words and realize that the message is horrible. It is not something you should be listening to at all!

*…what we allow into our minds affects the way we think about things; that what seems innocent can really be making certain things seem acceptable to us when they really are not.*

At this point, you have a choice. Will you listen or will you stop? It often comes as a surprise to me, that what I once thought to be great songs have often turned out to have very bad messages. While I have become more discriminating over the years and have chosen to stop listening to such music, I am also sure that I have allowed some of it to slide by. The song starts and I drive down the highway, singing along with an old favorite without a thought. In time, I am sure that I will weed these out as well, but it takes a conscious effort.

Satan is a master with music and we can see his influence throughout the industry, whether it is rock, country, rap or jazz. We need to be careful what we allow into our minds. "But it's **just** music, it can't influence me." It can and does! Some of it is blatant and rebellious, while in other songs we may not even notice the subtle messages coming across.

I remember being at a church campout once. Everyone was singing around the campfire and the atmosphere was festive. It was quite fun until the songs seemed to turn and suddenly we were singing very unchristian lyrics. When I complained, I was told it was **only** a song and that I was being too serious. But in my mind, I pictured campsites nearby overhearing our song and never thinking us to be Christians. It's something to think about.

More times than not, the music we listen to is very beautiful, has a good beat and or makes us want to dance. It's this catchiness that attracts us and hooks us. Sometimes the verses are written in such a way that we may not at first understand their meaning. We often don't even hear the words at first, even if we are singing them. Satan is cunning. He is very aware that music is a beloved part of almost every culture.

*Satan is a master with music and we can see his influence throughout the industry, whether it is rock, country, rap or jazz.*

There is music that leaves me feeling aggressive and tense. Many young people enjoy this style of music, but those who do often display these same characteristics. They are aggressive and angry. I saw this happen with my son when he was quite young. He was an active toddler, but I noticed that music affected the way he acted. Calmer music settled him down, while a screaming style song or music made him very hyper, even if exposed to it for a short time. There is much talk of the effect most classical music has on young children, and while I am not sure of its effect on the brain as far as intellect, I do know that when my family and I listen to it, there is a calming affect on us all.

Even grocery stores and restaurants know this to be true, playing soft rock or other calming music to get you to spend more time and money. They know that harsh music will make you want to leave and not spend extra time in their establishments.

The questions to ask ourselves:

- Do the lyrics speak positively, or do they speak of sin or sinful acts?
- Do I physically feel good when I listen to this?
- Would I listen to or sing along with this music with Jesus?
- Do I find myself saying things like, "But the music is so beautiful; what's the harm in listening to the lyrics too?"
- Am I allowing Satan a foothold into my life?

We make daily decisions on what we watch, hear and engage in on the computer. The question is will we later find ourselves making excuses for those choices? Will we be saying, "It's just… It's only…"?

### Further reading

Request or download our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.