

A Christian's Response to the CNN Poll on Torture

In 2009 I saw a CNN poll which claimed that churchgoers are more likely to support torture than non-attendees. This compelled me to speak out. Now, with the Republican victory on November 2010, the topic of torturing confessions out of terrorists has a resurfaced, so I have updated this study.

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CNN Poll and Aftermath

WASHINGTON (CNN, April 30th 2009) — The more often Americans go to church, the more likely they are to support the torture of suspected terrorists, according to a new analysis.

More than half of people who attend services at least once a week — 54 percent — said the use of torture against suspected terrorists is “often” or “sometimes” justified. Only 42 percent of people who “seldom or never” go to services agreed, according the analysis released Wednesday by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

White evangelical Protestants were the religious group most likely to say torture is often or sometimes justified — more than 6 in 10 supported it. People unaffiliated with any religious organization were least likely to back it. Only 4 in 10 of them did.

The analysis is based on a Pew Research Center survey of 742 American adults conducted April 14-21. It did not include analysis of groups other than white

evangelicals, white non-Hispanic Catholics, white mainline Protestants, and the religiously unaffiliated, because the sample size was too small.

While the pole was too small to have any real accuracy, and CNN's bias may have played a role in the results, the fact remains that many Christians do support torturing suspected terrorists to extract information.

In 2009 you could [Google "Christians and torture"](#) and see the backlash. Here were two quotes from non-Christians:

“Actually, if you believe the Bible is the literal word of God, it makes sense that you'd be for torture. Indeed, hell is the ultimate example of torture.”

AND

“When you add in the 17% who say that it is rarely justified, you get to a stunning 79% of evangelicals who would gladly put you on the rack and tear your limbs out.”

Of course, these statements are not true, and fortunately this backlash has died down some, as of December 2010. Yet this perception of us will make it a lot more difficult for a Christian to witness to this peer group. Jesus said that the world would hate us for righteousness sake. Is torturing people righteous?

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:10

Not every Christian supports torture; in fact, many have spoken out against it. The Rutherford Institute posted [this article at their website](#):

WASHINGTON, DC -- The Rutherford Institute, along with other non-governmental organizations, has filed a friend of the court brief in the U.S. Supreme Court urging the Court to accept review of a case in which 17 Chinese Muslims, known as Uighurs, seek release from Guantanamo now that they have been recognized not to be enemy combatants.

[...]

"The courts, the United States military, and the former administration under President Bush have long recognized that these men are not 'enemy combatants,' and do not pose a threat to the United States," said John W. Whitehead, president of The Rutherford Institute. "When our government lacks a legal basis to detain people and there is no evidence that they pose a threat to the United States, they should be released promptly.

Unfortunately, the world tends to ignore exemplary Christian behavior, and instead parades examples of bad behavior to embarrass us. They would rather remind us of the Spanish Inquisition than reflect on all the hospitals and orphanages that have been built around the world in the name of Christ.

Before we continue, we should define what it means to torture suspected terrorists to extract a confession.

The Definition of Torture

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language

tor·ture (tôrchr) n.

1. a. Infliction of severe physical pain as a means of punishment or coercion.
b. An instrument or a method for inflicting such pain.
2. Excruciating physical or mental pain; agony: the torture of waiting in suspense.
3. Something causing severe pain or anguish.

tr.v. tor·tured, tor·tur·ing, tor·tures

1. To subject (a person or an animal) to torture.
2. To bring great physical or mental pain upon (another). See Synonyms at afflict.
3. To twist or turn abnormally; distort: torture a rule to make it fit a case.

Collins Essential English Dictionary

Torture

[-turing, -tured]

Verb

1. to cause (someone) extreme physical pain, esp. to extract information, etc.: suspects were regularly tortured and murdered by the secret police
2. to cause (someone) mental anguish

Noun

1. physical or mental anguish
2. the practice of torturing a person
3. something which causes great mental distress: she was going through the torture of a collapsing marriage [Latin torquere to twist]

In defending the torture of suspected terrorists, some conservatives have made comments like the following:

"Some of these terrorists who are not recognized as soldiers don't deserve to be treated as soldiers." Jim Phillips of the Heritage Foundation (Wikipedia)

This is a true statement. However, they are human beings, and we, as Christians, have a duty to treat them humanly.

Those who play down the pain that the detainees being tortured suffer, are ignorant or dishonest. Terrorists are often willing to die for what they believe in. The pain would have to be excruciating in order for interrogators to get any kind of confession, or betrayal of their comrades out of such men.

According to a contributor at Wikipedia, by 2008 there had been at least four suicides and hundreds of suicide attempts in Guantanamo. It is possible that many other suicides attempts remain classified information. Some accounts record detainees literally pulling out their own hair.

Different Interrogation Techniques

Some of the interrogation techniques are sleep deprivation, forced drugging and waterboarding. All of these tortures leave permanent scars on the body as well as the soul.

The attacking of the detainee's religious beliefs by defacing of their Koran, forbidding prayer and the services of prostitutes, has been reported to happen to detainees at Guantanamo bay. How would you, as a Christian detained in a Muslim country, want to be treated?

[Jesus said:] Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. - Matthew 7:12

Other reported abuses include:

Their tormentors chaining captives hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor for 18 hours or more, thereby forcing them to urinate and defecate on themselves.

Subjecting Detainees to extremes of temperatures, barefoot with the air conditioning had brought the temperature close to freezing or the air conditioning being turned off in an unventilated room, making the temperature over degrees 100F.

Our Country's Values: The Bill of Rights

In 1776, our forefathers fought against King George because of the abuses of his government. When they rebelled they listed some of their reasons for separating from England.

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 of 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 their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they 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. (Declaration of Independence)

Shortly after adopting the Constitution of the United States, our founding fathers gave us a *Bill of Rights* in order to prevent the same evils from reoccurring. Some of the behaviors condemned by our *Bill of Rights* include:

First Amendment

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.

I cannot personally advocate Islam; however, we should consider whether or not we would want the right to worship if we were detained in a Muslim country, when we decide whether or not to allow incarcerated Muslims their religion. When Muslims are detained, it is wrong to ridicule or attack their religious beliefs.

Fourth Amendment

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Many suspects have been arrested and held without probable cause. These suspects were turned over by bounty hunters who sold them for a reward. Did we, the people, ever authorize our government to take this action on our behalf?

Fifth Amendment

*No person shall be held to answer for any capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; **nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself**, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.*

Torturing a suspect to get a confession is in complete defiance of not only the Constitution of the United States, but also of our Christian beliefs. On the Day of Judgment, it will shameful if our only defense is, "We didn't treat them like men because they weren't American Citizens."

Sixth Amendment

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district where in the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

The following quote comes from a contributor at Wikipedia:

An Associated Press report claims that some detainees were turned over to the U.S. by Afghan tribesmen in return for cash bounties

Of those 435, 110 have been labeled as ready for release. Of the other 325, only about 70 will face trial by military commissions, criminal courts run by the US armed forces. That leaves about 250 who may be held indefinitely. (Wikipedia)

It is wrong to hold suspects for an indefinite period of time, without a trial, an attorney, or a process by which to obtain witnesses in his favor. Those who cannot see this do not understand the values that made our country great.

Eighth Amendment

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

More than half of the Bill of Rights condemns our present behavior. In the early 1990s, federal prosecutors started using [Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act](#) (RICO), against profilers. At that time, the liberal media ignored these abuses. Later, RICO was used against environmental demonstrators; their silence had come back to bite them. If we do not make the federal government obey the law simply because these suspects are our enemies, be assured that this will come back to bite us.

International Law

Not only have we ignored our own laws, we are also violating international treaties. The Bush administration claimed that detainees were not entitled to any protection from the Geneva Conventions; rather, former President George W Bush issued an executive order that permitted the US military to indefinitely detain any suspect whom they believed was involved in any international terrorism. Today we may escape the [Nuremberg Trials](#)², but someday we will stand before the judgment seat of God. Nobody will escape that trial.

And unto the angel of the church in Saris write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. - Revelation 3:1

Jesus on Torture

Jesus said:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; - Matthew 5:44

On the Day of Judgment, will we be able to tell Jesus that we loved our enemies and blessed them that cursed us? What if He asks us how we treated those who hated us? In reference to the last days, Jesus said,

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. - Matthew 24:12-13

Terrorism would have fit well into Jesus' discussion about iniquity abounding. It is essential that we, as followers of Jesus, do not let the terrorists cause us to stop loving.

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. - Luke 6:27

AND

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. - Luke 6:35

If you hate terrorism, then the terrorists are your enemies. We are commanded to love them, not torture them.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. - John 13:34-35

Atheists are blogging all over the internet that Christians love to torture their enemies, but we must shine through as people who love our enemies. By our love shall men know we are His disciples.

Do We Trust in God?

Many people have argued that it is essential to torture terrorist suspects in order to get information that may prevent future attacks. The apostle John wrote,

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. **If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar:** for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? - 1 John 4:18-20*

If we really believe that God is in control, we do not have to be afraid. When we are not afraid, we can make rational decisions on how to please Him, without having to worry about self preservation. If God is for us, our enemies cannot prevail. Will God protect us when we behave like all the despots in history before us?

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. - Luke 12:4

AND

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. - Luke 12:6

AND

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. - Luke 9:24

Let us resolve to trust in God, that we may be obedient to Him.

Why Did so Many Christians Support Torture in the CNN Poll?

Many conservative Christians support torture simply as a reaction to the liberals who oppose it. Many Christians were supportive of George W. Bush when he came into office. Since then, they have tried to justify his interrogation techniques in order not to be divisive. For the same reason, most of the conservative talk show personalities have endorsed or belittled torture. If conservatives are for it and liberals against it, it has to be good, right?

We Cannot Serve Two Masters

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
- Matthew 6:24

Let us face the facts; there will be times when we have to choose between following men (even conservative men) and following Jesus. Let us choose wisely.

Christian Torture in History

In 65AD Nero began burning Christians at the stake. From that time until now Christians have been [tortured](#)¹ at the hands of their enemies. It is time for us to learn from history.

In the late 1500s, William Tyndale was strangled and then burned at the stake for translating of the Bible into English. Interestingly, Tyndale suffered this abuse at the hands of the Church of England. So who was on God's side, Tyndale or the church? Christians do not torture others; they endure torture for the sake of Jesus. This is how you can tell the difference. If two opposing people both profess Christianity, the one being tortured is the disciple of Jesus Christ; the one torturing is not.



*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that **whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.*** - John 16:2-4a

USA Torture in History

Interestingly, this is not the first time that the government of The United States has been involved in torturing people. In the 1950s, the CIA hired Dr. Ewen Cameron to do secret experiments involving torture.

Dr. Cameron

Dr. Cameron became the second President of the World Psychiatric Association, as well as president of the American and Canadian psychiatric associations. As such, Cameron was one of the most revered and rewarded psychiatrists on the international scene. He was also a member of the Nuremberg

Medical Tribunal in the late 1940s, where he accused German medics of things he himself had done between 1934 and 1960, or later.

His scientific work during World War II for the OSS has never been a secret. After World War II, He used shock, drugs, sleep deprivation, some bizarre forms of conditioning, and what he called de-patterning treatment to eradicate memories and even identities of his patients. These were usually women, who were receiving treatment without realizing they were guinea pigs, until it was too late.

Cameron subjected patients to twice-daily doses of six electroshocks, one after another, to maintain the individual in one prolonged stupor. Typically thirty to forty or more shocks were given in this blockbuster manner during his experiments on more than fifty patients in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The result of this devastating treatment was a severe delirium; patients would lose their sense of identity and sometimes become delusional. Robbed of virtually all memory, the patients became completely focused on present sensations and feelings. With much or even all of their lifetime memory bank obliterated, six months would be taken to reprogram them with new memories of themselves and a more docile personality.

Around the time of [Leonard] Frank's disclosures about Cameron's treatments, Cameron's work suddenly became a major scandal [The History of Shock Treatment (1978), shock survivor Leonard Frank was one of Cameron's victims]. The outcry wasn't directed at the extreme treatments themselves, which were similar to numerous other regressive shock techniques, variations of which still are practiced in the United States (see below). What made Cameron suddenly newsworthy was the disclosure in newspaper reports and books that he had been secretly financed in part by CIA funds. (Toxic Psychiatry, Peter R. Breggin, 1991)

There is plenty of [documentation](#) showing different governments supporting those like Dr Cameron, who torture their victims. What is unique about the present situation in Guantanamo Bay, is that those who are professing Christianity appear to be the ones supporting it.

The USA and Concentration Camps

The Guantanamo Bay detention camp is not the first concentration camp in The United States. While we speak of the evil of Nazi concentration camps (and we should), many people have forgotten that during World War II the United States had its own concentration camps. The Germans interned Jews for the crime of being Jewish; we [interned the Japanese](#) for the crime of being Japanese.

Americans justified their concentration camps during WWII for the same reason that we are justifying our detaining and torturing suspects today. Today, the need we felt to incarcerate the Japanese seems foolish. However, someday Guantanamo Bay will look even more shameful to historians because of the torture involved.

Christian Torture and the Future

Daniel prophesied that a world leader will come at the end of the age who will torture Christians. If this leader has Islamic ties, will the world, remembering our behavior, turn their heads the other way?

*And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet **they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days.** Now when they shall fall, they shall be helped with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed. - Daniel 11:32-35*

Recently, some at the Department of Homeland Security have declared that [right wing pro-lifers fit the terrorist profile](#). If those who believe in the sanctity of human life are considered terrorists, then they can lose all their rights under the constitution. Our enemies will be able to torture us in order to find out who our friends are. Be sure that when they do, they will remind us that torturing prisoners was our idea in the first place.

At the age of 19, Murat Kurnaz vanished into America's shadow prison system in the war on terror. He was from Germany, traveling in Pakistan, and was picked up three months after 9/11. But there seemed to be ample evidence that Kurnaz was an innocent man with no connection to terrorism. The FBI thought so, U.S. intelligence thought so, and German intelligence agreed. But once he was picked up, Kurnaz found himself in a prison system that required no evidence and answered to no one. (CBS)

If this could happen to Murat Kurnaz, why couldn't it happen to any one of us? Some count on a [pretribulation rapture](#) to escape. From Jesus' time to the present, the pretribulation rapture has not delivered any of the faithful from great tribulation.

In Closing

Can We Get Information from Terrorists?

There are different opinions on how effective these torture techniques are in extracting confessions. When the individual cracks, he may tell you what he thinks you want to hear because he is more interested in ending his suffering than he is in telling the truth. A more effective way to gather information may be to release a suspect (for which there is no proof of wrongdoing) and then track him. With a legal search warrant, his phones could be tapped, and his mail and email read. With a little follow-up, one may be able to gather more information and more reliable information than can be gotten through torturing a suspect who is out of circulation with his coconspirators.

Write Your Congressman

If you have supported the torture of these suspected terrorists in the past, ask God to forgive you. It is not too late to actively renounce cruel and inhuman treatment of those whom God made in His own image. Write letters to your [Congressman](#) and to the editor. Tell them you are a Christian, and that, no

matter what CNN says, you oppose torture. Tell them that you hate the inhuman treatment of human beings, regardless of whether they are American citizens or have the label of war criminals.

Right now you are reading this. Later you will be eating, listening to your favorite Christian music, enjoying a pleasant evening with your family, and tucking your children into bed. Today there are people who are suffering agonizing torture at the hands of fellow human beings. These victims need our prayers and our outcry of condemnation against their tormentors for this behavior.

Written by [Jeff Barnes](#)

Resources:

A website that records unethical [human medical experimentation in the United States](#).

Footnotes:

- [1] - Read [Fox's Book of Martyrs](#) for a history of the saints. Go to [Voice Of the Martyrs](#) for information on current persecution of the church throughout the world.
- [2] - The Nuremberg Trials were military tribunals, held by the Allied forces at the end of World War II. The crimes included genocide and torture (often under the guise of medical experiments). Critics of the Nuremberg trials argued that the charges against the defendants were only defined as "crimes" after they were committed.

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