

What This Shock Poll Had to Say About the Planned Parenthood Videos and Christians

Last year, the Center for Medical Progress released a disturbing, yet crucial, series of videos on alleged Planned Parenthood business practices. The outrage over what was depicted was appropriate. I questioned some progressive evangelicals who remained silent in the face of such a tragedy.

Here on The Exchange, Chris Martin addressed the sale of fetal tissue to then Planned Parenthood partner Stem Express. Kelly Rosati of Focus on the Family wrote about the cognitive dissonance of supporting Planned Parenthood and that one can be both pro-life and pro-justice.

National Review reported on the forensic review of some of the videos, *The Atlantic* did a summary after the first five videos were released, and *The American Spectator* talked about an attempted legal maneuver to suppress one video's release.

At least some moderate to center-right on the political spectrum did some coverage.

The New York Times also covered the release of the videos, an apology for "lack of compassion" by a Planned Parenthood staffer in the videos and more than two dozen articles on the controversy. *The Washington Post* reported on how the videos had revived pro-life activism and ran dozens of stories of the videos. A Google News search turns up more than 7,000 links to articles on the videos.

So I admit I was surprised when a recent LifeWay Research

project showed that 43 percent of Americans don't even know the videos existed. More than four of every 10 Americans are blithely unaware of the 13-part series in which Planned Parenthood employees negotiate the sale (*Reuters'* word, by the way, based on the obvious fact they were negotiating prices) of fetal body parts.

Writes Bob Smietana for LifeWay Research:

A phone survey of 1,000 Americans from Nashville-based LifeWay Research found seven out of 10 are either not aware of the videos (43 percent) or have not spoken out after seeing them (27 percent). Among those who are aware of the videos, relatively few spoke out against Planned Parenthood.

Not only were 43 percent of those surveyed unaware of the videos, just over a quarter (27 percent) knew about them yet said nothing. How can that be?

That's like nearly half of your neighbors don't know your house is on fire and another quarter of them know yet choose to say nothing.

There are at least three takeaways I see from this data: ignorance, apathy and the information ghetto.

Ignorance

When the videos were first released, I could hardly get away from the conversation that surrounded me. My friends were constantly discussing the content of the videos on Facebook, Twitter and face-to-face meetings. It's nearly inconceivable to me that so many people have no knowledge of their existence.

But it should serve as a reminder that news is not consumed the same across the board. Everyone doesn't see the same news at the same time, or even in the same way. We cannot presume that because we know something about a news item that *everyone*

knows of that thing or knows all the details we've consumed.

In addition to being uninformed about the videos, I believe many know what is happening but simply don't care enough to speak up.

Apathy

That more than a quarter of Americans saw the videos yet chose to say nothing, one way or another, is sad.

A great many people have lost any clear sense of right and wrong. Their moral compass isn't pointing to biblical North, leading to questions I asked last summer.

Around the same time, the Planned Parenthood videos began surfacing, a dentist from Minnesota shot a lion named Cecil in Zimbabwe. PETA President Ingrid Newark released a statement condemning its killing, claiming she hoped the American citizen would be "extradited, charged and, preferably, hanged."

How can we claim to be a nation guided by moral principles if we are more outraged at the killing of one lion than the killing of over 1 million American babies per year? Or, more specifically, be willing to ignore videos allegedly depicting practices that even pro-choice leaders like Hillary Clinton called "disturbing"?

Perhaps the problem isn't entirely one of apathy. Maybe it includes intentional silence due to political or moral agreement on the issue of abortion.

The Information Ghetto

It is absolutely true that not everyone knows all the news. It's also true that we tend to consume information, including news, referred to us by friends. This is the nature of social media, email and even texting. Facebook's newsfeed is designed to show us what we want to see. Even our search results are

biased.

One seemingly unavoidable outcome is that the information we get will be limited and usually related to the interests we already have. We tend to have friends with the same interests, attend churches with people with interests (and political opinions) like our own, join organizations that promote our interests and so forth.

If you made it through the second-half of 2015 and never saw anything about these videos in your Facebook news feed or your Twitter feed or heard about them in your Sunday school class, you may need to expand your circle of friends. And if you did not see anyone defending Planned Parenthood, the same applies.

When we (un)intentionally surround ourselves with people who think like us, vote like us and believe like us, we can experience false-consensus effect (the belief that a person's opinion or belief is shared by more people than it actually is).

False-consensus effect is especially strong when we are convinced our position is the correct one.

We will be ineffective in discussing hot-button social issues of our day with those who disagree with us if we stay inside our comfortable information ghetto. Not only do we risk misunderstanding their position, but we may likely have no reasoned answer if we don't have context for the questions they are asking or the solutions they are proposing.

Why Does This Matter?

Put simply, it matters because we must always be ready to give an answer on issues the Bible addresses. It matters because we need to learn to separate good information from bad. It matters because lives are at stake.

Many evangelicals strongly believe that abortion takes a human

life, Planned Parenthood is immoral, and our societal willingness to kill unborn children is unjust. This idea is reinforced when we spend time *only* with others who share our position, leading us to believe—rightly or wrongly—that the majority of people know what we know and believe what we believe.

Regardless, Christians are called to be salt and light in our culture (Matt.). We cannot on one hand follow a Jesus-ethic that values human life, and on the other hand stay silent about pre-born humans parted out like a stolen Toyota Celica.