



# ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

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

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER • FALL 2002

## The Scandal of Evangelical Dishonesty

by Randy Alcorn

*I am painfully aware that the subjects I address in this article are uncomfortable and controversial. Some of my good friends will think it inappropriate to raise these issues publicly.*

*I want to emphasize that I don't think most of the deceptions that have become common practice among Christians are perceived as deceptions. Nor do I think they were originally intended as such. Some practices, such as ghostwriting, have developed gradually, with a slow desensitization to standards of truthfulness that authors and publishers never anticipated nor desired.*

*I do not wish to be or to sound self-righteous, as though I have never been tempted by nor succumbed to some of the common deceptions I refer to, and others as well. I don't call anyone else to a standard without calling myself to the same. If I am wrong or unfair, I am open to correction and I invite it.*

**H**onored historians plagiarize. Politicians invent war records. Coaches embellish resumes. Employees call in sick when they're playing golf. Advertisements promise intimacy with someone beautiful if you buy this car or drink that beer.

We're so used to being lied to, and so prone to self-deceit, it's hard to discern what's true and what's not.

As followers of Christ, we are to be different. We're to walk in the truth (3 John 3), love the truth, and believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:10,12). We are to speak the truth, in contrast to "the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14).

We're to speak the truth "in love" (Eph. 4:32).

Truth is far more than a moral guide. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). He didn't say He would *show* the truth or *teach* the truth or *model* the truth. He said He *is* the truth—Truth personified. He's the source of all

truth, the embodiment of truth, and therefore the reference point for evaluating all truth claims. Jesus came full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He takes the truth personally, because it's part of who He is.

The phrase "I tell you the truth" appears 79 times in Scripture, 78 times spoken by Jesus. He *is* the truth, and He *tells* the truth. We can fully trust everything He says. If we are His representatives, people should be able to trust everything we say.

The Holy Spirit leads men into truth (John 16:13). Christ's disciples know the truth (John 8:32), do the truth (John 3:21),

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and abide in the truth (John 8:44). We are commanded to handle the truth accurately (2 Tim. 2:25), and avoid doctrinal untruths (2 Tim. 2:18). The “belt of truth” holds together our spiritual armor (Eph. 6:14).

God “does not lie” (Titus 1:2). He is “the God of truth” (Ps. 31:5). “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Num. 23:19).

Unlike God, the devil promises but doesn’t fulfill. He’s always denying, revising, or spinning truth. Jesus said “there is no truth in him” and called him a “liar, and the father of lies.” He said, “When he lies he speaks his native language” (John 8:44).

When we speak the truth, we speak Christ’s language. When we speak lies, when we mislead and give false impressions, we speak Satan’s language.

Consider fundraising strategies where Christian ministries make their mailings look like IRS mailings, or use a handwriting font to make it appear that the director wrote a note he didn’t. Isn’t that misleading?

No matter how we rationalize it, all deception within the evangelical community dishonors Christ, and serves the devil’s agenda. We need to identify deception, repent of it, and embrace the truth of Christ which will set us free to represent Him accurately to a world sick of being lied to (John 8:32).

## Truth in the Pulpit?

As it turned out, I flew 3,000 miles to *not* preach in a prominent East Coast church.

When I was shuttled from hotel to church, a Christian leader rode with me. He’d been accused of dishonesty and financial improprieties. I asked him about these charges.

“Did you really graduate from Harvard, as you say in your messages?” He said he’d taken a class at Harvard once, but no, he hadn’t graduated.

He admitted saying other things that weren’t true, but this didn’t seem to bother him. I told him, calmly, that I thought he should repent and publicly ask forgiveness for his dishonesty.

Five minutes after we arrived at the church, I was escorted to the private office of the senior pastor, where we were to pray before I preached in the service. When I stepped in, the pastor slammed the door and screamed at me. His face turned scarlet, veins showing. He poked his finger at me. I honestly thought he was going to hit me.

Then, out of the corner of my eye I saw the man I’d just confronted. The pastor told me I’d had no right to do this. “No way will I let you preach from *my* pulpit!” he said.

I tried to explain, but he wouldn’t listen. He was aware of the man’s reputation but thought it none of my business. We went straight into the service. The pastor took the microphone. His voice suddenly sounded sweet and spiritual. He introduced the man I’d confronted, who then conducted the offering, challenging people to give generously because he knew their wonderful pastor. The pastor then told the church he felt “the Holy Spirit’s leading” to dedicate the service to sharing and healing, so regretfully there wouldn’t be time to hear from the guest speaker.

On the long flight home I considered how Christian leaders, who should be guardians of God’s truth, could have such disregard for truth.

This isn’t new. “Do not let the prophets deceive you. Don’t listen to their lies. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 29:8-9). Various Christian celebrities, including

John Todd, Mike Warnke and Lauren Stratford, were proven to have lied about their experience with Satanism, and sold millions of books and entertained countless evangelical audiences in the process. The world scorns the church for serving as a platform for such lies.

A speaker can be popular, a book can be a bestseller in Christian bookstores, but can still be full of lies.

*I do not intend the preceding story to reflect poorly on pastors. Most pastors I know are men of honesty and integrity. I tell the story as an illustration that the Christian community isn’t immune to the dishonesty that plagues the world.*

## Celebrity Endorsements

A disturbing recent fundraising development is purchasing celebrity endorsements of charities given at conferences and concerts. A speaker or musician gives an appeal for a ministry’s child sponsorships. For every child sponsored as a result of the appeal the performer receives \$25 to \$50. (In the secular world, this is called a kickback.)

A pastor’s wife attending a popular women’s conference heard a speaker strongly endorse a ministry working with needy children. On a hunch, the pastor’s wife asked the speaker afterward if she or the organization had been paid an endorsement fee. “Of course,” the speaker replied.

Speakers have been paid as much as \$10,000 for a single large-event endorsement. A friend of mine learned at a ministry board meeting that the organization was “negotiating” with a popular musician to get his endorsement. “What’s there to negotiate?” he asked. “Either someone believes in this ministry and is willing to give his name to it, or he doesn’t.” If someone is *paid* money by a ministry for asking an audience to



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give money to that ministry, it doesn't qualify as a heartfelt endorsement. It's more like a payoff.

Satan is a master at twisting good things and perverting acts of grace and kindness into profit-seeking ventures. It's

commendable when speakers or musicians believe in a mission so much they sacrifice to support it. It's wonderful that they'd take an offering for that ministry. But to be paid for doing so—to take for themselves *any* amount of money given by those intend-

ing it to go to help poor children—is unethical. (If the audience knew, they would be heartsick and perhaps angry. God *does* know. Is He heartsick? Angry?)

I know a fine group of young musicians who were approached by a major missions organization asking them to promote its ministry. The mission offered them a 20 percent cut of all funds collected at their concerts. Suppose a singer made this public statement: "Eighty percent of tonight's offering will go to feed the hungry in Haiti; the other 20 percent will go to us as payment for bringing this to your attention." If the truth was divulged, people would be able to act in light of it. But most ministries, musicians, and speakers wouldn't agree to such a disclosure. Why? Because it would look bad for everyone. But if it *looks* bad, isn't that because it *is* bad? If those involved would be embarrassed by disclosure, isn't that an indication it shouldn't be done in the first place? Ministry leaders should be ashamed of themselves for putting this kind of temptation in front of young Christian musicians who need examples of integrity, not offers to compromise their integrity.

I have no problem with a ministry presenting its vision to a speaker or group and then asking them to pray about calling attention to their cause. I have major problems with offering them a percentage of "the take" (the offering). Unless this is done with full disclosure, unless clear verbal or printed recognition is made of this financial arrangement, the offering is a deception. Anything less than

full disclosure to potential donors constitutes fraud. Such arrangements will inevitably promote abuse, and sometimes lead to public scandal. Consider the temptation to overstate or misrepresent needs or to speak with artificial enthusiasm for

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the poor, while thinking of the larger kickback they will get for doing so. Our enemies dish out enough temptations without us dispensing them to our friends. Think of a Christian speaker appealing to people to give to starving children, knowing what the audience doesn't—his personal wealth will increase directly in proportion to what he says and how convincingly he says it.

Imagine your pastor asking the congregation to dig deep and give to a mission to plant churches and give medical aid to the needy in rural Colombian villages. Hearts are moved. The church takes an offering of \$50,000. Praise God! Now imagine it's a week later, and a church board member mentions that the pastor was paid \$10,000 for making the plea and only \$40,000 actually went to the mission. How would you respond? It may sound absurd—but that's exactly the deal arranged by some Christian ministries with musicians.

Some say, "We don't publicly disclose this arrangement, because people would get the wrong idea. They'd misunderstand." The real danger isn't that people would misunderstand—it's that they would *understand*. If they understood that part of the offering was going to the celebrity, not to the cause, they would see it for what it is, and probably not support it. (If I believed in the cause and knew of these arrangements, I would send my check directly to the organization, so more would go to needy children instead of to the celebrity. Shouldn't I be given the information to allow me to make that choice?)

Taking an offering should be an opportunity to serve the needy, not a means to make money off the cause of the needy. The only way to know one's motives are right in making the appeal is

not to profit from the arrangement. Those in ministry should seek to serve, not to be served. (Isn't that what ministry is about?) They should look for the right organization to support—which would not be the one that offered them the kickback.

"But speakers are paid an honorarium—what's the difference?" The difference is that people assume the speaker is being paid. If you attend a seminar, it's understood that part of the cost goes to the speaker. If you pay for a concert, it's understood that funds go to the music group. No one's being lied to or misled. But in the case of paid celebrity endorsements, people *are* being misled. Poll those attending and you'll find that most believe the speaker or musician is voluntarily endorsing the ministry because God has touched his heart by it. The audience has no clue that the first several thousand dollars given, or a percentage of the total, goes not to the cause but to the speaker or musician.

The ministry may argue, "It costs money to make money. If we put a full-page ad in a magazine, or if we produce an infomercial, it may cost us a higher percentage of what's given than if we pay 20 percent to a music group. If people realize it's okay to spend money to advertise in a magazine, why isn't it okay to pay to get the endorsement of a speaker or music group?"

The operative word is "realize." Everyone knows that it costs money to put an ad in a magazine. But unless it's explicitly disclosed, they have no clue that a speaker or music group is being paid for its endorsement.

"But the poor get more help than if we didn't do this." Who says we have to choose between misleading people and helping the poor? Believing that honest fundraising can't be productive is an insult to God and His people. I believe that speakers or musicians who are endorsing a ministry and receiving nothing in return should make this clear. Doing this would be a great example to other speakers and musicians and would reassure the audience (who might become cynical as they learn of deceptive practices). Best of all, the speaker or musician's reward would then come not from the ministry but from the Lord. We're not to serve those who can benefit us, but those who can't—and

then God Himself will reward us in heaven (Luke 14:12-14).

## Selling the Spiritual

Opportunism and attempts to buy and sell the spiritual are not new. Simon Magus was the first entrepreneur to see “money” written all over ministry:

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.” (Acts 8:18-22)

What makes us think that God has changed His opinion of attempts to profit under the veil of ministry? Every church and ministry leader should ask, “What are we doing that would make us embarrassed or uncomfortable if people knew it?” As I write this, I am asking myself that very question concerning our own nonprofit ministry. If we think of something—and I just did—isn’t that a good indication we should stop it now? (We did.)

Donors should ask the ministries they support whether they are paying to get celebrity endorsements or are spending their funds in some way other than it appears. If the answers aren’t ethically and biblically satisfactory, donors should say that until the ministry’s policies change, they can no longer in good conscience support them and must give their money to ministries that are operating at a higher level of integrity. For everyone’s sake, including their own, ministries need to be held accountable by their supporters—and so do Christian musicians and speakers.

We should be stimulating each other to love and good deeds, setting ethical examples, raising the bar for each other, not lowering it. Jesus will examine the motives of our hearts—including our truthfulness and the sincerity of our words spoken on behalf of the poor and

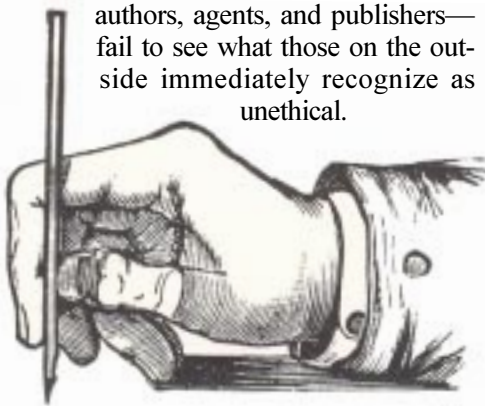
in support of kingdom ministries (1 Corinthians 4:5). If we have given to the needy for their good and God’s glory, He will commend us. If we have taken from them for financial gain, He will not.

Imagine standing before Christ someday and hearing Him say, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for—yourself!”

## Ghostwriting Ethics

Ghostwriting is when someone else writes a book that is credited to a celebrity as if he or she wrote it. The rationale is that because the real writer’s name isn’t well-known and marketable, the book won’t sell well unless it’s released under the celebrity’s name.

This is so commonly practiced that many Christian publishers, authors, and celebrities see no ethical problem with it. Some of these people are sincere in their beliefs—I know because I’ve talked with them. I have great respect for my publishers, and many others too, but all of us, including me, naturally become desensitized. Sometimes those of us who are on the inside of publishing—including authors, agents, and publishers—fail to see what those on the outside immediately recognize as unethical.



I’m not talking about the legitimate process of coauthoring, in which authors invest varying levels of work and expertise into the writing. Nor am I talking about books that, after being written, need substantial editing provided by the publisher. By *ghostwriting*, I’m talking about when the actual writer’s name is not on the cover, or when a person’s name is on the cover (even as a coauthor with the real writer) who did little or nothing to write the book.

I know of cases where the celebrity didn’t write a word and only skimmed through the book for the first time late in the editing process. Is this honest?

Consider what this practice does to immature believers who are athletes, musicians, or public figures made prominent through tragic or newsworthy events. “Here’s the offer: We will make you a lot of money, and you will get to take credit for doing something you really didn’t do.” We feed their ego, and set them up for deception and pride, which is bound to cause them to fall (Proverbs 16:18). They’re under enough temptation already—why do we feel compelled to add to it by making the false claim that in addition to everything else they’re writers?

If we teach them it’s okay to lie by taking credit for a book they didn’t write, why should we be shocked if we discover they lied when they claim to have graduated from a college they didn’t, or to have fought in a war they didn’t, or to have done a job they didn’t? Isn’t it ironic that Christian publishers would consider it an ethical breach if they discovered an “author” gave them a resume containing false information, when the same publisher has knowingly led the public to believe this person wrote a book he or she really didn’t write? Which is the bigger lie?

Nothing is more uncomfortable than hearing an interview with those who are asked about their experiences writing a book they didn’t write. Their temptation is to pretend and cover up the truth. Sometimes they pretend long enough that they convince themselves they’re writers, becoming better liars all the time.

Publishers sometimes approach prominent pastors and Christian leaders whose greatest temptations are toward pride and pretense and then help them pretend they wrote a book, taking pride in something they didn’t do!

Putting musicians, writers, speakers, and others on pedestals goes way beyond healthy respect for role models. It borders on idolatry. It’s not good for anyone, but certainly it’s not good for the young, the immature, and those already struggling with pride, pretense, money-loving, and other temptations that are fed by “I wrote a book” celebrity status.

Ask the average person what it means when a name is on a book cover, and they’ll tell you it means the person actually wrote it. That’s what book buyers believe. Hence, the book is sold to them under false pretenses. I’ve been

told “the ghostwriter knows what he’s agreeing to, and if he doesn’t need to see his name on the book, that’s up to him.” But the question isn’t what the ghostwriter or celebrity believes, it’s what the potential book-buyer believes. Ghostwriters may receive far greater royalties than if they were known as the book’s true author. They may have a vested interest in the falsehood just like everyone else involved.



Some of my editor friends are excellent writers. They are sometimes paid their normal salaries by publishers to do the actual writing—not just editing—of books where 100% of the royalties go to celebrities who did no writing.

Why not tell the truth on the cover, saying who *really* wrote the book and leaving off the names of any who didn’t write it? The answer is simple: “It wouldn’t sell as well.” If the response is “the book is just as good or better than if the celebrity wrote it,” that may well be true, but people should be allowed to decide that for themselves, shouldn’t they? How dare we mislead and deprive readers of accurate information about who actually wrote the book they are considering buying? This isn’t just patronizing and insulting, it’s downright dishonest. Why do we imagine this is any different than withholding information about the used car we’re trying to sell, for fear that if we told the truth people wouldn’t buy it? Is our goal just to sell books, or to honor Jesus?

The same principle applies to columns and articles—including those in many ministry and Christian college publications—that are not actually written by the Christian leaders listed as authors. Some college presidents never write their own articles in school publications, yet

their names are always attached to them. If students at the same college put their name on papers written by someone else, this would be grounds for expulsion. So why is it all right for the president to do it? Similarly, ministry fundraising letters signed by the president or CEO frequently aren’t written by him.

In 1990 a scandal occurred involving Milli Vanilli. The singing group’s name became a synonym for dishonesty and hypocrisy simply because the people doing the singing for their recordings weren’t the ones getting credit for it. (So why is this recognized as wrong, but it’s considered acceptable to take credit for a book, article, or letter someone else wrote?) A class-action suit was filed against Milli Vanilli and their recording company. Purchasers of *Girl You Know It’s True* were given the opportunity to request a rebate for fraud damages. Are readers of books not written by their stated authors entitled to a rebate for exactly the same reasons?

Someone could argue that the real singers sounded better than Milli Vanilli. So what? The whole thing was a lie, and customers were outraged.

It’s ironic that Christians would stoop to ethics that even most non-Christians, who don’t believe what the Bible says about truth, immediately recognize as wrong.

Isn’t it reasonable for both Christians and non-Christians to be able to buy a Christian book with the confidence that the person identified on the book and publicized as the author actually *wrote* it?

“But ghostwriting is a well-established practice.” Many things are well-established practices, but that doesn’t make them right. I’ve seen people heartsick, disillusioned, and angry when they discover that various popular Christian books weren’t written by the person whose name is on the cover. We who supposedly esteem the truth so highly should be the last ones to participate in such deceit.

Every argument I hear for ghostwriting is pragmatic. *Of course* people make money by ghostwriting. People also make money from prostitution, theft, and drug dealing. The real question is not whether ghostwriting is *profitable* but whether it is *moral*. I never hear people offer biblical and ethical justifications for it, only

practical ones. Why? Perhaps because there simply is no moral justification.

There’s sometimes a fine line between ghostwriting and celebrity books written “with” others. Writing a book about people, with their cooperation, is certainly fine, as long as there’s no pretense or false impression about who did the writing. But when the cover puts the celebrity’s name first, followed by “and” or “with” the true writer, the implication is that the celebrity did most or much of the writing. If, in fact, the celebrity did nothing more than grant interviews, answer questions, pass on a few pages of a journal, or tell a couple of stories, then he or she isn’t the author and shouldn’t be promoted as such.

If this isn’t a book *by* Celebrity X but *about* Celebrity X, that’s fine—but shouldn’t this distinction be made clear by listing the real author’s name exclusively on the cover? The celebrity can still be emphasized as the subject of the book, but not as the author. The writer shouldn’t pretend to be a world-class athlete or movie star, and the celebrity shouldn’t pretend to be a writer. Sometimes the “name” person is a celebrity author who *can* write but *didn’t* write this book. If the celebrity didn’t write it but just supplied some suggestions or advice, he or she belongs on the acknowledgments page, not the cover. Ask yourself, “Given the amount of work the celebrity actually contributed to writing the book, if the name wasn’t well-known, would it be on the cover?” If the answer is no, then the ethics are clear—the celebrity’s name shouldn’t be on the cover as author.

I believe Christian ghostwriting is a scandal waiting to explode. If we in the Christian community don’t clean up our act soon, we’re going to face widespread loss of credibility. What a tragedy if *60 Minutes* were to expose this practice we should never have tolerated. Can’t you see Steve Kroft or Ed Bradley holding up a book and asking well-known Christian authors, “Did you *really* write this book?” Envision the neatly edited scenes of embarrassment, head-hanging, evasions, rationalizations, and reports that “so-and-so author and publisher wouldn’t return our calls.”

This could be a major setback for Christian publishers and authors at the

very time Christian books have made unprecedented inroads into the mainstream culture. We need to confess, repent of, and change our policies—and stop being driven by money-love and ego building.

If we're not telling the truth about who wrote the book—on the cover, in large print—why should people believe what we say inside the book, in small print?

## False Advertising by Christian Colleges

Many Christian colleges routinely print doctrinal statements in their catalogs that are not believed or taught by some or even many of their professors. The academic vice president of a major Christian liberal arts college confided to me, "If Christian parents actually

knew what their children are being taught in our classrooms, they would pull them out of college tomorrow." And, I would add, they'd never give another dime to that college.

If Christian colleges told the truth in their promotional materials, some would read like this: "Thirty-four percent of our faculty believe in the inerrancy of God's Word. Twenty-one percent of our science teachers believe the biblical account of creation. No one in our psychology department believes in

the doctrine of original sin. Two out of our three sociology teachers are proabortion and defenders of homosexual lifestyles. The director of our philosophy department is an agnostic. The head of our Bible department hasn't attended church for ten years because he doesn't believe in organized religion."

Why not be honest and admit this publicly? The answer is simple: So Christian parents will keep paying to send their students there, and so the college's major Christian donors will keep sending money.

I am a great believer in Christian higher education. But the doctrinal statements published in many Christian colleges, including some at which I've spoken, are simply false advertising (also known as lying). Much of the motive for this dishonesty boils down to money.



When students go to secular colleges, they and their parents should be prepared for the fact that most Christian beliefs will be argued against, marginalized and

often ridiculed in classrooms. Many students are woefully unprepared to defend their faith, and end up abandoning it during their college years. But at least if they go to secular colleges they have no illusions they'll be taught Christian beliefs.

But many students go to Christian colleges assuming they will be taught biblical truths. They and their parents have the right to be told in advance what is actually taught at so-called Christian colleges. (I implore parents to do their homework and find this out.) If your goal is for your son or daughter to lose their faith, there are much cheaper ways to do this than sending them to "Christian" colleges that neither teach nor believe God's Word!

## Raising the Bar

I take no pleasure in addressing these issues. I hope it will serve Christ's body by initiating some much-needed self-examination and dialogue.

Which Christian colleges, missions organizations, speakers, musicians, publishers, and authors will come forward and confess past misleading practices and commit themselves to the highest ethical standards before the Audience of One, even if it means forgoing financial gain? Who will, in the name of Christ, raise the bar of honesty, integrity, and truth?

Only when Christian leaders establish new and higher standards will others feel the positive peer pressure and accountability to do the same. Only then will reform be widespread, with direct unspun truth-telling becoming the established norm.

Only then will we gain the trust of both the Christian public and a skeptical secular culture accustomed to deception, but desperately needing the truth.

### Inspiring Words from Missionaries...

The moment that I became a citizen of heaven, I became a foreigner on earth. It is unfortunate that we have adopted such a phrase as "foreign missionaries." We are all missionaries, and we are all pilgrims and strangers, foreigners in this world.

*T. J. Bach*

Even if I never should see a native converted, God may design by my patience and continuance in the word to encourage future missionaries.

*Henry Martyn*

I have a holy awe of the Lord. In a certain sense I am afraid of Him, for when God gives a command He means business; there is no foolishness with Him, and if the plea of love is not sufficient to elicit our obedience, then the Lord has His own methods of dealing with us. He is most gloriously a God of love, but it is a terrible thing to oppose the Ruler of the universe. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and I want to graduate from life's school with honors.

*Robert Savage*

*Quotes from World Shapers: A Treasury of Quotes from Great Missionaries  
Compiled by Vinita Hampton & Carol Plueddemann*

*He placed me in a little cage,  
Away from gardens fair;  
But I must sing the sweetest  
songs  
Because He placed me there.  
Not beat my wings against  
the cage  
If it's my Maker's will,  
But raise my voice to  
heaven's gate  
And sing the louder still!*

*(Excerpt from Streams in the Desert  
by Margaret Cowan, p. 98)*



# Make A Difference In Africa

*(The following letters were recently received from two worthy mission organizations who work with the poor. EPM recommends and supports both. After receiving these letters we decided to give substantially from our EPM reserve funds. We encourage you to consider doing the same.)*



Last week I returned from Zimbabwe where six million people are in desperate need of food.

The intensity of the crisis in southern Africa is increasing faster than expected and the situation has deteriorated most in Zambia and Zimbabwe, where a disaster will only be averted by immediate action.

Right now, many families have literally nothing to eat. Malnourished children display the classic symptoms of hunger—distended stomachs and orange-tinted hair. People look out at barren fields, scorched by the sun.

The people of Zimbabwe have come to such a place of constant suffering that it has become a part of their daily lives. Without immediate help, many will die in the coming weeks and months.

An elder in one of the communities I visited said, “We are grateful for visitors from other countries who hear our cry for food—we are really starving. In the past when there was drought we could at least buy food. Even if you have money there is nothing to buy. Now that you have observed our situation, we have hope.”

Many of those suffering are Christians—our brothers and sisters in Jesus. Desperately weak from hunger, they don’t even have the strength to walk to church. Helplessly watching their people suffer and die, community leaders cry out for help. “All we have to live on is black tea,” one man told me.

If my heart aches, how much greater is my Heavenly Father’s pain?

It is imperative that the Church acts now. Together, we can save thousands of lives in Jesus’ name. We can be the “hands of Jesus” to the hungry in Zimbabwe and across this troubled region helping our brothers and sisters in their hour of distress. We can show others that the love of Jesus is real, because we live out what we preach.

*Please, will you join me in prayer:* that Jesus will protect His people in Zimbabwe and across southern Africa; that the Church worldwide will grasp this opportunity to “be Jesus” to families in peril; that the light of Christ will shine as churches distribute food; that this place of constant suffering will feel God’s peace.

*Dr. Clive Calver, President, World Relief*

Malawi and Zambia are two countries of only 10 million people each. However, there are an estimated 800,000 orphans in each country. A huge percent of the total population between the ages of 15 and 49 is HIV positive. Action International is partnering with several national evangelical organizations and local churches to minister the gospel and compassionate care to these children.

We are very much concerned for the need for food for orphans and the extreme poor during these days of famine in Malawi and Zambia. Could you help provide maize and other food supplies during this crisis? Our prayer target is \$79,000 to help many orphans and families during the present famine.

Many of those suffering are Christians—our brothers and sisters in Jesus. Desperately weak from hunger, they don’t even have the strength to walk to church.

We’re also trusting God to be able to help clothe many of these children. We can purchase bales of clothing at only \$138 each. Each bale has 600 pieces of clothing. We would like to purchase twelve bales for a total

of \$1656. This is equivalent to about 23 cents for each piece of clothing (dress, blouse, trousers, etc.). Each child or adult can be provided with three pieces of clothing for only 69 cents... yes, therefore only 69 cents to fully clothe a child or adult!

Would you please consider helping orphans and needy families in Malawi and Zambia, especially with food during this crisis?

“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to [care for] orphans and widows in their distress...” (James 1:27).

Thank you for prayerfully considering this need as the Lord leads in this project for orphans and the poor for the glory of God!

*Doug Nichols, Director, Action International*



*As always, you can write a designated check to EPM and 100% will be sent directly to aid the poor.*

*Or you can write a check to the following:*

**World Relief, PO BOX WRC, Wheaton, IL 60189, [www.worldrelief.org](http://www.worldrelief.org)**

**ACTION USA, PO Box 398, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043-0398, [www.actionintl.org](http://www.actionintl.org)**

# Read Any Good Books Lately?

## *Advice and Recommendations*

By Justin Taylor, Director for Theological Resources & Education,  
Desiring God Ministries

### ▮ *Read only the best books.*

Richard Baxter wrote: "It is not the reading of many books which is necessary to make one wise, but the well-reading of a few, could they be sure to have the best."

### ▮ *Do not neglect books.*

They are gracious gifts from God for guidance. Larry Woiwode

warns, "There is rugged terrain ahead for those who are constitutionally incapable of referring to the paths marked out by wise and spirit-filled cartographers over the centuries."

### ▮ *Do not neglect THE Book.*

John Wesley (himself a prolific reader) wrote, "Let me be *homo unius libri*"—a man of one Book.



*With these principles in mind, I will mention a few recommended titles for your consideration...*

Frame's *The Doctrine of God* may be one of the best books ever written on the doctrine of God. Frame is at his best in this profound and biblical work. Wayne Grudem, one of his former students, says that Frame has now surpassed Calvin, Charnock, Hodge, and Bavinck on the doctrine of God.

Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*. This book is short, but worth its weight in gold. Reading this will change the way you view the Old Testament and cause you to marvel afresh at the person and work of Jesus Christ. Works by Graeme Goldsworthy, including his *Triology* and *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, are also quite insightful and helpful.

Veith, *God at Work*. Veith insightfully teaches on the vital but neglected Reformation doctrine of vocation. If your job feels mundane, or if you wonder whether you should be in a "secular" job, pick up this excellent book. This doctrine must be recovered in our day!

Enger, *Peace Like a River*. Enger, both a Christian and a fellow Minnesotan, has written an excellent story filled with fascinating characters and spiritual themes. This ended up becoming Amazon.com's 2001 Book of the Year!

Alcorn's *Safely Home*, this year's Gold Medallion Novel of the Year, is a unique novel about the persecution of Chinese Christians. All of the royalties for this book, by the way, go toward this cause.

What does it look like to raise godly, masculine boys? See Dobson's *Bringing Up Boys* and Wilson's *Future Men*. Chuck Colson has written, "I can't think of a more important subject." I agree. All who are raising boys (especially dads!) should read at least one of these very insightful books.

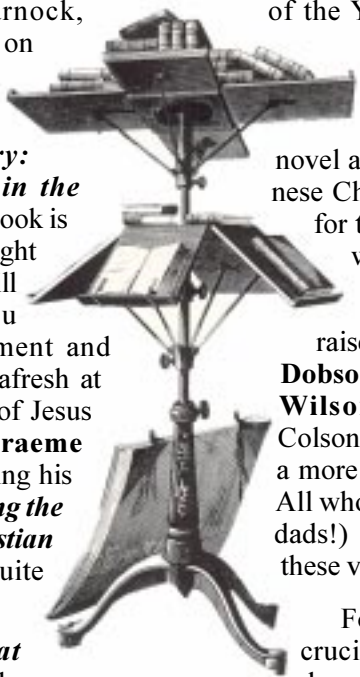
For some helpful books on the crucial task of catechizing children, I have been very impressed with MacKenzie's *My First Book of Questions and Answers*, Ferguson's *Big Book of Questions and Answers*, and Hunt's *Big Truths for Little Kids*. For those a bit older, see Hustedt's *Firm in the Faith*.

I have not read any books for women this year! Nevertheless, I can recommend a few with confidence. Nancy Leigh DeMoss, called by some an "Elisabeth Elliot for a new generation," recently edited a book entitled *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*, with chapters by Carolyn Mahaney, Susan Hunt, and others.

Another new book for women, *When Life and Beliefs Collide: How Knowing God Makes a Difference*, by Carolyn Curtis James, has even J. I. Packer excited: "This outstanding book offers the best demonstration that everyone needs theology, the best expository account of Mary and Martha, and the best trajectory for women's ministry in North America that I have yet read."

Finally, the late James M. Boice wrote that the books and Bible studies by Carol J. Ruvolo are "...the most valuable Bible study material written explicitly for women that I have come across in three decades of ministry...deeply God-centered, theologically profound, and very, very practical."

*So many books...  
so little time.*





# That Great Steel Cross

## *More Reflections on the Calamity of September 11*

by John Piper

Not surprisingly God and suffering were prominent in the commemorations of 9/11. But missing from most was the observation that there were greater horrors in 2001. This is not to minimize the pain of 9/11 but to sharpen the problem of suffering.

There is more suffering in the world than any human can imagine. And at the center of suffering is the cross of Christ—both in New York and in the Bible. On September 11 last year, 2,823 people died in the collapse of the World Trade towers. On that same day at least 35,000 people died of starvation. Eight months earlier near Bhuj, India, 20,005 people died in the deadliest earthquake of 2001.

A total of 2,400,000 people died in the United States that year. In round numbers that means 700,000 from heart disease, 550,000 from cancer, 160,000 from stroke, 120,000 from chronic respiratory disease, 93,000 from accidents, 68,000 from diabetes, 67,000 from pneumonia, 49,000 from Alzheimer's, 41,730 in car wrecks, and 15,000 from murder.

About 56,000,000 people died on this earth in 2001. In Africa one million children died of malaria, that year, 2,379 a day, while 2,300,000 million African people died of AIDS.

Seven years earlier during one month—April, 1994—Hutu radicals killed 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda. Fifty years earlier 500,000 American soldiers died during World War II, while in Russia 20,600,000 people lost their lives, including 7,000,000 civilians. And if we go back 140 years, we remember that in the Civil War 618,000 Americans were killed.

The Bible confirms the sad reality. Not only does it describe a flood that wiped out the earth's population, and battles where 100,000 and 185,000 men perished (1 Kings 20:29; Isaiah 37:36), and an epidemic that killed 70,000 Israelites (2 Samuel 24:16), and coming wars and earthquakes and famines (Matthew 24:7), but it also describes the origin of these calamities. "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

This does not mean that there is a direct correlation between specific personal sins and a person's suffering and death. The best people often die hard, and the worst die easy. It means that sin is more repugnant in the universe than suffering and death, and that God subjects the world to the futility of natural dysfunction and moral collapse to show us the horror of sin and point us to the Savior. This is the meaning of Romans 8:20, "The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope."

Surely, in God's minute and merciful providence, the steel cross standing erect in the rubble of the World Trade towers is a reminder that "we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). In other words, when God subjected the world to futility, he had in mind to send his Son into that very futility to rescue people for everlasting joy.



Christ's torture and sufferings were excruciating. The Romans had devised no worse punishment than crucifixion. That's what God chose for his Son (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28), and the Son willingly embraced it (Mark 10:45). It was sin that put Jesus to death—"the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Therefore, the sins that brought down the World Trade towers were the sins that put Jesus on the cross. That is what we saw in the great steel cross rising from the wreckage in New York. Sin caused the collapse and sin caused the cross. It was a gift to the world that God ordained a rugged cross to stand in the ruins of September 11 and show up in hundreds of commemorations.

Yes, the sovereignty that stood that cross could have stopped the calamity. But the designs of God are unfathomable. "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:33). Someday the curse will be lifted, but not yet (Revelation 21:4). For now, everyone suffers and dies. The hope God gives is not escape *from*, but triumph *in*, suffering. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). The answer is nobody and nothing. "*In* all these things we are more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). The cross of Christ calls us to suffer and secures our triumph. Suffering is certain. Salvation is sure. And the cross makes all the difference. Oh, that every American would say, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

# UNC Feminists Abort Free Speech

By Mike S. Adams

*"All university faculty and students must be free to consider all ideas whatsoever...without restriction or limitation imposed by political or religious orthodoxy. This principle has always been true, and it remains true today. It is the essence of academic freedom."*

University of North Carolina Faculty Assembly Chair Richard Veit

When a new Women's Resource Center was established at my university (UNC-Wilmington), I was concerned that it would serve as more of a resource for feminist professors than for female students. I also suspected that the Center would try to advance a "pro-choice" agenda with little tolerance for the views of pro-life advocates. Recently, those suspicions were confirmed.

During a recent visit to their web page, I noticed that the Women's Resource Center claimed a dedication to education and advocacy on a variety of issues facing women of "all backgrounds, beliefs, and orientations." The Center also claimed an interest in working with many community-based organizations and in maintaining "clear lines of communication" between the students and "any organizations involved."

Nonetheless, when I clicked on the portion of the website which provides links to community organizations, I noticed that contact information for Planned Parenthood, a "pro-choice" organization, was posted—while contact information for Life Line, a "pro-life" center, was conspicuously absent.

Without hesitation, I contacted the site's manager with a simple request for the Center to add contact information for Life Line in close proximity to the contact information for Planned Parenthood. After being directed to Dr. Kathleen Berkeley, I repeated that request. Dr. Berkeley was one of the professors who pushed for the establishment of the Women's Resource Center. She was also placed in charge of the Center until its first official director assumed her duties in July 2002. After a few days of deliberation, which included a meeting with the dean, Dr. Berkeley denied my request stating that "the addition of Life Line Pregnancy

Center would duplicate information provided by Planned Parenthood."

Of course, there is no "non-duplication requirement" for organizations posting information on the Center's web page. For example, two of the community organizations on their site offer rape crisis counseling. Certainly, no reasonable person could object to that kind of "duplication." Imagine, hypothetically, that someone wanted to build a second domestic violence shelter in town. Certainly, the Women's Center would not deny a request to post their contact information because they already had information on another such shelter.

Dr. Berkeley's supposed "non-duplication" standard is both non-existent and unworkable. It is also utterly inapplicable to the case at hand. The differences between Life Line and Planned Parenthood are far greater than their similarities. The decision to keep Life Line's information away from students is yet another silly episode which reveals the fundamental dishonesty of the university's so-called commitment to diversity. It is no accident that the university library has a copy of Planned Parenthood's response to Bernard Nathanson's *Silent Scream*, although they do not have a copy of the *Silent Scream* itself. The university library also houses a book by Dr. Berkeley which refers to the *Silent Scream* as "grisly sensationalism." It would appear that the university would rather have their students read

reviews offered from one perspective than to have students look at the original and assume the risk that they might come up with a different opinion.

The problem with higher education today is not that people are unaware that the diversity movement is dishonest. The problem is that among those people with reasonable objections to the diversity agenda, there are too few willing to do something about it. Administrators at public universities simply have no right to take money from taxpayers and use it to advance their own political causes while systematically suppressing the views of their opponents.

I hope that everyone reading this article will "duplicate" my efforts to expand the marketplace of ideas at their local university. If your tax dollars are being used to support a one-sided view on the issue of abortion, respectfully ask for information on the other side to be included. If you are denied, take your case before the court of public opinion or, if necessary, a court of law. After all, the right to free speech is older than the "right to choose." And censorship is decidedly "anti-choice."

After all, the right to free speech is older than the "right to choose." And censorship is decidedly "anti-choice."

## UPDATE:

My second request to Dr. Berkeley was ignored. In July, Dr. Elizabeth Ervin became the permanent director of the Women's Resource Center. She has responded politely and honestly to inquiries from pro-life taxpayers. While she has characterized Dr. Berkeley's reasoning as "a rather lame justification," she agrees with her decision. Ervin justifies Life Line's exclusion on the grounds that it is "overtly religious."

*Dr. Mike S. Adams is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at the UNC-Wilmington. He can be contacted at [adams\\_mike@hotmail.com](mailto:adams_mike@hotmail.com).*



# Questions and Answers

By Randy Alcorn

Dear EPM,

My name is John and I have a question that has been bugging me for a while. Let me explain. I have always been interested in computers and recently landed a good job in the computer field that pays a lot of money. I go to college in the morning from about 8-12 and then go to work. My question is whether or not I should buy a car. Not just any car, a Chevy Corvette. You see, I have always wanted one. I am a born again Christian and I adamantly follow Christ. I agree wholeheartedly about giving and investing in eternity in the articles on the website and I give a lot to missions and relief organizations. If I have more than enough money left over after giving to pay for living, tuition, and other things and also give a lot to the church and to missions, would it be wrong to buy a Corvette? I know it is a very expensive car. I have asked several people about it. Some say that if I have more than enough after giving I should get the Corvette if I want it while others say even if I have given a lot, I should still give more if I have it. What do you suggest I do?

John\*

Dear John,

Good for you that you are asking the question and looking for a Christ-honoring answer, rather than just assuming you should do whatever you feel like.

There's nothing wrong with a Corvette. But I guarantee you that you'll find far more joy in giving than in any car.

If I were you, I would take the money minus what it would take to buy an inexpensive car if you truly need to, and give it to missions and famine relief. Everyone comes out ahead that way—God is glorified, people are kept alive and reached with the gospel, and you will lay up treasures in heaven; and Jesus says your heart will follow your treasures.

When Jesus says don't store up for yourself treasure on earth, but in heaven, I think investing in God's kingdom and helping save lives physically and spiritually is an example of the latter, while getting the Corvette is an example of the former.

I have a book called *The Treasure Principle: Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving*. It gives a larger picture of why I believe this is the right thing to do—but not only the right thing, the thing that will bring you joy both in this life and in eternity. In the book I deal with passages such as 2 Corinthians 8:14 and 9:11, which I believe tell us why God provides us with lots of money, as He has you. It's not for us to give Him a "respectable amount" so we can feel good about laying up treasures on earth, it's so we can invest the great majority of the surplus in that which is closest to His heart.

One final question—at the judgment seat of Christ, if you bought the Corvette instead of giving the money away, can you envision Christ saying "I intended you to give the money to Me and needy people, not spend it on that car"? Second question, if you give it away, can you envision Christ saying to you, "Bad move—I didn't want you to give it, I wanted you to buy that car"? Bottom line, if you're not absolutely sure, you certainly won't disappoint or disobey Christ by giving it to Him.

Randy

Dear EPM,

The story of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) is of limited value in understanding how the poor are to be treated. This teaching is given by Jesus at the end of a discourse to His disciples after they asked Him when He would return. It concerns a judgment to be made either upon His pre-millennial return or at the great white throne at the end of the age. The issue is who will be allowed into His eternal kingdom. Its primary teaching is that the judgment will be made based upon how a person treats "these brethren of mine." This probably refers to either how the Jews or Christians are treated during persecutions that will occur in the days preceding His return or the final judgment.

This story does not appear to be a universal teaching on how to treat the

hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. If the teaching is applied universally to all hungry, thirsty, or naked, it conflicts with teachings that we are not commanded to provide for those who can feed or clothe themselves but won't.

I took the two paragraphs above from a study on what the scriptures have to say about the Christian's obligation to care for the poor. I have a different view of Matthew 25. It seems to me that we, the church, can and do for peace of mind and heart, produce for ourselves a whole litany of activities—noble, good, righteous activities that we tell ourselves meet the qualifications that Jesus has set down as criteria for making the "sheep team." Jesus Himself could have given us such a litany. He could have given us something more to make us feel good about ourselves, but He didn't. Instead He just mentioned this one posture—an attitude of proactive compassion for the lonely and the poor. Do we have hearts that respond to the needs of these hurting people? We need to look at Christ's own life for the model He left us. We see the special place He gave the poor—the time He gave them. Do we imitate Christ in the giving of self to the poor and the lonely? I think Jesus issued this statement as a solemn warning to all who do not have the care of the poor high on their list of "do" priorities—the cost is most serious. I may be wrong. Your interpretation would be most appreciated.

Jeff

Jeff,

I do not believe Matthew 25 is of "limited value in understanding how the poor are to be treated." On the contrary, it is of great value. Of course we are to use discernment as to who is truly needy and who isn't (Paul talks about "widows indeed," those who are truly needy and are to be helped), and of course people who are able-bodied should work (2 Thess. 3), but Matthew 25 teaches us we are to help those truly in need. There are many ways we can do so, with our time and money and possessions, and our prayers; but certainly the poor are close to the heart of God, and to help them is to do service not only to them, but to Christ.

Randy

\*The names have been changed to protect the identities of those writing.

# A Personal Plea for Orthodoxy

by Randy Alcorn

*Richard is not this writer's real name, but he is a real person. Many Christians have read his books, and many will likely read the one referred to here. My letter follows one in which he confirmed he is still writing this book. It's followed by his brief response.*

Dear Richard,

We don't know each other that well, but I know we both remember our long conversation about God's grace and the question of hell. I can live with people disagreeing with me, and I with them. But this one weighs heavily on me. So please bear with me as I try to share some more thoughts on this with you. I feel compelled to do this, by the Holy Spirit. I think it is His leading I am following. Because you say you're moving forward with writing a book claiming that all people will go to heaven, I'm deeply concerned. We're both writers, both profess to follow Jesus, and we're both responsible to make sure we're faithful to God's Word.

I've been writing lately on the subject of grace and truth, and how Jesus is full of both, but we tend to choose one over the other. Some choose truth over grace, some grace over truth, but there's a harmony to them which is paradoxical to us, yet ultimately not contradictory to God. One day we'll understand how they reconcile, but not yet.

I'm concerned that your treatment of the doctrine of hell is an attempt to choose between grace and truth rather than embracing both. I remember you affirming that you believe so much in God's grace, you cannot believe in hell. This has, if I understood correctly, led you to universalism, believing men cannot go to an eternal hell, because Jesus purchased the world's redemption. Therefore, all people will end up in heaven regardless of their choices in this life. "I love people too much to send them to hell," your logic goes. "And surely God loves them more than I do!"

If logic was my authority, I might agree. But since Scripture's my authority, I can't. I remember asking you if you believed heaven was eternal. You said yes, you did. Then I quoted Matthew 25:46, "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." The words translated "eternal" are the same Greek word—*aionos*. If "eternal" means heaven lasts forever, it can only mean hell lasts forever. There's just no way Christ would change the meaning of that word a heartbeat (six words later) after saying it the first time.

This is one of many reasons I can't choose grace instead of the truth about hell. Clearly Jesus believed in hell and taught it was eternal. Was He wrong? I don't think so. I have to believe in both grace and the truth of hell, because the Bible teaches both. Whether or not I like it is irrelevant. Truth is truth. I don't get a vote. My logic and my preferences don't trump Scripture.

As I was studying recently I saw that Jesus, full of grace, spoke more about hell than anyone else in Scripture. Twelve of the fourteen times the main New Testament word for hell is used, it's by Jesus. He spoke of being in danger of the fire of hell (Matt. 5:22), being thrown into hell (Matt 5:29), said people should fear God, "the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). He asked the Pharisees, "How will you escape being condemned to hell?" (Matt 23:33). He depicted hell as a place men are "in torment," without hope of relief (Luke 16:23).

Ironically, Richard, I'm afraid the doctrine you're planning on advocating in your book may convince people—or be used by others to convince them—they don't need to accept Christ's grace. If you're right, they can—and will—accept it later. If you're wrong, they will spend eternity in hell, as orthodox Christianity has always affirmed.

I fear that your denial of hell in the name of grace will discourage people from the grace you love, while leading them toward the hell you hate and deny.

Hate hell by all means—but let that prompt you not to deny it, but to share the truth that delivers men from hell.

The person who thinks he's not drowning won't reach for the life-preserver. Why *should* he?

I think sometimes we (at least I) ask the wrong questions. If we were holy, we'd realize the strange thing isn't why God would send people to hell. He's infinitely holy and we're sinners, steeped in rebellion, offensive even to finite angelic holiness, let alone infinite divine holiness. Send people to hell? No brainer. Where else would they be sent?

The really disturbing question, if we were holy, would be, "How could a holy God send sinful men to heaven?" Holy angels might reason, "God is far more holy than we, and we wouldn't let these evil people into heaven—so how could He?" Angels might write a book entitled "Why Do Good Things Happen to Bad People?"

We ask the wrong questions because we don't grasp the truths of God's holiness and our sin. Therefore, we don't grasp the wonders of His grace. We think of ourselves as greater than wretches, making God's grace less amazing.

We imagine hell is out of proportion to our offenses precisely because we don't grasp how serious our offenses are, nor how holy our God is.

God's grace faces straight-on hell's reality, and offers full deliverance. Denying hell takes the wind out of grace's sails. If there's no eternal hell, the stakes of redemption are vastly lowered. What did Jesus die to rescue us from? And if you say the answer is that Jesus rescued all men from hell despite whether they accept Him, what is the point of Jesus depicting the rich man in hell crying out for mercy which he clearly is not being granted? Surely we don't know something Jesus didn't, do we?

Grace is God's work to deliver us from the full extent of our depravity, and its full punishment (eternal hell). By understating depravity and denying eternal hell we lower the cost of our redemption. We cheapen grace. By diminishing the truth that demanded the ultimate price for sin, we diminish the grace that paid that price.

I don't know how else to ask this, Richard. What makes any of us imagine we're qualified to revise and edit God's truth to make it compatible with what we imagine grace to require? How quick we are to drag Almighty God before the bar of human reason!

The fact that I can't wrap my brain around God's grace and the truth of hell proves only one thing—I have a very small brain. I don't mean that as an insult. Just as a recognition of the facts. My brain is small, and yours may be a bit larger, but judged by the cosmic scales of wisdom, surely we both suffer from undersized minds!

I guess my concern, Richard, is that we seem determined to tone truth down, sand off its hard edges. We're embarrassed by God's truth, afraid it's making Him look bad. But we're not God's speech writers. He appoints us to deliver His message, not to compose it. He's already done that—it's called the Bible. He doesn't need editors and PR people. He needs faithful messengers.

If Matthew 25:46 isn't true when it says hell is eternal, what makes me think John 3:16 is true when it says God loves us and offers us eternal life?

There's another reason why some people will be drawn to your premise—fear. Because I'm afraid to tell people they're going to hell without Jesus, the problem is solved when someone says nobody's going to hell without Jesus. Whew! Now I can relax. I don't have to step outside my comfort zone and tell them that trusting Jesus in this life is the only way to go to heaven.

But my denial of truth does nothing to change it. God doesn't give me the deciding vote. In fact, He doesn't give me any vote at all.

I do hope you will really bring this thing to the Lord before following through on it. Scripture warns against false teaching in many places, including 2 Tim 4:1-4:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct,

rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. *For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.* Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

It grieves me to think that without realizing it, without wanting to, you could become one of these false teachers who speaks not the truth, but what people want to hear. I'm sure much of what you plan to say in your book is true. But unfortunately, that will serve only to cloak the heresy of saying people without Christ don't go to hell.

I hope you sense I feel no anger toward you. Only a sadness that your life, which has served many people's walk with God, is poised to take a turn that will violate Christ's teachings and dishonor Him.

I hope you will not only pray about this, but weigh your beliefs in light of Scripture. And if you sense the Holy Spirit telling you—through His Word—that your beliefs may be wrong—even if you're not certain—I urge you again not to put them in print.

If you wish to dialogue, I'm open. You don't owe me an explanation—but you do owe God fidelity to His Word. And I do owe you the truth and I hope I've spoken it in grace.

Randy

Dear Randy,

Thanks for your thoughtful letter. I won't attempt to respond to all you said, other than to say I've long reflected on the issues you've raised and answer them in the book.

It seems to me that our chief difference is one of authority. Whereas

the Bible is your ultimate authority, Quakers hold that the Spirit which inspired the Scriptures is our ultimate authority, and that God's Spirit continues to guide us in truth today. So while the Biblical witness informs my faith, I am not bound to accept it as the final word in all matters of faith.

This permits me to reject such practices the Bible accepted without question, such as slavery, the subjugation of women, the belief that the Earth is flat, etc.

I commend to you a book I've found most helpful, entitled *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* by John Spong. I've also been enjoying a book written by your fellow Oregonian, Marcus Borg, called *The God We Never Knew*. Both are excellent resources.

I hope all is well with you. I'll be happy to send you a copy of my book when it comes out next June, if you e-mail me around then to remind me.

Take care, Randy. May God's peace and presence fill you.

Richard

**Note to readers from Randy:** I disagree with Richard on these points, and on his recommendation of the books by Spong and Borg. Also, not every Quaker would agree with his statements about Quaker beliefs.



### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

You can help EPM cut down on costs by notifying us of your new address as soon as possible. Thanks!

Also, please let us know if you no longer wish to receive the newsletter. We want to send it to anyone interested, but desire to be good stewards.

# Letters to EPM

I am a 16-year-old Chinese American, and I have just read your best book so far, *Safely Home*. Although I knew Chinese Christians get persecuted, I never imagined the persecution would be so horrific. Thank you for all of the time and research you put into *Safely Home*. Shortly after reading *Safely Home*, I started my first job, and enclosed is my very first paycheck. If it is possible, I would like it to be used to help my fellow brothers in Christ to receive Bibles.

C.F.

P.S. I gave my parents the money and they wrote the check, because I don't have a checking account yet!

When I first got here at the rehabilitation center, my family and I were homeless and strung out on drugs. I had very little hope left in my life. I put my wife and kids through a lot of misery.

My sister-in-law gave me a few of your books to read. I have to say, your books brought back hope to my life. I know God is truly in your life.

God has restored me and brought my family back together again. I am extremely blessed today.

T.G., San Diego, CA

I read your book *In Light of Eternity* and I enjoyed it enormously. It changed my perspective. I am living differently now.

I am suffering from a serious burn-out and it turned me to reading my Bible again. I am educated with it and all my life I have tried to live like God wanted me to. I have had a difficult life with lots of pain and loss of energy. In my work, I tried to give lots of love and understanding to people in pain. I am good at it. I am a trained nurse and my husband is a chief firefighter. Our life is dedicated to serving people. We aren't rich and I always wanted more.

I knew God must love me, although I could not imagine it. He was sometimes so far away. I always thought there were two ways: either you go to heaven or you got lost. What does it matter or who cares when you are trying to live like the Bible wants you to?

I was living too much on earth and lost sight of heaven.

I am seeing it differently now. It matters what you think or do. I am reading your articles about eternal rewards over and over. I can forgive and lose the poison.

I hope and pray I don't lose it when I start working again.

M.B., The Netherlands

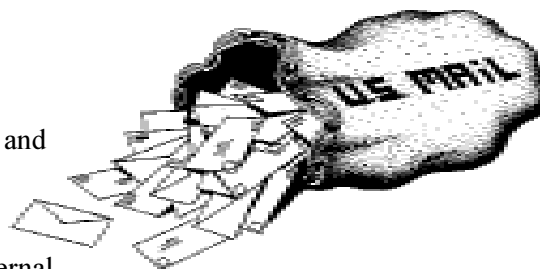
I recently received a copy of *The Treasure Principle*. What a powerful book! Of primary importance is the impact it has had on my own life and that of my family. I wanted to get a read on where my 11-year-old son was when it came to giving. He gets \$5 per week. We had taught him that 50¢ was his tithe, 50¢ went to savings, and the rest he could spend. He chose to give \$1.00 as a tithe, \$1.00 to savings, and spend the rest. He has maintained that pattern for quite some time. So, after reading the book, I said to my son, "If I were to raise your allowance to \$6 a week, tell me how you would use the extra dollar?" I asked him to write it down and give me a breakdown. He immediately wrote me a note and said, "I would put the extra dollar toward my tithe and give \$2.00." My heart was overjoyed at such a powerful response. As I read his response, I immediately decided to raise his allowance to \$7.00 per week.

This is just a small part of what is going on in our household.

R.S., Homestead, FL

I wanted to write you and thank you for your book *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments*.

I am a 43-year-old female. I recently went through training to be a volunteer at a pregnancy care center here in my town. It was through that training that I first got a copy of your book. It has been very helpful to me.



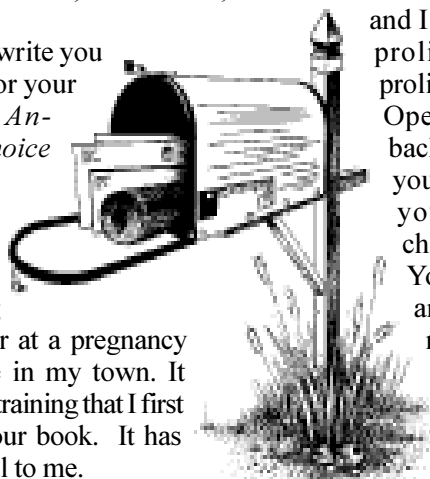
I know firsthand the damage that abortion does. I had an abortion when I was 18 years old. In October of last year, at the age of 42, I went through a PACE study (post abortion counseling and education) after 24 years of suffering. I was an alcoholic, agoraphobic, and physically abused myself. I had spent time in mental hospitals and was well on my way to being a permanent resident of one. Now, less than a year later, I don't drink, am active in church and the pregnancy care center, don't hurt myself anymore, and no longer have to take medications for depression, etc. God has healed me.

K.S.

Thank you for your very informative article on the abortive affects of the pill (*Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?*). I am a pastor, and up until this point I have recommended the pill to others. Furthermore, my wife and I have used it as our primary means of birth control. I have heard rumors that the pill might cause early abortions, but like many others I had not seen any hard data, so I assumed it was a legend built up by those who are against all forms of birth control.

Today I was on your website looking for sermon illustrations on hope even in desperate situations (like the Christians in your book *Safely Home*), and I came across your section on prolife issues. I am strongly prolife, and even got arrested with Operation Rescue a few years back, so I was interested in what you had to say. After reading your article I am forced to change my mind on this issue. You presented the facts clearly, and I can no longer reconcile my belief that life starts at conception with the use of the pill for personal use or to recommend it to others.

M.S.



## A Request from Randy Re: Heaven Questions

Over the next year I'll be writing a big book on heaven. It will be different and much more thorough than my little devotional book *In Light of Eternity*. The larger size and different format will allow me to explore in greater depth the question of what heaven will be like. This is one of my favorite subjects, and I'm really excited about it. (*In Light of Eternity*, which has had an encouraging response, will continue to help those looking for a small intro to heaven, while this book will be for people who want to explore more deeply the biblical teaching on heaven.)

I've collected every book on heaven I've managed to find, some of them a hundred years old, and I'm enjoying reading and rereading them, examining them in light of Scripture, as I further contemplate heaven. I've been helped over the years by responding to the many questions people ask about heaven, related to my novels and other books. (Some of these are dealt with in my article "Questions and Answers about Heaven," at [www.epm.org/heavenqa.html](http://www.epm.org/heavenqa.html).)

I want to address as many of the questions people have about heaven as I can. So, I'd like to ask you a favor. Would you take a few minutes and jot down the questions about heaven that you have? When you think about heaven, what do you most wonder about? What do you want to know? *What are your most burning questions?*

If you teach a class of children or adults, or if you're in a home Bible study, I'd be grateful if you'd ask others for their questions too. Or ask your own children. If you could compile their questions, that would be great. Everything is fair game. I might not be able to deal with them all, or give complete answers, but I do want to address as many as possible.

If you could come up with these, whether it's one question or dozens, I'd really appreciate it. Please email them to me at [ralcorn@epm.org](mailto:ralcorn@epm.org) or mail them to me at EPM, 2229 East Burnside #23, Gresham, OR 97030. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I won't be able to respond directly to your questions (though a number of articles at our website deal with heaven and you may find them helpful). My hope is that the book will serve as my response and offer you and others biblically-based answers that are pleasing to our Lord.

Also, if there are passages from books or articles you come across that say something interesting about heaven, if you wouldn't mind photocopying them and mailing them to me, I'd be grateful. Or if you have some thoughts on heaven yourself, I'd be interested in hearing them. Or maybe the subject of heaven has come alive to you, and you can share how that has revitalized your walk with Christ. I'd love to hear about that too.

Again, I regret being unable to respond to all who send something to me.

I'd appreciate your prayers as I work on this book. (I have a few other books that are in various stages too, and I'm also excited about them.) I want to be true to Scripture, and help readers find the joy in Christ of anticipating what heaven will be like. God says "Set your minds above, where Christ is" (Colossians 3:1-2). We are called citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Heaven is our true home. But, paradoxically, our true home is a place we've never been. And because we know earth so well and heaven so little, we tend to live as if earth, not heaven, is our home. That's why we lay up our treasures on earth instead of in heaven. If we are going to live as if heaven were our home, we need to take a much closer look at what Scripture says about it.

Please pray with me that God would help me write this book in a way that will stimulate biblical and Christ-centered thinking about heaven. I really want Him to be glorified and lives to be touched for eternity through this book.

*Speaking of prayer, we have a prayer team I periodically send out email requests to. If you're willing to sometimes pray for me and the ministry of EPM, I'd be deeply grateful. Contact me or my assistant Kathy Norquist at [ralcorn@epm.org](mailto:ralcorn@epm.org). Thanks!*

### Randy Alcorn's Speaking Schedule... (in response to those who've asked)

**October 12, 2002:** Washington, DC, area, The JESUS Film Executive Briefing (Contact information: 949-361-4435)

**October 13, 2002:** Covenant Fellowship, Philadelphia, PA, morning worship (Contact information: 610-361-0606)

**November 2, 2002:** Evangelical Christian Publishers Assoc., Tucson, AZ (Contact information: [www.ecpa.org](http://www.ecpa.org))

**November 24, 2002:** Overlake Christian Church, Redmond, WA (Contact information: 425-702-0303)

**January 23 & 24, 2003:** Christian Stewardship Association Conference, Chicago, IL (Contact information: 317-244-4272 or [www.stewardship.org](http://www.stewardship.org))

**April 11-13, 2003:** Christian Writers Confer., Mt. Hermon Christian Conference Center, Mt. Hermon, CA (Contact information: 831-335-4466 or [www.gospelcom.net/mthermon/index.shtml](http://www.gospelcom.net/mthermon/index.shtml))

**May 17-21, 2003:** Expolit Miami (Spanish Christian literature convention), Miami, FL (Contact information: Marie Tamayo, 305-592-6136)

**May 23-26, 2003:** The JESUS Film Briefing, Leavenworth, WA (Contact information: 949-361-7575)



# A. W. Tozer on Trials and Pain . . .

## Heartache or Happiness

From the trials and triumphs of Paul, we gather, too, that happiness is really not indispensable to a Christian. There are many ills worse than heartaches. It is scarcely too much to say that prolonged happiness may actually weaken us, especially if we insist upon being happy as the Jews insisted upon flesh in the wilderness. In so doing, we may try to avoid those spiritual responsibilities which would in the nature of them bring a certain measure of heaviness and affliction to the soul.

The best thing is neither to seek nor seek to avoid troubles but to follow Christ and take the bitter with the sweet as it may come. Whether we are happy or unhappy at any given time is not important. That we be in the will of God is all that matters. We may safely leave with Him the incident of heartache or happiness. He will know how much we need of either or both.

*We Travel an Appointed Way*, 80.

## Ordered by the Lord

To the child of God, there is no such thing as accident. He travels an appointed way. The path he treads was chosen for him when as yet he was not, when as yet he had existence only in the mind of God.

Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evils only because we cannot read the secret script of God's hidden providence and so cannot discover the ends at which He aims....

The man of true faith may live in the absolute assurance that his steps are ordered by the Lord. For him, misfortune is outside the bounds of possibility. He cannot be torn from this earth one hour ahead of the time which God has appointed, and he cannot be detained on earth one moment after God is done with him here. He is not a waif of the wide world, a foundling of time and space, but a saint of the Lord and the darling of His particular care.

*We Travel an Appointed Way*, 3-4.

## Good In Thy Sight

A determination to know what cannot be known always works harm to the Christian heart.

Ignorance in matters on our human level is never to be excused if there has been opportunity to correct it. But there are matters which are obviously "too high for us." These we should meet in trusting faith and say as Jesus said, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight...."

Human curiosity and pride often combine to drive us to try to understand acts of God which are plainly outside the field of human understanding. We dislike to admit that we do not know

what is going on, so we torture our minds trying to fathom the mysterious ways of the Omniscient One. It's hard to conceive of a more fruitless task....

Under such circumstances the Christian thing to do is to say, "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.... Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." A blind confidence which trusts without seeing is far dearer to God than any fancied knowledge that can explain everything....

To the adoring heart, the best and most satisfying explanation for anything always will be, "It seemed good in thy sight."

*The Next Chapter After the Last*, 54-55.

### Words to live by...

Martin Burnham had been a missionary hostage in control of the Abu Sayyaf Group for a year, and was killed in crossfire on June 7, 2002, leaving behind his wife and three children.

The last words he spoke to Rose Hill Bible Church on May 23, 2001 (just days before his return to the Philippines and his capture) were printed on his funeral program:

*"I wasn't called to be a missionary; I wasn't called to the Philippines; I was just called to follow Christ; and that is what I'm doing."*

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