



ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

*We fix our eyes not on what is seen,
but on what is unseen...*

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2000

A Dialogue About Origins

by Randy Alcorn



*I wrote this dialogue a few years ago for my book *Deadline*, but it was nonessential, so I removed it, and it's never been published until now.*

*I hope some readers will find the interaction between these two men stimulating and useful. The Jake referred to is Jake Woods, main character of *Deadline*, a non-Christian. I'm breaking into a conversation he's having with the man sitting next to him on an airplane.*

When Jake didn't respond the man made it clear he wasn't going to let it drop. "Why would you think there isn't anything beyond death?"

"Why would you think there *is*?"

"Because I think people are different than rocks or trees or dung beetles."

Jake said nothing.

"Do you?"

"Well, sure. But so what?"

"There's more to what we are than a

bunch of chemicals and water and calcium. There's a mind, not just a brain. Personhood doesn't stop just because the body stops."

This guy might be a nut, but he wasn't your basic airplane bore.

"Keep talking," Jake said. "Maybe you'll write my column for me."

"A column?" He turned enough to stick his right hand over to Jake. "Brandon Jurose. I'm a physics prof at Berkeley."

"Jake Woods, columnist for the *Tribune*."

"Glad to meet you, Jake. Sorry to interrupt your column."

"That's all right. Sometimes I need some stimulation to get the juices flowing. Keep talking—you're more interesting than my physics prof was."

Jurose smiled. "I can't understand why people find it so easy to believe in themselves and so hard to believe in God. It strikes me as irrational to think that

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all we are is the product of time plus chance plus nothing. That belief takes more faith than I can muster.”

“More faith?”

“Sure. There’s a lot more tangible evidence for creation than random existence, you know.”

Jake stared at him blankly.

“Ever hear of a philosopher named Francis Schaeffer?” Jurose asked. “In one of his books he laid out a logical argument for the existence of God.”

“A logical argument? Okay...I’m game,” Jake sighed, more interested than he wanted to admit.

“It starts by acknowledging that something exists. I’ll ask you what he asked—do you believe that there is something, as opposed to nothing?”

“Huh?”

“Well, you know, there are some eastern mystics who say everything’s an illusion. Nothing exists. Of course, here they are formulating a philosophy—not something you’d expect of nonexistent beings in a nonexistent universe. Kick them in the shins and when they feel the pain, it’ll remind them their philosophy is wrong, they really do exist. So, Jake, do you believe there is something that exists, as opposed to there being nothing?”

“Sure, that’s an easy one. Something exists.”

“Okay, then the second question is, where did that something come from?”

“I have a feeling you’re going to tell me.”

Jurose’s big grin reminded him of Finney’s. “No, you have to tell me. I’ll give you three options, but if you can’t think of a fourth, you have to choose one of them, okay?”

“Okay.”

“First option—whatever exists came into being out of nothing. That’s spontaneous generation. Second op-

tion—whatever exists has always been. Third option—whatever exists came out of something else that’s always been. The second two options require that something is eternal.”

“I guess I’m a Big Bang man.”

“Okay, but you still have to answer the question.”

“Well, the Big Bang had to have something to go ‘bang,’ right? And I can’t imagine there was absolutely nothing in the universe and something suddenly came into being on its own. So, I’ll eliminate spontaneous generation. It’s been a long time since my last biology class, but if I remember correctly, something doesn’t come from nothing.”

There’s a lot more tangible evidence for creation than random existence.

“Your science is right. So far so good. Where does that leave us?”

“Well, what’s here must have come from something else.”

“And that something else has always been, right? Otherwise at some point back there something would have had to come from nothing, and you’ve said it couldn’t. Right?”

“Right.”

“So what you’ve said is, you believe in a first cause, an eternal first cause that didn’t come from something else, but from which everything in the universe ultimately came.”

“I said that?”

“Yes, you did. Now, the question is, what was the nature of this first cause? There are only two possibilities.

It was a *something* or a *someone*. It was either unliving or living, impersonal or personal. So, tell me Jake, was the first cause impersonal or personal?”

“Impersonal, I guess. At least that’s what science tells us.”

“Really? How does science tell us that?” The scientist’s scrunched-up face told Jake his logic was in trouble.

“Well, don’t most scientists believe in evolution?”

“What scientists subjectively choose to believe is irrelevant. What science—the objective discipline—teaches, is something else. The question is this—that eternally existent source of all things, the first cause, was it personal or impersonal? Forget what you’ve been told. Make up your own mind.”

“But how?”

“The key to answering the question is observing what exists, and deducing from that. You tell me, Jake—what exists?”

“Everything exists, right?”

“Right, but is everything the same? Are there different kinds of things in the universe?”

“Sure. Inanimate things. Like rocks. Living things like plants and trees. Then there’s animals. And people are the highest form of animals.”

“Any difference between a rock and a plant?”

“Sure. The plant is living.”

“Do you think nonliving matter could produce the living?”

“I suppose it had to.”

“Don’t suppose anything. Just answer the question.”

“I’m not sure.”

“Well, think about trees and animals. Do you see a basic difference between them? I mean, are they just different in degree or in kind?”

Jake paused. “Different in kind. There’s a huge difference between my



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springer spaniel and the elm tree outside my apartment. In fact, there's a major difference between animals—a microbe or an insect as opposed to, say, a horse or a dog."

Jurose nodded. "I've got a bull dog. I know what you mean. And what about the difference between your dog and your family? Different in kind or just degree?"

The word "family" stung Jake. He hoped Jurose wouldn't ask him specifics. "Different in kind."

"Yet you said before that people are just 'higher animals.' Higher is a matter of degree—it suggests people are more advanced, but not essentially different than wasps and badgers."

"Okay, maybe I was wrong. Whether you call them animals or not, people are different than lower animals, much different."

"So what you've said

is not only that something does exist, but more than one kind of thing exists. You've identified

maybe five categories—nonliving matter, living plants, lower animals, higher animals and people. But let's just go with two categories to make it simpler. We'll call them nonliving and living, the impersonal and the personal. Rocks and trees are impersonal. People are personal. I'll let you decide about your spaniel, but it doesn't affect the argument."

"Okay, there's personal and impersonal—I'll buy that."

"The next question is, which of our two possible first causes, either of which has to be eternal, could account for all the impersonal things in this world?"

Jake paused. "I'm not sure. Either one?"

"An impersonal source could account for impersonal matter, provided it had the ability to replicate itself and change itself into new forms. That's highly questionable, but let's just assume it could. So, given time and just the right situation, maybe some impersonal chemicals could eventually account for the existence of other chemicals, minerals, dirt, rocks, etcetera."

"Sounds reasonable."

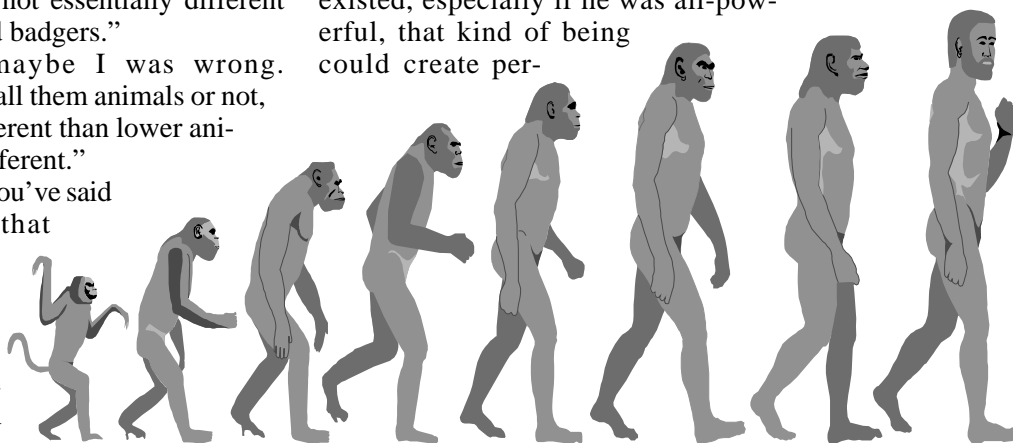
"And then there's the other possible first cause—if there was a personal being who has always existed, could he account for all those impersonal things?"

"Sure, why not? People are always making things—paintings, sculpture, airplanes, you name it. So could he."

"Right, Jake, exactly."

"So, it's a stalemate? The first cause could be either personal or impersonal?"

"No. Remember, we've got one part of the equation left, the critical part. What about the *personal* aspects of existence? A Creator who's always existed, especially if he was all-powerful, that kind of being could create per-



sonal beings, right? He could give them the personal quality that he himself has, just as a man and woman can create a child, passing on their personal nature."

"That makes sense."

"But what about the other possibility, the *only* other one? What about impersonal matter as a first cause? Maybe it could account for the impersonal universe, but is impersonal matter capable of creating or evolving into *personal* beings?"

"Well, I don't know."

"*Don't* you know, really? I mean, forget the propaganda you've always heard. Forget anything you heard in school or read somewhere. Just think for yourself, based on what you know about life. Is it possible for the unliving to make the living? For the impersonal to make the personal?"

"Well..."

"Isn't there an unbridgable chasm between the impersonal and the personal, between the rock and human beings?" Jurose stopped suddenly. "Do you have kids?"

"Yeah, a daughter."

"Okay, is there some fundamental difference, more than just a difference in degree, between your daughter and a rock?"

"Sure. But...with enough time, maybe the chasm could be bridged. Given millions of years of evolution, I suppose anything's possible."

"Jake, I'm a scientist. Believe me when I say that time makes the improbable probable, and the probable virtually certain. But time *never* makes the impossible possible. It's inherently impossible to bridge the gap between life and non-life, between a chemical or rock and a living, personal human being. Not in a million years, not in a billion or trillion."

"How can you be so sure?"

Jurose shrugged. "If I kept flipping a coin a hundred times in a row, there are astronomical odds against it coming up heads every time.

But given millions of years of coin flipping, the improbable becomes probable. Eventually I'd get a hundred in a row. But what are the chances of me flipping that coin in the air, and it sprouting wings, then flying off humming the Notre Dame fight song?"

"The chances would be...zero, I guess."

"But what about if I flipped the coin a million years, or ten billion or a million billion years? I mean, given time anything is possible, right? Eventually the quarter would sprout wings and root for Notre Dame, wouldn't it?"

"No. I see your point. You're right. Time doesn't make the impossible possible. Never thought of it that way. So, where does that leave us?"

"The only first cause that could account for both the personal and impersonal must be personal. It *has* to be. We must either believe that nothing exists, or that something comes from nothing, or that some eternal, impersonal thing has resulted in creating rocks and trees and people. Or, we must believe in an

eternal personal Creator. There are simply no other options.”

Jake paused and thought, then flipped up the top of his laptop computer. “So, what do *you* believe, Dr. Jurose? I’d like to take notes, if you don’t mind. If I can put the cookies on the lower shelf, maybe I can work this into a column.” He poised his fingers on the keyboard.

“Well, I believe what is the only rational thing to believe. There is Someone who has always been, who was the Creator, the first cause. There *has* to be. It’s the only thing that makes sense. Of course, none of us witnessed the beginning. It’s beyond the scope of science to recreate the beginning. So, we have to believe some account of the beginning, or come up with an account of our own. It’s all a matter of faith—what will we believe and why?”

“For years I went along with the status quo of my profession—I believed in large-scale evolution. Now, small-scale evolution, micro-evolution, is a fact, but I’m not talking about feathers changing colors or necks getting longer, I’m talking about macro-evolution, everything gradually working itself up from primordial slime. I actually believed it, because I thought there wasn’t a rational alternative. But I looked at the evidence, and there was so much that just didn’t make sense.”

Jake stopped typing, looked up and nodded.

“Think with me, Jake. What if we went into the Louvre or some other great art gallery, and looked at all these beautiful works of art—which aren’t nearly as beautiful or elaborate as the real world—and you asked me, ‘Who painted these?’ What if I said, ‘No one painted them, they evolved on their own, globs

heart, there is no God.’ I asked myself, during my pilgrimage, why doesn’t the Bible get into arguing for the existence of God? I finally concluded, maybe the Bible wasn’t written for fools.”

“You’re saying a lot of people are fools?”

“Well, you agreed with my analogy to the work of art. What’s the difference? It makes no more sense to say

Society has vested interests in believing God didn’t create us. If God isn’t our physical creator, then he’s not our moral judge.

the detailed, complex beauties, even the nonliving much less the living, came from nowhere than it does to say the paintings in the art gallery came

of paint formed themselves on these canvases over millions of years.’ What would you think if I said that?”

“I’d think you were crazy, I suppose.”

“And you’d be right. Throughout history people looked at the real thing, at the *real* ocean and forest and flowers and people and knew for certain there was a Creator. Anyone who didn’t realize this was thought a fool, and for good reason. That’s why the Bible says, ‘The fool has said in his

from nowhere.

“One more thing, Jake,” Jurose said as he put up his tray table for the descent. “You have to realize society has vested interests in believing God didn’t create us. If God isn’t our physical creator, then he’s not our moral judge. That gets us off the hook. We can be masters of our own destiny, reject and violate God’s standards and come up with our own. That’s what we’ve been doing, the last thirty years especially. Have you noticed it’s not working very well?”

We No Longer Need You



One day a group of scientists got together and decided that man had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell Him that they were done with Him. The scientist walked up to God and said, “God, we’ve decided that we no longer need you. We’re to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so why don’t you just go on and get lost.”

God listened very patiently and kindly to the man and after the scientist was done talking, God said, “Very well, how about this, let’s say we have a man making contest.”

To which the scientist replied, “OK, great!”

But God added, “Now, we’re going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam.”

The scientist said, “Sure, no problem” and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt.

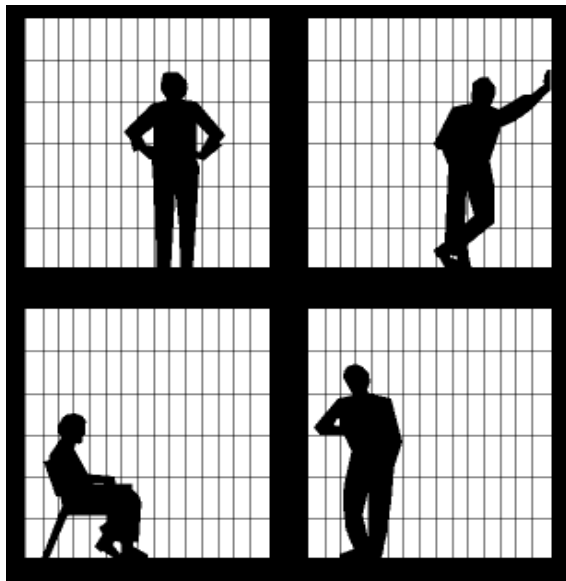
God just looked at him and said, “No, no, no. You go get your own dirt.”

The Toughest Day in Prison: Reconciling Criminals and Their Victims

by Charles Colson

BreakPoint Commentary, 11/26/1999

Craig has spent 14 years of a life sentence behind bars for murder. But if you ask him what was the hardest thing he's faced so far, it wasn't a prison riot or an attack by a fellow inmate.



What really hurt, Craig says, was sitting down face to face with the family of the man he murdered—and hearing firsthand how his act of rage shattered their lives.

Craig met the family through a program designed to reconcile criminals and their victims. Programs like these are catching on across the United States, and often they do more than years in prison to change a criminal's outlook.

In the American criminal justice system, most criminals never talk with the person they have wronged. At best, they might catch a glimpse of each other across a crowded court room. The crime is prosecuted as an offense against the state, not against the victim.

But in this impersonal system, the offender rarely confronts the personal pain and trauma he has inflicted. That's where Victim-Offender Reconciliation programs can make all the difference. As Craig puts it, meeting with the victim's

family "brought me to grips with my own culpability and personal feelings of guilt." And an awakened sense of personal responsibility is much tougher to deal with than any punishment meted out in a prison yard.

Reconciliation programs can benefit everyone involved in a crime. For victims, it gives a chance to express their deep pain and anger over the trauma they have suffered. For offenders, it gives a chance to face the consequences of their actions—and to set things right again as much as possible. Often the meetings end with the criminal apologizing and offering to pay restitution.

Finally, reconciliation is good criminal justice policy. A scandal of our current system is the high number of criminals who return to prison—again and again. Clearly, we need to look for programs that go beyond simply locking criminals up—programs that change them from the inside. Reconciliation programs can be just such a life-changing experience.

A prison inmate named Julius says he used to feel real sorry for his crime.

Four young men form a unique quartet named **RESCUE**, committed to learning, writing, and performing a cappella songs in their own captivating style. Their music is very worshipful, and ministers powerfully to the heart and soul.

Their mission is to serve the church, share the gospel with unbelievers, and encourage existing believers through the God-given gift of a cappella music.

The group has recorded two CDs: "2000 Years Ago" (December 1999, \$15) and "Rescue" (February 1999, \$10). Each CD may be ordered through EPM. Send checks to: *Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2229 E. Burnside #23, Gresham, OR 97030*. Be sure to designate which CD you wish to purchase, and that the check is to go toward a **RESCUE** purchase. All proceeds from these sales will be donated to World Relief to provide aid for the poor in other parts of the world. For booking an engagement, call Josh McKenney at (503) 730-9874. To hear a sample of their music, check out their website at www.rescueministries.com.



Sorry he got caught, that is. Then he attended a Victim-Offender Reconciliation meeting—and for the first time, he said, he saw his victims as real people. As he put it, "I realized this could have been my mother, father, brother, sister." By the end of the meeting, Julius says, he felt "genuine remorse and empathy."

That remorse often translates into real reform. A 1992 study by the Minnesota Citizens Council on Crime and Justice found that juvenile offenders who participated in reconciliation programs were less likely to commit crimes after their release from prison.

Why don't you find out whether your local court system is using reconciliation programs? Biblical teachings on justice aim not only at punishment for crime but also at restoration of the community. Crime tears a jagged hole in the fabric of our social life, but reconciliation and forgiveness mend that hole.

They can help restore the civil peace that the Bible calls "shalom."



The Sisterhood, 27 Years Later

by Barbara Curtis



(The following appeared in The Washington Times, January 24, 2000)

Twenty-seven years ago, nine black-robed men handed feminists a triumph that would try our souls, and I have come to believe find them wanting.

On Jan. 22, 1973, when the “Sisterhood is Powerful” crowd rejoiced at the outcome of *Roe vs. Wade*, I was with them, a Washington radical feminist scholar/abortion rights advocate, much in demand as a spokeswoman by virtue of my motherhood. After all, who better to illustrate the righteous need for abortion than a young woman with a future, already encumbered by a three-year-old in day care?

Five years later in San Francisco, that same little girl clutched my hand as we struggled against the chilly Van Ness Avenue wind on our way to some euphemistically styled “women’s health clinic.”

“Samantha,” I explained, ever the politically vigilant parent, “Mommy is pregnant. But since Jasmine’s only 2 and I’m not married anymore, this just isn’t a good time to have a baby. We’re lucky women have a choice.”

I was proud of the legacy we would leave my daughter’s generation. Thanks to the second wave of feminism, abortion was now available, accessible and not much worse than a trip to the dentist. Paid for by the state of California, to boot. And on the morning of my own abortion, I was feeling a little extra righteous. After years of posturing and sloganeering, I finally had an opportunity to demonstrate my core beliefs like a rite of passage.

Or a sacrament.

And in the 27 years since *Roe vs. Wade*, isn’t that what it’s now become? Consider the sacred ground around abortion temples, free speech suspended so as not to hinder partaking of the ritual within and abortion providers occupying pedestals for their noble efforts. Heretics dare not blaspheme by calling a fetus a baby or what happens to it murder. And as though in the grip of a state religion, the media use only sanctioned terms: pro-choice, reproductive rights, products of conception.

Consider: While every other political group is permitted to baptize itself and demonstrate publicly, those who call themselves pro-life are branded by the media anti-abortion extremists and charged with rack-teering.

But who’s extreme? For all the left’s vaunted respect for multi-culturalism, pro-abortion evangelists like missionaries of old spend vast amounts of time, energy and taxpayer money crusading into the Third World to bring the “good news” of “family planning” to primitives whose backward belief systems stand in the way of their salvation. Like religious zealots arriving on your doorstep when what you really need is an ambulance, they rush to ravaged lands such as Kosovo with abortion kits aplenty for those in dire need of more life-sustaining commodities such as medicine, food and water.

And what about here at home? In

the United States, according to the very pro-abortion Alan Guttmacher Institute, 34 million abortions took place from 1973 to 1996. That’s a million and a half per year. Who knows what genius men and women were whooshed away from our midst and with them what art, what music, what inventions, what cures.

How about it, sisters? Especially those of you who rode the crest of the second wave with me: Did you ever dream that this was where we were headed? Did you ever dream we would call a politician a friend to women no matter how flagrantly he exploited them as long as he continued to back abortion on demand? Did you ever dream we would enter the realms of denial required to condone a procedure in which a perfectly viable infant is pulled feet first through the birth canal until all but her head is exposed, then stabbed in the skull to suck out her brains, delivered dead and sold to the highest bidder for body parts?

That’s “a certain type of late-term procedure,” according to modern feminists, who have twisted themselves like pretzels to pretend the dream did not turn into a nightmare.

Perhaps it’s time to wake up and slap

Did you ever dream we would enter the realms of denial required to condone a procedure in which a perfectly viable infant is pulled feet first through the birth canal until all but her head is exposed, then stabbed in the skull to suck out her brains, delivered dead and sold to the highest bidder for body parts?

some cold water on our faces. Time to stop the hypocrisy, to sever the ideals of feminism, dignity for women, equal status, equal opportunity, equal pay from what has become a religious devotion to death.

We should have listened to our mothers, the feminist ones, that is.

Susan B. Anthony, now featured on our currency, wasn’t thinking of political correctness when she referred to

abortion as “child murder.” Nor when she wrote: “No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed. It will burden her conscience in life, it will burden her soul in death; but oh, thrice guilty is he who drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime!”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, with her

anti-slavery perspective, wrote, “When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit.”

Mattie Brinkerhoff said: “When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that either by education or circumstances she has

been greatly wronged.”

Think that one over next time you’re standing in line at the grocery store, as I was recently, and overhear a teen-age girl nonchalantly discussing with a friend the abortion she’s having tomorrow.

Some legacy.

Barbara Curtis is an author, freelance writer and mother of many, including two through adoption.

God Said...

If you never felt pain,

Then how would you know that I’m a Healer?

If you never went through difficulties,

How would you know that I’m a Deliverer?

If you never had a trial,

How could you call yourself an overcomer?

If you never felt sadness,

How would you know that I’m a Comforter?

If you never made a mistake,

How would you know that I’m forgiving?

If you knew all,

How would you know that I will answer your questions?

If you never were in trouble,

How would you know that I will come to your rescue?

If you never were broken,

Then how would you know that I can make you whole?

If you never had a problem,

How would you know that I can solve them?

If you never had any suffering,

Then how would you know what Jesus went through?

If you never went through the fire,

Then how would you become pure?

If I gave you all things,

How would you appreciate them?

If I never corrected you,

How would you know that I love you?

If you had all power,

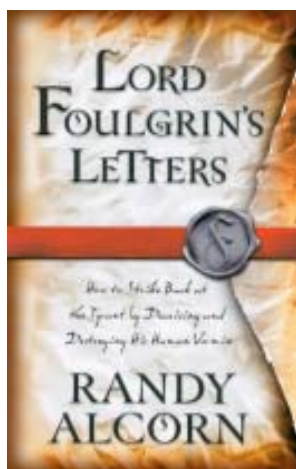
Then how would you learn to depend on me?

If your life was perfect,

Then what would you need Me for?



Author Unknown



Lord Foulgrin's Letters

by Randy Alcorn

Scheduled for a June 2 release by Multnomah Publishers

For years many westerners have denied the existence of demons, regarding them as mere symbols of man’s inhumanity to man. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis made an unapologetic appeal to the reality of the supernatural. He reminded us that we are surrounded by powers far greater than ourselves—forces that do battle for our souls, calling us to righteousness or tempting us to evil.

From this classic work of fiction comes the inspiration for *Lord Foulgrin's Letters*—a new, modern-day glimpse into the secret realm of the forces of darkness.

In *Lord Foulgrin's Letters*, correspondence has fallen into our hands that we were not intended to see. Foulgrin, a high-ranking demon, instructs his subordinate how to deceive and destroy Jordan Fletcher and his family. It’s like placing a bugging device in hell’s war room, where we overhear our enemies assessing our weaknesses and strategizing attack.

Lord Foulgrin's Letters differs from *The Screwtape Letters* in that it’s a dramatic story, with earthly characters, setting and plot. The letters each come on the heels of a particular scene.

A creative, insightful and biblical depiction of spiritual warfare, this book will guide readers to Christ-honoring counterstrategies for putting on the full armor of God and resisting the devil. Randy Alcorn says, “To win the battle, we must know our God, know ourselves, and know our enemy.” *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* is written to help us become better acquainted with each. The publisher has set up a website called www.foulgrin.com.

Is Christ Really the Only Way?

A letter to EPM and an answer by Karina Alcorn

Mr. Alcorn,

To give you a brief introduction, my name is Janet Thompson. I am a senior studying electrical engineering at a California university. I was raised by a Christian family and attended a Christian school up until college.

Maybe it was my exposure to secular education that first caused me to question the fundamentals of my beliefs, though I would like to say it was the rational part of me that naturally led me to question. I don't like to use the word brainwashed, but I realize it was a one-sided story that was told to me from birth. In other words, as I suppose many fundamentally Christian families raise their children, I was not exposed to other world religions.

At the suggestion of my mother, I've been reading *Deadline*. It would be an understatement to simply say she liked it. In fact, she alone might account for a percentage of the copies sold. I know she bought many copies for her friends as well.

Under the assumption that you are a Christian, your portrayal of heaven is consistent with theistic beliefs and opinions, as is evident in *Deadline*. My question is, how can you be certain that the Christian God is the correct choice? In other words, the Hindu or Muslim believer would not agree with your portrayal of God or heaven. Neither would the Buddhist, the Taoist, or the other thousand religions encompassed in the world.

Had I been born and raised in India a hundred years ago and stumbled across *Deadline* then, needless to say I would not believe a word of it. I mean, it seems all too obvious I could have been a Buddhist just as easily as I could have been Christian were I born in China. As you know, this is not a new philosophical question, but it is not one that I believe has been reasonably answered.

I'm not asking you to sell me on Christianity. I believe it myself. I would just like you to give me your opinion or maybe even some insight on this issue. I question this issue because it has some

startling implications into Christian evangelism. For example, is it right for the Christian to preach the Word of God, not knowing themselves if their God is THE God?

Furthermore, should Christians not acknowledge to the "unpeople" (epm.org) the possibility of other religions, allowing each individual to independently choose from the entire spectrum of religions? To be honest, I think this is how it should be done regardless of my monotheistic view of God. Shouldn't everyone be at liberty to choose with the benefit of knowing the entire picture, not a biased and one-sided picture?

I could explore a thousand tangents to this subject, but I realize you must be very busy. If you would respond to any of this at all, I would be very appreciative and grateful. Thank you very much for your time.

Janet:

Randy asked me to write out a few of my thoughts for you. I'm Randy's daughter, Karina, and I'm a junior at The Master's College in Valencia, CA. Like you, I was raised in a Christian home and attended a Christian grade school and middle school, but I went to a public high school.

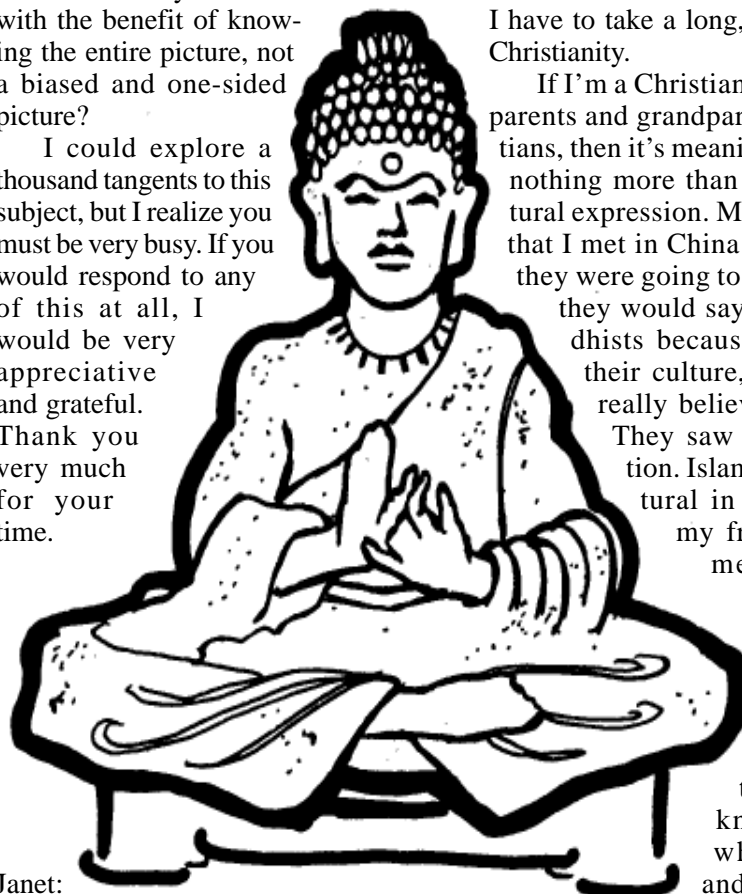
In the last year, I've had the privilege of living and studying in China for three weeks, Israel for 3 1/2 months, and

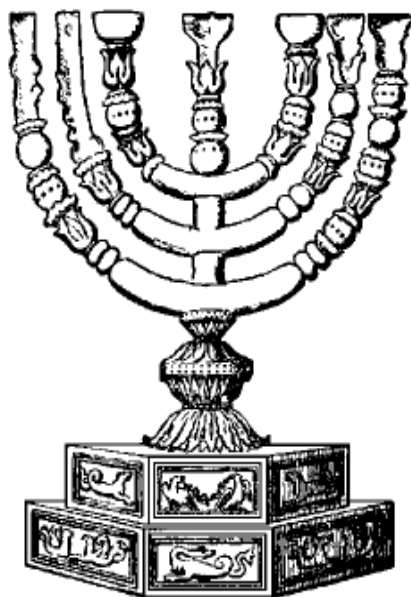
Turkey for two weeks. Needless to say, I gained some first-hand exposure to both eastern religions (Buddhism in China) and the monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Israel and Turkey.) I've also taken a World Religions class at school where we focused primarily on the eastern schools of Hinduism. There sure are a lot of different approaches to religion out there! Along with you, I sometimes find myself thinking: "I could have been a Buddhist just as easily as I could have been Christian were I born in China." And that's when I have to take a long, hard look at my Christianity.

If I'm a Christian just because my parents and grandparents were Christians, then it's meaningless to me. It's nothing more than an outward cultural expression. Most of my friends that I met in China were atheists. If they were going to claim a religion, they would say they were Buddhists because it was part of their culture, but they didn't really believe in Buddhism.

They saw it as a superstition. Islam is also very cultural in Turkey. One of my friends there told me that she was Turkish/Muslim and I was American/Christian. She didn't believe me when I told her that I know Americans who are Muslim and Turks who are Christians. To her, it was just part of her culture.

I don't know about you, but I sure don't want to base my eternal well-being on a cultural expression of religion! If it's okay for Turks to be Muslim and Chinese to be Buddhist and Europeans to be Christians and we all end up in the same place, then what's the point? Why even bother with religion?





But, I've also learned that Christianity is a whole lot more than a cultural phenomenon. After all, the first Christians weren't Europeans, they were Jews. There was a thriving Christian community in Africa centuries before Europe was ever "civilized." I've had the privilege of seeing believers in Jesus all over the world, in totally different cultures, worshipping the same God. The Lord promised Abraham that through his seed, all the nations of the world would be blessed! And He kept that promise by sending Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to die for the sins of the world. (Not to found a sectarian religion for western culture.)

It's arrogant for me to say that I have the only way to God, right? Sure is, if I'm the one who came up with the idea. But if God says there's only one way to eternal life, then I had better listen. And I had better tell others, too. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). That seems like a narrow-minded version of the truth. But when you think about it, God is a whole lot smarter than you or I. Just because we don't understand His way of doing things, doesn't mean that God made a mistake. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 'As the heav-

ens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts' " (Isaiah 55:9).

There is no way that we could understand God's ways unless He chose to reveal them to us. And He did, in the Bible. Throughout the course of human history, God has intervened. He has gradually revealed His plan of salvation down through the centuries. This unfolding drama of redemption is meant to bring Him glory; after all, He is the Creator, and we are the creatures.

I would encourage you to go back and read the gospel of John. Read about Jesus Christ and who He is. Read

about the way He broke down cultural and religious barriers. You have spent a lot of time studying for a career, but how much time have you spent studying God's Word? If the God of the Universe took the time to stoop to our level and express Himself in a way we can understand, we should be diligent to read and study that Word.

Being a Christian is not about a cultural or a family tradition. It's a decision each person has to make for him or herself. Have you ever submitted your life to the will of God? Have you given Jesus

Christ control of every aspect of your life? Are you living to please Him or to please yourself? I know these questions may seem harsh, but they come from a sincere heart. If Christianity is

true, then we should be diligent to spread the news of Jesus Christ to all the world. But if it is not the only way to God, then we should reject it entirely because that is what it

claims to be.

Jesus doesn't allow us to dismiss Him as just one more religious leader. He forces us to make the choice of either rejecting Him and His message altogether, or embracing Him fully. There is no middle ground.

One of your main questions was about Christian evangelism. It's impossible to

separate true Christianity from spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, it's commanded in the Great Commission. We are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them everything Jesus commanded us. In 1 Peter, we are called "aliens and strangers." This world is not our home. Once you and I committed our lives to God and

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14:6

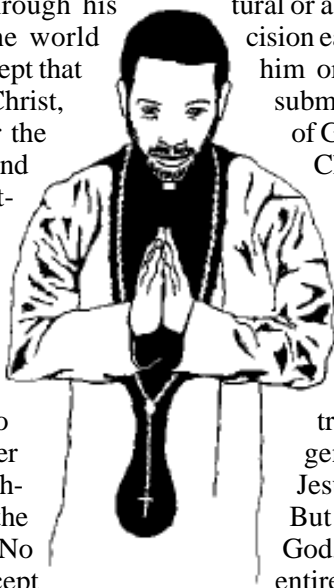
accepted Jesus' atoning death on our behalf, we were transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Now we have the responsibility and the honor of showing our fellow human beings the one true way of salvation.

It would be arrogant of us to go overseas and try to change a whole culture to make it fit with western Christianity in the name of "evangelism." But it would be cruel and wrong of us not to share the truth of the gospel for fear that we offend others by demeaning their local religion. You're right in saying before we share the gospel with people we had better be sure we're not giving a biased, one-sided picture. If we're not certain of the truth of the gospel, we have no business trying to share it with other people.

I have seen the transforming power of God in my own life and in the lives of my friends and family. I have seen that being a follower of Jesus Christ is not about following a cultural religion. In fact, at times it's quite counter-cultural. I've seen that the family of God can and does include people from every tribe, tongue and nation. I have a lot more in common with a tribal woman in Africa who has accepted the free gift of salvation than I do with my religious neighbor who is trying to earn her way to heaven.

I hope this sheds some light on the things you've been considering lately. If you'd like to dialogue further, I'd love to hear from you.

Serving the Master, Karina Alcorn



A Stumbling Block: What It Is and What It Isn't

By Randy Alcorn

The stumbling block of 1 Corinthians 8 (and Romans 14) is an action, taken by a biblically informed believer, that does not in itself violate any scriptural precept or principle, but which a less knowledgeable or less mature believer might imitate, in a way that violates his conscience.

In context, the mature believer feels free to eat meat offered to idols, because meat is meat and it's a provision of God, and idols are nothing. But the immature believer has come from a background of idol worship, so when he sees his brother eating meat, it eggs him on to do it. However, he associates the meat with the idols, and therefore is violating his conscience by eating it.

A stumbling block, then, is not just anything that causes someone to be offended.

It is not a stumbling block to commit adultery, because adultery is inherently sinful. It's always a bad example to do wrong, obviously, but this isn't what the passage is dealing with.

It is not a stumbling block for a man to have long hair and a pony tail, if the people who are offended by this are not thereby tempted to have a pony tail themselves, and in doing so violate their conscience.

It cannot be a stumbling block when a woman is offended at a man's beard, unless she is tempted to grow a beard and in doing so would violate her conscience. It is not a stumbling block when a man is offended at a woman nursing a baby in church, since he is presumably not going to be tempted to start nursing a baby.

The church people who are most offended by wine drinking would typically never be tempted to drink wine in the first place. Drinking alcohol may be a stumbling block, but not to those offended by it, but rather to those who may imitate this action without sufficiently strong conscience and self-control. They might not be able to handle it, so it would do them damage, become addictive and lead them into sin.

The biblical stumbling block involves a more mature believer exercising Christian liberty in a way that hurts a younger less mature believer. It does so by prompting him to say "I guess I can go ahead and drink alcohol, watch R-rated movies, etc." when by doing so he will end up sinning because of being unable to handle this action that another believer might be able to handle.

In many churches, it is older Christians, who think of themselves as more mature, who are offended at the behavior of younger Christians. Almost never are they tempted to do what the younger Christians are doing

that offends them (such as listening to rock music), and therefore their offense has nothing to do with the stumbling block of 1 Corinthians 8 or Romans 14.

Instead of saying "you shouldn't do that because it's a stumbling block to me," these "professional weaker brothers" should engage in healthy biblical dialogue concerning the subject and learn to accept those things that are no more than differences in taste. They should not pull out "stumbling block" as a trump card that means "you can't exercise Christian liberty in any area I'm uncomfortable with." In fact, those who are biblically informed enough to even be familiar with the term stumbling block should be mature enough not to trip over one.

Also, notice that in 1 Corinthians 8 the "stumbling block" action is taken in a spirit of pride, arrogance, and selfish independence. It is a deliberate flaunting of Christian liberty, at the expense of others. The stumbling block issue is as much a matter of the offender's attitude as his action.

Applying the Principles of 1 Corinthians 8-10 to Today's Issues

Begin by making a list of "gray" activities—things which do not seem to be absolutely right or absolutely wrong.

Then, try to fit each activity into one of the categories below:

1. Like eating meat in the market—**Go ahead and do it.**
2. Like eating meat in the idols' temple—**Never do it.**
3. Like eating meat served in a friend's home
 - a. Under certain circumstances, **go ahead.**
 - b. Under other circumstances, **don't.**

Conclusion:

What a believer is commanded to do, he should do without regard to the response of others. What he is permitted to do, he may choose to do, but never is he compelled to do it. If he realizes his example could be imitated by younger believers not mature enough to do this without facing temptation they're unprepared to handle, out of love he should be willing to forgo this action unless and until they are able to handle it. (Or until they are trained to understand that Christian liberty means some have the freedom to do what others cannot.)

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Why shouldn't an immature believer act according to his biblical instruction rather than his conscience, if the two are at odds?
2. How can "Christian liberty" be considered true freedom if it must be seriously restricted in light of the confusion, immaturity or misguided feelings of others?
3. How will a weak brother's conscience ever be enlightened in a given area, if no one dares to exercise Christian liberty in that area, for fear of misleading him?
4. Can't we learn to educate younger and older believers in the body of Christ so that they can learn what true Christian liberty is? This way they won't become legalists or professional weaker brothers, on the one hand, or on the other hand won't feel that just because someone else exercises a freedom, they are automatically ready to do so.

What a Truly Pro Life Candidate Believes

Alan Keyes (Republican Presidential candidate) addressed 120 middle school students (6th to 8th graders) at the Cornerstone School in Detroit. A 13-year-old girl asked if he would make an exception for rape in his position on abortion. The following is the dialogue that took place:

"If your dad goes out, and God forbid, I'm not saying he would do this, this is just a hypothetical." Keyes said. "But let's say your dad goes out and he rapes somebody—an awful thing. If your dad goes out and rapes somebody and we convict him of that rape, do you think it would be right for us to then say, 'OK, because your dad is guilty of that rape, we're going to kill you?'"

"No." (middle school students answer in unison).

"Why not?" (inaudible response)

"Now let me ask you something. How old are you?"

A young woman responded, "Thirteen."

"You're 13. It's not right to kill you for your father's crime at 13. If you were five would it be right?"

"No."

"If you were one year old would it be right?"

"No."

"Well let me see now, if you were six months old would it be right?"

"No."

"So how could I say that I'm going to let abortion take place because of rape? If I let abortion take place because of rape, I am killing a child in the womb for a crime committed by his parents. Is that right?"

"No."

"No. It's hard, isn't it? Can't do it. Can't let you."

"But why should the girl have to go through labor and everything and go through the pain of having a baby if it's not her choice?"

"That's a good question. Let me ask you a question. Let's take this young man here. How old are you?"

The young man responded, "Thirteen."

"Thirteen. Let's say that when you are 19, right, America gets involved in a war. And, when we've gotten involved in wars in the past, we had a draft and the people your age would be drafted, and they'd be sent off to war, right? You are going to have to go off. You are going to have to live on a battlefield. You are going to have to risk your life. And many people did in fact risk their lives, lived in hardship every single day and finally died. Why? Because they were defending what? Our country and defending its freedom. They had to go through hardship, didn't they, for the sake of freedom.

"The principle of freedom is that our rights come from God. Do you think it's wrong to ask people to make sacrifices to keep our respect for that principle? We have done it. We've asked our soldiers to do it in all kinds of ways. And yet, I think it would be right as is right to ask the women of this country to do it in order to respect when it comes to life in the womb.

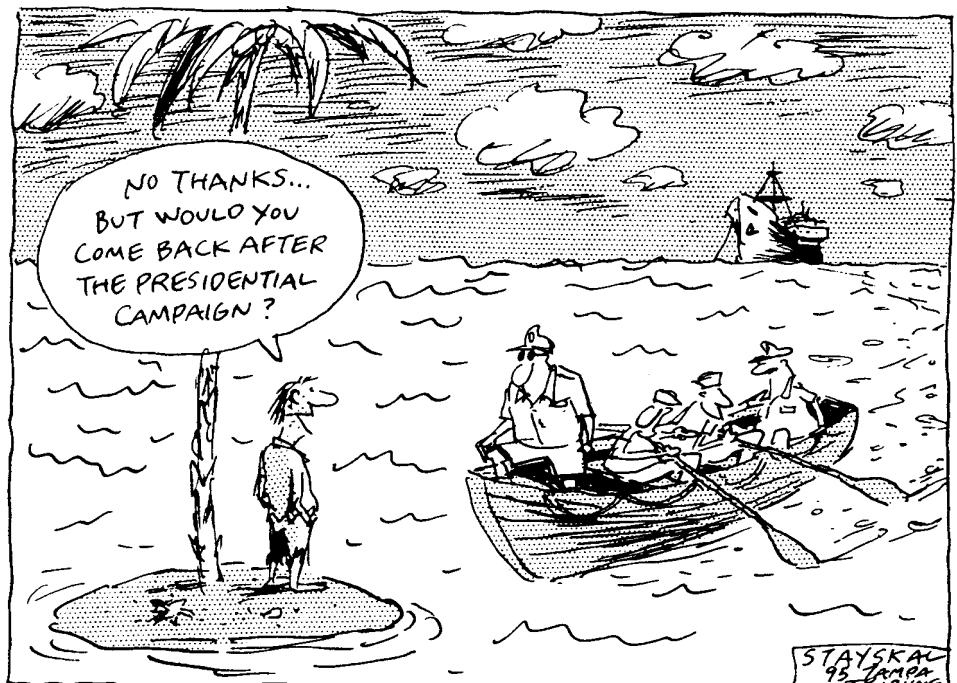
"We should help them. We should be there. I've raised money for crisis

pregnancy centers, where people get together and they reach out a hand to help people who are pregnant in situations that are difficult. Could be as a result of rape or incest. We need to love, we need to counsel and we need to work with folks so that when they're going through a period of this difficulty they will know that that's not their fault and that God loves them and that we love them. And we create for them a wealth of support to help them deal with the difficulty and the pain.

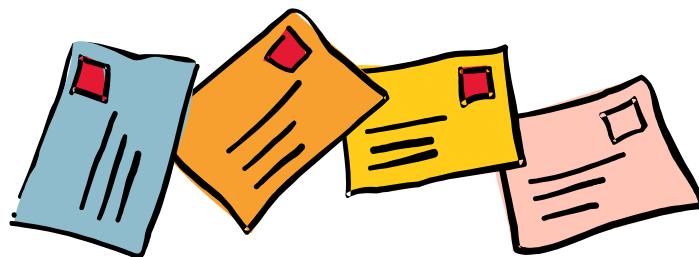
"But I don't believe it is right to take that pain and actually make it worse. And to the burden of that rape down through the years, if that abortion takes place, do you know what I'm adding if I let you have an abortion? I'm adding the burden of that abortion. And at some point, the truth of God that is written on your heart comes back to you. And you're wounded by that truth.

"So I don't think it's fair, not to the child and not to the woman, to let this tragedy claim both their lives; the physical life of the child and the moral and spiritual life of the mother. And I think in this society we do both terrible harm because we don't have the courage to stand by what is true."

(excerpted from ProLife Info Digest, 2/27/00)



Letters to EPM



Dear Randy,

After reading *Deadline* I couldn't wait to read *Dominion*, which my granddaughter made a special effort to get me for Christmas.

Thank you so much for your outstanding insights on the different races and their cultures and the problems we experience for lack of understanding.

I pray my own attitudes will experience a real change now that my eyes have been opened.

Outstanding reading—I'm going to see that these books get into our church library.

May the Lord continue to bless your ministry.

E.J. (age 82), Burien, WA

Dear EPM,

I appreciate your prolife message in your books and newsletter. Twenty years ago I asked my girlfriend to terminate her pregnancy. That is the nicer name used for killing my baby. The pain of killing my baby led to sixteen years of alcohol and drug abuse. Which led to a failed marriage—a marriage to the same girl I got pregnant.

Well, four years ago the Lord Jesus came into my heart and started to clean house, hallelujah! He delivered me from my addiction to alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, all in the same day. He has healed my broken heart. Someday I hope to see my baby in heaven.

So keep up the good work of showing people the truth about abortions. I know I would have liked to have known before it was too late.

M.R. (prison inmate), Salem, OR

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I thank you for sending me your new book *In Light of Eternity*. As I read this book, I realized that I couldn't put it down because you have been given a gift of explaining and opening up God's Word that I haven't read or heard before. I cried and was filled with joy that heaven is a real place for us as real people in Christ. I was also sad thinking about all the people who reject Christ and die

to be in eternal torment which God doesn't want for them but is the price for rejecting Him.

On September 3, 1992, I had an automobile accident which has left me disabled and in constant pain day and night. My back is badly hurt along with my neck, hands, feet, legs, and head. I've had seven surgeries since my accident. There is nothing the doctors can do for me. But praise God, He has healed my soul. He has stripped many of my worldly ways from me (very painfully, I might add) and replaced them with holy things. Every day God gives me the strength to face and get through another day and I praise Him for it.

I am only 28 years old and all I have to look forward to in this world is pain and suffering (unless God heals me in this world, which I know He can do), but praise God I look forward to being by His side up in heaven. I am different now than I was before the accident. Before I was angry, self-centered, world-seeking, world-pleasing, running from God. Now I try to live each day pleasing God. I still sin each day but I repent and, praise God, He forgives me. I look forward to meeting you in heaven.



Again, thanks for the book and God bless you, your family, and your ministry for the good work that all of you do.

M.E., Boonville, MS

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your most excellent book (*Deadline*). I consider myself something of an accomplished reader, but your book jumped to the top of my charts. I am a 27-year-old married man, a firefighter, and I found myself becoming tearful over several passages in this great story. It was the best Christmas present I received this past celebration of Our Lord's birth. May God richly bless and strengthen you and your ministry and keep you and yours from all harm.

J.D., Murfreesboro, TN

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I just finished reading your book, *Edge of Eternity*, and wanted to tell you how much it meant to me. I have been a Christian for some time and have understood the tremendous love, grace and mercy Jesus Christ had for me, to willingly take my punishment on the cross. I have known in a deep way that He died for my sins, even if I had been the only person on earth, His great love for me would have compelled Him to do the same.

But I had never seen myself as the administrator of that sentence, in the personal way it in truth is, until I read your book. For the first time I saw myself holding the hammer which drove the nails into my Savior's hands and feet. It shook me to the core of my being and drove me to my knees, weeping before my Lord.

If no other person was ever touched by this book, I want you to know how it touched me and has changed forever how I view my salvation.

A.M., Alberta, Canada

The Bible League in China

The Situation in China

In 1900, during the Boxer Uprising, over 230 western missionaries and 32,000 Chinese Christians were killed. This is considered the largest such martyrdom in missions history. After Chairman Mao Zedong declared the People's Republic of China in 1949, many sought to "purge" society of anything that would point to religion—especially the "foreign religion" of Christianity. This caused China's people to endure great hardship ever since. Mao's Great Leap Forward in the late '50s and the Cultural Revolution in the '60s and '70s left millions of China's people dead or victimized.

Even in this modern day, many suffer for their faith. Young Christian students are denied entrance to universities, or are assigned the worst jobs if they are fortunate enough to attend and graduate. Members of China's house churches, if caught, are spending decades in prison or at work camps just for possessing a Bible. Women are forced to be sterilized or have unwanted abortions because of the "one child per family" policy.

Christians outside of China need to realize in a new way the sufferings of Chinese Christians. We are so comfortable in our religious freedom that we never remember to consider those who are willing to pay the ultimate price for their faith.

The Bible League

Since 1938 The Bible League has been committed to making God's Word available to spiritually hungry people all over the world. They are interdenominational, supported by a wide range of evangelical denominations and agencies. Rather than focusing on raw numbers of Bibles distributed, they emphasize the use of Scripture and the results of that use. They partner to supply Scriptures to local churches and agencies who agree to report back to The Bible League how those materials were used and what results were achieved.

At the average cost of \$4.00 for a whole Bible and \$1.00 for a New Testament (this includes printing, shipping, and placing each Bible), they can place great numbers of these Scriptures in the hands of those who are trained in evangelism.

The Bible League in China

The Bible League is the number-one supplier of Scriptures to Christians in China's house churches. Since 1979, they have developed a network of Bible couriers—made up of

American tourists as well as Chinese nationals—who transport Scriptures into China, particularly to remote regions where Bibles are most rare. They have delivered over five million Bibles to the Chinese people this way. These workers know they can be arrested, tortured, or even killed if authorities catch them transporting Scriptures. But these dedicated people know the power of the Bible. They want others to experience the joy and salvation they have found in God's Word.

The Bible League delivers 2,000-3,000 Scriptures to China each day. This may seem a great number, until you realize that an estimated 10,000-20,000 Chinese convert to Christianity each day! This creates an enormous need for more Scriptures. Many Chinese Christians consider themselves fortunate if they possess a collection of a few verses they have hand-copied from a Bible they were once able to borrow.

What Can We Do?

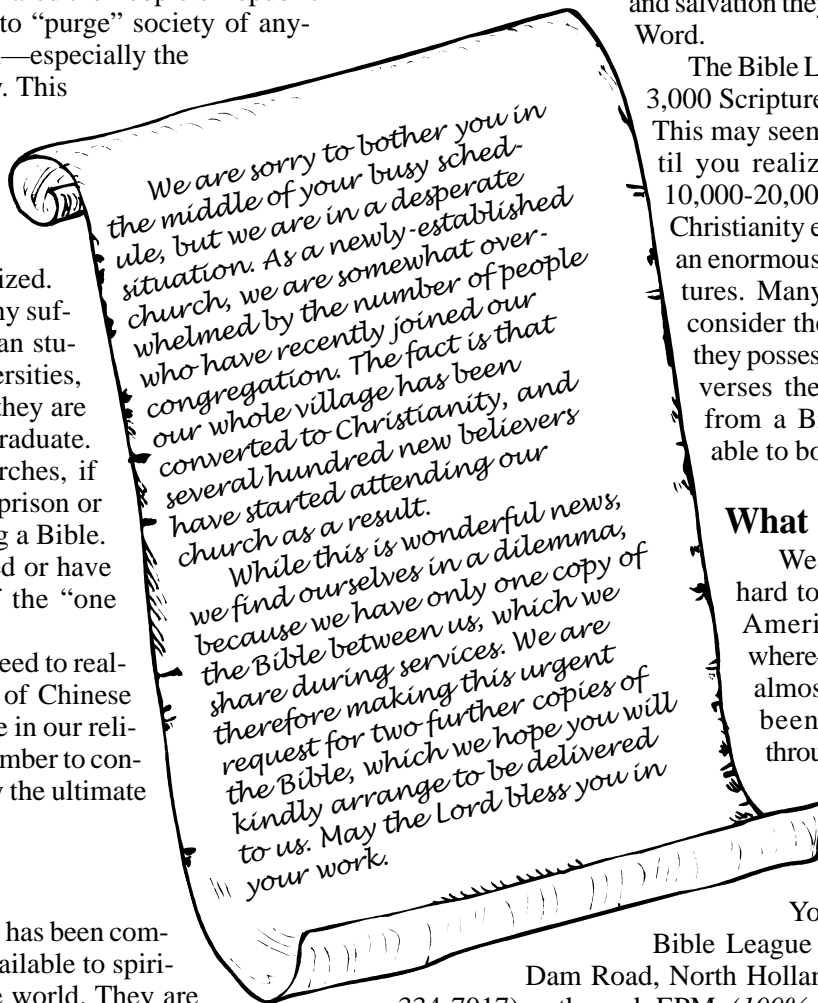
We don't have to look hard to find a Bible here in America. They're everywhere—so common they're almost invisible. If you've been touched by God through His Word, you can share that power by giving the Word to others, across the globe.

You may donate to The Bible League directly (16801 Van Dam Road, North Holland, IL 60473, 1-800-334-7017) or through EPM. (100% of all money donated to EPM with special designations goes directly to that organization.) Please designate your donation as "Bibles for China."

The Bible League is also funded through Bibles for Missions Thrift Centers located in Canada and the United States. These centers are staffed by volunteers, filled with donated materials, and raise millions of dollars so that people around the world can meet Jesus Christ in the pages of His Word.

For those of you in the Portland Metropolitan area, plans are under way for a new Bibles for Missions Thrift Center in Beaverton, Oregon. This would be a great opportunity to become a part of this exciting mission, volunteering to work at the store or providing funds through your purchases to furnish Scriptures around the world.

For further information related to the thrift center ministry or The Bible League in general, you may call Steve Chittenden, Regional Field Director, at 1-425-337-5676.



A Pastor's Love

This chapter is excerpted from the novel Refiner's Fire, by Sylvia Bambola, Multnomah Press, to be released in May.

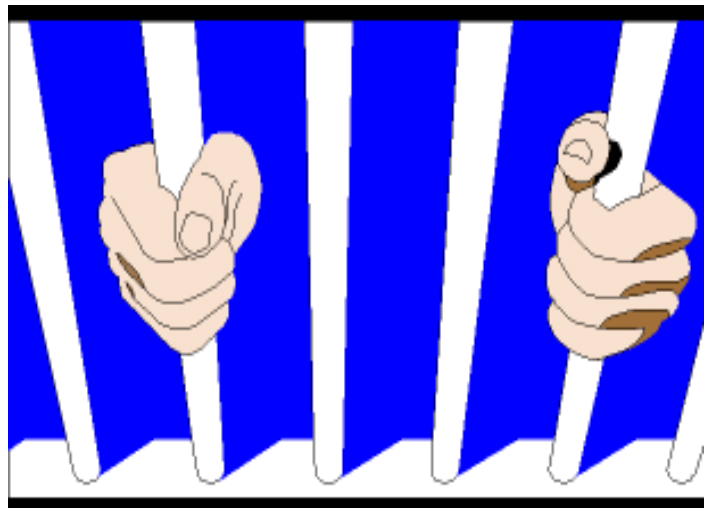
One day a theft occurred. Five loaves of bread were taken from the kitchen. The guards stole food all the time and would take it home or sell it to some of the prisoners. But on this day, the prison commandant heard about it and was outraged. The prison was searched from top to bottom. Each prisoner was inspected. The commandant was determined to punish someone and threatened to systematically torture every single prisoner in Tirgu-Ocna. He arbitrarily selected ten men and ordered they be whipped with chains in full view of everyone. They would be beaten until they either confessed or died. If they died and did not confess, then the commandant assured everyone he would choose ten more. He was prepared to beat the entire population of the prison to death in order to get his confession. Before the first ten received a single stroke of the chain, a voice cried out, "Wait."

The voice belonged to a tall man with graying temples. He was haggard and hungry looking, with cheeks that looked liked empty pockets on his face. He looked like a man of fifty, though he was only thirty-two. His crime was pastoring an underground church, and despite the harsh treatment he received, he continued preaching to whomever would listen. I saw him, almost daily, being dragged back to his cell after the guards worked him over. He would be bruised and bloody, but always, *always* he would tell then, "Jesus still loves you and so do I."

Now this hungry, broken man stood tall and bold in the courtyard, telling his jailers to wait. He had not been one of the ten chosen to face the chains, so his plea came as a surprise. All eyes were on him.

"I will take responsibility for the theft," he said. There was not one person in the camp who believed he was guilty. I was astonished. Why would this man say such a thing? He knew the commandant would kill him. Within seconds the ten grateful prisoners were removed from the wall, and before the entire camp, the pastor was strapped to a post. He was positioned so that everyone could see his face. His final words rang out as the commandant gave the order. "Jesus loves you and so do I."

Tears welled up in Yuri's eyes as he remembered that pastor's face. "This man died in front of us. The commandant made a grave error in allowing us to see that dying face as it looked out on the very inmates that had treated him with such contempt, had stolen his food, had beaten him unconscious so they could destroy the treasured scriptures he had scribbled on little papers. These inmates had spit on him, had laughed at him whenever he tried to speak of his Jesus. And yet he died for them, because he *loved them*. What kind of love was this? This impossible love? What kind of people were these



Christians? No human being could endure what they had to endure and still be so full of kindness, generosity, and love. Who were these lovers of the unlovely who looked into empty men's souls and did not turn away in disgust, who could pass through the fires of hell itself and still come out saying to their tormentors, "Yes, I love even you." And how could such a love be ignored?

Tears brimmed over onto Yuri's cheeks and he wiped them with the back of his hand. How foolish! I thought. It made me angry. It frightened and confused me. It made me weep for the sheer greatness of it. The pastor's love had been like a sweet flower blooming in this prison wasteland of hate. And even after it had been plucked, the fragrance of that love haunted me. Why? How

could anyone love so? In this land where men were only apes posing as men, love did not exist. Eight months at Tirgu-Ocna had taught me that. But now, this crushed flower poured out its sweet fragrance and cried not, "Love me for I am beautiful," but said to the dust and waste, "*I love you!*" What manner of man was this? I asked. And who is this Jesus?

Loretta's eyes had also filled. "They beat him to death?" Yuri nodded.

"Didn't anyone have pity on him?"

"Just as I saw God in the faces of these Christians, I saw Satan in the faces of the torturers. No, they did not pity. They loved their work. Sometimes their eyes would glow with joy as they beat and broke men. Once I heard one of them say, 'I am Satan.'"

"Surely you don't believe in the devil?"

"Madame, Romania is a country where evil lurks in caves by night and hides behind men by day. It is the home of Dracula. Do you know what people call President Ceausescu?"

Loretta shook her head.

"Draculescu."

Loretta was suddenly cold; she folded her arms across her chest and shivered.

"Yes, Satan is real and I have seen him in the dungeons of Tirgu-Ocna."

*"Jesus loves you
and so do I."*

Quotable Quotes...

As for the true Christian, he expects to have his reward in the next life, and to endure hardness in this one. The promise of the old covenant was prosperity, but the promise of the new covenant is adversity. Remember Christ's words—"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit"—What?—He "prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." If you bring forth fruit, you will have to endure affliction. You say, "This is a terrible prospect!" But this affliction results in tremendous blessing!

The Christian learns to rejoice in tribulations, because as his tribulations increase, so his consolations and comfort increase by Christ Jesus. Be assured, if you are a true child of God, you will be no stranger to difficulty, pain, sadness, and persecution. Sooner or later every bar of gold must pass through the fire. Do not fear, but rather rejoice that fruitful times are in store for you. For in the fire you will be weaned from earth and made ready for heaven; you will be delivered from clinging to the present, and made to desire those eternal things which will soon be revealed to you. *C. H. Spurgeon*

Elisabeth Elliot, speaking with Corrie ten Boom in 1976...

We spoke of the meaning of suffering. "American Christians are open and eager," she said, "but they do not understand the suffering they must undergo. Christians in Communist countries are much happier. They have to be genuine because of the terrible price they must pay."

I asked how we ought to prepare for suffering.

"Soak in the Word!" was her answer. I was glad for that, for I have often been asked why I speak and write so often about suffering. There are more than a hundred references in the New Testament alone.

(restated in The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, March/April 1998)

It is estimated that 165,000 Christians will be martyred for their faith in Christ this year.

American missions statistician,
David Barret
Religion Today, January 10, 2000

No man ever sunk under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear. Never load yourself so. If you find yourself so loaded, at least remember this: it is your own doing, not God's. He begs you to leave the future to Him and mind the present.

George MacDonald

The more we get what we call "ourselves" out of the way and let Him take over, the more truly ourselves we become. In that sense our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying to 'be myself' without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: Most of what I call 'me' can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

But there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away 'blindly' so to speak. Christ will indeed give you a real personality: but you must not go to Him for the sake of that. As long as your own personality is what you are bothering about, you are not going to Him at all. The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your body—in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

C. S. Lewis, Beyond Personality

Rich Kids vs. Children Facing Challenges

(Excerpted from Dr. James Dobson's Bulletin, October 1997)

Question: My wife and I are approaching our retirement years, and we have been very blessed financially. We own several large businesses and will have a sizable estate to pass on to our children. How do you feel about leaving large amounts of money to the next generation?

Answer: This may not be what you want to hear, but I can only tell you what I've observed and what I believe.

I'm convinced that it's very dangerous to give large amounts of money to kids who haven't earned it. A sociological study published some time ago called Rich Kids validated my concerns. The authors of the study concluded that large trust funds are usually destructive to those who inherit them. The case studies they cited were convincing.



Human history also confirms the dangerous influence of money. Men and women have lusted for it, killed for it, died for it, and gone to hell for it. Money has come between the best of friends and brought down the proud and mighty. And, alas, it has torn millions of marriages limb from limb!

It's also been my observation that nothing will divide siblings more quickly than money. Giving them a large inheritance increases the probability of tension and disharmony within a family. Your sons and daughters may fight over control of your businesses, and resent those who are

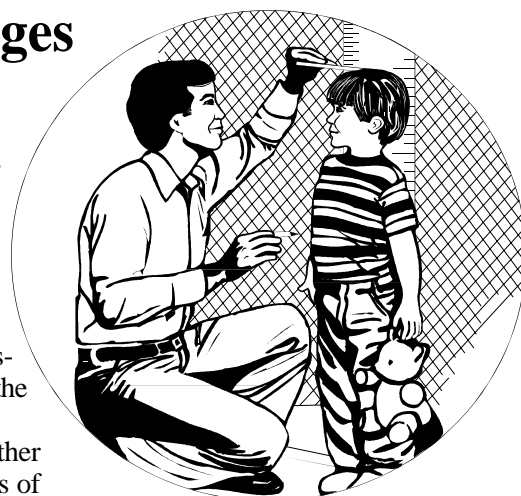
designated as decision makers.

Some of them may lose their motivation to be responsible and experiment with various addictive behaviors. There are exceptions to these negative consequences, of course, and some people do handle wealth and power gracefully. But it is a difficult assignment at best and one that requires the greatest maturity and self-control.

The question to ask is whether or not leaving large amounts of money to offspring is worth the risk it imposes on those you love. You must decide if you want to remove from your children the challenges that helped you succeed—the obligation to work hard, live frugally, save, build, and produce by the sweat of your brow. Do you feel right about replacing that need

for discipline and industry with a ready-made empire that may be mishandled or squandered?

Please understand that I know this view is unconventional. One of the reasons people work so hard is so their children won't have to. They love their kids immeasur-



ably and want to make things easier for them. Further, they've invested a lifetime in the development of a business and the accumulation of wealth. Are they now going to sell it and walk away? That's an unpleasant prospect for any parent.

In my experience, the inheritance of wealth is threatening to family relationships, self-discipline, spiritual commitment, and responsible living. It should be done only with great care, years of preparation and much prayer.

For a much more detailed development of these concepts, see Money, Possessions and Eternity by Randy Alcorn, pages 364-370.

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