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Doing the Moral Math
Measuring the Moral Climate of America 2019 - Part 1

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A Moral Climate Survey

Anyone in the United States above the age of 60 is probably aware how the moral climate of this country has changed radically just since the 1960s. Just a casual survey of the popular TV shows and movies of that era compared to now will demonstrate that fact. A few years ago, we pointed out how in the early 1960s, the most popular comedy TV programs were ones like *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *Make Room for Daddy*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and *My Three Sons*. All had solid moral plot lines. Now, it seems, no show can even be thought of as funny unless it is obscene or full of vulgar language. Even animated children's shows contain morally objectionable content. The same is true, if not worse, for movies.

So what is the current moral environment and how can we gauge what it is? Granted, it is not easy to know what people are thinking. Nonetheless, we can get a pretty fair perspective by looking at recent objective survey polls. One such poll was the American Moral Acceptability survey by the Gallup Corp. released in May. They surveyed a large segment of American adults and asked them their perspective on twenty-one specific moral issues. They presented an issue and asked if the respondents considered them "Morally Acceptable" or "Morally Unacceptable." The pollsters then measured the percentages of each response. They made it clear that they were not asking the respondents if they thought something should be legal or not, just their own opinion as to its morality. In this three part series we will exam-

ine the findings for each of those issues. We will also provide brief analyses from a biblical perspective when appropriate. (Note: The percentages may not add up to 100% because some respondents had or gave no opinion. Also, the issues were couched so that responses did not allow for exceptions or varying degrees of agreement or disagreement.)

1. Birth Control

In the survey, 92% of American felt that using some form of birth control is moral. Only 6% dissented. The Bible does not really address this question. Birth control was not an issue in ancient times. Most evangelical Christians, however, see no moral conflict with most birth control methods, providing they prevent fertilization. Many evangelicals agree with the official position of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), which says birth control methods that occur after fertilization is tantamount to abortion and is morally objectionable.

2. Drinking Alcohol

The survey found, unsurprisingly, that 79% of Americans believe that drinking alcohol is morally acceptable. 19% said no. Among Christians, the question of what the Bible teaches on alcohol is in dispute. No clear cut prohibition can be found, yet many Christians argue that believers should totally abstain from its use. Others maintain that moderate drinking is acceptable. In any case, the Bible clearly warns against the dangers of alcohol abuse and drunkenness. It also advises restraint from doing things that may cause a fellow Christian to stumble. Here are a few Scripture passages that are relevant to this topic: Psalms 104:14-15; Proverbs 20:1; 23:31; 10:14-15; 1 Peter 4:3; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 10:23-24; Ephesians 5:18; Gala-

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tians 5:19-2; 1 Timothy 5:23; 1 Peter 4:3.

3. Divorce

The Gallup poll indicates that currently 77% of Americans consider divorce acceptable. 20% regard it a morally unacceptable. This is another issue about which Christians disagree. Some argue that divorce is never an option (the RCC view). The Bible generally regards divorce unfavorably, as did Jesus. Nonetheless, it does provide for some situations where it is a legitimate recourse; including infidelity, abandonment, and abuse. The Bible never says, however, that divorce is mandatory, only an option under extreme circumstances. The ultimate goal should be to restore a marriage that is broken. Here are some key verses that address this topic: Genesis 1:27; 2:24 (the foundational marriage verses); Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:32; 19:4-9; Mark 10:5-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-4; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39.

4. Sex Between an Unmarried Man and Woman

Currently 71% of Americans see no moral problem with unmarried men and women engaging in premarital sexual relations. In contrast, just 28% now regard those relationships as immoral. This is an issue where the predominant opinion is in contrast to what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures indicate that such non-married sex is a violation of the sacredness of the marital bond. The biblical basis for marriage is found in Genesis 2:23-24:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

The main point here is that when a man and woman engage in sexual relations they become "one flesh." In the biblical sense, as Jesus asserted in his discussion of divorce in Matt. 19:3-6, that standard is the essence of marriage itself. Sex outside of or before marriage distorts that principle. Paul warned that even joining oneself to a prostitute was to be one flesh with her (1 Cor. 6:15-16). The Biblical ideal is for the husband and wife to come together in purity in marriage.

5. Gambling

According to the Gallup poll, 68% of Americans consider gambling as morally acceptable. Only 31% regard it as immoral. The exponential growth in the gambling (or "gaming") industry in the United States in the last several decades is astounding. Casinos, which prior to the 1970s were limited to the state of Nevada, are now found in nearly every state in the union (often on Native American reservations where state restrictions cannot be enforced). Sports and pari-mutuel wagering (horse and dog racing), both legal and illegal, is widespread, particularly with online bookmaking. And many states now sponsor lotteries, with jackpots running into the millions of dollars.

The Bible does not address gambling directly. However, it does conflict with biblical principles regarding stewardship of resources. Numerous Scriptures admonish against greed, covetousness, and wanting something for nothing. Also, gambling can become an addiction that leads to bondage and financial ruin. Here are several relevant passages regarding this topic: Proverbs 15:27; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

6. Smoking Marijuana

Americans' attitudes toward the use of Marijuana has changed considerably in the last several decades. According to Gallup, 65% of Americans now ac-

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cept marijuana as okay. 33% still say no. Most states and the federal government have resisted the pressure to legalize growing, selling, and using pot. Now, however, we are witnessing a growing trend to de-criminalize its possession in small amounts. A few states now allow legal growing and sales. Likewise, many states are legalizing the sale of cannabis oil (CBD) for use in some medical cases.

The passages cited concerning the use and abuse of alcohol apply also to Marijuana and other intoxicating drugs. Christians should have clear minds and avoid mind-altering substances that affect not only one's judgment, but also one's spiritual life. Frankly, the jury is still out as to whether or not CBD really has any positive medicinal qualities (see: <https://www.webmd.com/pain-management/news/20180507/cbd-oil-all-the-rage-but-is-it-safe-effective#1>).

7. Embryonic Stem Cell Research

You may be wondering, just what is a stem cell? Stem cells are cells (called pluripotent) that contain a full set of genes, chromosomes, and DNA, and that can, when actualized, produce various organs of the human body. They are, of course, found in fertilized human embryos which, if not prevented from doing so, will eventually make a fully formed human being. Most body cells are incapable of doing that. The Gallup poll indicates that 64% of Americans find em-

bryonic stem cell research acceptable. 31% find it unacceptable. So what is the problem?

In the 1990s, a major controversy arose over the use of stem cells derived from in vitro fertilized human embryos. The argument used by many in the medical research community was that stem cells were thought to be a possible solution for many previously untreatable diseases. Researchers on Parkinson's Disease, ALS, Alzheimer's Disease, MS, and many other maladies were optimistic that stem cells could be harvested to help find cures.

What makes this issue so controversial is that in order to harvest the stem cells, the in vitro fertilized embryos have to be destroyed. Evangelical and Roman Catholic pro-life advocates argue that this, like abor-

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tion, is the killing of a human life and should be banned (more on the issue of abortion in the next installment). In 2001, then President George W. Bush announced that government sponsored research could go forward only on cell lines that had already been harvested, but no new lines could be derived using federal funds. In 2009, President Barak Obama reversed that order and restored funding for all research.

It is obvious that most people, even most Christians, have never thought much about this issue. They fail to recognize the moral dilemma associated with embryonic stem cell harvesting. In any case, in the last decade this issue has all but disappeared from the public discussion. This is true for two reasons. One is that the research done on stem cells has not proven as positive as early expectations thought. Also, it is now known that active stem cells can be harvested from cells already existing in adults, children, amniotic fluid, and umbilical cord fluids. This fact removes the need to destroy fertilized embryos. In this case, Christians and other pro-life advocates have no objection to stem cell research continuing.

Conclusion

In this article we have analyzed the results in the American Moral Acceptability survey done by Gallup on seven moral issues. In the next installment we will examine seven more of the twenty-one moral issues addressed.