



ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • FALL 2000

Choosing A God-Honoring Lifestyle

by Randy Alcorn

Many speak out against the lukewarmness and materialism of today's Christians. Much of what they have to say is accurate, but they commonly make two critical mistakes.

First, they camp in the Gospels and ignore or brush off the Epistles. Yet the Epistles demonstrate the form that churches took after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, and after the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell his people. Since the church was not born until after the Gospels, we must look not only to the Gospels but to the Epistles to draw conclusions about the lifestyles of Christians.

The second mistake is failing to deal with the larger context of the Gospels themselves, quoting only isolated texts that tell people to give away everything. Some readers and listeners get the impression that Christians who retain any possessions are not true disciples. But a more careful and thorough reading of the Gospels demonstrates exactly what is later borne out in the Epistles—that by God's calling there are two kinds of disciples when it comes to the matter of owning money and possessions. Let's look in the Gospel of Mark for examples of this.

One Kind of Disciple

In Mark 1:16-20, Jesus called his first four disciples to leave their fishing business to follow him. Notice that this abandonment of possessions was neither inherently virtuous nor aimless. It was done with a clear purpose in mind, in order to practically facilitate the goal of the call. Christ's ministry was an itinerant one, requiring a great deal of traveling. To follow him, the disciples simply *had* to leave their boats and nets. The real point is not that they left their boats, but that they followed Jesus. That they left behind their major possessions was the inevitable result of their response to his call to physically follow him.

Yet, it appears that even these four apostles did not irreversibly divest themselves of all possessions. Just ten verses after they're said to have left their nets, we're told the apostles went "*to the home of Simon and Andrew,*" where Simon's mother-in-law lived, and presumably his wife and children as well. Also, the Gospels make repeated reference to traveling by boat on the Sea of Galilee. It seems fair to assume that the boat belonged to one or



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more of the fishermen-turned-apostles. This is substantiated by the fact that Peter and several of the others were back in a boat fishing again within days of Christ's death (John 21:1-3).

Peter later said to his Lord, "We have left everything to follow you" (Mark 10:28-30). He did not say, "We have sold everything," though they may well have liquidated nearly all of their major possessions (Luke 12:32-33). The point is, they "left their possessions" to physically follow Christ.

The apostles were a distinct historical group who have no direct equivalent today. Nonetheless, I believe we can look at them as representatives of a particular calling of God to traveling missionary work. Such work necessitates leaving behind major possessions that would tie us to a specific location and prohibit our ability to go where Jesus calls us.

A Second Kind of Disciple

Mark said that Jesus "saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him" (Mark 2:14). We are not told Jesus commanded him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. On the contrary, in the very next verse Jesus and the disciples are having a dinner party in Levi's house, along with many other tax collectors and "sinners." Levi's house is used to introduce many people to Jesus. Given his profession and the number of people at the party, it was no doubt nicer and larger than the average house.

This is not merely an acceptable use of possessions but an explicitly God-ordained one. Levi represented a second type of missionary activity that does not involve divesting oneself of all one's possessions but utilizing them for the same ultimate cause.

Not long thereafter, while large crowds were following Jesus, he went up into the hills and chose twelve of his followers to be his apostles (Mark 3:13-19). This unique group would join him in his itinerant ministry, traveling, preaching, and casting out demons. But only these twelve were chosen to travel with him. Others of the large crowds were not chosen as apostles but still remained his disciples.

Whether one has been called to leave his possessions behind for kingdom purposes or to retain ownership for generous and sacrificial kingdom purposes, he must keep in mind that a wrong view of material gain in this world will lure him away from the next.

Where did these "disciples-but-not-apostles" go? Where else but back to their families and homes and jobs! Just as Jesus had for many years served as a carpenter, owning a house and tools and likely a workshop, and lived on a piece of land, so they were to serve God, raising their families, living and working in their own communities.

Clearly, the majority of Christ's followers did not rid themselves of all their possessions, nor were they expected to do so. There were two callings of Christ—one to leave family and possessions behind, and one to go back to them. But both callings served the same ultimate purpose—the glory of God and the advance of his kingdom.

Summarizing Christ's Two Calls

In a probing call to discipleship, Jesus said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:34-37)

The number of economic terms in these few verses is striking—save, lose, gain, forfeit, give, and exchange. Every disciple of Jesus is given a radical call as to how he views and handles his money and possessions and every other facet of his life. Whether one has been called to leave his possessions behind for kingdom purposes or to retain ownership for generous and sacrificial kingdom purposes, he must keep in mind that a wrong view of material gain in this world will lure him away from the next. The money and possessions of the present will be of no use on the day his soul is laid bare before his Creator. On that day, money and possessions will be seen as either having facilitated his mission or having blurred or hindered it.

Finding a God-Honoring Lifestyle

When it comes to our attitude toward wealth, Jesus gave commands. When it comes to our specific possessions and lifestyle, he gave us principles. Jesus did not hand us a precise checklist of what we can and cannot own, and how we can or cannot spend money. Jesus did not say just one thing about money and possessions. He said many things. They were not random clashing noises, but carefully composed melody and harmony to which we must listen as we develop our lifestyles.



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On the one hand Christ said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matt. 6:19). On the other hand Paul gave these instructions to a pastor: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Paul did not say, “Command those who are rich to stop being rich.” The implication is that there is a legitimate diversity in the amount of money and possessions owned by Christians. Of course, there is no room for opulence and waste. There is no room for making wealth a source of security, nor for a lack of generosity or hospitality.

Paul left a door open for a Christian to be “rich in this present world”—but only if he carefully follows the accompanying guidelines related to his attitude toward and his use of that wealth. The rich are not told they must



take a vow of poverty. But they are told, essentially, to take a vow of generosity. They are to be rich in good deeds, quick to share, quick to part with their assets for kingdom causes—and in doing so they will lay up treasures in heaven.

Who are “The Rich”?

But who are these “rich,” and how rich are they? The answer is that almost everyone who reads this will be rich, both by first-century standards and by global standards today. Statistically, if you have sufficient food, decent clothes, live in a house that keeps the weather out, and

own a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top 15% of the world’s wealthy.

If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies (fishing, hunting, skiing, astronomy, coin collecting, painting), a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars (in any condition), and live in your own home, you are in the top 5% of the world’s wealthy.

Hence, when we speak of the rich we are not talking about “them” but “us.” Those we think of as rich today are really the super-rich, the mega-wealthy. But it is we, the rich, to whom Paul is speaking. The allowance of “rich Christians” by 1 Timothy 6:17 immediately follows a sobering warning of what awaits those who desire to get rich (1 Timothy 6:11). If we are rich, and we are, we need not conclude we are necessarily living in sin. But we

must carefully adhere to Paul’s instructions of what our attitudes and actions are to be.

Nevertheless, the door remains open to legitimate differences in the amount of wealth we own. When Peter pressed Jesus concerning the

Lord’s plans for John, Christ responded, “What is that to you? You follow me” (John 21:22).

His emphasis was on the word “you.” Each of us has a call of God. We should not be preoccupied with God’s dealing with others, nor should we make unhealthy comparisons with our own situation. There are some things that no Christian should do, such as hoard, live in opulence, or fail to give generously. But there are other things some Christians can rightly do that others cannot or choose not to, such as own land, a home, a car, a business, or go on a certain vacation.

How much money and possessions can we safely keep? Enough to care for our basic needs and some basic wants, but not so much that we are distracted from our basic purpose, or that large amounts of money are kept from higher kingdom causes. Not so much that we become proud and independent of the Lord (Deut. 8:13-14), or are distracted from our purpose, or insulated from our sense of need to depend on God to provide (Matt. 6:26-29).

Those who want to get rich set themselves up for spiritual disaster. Those who happen to be rich, simply as a result of circumstances, hard work, or wisdom, have done nothing wrong. They need not feel guilty unless they do not make their riches generously available to the work of God, or their lifestyles are self-centered and excessive.

Why Live More Simply?

There are a thousand ways to live more simply. We can buy used cars rather than new, and modest houses rather than expensive ones. We don’t have to replace old furniture just for appearances. We can mend and wear old clothes, shop at thrift stores, give up recreational shopping, use fewer disposables, cut down on expensive convenience foods, and choose less expensive exercise and recreation. Some of us can carpool or use public transportation. But these are things few of us will do unless we have compelling reasons. May I suggest four?

1. Because it would loosen the grip of materialism on our own lives. Giving away what we don’t need is the greatest cure for materialism. How can we expect to embrace the Christian experience of Paul, Wesley, Mueller, Taylor, and a host of others without also embracing their attitude toward possessions and the simple lifestyle it fostered?

2. Because of the reward God promises if we lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. Eternal rewards are to be a major motivation in my life. If I choose a smaller house now, investing the difference in cost in God’s kingdom, God will give me a bigger house in heaven. Why settle for an expensive necklace now when by selling it and giving the money to meet needs it

could contribute toward an imperishable crown in eternity?

3. Because of the dire spiritual need of the world. John Piper wrote: “We should be content with the simple necessities of life because we could invest the extra we make for what really counts. Three billion people today are outside Jesus Christ. Two-thirds of them have no viable Christian witness in their culture. If they are to hear the gospel—and Christ commands that they hear—then cross-cultural missionaries will have to be sent and paid for. All the wealth needed to send this new army of good news ambassadors is already in the church. If we, like Paul, were content with the simple necessities of life, hundreds of millions of dollars in the church would be released to take the gospel to the frontiers. The revolution of joy and freedom it would cause at home would be the best local witness imaginable.”

4. Because of the great physical needs of the poor. Someone has said, “Live simply that others may simply live.” Of course, there is no necessary relationship between my simple living and someone else’s being rescued from starvation or reached with the gospel. There is only a relationship if I, in fact, use the resources I have freed up to feed the hungry and reach the lost. This itself assumes I will continue to make a decent wage. For if I go off and pursue simple living for simple living’s sake, spending what little I earn on myself, it does no good for anyone else.

In fact, it is a violation of Scripture to try to make only enough money for my family’s immediate physical needs. Scripture says, “*He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may...*” That he may have enough to live on? No, “*...that he may have something to share with those in need*” (Ephesians 4:28). We should work not only because it is healthy for us and to care for our families, but to take our excess income and use it to help the needy. Even though it may appear to be nonmaterialistic, earning only *enough* to meet the needs of myself and family and no more, when I could earn enough

to care for others as well, can be a selfish and unchristian philosophy. The point is not merely saying “no” to money and things, but using money and things to say “yes” to God.

“Simple” or “Strategic” Living?

During World War II, when fuel was precious, billboards routinely asked the motorist, “Is this trip necessary?” Every resource used for individual convenience was one less resource for the country’s central concern, winning the war. As Christians, we are engaged in a great battle that also requires great resources (Ephesians 6:12). We too must realize that spending on our own private concerns leaves fewer resources for our kingdom’s central concern. We should ask, “Does this really contribute to my purpose in being here on this earth? Is this an asset to me as a soldier of Christ, or is it a liability?”

Ralph Winter uses the term “wartime lifestyle,” which is generally a more helpful concept than “simple lifestyle.” If I am devoted to merely “simple” living, I might reject owning a computer because it is modern and nonessential. But if I live a wartime lifestyle, then the computer may serve as a strategic tool

We too must realize that spending on our own private concerns leaves fewer resources for our kingdom’s central concern.

for kingdom purposes. My computer is serving that purpose as I’m writing books. Likewise, a microwave oven might be a luxury in one case but a useful tool in another, freeing time to engage in the cause for which we are fighting. Simple living may be self-centered. Strategic living is kingdom-centered.

Of course, the wartime mentality can be taken to such an extreme that we feel it’s unfaithful to enjoy any possessions,



pleasures, or special activities. This is not my perspective. Even in wartime, it’s important to have a break from battle. Soldiers need their rest and recreation. Life is not just utilitarian. There is nothing necessarily wrong with spending some money for modest pleasures that renew and revive us, especially since our battle is a lifetime in duration.

I am thankful that I own “for fun” possessions, such as a bicycle and tennis racquet. They aren’t necessary; yet they contribute to my physical and mental health. Our family spends money on vacations that aren’t necessary, yet they bring personal renewal and valuable relationship-building opportunities with one another and other families as well. My wife and I sometimes go out to dinner, enriching our relationship and renewing our vigor to return to life’s battles. I am not proposing we live at a poverty level, but as if our income was more modest, yet still adequate to allow breathing room for some legitimate recreational spending.

If I have a wartime mentality, then I don’t look at an increase in income as an opportunity to *spend more* but an opportunity to *invest more* in the cause. I might determine that I will live on a certain amount of money each year, an amount that allows some room for discretionary or recreational spending. All income beyond that I will give to God’s kingdom purposes. If he provides twice that basic amount of money I have designated for my living expenses, then I will be giving away 50 percent of my

Our Lord is pleased when we live in a way that reminds ourselves of, and introduces others to, what is truly the greatest pleasure and possession of life, both here and hereafter.

income. If he provides four times that much, I will be giving away 75 percent of it. If my situation radically changed, however, I might need more for my family needs.

At Eternal Perspective Ministries, our goal is to keep 10% of royalties that come in and use them for our ministry, while we give 90% away to missions, famine relief, prolife work and prison ministry. We've always given away a minimum of 10%, but as God provided higher royalties over the years, we've been able to steadily increase the percentage.

Suppose a wife wishes to go to work when the children are grown, and

assume the family's savings are adequate for retirement needs. Suddenly the family has a second income. Ninety percent of the time this second salary simply ushers in a higher standard of living. Expenditures rise to meet income. But why? The one income has been more than sufficient till this point—for needs, that is, maybe not wants. If the cause of Christ is so worthy, *why not devote the entire second income to the cause?*

Do such proposals seem strange? If so, why? Have we forgotten that all Christ's disciples are committed to using their money and possessions to further the kingdom cause? Have we distanced ourselves so far from the battlefield that our peacetime lifestyles have left us comfortable and complacent, unfit for battle and oblivious to the battle's eternal stakes?

God's called us not to a cruise-ship mentality but a battleship mentality. There's a big difference.



Conclusion

A biblical lifestyle will necessarily recognize itself as being in opposition to the prevailing values and lifestyle of its culture. It is informed by a different view of reality. This view of reality is not a harsh or austere view. It need not lead to ascetic or bare-bones living, or to condemnation of those Christians who have greater opportunity or feel greater liberty to possess more than I do. Rather, it is a view toward the riches of the eternal kingdom. Those who hold such a view are sincerely grateful for the refreshing pleasures and helpful possessions of this life.

But regardless of what material things surround it, this view of reality remains focused on the ultimate pleasure of possessing Christ. Our Lord is pleased when we live in a way that reminds us of, and introduces others to, what's truly the greatest pleasure and possession of life—our Lord Jesus.

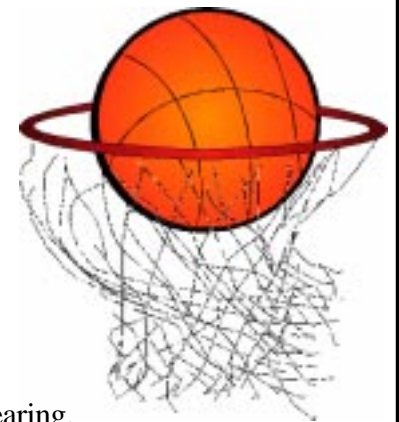
(For further development, see Money, Possessions and Eternity by Randy Alcorn.)

Pastor Quits Sports:

Twelve Reasons Why A Local Clergyman Stopped Attending Athletic Contests

12. Every time I went, they asked me for money.
11. The people with whom I had to sit didn't seem very friendly.
10. The seats were too hard and not comfortable.
9. The coach never came to call on me.
8. The referee made a decision with which I could not agree.
7. I was sitting with some hypocrites—they came only to see what others were wearing.
6. Some games went into overtime, and I was late getting home.
5. The band played some numbers that I had never heard before.
4. The games are scheduled when I want to do other things.
3. My parents took me to too many games when I was growing up.
2. Since I read a book on sports, I feel that I know more than the coaches anyhow.
1. I don't want to take my children, because I want them to choose for themselves what sport they like best.

With apologies to those who use the same excuses for not coming to church.



The Church Was Spoken Against Everywhere

by John Piper

Can the gospel spread, and thousands be converted, and churches grow, and love abound where Christianity is continually spoken against? Yes. It not only can, it has. I say this not to discourage winsomeness, but to encourage hope. Do not assume that seasons of hostility or controversy will be lean seasons with little power or growth. They may be seasons of explosive growth and great spiritual blessing.

How do we know this? Consider the way Luke reports the state of the church in the book of Acts. When Paul finally gets to Rome near the end of his life, he invites the “leading men of the Jews” to come hear his gospel. What these leaders say about the “sect” of Christians is very significant. They say, “Concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22).

This is not surprising to disciples who knew that Jesus said, “You will be hated by all nations because of My name” (Matthew 24:9). And: “Woe to you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6:26). And: “If they have called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they malign the members of his household!” (Matthew 10:25).

The early church was an embattled church. Yes, there were seasons of calm (Acts 9:31); but that was the exception. Most of the time there were slanders and misunderstandings and accusations and persecutions, not to mention internal disputes about ethics and doctrine. Virtually all Paul’s letters reflect controversy in the church as well as affliction from outside. The point is not that this is desirable, but that it need not hinder great power and growth. In fact, it may be the occasion and reason for great power and growth.

This seems to be Luke’s view, because, even though he portrayed Christianity as “spoken against everywhere,” he also portrayed relentless growth throughout the book of Acts. “The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

“The disciples were increasing in number” (Acts 6:1). “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase” (Acts 6:7). “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). “The word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied” (Acts 12:24). “The churches... were increasing in number daily” (Acts 16:5). “All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). “The word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (Acts 19:20).

Therefore, we must not think that controversy and conflict keep the church from experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit and dramatic growth. We are taught in Romans 12:18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” But we are not taught to sacrifice truth for peace. So Paul said, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have

preached to you, he is to be accursed!” (Galatians 1:8).

And if there is enough conflict and hostility that those who speak the gospel are even imprisoned, that very moment of bad press may be the occasion of gospel triumph. Why? Because, Paul said, “I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal [for the gospel]. But the word of God is not fettered” (2 Timothy 2:8). In fact, it may be that when God and truth are loved enough that we are willing to take stands that incur slander and hostility, the Spirit may move more powerfully than in times of peace and popularity.

Do not assume that seasons of hostility or controversy will be lean seasons with little power or growth. They may be seasons of explosive growth and great spiritual blessing.

S o m e t i m e s Christians have favor with society and sometimes we “are spoken against everywhere.” In either case, God can, and often does, pour out his power for effective witness. Both peace and slander can be the occasion of blessing. Therefore, let us not embrace the assumption

that times of social ridicule must be times of weakness and fruitlessness for Christianity. They may be a sign of faithfulness, and occasions of great harvest. The church was “spoken against everywhere,” and “the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”

(via Email, September 6, 2000, *Desiring God Ministries*, www.desiringgod.org)

Assurance grows by repeated conflict, by our repeated experimental proof of the Lord’s power and goodness to save. When we have been brought very low and helped, sorely wounded and healed, cast down and raised again, have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and placed in safety; and when these things have been repeated to us and in us a thousand times over, we begin to learn to trust simply in the word and power of God, beyond and against appearances; and this trust, when habitual and strong, bears the name of assurance; for even assurance has degrees.

John Newton

Early Church Teachings on Abortion

“You shall not kill an unborn child or murder a newborn infant.” — *Didache*

“You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not slay the child by abortion.” — *Barnabas [c. 70-138], Epistles*

“For us [Christians], murder is once and for all forbidden; so even the child in womb, while yet the Mother’s blood is still being drawn on to form the human being, it is not lawful for us to destroy. To forbid birth is only quicker murder...He is a man, who is to be a man; the fruit is always present in the seed.” — *Tertullian, 197, Apologeticus*

“Those women who use drugs to bring about an abortion commit murder and will have to give an account to God for their abortion.” — *Athenagoras of Athens, letter to Marcus Aurelius in 177, Legatio pro Christianis [Supplication for the Christians]*.

“There are women who, by use of medicinal potions, destroy the unborn life in their wombs, and murder the child before they bring it forth. These practices undoubtedly are derived from a custom established by your gods; Saturn. Though he did not expose his sons, certainly devoured them.” — *Minucius Felix, theologian [c. 200-225] Octavius*.

“If we would not kill off the human race born and developing according to God’s plan, then our whole lives would be lived according to nature. Women who make use of some sort of deadly abortion drug kill not only the embryo but, together with it, all human kindness.” — *Clement of Alexandria, priest and the “Father of Theologians” [c. 150-220]. Christ the educator*.

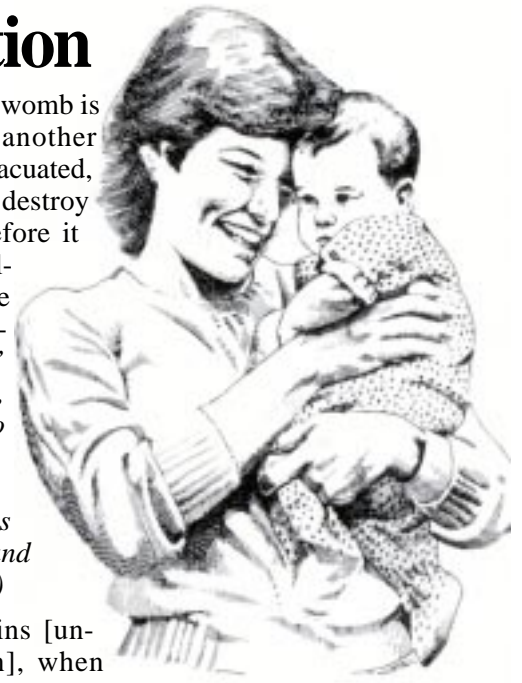
“Sometimes this lustful cruelty or cruel lust goes so far as to seek to procure a baneful sterility, and if this fails the fetus

conceived in the womb is in one way or another smothered or evacuated, in the desire to destroy the offspring before it has life, or if it already lives in the womb, to kill it before it is born.” — *St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo [354 to 430], De Nuptius et Concupiscus [On Marriage and Concupiscence]*

“Some virgins [unmarried women], when they learn they are with child through sin, practice abortion by the use of drugs, frequently they die themselves and are brought before the ruler of lower world guilty of three crimes: suicide, adultery against Christ, and murder of an unborn child.” — *St. Jerome [c. 340-420], Letter to Eustochium*

“The hairsplitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us. Whoever deliberately commits abortion is subject to the penalty for homicide.” — *St. Basil the Great [329- 379], “First Canonical Letter,” Three Canonical Letters*

“Those who give drugs for procuring abortion, and those who receive poisons to kill the fetus, are subjected to the penalty for murder.” — *Trullian Quinisext Council (692), Canons*



A Martyr for the King

Polycarp (c 69-155 A.D.), a leader of the early church in Smyrna, gave the memorable answer when commanded to [curse the name of Jesus Christ and] worship Caesar. “Eighty-six years I have served Him [Christ] and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?” To the end Polycarp...disdained to defend himself before the mob. He was threatened with the wild beasts and then with the fire, but he did not flinch. Once again his answer was memorable, as well as moving: “You threaten me with fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is put out, for you do not know about the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. But why are you waiting? Bring what you will.” And so they did. He was burned alive. The issues were clear to Polycarp and [other] Christians: “It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43). Immediately after Polycarp’s martyrdom, the local church wrote a letter describing the events, so eager were they for a neighbouring church to know of their leader’s joyful and glorious end. To them and to the [non-Christians] around them, such faithfulness was the best possible testimony to the truth of the gospel.

(The Footsteps of God, by John Legg, Evangelical Press, 1986, page 19)

A Second Glance at the Christmas Shepherds

by Randy Alcorn

In Christ's day, shepherds were lowly and despised. But Father God picked them to first hear the joyous news.

No Christmas program is complete without its little band of gunny sack shepherds. Frightened by the angel's sudden appearance, they marvel at the good news from the angel and rush to Bethlehem to see the Savior-King.

As they return to their flocks, they praise God and tell all who will listen about the birth of the chosen Child.

Once they're through with their part, we let them leave the stage and hardly give them another thought. We've always been quick to dismiss those quaint Christmas shepherds.

But, actually, why did the announcement come to them at all? Why not to priests and kings?

In Christ's day, shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the Palestinian social ladder. They shared the same unenviable status as tax collectors and dung sweepers. Only Luke mentions them.

Who were they that they should be eyewitnesses of the glory of God?

Shepherds are mentioned early in Scripture. Genesis 4:20 calls Jabel the father of those living in tents and raising livestock. During the time of the Patriarchs, shepherding was a noble occupation.

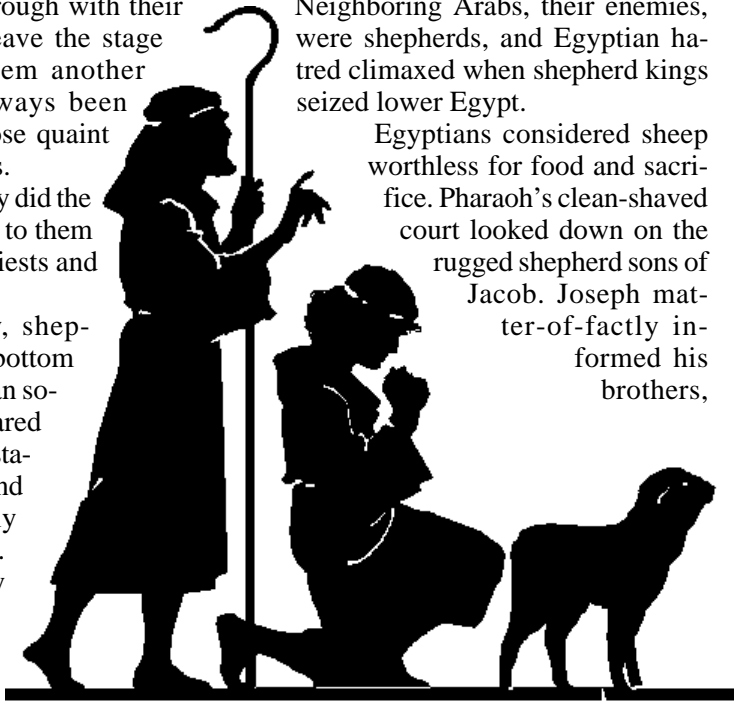
In nomadic societies, everyone—whether sheikh or slave—was a shepherd. The wealthy sons of Isaac and Jacob tended flocks (Genesis 30:29; 37:12). Jethro, the priest of Midian, employed his daughters as shepherdesses (Exodus 2:16).

When Israel migrated to Egypt, the tribes encountered a foreign lifestyle. The Egyptians were agriculturalists. As

farmers, they despised shepherding; sheep and goats meant death to crops. Battles between farmers and shepherds are as old as they are fierce. The first murder in history erupted from a farmer's resentment of a shepherd (Genesis 4:1-8).

Egyptian art forms and historical records portray shepherds negatively. Neighboring Arabs, their enemies, were shepherds, and Egyptian hatred climaxed when shepherd kings seized lower Egypt.

Egyptians considered sheep worthless for food and sacrifice. Pharaoh's clean-shaved court looked down on the rugged shepherd sons of Jacob. Joseph matter-of-factly informed his brothers,



“Every shepherd is detestable to the Egyptians” (Genesis 46:34 NIV).

In the course of 400 years, the Egyptians prejudiced the Israelites' attitude toward shepherding. Jacob's descendants became accustomed to a settled lifestyle and forgot their nomadic roots.

When Israel later settled in Canaan (c. 1400 B.C.), the few tribes still retaining a fondness for pastoral life chose to live in the Transjordan (Numbers 32:1 ff).

In *The Geography of the Bible*, Dennis Baly states that after the settling in Palestine “there was a strong swing-over and pastoralism ceased to hold the

prominent position in the thinking of the people.” As the Israelites acquired more farmland, pasturing decreased. Shepherding became a menial vocation of the laboring class.

Around 1000 B.C., David's emergence as king temporarily raised the shepherd's image. The lowliness of this trade made David's promotion striking (2 Samuel 7:8). While poetic sections of Scripture record positive allusions to shepherding, scholars believe these references reflect a literary ideal, not reality.

In the days of the Prophets, shepherders symbolized judgment and social desolation (Zephaniah 2:6). Amos contrasted his high calling as prophet with his former role as a shepherd (Amos 7:14).

Shepherding not only lost its widespread appeal, but eventually forfeited its social acceptability. A strong prejudice materialized in Israel. In Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Dr. Joachim Jeremias says shepherds were “despised in everyday life.” In general, they were considered second-class and untrustworthy.

Some shepherds earned their poor reputations, but others became victims of a cruel stereotype. The religious leaders maligned the shepherd's good name; rabbis banned pasturing sheep and goats in Israel, except on desert plains.

The Mishnah also reflects this prejudice, referring to shepherds in belittling and demeaning terms. One passage describes them as “incompetent”; another says no one should ever feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit.

Jeremias documents the fact that shepherds were deprived of all civil rights. They could not fulfill judicial offices or be admitted in court as witnesses.

He wrote, “To buy wool, milk or a kid from a shepherd was forbidden on the assumption that it would be stolen property.”

In another work, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, Jeremias notes: “The rabbis ask with amazement how, in view of the despicable nature of shepherds, one can explain why God was called ‘my shepherd’ in Psalm 23:1.”

Shepherds were officially labeled “sinners.” This was a technical term for a class of despised people. Smug

religious leaders maintained a strict caste system at the expense of shepherds and other common folk.

Into this social context of religious snobbery and class prejudice, God's Son stepped forth. How surprising and significant that Father God handpicked lowly, unpretentious shepherds to first hear the joyous news: "It's a boy, and He's Messiah!"

What an affront to the religious leaders who were so conspicuously absent from the divine mailing list. Even from

birth, Christ moved among the lowly. It was sinners, not the self-righteous, He came to save (Mark 2:17).

The proud religionists of Christ's day have faded into obscurity, but the shepherd figure colors church life today as pastors "shepherd their flocks."

That figure was immortalized by the Lord Jesus when He said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Christ is also the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd

(1 Peter 5:4). No other illustration so vividly portrays His tender care and guiding hand.

As we gaze on nativity scenes and smile at those gunnysack shepherds, let's not lose sight of the striking irony. A handful of shepherds, condemned by the social and religious elite as without worth, was chosen to break the silence of centuries, heralding Messiah's birth.

(First appeared in *Moody Monthly* magazine, December 1982)

ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments

Newly Revised, Expanded & Updated

by Randy Alcorn

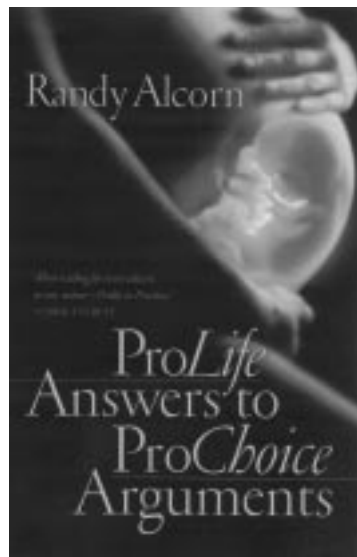
When I wrote the first edition of *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments* in the early 1990s, I wanted to supply people with a carefully researched, highly useable resource. I had no idea the impact it would have. The book sold over

75,000 copies, a huge number for a book on this subject. Most importantly, it has been repeatedly used by thousands of people in their attempts to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Many prolife groups use the book to train their volunteers and their speakers. Ethics classes use it as a textbook. I have received letters from hundreds of high school and college students who've used the book to help them prepare speeches or write term papers and editorials for their school news-

papers. I've spoken to five thousand public high school students at a single convention, distributing free copies of the book, which they eagerly snatched up. Pastors ask to use it in their sermons, people write and ask if they can use it to construct letters to newspapers, family members, and their representatives. (The answer is always yes.)

Some have read the book and changed their mind about abortion. But more significantly, many who were prolife without understanding the issues and arguments, who were intimidated by the almost universal prochoice assumptions in the media and on campuses and in workplaces, became equipped to defend the prolife position as they never had before.



For the last three years I've been acutely aware of the need for a new edition of this resource. While the overall structure of the book remains the same, many updates and revisions have been made.

Statistics have been updated and new charts have been added. The resource materials in Appendix K have all been double-checked and corrected, with many new additions, including internet resources. New subjects have been added, including partial-birth abortion, fetal tissue research, and frozen embryos. The four appendices from the original book are now accompanied by seven new ones, and the old ones have been revised. Some people may find the appendices to be the most useable resources in this book. (See additional resources at our website, www.epm.org.)

My hope and prayer is that this book, in its new and improved form, will be a tool in the hands of both church and culture. May it, by God's grace, help us restore the respect for human life that honors our Creator and His smallest children.

The Storytellers' Collection

This captivating collection of short stories focuses your attention on things beyond your everyday world—from the most remote corners of the world to the deepest recesses of the human spirit. This collaborative effort was written by authors you may know well and introduce you to others you have yet to discover (*including Randy Alcorn*).

You may purchase this beautiful hardcover book through your local bookstore or EPM at a retail cost of \$17.00. All proceeds for the sale of this book are donated to The JESUS Film Project.



The Heart of a True Missionary

(An Interview with Elizabeth Elliot)

by Russell G. Shubin

Elizabeth Elliot talks about cross-bearing Christianity, the immaterial wealth of her mission heritage, and what has given her strength in the face of adversity.

In a great number of North American evangelical homes today, Elizabeth Elliot is a household word. Her radio program, "Gateway to Joy," is broadcast on some 250 English-speaking stations and some 250 more in translation. She speaks of "soldierly qualities" and the need for a cross-bearing Christianity. She reiterates the need for wives to be submissive to husbands. She challenges outright the dating practices of our youth. Simply put, she advocates a Christianity that is a striking contrast to much of what fills the "bestseller" section in Christian bookstores today.

But Elizabeth Elliot may be best-known as the surviving wife of Jim Elliot, the 28 year-old missionary speared to death in 1956 with four of his co-laborers—Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, Roger Youderian, and Edward McCully. Along with their wives and children, these five men were in the early efforts of reaching the Auca tribe (now known as the Huaorani) in the dense jungles of northern Ecuador. They were nervous but optimistic as they landed their small Piper aircraft on a shallow part of the Curaray River.

Elizabeth Elliot's riveting account of this story and the follow-up to it—*Through Gates of Splendor* and *The Savage My*

Kinsman—quickly became standard missionary fare and remain so today, over 40 years later. The event itself—known as the Palm Beach incident for the shallow beach where the plane landed—continues to have a riveting impact on successive generations of young people. Countless youth have been called

to service in the fields of the harvest as a result. All have been called to live lives of increasing sanctification.

A prolific writer of over 20 books who has moved well beyond the pale of specifically mission-focused material, Elliot's writing efforts over the last 20 years have covered a range of topics—including God's plan for the Christian family, suffering, loneliness and a re-evaluation of Christian dating. While some find her a bit harsh and dogmatic, she has articulated a spiritual passion in the face



of all of life's hardships that has given many a more upright spiritual posture.

Elliot's immediate response to the Palm Beach incident placed her, along with co-laborer Rachel Saint (Sister of the slain Nate Saint) in the memory of evangelicals as modern-day saints. Shortly after the incident, she returned

to the tribe to continue the church planting work among the Huaorani. They made it clear that they did not want to prosecute the murderers. Today, the numerous Huaorani followers of Wnagogi ("creator God") may well be her most profound legacy. The sweet though costly irony was illustrated most poignantly as Stephen Saint, son to martyred Nate

Saint was baptized by a Huaorani pastor—one of the spear-wielding Indians who took part in the slaying of his father years earlier. The living testimony of Elizabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint's work amongst the Huaorani is a superb example of the vital and strategic role of women in the frontier mission task.

In addressing her preparedness for the initial tragedy Elliot attributes her strength in adversity to her upbringing—one that had missions at its very core.

"I grew up in a very strong, missionary-minded home. We had dozens, perhaps hundreds of missionaries visiting in our home. I have my mother's guest book that has 42 countries represented in it. Therefore, I had read missionary books, we had looked at thousands of missionary slides, heard many missionary stories and we knew that there would be hardships.

"Of course, I didn't know what the nature of mine might be and I didn't expect it to be quite so soon." She notes that in each of the major blows to her faith that first year in Ecuador, it was a return to the cross of Christ that provided the deepest counsel. But she recognizes that there are precious few who have a similar background and its component part—preparedness for adversity—with which she was so blessed. "So, when I have the opportunity to speak to prospective missionaries, I do want to emphasize an encounter with the cross. I think it takes a deep, spiritual encounter with the cross before we're really qualified to call ourselves missionaries."

While hesitant to generalize too broadly, Elliot sees in the younger generation an aversion not so much to the grand cause of martyrdom but to the mundane discipline of yielding to Christ's lordship in the small things. Her words to prospective cross-cultural workers: "I would take them first to the foot of the

"I think it takes a deep, spiritual encounter with the cross before we're really qualified to call ourselves missionaries."

cross and just ask them if they understand what the cross was all about and what it means in our daily life. If Jesus told us that we must take up our cross daily and follow Him, in what tiny little ways might we experience this?

“These students do know that five missionaries were killed in 1956 and that was a very dramatic event that is still in the minds of many. I am amazed at how many decades have gone by and it seems as though more people are acquainted with that story now than when it happened.

“But the great question is the tiny, little things which are not dramatic and not heroic, but those are the ways the cross is going to be presented to us. I often ask a group, ‘In what ways do you expect the cross to be presented to you?’

“Well, the chances are not very great that it is going to be anything dramatic or heroic; it is probably going to be, as John H. Newman put it, ‘the carrying on of small duties which are distasteful to us.’

“My impression is that they have not had the same kind of earnestness and preparation for suffering. America loves comfort and fun. And we need to face squarely the words that ‘If we endure, we shall also reign with Him’ (2 Tim. 2:12).

“I don’t run across very many people who have the depth of understanding that we were given. I am very deeply aware of the privileges that I had. I want to do my best to pass on to younger people those soldierly qualities and necessities that we have to learn. Jesus spelled it out very clearly that, if we were going to follow Him, there was going to be suffering. It’s not going to be different.”

While writing and speaking on a wide variety of subjects, center stage on her agenda has been the sad state of the North American family (e.g. *Passion and Purity* and *The Shaping of the Christian Family*). For Elliot, the connection of the deteriorating family structure with the impact on the message we export through the mission enterprise is not a difficult one to make. This is highlighted by recognizing that the family structure of many “pagan” peoples we attempt to reach is—shall we say?—much more Biblical.

“I did come from a strong missionary family. We ate, lived and breathed missions.

My parents had been missionaries and five out of the six of us kids became missionaries. This whole thing of divorce just becomes so endemic that it can’t help but have a tremendous impact on missions. If we are sending that kind of message around the world it undermines the Gospel itself.

Young people today, it is my impression, are not prepared to sacrifice. They want what they want and they want it now.

“I want to do everything that I can to strengthen the Christian family. I’ve written a book on that subject and I’m often asked to do seminars on the Christian family. It takes a strong father, a submissive wife and obedient children. But there was never any question in our minds that our parents were perfectly serious when they laid down the rules of



the house. What they said, they meant, and what they said, they meant the first time. These were all factors that gave us self-discipline.”

One of the fundamental flaws that Elliot recognized in North America upon returning to the States was the carefree practice of dating—which presented a striking contrast to her early years with Jim Elliot. “It became very obvious to me back in the 70’s that this whole business of courtship and dating—actually, it wasn’t called courtship at all, it was just called dating, and it was simply taken for granted—became more and more dangerous as all the old rules were discarded.

“So, I felt duty-bound to just tell my own story of how Jim Elliot and I made up our minds long before we ever fell in love, that we did not belong to ourselves, but to God Himself; and this body in which I live is holy, it belongs to God until God gives it to somebody else. So, Jim and I were perfectly clear about that independent of each other and then, when he came along and confessed to me that he was in love with me, he followed that immediately with saying, ‘I’m not asking you to marry me. You go ahead and go to Africa and I’ll go to South America, and if God wants to bring us together, God knows how to do it.’

“I thought I was going to Africa, but in various ways, God indicated that it was South America. And so, we waited 5 ½ years for each other. That, of course, is another tremendous lesson in sacrifice. Young people today, it is my impression, are not prepared to sacrifice. They want what they want and they want it now. They’re going to get what they want, any way they can get it. When you start at the foot of the cross and lay yourself totally at God’s disposal, there are a whole lot of pitfalls that are avoided.”

Elliot’s hard language of placing oneself “totally at God’s disposal” is a striking contrast to the rights language so prevalent in both secular and Christian media today. But it is the depth of her conviction on a number of matters that has emboldened many in their own calling to Christian work. She calls for unadorned, sacrificial living directed by a simple tenet: “Keep going back to the Old Book.”

The Bible, she says, is simply “our authority. There is no other way except the way of the cross. Jesus made it so crystal clear. He simply said, ‘If you want to be my disciple...,’ and that stands just exactly the same way today. He is saying that to each of us, ‘Do you want to be my disciple?’

“If the answer is ‘yes,’ then there can be no question about the willingness to fulfill the three conditions of discipleship which is [first of all] to give up your right to yourself—and that flies in the face of everything that the world is saying. When the world is saying ‘be good to yourself, work on yourself, do your own thing,’ that is the absolute opposite of giving up your right to yourself. You

can't take up the cross until you've given up your right to yourself.

"The second condition is 'take up your cross,' and that certainly means suffering of one sort or another. And the third thing, of course, is 'to follow.' And that means a determined obedience, from here to eternity.

"You don't tell God you will do two years of missionary work, period, and consider that you have done your job. Following means one step at a time, one day at a time, but we have a Leader who will show us the way."

Elliot is now living near Massachusetts Bay in Massachusetts—by her own admission a long way from the jungles of Ecuador. Her acquaintance with grief, however, did not end upon her return to the States. After Jim Elliot, she would lose

a second husband (Addison Leitch) in a tough battle with cancer in 1973. Today, she is married again—to Lars Gren, who serves as a manager for Elliot's personal ministry.

Elliot certainly doesn't hold herself up as one who deserves any special awards of merit for having borne heavy burdens. She insists her lot is no more difficult than the numerous others who have lost husbands—including the recent example of Gladys Staines who lost her husband and two sons while serving in India.

Reflecting again on the Palm Beach incident, she recalled how she knew it was very serious when Jim Elliot and crew turned up missing. "And when we got the word that they were all dead, what can you do except

turn to Christ and say, 'Lord, you are in charge, I accept this.' The great principle that Amy Carmichael taught was 'in acceptance lieth peace.' We cannot change what has happened, we cannot be angry at God because then there is no other refuge. I'm always aghast when I hear anyone say that he's mad at God, because where else can you turn?"

This interview first appeared in Mission Frontiers, August 1999.

Elisabeth Elliot is a speaker, radio host, former missionary and a prolific writer. She has written many books including Passion and Purity, Through Gates of Splendor and A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael. Find out more about her ministry and radio program "Gateway to Joy," at www.gatewaytojoy.org

Kids In Church

A little girl became restless as the preacher's sermon dragged on and on. Finally, she leaned over to her mother and whispered, "Mommy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?"

A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" he asked. "Why, God tells me."

"Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?"

A father took his 5-year-old son to several baseball games. Then the father and son attended a church on a Sunday shortly before Independence Day. The congregation sang *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and after everyone sat down, the little boy suddenly yelled out, "PLAY BALL!!!"

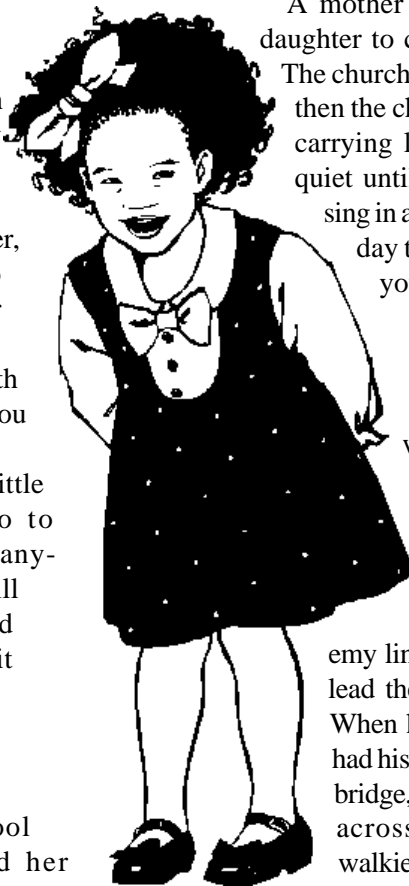
A 6-year-old was overheard reciting the Lord's Prayer at a church service: "And forgive us our trash passes as we forgive those who passed trash against us."

After a church service on Sunday morning, a young boy suddenly announced to his mother, "Mom, I've decided to become a minister when I grow up."

"That's okay with us, but what made you decide that?"

"Well," said the little boy, "I have to go to church on Sunday anyway, and I figure it will be more fun to stand up and yell than to sit and listen."

A Sunday School teacher challenged her children to take some time on Sunday afternoon to write a letter to God. They were to bring their letter back the following Sunday. One little boy wrote, "Dear God, We had a good time at church today. Wish you could have been there."



A mother took her three-year-old daughter to church for the first time. The church lights were lowered, and then the choir came down the aisle, carrying lighted candles. All was quiet until the little one started to sing in a loud voice, "Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you..."

Nine-year-old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday School.

"Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge, and all the people walked across safely. He used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters and call in an air strike. They sent in bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved."

"Now, Joey, is that really what the teacher told you?"

"No, but if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it!"

Letters to EPM

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I must confess I have never written a letter to the author after reading a book, but *Deadline* just blew me away. It was absolutely wonderful. Your characterization of the newsroom and reporters was obviously well-researched. I am a reporter and found myself chuckling at parts in the book I identified with and cringing at others—not because what you said was untrue, but because it really hit home.

I was prochoice when I began reading the book, now I am seriously questioning my values on the subject of abortion. I am a hard sell and if you managed to convince me, then I think it proves you wrote a great, thought-provoking novel.

Sincerely, D.M., Portland, OR

Dear Randy,

I have just finished reading your booklet *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* I wanted to say thank you for writing it and publishing it on the net. God's timing is interesting. I've been wanting to get off the pill for some months now and last night felt quite strongly that I would not renew my prescription. However, I was still debating back and forth as to whether I should do so. Today, while looking for alternative methods on the Epigee site, I came across your article and have now an excellent reason to stay off of the pill.

I appreciate your thoroughness of research, your unbiased tone, your honesty (that you and your wife *had* at one point used the pill and that you'd recommended it to other couples), and your words of encouragement based on Scripture at the end of the booklet. I feel rather stunned at present, having realized the abortive effects of taking the pill, but am grateful that I know the truth and can now wisely choose to stay off of it.

Many blessings and much thanks,
P.K.

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I absolutely LOVED *Lord Foulgrin's Letters!* I can't remember ever having read something, short of God's Word, that has made me stop and evaluate my

entire belief system before.

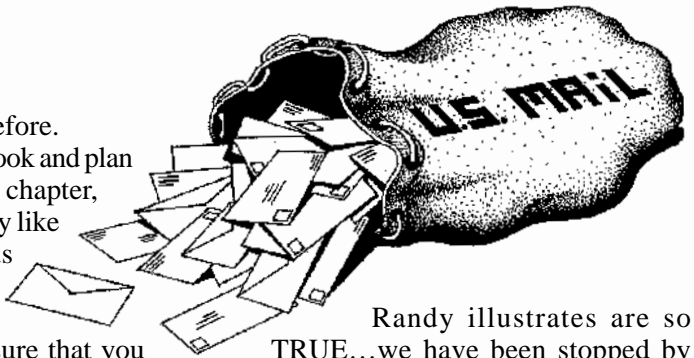
I just finished the book and plan to go back, chapter by chapter, issue by issue, and study like crazy! I am so anxious to study God's Word and see which of your points hold up. I am sure that you are right on about issues such as abortion and our current fascination with the occult, but I intend to read the Word and turn my focus completely to God and see what the Spirit has to teach me about my Lord and Savior, and true repentance, as well as demons and Satan's true power. I want to learn to focus on Him alone and how to put on the true armor and fight with determination and knowledge! I have never heard anyone talk about Heaven the way you do. I intend to search for more on that in the Bible as well!

I prayed, really prayed last night for the first time in several years. I prayed a prayer of true repentance, and now understand that this is not a yearly or even monthly occurrence, but a daily (sometimes hourly) task.

A.T., Chicago, IL

Dear Randy,

Dominion is truly a great book, in fact it is going to be a reference book for my daughter as she presents a report on the Nation of Islam to her religion class. My husband, who is African-American, literally had to stop reading the book last weekend while we were at a gym watching the kids practice, because it brought him to tears. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and I said "I told you it is a great book!" He was born in Cabrini Green in Chicago and lived there in the projects for 10 years before moving to a "white" city in Indiana. He was the only black child in his school growing up for the most part...a drastic culture change and shock for one so young. The issues that



Randy illustrates are so TRUE...we have been stopped by police both driving and while walking...for no reason other than my husband's color. Of course there are numerous other stories, but we do pray that God will use our insignificant family in some way to further His kingdom and help with racial reconciliation here on earth.

Anyway, again, I am recommending it to everyone I come into contact with. It is powerful!

D.P., Carmel, IN

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

It's four o'clock in the morning and I have just finished reading your novel, *Edge of Eternity*. I must confess to you that when I started reading the book, I thought it was going to be just another strange book loosely written about the end time, or something. Little did I know that your book would take me on a journey through my own life and show me myself in so many different ways. I found myself in many, many of the characters in your book. Unfortunately, some of them were not the type of person I want to think of myself as.

Your book has given me a wonderful picture of the walk we each must take on our journey to the King. It has helped me put many of my wrong ideas into proper perspective. It has helped me see my journey more clearly than I ever have before. I am 45 years old, the father of five children and the grandfather of one. I have known all along that my walk with the Lord is a living example to my family. But now I can see more clearly the consequences of not staying on the road the Lord has given us to travel.

Thank you again for writing this book.

God bless you, D.F.



Questions and Answers

by Randy Alcorn

Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I am a third year undergraduate at Staffordshire University, England, completing a dissertation on the relationship between religious orientation and self-esteem.

I have found a positive relationship between intrinsic religiosity and self-esteem, which I feel might be similar to having a biblical self-esteem. However, now I have hit a problem. Despite reading several articles including yours (especially *Two Sources of Self-Esteem: Secular and Christian*), I

still feel no clearer about defining just what a biblical self-esteem is, finding it probably easier to say what it is not, in the context of secular self-esteem.

Could you possibly help me in providing a concise description/definition of what biblical self-esteem is, so that I can attempt to relate it to the relationship that I have found?

Intrinsic relationship and self-esteem certainly appear to go beyond a secular self-esteem, but I can't find the right way to relate it to a biblical self-esteem.

I am becoming ever more confused in my writing and would very much appreciate your help.

Diane

Diane,

I think the proper self-esteem is stated in Romans 12:3: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment." Sober judgment means accurate judgment. Correct self-image is seeing ourselves as God sees us. He created

us, so we have purpose. He loves us, so we have value. But we are sinners, depraved and bent on evil (Romans 3). Our nature as sinners separates us from God. If we embrace the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, we become new creatures in Christ and are covered with his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:17,21). As such, a correct self-esteem for the Christian means seeing ourselves as we are, forgiven and made holy by the merit of Christ.

This is in stark contrast to much of the self-esteem movement which emphasizes our own supposed merit and worth apart from God. What makes God's grace amazing is our unworthiness, and if we underestimate that unworthiness, we undermine the grace of God on our behalf. It's not about us, it's about Christ. Everything that exalts men tends to bring down Christ. Our worth is not only as a result of His work of creation, but in particular, redemption.

Hope that helps a little. Best wishes.
Randy Alcorn

Will We Really Own Things in Heaven?

I recently read a Christian author who categorically states people won't own anything in heaven, which will assure our equality.

But what about the different "dwelling places" believers will have in heaven (Luke 16:4,9)? What about the treasures Christ commanded us to store up "for ourselves" in heaven (Matthew 6:20)? What about the different crowns and rewards God will hand out according to our works (2 Corinthians 5:10)? What about the fact that we have an "inheritance" that will be given us in heaven (Colossians 3:24)? Doesn't the word "inheritance" mean something tangible that will belong to us?

Will your crown be as much mine as yours? Of course not. What about the white stone God promises to give to overcomers, with our new name written on it, a name no one else will know (Revelation 2:17)? Will you and I have equal possession of those stones or names? No. The one God gives you will be yours,

not mine. The one he gives me—if I'm an overcomer—will be mine, not yours. Is this ownership wrong or selfish? Of course not. Ownership is never wrong when it's God distributing to us possessions he wants us to own.

Heaven is not a socialist utopia in which private ownership is evil. Materialism, greed, envy, and selfishness are sins—ownership is not.

Our different personalities, rewards, positions and names in heaven not only speak of our individuality, but of how God, who loves us all, finds unique reasons to love us. I love my wife and

daughters, but I love different things about each.

We are like unique instruments, played by an orchestra of individual musicians performing as one. We will play together in a perfect unity, but each of us will play our own part in bringing glory to God. We will all bring something different, something singular and vital, to the concert of praise. Perhaps each of us will uniquely draw attention to one of God's attributes. And he will take delight in each uniqueness, for he is not a God of sameness, but diversity.

The clearest expression of God's loving character is revealed in an event which happened on a low hill outside the city of Jerusalem some 2000 years ago. There, God allowed metal stakes to be pounded into His flesh, and was put to death on a crude Roman torture tool—a cross. On that day He bore the full force of evil upon His shoulders, paying the price for every sinful choice ever made in all of human history. The cross stands in stark contrast to any accusation against God's loving character. It is impossible to accuse God of being evil or unjust when one understands the depth of pain and suffering He chose to endure because of our sin.

Adapted by Bob Maddox, Pastor
Good Shepherd Community Church, Boring, OR

America's Right to Pray: Resisting Unjust Judges

by Chuck Colson

There's a poignant scene in the movie, *Casablanca*, when the Nazis occupied North Africa. At one tense moment as a group of German officers begin singing their national anthem, something snaps in the crowd of Frenchmen. In spontaneous defiance, they begin singing "La Marseillaise."

Even facing armed tyrants, the people wouldn't give in.

I thought about this dramatic scene recently as I read how thousands of football fans across the country are reacting to the Supreme Court's ban on student-led prayer at football games.

What has happened? Spontaneous prayer has broken out all over America—something I advocated in a late June commentary on *BreakPoint*.

In Hattiesburg, Mississippi, a few students held hands in the bleachers, and they began the Lord's Prayer. But by the time they got to "deliver us from evil," 4,500 people had joined them.

In Hendersonville, North Carolina, a Presbyterian pastor led prayer before a football game; the crowd joined in. In Searcy, Arkansas, the school board voted to let a Christian group hold prayer vigils around a stadium flagpole.

In some cities, radio stations have allowed ministers to pray, and football fans joined in by portable radio. And boldest of all, the Lexington, South Carolina school board reaffirmed a pre-game prayer policy, and a student led the crowd in prayer—in direct defiance of the Supreme Court ruling.

Like the scene in *Casablanca*, the moral convictions of the people refused to be broken. Unlike the movie, however, these are real people who pay their taxes, obey the laws, and

mind their own business—quiet people in ordinary places doing an extraordinary thing: expressing their resistance to a Supreme Court that has gone too far.

They flinched when prayer was taken from the classroom, and they swallowed hard when the Bible was expelled. But when the Court demonstrated such clear hostility to religion this year, they said no. And they prayed.

The usual media crowd accused them of trying to force their values on others. But more surprising was the number of high-profile Christians who criticized them. One Christian writer said prayer has no place in public, and used Christ's admonition to pray in private as his defense.

He's missed the point! It's not that America will fail if prayer is outlawed at football games. It won't. But America most assuredly will fail if the courts continue their unconstitutional usurpation of power.

Issues like the role of religion in public life are supposed to be debated and decided by a Congress that represents the people. But the justices have cast Congress aside like an old rag, specifically declaring themselves the ultimate lawmakers.

Some would even say that Christians aren't supposed to worry about such things. Well, tell that to the apostle Paul, who insisted on his rights as a Roman citizen and forced the Roman government to honor them.

With all due respect, we are under no obligation to stand by silently as our Constitution is violated by a power-hungry Court.

This experiment in self-government was established to rule with the consent of the governed. And the governed—including Christians—have a duty to respond in an appropriate and peaceful way whenever institutions hostile to our religious freedom step over the line.

(Originally presented on "BreakPoint with Chuck Colson," 9/21/00, Copyright (c) 2000 Prison Fellowship Ministries. Reprinted with permission.)

School Principal Addresses Prayer at Football Game

This statement was read over the PA system at a football game at Roane County High School, Kingston, Tennessee, by school Principal Jody McLoud, on September 1, 2000.

"It has always been the custom at Roane County High School football games to say a prayer and play the National Anthem to honor God and Country. Due to a recent ruling by the Supreme Court, I am told that saying a prayer is a violation of Federal Case Law.

"As I understand the law at this time, I can use this public facility to approve of sexual perversion and call it an alternate lifestyle, and if someone is offended, that's OK. I can use it to condone sexual promiscuity by dispensing condoms and calling it safe sex. If someone is of-

fended, that's OK. I can even use this public facility to present the merits of killing an unborn baby as a viable means of birth control. If someone is offended, no problem. I can designate a school day as earth day and involve students in activities to religiously worship and praise the goddess Mother Earth, and call it ecology. I can use literature, videos and presentations in the classroom that depict people with strong, traditional, Christian convictions as simple-minded and ignorant and call it enlightenment. However, if anyone uses this facility to honor God and ask Him to bless this event with

safety and good sportsmanship, Federal Case Law is violated.

"This appears to be at best inconsistent, and at worst diabolical. Apparently, we are to be tolerant of everything and anyone except God and His Commandments. Nevertheless, as a school principal, I frequently ask staff and students to abide by rules with which they do not necessarily agree. For me to do otherwise would be at best, inconsistent and at worst, hypocritical. I suffer from that affliction enough unintentionally. I certainly do not need to add an intentional transgression. For this reason, I shall, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," and refrain from praying at this time. However, if you feel inspired to honor, praise and thank God, and ask Him in the name of Jesus to bless this event, please feel free to do so. As far as I know, that's not against the law—yet."

A. W. Tozer Speaks on Evangelism . . .

Modern Salesmanship

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:19)

In our eagerness to make converts I am afraid we have lately been guilty of using the technique of modern salesmanship, which is of course to present only the desirable qualities in a product and ignore the rest. We go to men and offer them a cozy home on the sunny side of the brae. If they will but accept Christ He will give them peace of mind, solve their problems, prosper their business, protect their families and keep them happy all day long. They believe us and come, and the first cold wind sends them shivering to some counselor to find out what has gone wrong; and that is the last we hear of many of them...

By offering our hearers a sweetness-and-light gospel and promising every taker a place on the sunny side of the brae, we not only cruelly deceive them, we guarantee also a high casualty rate among the converts won on such terms. On certain foreign fields the expression "rice Christians" has been coined to describe those who adopt Christianity for profit. The experienced missionary knows that the convert that must pay a heavy price for his faith in Christ is the one that will persevere to the end. He begins with the wind in his face, and should the storm grow in strength he will not turn back for he has been conditioned to endure it.

By playing down the cost of discipleship we are producing rice Christians by the tens of thousands right here on the North American continent.

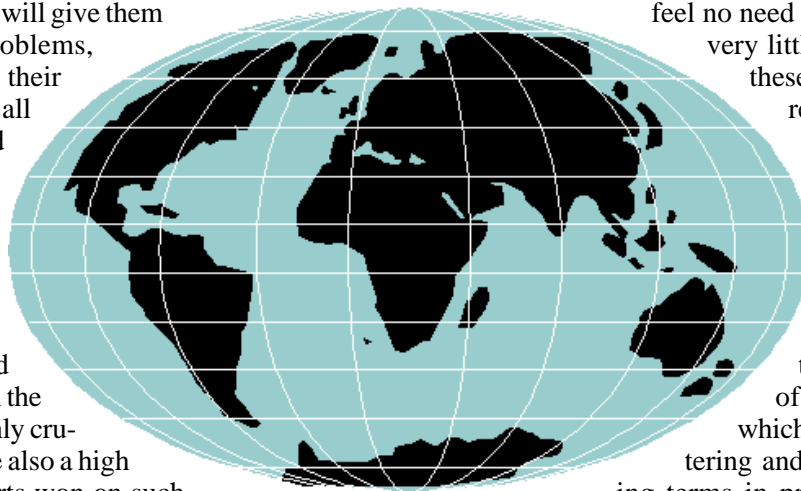
(That Incredible Christian, A. W. Tozer, 116-117)


Man-centered Christianity

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all. (2 Chronicles 29:11)

Christianity today is man-centered, not God-centered. God is made to wait patiently, even respectfully, on the whims of men. The image of God currently popular is that of a distracted Father, struggling in heartbroken desperation to get people to accept a Saviour of whom they feel no need and in whom they have very little interest. To persuade these self-sufficient souls to respond to His generous offers God will do almost anything, even using salesmanship methods and talking down to them in the chummiest way imaginable. This view of things is, of course, a kind of religious romanticism which, while it often uses flattering and sometimes embarrassing terms in praise of God, manages nevertheless to make man the star of the show.

(Man: The Dwelling Place of God, A. W. Tozer, 27)





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