



Eternal Perspectives

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

Fall 2007

Do Human Beings Really Have Free Will? *How does that fit with God's sovereignty?*

by Randy Alcorn



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God is not the author of evil. Neither, however, is He ever the victim of evil. His hands are never tied by evil. He's never painted into a corner by evil. When Jesus went to the cross He didn't fall into Satan's trap—Satan fell into His. Wills were being exercised, but men weren't calling the shots—God was.

God is not only more powerful than any evil-doer, He can take the worst evil and use it for the highest good. Overstatement? No. Was the crucifixion the greatest evil ever committed by Satan and fallen man? Yes. Was it ordained by God to produce the greatest glory for God and the greatest good for men? Absolutely. We can't figure out how that works. (Why should we expect our finite minds to understand the workings of the infinite God? Isaiah 55:8-9) Fortunately, our inability to understand how it works never diminishes the sovereignty of God.

I certainly believe in man's free will, but also believe it has clear limits. Some go to one extreme and think of us as automatons with no true freedom to choose, mechanical men wandering the deck of a ship, some destined to clean the decks, some stuck in the engine rooms, some to steal purses. They think free will is an illusion. All is fate or sovereign design. They cite Romans' reference to people who are "vessels of wrath created for destruction," but there are many other passages that invite people to come and choose and drink freely of the water of life.

Others err, though, in envisioning us as fully free to determine the course of our lives, captains of the ship, capable of doing whatever we wish, taking the ship to any harbor and destiny, without fear of the ship sinking or our plans being ultimately thwarted. In some cases, they see Him as a deistic

God who got it started then abandoned ship, with no real interest or control. We're on our own, and we're "captains of our fate."

A more biblical analogy, I think, is that we have true freedom to walk the ship, to choose when and where we eat, whether or not we befriend other passengers. We can do good or evil. We can stay on the ship or even jump overboard. But we do not have control over exactly where the ship is going, the sway of the sea, the weather—sunshine or storms—and whether we ultimately live or die. Some things are determined, even when we don't know the timetable, our death among them. ("No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death," Eccles. 8:8.)

Using the illustration of the Titanic, these people were free to make meaningful choices, both moral and immoral, and indeed they did so. They were not free, however, to snap their fingers and go back in time, causing the ship this time to miss the iceberg.



Nor were they able to keep the Titanic from sinking, no matter what they did. You and I can't make this world into something that will avoid its inevitable destruction by fire (2 Peter 3). But we can certainly help the needy, bring the gospel to the lost, feed the

hungry one at a time, pray, and serve our God in meaningful choices each day.

It is not fate, randomness, or nothingness which control these things, nor is it a whimsical pagan god with limited powers, duking it out with competing gods, and only time will tell who wins.

In John 9, the disciples wanted to attribute the man's blindness to human sin, either his or his father's. Jesus corrected them: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the

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work of God might be displayed in his life.” We sometimes back away from thinking God actually makes someone handicapped. We attribute deformity and imperfection to human sin and to Satan, and there’s a half truth in that, but only a half truth (and all heresies are half truths). God said to Moses, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” (Exodus 4:11). Notice God doesn’t merely say “who allows man to be deaf or mute or blind” but “who makes him that way.”

Here’s a little quiz. Don’t look ahead, but say the first thing that comes to your mind in answer to each question.

1. What’s the opposite of good?
(Say it aloud.)
2. What’s the opposite of black?
(Say it aloud.)
3. What’s the opposite of God?
(Say it aloud.)

If you answered “evil” to one and “white” to two, you were correct. But if we answer “Satan” or the devil to number 3, we’re dead wrong. (Yet in my experience that’s exactly what most Christians answer.)

Satan is not the opposite of God. He is the opposite of Michael, the unfallen archangel. This is not a semantic trick—this is the truth. God has no opposite. To make a created being the opposite of the Creator results in many other heresies, not the least of which is thinking that Satan and God are battling to see who can pilot the ship, with the results in question. This is *Star Wars* theology, not the Bible. Who will win, the dark side or the light side of the force? Dualism is a heresy many Christians buy into without realizing it. We make Satan too big—but far worse, we make God too small.



Yes, Satan is called the “god of this world,” but this is set in an overall context with God being absolutely sovereign. Satan isn’t anywhere close to being all-powerful, omniscient, omnipresent, or anything else that God is. He is capable of great evil influence, but he is ultimately a dog on a leash. (That doesn’t mean God is responsible or accountable for Satan’s actions—indeed, God is accountable to no one.)

God says “I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness. I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7). Our tendency is to try to be God’s PR people by absolving Him of all disasters. Sure, we can link them to the curse on the earth due to the sin of man, and yes demons do seek to bring disasters on us, but by distancing God from disasters (in a misguided attempt to defend his goodness—which needs no help from us) we end up with a deistic God who just lets the universe go wherever it will, run amok because of our sin. That kind of God isn’t vitally involved in our lives. He does not work all things together for good, like the true God of the Bible.

In 2 Cor. 12, why did Paul stop praying after the third time that God would remove his thorn in the flesh? Because God made it clear He had intended this affliction for His glory and for Paul’s good.

Why was Paul afflicted with his disease or handicap, his thorn in the flesh? “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (2 Cor 12:7).

Notice Paul says Satan gave him his thorn in the flesh. But He simultaneously sees the larger picture—God gave him his thorn in the flesh. Clearly Satan does not give us adversity to keep us from becoming conceited. He wants us conceited. This passage attributes “a messenger of Satan” as something given with God’s intention for our good and His glory. Paradoxical? Yes. Contradictory? To pea brains like ours, yes. To God, no.

Like Joseph in Genesis 50, to his brothers: “You intended it for evil, God intended it for good.” God intended the selling of a boy into slavery for good? That may sound dangerously close to attributing evil to God, but Joseph’s perspective was exactly right. Satan always intends evil for evil. God never commits evil, but in His sovereignty He intends evil for good.

As Isaiah 53:10 says of Jesus, “It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer”—not simply it was the will of man and will of Satan, but God managed to bring some good out of it so it wasn’t quite as bad as it would have been.

Many of us try to get God off the hook by saying he has nothing to do with sickness and tragedy, that these things are done by men and Satan—they are the result of the fall, not of God’s will. But in doing so we distance God from the suffering in our lives.

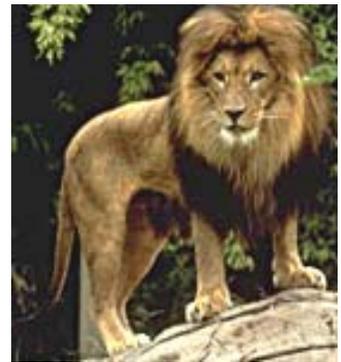
We are right to try to distance God from the commission of evil—Scripture does this—but we are wrong to distance Him from being sovereign over evil. Spurgeon suffered from a very painful malady and said something like “If I did not believe God sent me this affliction, I would despair.” Being an insulin dependent diabetic was orchestrated by God to increase my sense of dependence on Him. Being sued by an abortion clinic for 8.2 million dollars was orchestrated by God to take me out of a pastoral ministry I loved to do what He really wanted me to do. God’s hands weren’t tied by my genetic propensity toward my disease (result of the curse), nor by the vengeance of child-killers (result of human sin and demonic strategy). He didn’t merely “make the best of a bad situation.” He took a bad situation and used it for His highest good. So much so that I can no longer think of it as a bad situation—it was a severe mercy, a grace disguised in hardship.

If this were not true, anyone facing a terminal illness would have to believe that they had experienced bad luck, that God is either not as powerful or not as loving as He claims to be. Parents who’ve lost children would have to believe their death was a cosmic accident, and wouldn’t have happened if only they hadn’t been at that place at

that time or if others hadn’t been on the road or if only this or if only that. We can drive ourselves crazy with this. But embracing God’s higher purpose in events that are painful and even tragic is an affirmation of God’s greatness. This is not fatalism. It is faith in the promises and character of God.

God is sovereign over the ifs. He is never taken by surprise, never perplexed, never faced by circumstances out of His control. He is not only the main character in the drama of redemption. He is the author. He is not responsible for sin, yet He orchestrated a perfect plan, to His glory, in which sin had a part as the dark backdrop of His everlasting light. Could He have prevented sin? Of course. Can He prevent murders and rapes? Of course—and I’m confident He does so every day. But for those that do happen, they do not sneak by Him while He watches helplessly (as Rabbi Kushner suggests in *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* Better question: why do good things happen to bad people?) God’s sovereignty reigns without Him being held accountable to us. He stands before no one’s judgment seat—we stand before His. As Lewis put it, He is not a tame lion. (From time to time I read the last five chapters of Job. This is a great cure to the disease of thinking God owes me an explanation for what He does and doesn’t do.)

This doesn’t mean we don’t have free will, but it certainly means the free will of finite created beings isn’t anything near absolute like the free will of Creator God. It means that the will, decree, and glory of God are the life-breath of the universe. Everything—including the real choices made by Satan, the angels, and every person who’s ever lived—is subordinate to and secondary to the providence and glory of the one and only God. In other words, it’s not about us, it’s about Him. We’re not the point—He’s the point.



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“For my own name’s sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.” (Isaiah 48:9-11)



Myth of Adolescence by Alex Harris

The trained elephant of India is a perfect picture of the power of psychological captivity. Tamed and utilized for its enormous strength, the great beast stands nearly 10 feet tall and weighs up to 5 tons when fully grown. Its tasks may include uprooting full-grown trees, hauling great boulders, and carrying enormous loads on its shoulders. And yet, when the day's work is done and this powerful beast must be kept from wandering off during the night, its owner simply takes a piece of twine, attaches it to a small branch embedded in the ground, and ties it around the elephant's right hind leg. Reason dictates that the elephant can easily snap the twine or pull the twig from the ground, and yet the owner does not worry, fully confident that when morning comes he will find the animal exactly where he left him. And he does.

I'll admit that upon first hearing of this practice, I couldn't decide which was harder to believe: that the owner was confident, or that his confidence proved justified. A beast that can uproot trees is suddenly unable to pull up a twig? What is it about the piece of twine and the small branch that allows them to subdue all of the elephant's power? I soon discovered that it had little to do with the twine around the elephant's ankle, and everything to do with invisible shackles around its mind.

My contention is simple: The young adults of our generation are the elephant. Our twine is the 20th century concept of adolescence. Our twig is societal expectations. We stand restrained as a hurting world burns around us. Yet our twine and twig are of a recent origin. Young adults of the past were not so encumbered.

David Farragut, the U. S. Navy's first admiral, became a midshipman on the warship Essex at the age of 10. At the age of 12, a mere boy by modern standards, Farragut was given command of his first ship, sailing a captured vessel, crew, and prisoners, back to the U. S. after a successful battle. Young David was given responsibility at an early age, and he rose to the occasion.

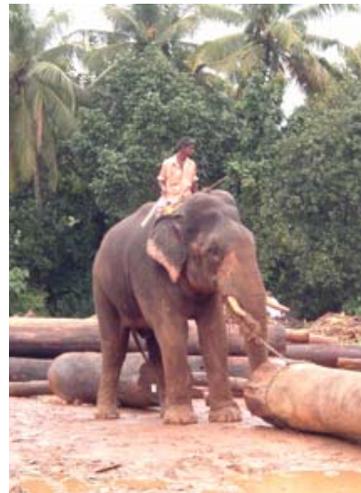
The father of our country, George Washington, though never thought to be particularly bright by his peers, began to master geometry, trigonometry, and surveying when he would have been a 5th or 6th grader in our day and ceased his formal education at 14 years of age. At the age of 16 he was named official surveyor for Culpepper County, Virginia. For the

next three years, Washington earned nearly \$100,000 a year (in modern purchasing power). By the age of 21, he had leveraged his knowledge of the surrounding land, along with his income, to acquire 2,300 acres of prime Virginia land.

These examples astound us in our day and age, but this is because we view life through an extra social category called 'adolescence', a category that would have been completely foreign to men and women just 100 years ago. Prior to the late 1800s there were only 3 categories of age: childhood, adulthood, and old age. It was only with the coming of the early labor movement with its progressive child labor laws, coupled with new compulsory schooling laws, that a new category, called adolescence, was invented. Coined by G. Stanley Hall, who is often considered the father of American psychology, 'adolescence' identified the artificial zone between childhood and adulthood when young people ceased to be children, but were no longer permitted by law to assume the normal responsibilities of adulthood, such as entering into a trade or finding gainful employment. Consequently, marriage and family had to be delayed as well, and so we invented 'the teenager', an unfortunate creature who had all the yearnings and capabilities of an adult, but none of the freedoms or responsibilities.

Teenage life became a 4-year sentence of continuing primary education and relative idleness known as 'high school' (four years of schooling which would later be repeated in the first two years of college). Abolished by law were the young Farraguts and young Washingtons, who couldn't spare the time to be children any longer than necessary. Cultivated instead was the culture we know today, where young people are allowed, encouraged, and even forced to remain quasi-children for much longer than necessary.

The effect of this seismic shift in America's philosophy of education is not limited to students in the public schools. As homeschoolers we may feel as though we have escaped the danger, but an honest evaluation proves that, as a whole, we also fall short of realizing our potential. After reading the examples of great men of our country's past, we should recognize that there is no reason why a 13 to 18 year old cannot behave as a responsible adult. History proves it is possible. Diverse cultures confirm its validity. The only thing



Alex and Brett Harris are the real deal— young men of character, depth, and eternal perspective. They're abandoned to Jesus. Their message is vital, for just such a time as this. Join the rebellion!

Randy Alcorn

holding young people back in America today is the twine of this perpetual recess called adolescence and the twig of lowered social expectations. We expect immaturity and irresponsibility, from ourselves and from one another, and that is exactly what we get.

I wrote of the great elephants of India, who, although they have the physical capacity to uproot trees during the day, can be restrained all night long by a piece of twine and a twig. How is this possible?

The elephant's training begins when it is still young and considerably less powerful. Removed from its mother, the elephant is then shackled with an iron chain to a large tree. For days and weeks on end, the baby elephant strains against its restraints, only to find that all exertion is useless. Then slowly, over a period of several weeks, sometimes months, smaller chains and smaller trees are used. Eventually, you can use a piece of twine and a small branch, and the great beast will not budge. Its mind is fully committed to the idea that it cannot go anywhere when there is something around its right hind leg.



sexually alluring, are not expected to attain any notable level of character beneath the surface.

Our world cannot last another generation of Christian young people who fit in. The shackles of society are on our minds and hearts, not our ankles. We are held back only by the myth of adolescence and the lies of social expectations. If we would only recognize that our restraints are illusory, and then let God's Word and all of history govern our sense of what we are capable of, we would be a force this world could no longer ignore.

We face a crisis and an opportunity. A crisis, in the sense that we can no longer afford to slowly drift towards adulthood, viewing the teen years as a vacation from responsibility, and an opportunity, in the sense that we can embrace life now and make a difference for the glory of God, and for the good of our family, our nation, and our world. Look down at your "ankle" and see the pathetic contrivance that has been restraining you. Now renew your mind in the light of God's Word and take a step forward.

And so I ask my generation, individually and corporately, "What is holding us back?" History demonstrates that we are far more capable than we think we are. Our failure to realize substantial achievement at early ages is due, not to any innate inadequacies on our part, but rather to our social conditioning. American society, with its media-saturated youth culture, not only follows trends and fads, but it creates them. Classrooms, TV shows, magazines, and websites are not only addressing us at the level of social expectations, but they are in fact dictating those expectations. They tell us how to act, think, and talk; they tell us what to wear, what to buy, and where to buy it; they tell us what to dream, what to value, and what to hate. We are being squeezed into a mold where there is no room for Christian character or competence. And as the famous proverb goes, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree."

In what could be considered the most maddening aspect of this crisis, not all areas of maturity are being stunted. In a powerful demonstration of teenagers' ability to meet the expectations set before them, we witness young people today reaching unprecedented levels of technological proficiency and sexual experience. It is ironic that many teenagers, while fluent in multiple computer languages, are not expected to carry on an intelligent conversation with an adult. It is heartbreaking that so many young girls, while constantly pressed to become more and more



What is the Rebelution?

by Alex and Brett Harris



The official definition of the 'rebelution' is "a teenage rebellion against the low expectations of an ungodly culture." The word 'rebelution' is a combination of the words "rebellion" and "revolution." So it carries a sense of an uprising against social norms. But in this case, it's not a rebellion against God-established authority, but against the low expectations of our society. It's a refusal to be defined by our ungodly, rebellious culture. Actually, we like to think of it as rebelling against rebellion.

It's not enough for us to try to ignore the culture. We have to create a counter-culture. The way we do that is by networking, exhorting, and encouraging one another in the fight. By God's grace, that's what The Rebelution has become. And when you have a community of young people mutually committed to doing hard things in their teen years for the glory of God, that's an incredibly powerful thing.



EPM's Plans to Fund the Elque Bible Translation Project

There is no language that cannot learn to praise God. He is the God of many cultures, a Lover of diversity, and the Creator of every tribe and every tongue. In the book of Revelation, John recorded the heavenly song of the 24 elders around God's throne who praise Him by singing, "for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The diversity of languages provides a wider range of opportunity to glorify God: "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:11)

But there is work yet to do so that every tribe can hear the good news of Christ in their own language. There are almost 2,300 languages around the world that do not have the Bible, comprising an estimated 270 million people who have yet to hear the good news of Christ in their mother tongues. These 270 million people do not yet know about the powerful love of the one true God, who through His blood freely offers to ransom and redeem them. They have yet to hear that this God really does speak *their* language!

The Project

Eternal Perspective Ministries, through the work of one of our ministry partners, is privileged to have the opportunity to help translate the Gospel into two languages, the El and Que languages. Translation has never before been attempted in these languages, which represent about 700,000 people living on a Southeast Asian island near China. It is a place where believers make up less than 1% of the population, and where there are only six churches, which use the national language, not the Elque languages. These churches are closely supervised by outsiders and are not allowed to bring in new people. Five of them are based on tradition and steeped in ritual.

The Word in their mother tongue will offer a catalyst for revival among these struggling groups. One church has already expressed an interest in the Elque cluster translation project. The small group of believers wants to explain their faith to their relatives and neighbors, but they have no Scripture tools. The only Scripture available to

them is in a foreign language and is irrelevant to their friends. Scripture in their mother tongue will provide the authority these Christians need to share their faith.

God has provided four mother tongue translators per language who will do full-time translation. Because the Elque people are oral learners, they will begin by translating some of the Biblical stories orally. Since neither El or Que is a written language at present, these oral stories, carefully chosen and taught, are designed to quickly open doors and soften hearts to Christ's message. During this initial oral phase of the project, linguists will also develop a written form for the Elque languages and produce the script for the JESUS film. This will provide a solid foundation for the video version of the JESUS film, written forms of the oral stories, and the translation of Acts.



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The Goal

The Elque believers desire to have at least the entire New Testament and Old Testament portions in each of their languages. The translators are committed to seeing these goals accomplished.

- In just over 36 months, they hope to be able to give the people access to some of Genesis, all of the Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, and the JESUS Film, using audio, video, print, and oral formats. This is Phase I.

- The ultimate goal is to translate the entire New Testament into both languages, along with various Old Testament portions, and to provide the people with the Faith Comes by Hearing audio Bible. All of this is Phase II.

- After the languages' key terms have been defined and the alphabet issues solved, things will speed up so that translators can complete this further work.

The Cost

- The total investment for Phase I, the initial three years, is \$119,393, or about \$37,000 per year. (This is the average investment for translation projects around the world.)

- Phase II, the completion of the New Testament as well as other Old Testament portions, will cost approximately \$33,000 per year.

- The final investment amount is unknown, as it is dependent upon the number of years to complete Phase II's entire New Testament, the Old Testament portions, and the Faith Comes by Hearing audio Bible.

Randy Alcorn says, "I believe so much in this project that I've committed Eternal Perspective Ministries to funding it. Much of the money will come from our book royalties, but I would ask others to prayerfully consider joining us in giving to this project. I know God will provide, and I want others to have the joy of being part of this with us."

Ray Boltz's song "Thank you" pictures us meeting people in Heaven who explain how our giving touched their lives. They say, "Thank you for giving to the Lord, I am so glad you gave." This is more than just a nice sentiment. It's something that will actually happen. Every time you give to world missions and famine relief and God's kingdom, dream about the day you will meet precious people in Heaven who your giving tremendously impacted.

Get Involved

The most enthusiastic supporters of this project are Elque believers who have come to faith



in majority-language churches. They see the need for heart language Scriptures and other resources. However, they cannot accomplish the task without help.

- EPM, with your help, can enable these translators to receive the training they need to undertake this work. As financial resources are made available, they will be able to purchase equipment and attend workshops where consultants will mentor them in translation. Prayerfully consider how God might use you to help make this possible.

- The translation team needs our prayers. As they commence their work in Bible translation, they are putting themselves and their families on the front lines of a fierce spiritual battle. Please commit today to pray for not only the technical challenges they face, but for their health, the safety and security of their families, and the myriad of details surrounding such a huge undertaking.

To receive postal mail prayer requests and updates about the translation's progress and/

or to contribute financially to the project, please contact Eternal Perspective Ministries at (503) 668-5200, or e-mail stephanie@epm.org with your name and physical mailing address. Because of the confidential nature of this project, and for security reasons, detailed progress updates will not be available on the EPM website, Randy's blog, or through e-mail.

The Big Picture: China

Population:
1,298,847,624

Languages:
201 living languages
22 New Testaments
18 have portions
15 have complete Bible
146 have no biblical translation



Into the Depths of God by Calvin Miller

“But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”

1 Corinthians 2:10

Natural vastness inspires, but it rarely results in an intimate togetherness with God. The rapture we feel standing before the Grand Canyon is more likely to erupt in a shout than in a conversation. The soaring galaxies are more prone to cause us to take our eyes from heaven and ask, “Father, are you there?” The best answers never come from beyond us. Why? Because God best declares himself from within us.

God becomes visible to those who look for him in the right place. Therefore, no eye—no literal eye—can see him! No ear can hear him! No mind can conceive him! He hides his vastness only in the deepest dimensions of our inner existence.

The world around us is the world of “outer” relationships. In such outer places we make friends, achieve success—get on in the world! In this busy, worried world we have appointments, face disappointments, and force our ego-driven souls to stab at achieving power. On the surface of our lives, things frenzied and dyspeptic dominate us. But in our hearts it is quite another matter.

First Corinthians 2:10 contains one little word that lunges at us with challenge: “But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the *deep* things of God.”

The apostle used the word *bathos* for “deep” here. This is the symbol that I want to keep central in this book.

Deep is the dwelling place of God. *Deep* is the character of the ocean.

Hold the metaphor for a moment and savor its lesson ahead of time. For deep is where the noisy, trashy surface of the ocean gets quiet and serene. No sound breaks the awesome silence of the ocean’s heart. Most Christians, however, spend their lives being whipped tumultuously through the surface circumstances of their days. Their frothy lifestyles mark the surface nature of their lives. Yet those who plumb the deep things of God discover true peace for the first time.

Deep is the gift of discipline.

Bathos is a word I really discovered at the Great Barrier Reef. Like all visitors to the Reef, I was at first overwhelmed by the odd sensation of standing up—only ankle deep—seventy or ninety miles out in the middle of the ocean. It was for me the odd sensation that Peter must have felt when he walked on the Sea of Galilee.

But once my “ankle-deep wonder” had passed, I remembered why I had made the trip. I was with my wife and son. My son had come to scuba dive while my wife and I snorkeled. Snorkeling is a pastime more than a sport. For while my son plunged deeply beneath clear waters to bury himself in the wonder of the mysterious ocean depths, my wife and I, wearing masks, only floated on the surface facedown.

In some ways what we were all seeing looked the same. But my wife and I literally sunburned our backs in our surface study of the reef, while our son plumbed its wonders.

There were other differences in the day. Our son had spent many years learning to go deep. Deep requires years of practice. Deep cannot be achieved instantly upon the first dive. The equalizing of pressure in the head and facial sinuses must be developed gradually, for going deep can be dangerous, even fatal.

What amazes me most is what we reported upon returning from the Great Barrier Reef. Ask me if I’ve been there, and I will hastily answer yes. So will my son. However, the truth is that the content of our experience was greatly different. We will both spend the rest of our lives talking about that experience and our enthusiasm will always be exuberant. But only our son really knew the Reef; only he understood the issue of depth.

Abraham Maslow conceptualized the pyramid of priorities. Only a few people, he said, ever become self-actualized. Only a few know who they are and live life to the fullest extent. Only a few live adjusted lives at the peak of his pyramid. In fact, Maslow said the whole world is comprised of non-peakers talking to non-peakers about peak experiences. In some ways it seems to me that much of Christianity is a conversation of snorkelers talking to each other of scuba experiences. If mere conversation or study groups were the path to depth experiences, the church would be deep indeed. But it is those who read and pray, not those who philosophize and chatter, who arrive at lives of real power.

The issue is going deep. Deep reveals the reality of God. Yet the snorkelers can use the language of divers, for the metaphors pass close. But they are not the same.

Excerpted from Calvin Miller’s book Into the Depths of God. Pictures by Randy Alcorn



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Randy's Blog

Visit randyalcorn.blogspot.com for a more personal side of Randy, his family, and the ministry—as well as thoughts about Jesus, Scripture, the Christian life, and much more.

The subjects include:

- The Blessing of Gratitude, the Curse of Complaining
- Why I'm Leery of Harry Potter
- Randy attending the International Christian Retail Show

Free Monthly EPM E-News Update

Each issue of our new EPM E-News Update will contain the latest news about Randy's books, radio and speaking appearances, EPM family news and special projects.

To receive the E-News Update via email, go to www.epm.org/enews.html.



International Day of Prayer November 11, 2007

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) is a global day of intercession for persecuted Christians worldwide. Its primary focus is the work of intercessory prayer and citizen action on behalf of persecuted communities of the Christian faith.

The IDOP began in 1996 through the efforts of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) in cooperation with a variety of denominations and faith-based organizations. Now Christians in over 130 countries take part in IDOP and are growing in awareness of the problem of persecution and spending time in prayer.

For more information on IDOP, go to their website: www.persecutedchurch.org

To reserve your free 2007 IDOP Kit, please call Open Doors at 888-5-BIBLE-5 (524-2535), or e-mail usa@opendoors.org (specify "Free IDOP Kit" in subject line and include your mailing address).



*Remember those
in prison as if
you were their
fellow prisoners,
and those
who are
mistreated as if
you yourselves
were suffering.*

(Hebrews 13:3)

*Question
and Answer
by Randy Alcorn*

Can a believer lose a crown that is already laid to his account?

In your book In Light of Eternity, you say we can lose our crowns and quote I Corinthians 9:27: "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." I have understood the word "castaway" translated as rejected from the competition. I can see this as not receiving a crown that would have been available just as not receiving a reward that would have been available, but losing a crown and having it taken away from you, a crown that is already laid to your

account? I don't see anything like that in this verse. I have read the context and have taken into account verse 25. I also look at the words in the verse and interpret them in light of their biblical usage, keeping in mind figures of speech, etc. Does this verse say you can lose your crowns?



Randy's Answer:

Revelation 3:11 says, "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." We can be disqualified from earning our crowns (1 Corinthians 9:27), we can lose them (1 Corinthians 3:15), or we can have them taken from us (Matthew 25:28-29). When we seek our rewards from men, we forfeit rewards from God (Matthew 6:5-6).

Note that I did not say 1 Corinthians 9:27 says you can lose a crown you already earned, but that "we can be disqualified from earning our crowns."

However, I think anyone running in a race would consider it a true loss to be disqualified, even if technically you can't lose something until you first have it.

1 Corinthians 3:14-15 speaks of loss of reward: "If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." The loss isn't loss of *salvation*, but it is loss of *reward*. The idea is the loss of reward you otherwise would have had. It doesn't directly say that actual reward laid to your account is taken, but reward which should

have been laid to your account—and would have been if you'd been faithful—is lost.

"Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:11) seems to imply that if you don't hold on to what you have (already), you can have it taken from you.

2 John 1:8 says, "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully." This speaks of partial reward, reward that is less because some of it has been lost.

In Mark 9:41 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." This could be seen either as saying no reward, once earned, can be lost, or that if one fails to give cups of cold water to the needy, he will "lose his reward."

So Scripture repeatedly uses the word "loss" in relation to reward. I'm not sure all that entails, and can't answer all that's behind your question, but I hope these verses help clarify the actual teaching of Scripture.

The following is from one of my articles on eternal rewards which puts this into context:

Losing Our Rewards

1. We can forfeit rewards from God by seeking them from men.

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6).

"How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44)

2. We can have rewards taken from us because of our unfaithfulness.

"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matthew 25:28-29).

3. We can become disqualified for rewards because of moral and spiritual compromise.

"No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will

Revelation 3:11 says, "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

4. We can lose rewards because of an unproductive life.

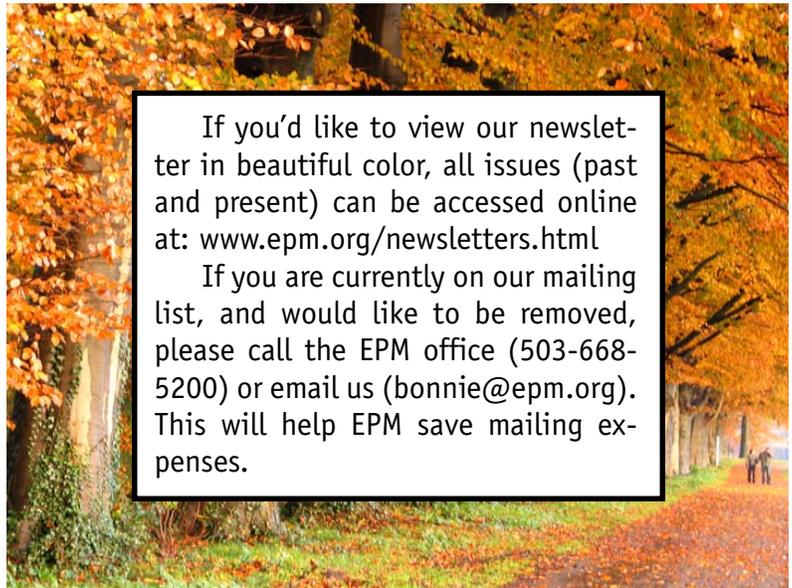
"If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

5. We can lose rewards by carelessness and waste.

"Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2 John 8).

6. We can have our rewards taken from us because of lack of attention to the obedient life.

"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).



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What Kids Want to Know About Heaven

(Real questions submitted to EPM website)

Will my sisters still be my sisters in Heaven?

– Sydney, age 7

Will our pets go to Heaven? – Jeremy, age 13

Are there real dinosaurs in Heaven? – Kyle, age 6



Will the dinosaurs in Heaven eat us?

– Daniel, age 6

Do we have to go to sleep in Heaven?

– Benjamin, age 4

Will there be bicycles built for two in Heaven? I want to ride one with my brother who is already there.

– Hannah, age 11



A. W. Tozer on The Church . . .

Different From the World

Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." - 2 Corinthians 6:17

The church's mightiest influence is felt when she is different from the world in which she lives. Her power lies in her being different, rises with the degree in which she differs, and sinks as the difference diminishes.

This is so fully and clearly taught in the Scriptures and so well illustrated in Church history that it is hard to see how we can miss it. But miss it we do, for we hear constantly that the Church must try to be as much like the world as possible, excepting, of course, where the world is too, too sinful....

Let us plant ourselves on the hill of Zion and invite the world to come over to us, but never under any circumstances will we go over to them. The cross is the symbol of Christianity, and the cross speaks of death and separation, never of compromise. No one ever compromised with a cross. The cross separated between the dead and the living. The timid and the fearful will cry "Extreme!" and they will be right. The cross is the essence of all that is extreme and final. The message of Christ is a call across a gulf from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and from Satan to God.

The Set of the Sail, 35, 36

Staying in the First Grade

...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 3:13, 14

There are Christians who grow up and have no relish for anything spiritually advanced. They're preoccupied with their first lessons. The average church is a school with only one grade and that is the first one. These Christians never expect to get beyond that and they don't want to hear a man very long who wants to take them beyond that. If their pastor insists they do their homework and

get ready for the next grade, they begin to pray that the Lord will call "our dear brother" somewhere else. The more they hate him the more they bear down on the words "our dear brother." All he's trying to do is prepare them for another grade, but that church is dedicated to the first grade, and the first grade is where it's going to remain.

Paul said some of them went up into the second grade and gave it up, and said, "It's too hard here," and they went back to the first.

"How long have you been in the first grade, Junior?"

"Twelve years."...

Paul said, "Forgetting what is behind...I press on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:13b-14a). There was a man not satisfied with the first grade.

Success and the Christian, 4, 5

A Model for Other Churches

...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. - 1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8

I would like to see a church become so godly, so Spirit-filled that it would have a spiritual influence on all of the churches in the entire area.

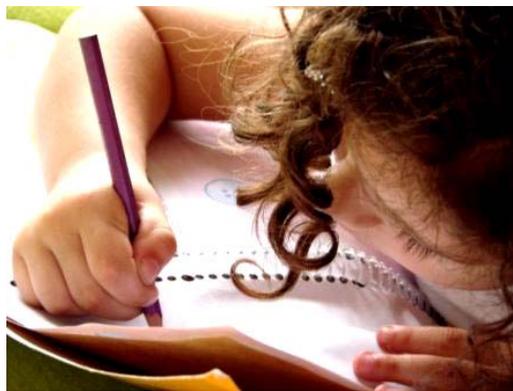
Paul told some of his people, "You became a model to all the believers" and "your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8).

It is entirely right that I should hope this of you. I could hope that we might become so Spirit filled, walking with God, learning to worship, living so clean

and so separated that everybody would know it, and the other churches in our area would be blessed on account of it....

There is no reason why we could not be a people so filled with the Spirit, so joyfully singing His praises and living so clean in our business and home and school that the people and other churches would know it and recognize it.

The Counselor, 9, 10



The cross is the essence of all that is extreme and final.

Letters to EPM

Wait Until Then, illustrated by Doron Ben-Ami, is a beautiful work that will be shared by many. There are 56 million people with disabilities in America. I am so thankful you have touched this audience for Heaven. May all 56 million find Christ! - **M. M., Lynden, WA**

It's very difficult to put into words how much your teachings on purity and sexual immorality mean to me. I am a former church leader who fell into horribly ugly and damaging choices involving adultery, pornography and incest. (See? I just used the term you taught was wrong—I said “fell” into those choices. Well, I didn't fall, did I? The ugly, polluted and life-altering things I did, I did by my own choice. I agree—using “fell” implies that I'm the victim. In one sense, I am—but I am the victimizer, not my wife and daughter.)

As I read *Sexual Temptation* and *The Purity Principle*, I feel like screaming, “Why?” The quote on page 36 of *The Purity Principle* says it best: “If someone could have helped me envision the tragedy (sexual misconduct) would bring to my ministry—not to mention family, friends, secular co-workers and untold dozens of other people who are victims too—and the disgrace it would bring to Christ's name (which really should be first), I might never have done it.” To expand on that, if someone would have told me the magnitude of the damage and loss my actions would cause (marriage, family, a relationship with my teenage daughter, totally missing involvement with my infant daughter [now age 2], loss of career, home, retirement plans, and a host of other things, including my time spent in prison), well, I'm sure I would have thought more than twice about committing these acts of sexual immorality.

I know I'm forgiven, but the damage is already done. Will I ever know if my daughters will survive and grow from this? Have I done irreparable damage? What I do know is that His love is perfect and His plan is holy, and what Satan meant for evil will turn out for good for those who love Him. My main prayer is that my family finds Jesus in their hearts and that they look to Him—and not to me—for their own purity. - **Prison inmate**

Our 14-year-old daughter just read *Deception*. Usually when we recommend a book to her, she is a little leery...but Sunday afternoon she picked up the book and by 11 p.m. had almost finished it! It was both exciting and spiritually uplifting to her. Our daughter is in junior high here in

France—it's often rough for her to keep on for Jesus—but books such as yours really contribute to her faith. Now she wants to read *Deadline* and *Dominion* as well! - **D. M., Angers, France**

I just finished reading your book *Deadline*. I must say that it made me think more about my role as a Christian in the service of the Lord. It helped put a perspective on matters that I thought were out of my hands.

I ask that you would pray for me and my company and all the other soldiers here in Iraq. - **R. B.**

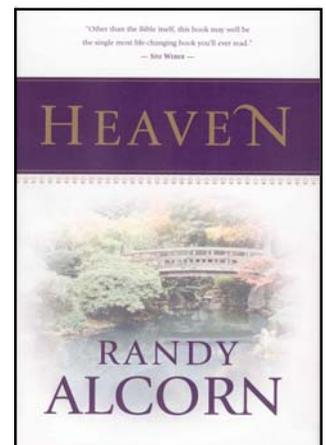
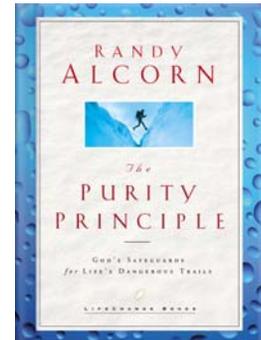
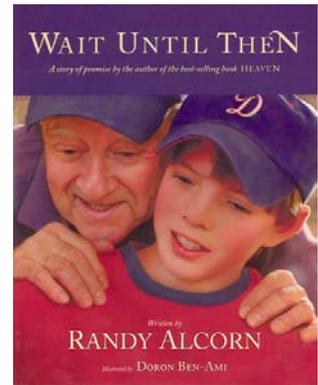
My wife and I are 100% debt free. This is due mainly to your book *The Treasure Principle*.

We have been so blessed by this book! We just bought a modest house. Since becoming debt free, we have been assessed by the government at tax time: our giving is above average for the area in which we live. It's a joy every year to get the tax man's letter. - **H. C.**

We are now reading *Heaven for Kids* together at night around the table—the six of us. It is a good start to many great conversations. We really appreciate that it is helping to build a good, healthy anticipation of heaven in the kids—and in us too. - **Missionary family from Australia**

My 17-year-old, special son who was born with C. P. passed away unexpectedly in his sleep. I didn't even get to say good-bye. All I could think about was finding a book on Heaven so I could know about where my son was. Everything I found was not much and I knew everything I read. The other day I was in LifeWay and there it was right in front of me, *Heaven*. I couldn't believe it. It was as though God had you write this book just for me. And I know with all my heart it was for me and for many others. I've almost finished it and I bought another one because it is such a wonderful witness. I gave the book tonight to my mother and my father who are not saved in memory of my son. I am believing God is using your book to show my mother and father the truth they have been running from. - **R. L.**

I just finished *Edge of Eternity*. I loved it! I thought it was thought-provoking and was right in step with my walk with the Lord since I came to Him a year ago. This book was recommended to me by a friend and now I have been telling everyone about it and carry it too. - **T. F.**





The Parent Game: Playing for Keeps

by Randy Alcorn

The following is an interview between Randy Alcorn and a representative of Multnomah Bible College, originally appearing in the Multnomah Message.

What is the greatest challenge parents of young people face?

I would say balance. Parents have to balance their responsibility to govern their children's lives with their teenagers' need to develop independence and freedom. Parents have to maintain that tension.

Is it an issue of hanging on too much or letting go too soon?

I think both happen. Some parents let go too soon and feel like they've lost control. They feel like everything is their kid's decision. For example, I've heard parents say, "I wish my kids wouldn't play that terrible rock music."

Well, what are parents for? That's like saying, "I wish my kids wouldn't play on the freeway. Every day they go and play on the freeway and I just feel sick about it."

You're exaggerating a bit, aren't you?

Sure. But my point is, parents say the moral equivalent of that. It's frightening to hear how little control parents feel they have. It creates anxiety.

Without control, what can you do?

When you sense there's low control, it's likely you can do something about it. With every responsibility, God also gives us authority. Parents are responsible for their kids, which puts them in authority. They don't have to apologize for it.

Of course, they can go to the other extreme and smother their kids. But once the child is out of their environment, he'll go nuts because he hasn't developed any wisdom. *Proverbs* is a key book for parents. It shows that children need to learn first-hand the consequences of sin and the reward of wisdom. Unfortunately, many parents try to gain control too late.

They can still redeem their relationship, but they have to do it carefully. Children have learned certain levels of freedom. For a parent to suddenly come home after reading one article or going to one seminar and say, "From this moment forward there will be no rock music"—when you've let them listen to rock music for eight years—is not going to work without some confession of your failure and some heart-felt communication.

It would be better to come home and say, "I want to apologize to you for not parenting you the way I need to. I feel a new conviction and I'm going to pray about some areas where I can exercise more responsibility in your life, to encourage and protect you. You may not like some of it, but I want you to know I love you."

That's humbling. It's also time-consuming.

Yes, that's the other problem: mother ends up doing all the work with the kids while father stays at a distance. It comes back to who reads Christian books. Of those sold in Christian bookstores, 80 percent are bought by women. Then you have radio. Who listens to "Focus on the Family"? Or "Family Life Today"?

It's great that women get all this input, but sometimes they end up having to run the family. A woman trying to always keep teenage boys in check is in a tough situation.

Many Christian women are really burned out. When I was pastor of counseling, my typical week would consist of 25 counseling appointments, many of those with women who had very high expectations for themselves—and sometimes, very high expectations of their families. Both were unrealistic.

You're saying stress differs between the sexes?

Both men and women experience stress, but there are some distinctive stresses on each gender. Nanci and I have both overextended ourselves in the past and have learned some things about pacing ourselves.

God calls us not first to excellence, but to faithfulness. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that it's required of a steward to be found faithful, not that he be found excellent. Jesus said at the end of his life, "I have finished the work that you gave me to do." He didn't do any less than that, but he didn't do any more.



It's frightening to hear how little control parents feel they have.

So, what does that mean in terms of parenting?

The ideal is prevention. Parents need to develop their relationship with their child and build the level of intimacy that gives them the right to come down hard in certain areas.

Too often the relationship is typified by Mt. Olympus. Parents come down like lightning bolts to their kids, then return to the top of their mountain. The relationship is confrontational, when what they need is a consistent, loving relationship in which 90 percent of what is done is affirming. Criticism should be the exception instead of the rule.

Jesus came down to us in the incarnation and we need to come down from our adult world and enter our children's lives. Only then can we help pull them up into maturity.

You raised two daughters. What patterns did you establish with them?

We talked a lot. When the girls were young, we sat down and read Bible stories and talked about principles, trying to plug those into their current situation—whether it be kindergarten or sixth grade or high school, the principle is the same. We tried to spend the time with them that allowed us to see their lives as they happened. That was a big thing to us.



You sound like you've thought this through.

If we don't think strategically about parenting, then we've made a statement: our children aren't important, or parenting comes so naturally that it happens without our attention.

If we're going to influence our children, we need to strategize—regrouping and reevaluating along the way.

Can the church help with that?

Yes. We can educate and encourage parents to be involved in issues that may affect their children. But godly living begins at home, in our own lives before God.

If we as parents cultivate our inner person and develop our character, we give our children footsteps to follow.

The most important part of our lives is the part that only God sees. We need to be concerned with the inner realities rather

than protecting an image. In terms of parenting, the best thing we can do is be sure our relationship with God is in order, then our relationship with each other. The greatest gift we can give our children is to love God and our spouse with all our hearts.

If we as parents cultivate our inner person and develop our character, we give our children footsteps to follow.

Charles Spurgeon Speaks On Foolish Questions

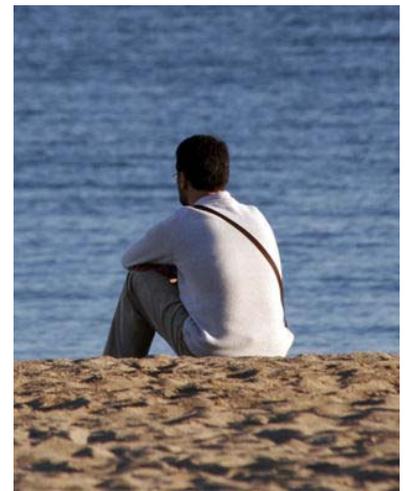
Our days are few, and are far better spent in doing good, than in disputing over matters which are, at best, of minor importance. The old schoolmen did a world of mischief by their incessant discussion of subjects of no practical importance; and our Churches suffer much from petty wars over abstruse points and unimportant questions. After everything has been said that can be said, neither party is any the wiser, and therefore the discussion no more promotes knowledge than love, and it is foolish to sow in so barren a field.

Questions upon points wherein Scripture is silent; upon mysteries which belong to God alone; upon prophecies of doubtful interpretation; and upon mere modes of observing human ceremonies, are all foolish, and wise men avoid them. Our business is neither to ask nor answer foolish questions, but to avoid them altogether; and if we observe the apostle's precept (Titus 3:8) to be careful to maintain good works, we shall find ourselves far too much occupied with profitable business to take much interest in unworthy, contentious, and needless strivings.

There are, however, some questions which are the reverse of foolish, which we must not avoid, but fairly and honestly meet, such as these:

Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I renewed in the spirit of my mind? Am I walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit? Am I growing in grace? Does my conversation adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour? Am I looking for the coming of the Lord, and watching as a servant should do who expects his master? What more can I do for Jesus? Such enquiries as these urgently demand our attention; and if we have been at all given to cavilling, let us now turn our critical abilities to a service so much more profitable. Let us be peace-makers, and endeavour to lead others both by our precept and example, to "avoid foolish questions."

Charles Spurgeon, Morning and Evening: Daily readings



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

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EPM's Plans to Fund the Elque Bible
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The Parent Game: Playing for Keeps

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