



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

Truth & Grace in an Age of Lies

By Randy Alcorn

What distinguished the first Christians from the world around them? It certainly wasn't their buildings—they had none. It wasn't their programs—they had none. It wasn't their political power—they had none.

Read Acts 2 and Acts 4 and you see a radical difference in the church, a profound transformation in the way people treated each other. Christians were different in the way they behaved, in the way they lived. They were characterized by visible acts of love and generosity and joyous sacrifice for the good of others.

Acts 4:32-33 says, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all."

The truth of the resurrection and the grace of generous living—truth was what they believed and spoke and grace was how they lived. After the similar description in Acts 2, where we're told the believers sold their possessions to help the needy, it says "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

The grace they gave was an echo of the grace they received. As thunder follows lightning, our grace to others follows God's grace to us.

Two ingredients combined to make this impact on the world: truth and grace. The truth, the teachings and doctrines of the church, was the ethical foundation of right and wrong. And the grace of God, which

granted them forgiveness and empowered them to forgive others, enabled them to embrace what was good and turn away from what was bad. That is the heart of ethics—discerning and living out what is good while rejecting what is bad.

When the world heard and saw the distinctive ethics of the early Christians—what they believed and how they lived, truth and grace—people were drawn to the living God.

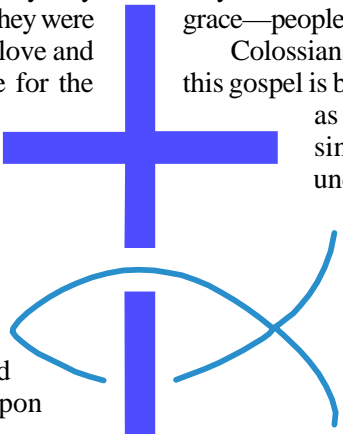
Colossians 1:6 says "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

The gospel is characterized by grace and truth. But grace and truth are not just part of a religious system. They are both embodied in Jesus Christ. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and

made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The word translated "made his dwelling" is the word for "tabernacled." Christ tabernacled among us, picturing him as the dwelling place of God on earth. God's glory no longer dwelt in a building, the temple, but in Christ. He was the holy of holies. But when he ascended he deposited the shekinah glory of God in us—we became the living temples, the holy of holies, both corporately as churches (1 Cor. 3:16-17) and individually as Christians (1 Cor. 6:19).

God's essence, his shekinah glory, was visibly manifested in two things: grace and truth.



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To be Christlike is to be full of what he was full of: grace and truth. Is the world seeing Christ in us? If we are receptacles of his glory we have a very short biblical checklist of what we should be full of: grace and truth.

John tells us, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

The law was righteous but it had no power to transform us. It was necessary, but not sufficient. Jesus brought us what no law, no list of rules—no matter how righteous—could bring us. He brought us grace and truth.

The world today is desperately hungry for two things—truth and grace. It is not enough for us to offer them one—if we are to be true Christians, we must offer them both.

Today you can make a case that the church is simultaneously too hostile to the world and too friendly to it. Sinners wanted to be around Jesus, but today they don't want to be around the followers of Jesus. Why?

On the other hand, when the church tries to make itself a place where sinners are comfortable, the distinctives of Christianity are sacrificed. The church becomes one more social club that helps people *feel* good but fails to help them *be* good. Why?

Because in the one case Christians emphasize truth but neglect grace. In the other case they emphasize grace but neglect truth.

Some churches are strong on truth but weak on grace. Some are strong on grace but weak on truth. Truth is not complete without grace and grace is not complete without truth. Grace without truth deceives people. Truth without grace crushes people.

Martin Luther said the devil doesn't care which side of the horse we fall off of as long as we don't stay in the saddle. A

saddle has two stirrups. To stay in the saddle, the church needs to mount the horse with one foot solidly in the stirrup of truth and the other solidly in the stirrup of grace.

Now, finding this balance isn't easy. In the past I've intervened on behalf of children at abortion clinics and been arrested and gone to jail for peaceful non-violent civil disobedience. One of the consequences of that was having to step out of pastoral ministry when one of the clinics tried to garnish my wages from the church. I believed and still believe the truth that unborn children are created in the image of God and that truth has com-

pelled me to say and do things that are not popular not only among nonchristians but many Christians. I've always tried to represent the truth in a spirit of grace, but not everyone sees it that way.

Last year my church, Good Shepherd Community Church, was picketed by thirty protestors because some of our people go down to LoveJoy abortion clinic and sidewalk counsel. We offer women alternatives to abortion and share the gospel with them and sometimes hold up signs encouraging them to reconsider their decision and let their babies live. So three pro-abortion groups decided to combine forces and give us a taste of our own medicine. (The groups were Radical Women for Choice, Rock for Choice and Lesbian Avengers.)

We heard they were coming so we set out donuts and coffee for them and tried to strike up conversations. I spent an hour and a half talking with a man named Charles who was holding a sign saying "Keep Abortion Legal." I gave him coffee and when it started raining I held an umbrella over him. We talked a bit about abortion, but most of the conversation was about Christ. I shared the gospel with him start to finish, he gave me his address and I've sent him a couple of my books and some other gospel material.

Now, I really liked Charles. But when you believe as strongly as I do that abortion is the killing of a child, it's a bit awkward serving coffee and holding an umbrella for someone who is holding a proabortion sign—imagine if they were holding a sign saying "Legalize rape" or "Let's kill black people." To me, it's the same thing. Yet, because of the opportunity to share the love of Christ, his truth and his grace, I felt it was the right thing to do. *As truth sometimes puts us in awkward situations, so does grace.*

The morning we were being picketed, some brothers had heard about it and showed up wearing sandwich boards that talked about sin and hell. Their message content was biblical. However, there was a bit of a philosophical difference. One of the street preachers barged between my daughter and I and a few of the Lesbian Avengers just as I thought we had a chance to open a conversation with them. Several of us spoke with the street preachers, most cooperated but a few decided we were compromisers waffling on the truth and that it was an abomination for us to be giving donuts to people who needed to be confronted with their sin.

A few letters were exchanged that week and the following Sunday two street preachers came to our church and picketed us.



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When you stand for truth you get picketed by some nonchristians, and when you try to demonstrate grace you get picketed by some Christians. With some you may be way too radical, with others not nearly radical enough. So you have to decide you're not going to live for the applause of one particular group, but live out your life before the Audience of One, your only final and ultimate Judge.

Directly out of truth flows *ethics*. Ethics is a subject matter many people see as irrelevant or secondary, not at the heart of the Christian life. I disagree. Ethics is how we follow Christ, how we live out our lives to the glory of God. Embracing Christian ethics, in truth and grace, can be a powerful witness for Christ.

Last year I met with a businessman who'd been attending our small group Bible study. A few days earlier at our study this man opened up about his job situation where his employer routinely promises his customers things the company doesn't deliver. Once he got into the details a few men in the group graciously pointed out that he needed to confront his boss with this and if his boss doesn't change his business ethics, he should resign. His already sensitive conscience had led him to the same conclusion. The group's counsel struck a very responsive chord in him.

The next day he called me. He said "You know, listening to you guys at the group made me realize you have a perspective I really need." Two days later we met for lunch to discuss his ethical dilemma. I had the privilege of sharing with him the ultimate ethical dilemma, sin, and the provision of Christ for his sin. We bowed our heads and there in a restaurant in Boring, Oregon, he confessed and repented of his sins and gave his life to Christ.

What did God use to bring about this man's conversion? Though many factors played a part, the immediate thing that week was his ethical dilemma. The persuasive power of Christian ethics advocated by men in that group appealed to his conscience in a world that had violated his conscience. In a context of grace he heard the truth.

Both truth and grace are necessary, but neither is sufficient. One without the other leads to heresy and superficiality.

The darker the world gets, the brighter the light of truth shines. Romans 2 says God has written his law on human

hearts, in the conscience. When the world hears the truth, accompanied by grace, many are drawn to that truth by the moral vacuum they feel in their lives.

My wife's folks have a cabin in Manzanita, down on the Oregon coast. Every year they have a July 4th parade, with hundreds of people lining the streets. People in the parade, on the floats and trucks, throw salt water taffy into the crowd. One year, an hour after the parade was over, I walked up the main street to a store. I was shocked



at what I saw. The street was covered with salt water taffy wrappers. Hundreds of them, everywhere. If there'd been one or two, you probably wouldn't notice. But the cumulative effect was huge. The whole town had become an eyesore.

Sin is like that. As Scripture says, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Take each violation of truth, each case of lying and cheating, and multiply them by a million daily situations in business, school, family and government. Any one of those by itself might seem harmless and insignificant, but put them together and you have a monumental moral drift. The cumulative results of "little deceptions" add up to the moral crisis surrounding us, from the White House to the houses we all live in.

According to Patterson and Kim's book *The Day America Told the Truth*, 74% of Americans say, "I will steal from those who won't really miss it" (*James Patterson and Peter Kim, The Day America Told the Truth, New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991*).

64% say, "I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage." 53% say, "I will cheat on my spouse—after all, given the chance, he or she will do the same."

Only 31% of Americans agree with the statement "Honesty is the best policy." When asked what they would do for ten million dollars, 25% said they would abandon their entire family, 23% said they would become prostitutes for a week or more, and 7%—one out of fourteen—said they would murder a stranger.

To what can we attribute this startling unraveling of the moral fiber of our nation? Patterson and Kim say, "In the 1950's 75% of Americans believed that religion was very important. Today the figure is 54%" (*Patterson & Kim, p. 3*).

They say Americans now live in a "moral vacuum" where "the religious figures and scriptures that gave us rules for so many centuries, the political system that gave us our laws, all have lost their meaning in our moral imagination." (*Patterson & Kim, p. 32*) Based on thousands of interviews, they say,

Americans of the 1990s stand alone in a way unknown to any previous generation. When we want to answer a question of right and wrong, we ask ourselves...the overwhelming majority of people (93%) said that they—and nobody else—determine what is and what isn't moral in their lives. They base their decisions on their own experience, even on their daily whims.

...We are a law unto ourselves. We have made ourselves the authority over church and God. We have made ourselves the clear authority over the government. We have made ourselves the authority over laws and the police.

What's right? What's wrong? When you are making up your own rules, your own moral codes, it can make the world a confusing place. Most Americans are very confused about their personal morals right now (*Patterson & Kim, p. 27,34*).

Patterson and Kim ask and answer a critical question about the relationship between religion and morality in this country. How does the growing number of non-religious Americans compare to those who still hold to traditional beliefs? Can a judgment be made about who's more moral?

People describing themselves as "very religious" (14%) definitely make better citizens. In the self-portraits they painted for us, the very religious scored

much higher than did other people on moral questions that most of us would accept as defining citizenship in a civilized society... Religious people are far less likely to have a price (*Patterson & Kim, p. 201*).

... Religion appears to play a strong role in building moral character. We found that people who defined themselves as religious showed a much stronger commitment to moral values and social institutions than did nonreligious people (*Patterson & Kim, p. 61*).

Based on their interviews Patterson and Kim maintain, "A let down in moral values is now considered the number one problem facing our country. Eighty percent of us believe that morals and ethics should be taught in our schools again" (*Patterson & Kim, p. 8*).

Unfortunately, no suggestion is made as to what these morals and ethics could be based upon if not what they always were in our past—the Judeo-Christian morality rooted in the Scriptures. But there is a second problem—even if we recognized the truth, we have no internal righteousness to live out the truth. Unless, that is, we understand the meaning of God's *grace*.

When traveling in the Soviet Union in 1991 I had the opportunity to talk with two public school principals. Both were communists and both had followed the strict practice of keeping religion out of the classrooms. After seventy years under Lenin's atheistic state, they now realized there was a severe moral crisis in the Soviet Union.

One of them said, "Our children have nothing to believe in, no morality, no reason to be honest, good citizens." His solution to this problem? "We want to bring the Christian religion back to our young people, back to our classrooms, so we can have a moral society again."

Though these men had no strong religious faith themselves, they were recognizing what we in America have forgotten—the essential connection between a society's morality and its religious beliefs. They were open to seeing the truth—and we sought to use the opportunity to share with them the truth-based life-changing grace of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, the moral condition of the church—which alone is capable of

helping this immoral world—is itself in serious jeopardy. In the early 80's I was writing my first book *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*. At the time it was highly controversial, because I was pointing out that instead of the spirit of the church invading the spirit of the city, the spirit of the city had invaded the spirit of the church. My premise was that because we have become so much like the world we have very little to offer the world. In other words, an unholy world can never be won to Christ by an unholy church.

People could hardly believe back then my stories of pastors committing immorality—that was before the era of Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Bakker. What were startling revelations in my book fifteen years ago have long since become routine. My illustrations of offensive TV programming that were so shocking then now seem tame.

We have become so desensitized to sin that it's common for Christians to recommend movies to each other that have nudity, sex scenes and offensive language, but "aren't that bad" compared to other movies. After all, they only have "just a little" immorality in them. (Question: if you knew there was "just a little" excrement in a cookie, would you eat it?)

To bring home the degree of the church's moral desensitization in the past decade, let me say something I hope you'll find disturbing.

Suppose I came to you and said, "There's an attractive girl down the street. Let's get together and go look through her window and watch her undress and

lay back on a couch and pose naked from the waist up. Then this girl and her boyfriend will go get in a car and have sex—let's get as close as we can and listen to them and watch the windows steam up."

You'd be shocked. Your respect for me would dissolve. You'd think, "he's disqualified for the ministry." And you'd be absolutely right.

Suppose I then said, "Listen, the young woman has given us permission. She knows we'll be looking at her. She doesn't mind." Would that change your thinking about the situation? Of course not.

But suppose instead I had you over to my house and said, "Let's watch the *Titanic*."

The majority of Christians have seen this movie, many recommend it, whole youth groups view it together, and many have purchased it and show it in their homes.

Instead of looking through a window glass, they look through a television glass. But they still watch people undress and seduce each other and have sex together. They never seem to ask how something shameful somehow becomes moral because it's watched through one kind of glass instead of another.

"*Titanic*? Wonderful. It wasn't even rated R!"

Suppose I said to you, "My wife and I are going to make love tonight. Why don't you come over and watch? And when we're done, we'll watch you and your wife have sex. It's okay, we're married."

How would you react. What about if I said, "Let's watch *Braveheart*?"

Think about it. Every day Christians across the country, including many church leaders, watch women and men undress through the window of television and watch people commit acts of fornication and adultery that our God calls an abomination. That's what it is—that's the truth. And that's how out of touch with the truth we've become. We're a bunch of voyeurs, peeping toms, entertained by sin.

There's nothing new about sexual immorality. But there's something new about the ease with which it invades our home. We live in a technological Corinth. Parents who wouldn't dream of letting a dirty-minded adult alone with their children do it every time they let their kids sit and surf channels without supervision.

Christians who wouldn't consider going to a strip club watch strippers on videos, TV shows and news programs.

Because we've become desensitized, our ethics as Christian parents have sunk so low, our children learn to think of immorality as normal. Why are we surprised when a girl gets pregnant or a boy gets a girl pregnant when we've allowed them to watch hundreds or thousands of acts of sexual immorality on television and hear tens of thousands of jokes with sexual innuendoes?

A survey was taken at one Promise Keepers gathering of 1500 men. One half of them had viewed pornography within the previous week. Not the previous five years, the previous week. And that didn't count watching R rated movies.

This isn't the place or time to elaborate further on sexual temptation, but we'd be glad to send anyone at no charge a copy of my booklet *Sexual Temptation: How Christian Leaders Can Win the Battle*. It offers help not only for Christian leaders but to anyone, especially to men. It offers both truth and grace.

I'll end by telling a story about a day seven years ago where I was greatly tempted to underplay God's truth in the name of grace.

I was raised in a nonchristian home. A year after I became a Christian at age fifteen, my mom came to the Lord. But my father was the most resistant person to the gospel I've ever known. He had told me never to talk to him about that "religious stuff" again. I'd still give him Christian books and give him my own books, which always have the gospel in them, knowing my books were the only Christian books he'd read. (*Deadline* and *Dominion* both contain things I wanted my Dad to hear.)

Seven years ago, at age 84, Dad was diagnosed as having terminal cancer. The doctor estimated he had six months to live. One day I got a call from him, from his home in Vancouver, Washington. He sounded very distressed and he said, "I've called to say good-bye. I'm in pain from the cancer—I know the end's coming. I've got a gun to my head. Sorry to leave you a mess." I knew my Dad well enough to know he had never bluffed in his life. I begged him to put down the gun and to hold on till I got there.

I jumped in the car, made the thirty-minute drive in twenty. I knocked on the door, no answer. I walked in, and on the floor I saw a rifle and a handgun. I called out for my father, turned the corner into his room and held my breath for what I was about to see. Right then he walked out and bumped into me. Heart pounding, I took him to the hospital and they scheduled surgery for the next morning.

I came in early, an hour before surgery. I prayed that somehow, in his pain, with no easy way out, God would break through to my father. I opened to Romans and read some verses from chapter three.



"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." I knew my father had been offended at the idea of being called a sinner, so part of me wanted to gloss over this and move quickly past the bad news to the good news. I was greatly tempted to underemphasize the truth of human depravity. But I forced myself to keep reading verse after verse talking about our sin.

I told myself, if I really loved my dad I had to tell him the whole truth, and if God was going to do the miracle of conversion, that was his job, and it was mine just to tell the truth.

Finally we made it to Romans 6, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." After half an hour of going from verse to verse, I looked at him and asked, "Dad, have you ever confessed your sins and asked Jesus Christ to forgive you?" (Of course, I knew the answer.)

"No....," he said, then paused for what seemed a long time. Even as he paused I thanked the Lord for giving me

this opportunity, and helping me to share the truth, even though I was sure Dad wouldn't accept Christ. Finally he finished his sentence: "...but I think it's about time I did."

To say I was shocked is the ultimate understatement. What I and many others had prayed for all those years was being answered, and I couldn't believe it. My father prayed aloud, confessed his sins and placed his faith in Christ that morning, just before they wheeled him into surgery. The surgery was successful.

God graciously gave me five more years with my dad (so much for the doctor's "six months to live"). My wife and daughters and brother and I were with him when he left this world for the next. I can't wait to see him and my mom and many of my friends in heaven.

My point is this: part of me wanted in the world's worst way to skim over or minimize the truth of human depravity. Yet without the bad news, there is no good news—the good news is unnecessary without it. Without the truth of God's holiness and the truth of our sin, the grace of Christ on our behalf becomes meaningless or irrelevant.

The worst thing I could have done to my father was to hold back the full power of God's truth. Without knowing that truth, it is possible to repeat a prayer from a gospel booklet, but it is impossible to experience the grace of God. For grace is not simply kindness, it is a specific response to sin. If there is no knowledge of sin, there can be no experience of grace.

The other mistake I could have made was this—believing that Dad had turned his back on the truth for so many years that his Creator had given up on him. I could have withheld God's grace from my father, reasoning that when I'd shared it before he had always been hostile, and there was no point in doing it again. (That too had been a temptation.)

To withhold God's grace or God's truth is equally wrong and equally devastating.

May we as Christians never make the mistake of choosing between truth and grace. May we eagerly offer them both to a world that so desperately needs to know the One who is full of grace and truth.

Testimony of Darrell Scott

*Father of two victims of Columbine High School shooting
Littleton, Colorado*

*Before the Subcommittee on Crime
House Judiciary Committee
United States House of Representatives*

Since the dawn of creation there has been both good and evil in the hearts of men and of women. We all contain the seeds of kindness or the seeds of violence.

The death of my wonderful daughter, Rachel Joy Scott, and the deaths of that heroic teacher and the other children who died must not be in vain. Their blood cries out for answers.

The first recorded act of violence was when Cain slew his brother Abel out in the field. The villain was not the club he used. Neither was it the NCA, the National Club Association. The true killer was Cain and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain's heart.

In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how quickly fingers began to be pointed at groups such as the NRA.

I am not a member of the NRA. I am not a hunter. I do not even own a gun. I am not here to represent or defend the NRA^¾ because I don't believe that they are responsible for my daughter's death. Therefore I do not believe that they need to be defended. If I believed they had anything to do with Rachel's murder I would be their strongest opponent.

I am here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy^¾ it was a spiritual event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies!

Much of that blame lies here in this room. Much of that blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves.

I wrote a poem just four nights ago that express my feelings best. This was written way before I knew I would be speaking here today.

Your laws ignore our deepest needs,
Your words are empty air,
You've stripped away our heritage,
You've outlawed simple prayer.

Now gunshots fill our classrooms,
And precious children die,
You seek for answers everywhere,
And ask the question "WHY"?

You regulate restrictive laws,
Through legislative creed,
Add yet you fail to understand,
That God is what we need!

Men and women are three part beings. We all consist of body, soul, and spirit. When we refuse to acknowledge a third part of our makeup, we create a void that allows evil, prejudice, and hatred to rush in and wreak havoc.



Spiritual influences were present within our educational systems for most of our nation's history. Many of our major colleges began as theological seminaries. This is a historic fact. What has happened to us as a nation? We have refused to honor God and in doing so, we open the doors to hatred and violence.

And when something as terrible as Columbine's tragedy occurs, politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass

more restrictive laws that continue to erode away our personal and private liberties.

We do not need more restrictive laws. Eric and Dylan would not have been stopped by metal detectors. No amount of gun laws can stop someone who spends months planning this type of massacre.

The real villain lies within our OWN hearts. Political posturing and restrictive legislation are not the answers.

The young people of our nation hold the key. There is a spiritual awakening taking place that will not be squelched!

We do not need more religion. We do not need more gaudy television evangelists spewing out verbal religious garbage. We do not need more million dollar church buildings built while people with basic needs are being ignored. We do need a change of heart and a humble acknowledgment that this nation was founded on the principle of simple trust in God.

As my son Craig lay under that table in the school library and saw his two friends murdered before his very eyes, he did not hesitate to pray in school. I defy any law or politician to deny him that right!

I challenge every young person in America and around the world to realize that on April 20, 1999 at Columbine High School^¾ prayer was brought back to our schools. Do not let the many prayers offered by those students be in vain. Dare to move into the new millennium with a sacred disregard for legislation that violates your conscience and denies your God-given right to communicate with Him.

To those of you who would point your finger at the NRA, I give to you a sincere challenge. Dare to examine your own heart before you cast the first stone!

My daughter's death will not be in vain. The young people of this country will not allow that to happen.

Kid's Letters to God:

Dear God: Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident? *Love, Norma*

Dear God: I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay? *Neil*

Dear God: Thank you for my baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. *Joyce*

Dear God: Please send me a pony. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up. *Bruce*



School Shootings: Why?

by Randy Alcorn

“Why are kids killing kids?” people are crying out, as if it were some great mystery. There’s a simple answer. It’s because they’ve been listening to what we’ve been telling them.

Everywhere in the secular media I’ve been hearing about the critical problem of poor self-esteem and low regard for human life among our young people. These two things are cited as the cause of teen suicide, drug abuse, crime and violence, including all the school shootings where kids have killed other kids.

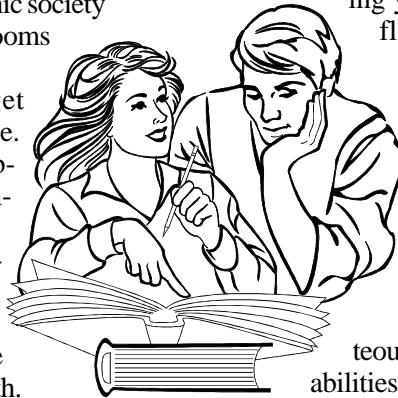
Educators and community leaders are desperately trying to find ways to help children bolster their sense of the value of all human lives, including their own. “How can we get through to our kids?” everyone is asking.

But where does this plague of the perceived low value of human life come from? Ironically, straight from the atheistic evolutionary view of man with which society has indoctrinated our young people in the classrooms, through the media and often even in the home. (By the way, educated *adults* have been killing kids by abortion—and justifying it—for decades...so why shouldn’t *kids* kill kids?)

So where can young people get a positive view of the value of human life? From the very Judeo-Christian ethic society tries so desperately to keep out of the classrooms and public life.

The answer is not for society to “get through” to our kids with our current message. Our message isn’t the solution, it’s the problem. The solution isn’t to improve our communication, it’s to change the message.

Let me summarize the secular and Christian foundations for the value of life, then you tell me whether it’s any wonder that America’s children are feeling like they, their lives and the lives of others have so little meaning and worth.



The Secular Basis for the Value of Human Life

You are the descendant of a tiny cell of primordial protoplasm that washed up on an ocean beach ten billion years ago. You are the blind and arbitrary product of time, chance and natural forces. Your closest living relatives swing from trees and eat crackers at the zoo.

You are a mere grab-bag of atomic particles, a conglomeration of genetic substance. You exist on a tiny planet in a minute solar system in an obscure galaxy in a remote and empty corner of a vast, cold, and meaningless universe. You are flying through lifeless space with no purpose, no direction, no control, and no destiny but final destruction.

You are a purely biological entity, different only in degree but not in kind from a microbe, virus or ameba. You have no essence beyond your body, and at death you will cease to exist entirely. What little life you do have is confined to a fragile body aimlessly moving through a world plagued by war, famine and disease. The only question is whether the world will manage to blow itself up before your brief and pointless life ends on its own.

In short, you came from nothing, you are going nowhere, and you will end your brief cosmic journey beneath six feet of dirt, where all that is you will become food for bacteria and rot with worms.

And now, kids... **Why don’t you feel good about yourselves? Why don’t you have more respect for human life?**

The Christian Basis for the Value of Human Life

From the moment of conception you and all other human beings are the special creation of a good and all powerful God. You are the climax of his creation, the magnum opus of the greatest artist in the universe. You are created in His image, with capacities to think, feel, and worship that set you above all other life forms. You differ from the animals not simply in degree, but in kind, in your very essence.

Not only is your kind unique, but you are unique among your kind. God has masterminded the exact combination of DNA and chromosomes that constitute your genetic code, making you as different from all others as every snowflake differs from the rest.

Yes, you are sinners, and because of sin you do not deserve to go to heaven. But despite your unworthiness, your Creator loved you so much and so intensely desires your companionship that he gave the life of his only Son that you might spend eternity with him. If you are willing to accept the free gift of salvation, you can become a child of God, the King of the universe.

As a Christian, you are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. He has given you special gifts and abilities to serve him in a particular and unique way.

Your heavenly Father is sovereign, and will allow nothing to cross your path that is not Father-filtered. He cares for you so much that He is totally available to you at all times, and listens to every word you say. He cares deeply about your hurts, and has a perfect plan for your life. He has given you the inspired Word of God as a road-map for living. He gives you the truth that sets you free, a life that is abundant and eternal, and a spiritual family that loves and needs you.

Your destiny is to live forever in a magnificent kingdom, to reign with Christ over the universe. You will forever enjoy the wonders of his presence and the marvels of his creations. You will spend eternity in intimate and joyful fellowship with your beloved Lord and your precious spiritual family.

Now, kids... **How does that make you feel about yourselves? How does that make you feel about the value of human life?**

“Whoever finds Me loves life . . . but whoever fails to find Me harms himself; all who hate Me love death.” (Proverbs 8:36)

A Simple Gesture

by Randy Alcorn

Mark was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying, along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove and a small tape recorder. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered articles. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry part of the burden. As they walked Mark discovered the boy's name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball and history, and that he was having lots of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girlfriend.

They arrived at Bill's home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some television. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk, then Mark went home. They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice, then both graduated from junior high school. They ended up in the same high school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally the long awaited senior year came and three weeks before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk.

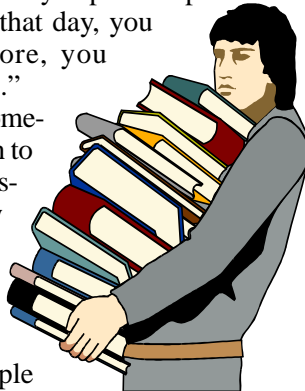
Bill reminded him of the day years ago when they had first met. "Did you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things home that day?" asked Bill. "You see, I cleaned out my locker because I

didn't want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother's sleeping pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after we spent some time together talking and laughing, I realized that if I had killed myself, I would have missed that time and so many others that might follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up those books that day, you did a lot more, you saved my life."

When someone passed on to me this supposedly true story it reminded me of two things. One, the impact we have on people by doing good works.

And two, the sense of satisfaction when we finally hear the story. Can you imagine how Mark felt when he heard that? I've felt that way when people have sent me a baby photo or handed me a baby and said "Thought you'd want to know that this child is alive because of what you told us about abortion; we'd scheduled an abortion but we cancelled it."

But the other thing that strikes me is Mark didn't know and if Bill hadn't told him he still wouldn't know. There are so



many things like this that we won't know until eternity. We will hear the stories. Stories of entertaining angels unaware.

I feel this every time I write a book. I get to the late stages of the book, where it's all-consuming and I'm so tired, and keep asking myself, "Is it worth it?" After the book comes out I start getting the letters from people saying how their lives have been changed, how they've come to faith in Christ or have drawn closer to God. One man met me in another city and told me, "My wife was so depressed she'd decided to take her life; she read one of your books and God spoke to her; she's still here and she's doing so much better."

The story of Mark and Bill also reminds me how important it is that we tell the other person when God has used him or her in our lives. That itself is a short-term reward, but it also encourages us to keep on and anticipate the long-term rewards as well. I'm grateful for every kind letter I've received. Like most people, I keep many of them on file. I hope it's not that I love the praise of men more than the praise of God. I hope it's because in hearing the expressions of men I can sense God's affirmation and encouragement to keep working, keep investing the time and effort, because it is mattering, it is making a difference for eternity.

Has anyone ever changed your life through something they've done for you? Have you told them how much it meant to you?

An Example from History

(80,000 orphans from England to Canada)

Fifty Christian agencies in Great Britain sought to rescue thousands of orphaned boys and girls on the streets and in work houses from the years 1870 to about 1920. The children were mainly in the major cities of London and Liverpool. Eighty thousand of these rough, sickly but needy boys and girls were taken from England to homes and farms in the new frontiers of Canada. Criticism was faced and many mistakes made, but the Christian agencies continued to do all they could to find homes and care for these 80,000 children!

Will there be fifty, fifteen, or even five evangelical mission agencies that will take on the task of caring for over 800,000 orphans in Malawi, Africa, and over 800,000 in Zambia who are destitute because of AIDS? It will not be possible to take these children from Africa to Christian homes in America, Austria, or Australia, but could we not trust God for Christians to

be raised up from these countries to go (move) to Malawi and Zambia to deal with this crisis, a crisis which is one of the worst to ever face the world?

To keep the facts straight, USAID says there will be an estimated 1,230,000 orphans in Malawi by the end of 1999, and 1,656,000 in Zambia. This is a total of 2,886,000 children! Who knows how many thousands of widows there will be!

When the street children crisis hit Great Britain in 1870, it was not men who began ministry among these children, but women. Will there be a repeat in the history of the church of God again raising up women to do a job that men should do? Should we not trust our Sovereign Lord to raise up women and men to tackle this impossible task for His glory? In the words of Luke 1:37, "...nothing will be impossible with God."

Doug Nichols, *International Director*
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The Memorial Rose Garden

By Kathy Norquist

"For the Glory of God, the Giver of all life, we dedicate this rose garden in memory of unborn babies who have taken "early flight" to the Lord Jesus Christ. Though never held on earth, we honor them at this garden, and hold them dear in our hearts. The garden is also a place to reflect on the comfort, healing and forgiveness that come from Jesus Christ."

Cobb Pregnancy Services, May 11, 1997

These are the words engraved on the dedication stone at the Memorial Rose Garden on the grounds of Grace Community Church in Marietta, Georgia.

The idea for the Memorial Rose Garden was birthed in the hearts of Dave and Audrey Stout after Audrey had visited the National Memorial to the Unborn in Tennessee. Dave is the pastor of Grace Community Church, and the memorial is a joint effort of the church and the local crisis pregnancy center (Cobb Pregnancy Services) where both Dave and Audrey serve on the board of directors. The garden is a physical, visible "statement" that brings an eternal perspective to the abortion issue, an issue that must be addressed both in the world and in the church.



Housed in a relatively small area, it's a quiet, solemn place with gorgeous roses surrounding the entrance and gracefully growing along the walkways. Small plaques with powerful words of dedication to precious babies line the posts.

Throughout the day and into the evening people come and go. Since it's located right next to the church parking lot it is a visible reminder to those coming to church services of the sanctity of human life. Young children grow up with this weekly reminder that life is precious and God is the author and giver of life. Teenagers regularly see the garden and remember the importance of making godly decisions about life. The eternal impact of the garden has certainly surpassed the expectation of the vision behind it!

One church member, a retired man, told about his unbelieving daughter who had already had at least two abortions. When she came to Marietta to visit him, he took her out to the memorial garden to talk about her life and choices. Recently pregnant again, she called to say she had decided to give her baby life. Her father believes it was the presence of the memorial that saved his grandchild.

Another young girl, deeply grieving over her abortion decision and the loss of her child, comes by every couple of months and leaves a rose on the dedication stone. Through her baby's death she came to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ after the post-abortion counseling she received.



A young couple grew up in a nearby church and aborted their first child before they were married. They are presently involved in the same church and had never confessed their sin to anyone. Recently the wife called two of her closest church friends to get together for an evening out. She took them to the memorial rose garden where she shared about her abortion. It was a place to go for a time of confession and restoration. This woman is now getting involved in helping other young women through a crisis pregnancy.

Through the help of post-abortion counseling women can experience the healing power of Christ's love and forgiveness that only He can give. They then have a place to go to give honor and recognition to the precious life of their child that was lost. Memorial plaques are also placed for children who die by miscarriage or ectopic pregnancies. This serves as a reminder that a child, not just a pregnancy, was lost.

Memorial services (both private and public) are held at the garden throughout the year... whenever plaques are placed, on Mother's Day afternoon, and at the completion of post-abortion Bible studies offered through Cobb Pregnancy Services.

According to Dave and Audrey the financial cost was fairly minimal in comparison to the wonderful benefits. Through the help of volunteers costs were cut even more and there was added benefit of people working together for this common cause.

When Randy Alcorn visited this memorial, he said, "I was deeply touched that a local church and a pregnancy center would cooperate to create such a powerful place. Both times I went there, I sensed the presence of God. This is something almost any church can do. I hope these memorials spring up all over the country."

What about a memorial on your own church grounds? (Contact the Stouts at 770-422-9939 for further information.) What a powerful testimony of God's love and grace!

Plans are underway to erect a Northwest Memorial to the Unborn. If you are interested in a promotional video, participating financially, or know of a suitable site in the Portland/Metro area, you may contact the Portland Crisis Pregnancy Center, 503-284-1830.

Christian Persecution Around the World

The following is an update on Christian persecution prepared by the Religious Liberty Commission of World Evangelical Fellowship dated May 1999.

NEPAL. Twenty-eight Christians were hospitalized on Good Friday after being beaten by police in Patan, in Nepal's Katmandu Valley. Church leaders sought permission to hold the service at a local sports club. After hundreds arrived, the Chief District Officer sent word through police that the service could not take place. The Christians moved 300 yards away to another field and completed the official permission process with local authorities. Again the police came with news that they could not hold the meeting in a "public place," in clear defiance of constitutional provisions that allow Christians to hold peaceful meetings. They have since learned that the order to stop the meeting came from the central government's Home Ministry, and it is feared that Nepal's government is being influenced by neighboring India's nationalist government. The church in Nepal has experienced great growth in the 1990s, now numbering more than 300,000 believers. It faces increasing hostility in a country of 17 million that is largely Hindu.

INDONESIA. Indonesia continues to be gripped with fear over Muslim-Christian tensions and rioting. The situation is quite grim. According to an article in the *Los Angeles Times* on February 20, Indonesia is being "Balkanized" in the aftermath of the end of the Suharto regime and the recent economic collapse, which left millions poverty-stricken and angry. Indonesian sociologist Wimar Witoelar states, "A lot of this violence didn't just happen, it was choreographed." The *Times* article says, "Political analysts are of two views over where blame lies. One is that provocateurs represent hard-core Muslims who want to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state. The other is that they are financed by Suharto loyalists trying to force the cancellation of the elections in order to maintain the [old] status quo. A military takeover in the name of restoring national security could fulfill that objective."

More than 100,000 Muslims marched through the streets of Jakarta, capital of Indonesia, on March 7 to protest against the military's failure to quell Christian-Muslim bloodshed in the Ambon region. While the police report 200 killed during the January 19-24 riots, Ambonese Christians say the number is closer to 2-3,000. Some Muslim groups are calling for a holy war against Christians who they accuse of running a vendetta against Muslims. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country.

On March 10, two people died and scores were injured when Indonesian troops fired on tens of thousands of Christians and Muslims fighting with Molotov cocktails, machetes and spears in Ambon. A 15-year-old boy who regularly took part in Youth With A Mission's King's Kids youth activities died after being beaten by members of a Muslim mob that stormed a local church gathering in Ambon province. A volunteer staff member was beheaded in the same incident. The teen died after refusing to deny his faith.

On April 20, hundreds of Muslims burned a Christian community center on the eastern island of Sulawesi in retaliation for the bombing of the country's largest mosque located in Jakarta. Pray that a spirit of peace settle over Indonesia to stop the escalation of retaliation between Christians and Muslims. Ask God to break the power of the demonic forces that inspire such persecution and set the people free to accept Christ.

ISRAEL. For the second time in two years, the retirement of a member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament) has eliminated a proposed law seriously restricting religious freedom in Israel. The Pinchasi Bill against religious missionizing faced apparent withdrawal after March 30, when its legislative sponsor declined to register his candidacy for the May 17 elections and retired to private life. An April 6 report from the Messianic Action Committee warns that despite this recent reprieve, several Knesset members from the Jewish religious parties have indicated they would continue to propose legislation until they attain the goal of preventing Messianic Jews and Christian Evangelicals from operating freely in the country. Praise God for His intervention

in Israel and ask that religious freedom not be denied to citizens of Israel.

SUDAN. This account demonstrates the blatant aggression of the Islamic government's war against the largely Christian southern part of the country, in what has increasingly become a religious war of persecution against civilians.

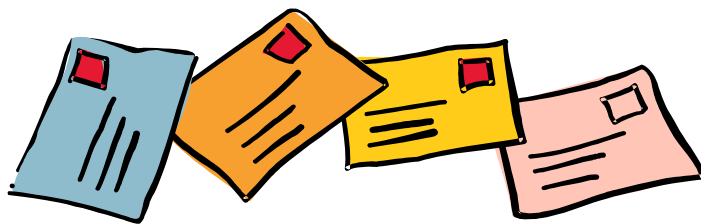
On February 27, during the opening of a week-long training seminar of Episcopal church leaders in Maridi in the Western Equatoria region, a National Islamic Front (NIF) bomber attacked the hospital, churches, and market area, dropping six anti-personnel bombs. On March 3 the NIF bomber returned dropping at least 16 bombs. There was no pretense of aiming at military targets. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, that justice and peace will come to Sudan.

Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom is coordinating a national, student-led "Campaign of Conscience for Sudan." The Campaign appeals to Congress to adopt a non-military policy to end the atrocities in Sudan. Freedom House's website (www.freedomhouse.org/religion) allows users to send e-mails directly to Congress, without charge. Sample letters and information on Sudan available. Or mail a letter directly to your congressman!

Chains of Blessing. World Evangelical Fellowship is often asked how to help Christians suffering because they stand firm against the forces of evil. The first response is to bring petitions before the throne of an Almighty God. But, you can also tangibly help them rebuild their lives. Through Chains of Blessing, sponsored by the WEF Religious Liberty Commission, you or your church can provide financial support directly to those being persecuted for their faith. Each year six beneficiary groups will receive your financial gift. Contact Kathi Graham at 630-668-0440 for further information.

A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you when forget-me-nots are withered. Carve your name on hearts, and not on marble. Charles Spurgeon

Letters to EPM



Randy,

I think that the Audience of One is very pleased, and I want to thank you for being faithful to use the gifts He has given you!

I cried seeing the tenderness of our Chasm-Crosser, thrilled at the glimpse of Charis, and am so motivated to use every opportunity to gather stones along the “way”!

This book (*Edge of Eternity*) answered my prayers for a “fresh vision of His glory” and a closer walk with Him—so thank you for sticking it out during the not-so-fun times.

May God richly bless you as your work has blessed others!

K.A., Alamagordo, NM

Mr. Alcorn,

I can't describe what your books have meant to me. I have read *Deadline*, *Dominion* and *Edge of Eternity*. They are books I cannot keep because I keep giving them to others to read, then I have to buy myself another copy.

These three books have taught me things not only about God and His relationship to us, but also our relationships with each other, and they are totally enjoyable stories to boot.

Thank you for writing them, and I thank God for the talent and insights He has given you to share with us.

K.B., Spring Hill, TN



Dear Mr. Alcorn,

I just finished reading through your paper *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* on the internet. I am a 23-year-old Christian woman and I'm getting married this summer. My fiancé and I assumed birth control was the easiest and most effective option for us, since we know we won't be ready for children anytime soon. Although we are not sexually active now, I had planned to start the Pill to regulate my cycle before the wedding, and stay on the Pill indefinitely after we were married. I went to the doctor, got the prescription, and thought I was all set—but I had a funny feeling about it. I couldn't have told you why, since all I knew about the Pill was that it prevented conception.

I asked my fiancé if he thought taking birth control pills was morally wrong, since we are both pro-life. He said there wasn't any reason he knew of, but if he saw evidence to the contrary he'd reconsider it. I decided to keep researching and came across your paper. I'm so glad I found it! I didn't want it to be true since I was looking for my own convenience, but now that I've seen your research I feel a big sense of relief, like a load has been lifted. I told my fiancé about your research and he took it pretty hard, as I did, but we agreed that if we really believe life begins at conception we can't knowingly participate in the

taking of that life. I might have my terms mixed up but what I mean to say is that life begins when the egg is fertilized, regardless of when it's implanted.

We are now investigating methods of Natural Family Planning, and although we still have some talking and praying to do before we reach a final decision, I feel led (I think my fiancé does too) that this is a better way to go. I'm so glad you've done this research and made it available to people. *(received via e-mail)*

(The booklet entitled Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions? is available through EPM for \$3.00 per booklet. Quantity discounts available.)

Brother Alcorn,

Thanks so much for your two books—*Deadline* and *Dominion*. I laughed and cried and rejoiced with the characters as I shared their experiences. The visions of heaven in both books have expanded my conception of what the Carpenter has been preparing for those who trust Him—realizing that even your wonderful imagination is only a faint echo of Elyon's glorious plan!

I look forward to your next book—if not here, then in that place of beauty and imagination where God is the center of all thought and action.

Yours in Him, W.R.

NEW BOOK: *In Light of Eternity*

Randy Alcorn's newest book, *In Light of Eternity*, is scheduled for release in October. This nonfiction book presents the biblical basis for the way Randy portrays heaven and eternal rewards in his novels. It is a biblically-based Christ-centered work designed to answer basic questions about heaven and challenge the false notion that heaven will be an uninteresting and unearthly place. It will be a *new* earth, not a *nonearth*, a place of joy and excitement beyond measure. We were made for one person and for one place—Christ is the person and heaven is the place. Heaven is our home—this world isn't. When we live with an eternal perspective, we live differently.

In early August, check your local Christian bookstore for the availability of the new **audio** version of *Deadline* for \$19.99. Quantity discounts will be available through EPM.

Edge of Eternity is also going to audio and will be available mid-September.

PERSONally Opposed

by Ron Norquist

The following article is excerpted from Ron's presentation at colleges that presents a moral perspective on the beginning of life geared toward a secular audience.

When it comes to the choice of abortion we are faced with a most fundamental question: Is an innocent person injured? If not, then abortion isn't much different than an appendectomy or a gall bladder removal and society and government should keep their noses out of what truly is a personal decision. If, however, an innocent party suffers injury or death, then we should be unapologetically opposed to abortion.

So is anyone hurt by abortion? That is the great debate. We know that a fetus dies in an abortion. Dr. Warren Hern, a director of Boulder Abortion Clinic in Boulder, Colorado, is the author of the abortion "how to" manual, *Abortion Practice*. In it he says an abortionist may, in some second trimester procedures, have to wait to make certain "fetal death has occurred" before continuing with the rest of the abortion process (*Abortion Practice*, J. B. Lippincott Co. 1990, p. 154). We know something dies in an abortion. But does someone die?

That question can only be answered by ascertaining the difference between a thing and a person. What is it that sets a person apart from everything else? Imagine your favorite human. If someone were to question his or her personhood how would you prove he or she truly is a person? It's not as easy as it might first appear.

Most people recognize two plus two equals four. It's a given...until someone comes along and questions it. Then it takes several pages of mathematical notation to prove the equation.

In the same way the personhood of a human is usually assumed. Every human has an intrinsic value which is equal to every other human. This is a truth our American Founding Fathers accepted as intuitively obvious. "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men [humans] are created equal." Questions about personhood are usually only raised when someone wants to do something to an individual they would not want done to a person.

Defining personhood, then, becomes crucial in determining who we value and protect. The U.S. Supreme Court stated as much in its *Roe v. Wade* decision: "If the suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant's case [to legalize abortion], of course collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by [the fourteenth] amendment" (*Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 1973, p. 38). The Fourteenth Amendment says the state shall not deprive any "person" of life without due process of law.



Aside from the fact that killing an innocent person is unconstitutional it is also morally repugnant to decent folks. So in order to legitimize abortion it has become necessary to define personhood narrowly enough to exclude fetuses (Latin for "little ones") killed in abortion.

A number of criteria for determining personhood have been proposed in the last several decades.

Appearance

Carl Sagan tackled the problem by implying preborn humans in early gestation lack personhood because they don't look human.

"By the third week...the forming embryo is about 2 millimeters long and is developing various body parts. But it looks like a segmented worm...By the end of the fourth week...it looks something like a newt or a tadpole...By the sixth the reptilian face has connected slits where the

mouth and nose would eventually will be. By the end of the seventh week...the face is mammalian but somewhat piglike. By the end of the eighth week, the face resembles a primate's but is still not quite human ("Is It Possible To Be Pro-Life and Pro-Choice?," *Parade Magazine*, 22 April 1990, p. 6).

The problem with this approach is it is extremely subjective. Some might say Carl Sagan looked a bit reptilian. But how utterly unscientific it is to say because an individual looks animal-like he is something less than a person.

This dehumanization was used to rationalize slavery in the United States for many years. Afro-Americans were said to look "monkey-like" and, therefore, less than human. This attitude was backed up by the Supreme Court's 1857 *Dred Scott* decision which said, "A black man has no right which the white man is bound to respect" (Roger B. Taney, cited by James C. Dobson and Gary L. Bauer, *Children at Risk*, Waco, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1990, p. 141). In essence, our country needed certain people to be less than human because we wanted to do something inhumane to them.

This approach was used against European Jews in the 1930s and 40s. They were referred to as "vermin" and "insects" to make their extermination palatable.

Intelligence

This category consists of several elements. Joseph Fletcher, a Medicine professor from University of Virginia, proposed a number of "indicators" of personhood:

- a minimum IQ (less than 40 and you are questionable, less than 20 and you are definitely not a person)
- self-awareness, sense of time
- self-control
- sense of the future
- sense of the past and ability to relate to others (*Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man*, The Hastings Center Report 2, Nov. 1972, p. 1)

At first glance these criteria for personhood might seem reasonable. Shouldn't a person have some sort of personality? Wouldn't this mean a certain amount of intelligent awareness and ability to relate?

The trouble with these criteria is they don't apply to an entire class of people we know are persons, namely the comatose. A while back my friend, Bob, was injured in an accident and was in a coma for four days. I was privileged to be with him when he started coming out of the coma. His family and friends wept for joy as he asked questions like, "Where am I?", and "What happened?" During those four days Bob had no self-awareness, no sense of time, no self-control, no sense of past or future and definitely no ability to relate to others. His IQ could not be measured. But he was still Bob the human, Bob the person, Bob the husband, Bob the daddy and Bob my friend. He was treated as a person because he *was* a person.

The problem with defining personhood by some standard of intelligence is that it is completely arbitrary. Who has been given the insight and wisdom to say that an IQ of 40 is acceptable but 39 is questionable? Who has the supreme authority to say that a human must perform at a given intellectual level before he or she is deemed a someone?

Maturity

Some say that an individual becomes a person at a certain stage of physical development. A few use viability as a starting point. Viability is the age of the "little one" when he or she is capable of surviving outside the mother. The trouble with using the age of viability (anywhere from about 20 to 24 weeks) as a determiner is that "viability depends not only on the child but on [our] ability...to save its life" (Randy Alcorn, *Pro Life Answers to Pro Choice Arguments*, Portland, Oregon, Multnomah Books, 1994, p. 63). Can we honestly say that the nature and worth of a child at twenty-one weeks depends on whether or not it is born in a hospital with enough technology to save her life?

An additional problem with viability is that it is so vague in another way. Most children, born at the so-called age of viability, can't live on their own without an abundance of medical help. So are they truly viable? And what about full-term newborns? They, too, need a tremendous amount of care to live outside the womb. What really is viability? And even if viability were an exact point in time (which it isn't), why would anyone think that's

the age you become a person? Why not say it happens in the fourth week when your heart beats? Or the sixth week when your brainwaves are measurable? Or when you first respond to light and noise? (Alcorn, p. 62) Certainly viability is no more significant to your personhood than any of these other stages of maturity.



Thinking Ability

Carl Sagan offered yet one more stage of development where the line between person and nonperson could be drawn.

"...brain waves with regular patterns typical of adult human brains do not appear in the fetus until about the 30th week of pregnancy...Fetuses younger than this—however alive and active they may be—lack the necessary brain architecture. They cannot yet think...Regular brain waves are rarely found in fetuses...If we wanted to make the criterion still more stringent, to allow for precocious fetal brain development, we might draw the line at six months (Sagan, p. 7,8).

Whether you're measuring IQ or brainwave patterns, the decision to draw the line at a given point is purely arbitrary. Mr. Sagan tipped his hand when he says "...we might draw the line at six months". After all the rationale is presented, this argument really gets down to choosing a personhood beginning point to suit ones fancy.

Desirability

In Portland, Oregon, local abortionist, Jim Newhall, revealed his ideas about personhood. He said, "Not everybody is meant to be born. I believe, for a baby, life begins when his mother wants him" (as cited by Maureen O'Hagan, "Cross Hairs to Bear," *Willamette Week*, 3 May 1995). When he says "life" it is assumed Newhall means "personhood". He could not mean simple biological life since he is in the business of terminating life on a daily basis. The absurd yet inevitable result of his view is that the unborn could move in and out of personhood each time the mother changed her mind about whether or not she wanted her baby.

Using appearance, intelligence, maturity, thinking ability or desirability to determine personhood is tempting. A later personhood date allows abortion to become a benign surgical procedure which injures no one. It becomes a harmless way to solve the problem of an unwanted pregnancy. But this is the kind of reverse logic we sometimes tend to fall into when trying to solve a pressure packed problem. We start with a solution, a conclusion, a place we want to end up. Then we look for ways to get there while still keeping our sense of personal morality in tact. It's called rationalizing. At the same time we tend to reject information that would prohibit us from doing what we think is necessary to achieve our goal. This is especially true when we are looking back to a decision which has already been made. When looking at abortion, the last thing we want to consider is information that would lead us to believe we participated in the killing of a child. Who wants to face that? This distancing oneself from information is called denial. Rationalization and denial are methods we use to cope with unwanted and stressful information. However both hinder a clear view of reality.

Looks, aptitude, age, size, intelligence and personality don't determine when a person begins. These are merely attributes which describe already existing persons.

Real Personhood

So, what is a person? A person is simply *a live human*, a living, individual member of the human species.

PERSONally Opposed (Continued)

A live human. Unlike a finger or a gall bladder which are parts of a person, a person is an entirely unique individual taking up his or her own space.

A *live human*. In terms of the legal right to life, a person must be physically alive.

A *live human*. A person is not a feline, a canine, a bovine or an equine but a human, a member of the species, *homo sapien*.

Think about your own life. When did it begin? When did you become you? It happened when you became a *live human* and that occurred at conception. Like an idea which begins when it is conceived, so an individual life begins when he or she is conceived. At conception dad's sperm unites with mom's ovum and something incredible happens. The union forms a single cell with an entirely new genetic code. This new cell, a zygote, contains enough information to fill fifty sets of encyclopedias (Alcorn, p. 47). All of this information is on a kind of time release. Some is released almost immediately as the zygote divides, grows and becomes an embryo. Other information is released later along the road to maturity, first in utero, then as an infant and on through adulthood. In the early teen years an explosion of changes occurs with the triggering of puberty. Still other information delays going into effect until later in life when, for some, that first gray hair appears or that extra weight becomes more difficult to lose.

The problem is it's difficult to think of a single-celled human zygote as a person. Can you really have a one-celled person? The answer is a definite yes and here's why. Let's say the number of cells in your body right now is represented by the value x . At an earlier age, when your cell count was $1/2x$ or $1/20x$ or $1/2,000x$, you were just as much the unique and distinct person you are now. You were simply smaller and younger. The same principle applies when you were made up of 1,000 cells, 100 cells or one cell. You were still you. Remember the size of a human, that is the number of cells in a human body, does not determine personhood. You do not become a human being through cell division. Put another way, "something nonhuman does not become human by getting older and bigger" (Alcorn, p. 54).

At the age when you were just a single cell, you were small, immature and difficult to relate to. The same could be said about you when you were a newborn. When you think about it, some adults can be described as immature and difficult to relate to. That's the point, humans come in all sizes, ages, levels of intelligence and types of personality. Appearance, intelligence, maturity, and desirability are just descriptive terms which show the amazing diversity of the human race.

Conclusion

The bottom line is this: *person* is synonymous with *human being*. Every

human, every person begins his or her life at the beginning, at conception.

When we talk about the choice of abortion we are talking about killing an existing person. Children about to be aborted are, admittedly, quite young, small and helpless. So helpless, in fact, that none of them has any means of defending against his or her own death. But lack of protest by a victim does not justify the victim's destruction.

To be pro-choice on abortion, you would have to ignore the medical and scientific evidence for personhood. Either that or hold a world view that allows the killing of innocent people.

Trying to solve problems by killing children is insane, isn't it? For most, killing a child by abortion requires a self-induced numbness. The anesthetic comes in numerous forms of rationalization: "parenting will ruin my future, my boyfriend will leave me, I couldn't face my family and friends, there's no way I could give up my baby for adoption, the world is overpopulated..."

The numbness, however, lasts only a short while. Eventually the tingling prickles of reality awake us to the fact of our personal participation in the killing of a little girl or boy.

This world is full of problems some of which seem overwhelming. Let's solve our problems without harming innocent people. We can do it. We must do it. There is no other choice.

“What Happened Here Today?”

One afternoon a man came home from work to find total mayhem in his house. His three children were outside, still in their pajamas, playing in the mud, with empty food boxes and wrappers strewn all around the front yard. The door of his wife's car was open, as was the front door to the house.

Proceeding into the entry, he found an even bigger mess. A lamp had been knocked over, and the throw rug was wadded against one wall. In the front room the TV was loudly blaring a cartoon channel, and the family room was strewn with toys and various items of clothing. In the kitchen, dishes filled the sink.

Breakfast food was spilled on the counter, dog food was spilled on the floor, a broken glass lay under the table, and a small pile of sand was spread by the back door.

He quickly headed up the stairs, stepping over toys and more piles of clothes, looking for his wife. He was worried she may be ill, or that something serious had happened. He found her lounging in the bedroom, still curled in the bed in her pajamas, reading a novel. She looked up at him, smiled, and asked how his day went.

He looked at her bewildered and asked, "What happened here today?"

She again smiled and answered, "You know every day when you come home from work and ask me what in the world I did today?"

"Yes," was his incredulous reply.

She answered, "Well, today I didn't do it."



Should We Save or Give?

by Randy Alcorn

How do we balance financial responsibility with the scriptural imperative to give sacrificially?

Q. For several years my husband and I have enjoyed giving most of our discretionary income to our church and various missionaries. But lately we have been counseled that we need to be more “responsible” about preparing for our future, especially since retirement is only a few years away. How do we deal with the guilt we would feel about decreasing our giving, since we still desire to meet the needs we see all around us?

A. There are two sides to the issue of savings. Scripture tells us that the wise man anticipates future needs, while the foolish man spends and consumes all his resources with no thought for the future. “In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has” (Prov. 21:20). Even ants store up provisions for the coming winter (Prov. 6:6-8).

It’s a shortsighted person who fails to store up provisions (money, food, or materials) for upcoming times of *predictable* need. If you are planning to retire and have no other means of income, then it would be wise to make some plans for how and where you will live after retirement.

On the other hand, Jesus commended the poor widow of Mk. 12:41-44 because she did something most of us would consider foolish. She gave her last two pennies to God, having no idea where tomorrow’s provision would come from, except that it would come from her Lord. In 2 Cor. 8:3-15, the Macedonian Christians gave “beyond their means” to the point of leaving themselves impoverished. Paul commends them for it.

So, when it comes to the “retirement dream,” we must ask ourselves, Whose dream is it? Is it God’s dream or the American dream? Consider one man’s plans for retirement: “I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry!’” (Lk. 12:18-19).

We aren’t told that this man was dishonest or irreligious. His plans make sense by our standards. But in the verses that follow God calls this man a fool. He tells him his life is over and asks, “Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” Jesus promises, “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Lk. 12:21).

I will use my possessions to promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all.

David Livingstone

The distinction between financial responsibility and financial foolishness is this: Saving becomes hoarding when it is exercising our own sovereignty and financial independence so that God doesn’t have to come through for us.

James condemned the spirit of selfish stockpiling and indifference to a suffering world that had spread into the early church (Jas. 5:1-5). And in Exodus 16 there is a graphic lesson against hoarding. We must beware of any savings or retirement or insurance plan that becomes a God-substitute.

You mention that you have “enjoyed giving” to the Lord. The joy of giving is at the heart of a walk with God, so don’t stop giving sacrificially. Saving can be wise, but it is never a substitute for giving. If ever we don’t feel we can save and give, by all means we should give. Some people in Scripture are rebuked for *saving* too much, but no one is ever rebuked for *giving* too much.

You have been counseled to be more responsible. In the truest sense, generous giving is not just compassionate, it is also responsible. By giving we prepare for our eternal future, because we lay up for ourselves treasures in

heaven (Mt. 6:19-24). Laying up treasures on earth is ultimately irresponsible. Why? Because it’s investing in something worthless, that will be annihilated in the coming holocaust of things (2 Pet. 3:10-11).

Now, if you have been counseled to be more thrifty, to reduce your lifestyle expenses in order to provide savings for retirement, this is probably wise. I believe that having less because you give is different than having less because you spend.

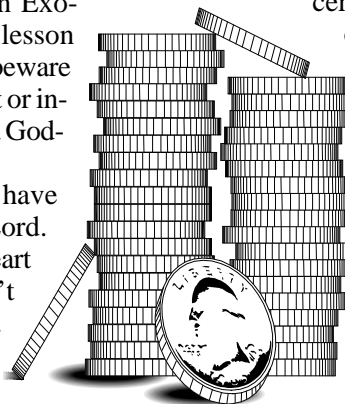
We know a missionary family who took their retirement savings and poured everything back into the mission. I suggest that God looks very differently at these people than at the Christian who spends his money on short-term indulgences with no thought of saving for upcoming needs or providing for his family’s future. To those who seek first His kingdom, and to those who sacrificially give of their assets to His kingdom, His promise is one of material provision (Mt. 6:32-33; Phil. 4:19).

I suggest that you look for ways to save without reducing your giving. To that end, there are some practical questions to ask yourselves: Can we presently reduce some expenses that would allow us to continue to give generously *and* save money? Are there other means to supplement our income during retirement? Can we liquidate certain assets? Can we sell

our home and buy or rent a smaller one? Or buy a comparable home in another area where it is cheaper to live? Is it necessary for us to maintain our present standard of living, or can we cut costs in our retirement?

The old saying goes, “You can’t take it with you.” But when Jesus spoke of laying up treasures in heaven he added a corollary. “You can’t take it with you, *but you can send it on ahead.*”

Instead of spending our lives backing into eternity and clinging to our earthly treasures, we can turn around, walk forward and lay up our treasures in our eternal home. Then, instead of moving away from our treasures we’ll spend our lives moving toward them.



Bible and Psychology

by David Powlison

(The following is excerpted from "Do You See?", *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 1997.)

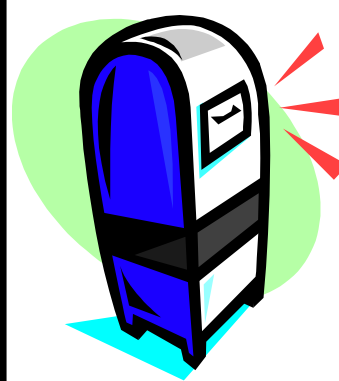
Many conservative Protestants do not see the sufficiency of Scripture for the cure of souls. Typically, "spiritual" matters are split off from "psychological, emotional, relational" matters. Spiritual matters include such things as commitment to God, prayer, ethics, doctrine, evangelism, assurance of salvation, the devil, and a mystical leading of the Spirit. Other matters—suffering, socialization dynamics, unpleasant emotions, interpersonal reconciliation, enslavement to sinful habits, patient and probing conversation, self-deception, motivation, and so on—are relegated to extrabiblical authorities. Scripture is not seen to offer the answers that enable us to interpret and redress human experience. Instead, wise and effective counseling can only emerge from grafting or "integrating" secular psychological systems into Christianity. In real life, the engrafted secularism inevitably dominates what is seen as an impoverished and impotent Scripture.

Continued debate must occur over the *scope* and *purposes* of Scripture's intended sufficiency and the consequent *use* of Scripture. Conservative Protestants on both sides of the question confess Scripture as an authoritative guide to "matters of faith and practice." But do those matters include understanding life's practical problems and finding ways to help? On the one hand, the "integrationist" paradigm proclaims that Scripture is an inadequate guide for the counseling task. They believe it has not revealed enough about ourselves and our world. And though most integrationists view their work as a form of "ministry" for Christ, they see such ministry as needing a *fundamental* contribution from something besides Scripture. The Bible for them simply lacks adequate explanations, instructions, and implications.

On the other hand, those committed to systematic biblical counseling see that a biblical practical theology is not only possible but necessary. We would affirm that "spiritual matters" *include* the details of practical human problems.

Any contribution of extrabiblical sources is distinctly subordinate and secondary to the givens of the biblical model. Other sources may be informative and provocative: we may learn from and be challenged by our own experience, popular fiction, history, the mass media, psychology, the idiosyncrasies of those we counsel, sociology, music theory, rock stars, rhetoric, comparative anthropology, Muslim immigrants who move in next door, medicine, and organizational management. But the "truth" of all these interesting things must be judged by Scripture and reinterpreted according to the Spirit's wisdom.

Unless God has lied to us, we do have what we need to develop systematic biblical counseling. Any such system must provide four things: (1) a penetrating and comprehensive analysis of the human condition, (2) an effective solution, equally penetrating and comprehensive, (3) a wise pastoral methodology that helps us deal with the variety of persons and problems appropriately, and (4) a standpoint from which to discern unbiblical elements in other systems of counseling. Scripture is *crammed* with just these things. Do you see?



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