



ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2002

Looking Up

by Randy Alcorn

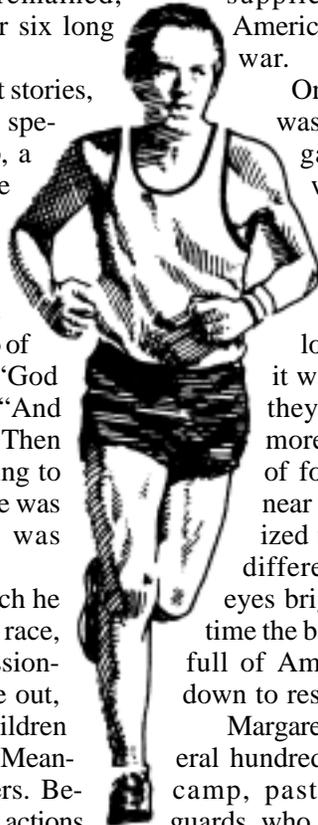
Fourteen years ago in England, Nancy and I spent an unforgettable morning with Phil and Margaret Holder. We discovered Margaret had been born in China to missionary parents with China Inland Mission. In 1939, when Japan took control of Eastern China, thirteen-year-old Margaret was taken prisoner in a Japanese internment camp. There she remained, separated from her parents, for six long years.

Margaret told us some great stories, one of which concerned a very special person in the prison camp, a godly man she called "Uncle Eric," who tutored her in chemistry, and was deeply loved by her and all the children. "Uncle Eric" turned out to be Eric Liddell, "The Flying Scott," hero of the movie *Chariots of Fire*. "God made me fast," Liddell said. "And when I run I feel His pleasure." Then he shocked the world by refusing to run his Olympic race—which he was favored to win—because it was scheduled on Sunday.

After the Olympics, in which he won a gold medal in a different race, Liddell had gone on to be a missionary in China. When war broke out, he sent his pregnant wife and children to safety, hoping to follow later. Meanwhile, he stayed to assist others. Because of his loving and sacrificial actions, he would never see his family in this world again. Margaret told us through tears that seemed as fresh as if it had just happened: "I remember the day Uncle Eric died." The children had lost a dear friend, and mourned

their loss. Liddell had represented faith and hope, and now their hero, their mentor, was gone.

At times it seemed unbearable to be cut off from their homes and families, subjected to the whims of their captors. But Margaret spoke with awe and delight of the "care packages," the barrels of food and supplies parachuted down from American planes near the end of the war.



One day, not long after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Margaret and the other children were lined up as usual to count off for roll call. (They would often have to stand in line hours in the bitter cold.) Suddenly an airplane flew over low. They saw the markings—it was an American plane! Then they watched it circle and drop more of those wonderful barrels of food. But as the barrels came near the ground, the captives realized that this time something was different. Her face animated, her eyes bright, Margaret told us, "This time the barrels had legs!" The sky was full of American soldiers parachuting down to rescue them!

Margaret and the others, including several hundred children, rushed out of the camp, past the speechless Japanese guards, who offered no resistance. Out of their prison for the first time in six years, they ran to the soldiers, who by now were raining down everywhere. The children threw themselves on their rescuers, hugging and kissing them.

**Dialogue with a
Christian Lesbian**

4

The Road to Belief

8

**What is Spiritual
Leadership?**

10

Letters to EPM

12

**A. W. Tozer Speaks
on Trials & Pain**

13

**The Persecution
of Christians
Today**

14

(continued on page 2)

For years Margaret and the other children had wondered if anyone really knew they were there, if anyone out there really cared about their suffering. They were isolated, alone, separated from their families, desperately needing deliverance. But there was no deliverer in sight. Their hope was rekindled by the packages from the sky, but still they had to endure the present realities of prison.

But in one day everything changed, because at last someone had come from the sky to deliver them from prison, take them back home to England, and reunite them with the families they hadn't seen for six years.

This reminds me of God's words in Isaiah: "My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm" (Isaiah 51:5).

After talking with the Holders, Nanci and I thought about the parallels to the day we will at last be delivered from this world. Whether it's Christ returning from the sky to liberate us, or drawing us up to Himself through our deaths, we will at last be rescued, at last reunited with loved ones who've gone on before us, at last be free, at last be *home*. At last be with the Person we were made for, and living in the Place we were made for.

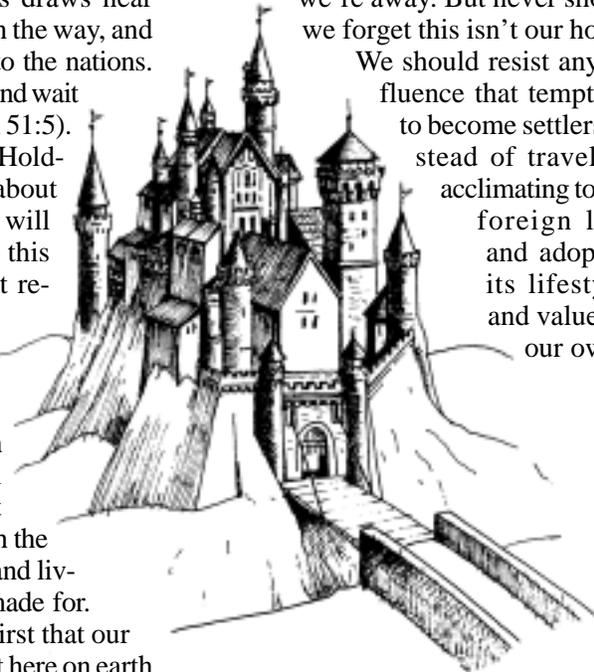
Scripture reminds us first that our citizenship is in heaven, not here on earth (Philippians 3:20). While on earth, we await the deliverance of our Savior. We long for Him to come rescue us.

No matter what difficulty surrounds it, God is intimately involved and interested in the Christian's departure from this world: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

We're ambassadors representing Christ in this world, this foreign and difficult land called Earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). Like Eric Liddell in that prison camp, we have a mission for which we'll be held accountable. That means we're to make the most of our limited time here.

We're aliens and strangers as long as we're here (Hebrews 11:13). This is not our home, any more than the prison camp was Margaret's home. Our thoughts and hearts and hopes are focused on the day of our deliverance, when we will be rescued, taken home at last, for the great reunion. Meanwhile, we take encouragement in the way God provides and watches out for us while we're away. But never should we forget this isn't our home.

We should resist any influence that tempts us to become settlers instead of travelers, acclimating to this foreign land and adopting its lifestyles and values as our own.



James minces no words: "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to become a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Imagine an ambassador who leaves his country to live in another nation, one

Scripture reminds us first that our citizenship is in heaven, not here on earth...How are you doing representing your true country, heaven, as you live in this world that is not yours?

hostile to his own. Naturally, he will want to learn the language, see the sights, eat the food, become familiar with the people and culture. But suppose he fails to draw the line. Suppose he becomes so engrossed in this country's customs and philosophies that he gradually assimilates into it. He becomes sympathetic to its policies, buys into its values, begins to regard it as his true home.

His allegiance wavers. He compromises his position as an ambassador. He becomes increasingly ineffective in representing the best interests of his true country. His loyalties drift. Eventually, he may even defect. At best, he becomes incapable of serving his true country. At worst, he may actually betray it.

His fatal mistake is this—just because he lives somewhere, he comes to think of it as his home. As Christians, we live on earth—but earth is not our home. Heaven is. We forget that to our peril.

How are you doing as an ambassador for Christ? How are you doing representing your true country, heaven, as you live in a world that's not your home? Have you adopted values and customs of this culture that are contrary to those of the culture of heaven? Have you compromised your allegiance to your true country and your true King?



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“Live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear” (1 Peter 1:17). “I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

Back in Kansas, with Oz behind her, Dorothy says, “There’s no place like home.” How true. But how easy it is for you and me to forget where home really is. At death we won’t leave home; we’ll *go* home—“away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). One of the great paradoxes is that our home is a place we’ve not yet been. But the moment we set foot there, we’ll wonder how we ever could have imagined anywhere else was our home.

While we’re content to be on our Father’s business here in these seventy-year motel rooms we call bodies, we’re never entirely at home. How can we be? Our true home is so far superior, and the spiritual family there so vast and rich. The Great Reunion awaits us, and we long for it.

When we understand what home really is, what this world offers loses its glitter. We finally see worldly things as they have been all along: pale, insipid, and cheap imitations of the true and vast wealth that’s ours as God’s children.

Michael Griffiths’ book *God’s Forgetful Pilgrims* maintains the church has largely forgotten her wondrous identity

in Christ, and settled for the superficial substitute-identities of the world. In a bookstore, I ran across the original British edition of the book, which had a different and more striking title — *Cinderella With Amnesia*. We are the chosen bride of the Prince. Our home is His palace, His estate. But we keep forgetting and going back to our second-rate “home” where we settle for so much less than He intends for us.

How easily we forget who we are, whose we are, and where we will spend eternity. Perhaps we should say aloud, over and over, the words of the black spiritual: “This world is not my home, this world is not my home, this world is not my home...”

Speaking the Truth: Ani’s Oral Report

by Chuck Colson

Whenever I start despairing over defeats in the culture war, I hear a story like this one and it renews my hope. Ani Seromik is a high school senior in the Midwest and she’s a Christian. A few months ago Ani’s teacher assigned the class an oral report: It could be about anything regarding health care.

Ani decided to talk about abortion, but that didn’t sit well with her teacher—who told Ani she’d have to get approval from the school’s Health Education Committee. “Fine,” Ani said, “Who do I see to get on the agenda?”

Taken aback by Ani’s bold reply, the teacher suggested she talk about teen pregnancy instead and mention that abortion is an option that many teens choose. Ani says, “I told her I wanted to do my presentation on abortion, and that I would present it very objectively, because in my opinion the facts about abortion speak for themselves. “Nobody,” she added, “needs someone to [explain] that there is something morally wrong about abortion once they hear the facts.”

Ani’s teacher was very upset and over the next few weeks she made several more attempts to change Ani’s mind. Ani’s parents—concerned that the conflict might hurt her final grade—urged her to choose another topic.

Ani prayed about it, then told her parents she was going to stick to her guns. So she spoke with her school’s principal, who told the teacher that Ani’s topic was fine. Unbelievably, the teacher still didn’t give up. She told Ani to get her research materials from

Planned Parenthood. Instead, Ani went to local pro-life sources and borrowed models of fetuses at different stages of development.

On the day of the talk, Ani described abortion procedures from RU-486 through partial birth abortion. She described the stages of development during each abortion procedure, and she talked about post-abortion stress and the abortion/breast cancer link.

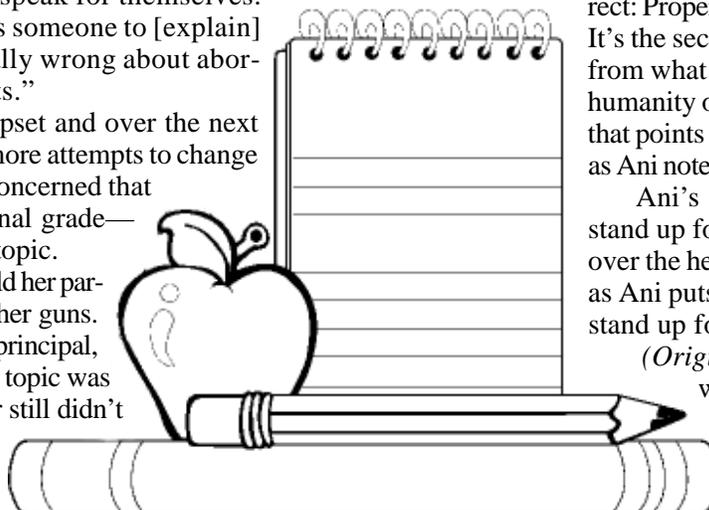
When she finished, Ani asked if there were any questions. “I expected people to try to argue with me,” she said, “because there were a few very vocal pro-choice girls in the class.” But no one had any questions. “I had covered all the points that people normally try to argue, from the humanity of the unborn child, to issues of overpopulation and the well-being of the mother so thoroughly that nobody could argue with me.” In fact, several classmates thanked her later because they had no idea what abortion was all about.

“I’m glad I fought to do this presentation,” Ani concluded, “not only because [my classmates] were able to hear the truth, but because hopefully it will encourage students who come after me to stand up for what is right.”

What a terrific story! And Ani is correct: Properly presented, science is our friend. It’s the secularists who have the most to fear from what science reveals—whether it’s the humanity of the unborn child or the evidence that points toward a divine Creator. The facts, as Ani noted, always point toward moral truth.

Ani’s story is a reminder that we can stand up for the truth without hitting people over the head with our Bibles. Sometimes—as Ani puts it—all we need is the courage to stand up for what’s right.

(Originally presented on “BreakPoint with Chuck Colson,” 7/16/2001, Copyright (c) 2001 Prison Fellowship Ministries. Reprinted with permission.)



Dialogue with a Christian Lesbian

Note: Names and distinguishing details have been changed to protect the writer's identity. However, 98% of the words are hers.

Mr. Alcorn,

I am a big fan of your writing—both your books and your articles. I recommend you to Christians and non-Christians alike and visit your website frequently. I have been resisting the urge to write you for months. I am not one for disagreement or debate, so I usually avoid inviting people into my life. I just feel very strongly about a particular issue and have been troubled by your viewpoints. I feel burdened with the need to reach out to you, with no animosity or disrespect, in regards to it.

I agree almost 100% with you on most issues on which you have written. I am vehemently against abortion and euthanasia. I consider adultery abhorrent and generally concur with your views on modern secular psychology. I am a “straddler” on the capital punishment issue, but I feel God will reveal that to me in time.

I am a Christian. I was raised in a fairly “functional” Christian home. My father is a social worker, my mother a nurse, and they both love me very much and gave me a solid upbringing. By the grace of God, I have endured no “major” traumas in my life. I have a very close relationship with Jesus Christ, I am an active member of a spirit-filled, charismatic church, I have close Christian friends, I spend significant time reading Scripture, I am striving to be a true prayer warrior interceding for family, friends, church, children and our nation and have seen many of my prayers answered, I have a great relationship with my parents, etc., etc. I say all of this not to boast or turn attention to myself, but to give you an idea of who I am, because I also happen to be gay.

My partner of five years is a devout Christian as well. We pray together, worship together, have devotional time together, and focus on Jesus Christ as the center and cornerstone of our relationship.

We are completely monogamous and have dedicated our relationship and ourselves as individuals to God. We would absolutely be married if it were legal. We have prayed about our “lifestyle” (as some would call it), have opened our hearts to God's leading, and neither of us feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit that our relationship is a sin. We have made other extremely difficult decisions based on the leading of the Holy Spirit. For example, both of us quit very lucrative jobs because we were making the pursuit of money and the approval of the secular world our gods. We do not make anywhere near the amount of money we were making before and have had to change our lifestyle dramatically, but we are now where God wants us to be (or at least closer to it!).



I just don't understand why people in the church—good, knowledgeable, intelligent, kind Christians like yourself—continue to persecute and shut out gay and lesbian people based on passages of Scripture that are very much open to an interpretation very different from the traditional stance the church has always taken. I would expound on this myself, but, despite the research I have done on this topic, I do not consider myself in any way to be a Bible scholar. Therefore, I am going to rely on someone who is more educated than me to elaborate on this subject. Walter Wink, Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological

Seminary in New York City, has written an article that concisely and accurately states what I have always believed to be true. I beg of you to read this article, if only to see what the “other side” is saying (even though I am sure you are well-versed on that already!). Think of it as an educational, journalistic endeavor. See www.melwhite.org/biblesays.html

I respect and admire you so much. It deeply troubles me that someone with such knowledge, conviction, and clear thinking adheres to the idea that no practicing gay or lesbian person can be a Christian in a close, right relationship with God. Whether you believe me or not, I am proof that there is such a thing.

I truly appreciate and value your time. If you made it this far, and have read this entire e-mail, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for valuing a stranger enough to read her “two cents worth.” I pray for you and those involved in your ministry and for the important work you are doing. Thank you again for your time.

*Your sister in Christ,
Shannon*

Shannon,

I wish we could talk face to face so you could hear my heart for you. In your letter you said, “I just don't understand why people in the church—good, knowledgeable, intelligent, kind Christians like yourself—continue to persecute and shut out gay and lesbian people based on passages of Scripture that are very much open to an interpretation.”

First, if someone is persecuting you, they are not being kind. This does not mean they are wrong in what they believe about homosexual behavior, but it does mean that they are wrong in not bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Some people are just hateful. Someone may be accurate in telling a woman “abortion will kill your baby,” but they may do it in either a loving or a hateful way.

It's important that you understand that just because someone disagrees with you, even if they may think you are making sinful choices, it does not mean

they are persecuting you. Sometimes I believe things not because I want to, but because I feel compelled to. It would be much easier for me if I believed, for instance, that abortion doesn't kill children. It would be much easier if I kept silent about it. (Since you're prolife, you probably understand that.) I may say to a woman "abortion will kill your baby" in the most loving way I know how, but from her point of view she may think I'm being hateful because of the horrible implications of what I'm saying, and of what that means about what she is doing.

It would be much easier, and it would make me feel much better to just say "No problem, Shannon, I love you and that means I'll say however you want to live is just fine with God." Frankly, Shannon, you seem extremely likeable, and I felt a kinship with you as you wrote. You seem like the kind of person I'd have loved to have as a sister. (I grew up with one brother and always wished I'd had a sister, so I've sort of adopted some since then.) The last thing I want to do is hurt or offend you. But our job is not just to help each other feel better, but to help each other be better. If I truly love you, and I do, I will come to you as Jesus did, in grace and truth. Not truth without grace, not grace without truth, but with both.

Let me clarify I'm not homophobic, meaning I do not fear homosexuals. (Homophobic is now construed by many to mean disagreeing with homosexuals, an interesting twist on the real meaning.) I attended a meeting where dozens were present, and I was the only one who hadn't lived as a homosexual. I didn't feel a need to sit near an exit!

Yes, I disagreed with the homosexual lifestyle (most of them did too), but I felt no hatred or revulsion toward anyone there, including those still involved in it.

I invited a lesbian abortion activist to lunch a few years ago and we sat for four hours in honest dialogue. She did not repulse me. I found her very likeable. I recently talked with her on the phone, and I consider her a friend even today. (She has walked away from her

lesbian relationship and her pro-abortion activism, but at the time she was immersed in both.)

I am very familiar with Mel White, whose website you referred me to. In fact he was involved in youth ministry here in Portland many years ago. I don't know him personally, but I received a letter from him years ago (a letter to Oregon pastors) that I believe was very twisted and misrepresented both the Scriptures and a number of things that were happening at the time. While I have appreciated some things I've heard Mel White say, I have to be honest and say I don't trust his ability to separate his claims about the Bible or the Christian life from his own personal experiences. He has built his new "ministry" around a series of rationalizations and justifications of choices he has made, some of which dishonor the Lord he claims to serve. I feel no hate for him as I say this, none whatsoever. I also do not hate the people who perform abortions. But I still believe they are dishonoring God.

I read the whole Walter Wink article carefully, making notes in the margins. I have often read similar things, many when I was researching my first book in the early '80s (*Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*—recently updated and republished as *Restoring Sexual Sanity*; be glad to send you a copy if you want one). Wink takes the same approach to biblical interpretation many people do. He starts with his modern beliefs—including the currently popular notion that homosexuality is a matter of genes and destiny as opposed to choosing to succumb to a temptation—and works backwards, trying to read some of them into Scripture. He refers to texts such as 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 saying they are "ambiguous." But I know of no one prior to our place and time who would have thought these were "unclear," as if the *real* issue might just be sex for hire, not homosexuality. I believe the texts themselves are much clearer than he admits.

When Dr. Wink moves on to the unequivocal condemnations, he dismisses these, stating as if it were fact why he thinks the Hebrews considered homosexuality an abomination. He cites population issues, which Scripture never does. God has a created order in which He has decreed that

the only proper sexual intimacies occur within a heterosexual legally binding marriage. Now, we may not like that, but that's the truth, regardless of any interpretive gymnastics we might attempt to get away from it.

Dr. Wink clearly believes that the source of the law was chauvinistic Hebrew men, not God Himself. Well, in that case, why bother explaining anything away? Why not just say "they

were a bunch of pigs and God had nothing to do with this, so let's just disregard it"? He says "Paul knew nothing of the modern psychosexual understanding..." Yes. But instead of considering that perhaps that modern understanding is wrong and Paul was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (and therefore right), Dr. Wink is patronizing and demeaning in discrediting the validity of Paul's objections to homosexuality.

Well, Paul either spoke the truth or he didn't. If he didn't, then why not just turn our backs on it and admit that's what we're doing? But if he did, then we need to come to terms with what God's Word is really saying.

Dr. Wink also makes various false claims and gross generalizations such as "adultery, which creates far more social havoc, is considered less sinful than homosexual activity. Yet no one is calling for [adulterers'] stoning. And we ordain adulterers."

This is false on many levels. First, who is he talking about? I do not think heterosexual adultery is less sinful than homosexual activity. And I pastored and taught ethics for years at the very kind of churches and colleges he would assume believe and teach such things. He also implies people are calling for the stoning of homosexuals, yet I've never once heard anyone do that.



And his comment “we ordain adulterers” is entirely irrelevant. (If his point is, many churches operate with hypocrisy, well of course they do, but that hardly functions as an argument for his case.) Known child molesters have been ordained too, but that has nothing to do with whether homosexual acts are wrong in the sight of God. I am convinced, Shannon, that any honest examination of Scriptural teaching shows clearly that they are.

Your letter seems to take refuge in the fact that Dr. Wink is a scholar. But many scholars are wrong. I can give you the names of countless scholars who believe and teach that the Bible condemns all sex outside of marriage. Calling on scholars is much like lawyers calling on expert doctors and psychologists as witnesses. You can always find someone to back up the point you want to believe, or want to make the jury believe. But it doesn't matter that the doctor has degrees—his testimony could still be wrong. Dr. Wink makes some valid points, of course, but I take issue with many claims he makes.

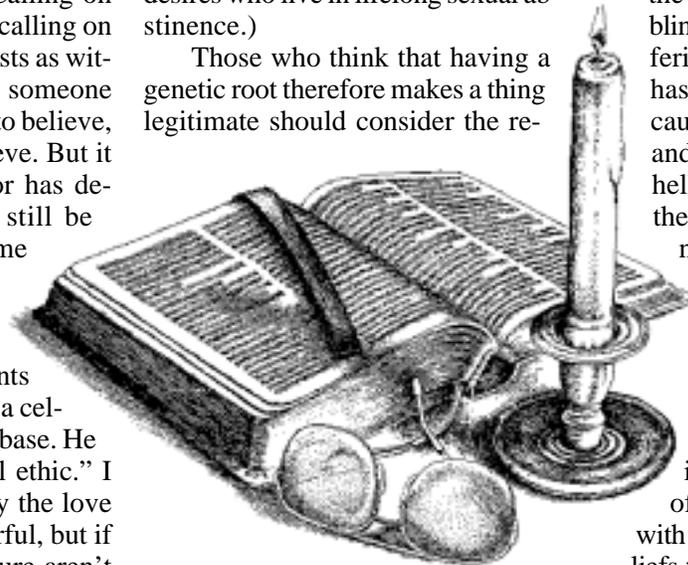
For instance, his comments about Song of Solomon being a celebration of fornication are off base. He says “the Bible has no sexual ethic.” I disagree. His pleas to “live by the love ethic of Jesus” sounds wonderful, but if the actual teachings of Scripture aren't our guide, we will simply decree anything to be “Christlike” if we want to do it and “unchristlike” if it makes us uncomfortable. (Hence we, not Christ, are our own authorities.) He seems to utterly fail to understand what Scripture calls the wickedness of the heart, our tendency toward self-deception and demonic deception. He has adopted the spirit of the age and placed himself above Scripture as its judge.

Where is Dr. Wink going to take this? Maybe he still believes adultery is wrong, I'm not sure. But if his wife doesn't meet his needs, I could see him developing an ethical framework justifying adultery, then writing another paper giving a scholarly defense of adultery from the Bible, showing how twisted traditionalists have made us think the Bible actually condemned adultery, when in fact it really doesn't. (Or arguing that

even where the Bible condemns adultery, it is wrong because it didn't have the benefit of our modern psychological understanding of why adultery can actually be a good thing.)

One thought on the issue of unfairness. I know people who are handicapped, who will never walk again in this life or never see. Is that unfair? In one sense, yes. Most other people can walk and see, why not them? Is it unfair to have a sexual attraction which God says you cannot righteously act out? Well, it is extremely difficult. But it is certainly not impossible. (In fact, I know people with very strong heterosexual desires and others with very strong homosexual desires who live in lifelong sexual abstinence.)

Those who think that having a genetic root therefore makes a thing legitimate should consider the re-



search suggesting there may be “a rapist's gene,” that men who commit rape tend to have certain chromosomal patterns. This may or may not prove true, but suppose for a moment it did. Would you consider it a legitimate thing for a man to commit rape just because he has a genetic condition that gives him a much stronger temptation toward rape than someone else has?

You may feel that's a poor analogy because rape hurts someone and consenting homosexual acts don't. Yet God condemns not only adultery, but fornication, premarital sex between consenting people. Consent and lack of betraying someone else don't automatically make a behavior right. We should see the larger picture of a God whose holiness is violated by our sin. And certainly His heart is grieved when His children choose to violate His standards of holiness. We

should ask not only if our choices hurt ourselves and others, but if they hurt our Lord.

As I feel sorry for someone who will never walk again, I feel very sorry for those who want to be married, but have no desire to be married to the only ones God (not just society) permits them to marry, those of the opposite gender. But my sorrow and empathy do not negate the objective teaching of Scripture. It is never loving people to mislead them into thinking that God permits what He in fact condemns.

There are many things Scripture teaches that disturb me, Shannon, that I would rather not believe. One of them is the doctrine of hell. I find it very troubling and difficult to think of eternal suffering. I have a friend, a writer, who has come to the conclusion that because God is more loving than he is, and he would never send someone to hell, therefore God never would, and there cannot be such a thing as an eternal hell.

Well, the problem is, God is God and we're not. My job isn't to try to pretend the Bible says what I wish it said, but to believe what it does in fact say. If there's a conflict between my way of thinking and what the Bible says, instead of trying to reinterpret the Bible to fit with my beliefs, I need to change my beliefs to make them conform to what God says. That's why I believe in an eternal hell, election, and other doctrines that once troubled me and in some cases still do.

In this sense, I think an atheist homosexual is being much more honest about the Bible than Mel White. He will tell you that the Bible clearly and consistently condemns all sex outside of marriage, including homosexual relations. He simply chooses to reject that teaching. But Mel White and others are often unwilling to outright reject Scripture. They twist it to fit their inclinations and thinking and preferences. (I have done that in the past myself with various doctrines, and probably still do without realizing it.)

Dr. Wink finally gets very honest near the end of the article when he says, “Where the Bible mentions homosexual behavior at all, it clearly condemns it. I freely grant that. The issue is precisely whether that Biblical judgment

is correct.” There—at last he hits the nail on the head. I believe the Bible is correct. He believes it is not, and that is the basis for his own moral conclusions.

So, Shannon, it comes down to this—do you agree with Dr. Wink (and with me) that the Bible clearly condemns homosexual behavior? Secondly, do you agree with Dr. Wink that the Bible is dead wrong? Or do you agree with me that it is right? You can’t have it both ways. If you’re appealing to Dr. Wink’s arguments, you’re ultimately appealing to his disbelief in the Scriptures.

This I know, Shannon, and it grieves me to say it, but I must because I am commanded to speak the truth in love: Christ has something much higher for you than disobedience to His decrees and principles. He wants something great for you, something that brings him glory and brings you joy. And whether or not you recognize it, if you are in fact engaged in sex outside of the only kind of marriage God recognizes, you are living in sin. If I am living in sin, whether in greed or pride or lust, my sin may very well be as bad in God’s sight as yours. But that doesn’t mean that yours isn’t real. (I search my own heart, asking God to make me aware of hidden sins, and to give me the courage to repent of them.)

I wish I could meet you face to face and put my arms around you. I wish I could make you believe that I love you, and far more importantly, that Jesus loves you just as you are, but loves you too much to let you stay that way. He has not put his decrees there as baseball bats to bludgeon you with, but as guardrails to keep you from plunging off the cliff and destroying yourself. If I was a doctor and you came to me saying you were bothered that someone had given you a diagnosis of cancer, I would hope that I could give you what you wanted to hear: “clean bill of health—no cancer.” But if the test results showed cancer, a good doctor wouldn’t do that. He would try to save your life by telling you the truth and suggesting the necessary treatment. I have wept for you, asking God to show this to you. I know that’s not what you want to hear. But I believe it’s what you need to hear.

You strike me as sincere, Shannon. But I also believe you are deceived. Satan is a liar, and he is whispering lies in your ear. He is convincing you that because you believe most of the right things and engage in many Christian practices and are sincere, therefore you are justified in doing what God says you should not.

I ask you to take a fresh look at God’s Word, not trying to back up what an ungodly culture has taught you to believe, but asking God to show you what is really true. He never commands us to do anything—or to abstain from anything—that He does not give us the power to carry out. There is the cancer of sin in your life—but there is corrective surgery to deal with it. Confession, repentance, and transformation of living obediently, and getting help from supportive, loving Christians who believe the Word of God and seek to follow Jesus even when it’s costly, even when it breaks your heart. Sometimes the joy doesn’t come until after we’ve walked the path of heartbreak. (Speaking of heartbreak, would you ask Jesus if some of your choices are breaking His heart? I must ask the same, and I do.)

I am not saying you should change your behavior to earn God’s grace. You can’t earn God’s grace—it’s a free gift. You don’t deserve God’s grace any more than I do. If we deserved God’s grace, we wouldn’t need it.

But if we embrace the grace of God, it will break our hearts to engage in the sins of the heart and the outward behavior that sent Him to the cross for us. We want to live like what we are—“If anyone be in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

What you need is exactly what I need, every day and every hour—an infusion of God’s sovereign grace. His grace alone empowers us to live holy lives. I pray you will give yourself over to His grace. I encourage you to read carefully Romans 3-8. God’s Word has an authority that mine, Dr. Wink’s and Mel White’s certainly do not. Don’t ask what others think—read and ask God what He thinks. Because that alone is true.

There are many people—I know a number personally—who have broken out of homosexual relationships. I know this isn’t what you want, but it is what God wants. (I base this on the teaching of Scripture, not speculation.) And if I can be of help to you, please let me know. You are likely familiar with them, but if you’re not, here are some addresses, phone numbers and websites of groups reaching out to and ministering to people in your exact situation. [Exodus International/North America, PO Box 540119, Orlando, FL 32854; www.exodusintl.org; Love in Action, PO Box 171444, Memphis, TN 38187, 901-767-6700, www.loveinaction.org]

From your notes, I feel I know you, Shannon. And I want you to know that I love you. You are worth anything that I could do for you, and much more. Jesus has done for you what I can’t, and wants to do for you more besides. Please ask Him to show you what’s true and right and what He really wants for you—not what you want and what others want for you, but what He wants. Listen to His Word for the answers, and call upon Him to show you the truth and empower you to live it.

I am praying for you right now, and will continue to in the coming days.

Investing in Eternity,
Randy Alcorn

WISE WORDS

We should live our lives so that, when the time comes to die, the only thing left to do is die.

Jim Elliot

Sin is pursuit of happiness outside of God and half-hearted pursuit of happiness in God.

Dr. John Piper

The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from our prayerless work, or prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, he mocks our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.

Samuel Chadwick

The Road to Belief

Dear Randy,

I wanted to thank you for taking this afternoon time out of your busy schedule so we could meet. I gather you've seen it thousands of times—where one is comforted by simply being able to share their worries, frustrations, conflicts and anxieties. Yes, I have unsettled questions of the theoretical and academic. And yet, I can stand upon my tip-toes, look down my path and see that making a commitment grounded in faith is what yields my greatest anxiety.

As I study, I am seeing more and more that faith is "in fact" what seems to make the commitment so comforting for those who do give themselves to Christ. I truly do find myself in the shoes of Mr. Templeton at the moment.

Our son and daughter were over tonight for dinner and Bible study. Tonight's chapter was on self-sacrifice. I had done my homework except for answering the commitment question: "What do you believe the Lord is calling you to sacrifice in order to serve someone else?"

I finally had to get it out on the table that as a "bystander" I'd say that looking over the fence I see a very, very significant sacrifice that is awaiting me if I make a commitment to Christ. For this I am very, very scared. I explained it as though one may see enormous clouds off in the distance. I don't know how big the rain drops are going to be, but there's going to be a lot. I see it, it's out there.

I feel that I can't straddle this line of indecisiveness for a long time. And, I have great fear of such an ominous unknown.

My wife shared with us how she has been having a vision of how she and I might serve Christ together. Unfortunately I don't have such clarity.

But I do know that I have a responsibility to my wife and my family and to those including yourself, for me to carry out this investigation with an open mind...and an open heart.

Heck, Randy...I'm scared.

Respectfully, Dave

Dear Dave,

Your comments concerning your fears and anxieties about meeting Christ remind me of one of C. S. Lewis's children's stories. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, volume one of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, one of the children asks Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan the Lion, who is a figure of Christ:

"Is Aslan quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver. "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or just plain silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

God is good. But until we understand the truth that He is not safe, that He is not under our control, until we come to grips with the truth of His uncompromising holiness, we will never begin to grasp His amazing grace.

So in a sense, Dave, you are right to be afraid. God is not a genie, under our control. He is the master. When we fancy ourselves masters, it can be intimidating to agree to being a

servant. We are saying, "You call the shots. You're in charge." Of course, even if we don't say those things, they're still true! Christ is in charge of the universe whether or not we recognize Him—but when we do, we honor Him by submitting to His lordship.

He may call us to do things that make us uneasy. If He does, He promises to be there with us. He's in charge. In many passages of Scripture, God calls upon us to fear Him. But once our sins are confessed He says we can warmly embrace Him, come to Him as "Abba, Father" (meaning Papa or Daddy). We can come boldly before His throne with the access only permitted to the King's children. We still fear Him, but in a way that does not diminish our love for Him, or His for us. When my daughters were growing up they knew my love for them, but they were also very nervous when they knew they'd done something I wouldn't approve of. If you come to know Christ you will fear Him, yes, but because you will love Him wholeheartedly, and sense His love for you, the fear will not be a distant and distressing thing.

Ecclesiastes 8:13 says, "Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them." Fearing God is in our best interests. If you have not accepted Christ's gift of salvation, you are still an enemy of God (Romans 5:10), and you have every reason to fear. If you died today you would go to hell rather than heaven. I'm not saying this to try to pressure

you or make you feel bad, Dave. I'm saying it because I believe it's true, and the greatest kindness we can offer each other is the truth.

So it comes down to this. We all must fear. But if you fear God, you need fear no one and nothing else, even the devil. If you do not fear God, you will ultimately end up fearing many things besides Him.

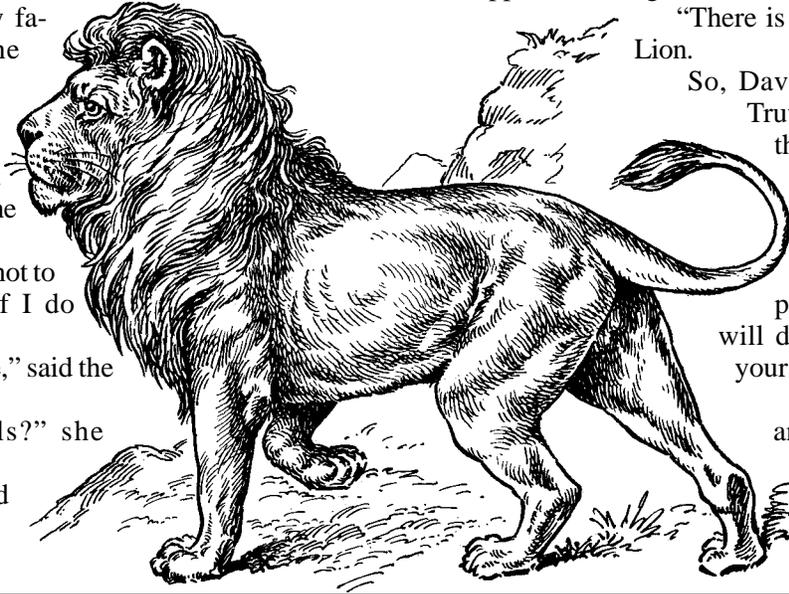
Here's another of my favorite passages from the *Chronicles of Narnia*, this one from *The Silver Chair*, where young Jill is very thirsty, but the great lion, Aslan, is standing by the water:

"Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion...

"Do you eat girls?" she asked.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men,



kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I dare not come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion.

So, Dave, you may indeed fear the Truth. But in the final analysis, there is no other Truth. And just as Jill discovered—but only by going to the stream to drink—that the Lion was the answer to her thirst, so if you place your faith in Christ, you will discover He is the answer to yours.

It was good to talk with you and a special treat to meet your wife. You're in my prayers.

Investing in Eternity,

Randy Alcorn

Randy,

Today at church I asked Christ to enter into my life.

I am so grateful for the support that you and my wife have provided me. You cannot imagine. By "coincidence" our neighbor popped in yesterday to ask about some unrelated topic, and we chatted. Come to find out that his wife was originally an atheist when they had first met. Both are devout Christians.

It was a very enlightening conversation, as he described her path to Christ. As so many others have, he offered his support and prayers for me.

And...we needed a new set of Bible study materials. My wife's daughter recommended one (she and her husband participate with us weekly). My wife and I picked them up, I reviewed the guide and that was where it all fell into place: Revelations 3:20

Then, I was reading Luke last night and was overwhelmed with anxiety. How can I possibly meet the expectations of what Christ preached? I queried my wife and she said that with Christ you are forgiven of your sins and He is there to support you in your efforts. I gathered that if the same one that is setting the expectations is also willing to help me in my quest to achieve those expectations then I have a chance.

But it isn't a test, is it? Rather it is the integrity and purity of my testimony in my commitment to God in the name of Jesus Christ that is of measure.

Heck, I get rather confused.

Regardless, I am clear on the following:

- *There is a God.*
- *I have sinned (actually, my life's been quite a mess).*
- *Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and as God Himself, died to forgive us of our sins.*
- *I believe in Christ and have accepted Him into my heart and soul.*

I dearly thank you so very much. Now I really have so much to learn and I look forward to my dialogue with Christ to assist me in my ways.

With Love and Prayers, Dave

What is Spiritual Leadership?

Excerpts from Henry Blackaby's new book, *Spiritual Leadership, 2001*, published by Broadman and Holman

1. A Calling. "Holding a leadership position in a Christian organization does not make one a spiritual leader. Spiritual leadership is not an occupation: it is a calling." (Page xi)

2. Leaders You Can Trust. "People know intuitively that claiming to be a leader or holding a leadership position does not make someone a leader. People are warily looking for leaders they can trust." (Page 5)

3. Leadership Based on Scripture. "The trend among Christian leaders has been for an almost indiscriminate and uncritical acceptance of secular leadership theory without measuring it against the timeless precepts of Scripture." (Page 10)

4. God's Authority in the Spiritual and Secular Realm.

"The problem was the Israelites' assumption that spiritual concerns, such as righteous living and obedience to God, belonged in the religious realm while the practical issues of doing battle with enemies, strengthening the economy, and unifying the country were secular matters. They forgot that God himself had won their military victories, brought them prosperity, and created their nation. He was as active on the battlefield as he was in the worship service. When the Israelites separated spiritual concerns from political and economic issues, their nation was brought to its knees. Scripture indicates that it is a mistake to separate the spiritual world from the secular world." (Page 13)

5. God's Leading for Leaders. "Spiritual leadership is not restricted to pastors and missionaries. It is the responsibility of all Christians whom God wants to use to make a difference in their world. The challenge for today's leaders is to discern the difference between the latest leadership fads and timeless truths established by God." (Page 14)

6. God's Agenda. "There are a number of helpful definitions of leadership available, but we believe true spiritual leadership can be defined in one concise statement: Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God's agenda." (Page 20)

7. Valuable Model of Leadership. "Too often leaders allow secular models of leadership to corrupt the straightforward model set forth by Jesus." (Page 24)

8. Leading Through Obedience. "Jesus has established the model for Christian leaders. It is not found in his 'methodology.' Rather, it is seen in his absolute obedience to the Father's will." (Page 28)

9. Look and Listen to the Father. "If Jesus provides the model for spiritual leadership, then the key is not for leaders to develop visions and to set the direction for their organizations. The key is to obey and to preserve everything the Father reveals to them of his will." (Page 29)

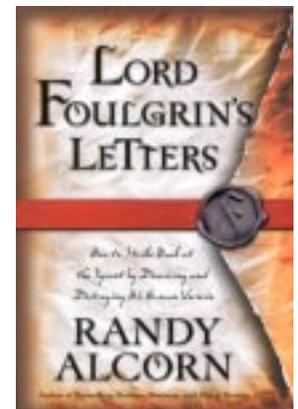
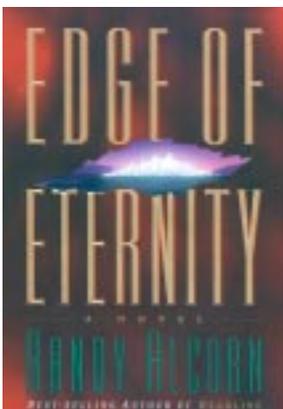
10. Pleasing God. "Spiritual leaders do not try to satisfy the goals and ambitions of the people they lead but those of the God they serve." (Page 29)

11. Seeking and Acting. "Spiritual leaders seek God's will, whether it is for their church (mission) or for their corporation, and then they marshal their people to pursue God's plan." (Page 30)

12. Being Christ-Like. "Just as Christians are aware that a worldly lifestyle can discredit their Christian witness to others, so leaders know that a careless lifestyle can diminish their credibility in the eyes of their followers." (Page 158)

\$5.00 Book Sale!

We have an overstock of *Edge of Eternity* and *Lord Foulgrin's Letters*. Both books retail for \$14.95 each, but we'll sell them for \$5.00 per copy and no shipping charges. If ordered by case lots, the discount will be even bigger, \$4.00 per copy—*Edge of Eternity* hardcover (10 books per case), *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* (24 books per case). Call EPM at 503-663-6481 to order or email Bonnie at bhiestand@epm.org. (Please mention the special sale price when ordering to be sure and receive the best discount.)



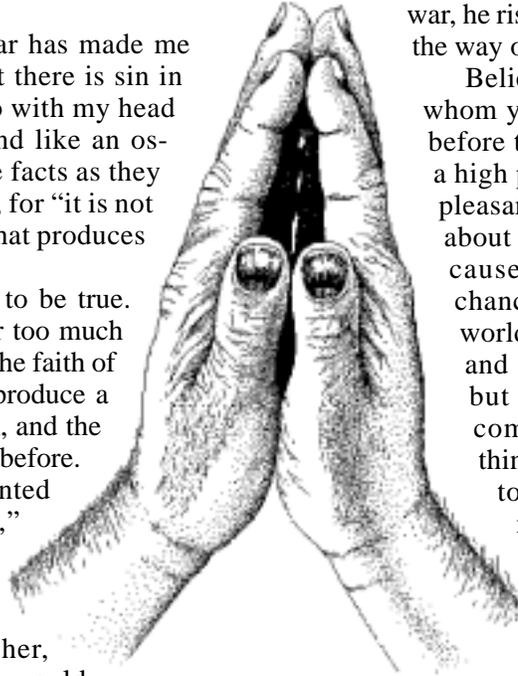
Wisdom in a Time of War

by J. I. Packer

C. S. Lewis said, "...If the war has made me reconcile myself with the fact that there is sin in human beings, I shall no longer go with my head in the clouds, or buried in the sand like an ostrich, but I shall be wishing to face facts as they are." And that will be a good thing, for "it is not being reconciled to the fact of sin that produces all the disasters in life."

Lewis's Screwtape knows this to be true. He tells Wormwood not to hope for too much from the war, for it will not destroy the faith of real believers and will under God produce a measure of realism about life, death, and the issues of eternity that was not there before. "One of our best weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless," moaned Screwtape. "In wartime not even a human can believe that he is going to live forever."

"War," said Lewis the preacher, "makes death real to us; and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past." Then he told his audience of undergraduates that they were at Oxford to study, that the



values of being educated were not affected by the fact of war, and so they should get on with their academic work. Thus they would glorify God. For trusting God for the future, and attending to present daily duties and tasks, is the way to honor God in wartime, as at all other times.

Lewis sharply denies that the experience of war in any form changes everything, as some have been saying that September 11 did. Writing half a century ago of nuclear war, he risked sounding unfeeling in order to enforce the way of wisdom:

Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented; and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways.... It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance but a certainty.... Let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (any microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

(This is a portion of an article which appeared in *Christianity Today*, January 7, 2002.)

Before I Give You Away: A Parent's Thoughts on Marriage

by William L. Coleman

A Question of Character

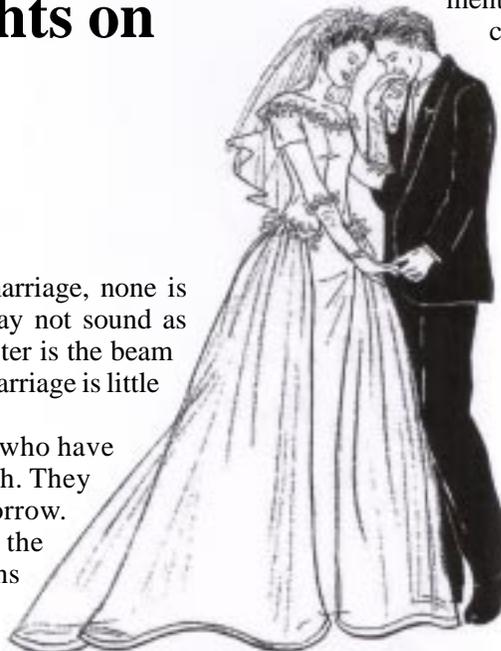
Of all the strengths you bring into a marriage, none is more valuable than your character. That may not sound as exotic as romance, wit, or charm, but character is the beam that holds the structure together. Without it marriage is little more than cotton candy or shifting winds.

Good character is never fickle. People who have it stand like rocks when the going gets tough. They aren't dependable one day and flaky tomorrow. They don't run like scared rabbits when the relationship starts to rattle. Character means we stay and stand even when we are down on each other.

Character takes its vows seriously. Very seriously. It still believes that a promise is a promise, a commitment a commitment, and that two people in love dedicate themselves to each other for life.

"In sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer" means what it suggests. Character doesn't believe marriage is a turnstile, a stop on the road, or a phase in life. Marriage isn't an experiment to dabble at to see if it works out.

Love isn't for irresponsible people. It isn't for the immature. Marriage wasn't created for those who can't tell time, keep appointments, call home, leave notes, or keep in touch. Love is too good to be wasted on independent souls. Only the truly interdependent know how to share meaningful affection. Only those who learn to blend reach true intimacy.



Letters to EPM

Thank you for your honesty and bluntness in your books. You have opened my eyes since I first read *Deadline* through *Dominion*, *Foulgrin's Letters*, *Ishbane Conspiracy* to *Safely Home*. I am more sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and have gained a deeper love for my Lord, poring over His Word like I have never done before. I have shared a few of your books with my mother, and she too has felt a renewal in her life that is very exciting. As a sister in Christ, I hope to encourage you to keep on in your good work.

J.E.

The Ishbane Conspiracy is one of the best books I have read in a long time. As a youth director I wish I could get all my youth and parents to read it. Every parent of a child of any age should read it and so should anyone else for that matter. It made me think about things I had never thought of before. One of my youth, whom I had recommended the book to, called me and told me she could no longer watch her favorite TV show, because the book convicted her about what she put in her mind. Everyone I have loaned it to loves it.

L.F., Flower Mound, TX

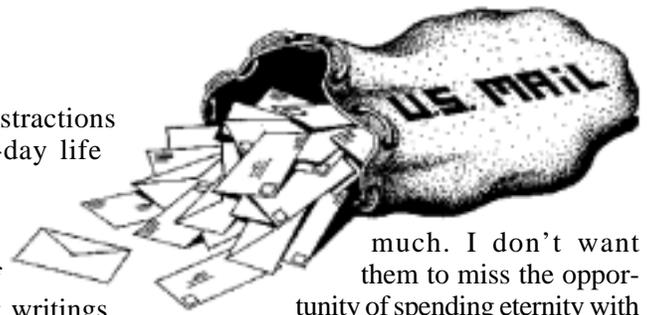
I have been wanting to send you this note for a long time, ever since I borrowed your book *Edge of Eternity* from the library. I loved it so much that I bought the book to send to my 45-year-old brother, Chris, who was at that time going through cancer treatments. It became his second favorite book, after the Bible. He read it several times and said it really spoke to him. He felt like he was the "pilgrim" and could relate to his many different experiences, especially since Chris had spent six months on the Appalachian Trail one year earlier which turned out to be a spiritual journey as well as a physical one.

We have since then read several of your other books, including your wonderful fiction, and loved the emphasis on living for eternity instead of for the trivial. What a wonderful message that is. However, I have to remind

myself of it daily as the distractions and drudgery of day-to-day life sap my spiritual energy.

My brother, Chris, passed to the other side yesterday. The visions of heaven described in your writings helped him immensely. In fact, they helped all of us to let go of him, convinced he was being welcomed into eternity by loved ones as well as Christ Himself. I know your rendition of heaven is based on Scripture, but that you don't pretend to know for certain. I think it's enough to know how much the Father loves us. Whatever He has planned for His children will be perfect and wonderful in every way. I especially loved a statement in one of your novels regarding whether pets will be in heaven. The response to the child with the question was that if that's what would make you happy, God will probably do it. I know I don't have that exactly right, but that was the gist of it and it has stayed with me. My brother Terry read to Chris from some of your books as he was dying. Also, taking a cue from your novel *Deadline*, he and my mother read scriptures to him. It truly was a perfect departure from this world into the next as he heard the Word of his loving God.

I too am battling cancer. I was diagnosed with breast cancer last year and am just now finishing up my treatments. My prognosis is good so I plan to be around for a while. However, because of your inspiration I am not afraid of dying. I try very hard to keep my eyes on God and to praise Him through the joy and the sorrow. I'm trying to keep my eyes on eternity and not get bogged down with the minor annoyances of life. By concentrating on eternity there is a sense of urgency to share the Good News with others, especially those I love so



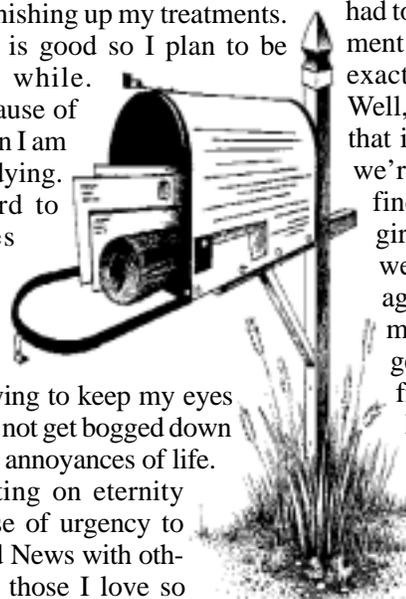
much. I don't want them to miss the opportunity of spending eternity with our Lord.

I wanted you to know how much you've impacted our lives. Not just Chris's and mine, but my brother Terry's and my mother's life. We just keep passing around our latest Randy Alcorn books. They prepared us for the inevitable passing of my brother, and for that we are "eternally" grateful.

D.K.

My wife & I want to thank you so much for helping us understand that the "birth control pill" is really a potential abortifacient. Although from my understanding the pill many times won't cause an abortion, the fact that it certainly can and surely has done so is enough to cause any Christian to pause and think: "Could I ever justify behaving in such a way that I knew that what I was doing could possibly cause the death of an innocent baby that God has given to me?" I think that profound question speaks for itself. I believe it was late last year when we read your book *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* We read the info & it shocked my wife & I. I knew we had to stop using the pill from that moment on, even though we weren't sure exactly what we were going to do. Well, God has blessed us with a child that is on the way. Next Wednesday we're going to have the ultrasound to find out if it's going to be a boy or girl. To those of you out there who were just like us less than a year ago, just ask yourself the question mentioned above and then write to get Randy's straightforward, fact-filled book and see for yourself. Pray to God to help you make the right decision. None of us wants to do what God would hate, & that's hurt an unborn baby, God bless you & thank you so much!

A.R.



A. W. Tozer on Trials & Pain . . .

The Ministry of the Night

But there is a limit to man's ability to live without joy. Even Christ could endure the cross only because of the joy set before Him. The strongest steel breaks if kept too long under unrelieved tension. God knows exactly how much pressure each one of us can take. He knows how long we can endure the night, so He gives the soul relief, first by welcome glimpses of the morning star and then by the fuller light that harbingers the morning.

Slowly you will discover God's love in your suffering. Your heart will begin to approve the whole thing. You will learn from yourself what all the schools in the world could not teach you—the healing action of faith without supporting pleasure. You will feel and understand the ministry of the night; its power to purify, to detach, to humble, to destroy the fear of death and, what is more important to you at the moment, the fear of life. And you will learn that sometimes pain can do what even joy cannot, such as exposing the vanity of earth's trifles and filling your heart with longing for the peace of heaven.

That Incredible Christian, 122-124.

It Works!

Ten thousand enemies cannot stop a Christian, cannot even slow him down, if he meets them in an attitude of complete trust in God. They will become to him like the atmosphere that resists the airplane, but which because the plane's designer knew how to take advantage of that resistance, actually lifts the plane aloft and holds it there for a journey of 2,000 miles. What would have been an enemy to the plane becomes a helpful servant to aid it on its way....

If this should seem like a bit of theorizing, remember that always the greatest Christians have come out of hard times and tough situations. Tribulations actually worked for their spiritual perfection in that they taught them to trust not in themselves but in the Lord who raised the dead. They learned that the enemy could not block their progress unless they surrendered to the urgings of the flesh and began to complain. And slowly, they learned to stop complaining and start praising. It is that simple—and it works!

We Travel an Appointed Way, 32-33.

Forced to Our Knees

The experiences of men who walked with God in olden times agree to teach that the Lord cannot fully bless a man until He has first conquered him. The degree of blessing enjoyed by any man will correspond exactly with the completeness of God's victory over him....

We might well pray for God to invade and conquer us, for until He does, we remain in peril from a thousand foes. We bear within us the seeds of our own disintegration.... Deliverance can come to us only by the defeat of our old life. Safety and peace come only after we have been forced to our knees. God rescues us by breaking us, by shattering our strength and wiping out our resistance. Then He invades our natures with that ancient and eternal life which is from the beginning. So He conquers us and by that benign conquest saves us for Himself.

The Pursuit of Man, 45,50.

We May Expect Troubles

We are all idealists. We picture to ourselves a life on earth completely free from every hindrance, a kind of spiritual Utopia where we can always control events, where we can move about as favorites of heaven, adjusting circumstances to suit ourselves. This we feel would be quite compatible with the life of faith and in keeping with the privileged place we hold as children of God.

In thinking thus we simply misplace ourselves; we mistake earth for heaven and expect conditions here below which can never be realized till we reach the better world above. While we live we may expect troubles, and plenty of them. We are never promised a life without problems as long as we remain among fallen men....

What then are we to do about our problems? We must learn to live with them until such time as God delivers us from them. If we cannot remove them, then we must pray for grace to endure them without murmuring. Problems patiently endured will work for our spiritual perfecting. They harm us only when we resist them or endure them unwillingly.

Of God and Men, 121-122.



The Persecution of Christians Today

by Rev. Johan Candelin, Director
World Evangelical Fellowship
Religious Liberty Commission

Let me start by saying that many people find it very surprising, even unbelievable, that in today's world the largest group of people being persecuted for their faith are Christians. This seems all the more unusual because Christianity is the world's largest religion.

I am fully aware that other religions, whether Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or others also suffer in various contexts, and we shall address these situations in subsequent articles. However, for the present we will focus on Christians, due to the urgency of the situation.

Incredibly, more than 200 million people in over 60 nations are being denied their basic human rights for one reason only: they are Christians. The main reason Christians are being persecuted today is the simple fact that Christianity is growing fastest in countries where human rights are being violated or do not exist.

One of my tasks as director of the Religious Liberty Commission is to represent these Christians—both Catholic and Protestant—at the United Nations Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, as well as in other contexts.

I would therefore like to give a brief analysis of the global situation regarding persecution of Christians. This analysis is based on reports from 114 countries and personal visits to many countries where Christian people suffer.

The Great Paradigm Shift

The persecution of Christians goes hand-in-hand with some **important trends** taking place around the world. I'd like to name five:

1. Conflicts tend increasingly to occur within states, rather than between them. In such situations, religious tensions are likely to increase. We are all familiar with the heart-rending struggles in Kosovo, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Chechnya, Northern Ireland and East Timor, to name but a few.

The whole structure of the UN was created after the Second World War, and is designed to solve conflicts between states, not within them. Human rights are increasingly at the core of civil conflict, and added to that is the way countries like China, Russia and Indonesia interpret the whole issue of human rights—in other words, that human rights are each country's own internal affair. This places two fundamental principles on a collision course with one another: the sovereignty of the state, and the universal nature of human rights.



2. Many countries with a colonial past are seeking their own identity. Very often, this has strong ties to a religion. We see this clearly, for example, in Asia: Pakistan adheres to Islam, India to Hinduism, Indonesia also to Islam, and Sri Lanka to Buddhism.

It is worth noting that the search for a national identity is strongest in five of the eight countries that together make up more than half of the world population. These are China, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In each of these countries, Christians are finding themselves in increasingly tense situations, because they are painted as bearers of the religion brought by former colonial powers, and thus are considered a threat to national harmony.

3. Developments in the Muslim world are likely to have an increasing impact on the lives of Christians within the next decade. The population growth in the Arab world is 4.3 per cent, compared with economic growth of only 0.5 per cent. The population is very young, and this creates the conditions for the growth of radical elements.

4. There is a great difference between the West's view of reality and that of the developing countries. The West often interprets global thinking as its own world view written large. But ways of thinking,

interpretation and culture differ far more than Westerners think. The West must be ready to listen, and to listen as never before.

5. I would like to say something here about the growth of the Christian Church. There is a clear misunderstanding in Europe today that religion is no longer relevant to the modern world. Nothing could be further from the truth. The amazing fact is that of the world's six billion people, only a tiny proportion—151 million—call themselves atheists. There are two



billion Christians, 1.2 billion Muslims, 786 million Hindus and 362 million Buddhists. Religion is, and will continue to be, at the very centre of our world, at the centre of the conflicts within it, and also at the centre of how these conflicts are resolved in the next millennium.

These five paradigm shifts are the principle reasons Christians are being persecuted today, and most likely why it will continue in the future.

However, there is a **sixth paradigm shift** that is very important. This is **partnership**. The European Union is an example of political partnership, and in the financial world, we hear almost daily of some significant merger. The trend toward partnership is clear, and all of us can work very effectively together to help guarantee the human rights of Christians. At the same time, I want to stress again that religious liberty should apply to every person on this planet, regardless of their religion.

The broadest international basis we have for cooperation in helping suffering Christians is the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 1949, especially Articles 18 and 19. Simply put, they say that every person should have the freedom to adhere to and practice the religion he or she chooses, and to change religion without coming under pressure as a result. This obviously includes the right to keep one's religion without being forced into another. In fact, religious rights could be said to be a principle building block, even the cornerstone, of human rights.

What Do We Mean By Persecution?

It is clear that not all persecution has to do with religion. Many people are persecuted for ethnic, social and political reasons, but they also happen to be Christians. How do we know the difference between that kind of

persecution and persecution based on their faith alone? I think we can answer it by asking a simple question: "If a person changes their religion to the majority religion of the country, will things get better for them?" If the answer is "yes," then it seems that the persecution is solely on religious grounds. And by persecution I mean the lack of full human rights, together with some kind of suffering.

Literally hundreds of thousands of people today are being killed, brutalized, sold as slaves, imprisoned, tortured, threatened, discriminated against and arrested solely because they are Christians. They are being subjected to persecution and suffering, the extent of which we can hardly begin to comprehend, because of their faith. They ask us to *shatter the silence* and use our voices to express their cries. This plea is directed at us, wherever we are, today.

Persecution seems to pass through **three phases**. The **first** is **disinformation**. Disinformation begins more often than not in the media. Through printed articles, radio, television and other means, Christians are robbed of their good reputation and their right to answer the accusations made against them.

The public opinion that easily results from being constantly fed such disinformation will not protect Christians from the **second** step, which is **discrimination**. Discrimination relegates Christians to a 'second-class' citizenship with inferior legal, social, political and economic standing than the majority in the country.

The **third** stage is **persecution**. Once the first two steps have been taken, persecution can be practiced without normal protective measures taking place. Persecution can arise from the state, the police or military, extreme organizations, mobs, paramilitary groups, or representatives of other religions.

(www.worldevangelical.org/persecanalysis.html)



Encouragement For Difficult Days

A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path and the way was not too easy. "Why, this isn't a path at all," the little girl complained. "It's all rocky and bumpy." And her brother replied, "Sure, the bumps are what you climb on." That's a remarkable piece of philosophy. What do you do with the bumps on the path of life? (p. 9)

Abraham certainly didn't become a great man of faith overnight. He had to go through some difficult tests on the road of life before he reached the top of the mountain. (p. 9)

One of the greatest promises found in Psalm 91 has to do with the stones on the path. "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." God doesn't promise to remove the stones from the path, but He does promise to make them stepping-stones and not stumbling blocks. He promises to help us climb higher because of the difficulties of life. (pp. 10-11)

(Warren W. Wiersbe, excerpted from *The Bumps Are What You Climb On: Encouragement for Difficult Days*, [Baker Book House, 1980], 9,10-11.)

A History of Your Life

That we practiced the heavenly spiritual exercise of meditating on the providences of God! How sweet it would make our lives; how light it would make our burdens! You live estranged from the pleasure of the Christian life if you ignore or neglect this discipline.

Fill your heart with thoughts of Him and His ways! Let your meditation be as full and exhaustive as possible. Do not let your thoughts swim like feathers upon the surface of the water, but sink like lead to the bottom. Although we cannot sound the depth of providence by our short line, it is our duty to live to dive as far as we can and to admire the depth even when we cannot touch the bottom.

Search backward into all the acts of providence throughout your life. That is what Asaph did: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds" (Psalm 77:11-12). He labored to recover and revive the ancient providences of God's mercies and so coax a fresh sweetness out of them.

There is no more pleasant a history for you to read in all the world as the history of your own life. Sit down and record from the beginning what God has been to you and done for you. What outstanding displays of His mercy, faithfulness, and love have taken place throughout your days? If a single act of providence is so ravishing and thrilling, what would many of them be if they were considered together? If one star is beautiful to behold, what is a constellation? If your heart does not melt before you have recited half that history, it is a hard heart indeed.

(John Flavel, Adapted from The Works of John Flavel, Vol. 4 [London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820].)

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Be Where the Provision Is

Get near to God if you want to enjoy what He has prepared for you. Live in simple, loving fellowship with Him if you desire to drink in His fullness. And be sure of this: You will have no part in the matter unless you are a child of His house. "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided," but around it lies a desolate wilderness of famine and death.



Remember, only when Abraham stands with knife in hand, expecting that the next moment it will run red with his son's blood—only then does the call come: "Abraham!" Only then does he notice the ram caught in the thicket.

That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven before He puts out His hand to help us. It is best for us that we should be brought to desperation, to say, "My foot slips" and then, just as our toes feel the ice, help comes and His mercy holds us up. At the last moment—never before it, never until we have discovered how much we need it, and never too late—comes the Helper.

If we want to get our needs supplied, our weakness strengthened, and wisdom to dispel our perplexity, we must be where all the provision is stored. If a man chooses to sit outside the provision shop, he may starve on its threshold. If a woman will not go into the bank, her pockets will remain empty though there may be bursting vaults to which she has a right. If we will not ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place by simple faith, God's amplest provision will be nothing to us, and we will be empty in the middle of affluence.

(Alexander Maclaren, Adapted from The God of the Amen by Alexander Maclaren [New York, Funk and Wagnalls Co., n.d.].)

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