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**Doing the Moral Math**  
***Measuring the Moral Climate of America 2019 - Part 3***

By Tal Davis

In this three installment series, we are examining the results of a 2019 poll by the Gallup Corporation regarding the attitudes of American adults on twenty-one specific moral issues. The survey asked the respondents to state if they considered various issues as morally acceptable or morally unacceptable. In parts one and two we analyzed the first fourteen of those poll responses and evaluated them based on biblical teaching. They included the theses subjects: 1) Birth Control; 2) Drinking Alcohol; 3) Divorce; 4) Sex between an unmarried man and woman; 5) Gambling; 6) Smoking Marijuana; and 7) Embryonic Stem Cell Research (To read the poll results and our comments in part one go to:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2019/06/doing-the-moral-math-part-1>); 8) Having a baby outside of marriage; 9) Gay and lesbian Relations; 10) The death penalty; 11) Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur; 12) Doctor assisted suicide; 13) Medical testing on animals; and, 14) Abortion. (To read the poll results and our comments in part two go to:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2019/06/doing-the-moral-math-part-2>)

The full Gallup Moral Acceptability Poll can be found at:

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/257858/birth-control-top-list-morally-acceptable-issues.aspx>

In this third and final installment, we will look at the poll results for the other seven issues and, again, see what Scripture has to say about each one.

**15. Sex Between Teenagers**

It may be hard to believe, but 38% of American adults consider sex between teenagers as morally acceptable. Most (58%), however, still consider it unacceptable. Given the high rates of births and abortions among those who are unmarried, it would seem nearly everyone would strongly discourage teens from sexual activity.

The Bible does not address this issue directly. Nonetheless, the tenets of Scripture governing sexual morality for adults certainly apply to teenagers all the more. In point four of installment one we analyzed the biblical teaching on sexual relations between unmarried people (see link above).

We explained how the Bible, and Jesus Himself, teaches that when a man and woman engage in sexual relations they become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). That principle is the essence of marriage itself. Sex outside of or before marriage by teens or anyone else is a violation of God's word. The biblical ideal is for the husband and wife to come together in purity in marriage. Teens need to be instructed as to the sacredness of sex and the importance of purity before marriage. Unfortunately, neither of those concepts are upheld by modern secular society.

**16. Pornography**

In 1953, a Chicago entrepreneur named Hugh Hefner started a magazine called Playboy. The first issue contained a nude picture of actress Marilyn Monroe. Soon that publication became one of the most widely circulated in the world. Its primary attraction was, of course, the nude pictures of women it included in each

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issue. Thus began the proliferation of legal pornography in the general public that now has basically no boundaries (except involving children under 18). In 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled that lewd material could be restricted only if it lacked "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." That means, essentially, that whatever someone calls "art" cannot be restricted by the state.

With the advent of the internet, hard core pornography is available free of charge to anyone with a computer. Parents are almost helpless to control its exposure to their children and teens. Popular movies and TV shows now include scenes that in 1953 were not dared portrayed, even in Playboy. So how do people feel about this pornographic revolution?

The Gallup poll showed that only 37% of adults consider pornography morally acceptable. 61% regard it as unacceptable. Of course, the definition of what is pornographic is widely disputed. The poll did not distinguish nudity from soft core or hard core sex. Likely, many Americans consider nude pictures as acceptable, while disapproving hard core pornographic sex.

In any case, Christians do not set their standards by what is currently acceptable in secular society. Our standards must be informed by the Bible. So, what does Scripture say, if anything, about pornography? To begin with, the English word pornography has its root in the Greek word *porneia*. It is used in many passages and is defined as "sexual immorality," "fornication," "marital unfaithfulness," "prostitution," and "adultery." It is basically a generic term for sexual sin of any kind. Here are a few Bible verses where it is used (underlined):

*"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." (Matt. 15:19)*

*"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries." (Mark 7:21)*

*"But that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood." (Acts 15:20)*

*"That you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:29)*

*"You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." (John 8:41)*

*"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt. 19:9)*

*"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife." (1 Cor. 5:1)*

Another important Greek word is *epithumeó*. It essentially means "to long for," "to covet," "to lust after," or "to set the heart upon" things that you do not rightfully possess.

Consider what Jesus said regarding adultery and the heart:

*"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).*

Paul gives these warnings:

*"Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the*

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*desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest"* (Eph. 2:3).

*"Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (1 Tim. 2:22).*

And James says:

*"Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:15).*

The point is that the Bible condemns all forms of sexual immorality. That includes all those sins listed above and in our thought life. Sex is to be between a man and his wife in marriage. Pornography appeals to our basest instincts and distorts God's plan for sex and marriage. People are not objects for gratification, but persons made in the image of God. Those who produce pornography dehumanize and desecrate God's image both in its participants and its consumers.

## 17. Cloning Animals

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines cloning as "the process of generating a genetically identical copy of a cell or an organism." That process actually occurs in nature all the time. Many creatures, such as bacteria, reproduce by a single cell splitting into two identical cells. Artificial cloning occurs when the nucleus from a donor adult cell (somatic cell) is transferred to an egg from which the nucleus has been removed. Cloning of lower forms of life has been practiced since the early 20th century. In 1996, two British scientists successfully cloned a mammal for the first time. Dolly, a Scottish ewe, was born that year and lived until 2003. Since that time, hundreds of other successful animal clones have been produced. The clones have included dogs, wolves, sheep, cattle, pigs, camels, monkeys, and many others.

One interesting sidelight to this issue is the possibility of cloning extinct species. The 1993 book and movie Jurassic Park presented a far-fetched scenario wherein extinct dinosaurs are cloned back into existence. While that prospect is probably unrealistic, the cloning of some creatures more recently gone extinct, such as mammoths, saber-toothed tigers (smilodons), mastodons, and dodo birds are not outside the realm of possibility. Whether or not that is a good idea is questionable.

So what about the morality of animal cloning? Animal cloning has not been without its critics. According to the Gallup poll only 31% of Americans consider cloning animals as morally acceptable. 66% consider it unacceptable. Many scientists object that the techniques used are still unsafe and unreliable. Also, many animal rights advocates argue that too many cloned animals are born with genetic defects and have to be destroyed. On the other hand, advocates for animal (or plant) cloning say that it can increase the production of food and may actually make it safer than what is produced by natural methods.

So, what does the Bible say about this issue? Obviously it says nothing directly. Cloning was never even imagined until the 20th century. That being said, we must apply some moral standards to this scientific process. We have already addressed animal rights, so we might agree with animal rights groups in saying that uncontrolled cloning may be harmful to God's creatures. On the other hand, if safe and properly controlled, cloning can help relieve the major food problems in the world, it may be justified.

In point twenty below, we will explore the moral question of human cloning, which is a moral issue of a much higher degree of concern.

## 18. Polygamy

Most Americans are aware that in the early part of the 19th century, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons or LDS) in Illinois, and later in Utah, openly practiced what they called "plural marriage." Plural marriage was basically polygamy – the simultaneous marriage of a man or woman to more than one spouse. The LDS argued that the practice was mandated in their scriptures as received from God by prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.

In 1862, the United States Congress passed the Morrill Anti-bigamy Act which outlawed polygamy in all American territories. Later, in 1878, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld that law in *Reynolds v. United States*, declaring that polygamy is not protected by the U.S. Constitution. Consequently, because the Utah territory was under threat of military take over, and because its people desired statehood, polygamy was officially suspended by the LDS church in 1890. Utah joined the union in 1896. Now polygamy is prohibited in the LDS church.

Today, polygamy is illegal in all 50 states, DC, and all U.S. territories. Nonetheless, thousands of people, particularly in Mormon splinter movements in the western U.S., still engage in unregistered plural marriages. In most cases, the state authorities ignore the practice. In a few instances, polygamous groups have been raided when there was evidence of underage or forced marriages.

Most Americans regard polygamy as morally unacceptable (80%). 18% consider the practice morally acceptable. Of course, our position must be based on the biblical teaching; not statistics, not Congress, and not the Supreme Court.

It is certainly true that many Old Testament characters had more than one wife. Examples are Abraham (Gen. 16:3), Esau (Gen. 26:34), Jacob (Gen. 29:15-28), Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:1-8), David (1 Sam. 25:39-44; 2 Sam. 3:2-5; 5:13-16), and Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-3). It is important to note, however, that the practice was never sanctioned by God. Actually, the Old Testament Law discouraged it (Lev. 18:18; Deut. 17:17). In most of those cases, when a man took multiple wives, it caused serious problems and sins for himself, his family, and his country. This was especially true with the kings who took wives from foreign lands. Consider what happened to Solomon.

*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter - Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. (1 Kings 11:1-3)*

As we discussed in the section on homosexuality (see installment 2), the biblical standard for marriage is found in Genesis 2:24: For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Jesus reiterated this principle when answering questions about divorce.

*And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)*

Likewise, Paul maintained that church leaders should have only one wife.

*An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2)*

*Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. (1 Timothy 3:12; see also Titus 1:6)*

The consistent teaching of Scripture is that marriage should be between one man and one woman – until death do they part. Polygamy is not morally acceptable. Most Americans are correct!

## 19. Suicide

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), suicide is defined as "death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior." The NIH also indicates "a suicide attempt is a non-fatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A suicide attempt might not result in injury. Suicidal ideation refers to thinking about, considering, or planning suicide."

According to the NIMH, more than 47,000 Americans took their own lives in 2017 (latest statistics available). That was more than twice the number of homicides, and more than the number deaths in auto accidents. It was the second highest cause of death among people ages 18-34 (accidents being highest), and fourth highest for those 35-54 (only cancer, heart disease, and accidents being higher). In the years between 2001 and 2017, the overall rate of suicides per 100,000 population increased by more than 30%! The overall rate in 2017 was 13.3 suicides per 100,000 population (1.33% of the population). The rate was also more than three times higher for men than women.

(<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>)

Those statistics indicate what can only be called a national tragedy and crisis. According to the Gallup poll, the consensus of Americans agree that suicide is morally unacceptable (79%). Nonetheless, surprisingly, 17% of respondents say it is morally acceptable.

Again we ask, what does the Bible have to say about this issue? In the second installment of this series we discussed the issue of doctor assisted suicide (Point 12), and presented several principles concerning suicide in general (see link to Part 2 above). In that section we quoted eight reasons the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention says suicide is a sin.

- Suicide is a sin against God as the creator and sustainer of life. It rejects God's sovereignty and usurps his prerogative in regard to life and death (cf. Job 12:10).
  - Suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment (cf. Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).
  - Suicide disregards the image of God and the sanctity of human life (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 9:5-6).
  - Suicide is poor stewardship of one's body (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20).
  - Suicide demonstrates misdirected love and is injurious to others (cf. Matt. 22:36-39; Eph. 5:29).
  - Suicide overlooks the value of human suffering (cf. Rom. 5:3-5; 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17-18; 12:10).
    - † Believers are called to suffer with Christ (cf. Rom. 8:17).
    - † The present life is not one of earthly glory and conquest. Believers are called to have joy and hope in the midst of current trials, looking forward to the age to come.
  - Suicide fails to recognize the unnatural nature of death (cf. Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:26; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
  - Jesus refused to commit suicide and Paul prevented it (cf. Matt. 4:5-6; Luke 4:9-11; Acts 16:27-28).
- (<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/suicide-from-a-christian-perspective> )

## 20. Cloning Humans

In Point 17 of this article, we examined the issue of animal cloning. As we said, The Encyclopedia Britannica defines cloning as "the process of generating a genetically identical copy of a cell or an organism." We indicated in that section that cloning happens often in nature. It can also happen naturally in humans when a fertilized zygote (egg) cell divides into two separate but genetically identical embryos. This is the process of forming identical twins (or triplets, etc.) or monozygotic twins, who usually look very much alike. Twins who are from two simultaneous but separately fertilized zygotes (thus not sharing identical genetics) are known as "paternal twins." They may not look alike and may not even be the same gender. Of course, such natural occurrences are relatively common and pose no moral issue.

As we also discussed, artificial cloning occurs when the a nucleus from a donor adult cell (somatic cell) is transferred to an egg from which the nucleus has been removed. Many clonings of various animals, including mammals like sheep and cattle, have been done successfully over the past several decades. The morality of that practice, even from a Biblical perspective, is debatable. But what about the artificial cloning of human beings – is that morally acceptable? According to Gallup, only 12% of Americans believe it is morally acceptable. The vast majority (85%) agree that it is unacceptable.



Needless to say, the morality of human cloning has generated a great deal of controversy since the 1960s. As of this writing, no known fully developed human baby has been born who was the product of cloning. Those few times people claimed it were shown to be hoaxes. Some fertilized embryos have been produced, but, due to being used in research, they did not survive. This, of course, raises even more moral issues. More than 70 countries outlaw human cloning, though it is used in some countries to produce stem cells (see Point 6 in Part 1 for an analysis of that issue - link above).

So what can we glean from Scripture to weigh the ethics of that artificially done procedure? A full evaluation of this issue from a biblical perspective would require far more space than available here. J. Kerby Anderson has written an excellent review about this question at <https://voice.dts.edu/article/cloning-stem-cell-research-and-the-bible-dallas-theological-seminar>.

Basically though, from a Christian point of view, the issue of human cloning goes to the very heart of what makes humans human. As we have stated several times before, the most important principle concerning human life is that we are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6). As such, we have a special place in God's creation. This means that human life should be considered sacred. Any scientific procedure that may obscure mankind's value, or seeks to circumvent God's sovereignty in creating human life, is wrong. Therefore, Christians should oppose, as in stem cell research, the practice and legalization of human cloning when it involves the artificial fertilization of zygotes. (Note: If an embryo is conceived and/or a child is born from an artificial cloning – legal or not – he or she has the same human value in God's eyes, and possesses the same human rights, as anyone conceived naturally.)

## **21. Married Men and Women Having an Affair**

The final moral issue addressed in the Gallup Poll is that of marital infidelity. Only 9% of those Americans polled think married men or women having extra-marital affairs is morally acceptable. The overwhelming majority (89%) say committing adultery is morally unacceptable. The Bible, of course, has much to say concerning adultery, going as far back as the Ten Commandments, where it says, "You shall not commit adultery (Hebrew: tne-'ap)" (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). (For an explanation and analysis of this Commandment go to: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2018/09/the-ten-commandments-a-ten-part-study-of-the-decalogue-part-7>)

In every Scriptural instance, adultery is condemned as a vile sin against God and one's spouse. Here are a number of other key verses that indicate God's perspective. First from the Old Testament.

*If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.* (Leviticus 20:10; see also Deut. 22:19-22)

*The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it.* (Proverbs 6:32) (See also Jeremiah 23:14; 29:23; Hosea 4:2, 13-14; Malachi 3:5)

Here are key verses from Jesus and the New Testament.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery' (Greek: moicheuó); but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Matthew 5:27-28)

*"But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."* (Matthew 5:32)

*"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.* (Matthew 15:19; see also Mark 7:21) (See also 2 Peter 2:13-15; Hebrews 13:4)

In the previously mentioned study of the Ten commandments, we listed three principles from Scripture regarding adultery. Number three may be the most important.

1. Adultery is an act that is conceived in one's mind and heart. (Matt. 5:27-28)

2. Adultery distorts the relationship of man and God. Marriage was intended to be a picture of Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. (Matthew 9:14-16; 25:1-13; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:34-36; John 28-30; Rev. 19-22).

3. Adultery is not the unforgivable sin (John 7:53-8:11). If someone has been unfaithful, God can forgive and restore the marriage if the guilty one sincerely repents and receives God's forgiveness, and if the spouse is willing to forgive also. Remember what King David wrote to God about his adultery after Nathan exposed his sin with Bathsheba (see Psalm 51).

This concludes this three-part analysis of the 2019 Gallup American Moral Acceptability poll. We have examined what that survey found regarding how Americans view the moral acceptability or unacceptability of twenty-one major ethical issues. From a Christian perspective, the results are mixed. In some cases, Americans are in line with biblical teachings, but on others they are far afield. In any case, the poll indicates again the need for a spiritual awakening and moral revival in this country.

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