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# Chalcedon report

#441

**A Monthly Report Dealing with the Relationship of Christian Faith to the World**

## Movies, Storytelling, and Apologetics

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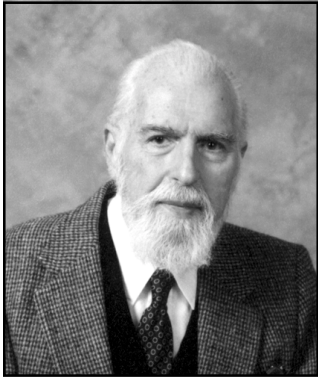
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# The Biblical Doctrine of Submission

## Part 2

*By Rev. R. J. Rushdoony*

**T**he Biblical doctrine of submission to an ungodly authority requires that we turn away from revolution to regeneration, from man's way to God's way, to reconstruct and re-order our world.

But what about the Christian community? Are we to submit to evil here? If we are dealing with presumably regenerate men, are we to submit as we would to the ungodly from whom we cannot expect God's justice?

As we saw last month, the Jesuits have required an unquestioning submission to the pope, and they have only earned the hostility of many Catholics, including the clergy. An unquestioning and total submission to anyone other than God is rightfully seen as wrong, and those making such a vow have been mistrusted even by their fellow Catholics. It is very dangerous to require a submission of any such dimension to any other than God and His Word. What then does godly submission mean within the Christian community?

### The Word of God

The alpha and omega of our understanding of godly submission is that we recognize that every word of God is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16) and is binding on us. Because it is God-given, the words of Scripture are all God's law. The Bible is God's law-book.

In Matthew 18:15-17, we are given God's way of dealing with problems created by sin. The *first* step, when we have an offense committed against us, is to go to the offender quietly and to tell him of the problem. "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (v. 15). The presupposition is that an actual offense has occurred.

*Second*, if this effort fails, "then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (v. 16). We are here dealing with a procedure which is both neighborly and yet also legal. Its purpose is restorative.

Then, *third*, "if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a

publican" (v. 17). Notice that this reads, "tell it to the church." As long as the church was small in numbers, and for at least two centuries home churches predominated, this could be true, but in time this hearing was delegated to the elders. In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, we read:

*And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

Paul here exercises apostolic authority to function by the Holy Spirit as the church. What is relevant for us is that the disciplined man was not to be counted as an enemy but as a wayward brother. The goal was to make him ashamed and repentant. On occasion, however, the judgment could be severe. In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul writes, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema," or *accursed*. At times, as in 1 Corinthians 16:22, we find *Anathema* and *Maranatha* joined together, and this usage was at times present in the early church. Maranatha was a Hebrew word meaning, "The Lord is come." Its use could have meant either, "The Lord had come in judgment," or "Lord, come in judgment." In either case, its usage stressed the solemnity of the judgment.

### The Pope vs. Jesus Christ

As we have seen, the Jesuit error was to tie absolute loyalty to the pope rather than to Jesus Christ, and this misplaced loyalty was resented by other Catholics. A like misplaced loyalty is to the church rather than to Jesus Christ. A related error is to insist that there can be no reversal of any church court's decision except on *procedural grounds*. A great injustice may be perpetrated, but, if the legal procedures of the session or presbytery are correct, there can be no reversal unless an incorrect form has been filed, or some like technical error. This is also true in civil courts in the twentieth century. What this does is to declare that the decisions of the court of origin

are virtually infallible; and, with respect to justice, they are inerrant and do only err in procedural matters. This is, of course, *a denial of the Reformation*, and a very common one. The Reformation stressed the fallibility of men and institutions; Calvinism in particular made clear that no class of men or organizations, neither church nor state, were exempt from sin. To trust in men and institutions was tantamount to distrusting God and His Word. Even though the Calvinists tended to be well educated and scholarly, even into the eighteenth century, Calvinism was regarded as a faith unfit for gentlemen because it placed them on the same level as common people. For Calvinists so-called to insist on trusting the church was a denial of their heritage.

## Church Courts vs. Community

In a very real and important sense, we have begun at the wrong end by stressing the work of the church court. Because the church is a community whose central rite is communion, any judicial action must be preceded by prayer and godly, loving care by the people. Instead of talking about the sin of a member, they must be in prayer and manifest a family's concern for a member.

The texts requiring this are too many to cite. Here are a *few* from the gospels alone: Matthew 5:23, 24; 6:12; 18:21f.; 23:28; and 25:31-46 (the parable on judgment). In Luke, we have 10:27-37 (the Good Samaritan) and 14:12-14, and in John 15:15-17 we are most emphatically commanded to love one another. Any church that ceases to be the family of Christ and becomes simply a court has failed. The elders cannot replace the functions of the family members, and to reduce a church's duty to the work of elders is to handicap the elders.

Life depends on obedience, and without it we have anarchy and death. In fact, our Lord tells us in John 7:17 that knowledge depends on obedience: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." This means that an inactive congregation will be an ignorant one.

At this point, an important aspect of the Biblical doctrine of submission comes to light. Submission is not inaction but rather a reliance on Christian action. This can mean prayer for the person or persons involved, intercession by friends of the offended party *before* the matter goes to the elders, and even *afterwards*. This must be brotherly helpfulness rather than censoriousness. Its good is restoration rather than judgment, although that may follow at the hands of due authorities.

We began by calling attention to the very different views of non-Christians and Christians, the differ-

ence between revolution and regeneration. The first sees compulsion and violence as the answer, and too often in church history men have put their reliance in compulsion. For the Christian, the answer is regeneration, and this means the ways of *grace*. Now grace is not without judgment, but in essence its ways are the ways of peace. We live in a culture that refuses to admit the existence of supernatural grace, but this does not diminish its reality, and neither does the widespread prevalence of revolutionary violence diminish its failure. We, the people of God, have God's work to do, and it must be done in God's way.

When our Lord declares, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (*Mt. 5:9*), He does not say, "Blessed are the elders who are peacemakers." If we know enough about a problem in the church to gossip about it, perhaps we know enough to help remedy it! Submission, we must remember, begins with submission to every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (*Mt. 4:4*).

We submit to civil powers in most instances, although where the freedom of the Word is at stake, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (*Ac. 5:29*). The scope of a non-Christian civil solution is limited, and even in a Christian state, the state is at best a ministry of justice, not salvation. Salvation is from the Lord. We must constantly seek the regenerating power of the Lord, and here the church *and* the Christian people and community have God's power in ways that the state does not. They can invoke Christ's regenerating power to cope with sin. As against coercive power, the Christian must invoke the regenerating power of God. If we do not do so more often, it is perhaps because we have come to believe more in compulsion than in grace, more in revolution than in regeneration. Too many churchmen have become children of their times and expect compulsion to be more effective than grace. Christian submission begins with placing ourselves under the every word of God and His Spirit, for only so can we do His work.

## Wanted!

Chalcedon-friendly Churches, Home Churches, Bible Studies. Chalcedon wants to develop a list of churches, home churches, and Bible studies sympathetic to our position and objectives so that we can share this information with those of you who call asking for groups in your area. If you would like for your group to be included on our list send the name of the contact person, their email, phone number, the town and state of the group to Susan Burns at [chalcedon@netscope.net](mailto:chalcedon@netscope.net).



# Chalcedon's First Principles

*By Rev. P. Andrew Sandlin*

**A**mid the din and bustle of life, there comes a time to revisit “first principles.” First principles are the deepest beliefs by which we live. Everyone has them. They create in us what the Germans call a *Weltanschauung*, what we term a “worldview.” It is a way of looking at things that shapes all we see. We see all we see and think all we think in light of our worldview, which is animated by our first principles. Even if we do not think about them often, they are always there, lurking in the background, but choreographing what is going on in the foreground. If we take the time and effort, we often can articulate these first principles.

Chalcedon has first principles. Trying to avoid special theological or denominational “trade language” and speaking earnestly and directly, I here articulate those first principles to our friends, supporters, and readers:

1. *All of the universe must be oriented to its Creator and Sustainer, the sovereign, Triune God.* Through Jesus Christ, God created and sustains all things (*Heb. 1:2*). He is the great Creator and Redeemer to Whom all creation is subject. The religion of evolution sees the universe as random and chaotic, to be reordered by the highest animal, man, usually in the form of the state. The religion of Christianity sees the universe as God’s handiwork, under His constant providence and care, moving to a divinely predetermined, glorious end.

Man, God’s supreme earthly creature, was made in His image, and man’s life must be expended in glorifying God, His Creator. His purpose in all things must be to bring glory to God by passionately loving and obeying Him (*Mt. 22:36-38*). God charged man with exerting dominion over the rest of His creation (*Gen. 1:26-28*). Man was to be God’s loving, worshipping “vicegerent,” his royal representative, in the earth. He was to create a *culture* to the glory of God. *All* created things are meant to bring glory to God.

2. *Man’s fundamental dilemma is sin.* Man is called to glorify and obey God, and he was created in

goodness and innocence. But man, in Adam, sinned (*Rom. 5:12-21*). He broke God’s holy law (*1 Jn. 3:4*). Man’s great dilemma is not his “human condition,” but his sin. Sinful man usually wants to deflect attention from his real dilemma. So he blames his ignorance, his finitude, and his environment. This is why political (and theological) liberals usually support gun control, “economic enterprise zones,” and prison systems. They believe that man’s real problem is outside man — man is corrupted by what is *external* to him; and if he can change his circumstances, he can solve all his problems. Alternatively, the Bible teaches that man is corrupted by his own sinful nature (that which is within). Man must be changed internally (his sin must be dealt with) if he expects to change his circumstances.

Because of his sin (law breaking), man stands under God’s judgment (*Rom. 6:23*). He is bound to Satan (*2 Tim. 2:26*) by his sin (*Rom. 6:16*). In his unsaved state, he is enslaved. He must be emancipated by Another.

3. *Jesus Christ redeemed man and creation from sin.* Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, the eternal Son of God. On the cross of Calvary, He bore the penalty for our sin. God judged Him in the place of us. He was our sacrificial Lamb (*1 Pet. 1:18-19*). He rose victoriously from the grave on the third day and ascended to His exaltation in the heavens. In doing this, He triumphed over sin, Satan, Hell, and all evil (*Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:20-21*), liberating even creation itself (*Rom. 8:23*).

4. *The center of Biblical Faith is the Lordship of Christ.* The early Christians saw their Lord as reigning from the heavens (*Ac. 2:29-36; Phil. 2:9*). He has given His people, His church, a gospel, good news to proclaim to the nations (*Mt. 28:18-20*). It is that Christ died, was buried, and rose again, and that all those who repent of their sin and place faith in Christ will be granted eternal life — starting now. All nations are to be subordinated to Jesus Christ’s Lordship by the preaching of this gospel, baptism, and instruction in all that Christ commands.

Because He died and rose again, *He is Lord* (Rom. 14:9). He overturned the course of the Fall in Genesis 3 by His great power. Because there are no spheres over which He does not rule, He is Lord of all things.

5. *The Bible is God's inspired, authoritative Word for all areas of life.* This is the principal way that Christ exercises His Lordship in the earth. The Bible sets forth the authoritative will of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is, *first*, a narration and interpretation of great redemptive events. It tells us and explains for us what God has done in Jesus Christ. This Christ *today* exercises His Lordship. This is why the Bible contains interpretation as *commands*. It tells us how we are to live our lives. It tells us how we are to govern our world as believers. The Bible, authoritative in all its parts — the Old Testament and the New Testament — “lays down the law,” God’s law, and not just in theology, but in the arts, business, economics, education, politics, science, and technology. God’s revelation, primarily in the Bible, gives us explicit or implicit direction in all of these.

6. *The work of Christians is to advance Jesus Christ's kingdom in time and history.* Before the end, when Christ will return to usher in eternity, our Lord’s kingdom will put down all human authority and power (1 Cor. 15:22-28). We are God’s agents in this endeavor (2 Cor. 5:20). The Christian family, the church, Christian schools and home schools, Christian businesses and foundations, and other godly institutions are God’s instruments to further His

Son’s mediatorial reign in the earth. Christians and Christian institutions do this by declaring the Bible’s full-orbed gospel and seeking, incrementally, to bring every area of life under Christ’s authority mediated in the Bible. All areas of life must be redeemed. In the words of Cornelius Van Til, “[T]he redemptive revelation of God had to be as comprehensive as the sweep of sin.”

7. *We can expect great battles, but eventually a gradual, glorious worldwide Christianization before Christ returns.* A sinful world will not take Christianization sitting down. It is hostile to God and His work and workers (Eph. 2:2-3; Jn. 10:20). But the days of a sinful world are numbered, even though great evil abounds today. We do not yet *see* all things placed under Christ’s feet (Heb. 2:8), but they are nonetheless placed there (Eph. 1:22). The end of redemptive history cannot come until all things are *visibly* placed under Christ’s authority (1 Cor. 15:22-28). Prior to Christ’s return will be fulfilled all the great Biblical predictions of a godly gospel age (e.g., Is. 2:3; 11:1-9; Dan. 2:31-45; Rev. 11:15-19)

The notion that evil will escalate and overwhelm the earth before Christ returns is a myth. Evil men will become more evil (2 Tim. 3:13), probably as they see the great gospel blessings; but the kingdom of God and the gospel and Jesus Christ and the law of God will pervade the earth.

*These* are Chalcedon’s first principles, and it is our calling to inculcate, refine, disseminate, and apply them.

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# Funding The Lord's Work

*By Rev. Mark Rushdoony*

**C**hristian activity is constantly confronted with a chronic shortage of money. While we must not believe we can buy advances in God's work, we must see the moral basis for work and money and a deficiency of either for Christian causes as a moral failure of God's people. God commands both work and giving, and an understanding of the moral basis of money helps us understand why neither money nor giving should ever be viewed as worldly or unspiritual.

Money is a medium of exchange. An ethical exchange must be value given for value received. If money is to represent value, it must represent a cost. (This is the deficiency of paper money; it represents no value. Paper money is government sponsored counterfeiting. It is government offering paper or credit of no value to represent value. It has always been a means of government assuming power at no loss to itself. Just as spending counterfeit money that you produce on your color copier would give you spending power at no cost, governments get tremendous power by creating costless money. Even though paper money is a fraudulent money, it is made legal tender and citizens are forced to accept it as representative of cost.) Thus, when we exchange our labor or goods for a given amount of money, we call this exchange their cost. Likewise, when we give money away, it represents a cost or value that we surrender.

Giving money to Christian work thus costs us something, and this is a cost God commands us to assume. Greek dualism has caused us to assume a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical realms. But God created man with a soul in a physical body and environment. We will also receive new bodies at the resurrection and will serve God in a new heaven and a new (physical) earth. We must not deprecate either the physical or the spiritual realities of our creaturehood.

Emphasis on the spiritual aspect of our new birth should not cause us to lose sight of our physical, earthly context and its requirements. Work is one of those requirements. Work was a requirement of our first parents even before the Fall. Money is a medium of exchange which represents the value of our work. When we give tithes and offerings, we are, in effect, transferring our work in one area to work in God's service.

A proper emphasis on our physical context and duty, however, should not make us confident that this is the essence or measurement of God's work. We cannot buy God's kingdom, nor can we orchestrate it by our work. Obedience must not become presumption.

If we believe that God is Sovereign over His creation, and that its spiritual and physical aspects find ultimate meaning and resolution in Him, we will focus on our duty as He describes it in His revelation. The old hymn rightly teaches us to "trust and obey." The first reaction of faith ought to be obedience to the Sovereign in Whom we profess faith. The great and basic error of so much modern theology is that it places the theologian or academic in the position of explaining away God's own words. Otto Scott once correctly noted that C.I. Scofield's error began when, "He tried to edit God."

## Tithes and Offerings

God requires tithes and offerings. Those antinomians who oppose the teaching of tithes in favor of Spirit-led free-will giving must assume the duty of explaining why either the Spirit's or the believer's will would demand less than God required. That requirement began with the basic tithe which was ten percent (*Lev. 27:30-33*). The rejoicing tithe and the poor tithe may have increased the overall tithe to as much as fifteen percent. Only what was given above that amount was a free-will offering. The tithe itself was an obligation before God.

The tithe went to the Levites who used it for various social functions, including education. The poor tithe went directly to the needy. A tenth of the basic tithe went to the priests for ecclesiastical purposes (*Num. 18:26-28*). Thus, much of what are now functions of civil government were administered by a separate non-profit religious organization, the Levites. We cannot reconstitute the Levites, but we can see that the basic government of the Hebrew theocracy was the self-government of the faithful covenant man with private-sector funding supplying most social needs. God warned the Hebrews of the high price they would pay for a monarchy (*1 Sam 8: 14-17*). Today, we still pay for letting the state assume responsibility for social functions. If the high price of state taxation then causes Christians to stop giving tithes and offerings, Christian



work will be most affected. This is the sad state in which the church finds itself today. God does not want our “tips” nor does He offer us “tithes-credits” for what we pay the state. What we lose to the state in taxes does not lessen our responsibility to God.

God commanded that His work be funded by tithes and offerings. Obeying God’s command to labor in His kingdom cannot be confused with legalism or attempting to orchestrate the kingdom. It is a matter of obedience. It is, moreover, not legitimate to seek to fund the kingdom through free enterprise endeavors alone. It is legitimate to encourage God’s people to succeed financially. It is legitimate to dedicate a business or investment to funding God’s work. These can generate tithes and offerings to God’s work. However, it is not legitimate to think that a few such enterprises will fund God’s kingdom. It is not the profits from a few that God wants; it is the tithes from all that He has commanded.

### **Accumulating Capital**

Many people are familiar with the Asian method of accumulating family capital. A large extended family will live together in humble surroundings, pool their resources, and quickly accumulate a large amount of capital. Their work is transferred to money and quickly represents a financial and social power. (This method is not exclusive to Asians, but was common amongst various ethnic immigrant groups who came to this country and wanted to get ahead. It is still a viable

model of capitalization.) Additionally, part of the legislative clout of the homosexual lobby is their generous giving tendencies; this gives them a lobbying power far in excess of their numbers. The power accumulated by these groups could be dwarfed by the power that would be represented by tithing Christians.

Money represents power. That is a good and moral thing. Money represents power because it represents value which depends on the input of labor. We realize, of course, that money is not enough for God’s work because human labor alone is not enough. However, to the extent we deprecate money, we devalue labor, man’s first calling.

A great deal of effort is expended trying to encourage “free-will” giving. Often the slick emotional appeal takes precedence over the reasoned need. Most successful are emergency appeals for defensive fights against evil. The tithe and offering went to work-oriented ministries by those committed to their necessity. Like the bulk of any person’s vocation, Christian work is predominately mundane and fatiguing (see *Gen. 3:17-19*). This is all the more reason God’s servants must be supported.

It is common to hear people say that they feel their labors are unproductive for God. Directly, this may be true, but tithes and offerings are, if properly dispensed, a transfer of labor to the Lord’s work through the labor-representing medium of money. Do you want to do more for the Lord? Tithe! Do you want to do yet more? Give Him your offerings!



## ***Attention High School and College Age Young Adults:***

**The second annual Great Lakes Worldview Conference will be held on the campus of Reformed Bible College (Grand Rapids, MI) July 18-20, 2002. Cost is \$150 (room, board, tuition) \$135 if registration is paid in full prior to July 1.**

### **Speakers this year are:**

**Rev. Steve Schlissel speaking on “Biblical Manhood & Womanhood” and Dr. Leonard Payton speaking on “Music & the 21st Century Church”**

**The conference is designed to train you to be discerning and thinking, and prepare you to handle the intellectual warfare of a culture increasingly hostile to Christianity.**

**Brochures with more information and a registration form are available from  
Rev. Paul T. Murphy [duttonch@iserv.net](mailto:duttonch@iserv.net), (616) 698-7467**



# Distinctives and Promises of a Biblical Christian Education

*By Ron Kirk*

**I**n pursuing a Biblical Christian education, we must articulate a vocabulary for Christian liberty and accomplishment sufficient to build a universal setting for the Great Commission work and godly living. Because of the effective displacement in our time of a practical Biblical framework of life, these concepts may seem novel. For some, new ideas require time and reflection to appreciate their real power and potential. For others, these may be familiar ideas applied in a new way. I speak to serious, thoughtful, abiding Christians who see their family and personal lives as important elements of the gospel work. It takes a humble heart to let the Lord work us over to accomplish a profound and true education. Yet, such is the nature of our calling (*1 Pet. 1:6-7*). Therefore, please carefully consider the following elements of a Biblical approach to education.

## Parental Involvement

Parents ought to acquire the power and ability to educate their children. A Biblical system of education ought to provide the home with the vision and tools necessary to fulfill the parental responsibility to educate the family (*Dt. 6; Eph. 6*). While parents may rightly delegate some authority to other teachers, according to the Biblical principle of specialization (*e.g., 1 Cor. 12*), final responsibility for the education of children remains with the parents.

A modest investment of time in the study of a few basic Biblical educational principles will allow parents and professional educators to use almost any curriculum more effectively. Educationally minded parents and teachers tell me, "We need a curriculum and we need it now!" As a home school dad and servant to numbers of home school parents, I have great compassion. The good news is a systematic Biblical scholarship will unite all areas of life. A few Biblical principles govern a diversity of subjects and issues. My Biblical and creedal faith and experience declare that a concise and intensive investment in the basic Biblical principles of life and learning enable the typical parent or teacher to take command over

whatever content and curriculum may be available. While increasingly greater excellence requires increasingly better curriculum content, it is wrong to wait until the ideal somehow arrives. Indeed, getting from here to there, the educational struggle produces the best results in teacher and student alike. God rewards the investment of faith.

## Christian Scholarship

A Christ-centered scholarship produces understanding of how life ought to be. The challenge is to develop a method of scholarship that leads directly to application of sound Biblical doctrine. For example, the many Scriptures dealing with children — their natural foolishness and the need for training and instruction — lead us to abandon the modern child-centered psychology of permissive parenting. Likewise, the concept of Christian liberty is one of the most important but typically underdeveloped aspects of Scriptural teaching about man and how a Christ-centered society should look. An historical method of scholarship identifying any subject Biblically and then drawing conclusions for application supplies an amazingly powerful instrument for gospel influence.

Children and adults love learning. An astounding side effect of my attempt to implement a thoroughly Biblical view of education is that children, even kindergartners, quickly grow to love learning and the liberty arising from doing what is right. The children work hard and are happy. Similarly, adults discover, with the right tools and faith, a new or renewed interest in and willingness to learn. Such an experience corresponds to the record of early America's high degree of moral and material accomplishment.

Adults and children find ready mastery in a short time. A Biblical psychology and method provide proper foundations for continual growth, and a clear pattern for expanding and deepening the subject. This is true with even a moderate investment in effort by a relatively unaccomplished individual. One key to such a result is the steady application of



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the mind, by faith in Christ, to master the basic principles and skills of any subject. Thoroughly laying a sound foundation leads to subsequent rapid development. We often call this “slowing down to hurry up.” Work at the task at hand, trust the Lord with a whole heart, and in due season He will bring the increase. Such an overcoming faith finds success in every area of endeavor.

## True and Trustworthy Ways

Biblical doctrine and educational methods are trustworthy. This may sound outlandish in our age of skepticism and competing ideas. Nonetheless, the basic doctrines of the Faith have withstood the test of time. Furthermore, the Bible itself readily feeds and corrects our understanding. Admittedly, our comfortable, personal point of view may rub hard against the Word of God, but then this is the nature of a faith-based system of life and decision-making. Indeed, we lay down our lives to gain them. Man’s way is the way of death (*Pr. 16:25*). Therefore, while it is true that a Biblical educational method may stretch our trust in the Lord, it is just as clear that such a thing pleases God (*Heb. 11:17*). Nonetheless, it is important that we work toward an excellent and independent understanding of Biblical doctrine as a foundation for faith based life and learning. Even here, we maintain great confidence, as we trust our Savior to correct and improve us.

A Biblical educational approach is self-correcting. Because learning is essentially repentance, we constantly seek to correct our view of God, man, and things, as well as our life practices, to increasingly conform to the image of Christ in thought and deed. Repentance is a way of life. Education is change, filling what lacks and correcting what is wrong.

Biblical worldview education is spiritual. We assume no other proper foundation for any human accomplishment than the fear of the Lord and the love of Jesus Christ. We assume that we must know God thoroughly and personally as the only sound basis for anything else we may seek to know. We accept Christ and Him crucified. When we self-consciously begin with Christ and His works, He is glorified and His children are blessed.

Biblical worldview education is intellectual. Factions of the church have for too long minimized the importance of understanding and the active use of the mind in spiritual matters. The Scriptures do not split the nature of man vertically between the spiritual and the mental, but horizontally between an unregenerate spirit and mind as against a regenerate and godly spirit and mind (*1 Thes. 5:23*). Paul said that we are to be transformed — in our essential

internal quality — by the renewing of our *minds*. A Biblical approach to learning seeks to align the head and the heart according to God’s provision and grace for man.

A Biblical educational philosophy replaces the do-or-die performance/failure system. Modern education either exacts instant accomplishment or so lowers the standard so that no one truly achieves. Rather, faith applies itself to a process of continuous growth, regardless of native ability or present accomplishment, through diligence and a persevering trust in Christ to bring the increase in due season. Add a developmental sequence reflecting the subject’s true nature and success will come. Only effective rebellion against the process constitutes failure.

## The Results

One of the most significant results of this method is the development of Christian character. Character grows upon loving instruction, directed practice, example, and correction when needed. This is preparation of the heart for grace. The character of Christ stands firmly on principle in any circumstance and is faithful, steadfast, diligent, cheerful, and loving. Character governed by the Holy Spirit is the spiritual vessel for all achievement.

Biblical commandments and principles displace secular values, methods, and ideas. Biblical principles are statements of applied theology. Upon a commitment to self-consciously apply the doctrines of the Faith and cultivate the courage to learn, the saying, “Old ways pass away, behold, all things are new,” becomes a reality (*2 Cor. 5:17*).

Godly individuality produces personal effort, responsibility, and accomplishment. True individuality is possible only in relation to and with dependence upon Christ. Upon His excellence, power, and grace, education draws out God’s unique gifts, calling, and purposes. A Biblical philosophy of education stresses individual moral responsibility and duty to produce fruit in the community. Thus, loving one’s neighbor becomes a reality. Biblical principles govern human relationships supporting the greatest expressions of Biblical love or *agapé* from the most personal to the greatest spheres of civil government and international relations.

This method of education self-consciously trains Christian leaders. Christian leadership assumes a servant’s heart with the confidence of godly authority. Christian leadership finely balances the seemingly contradictory traits demanded of the mature Christian. For example, these include accomplishment without pride, hard work and productivity without greed, liberty under law and

conviction of heart with forbearance to others. The principle of stewardship puts our lives, careers, Christian liberty, conscience, and possessions into God's hand as resources for His gospel purpose.

Biblical education replaces ineffective graded, lockstep, and linear processes. Rather, we implement processes that address individual ability and cumulative learning, even in a group. Thus, no one is left behind or held back. Learning is not linear. Rather, as Van Til describes it, learning is a spiral. Accumulation of accomplishment results from the systematic return to various related topics in a given subject, each time going a degree deeper. Progress based on actual accomplishment replaces artificial age or grade based standards. Such a reciprocal approach to learning avoids educational gaps.

In the light of Scripture and providential history, each subject reflects God's truths. God stamps creation with the imprint of His law and ways (*Ps. 85:11*). Thus, the teacher identifies God's revealed wisdom — His Word — through the subject. The Word corrects and directs empirical learning. The traditional Christian liberal arts teach the student the greatest Christian ideas and expression, while helping form the mind with a powerful ability to reason

and communicate Biblically. Certain unique insights of the Christian heritage contribute to the body of wisdom, particularly the doctrines of liberty.

A complete study upon the Biblical heritage of education should be the beginning of wisdom for living out the great Christian adventure and making a personal contribution to the gospel. For increasing numbers of Christians, the traits above compel us. These things promise to restore the adjective *Christian* to the present era, providing the societal and civil foundations of liberty and prosperity necessary to sustain and expand the gospel work into all nations.

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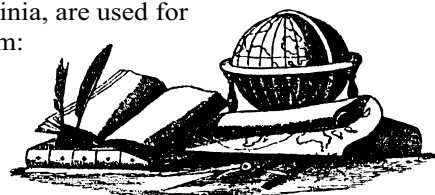
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# The Charlie Daniels Band

## “How Sweet the Sound”

*Reviewed by Susan Burns*



**I** have noticed through the years that when my foot starts tapping, The Charlie Daniels Band is usually the reason. I think that you would have to bind me tighter than the Mummy to keep me still when he starts playing that fiddle. Even then, I would be tapping and clapping in my heart!

His recent 2-CD set “How Sweet the Sound” keeps up my toe-tapping tradition. The same energy that is in “The South’s Gonna Do It” and “The Devil Went Down to Georgia,” (among many other tunes) has been infused into 25 gospel songs and hymns. Songs that I am used to hearing sung in mournful, tear-jerking renditions, come alive when played by TCDB. Are you interested in hearing absolute joy in “Amazing Grace”? How about “Nothing But the Blood,” “Power in the Blood,” and “I Am Thine O Lord” sung and

played so that you just about have to stand up and shout “Amen!!!” And if you are a TCDB fan, you can imagine the delight in hearing Charlie Daniels sing “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” “I’ll Fly Away,” and “Peace in the Valley.” There are also some old country favorites, “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” “Softly and Tenderly,” “I’ll Fly Away,” and “Life’s Railway To Heaven.” I even enjoyed the songs that aren’t particularly my favorite hymns, like “How Great Thou Art.” When Charlie sings it, it has soul.

Charlie says on the jacket of this CD: “I dedicate this imperfect work to Him who alone is perfect, creator of everything which exists, Father of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, author of all truth, all goodness, all salvation, whose mercy endures to all generations, to the majesty, the honor and glory of almighty God.”

I am glad Charlie Daniels will be singing and playing for us for eternity. Heaven will rock! How sweet the sound! I hope he considers doing a CD of Psalms sometime. It would be something to hear and our exclusivist brothers could use the help!

Are you a war-weary warrior? This CD is vitamins for the whole man. It looks to me like your foot is in need of some tapping, your hands in need of some clapping, and your heart in need of some good o’gospel joy. After a few doses of this soul-medicine, you will be energized and recommitted to going onward through life, with your hand upon the throttle and your eye upon the rail.

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# Movies, Storytelling and Apologetics

## Part I

*By Brian Godawa*

**S**torytelling is making a comeback. With the influence of postmodernism on our cultural landscape, rational argumentation and empirical observation are being questioned in humanity's quest for meaning and truth. They only go so far. There are equally effective means of reaching the spiritual part of people in a way that abstract reasoning or mere scientific measurement may not. Storytelling is one of those means. Stories wholistically engage our body, minds, and emotions through dramatic narrative. The ancients knew this, which is why there are so many myths, parables, fairy tales, and other stories in history that helped reinforce the values and worldviews of their respective cultures, and find meaning in their existence.

Daniel Taylor writes of the desire for meaning as the originating impulse of our storytelling:

*We tell stories because we hope to find or create significant connections between things.... Our stories teach us that there is a place for us, that we fit. They suggest to us that our lives can have a plot. Stories turn mere chronology, one thing after another, into the purposeful action of plot, and thereby into meaning.... Stories are the single best way humans have for accounting for our experience.<sup>1</sup>*

Famous psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim writes in *The Uses of Enchantment*, his classic study of the meaning and importance of fairy tales, "Myths and fairy stories both answer the eternal questions: What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself?"<sup>2</sup>

The concept of "mythology" has a bad rap in many Christian circles. It has come to be synonymous with "falsehood" or "lies." But this was not always so. Christopher Vogler, accomplished educator of screenwriters echoes his mentor, famous mythologist, Joseph Campbell, by explaining that myths are not untruths or fanciful exaggerations, but metaphors for a mystery beyond comprehension. "It is a comparison that helps us understand, by analogy, some aspect of our mysterious selves. A myth, in this way of thinking, is not an untruth but a way of reaching a profound truth."<sup>3</sup>

So one way to define mythology is simply as the incarnation of a worldview within the narrative framework of story. Though Campbell erroneously promoted a relativistic metaphysic and a bigoted prejudice against Christianity, his study of mythology demands some respect from Christians in its encyclopedic scope and in some of his insights into the nature of myth. Like Paul on Mars Hill, we must not be afraid to agree with pagan authors where they are correct, while refusing to endorse the totality of their worldview.

## Lights, Camera, Action

Love them or hate them, movies have become one of the dominant forms of storytelling in our society and therefore carriers of cultural mythology (television, even more so). Modern man may pride himself in his scientific rejection of ancient mythologies and pagan gods and goddesses, but he has not rejected mythology in principle. He has merely replaced one mythology with other mythologies. The myths of Odysseus and Hercules that taught Greeks and Romans courage, honor, strength, and fate have been replaced with movies like *Gladiator* and *Braveheart* that teach Americans and Europeans very similar values. As most moviegoers know, movies about historical people are more often legend and myth than actual history.

*X-Men*, the 2000 movie about an assembly of comic book heroes with "mutant" powers who fight each other over the skyline of Manhattan, is the same kind of scenario as the Greek pantheon of deities who fought it out over mere mortals below Mount Olympus. In fact, many movie heroes played by actors like Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, George Clooney, Tom Cruise, and others are larger-than-life protagonists who achieve their goals through Herculean-like labors. Deity is not a prerequisite for mythology. Francis Schaeffer pointed out that the gods of Greece and Rome were actually amplified humanity, not divinity.<sup>4</sup> Are not movie stars and the characters they play given the same amplification in their social status because of their "big screen" persona?

A good example of American movie mythology is the western genre. The values which many of us take

pride in, like rugged individualism, the pioneer spirit, vigilante justice, outlaws as heroes, restlessness of spirit, and love of outdoors run deep in many American hearts and many American westerns. A typical western movie reinforces the “bootstraps” lone righteous man against a savage world, carving his way through the wilderness of harsh rugged terrain, burly outlaws, and “uncivilized, wild Indians” in order for “civilization” to find its roots. With a six-gun on his hip, and a warrior code of honor, the cowboy hands out posse justice to outlaws who endanger the growth of the village. The western movie embodies many of the values (and mythology) of American culture.

The recent movie based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is another example of the mythic nature of movies. It is a story that not only incarnates values like courage, sacrifice, and pity, but also embodies a deep underlying essence of the average person's search for significance. Frodo is an everyman in his universe, as we are in ours. Like most of us, he is not famous or especially gifted with talents or powers that place him above other men, or rather, other hobbits. His journey is one of self-discovery where he learns that, as the Lady Galadriel tells him, “[E]ven the smallest person can change the course of the future.” Isn't this what each of us desires in our innermost being? Most of us are not larger than life in our social, political, or economic status, yet we long for significance in our own existence. *The Lord of the Rings*, as mythology, reaches deep within our universal need because it incarnates the truth that significance is not achieved through power, but through humility. God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

*The Lord of the Rings* also illustrates the point that there is such a thing as a Christian mythology. Stories that communicate such values as self-sacrifice, loving one's neighbor, or even ultimate justice are in essence expressing a Christian mythology or worldview. For example, the screenwriter Randall Wallace has expressed his intent behind *Braveheart* as being a reflection of the gospel. In the same way that William Wallace's martyrdom became the apparent loss that won Scotland's freedom, so our own spiritual freedom is wrought from the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. One man dies that many may be set free and “really live.”

Certainly, not all movies are epic mythology. Some may be more like parables or fairy tales. But all of them are stories, and as stories, they incarnate the values of a worldview. Campbell discovered an underlying universal pattern in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies. He called it “the hero's journey” from *separation to initiation to return*,<sup>5</sup> and that journey incarnates redemption in a way we will discuss in part two of this article. It is difficult to deny this common thread between diverse cultures. But the Christian need not fear facing such facts. God is the God of story. The cliché that history is *His* story is certainly

accurate as the Bible itself indicates through its own storytelling. The fact that all stories contain common elements should be expected if our Creator created us in His image. Even the most reprobate pagan myth reflects that image, fallen though it may be, and suppresses that truth, twisting it to idolatrous purposes (*Rom. 1:18-25*).

C.S. Lewis explained well the relation of myth and Christianity in his article, “Myth Become Fact”:

*The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact...by becoming fact, it does not cease to be myth: That is the miracle. I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other... We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about “parallels” and “Pagan Christs”: they ought to be there — it would be a stumbling block if they weren't. We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome.<sup>6</sup>*

In part two of this series, I will examine the redemptive nature of storytelling in the movies and how the very structure of that storytelling is an apologetic for worldviews.

<sup>1</sup>Daniel Taylor, *The Healing Power of Stories: Creating Yourself Through the Stories of Your Life* (Dublin, Ireland: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1, 2, 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 45. Unfortunately, Bettelheim's analysis of fairy tales suffers the excesses of a myopic Freudianism.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1992), p. vii.

<sup>4</sup>Francis Schaeffer, How Should We Then Live? in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), p. 85.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1949, 1968, 1973), p. 30. Also, see Vogler, *Writer's Journey*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 66-67.

*Brian Godawa is a screenwriter living in southern California. He wrote the screenplay for the feature film To End All Wars, and is the author of the book Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Movies With Discernment (Intervarsity Press). He speaks at various churches on How To Watch Movies and other movie topics, and his website is [www.godawa.com](http://www.godawa.com).*





# Religion and Truth

*By Samuel L. Blumenfeld*

**I**n today's multicultural swamp, where moral relativism is the order of the day, it has become increasingly difficult to assert the truth of Biblical Scripture in face of the idea that nobody and everybody has the "truth." So how do people of faith assert the truth of Christianity? By demonstrating how the fruits of Holy Scripture are the benevolent results of a truth-bearing seed.

## **The American Idea**

We know that communism was based on a mountain of lies and produced a civilization of murder, enslavement, and impoverishment. And we know that adherents to Islam will believe any lie that advances their religion. The fruits of Islam have led to terrorism, poverty, and despotism.

The American idea, as promulgated by the Founding Fathers, was based on the teachings of the Bible, and the fruits have been incredibly good and abundant: freedom, happiness, and prosperity. That doesn't mean that America hasn't had its faults and shortcomings. It took us a while to shake off slavery, an institution that was virtually universal when it was introduced into the New World. But we did rid ourselves of the evil of slavery at great human cost. Since Americans are human, they are subject to mankind's depravity. However, it is this nation's general adherence to Biblical principles of morality and political economy that have mitigated its own tendencies toward depravity.

It is the American idea that has attracted immigrants from all over the globe. There is no other country on earth that people are clamoring to get into. They know instinctively that America is the place to live, rear children, work, and prosper. They may not know that the American idea is based on the truth of Biblical precepts, but they do know that America works as a society, regardless of the negative forces that are trying to tear it down. We are the only nation that invokes the blessings of God in the simple statement "God bless America," which every president has iterated over and over again in speeches to the American people and the world. That is why America is considered the most

religious nation in the world, despite the fact that Islamic countries constantly invoke Allah without gaining any blessings, and communist countries like Cuba and North Korea invoke Marx and Lenin as they continue to subsist in misery.

Of course, the humanists and atheists will claim that the Bible was written by human beings and is therefore full of error, and thus cannot claim divine inspiration. You cannot prove the existence of God, they claim. But to Christians and Jews the Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, God exists. We know that God exists because He made all that exists: the sun, the stars, the earth with all its incredible beauties. God's existence shines through the eyes of an innocent child, the playful babes of animals, the delightful personality of a cat or a dog, the shape of the human being so unlike anything else on earth. Who could have designed the peacock's tail if not the God Who has created such living wonders? And look at man, given the gift of language and intellect, and the ability to create works of art and magnificent music and poetry.

## **The Bible vs. Other Religious Books**

Why is the Bible the truth and not the Koran or other religious writings? Because the Bible is the early history of man's relationship to his Creator. It is the statement of God's law, which must be of God, because no man-made legal system would demand of humans what the Bible commands. The fact that man has rebelled so constantly against God's law is proof that it is above man's law because of its divine origin. Man has tried time and again to usurp God's authority only to bring disaster on himself and his society.

God's world is a constant reminder of His truth. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Every human being lives through a programmed cycle beginning at conception, and passing through infancy, childhood, young adulthood, middle-age, old age, and death. The programming is God's truth within us, moving us through all the stages of life, inexorably, to its end. Unless we acknowledge God's

— Continued on page 17 —



# Recovering the Bride Price

*By Timothy D. Terrell*



## Protecting Brides

**A**mong the valuable traditions of the people of God recorded for us in the Old Testament is the *bride price*, sometimes called a *dowry*. This is a large transfer of wealth from the groom to the new father-in-law before marriage.<sup>1</sup> As we will see, a bride price is best understood not as a payment for the transfer of a human being, but as a way to protect the bride as she leaves her father's household. It is present in many important Old Testament marriages. First mentioned in Genesis 24:53, in which Abraham's servant pays a bride price for Rebekah, the bride price takes on special importance in the marriage of Jacob to Leah and Rachel. In this instance, recorded in Genesis 31, Laban required an expensive commitment of labor from Jacob for his daughter Rachel. Later, Saul required an unusual bride price of David for his daughter Michal (*1 Sam. 18:25*).

The bride price is not only part of ancient Near Eastern custom, but is part of the Mosaic law, as in Exodus 22:16-17: "If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins." A parallel passage in Deuteronomy (22:28, 29) indicates that the bride price is properly paid to the woman's father, that it was fifty shekels of silver, and that if the two marry, the man loses whatever right he may have otherwise had to divorce her thereafter. Fifty shekels was a considerable sum, probably enough to induce many a young Israelite lover to govern his passions.

The wisdom of the bride price is completely lost on modern Westerners, who generally regard it as antiquated and pointless. Yet bride prices had a significant economic purpose: they provided a trust fund to protect the wife and her children against the possible infidelity or incompetence of the husband. R. J. Rushdoony noted that the bride price was "the family capital; it represented the wife's security, in

case of divorce where the husband was at fault. If she was at fault, she forfeited it."<sup>2</sup> A woman lacking the protection of a bride price, he wrote, was actually a concubine.<sup>3</sup>

Normally the father of the bride would keep the bride price in trust for his daughter and her children, investing it wisely for their benefit. After his death the fund would go to the daughter for her to manage. Laban's behavior with Rachel and Leah's wealth provides a good example of a breach of that trust:

*Then Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him [Jacob], "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it." (Gen. 31:14-16)*

In Laban's quarreling with Jacob over wages, God providentially gave the fortune — fourteen years' worth of Jacob's labor — back to Jacob (*Gen. 30:27—31:13*).

According to Rushdoony, the bride price was normally about three years' wages.<sup>4</sup> In modern society, a groom rarely comes to a marriage with that much wealth, yet it might be wise for Christians to begin placing heavier requirements on the groom than is customary in today's society. The groom's father could provide some of the funds, as a blessing on his son's marriage, and the groom himself would, of course, contribute money from his own earnings. Rushdoony observes that the bride's father would usually add to the bride price himself, but the funds generally came from the groom or his family.

The tradition of the bride price thus had the virtue of involving the family of the young man in his choice of a wife. A poor choice might meet with the disfavor of the groom's family, and thus a greater financial commitment out of the groom's own pocket. Talk is cheap, but withholding family assets

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from the groom could make a poor choice an expensive one. A secondary benefit of the tradition is that it provides an incentive to a young man to maintain a good relationship with his parents.

## Alimony

As the tradition of the bride price has faded from Western culture, the state has made attempts to fill the void. Chief among these are alimony provisions in divorce settlements, which require the ex-husband to pay some amount toward the ex-wife's care. To many people this may seem an acceptable substitute for the bride price, because it provides a divorced wife with financial support. Some might even argue that it is superior, for it puts an additional financial burden on a divorcing husband, while the bride price tradition requires nothing more from him than what he contributed before the wedding. However, alimony has serious shortcomings.

First, this state intervention acts to separate the marriage decision from the beneficial influences of the two families. As the supposed guarantor of the woman's well-being, the state somewhat reduces the pressure on the bride's family to carefully screen suitors before marriage. Likewise, the groom's family has less invested in the marriage — literally — and may not exert that valuable cautionary influence on the young man.

Second, alimony judgments are sometimes poorly enforced. The state, as a disinterested third party, may be lax in squeezing alimony payments from a less-than-enthusiastic ex-husband. Who better than the ex-wife's father to entrust with making on-time payments out of a trust fund to his victimized daughter?

Third, alimony payments depend upon the income of the ex-husband, who has already demonstrated his unreliability. What of the ex-husband whose income drops substantially after divorce (not unlikely), or is in jail, disabled, or deceased? With the trust fund, the ex-wife's financial situation is completely unrelated to the success or failure of her ex-husband.

Fourth, the bride price provides the wife with some means of support if the husband fails financially but the marriage survives. The wife's father may, in such circumstances, decide to support his daughter out of the trust fund until his son-in-law is once more able to provide for his family. The fund should not be overused, however — it should be regarded as an emergency fund only to be relied upon when there is the utmost financial distress.

Alimony should be regarded as a poor substitute for a bride price. A culture moving toward Biblical marriages and strong family-oriented traditions should wean itself from this counterfeit and remind fathers of their responsibilities toward their daughters.

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## Engagement Rings

The giving of an engagement ring is a relatively new custom that, to a very limited extent, takes the place of a bride price. It acts as a performance bond: if the man does not follow through on his promise to marry, the woman keeps the ring as compensation for her emotional loss. That is why the value of an engagement ring is traditionally a certain (large) proportion of the fiancé's income. It is supposed to require such a significant financial commitment on his part that he will not casually make a promise to marry (or break the promise). A cubic zirconia, because it is cheap, defeats the economic purpose of the ring. It is similarly useless as a bond if the fiancé purchased the ring on credit and has subjected it to repossession if he does not make the payments.

Before the 1930s, the practice of giving an engagement ring was uncommon. As economist Margaret Brinig has suggested, this is probably because at that time almost all states permitted a jilted fiancée to file a lawsuit for damages if the man broke his promise to marry. Between 1935 and 1945, however, this legal option was abolished in states containing about half of the U.S. population. Engagement rings then became more popular, as they afforded the protection the state had ceased to provide.

Regrettably, our society is confused about the economic purpose of the engagement ring, so the woman frequently faces some pressure to return the ring if her fiancé proves unfaithful, and the wedding is called off. The *only* case in which the woman should return the ring is if she is at fault in the breaking off of the engagement.

Even after marriage, the ring remains the property of the wife alone, so that she possesses at least one valuable asset that can be sold in the event that the husband breaks the marriage covenant or impoverishes her. The engagement ring thus acts as a sort of bride price, though it is typically less expensive — and thus less protective of her — than a true bride price.

## Recovering the Tradition

Where do we start in reforming our society's ideas about bride prices? There are several possibilities. First, fathers should acknowledge their responsibility in protecting their daughters by planning for them to enter marriage in sound financial condition. Ideally, brides would not only be endowed, but would be debt-free.<sup>5</sup> Second, daughters should be convinced of the protection that a bride price provides, so that the requirement is not cause for her rebellion if a suitor objects. Third, the suitor should be informed (as soon as his intentions become clear) that he will be asked to contribute to this trust fund

for his wife, so that he can plan accordingly. The financial sting of the bride price can be reduced by permitting the engagement ring to satisfy part of the requirement, and perhaps by offering to turn over a portion of the earnings from the trust fund to the couple after marriage. In addition, the father of the bride may contribute to the fund himself, as a gift to the married couple. A college education can provide an alternative source of financial protection for the woman in the event of divorce, and should be factored into the decision about the amount of the bride price. Yet it may not be wise for a young mother to depend on this contingency plan while she has young children.

In thinking about bride prices, the father should be careful not to be hypocritical or unduly rigid. For example, it may be a bit unreasonable for a father to demand an \$80,000 contribution to a trust fund from a brand-new seminary graduate with very little money in the bank and middle-class parents. This is particularly true if the father has himself demonstrated a serious lack of faithfulness

in financial matters. As with the reviving tradition of courtship, the bride price tradition requires the father to be trustworthy and actively involved in the betrothal of his daughter, seeking her best interests before his own.

<sup>1</sup>The European dowry reverses this and requires a payment from the bride's father to the groom.

<sup>2</sup>Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Rushdoony, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup>Rushdoony, p. 177.

<sup>5</sup>Of course, a father's duty toward his daughters includes many other, less tangible gifts, such as spiritual development and education. Rushdoony notes, "The bride's dowry was not only whatever her father gave her, and what her husband endowed her with, but also the wisdom, skill, and character she brought into the marriage" (p. 177).

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— Continued from page 14 —

work in our lives, and the necessity of using that time and those gifts, we see no purpose to life. Nihilists who believe in nothing usually wind up committing suicide or killing others.

To deny God is to deny truth. It is to deny all that makes life worth living. When we live with the knowledge of the God of the Bible and are willing to adhere to His Word, we accept His guidance. The Bible has been described as the human being's user manual, written by the Creator. The Founding Fathers, much to our benefit, adhered to that manual and created the greatest, freest, happiest, and most prosperous nation in all of human history. Without the truth, it would have never been possible.

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# The Sick Feeling I Get when I Hear about Enron

*(Warning: It may be different than you think)*

*By David L. Bahnsen*

Everyone with a television and/or a newspaper subscription is now well aware that Enron is the devil. The executives are a group of men who form the Beast of Revelation. The White House is completely in bed with Enron management. Every single employee saw their retirement go from \$4.2 million to -\$57.23. To make things even worse, there is not an accounting statement you can look at from a Fortune 500 company that you should assume has any merit or truth to it whatsoever. (I hate having to say this, but I am being a bit facetious here.)

## Enron and George W.

However, the news has also clearly taught us some very positive things of late. The Democrats on the Hill are going to fight to stop the corruption that exists between Enron and the Bush Administration. The media is making sure the public is aware how dangerous it is to receive free stock from your employer. And at the end of the day, there will be reforms — reforms, reforms, reforms.... Not so fast! Before we end up begging that we had the 401k opportunities the disgruntled Enron employees had, may I interject on behalf of all who do not wish to be fed hogwash by a group of media elite who have an agenda to lie, cheat, and steal far more than Kenneth Lay or Jeffrey Skilling ever dreamed?

Allow me to make a few disclaimers before I embark on my emotional tirade. I want to be clear that, as far as I know, it may very well be true that the Enron executives (particularly Lay, Fastow, and Skilling) are every bit as corrupt as we have heard. I do not know who is telling the whole truth; but from my amateur assessment, it appears there were intentionally malicious and self-serving fraudulent actions by some of the men involved, most blatantly by Fastow. Any time a CEO sells stock worth \$100 million in a company that declares bankruptcy within 10 months, it is natural to be suspicious, disgusted, and even a bit envious. However, what these men may or may not have done wrong is really not the subject of

this particular tirade (although if there are any requests, I would be happy to save that one for a different day).

No, it would be a waste of time today for me to talk about any of those matters. You see, *if* Kenneth Lay and company were guilty of the things I refer to, it would not really require too much attention, as *fraud is already against the law in this beautiful nation of ours* (my apologies to those “Christians” who are not really that into being American). If they did do something wrong, it would not constitute a violation of a “new” law, and it would not require the enactment of “new” laws. Fraud, embezzlement, etc. have been criminal offenses in our country for years and years. “Cooking the books” in a publicly held company is a crime, and if there were proof that they did such a thing, indictments should be and would be forthcoming.

## Pure-Hearted Democrats

I am much more interested in a few other fascinating elements of this story. Let me start with the pure-hearted intentions of the Democrats on Capitol Hill.

I probably should just cut the sarcasm now, because I actually hold these men in such contempt that I will end up using the vocabulary that frequently gets me in trouble if I continue. Has anyone heard one shred of evidence demonstrating corruption in the White House as it pertains to the situation with Enron? Are Daschle and Lieberman and other random liberal bastions of sloth and hypocrisy so frustrated with Bush's post-9/11 popularity that they will make up anything they have to in order to slander, manipulate, and poke their way into a position of better political prestige? The reality is that Enron executives made donations to a *lot* of Republicans, and a *lot* of Democrats. More Republicans received money than Democrats. Who received the *very* highest amount of donations out of *every* American politician? Governor Gray Davis of California.... You haven't

seen that one on the front page, have you? How about this? Global Crossing, the “minor league” Enron story, where a \$6 billion company declared bankruptcy, features these highlights: The CEO sold stock worth \$700 million in the last two years (way more than the measly \$100 million Kenneth Lay sold). They donated over \$1 million to Bill Clinton’s campaign (way more than the measly \$100,000 Bush got from the Enron folks). Has CNN been running any features on this beauty? Did *USA Today* run a 34-point font size headline on this one? Of course not. The reality is that corruption exists in this nation. The other reality is that sometimes people give just because they believe in something. My guess is that the knucklehead at Global Crossing liked Clinton, and the knucklehead at Enron liked Bush. Either way, “guilt by association” is almost as wrong as the hypocrisy that underlies everything the Dems on Capitol Hill stand for.

## Reform of 401Ks

Now for my favorite part of this Enron mess — the massive need to regulate, reform, change, modify, reinforce, oversee, and massage the retirement plans that companies freely and without obligation offer their employees in our country, because a handful of people saw their 401k moneys in Enron disappear. If the fact that people really believed this nonsense wasn’t so tragic and depressing, it would be amusing. I need to do a little math for you at this point: Employee John Doe works for Enron. He signs up for the 401k, putting 6% of his \$100k per year salary into the plan. Enron is going to match every dollar he puts in their stock with another dollar’s worth of stock. If he puts his 6% (or a portion thereof) into another investment, they will still give him 50% (for free!). He is given a booklet with 19 different investment options. But, he chooses the one that will give him the extra 50 cents. There were no guns involved. There was no coercion — just a pen and an account form. The stock is at \$10. He is buying \$6,000 per year, and the company is giving him \$6,000 per year. The stock goes to \$80. He has been buying for years. They have been giving him free stock for years. He has paid a total of \$72,000, and his account is now at \$1 million because the stock went up, and because of the free stock Enron gave him. Boom — the company hits the skids, the stock goes to \$0, every analyst on Wall Street is wrong, and now he lost — how much?

For those of you who say \$1 million, I need to recommend a revised approach to accounting. His

*I am very sorry for people who worked for Enron and lost their jobs and/or a piece of their planned retirement assets. But this is America, and I would rather Congress keep it that way.*

principal outlay was less than \$100,000. His free stock was the other chunk, and the paper gain appreciation was the biggest. He voluntarily put 100% of his retirement into one company, despite dozens of legal waivers, economic disclaimers, investment advisory notices, and the innate common sense most of us are born with. I am not saying that I do not feel bad for him. I am simply saying that John Doe took a gamble, and he lost.

The most important thing I can say is this: Any attempt by the leeches on the Hill to regulate and control and restrict retirement stock plans in our country will serve to decrease wealth and prosperity in our nation — not protect it. Did any of these self-serving bureaucrats fight for legislation requiring higher amounts of company stock when Microsoft, Wal-Mart, General Electric, and IBM made millionaires out of secretaries by giving them free stock? It is just absolutely preposterous. Why would Bill Gates have any desire to incentivize his management or employees with stock if he faces regulation, scrutiny, imprisonment, Congressional hearings, etc. as soon as the company faces hard times? The bottom line is this: Equity participation in most companies is a good thing. Companies can recruit and retain better employees with such a mechanism than they can without. If Uncle Sam gets involved, it will serve to damage the process — not help it. (By the way, that is always the way it works).

I am very sorry for people who worked for Enron and lost their jobs and/or a piece of their planned retirement assets. But this is America, and I would rather Congress keep it that way. Otherwise, we really have no reason to bemoan a company that declines, and no reason to celebrate a company that excels.

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# Practicing Postmillennialism

## Part III

*By Jeffery J. Ventrella*

**A** fundamental nexus exists between eschatology and ethics. Stated differently, eschatology implies ethical imperatives. Theonomic postmillennialism demands several ethical responses: (1) promoting the primacy of the gospel; and, (2) demonstrating evangelistic and missiological zeal. There is more, however.

### Christendomic Consciousness

Theonomic postmillennialism also demands that one *cultivate Christendomic consciousness*. God has promised to redeem “a people” — consecrated for His purposes — this coming reality will progress in history (“living stones” fitted together to form a “New Temple”) and will climax as an eschatological collective, (the Bride, the New Jerusalem, etc.). Accordingly therefore, to live consistently with these coming eschatological realities requires Christians to intentionally develop an awareness for God’s present Christendomic work in, among, with, and through His people.

While it is true that God elects particular sinners for redemption, it is also true that the promise of the New Covenant is explicitly couched in terms of God’s gathering of a collective people — *loved by God and unified in thought and deed*. It is this redeemed collective which grows intergenerationally under the Lord’s ruling hand:

*They shall be My people, and I will be their God: then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And, I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not run away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in the land, with all My heart and with all My soul. (Jer. 32:38-41, NKJV)*

As God in history gathers His eschatological people, postmillennialism (and the Bible) teaches that this gathering will be incrementally, yet unmistakably, manifested tangibly over time — just as Jesus taught parabolically in Matthew 13: the leaven and the mustard

seed parables. Critically, however, this manifestation occurs along the lines of the Antithesis — that judicially instituted hostility and enmity existing between the Seed of the Woman and the seed of the Serpent (*Gen. 3:15*). This concept demarcates the battle between God’s people and His gathering of them on the one hand, and on the other hand, the “darkness,” the “tares,” the “goats,” and the “dogs,” or put theologically, the covenant breakers.<sup>1</sup>

This enmity “plays out” in history and does so with *communal* dimensions as recognized by the early church Fathers: Jerusalem versus Athens (Tertullian); the City of God versus the City of Man (Augustine).<sup>2</sup> And, this communal expression of Antithesis reoccurs throughout redemptive history as the Lord *divides, delivers*, and then *destroys* — all for the sake of His expanding kingdom to His glory alone: The Garden, Noah and the Flood, Lot and Sodom, the Tower of Babel, the lives of the Patriarches, the Exodus — in each case, the Lord *divides* along the line of the Antithesis, *delivers* His people, and then *destroys* the covenant-breakers. The Lord God is an active God whose work continues eschatologically — *but does so along antithetical Christendomic lines*.

Sadly, however, much of the American church has lost its Christendomic consciousness, that is, the confident vision of God’s certain eschatological purpose to save a people, dwell with them, do good to them, and rejoice over them — all for His own glory. Instead, God’s people, having lost Christendomic consciousness, do not really engage the cultural antithetically, but rather spawn conflicts of Light v. Light; Wheat v. Wheat; and Sheep v. Sheep. Christians, including many Reformed Christians, endlessly debate the footnotes in the City of God’s Zoning and Building Codes *while the City of Man is quickly and incessantly stealing and/or poisoning the Christians’ water, power, and homesteads*.<sup>3</sup> Christ’s living waters have been converted into a stagnant evangelical slough. This should not be, and yet this occurs regularly because Christians fail to conduct their affairs in terms of Jeremiah’s eschatological promise: God is gathering *one people* and He purposes to *rejoice in them* and *do good to them*. Christians must therefore recover a Christendomic Consciousness — that is, an eschatological understanding of God’s purpose to sanctify His people — imperfect as they



now are. A Christendomic Consciousness must be recovered, and a postmillennial confession supplies the motive and the mandate for doing so.

Recovering a Christendomic consciousness means, among other things, *keeping the main thing the main thing*. The Scripture's priorities must be recaptured — in both word and deed, faith and works, doctrine and duty.<sup>4</sup> Many obstacles or constraints impair Christendomic Consciousness, even (especially?) among those professing an optimistic eschatology.<sup>5</sup> Here are some suggestions for remedying this situation:

## Being Long-Suffering with Our Brothers

2 Timothy 2:22-25 *requires* servants of the Lord to be gentle, patient, and humble. And the reality is that, according to Christ, love is *the mark* of the visible church (Jn. 13:34, 35).<sup>6</sup> While differences among brothers are important and ought to be resolved, *they are differences among brothers*, and should be considered accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

## Negating the Cult of Personality

The Reformed often (and rightly) critique Rome's Papacy. However, splintered Protestantism, including the Reformed, appear to function in terms of many Popes or other Pied Pipers. "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, or Calvin, or Augustine, or Machen, or Clark, or Van Til, or Rushdoony," or whomever — with a bit of reflection, this list could be greatly extended.<sup>8</sup> The reality is, however, that neither Calvin (nor any other great or not-so-great leader) died for anyone's sins, and though Christians do and ought to learn with gratitude from those whom God has illumined, a divisive party-spirit has no place in the kingdom. One solution to the party-spirit is to intentionally foster Christendomic consciousness. After all, loyalty is owed exclusively to Christ alone.<sup>9</sup>

## Pursuing Biblical Peacemaking

Where schism exists, reconciliation in the gospel should be actively pursued. Jesus makes this point with utmost clarity and urgency: worship itself is secondary where brothers are estranged by personal offense (Mt. 5:23, 24). To be conscious of the covenant requires reality in relationships, especially where conflict exists.

Postmillennialism provides a Biblically tenable basis for hope in God's future grace. But what must not be forgotten is that God's decree ordains both the *telos* as well as the means.<sup>10</sup> Christians must "work out their own salvation," and this means ethical living by God's holy standard, that is, theonomically. But note: Paul's command to do so (Phil. 2:12) is a *conclusion* he draws *after* admonishing Christians to embrace a Christendomic consciousness:

*Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the*

*interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2: 3-5, ESV)*

Theonomic postmillennialism demands no less.

<sup>1</sup>There is perhaps no more enduring explication of the Antithesis than Augustine's *The City of God*.

<sup>2</sup>Modern American evangelicalism, including many in the Reformed community, continue to be negatively impacted by the individualistic semi-Pelegianism of 19th Century revivalism and Scofieldism and its progeny, and thus have lost the robust Christendomic consciousness generated by the Antithesis.

<sup>3</sup>As Professor John Frame once lamented when faced with the seemingly endless presbyterial energy expended upon "perfecting minutes": "I often wished someone had asked seriously how high a priority God would have us place on the perfection of minutes!" *Evangelical Reunion—Denominations and the Body of Christ*, (1991), p. 123, n. 11.

<sup>4</sup>These dialectics describe what the Scriptures principally teach, as the Shorter Catechism summarizes in Q & A 3.

<sup>5</sup>As Steve Schlissel put it pointedly, (the only way he can speak): "Isn't it a shame that the first thing two Reformed people, do when they first meet is to find out where they disagree?" (paraphrased).

<sup>6</sup>Why the Reformers omitted "love" as being a mark of the church is baffling. Dr. Bahnsen issued an insightful corrective to the traditional Reformed position by arguing that biblical fellowship (as well as evangelistic effort) should be recognized as necessary features of a viable biblical church in addition to the three traditionally articulated marks. See, Ventrella, *Ecclesiastic Consequences of Theonomic Presuppositionalism* (1996).

<sup>7</sup>As Dr. Bahnsen quipped when reflecting upon the often-deplorable state of Christian scholarly debate: "Isn't it too bad that *quarrels* interfere with good *arguments*."

<sup>8</sup>Consider the current evangelical appetite for "left behind" dispensationalism, or the enthusiastic promotion, embracing, (and heralding by the secular media) of a self-conscious modalist as being "the next Billy Graham." Or, more close to home, consider the various band-wagons arising in Reformed circles trumpeting educational, marriage or parenting modalities. Indeed, entire congregations are being founded on narrow trendy preferences relating to one version of practical theology for the family, a sort of monotheistic Mormonism, rather than biblical Christendomic consciousness.

<sup>9</sup>The author recalls a "truly reformed" man who never had any theological opinion regarding any issue until an East Texas newsletter addressed the topic, and then, that opinion—and that opinion alone—became the only correct theological option—notwithstanding its cogency or lack thereof.

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g., WCF 3.1 *and also*, LC, Q & A 18.

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# Nicaragua: Using Micro-enterprises to Rebuild a Nation

*By Donna Pierce*

**F**rom under the wreckage of twelve years of hellish war and economic disaster, a glimmer of hope poked through the darkness with Violeta Chamorro being elected to the presidency of Nicaragua in 1990. After twelve years of economic free-fall under the Sandinista regime, Nicaragua began free market reforms in 1991. Despite some setbacks, the country has made dramatic progress: privatizing 351 state enterprises, reducing inflation from 13,500% to 12%, and cutting the foreign debt in half. The economy began expanding in 1994 and grew a strong 5% in 2000, with overall GDP reaching 2.3 million in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Despite this growing economy, Nicaragua still remains the second-poorest nation in the western hemisphere.<sup>1</sup>

## Micro-enterprise Loans

In 1991, through Mario Aviles, a childhood friend of Mrs. Chamorro, Children's Hunger Relief Fund (CHRF) was given an open door to minister among the ruins by giving a new hope to families via Micro-enterprise loans, a building block for a broken and devastated nation. The unique Micro-enterprise fund was started, and CHRF with its affiliate FUNAD (headed by Mario Aviles) has been giving small business loans ever since to qualified families giving them hope for the future.

How does CHRF qualify recipients for loans when almost the entire country is sunken in rubble with many still scavenging for existence? They start with networking through the people in the neighborhoods and their families. People know people. They know who is a hard worker, who has the knowledge or experience to run a business, and who is honest and has a good work ethic.

Next, collateral or a guarantee is established for the loan to be paid back. Sometimes the collateral can be a family horse or perhaps a refrigerator, or a bike. If the prospective recipient doesn't have anything, it may be a friend who has something to offer and who will sign for the borrower. Many loans start as low as \$300, but in Nicaragua, \$300 goes a long way to start a small family business.

After collateral and perhaps a co-signer is established, paperwork is filled out, references checked, and

a contract is drawn up by an attorney stating duration of the loan, interest rate, late fees, and an agreement for the recipient to meet with our staff once a week for training, problem solving, and fellowship.

## Business Training

What is this training? Loan recipients are taught life and business development skills such as: effective planning, the benefits of hard work, the importance of financial integrity, leadership, forgiveness, understanding others, communication, justice, and personal motivation, which build families, which builds communities. Generosity, a major key in the growth of the community, is taught to encourage recipients to give back to the community by volunteering to help others in need and/or by giving a portion of their earnings to needy causes. Many start small groups of their own and teach others in the community about these principles for the successful building of their families and their communities.

While visiting our orphanage in Nueva Guinea, I saw this principle at work. I was being served dinner by Josephine whom I recognized as the owner of one of the produce-stand enterprises we loaned money to a few years before. She volunteers her time at the children's home to help take care of the orphans and their many needs. As I visited more of the sites in the area, I began to see numerous forms of giving back to the community.

One example occurred while I visiting Hotel Nueva Guinea where I met Segunda and her husband Cruz. Eight years earlier, they had received a small \$300 Micro-enterprise loan to start a *pulperia* (small store) that would be set up in a corner of their war-torn, dilapidated hotel. Because of their experience prior to the war and along with their training from our staff in Nueva Guinea, the *pulperia* began to flourish. They paid off their loan in a short period of time and decided to expand their product line. As business continued to grow, they received a few more loans and began to rebuild the hotel.

Currently they are building a new wing with beautiful air-conditioned rooms, which also have their own bathroom (a luxury in Nicaragua). They

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were presented the “Best Hotel” award in Nueva Guinea in 2000. Segunda and her husband give back to the community by conducting a small community discipleship group once a week in their hotel, teaching the same principles they were taught by our staff.

## Giving Back

Rodiver, co-director of our orphanage, Hogar de Reposo, in Nueva Guinea gives back to the community by teaching life and business development skills to the micro-enterprise recipients in that area. He and his wife, Victoria, acquired these important skills when they became one of our first micro-enterprise recipients years earlier. As time went on, they were overcome with a burning passion to take care of orphans they found wandering in the neighborhood. They sold their business and helped establish our orphanage in Nueva Guinea.

Rodiver also coaches a soccer team. He meets with the team on a regular basis, not just for soccer practice, but also to train the young high school men the principles of successful human development and giving back to the community. Some of these boys meet with other friends from the community and disciple them as well.

The network does not stop there. CHRF through FUNAD’s director Mario Aviles, oversees a furniture-making trade school. This training is conducted in Mario’s church building in Managua. During the week the tables, tools, and saws are set up, and interested young men and women from the neighborhood (many homeless, abused, or neglected) are trained in wood-working and other skills, along with the same human development skills taught to our micro-enterprise owners. The trades they learn help them get off the streets, and the life skills strengthen the family and the community. Some of these young men and women become recipients of micro-enterprise loans themselves.

Renting a small area on the opposite side of the same church building is a small Micro-enterprise called CORDISA — a small chemical company. They mix and bottle cleaning chemicals, which are sold to hotels, schools, and stores. Felipe started this enterprise with a small loan from CHRF three years ago. Felipe was found by Mario barefoot and selling water on the streets. After working with Felipe for quite some time, Mario considered him a good risk for a Micro-enterprise loan.

Now CORDISA employs a five-person sales force comprised of four women and one man. The chemical area has a staff of four.

Felipe meets once a week with his staff and teaches them professional and personal development skills along with the principle of giving back to the community. Phillipe sometimes employs street youth in the

neighborhood that are looking for a way out. Felipe and Carlos (who runs the wood working shop) are highly respected in the neighborhood because of the positive influence they bring to the community.

Besides reaching out to the community, Felipe supports his family of four with his successful business and also attends school in the evening. He has one more year at the university and he will receive his degree in business administration.

Now that you have seen one side of this amazing network, it’s time to show you the other. With Mario as the hub, there is a different dimension of the network called La Red (The Net). It is comprised of a group of 12 professional men —lawyers, professors, lawmakers, and businessmen. They meet once a week working the familiar life and business development principles that are taught to the Micro-enterprise owners, but at an executive level.

Additionally, these twelve professionals conduct their own small groups that branch out into the professional community. They meet regularly to teach in their respective cities and specialized areas. Again these groups are taught the same development principles including the important philosophy of giving back to the community. They are teaching others and sharing their resources with the needy as well as bringing about change through their professional networks in their corporations, in their colleges, and universities, in their law practices, and even within the judicial arena. They are building up families, communities, and finally their nation.

Mario also holds popular leadership training seminars on a frequent basis, further spreading the good news for building a nation. These training seminars use books like Colonel Doner’s *Samaritan Strategy* and Thomas Shirmacher’s *God Wants You to Learn, Labour and Love*, which includes a chapter on social responsibility through love. The attendees include professionals like Hernaldo Zuniga, Congressman; Oscar Rivas Haslam, Supreme Court Judge; Hasman Pineda, Vice Dean of Upoli University.

As you can see, there is a large and unique network connected to our Micro-enterprise loan program. It starts from the streets and moves through the various channels of society all the way to the upper class of professional businessmen, professors, lawmakers, and judges. Accordingly, not only are poor families and individuals receiving loans to help them start a business, but with our specialized training permeating throughout all levels of society, many are seizing a unique opportunity to rebuild their future, the future of their community, and finally the future of their nation.

— Continued on page 26 —



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*"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ." Ephesians 4:14.*

# Christian Economics: A Foundation in Law

## Part 3

*By Ian Hodge*



**I**n last month's article, I dealt with the positive side of the Eighth Commandment, "You shall not steal," as explained in the Westminster Larger Catechism. These are the duties, the positive obligations, imposed by the commandment. This month our interest is with the negative concepts in this commandment as presented in the Catechism.

### **Question 142**

*What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?*

### **Answer**

*The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving anything that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing land marks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust enclosures and depopulations; engrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor: What belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness; inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God has given us.*

The broad expanse of the negative aspect of the Eighth Commandment is immediately obvious. No theft or robbery, that is, taking what God says you are not entitled to. This is the key, for property rights are not established by the legislative domain of Congress or Parliament but in the law of God. It is God Who distributes property and determines who "owns" it. And just to close the loop, the Catechism

includes man-stealing as a prohibition. This indicates that property rights extend to more than "things." It resides in people as well. To take someone against his will or against the will of a parent or guardian constitutes theft. It should not be done. Beware our political system that decrees all children belong to it and so legislate their school years, who shall teach them, and what shall be taught, thereby proscribing parental control.

### **Property Rights**

This idea of property rights as defined by God has serious implications for modern social welfare. If taking someone else's property (and property here would include money) is condemned, it is wrong only within the confines of how God distributes ownership. Does He, for example, say all wealth is the domain of the political state, as in socialism or communism? Does God say houses, cars, and factories belong to private owners, but the political state has ownership of all wages and salaries received and therefore may tax at its discretion, as in our modern democratic nations? If God does not give the political state ownership of people's money, then anything the state takes that is over and above what God says it is entitled to is theft. To *receive* that money in any form is to receive stolen money. We should not do this, according to this standard. Our modern welfare system, then, is in urgent need of an overhaul, first to determine what taxes might be legitimate, second to determine what receipts would avoid making welfare recipients the receivers of stolen goods.

The next section of the Catechism's explanation of theft takes us again into the realm of economics and political theory. There can be no fraudulent dealing, including weights and measures. Economists have long understood that modern fractional reserve banking is a violation of this principle. Fractional reserve banking, with its attendant practice of printing or coining money as the political state demands, lowers the value of existing money. This defrauds people of their current purchasing power. It is, by this

standard, wrong, just as removing landmarks or refusing to keep the terms and conditions of a contract are wrong. Our politicians who confiscate property, even for supposedly good causes, are guilty of removing landmarks to substitute their own. Thus we can see that the Eighth Commandment has the potential for a large-scale change to modern politics.

## Restraining Economic Appetites

Oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust enclosures, and depopulations are a curious mix. Yet they have this in common: they are there to put a restraint on unbridled economic appetites. Do not oppress or extort to get your own way. No usury (charging of interest) or bribery as a way to make ourselves wealthier. Lawsuits, often seen as a way of getting rich (for lawyers, if not for plaintiffs), should be reasonable. No unjust enclosures or depopulations as a way of driving up the price or keeping others from getting their share. Similarly, engrossing products, that is trying to get a monopoly situation in a product or service in order to command higher prices, is prohibited. What a world we would live in if people followed these rules!

The Catechism writers also give us the broad principles that govern their understanding. We should neither take nor withhold from our neighbor, especially if our motives are covetousness, greed, or worse, envy. We must learn to modify our economic appetite for worldly goods. On the other hand, their prohibition against idleness and prodigality ensure that we balance this. Economic goods are necessary. We must eat, clothe ourselves, our family, and, if we are faithful, use the wealth God gives us to expand His kingdom. This kingdom is built, however, by the expansion of Christian homes, businesses, and schools, so there is a balancing act. We must expand our wealth, but we may not make it a goal in itself. The attainment of wealth must serve God and His purposes.

We may not, the Catechism concludes, defraud ourselves of the “due use and comfort” of the wealth that God has given us. In an age where state and national governments rely on gaming as a major source of government revenue, thereby encouraging gambling in various forms, the inclusion of “wasteful gaming” in the list of prohibitions included in the Eighth Commandment is a timely reminder that our wealth is not our own. We are not free to do whatever we like with it. Wealth carries with it duties and obligations that are prescribed in the Word of God.

The Larger Catechism’s understanding of the Eighth Commandment is drawn from a study of the Bible. By and large, contemporary Christianity does not find this the way to discover God’s will for our lives. Instead, it advocates the mystical leading of the

Holy Spirit as a *substitute* for Bible Study and exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. The result has been a minimal understanding of the Eighth Commandment as well as the other nine. Consequently, there is no criticism, for example, of fractional reserve banking or the modern welfare state from the Christian community. It’s as if the Holy Spirit, in the way He is purported now to lead, ignores His own Holy Scriptures and provides a less comprehensive set of instructions.

In the final part of this study, I want to explore what is wrong with some contemporary understandings of the Commandments based on the Westminster Standards, and why this has placed Christianity in a state of borderline irrelevance to the economic culture in which we find ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of State: Background Notes: Nicaragua, March 1998; Released by the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs.

*Donna Pierce is program coordinator for Children’s Hunger Relief Fund. In her position she traveled to Nicaragua to review the projects and gather information for this report. She is also an award-winning web designer and content developer for CHRF’s website as well as many other sites. She can be reached at [donna@chrf.org](mailto:donna@chrf.org).*



— Continued from page 28 —

common and mundane names, but is that not the wonder of the church, the fact that it is unique in the world—in the world but distinct from it?

22. Why use just any word to describe the beautiful assembly of fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord?

23. Paul so frequently writes to “the churches.” Why when he was raptured to the third heaven, if another word be preferred, did not God and his holy angels give it to him? Surely they would have, and is God a man that he should forget such a weighty matter? 24. If there were a better word, I believe we’d have it.

25. I fear, brother Sillius, that the relative wealth and peace of Gorpo has lulled you to sleep in this matter. I can hear your snores from here. 26. But do not think I am being overly harsh on you, brother. No, I merely want to see a vibrant church for our Lord, and I am afraid that you have allowed your faith to dull as your circumstances shine all the more.

## Clubs Don’t Merit Death

27. When Rome was so viciously on our backs, we were fired with the Gospel, we were ready to defend every little point of doctrine, and we knew well our faith. After all, no one wishes to stare down

an arena of tigers over a religious quirk or shallow fling with faith. 28. It is much easier to abandon a poorly grasped faith than one that quickens the very soul and fills the heart and mind. 29. And, remember, we were not rounded up and sentenced to die because Rome did not like our club.

30. Maybe the reason Caesar pays us so little attention is that so many of our churches are nothing more than clubs, harmless assemblies where we meet to show off our gold-trimmed togas, Bavarian Cart Works chariots, and padded-insole sandals. 31. If such is the case, then it is little mystery that we no longer call ourselves the “church.” 32. We do not act as if we are.

<sup>1</sup> With apologies to Calvin Miller.

<sup>2</sup> Recent archeology suggests this was a mildly posh suburb of Corinth.

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# The Gorpo Letters

## *The First Epistle of Cornelius Quintus to Sillius Sump<sup>1</sup>*

*By Joel Miller*

### **Chapter 1, As Concerns the Church**

1. My dear Sillius, shepherd of the flock at Gorpo,<sup>2</sup> faithful if sometimes daft brother in our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom, I, Cornelius Quintus, am the least minister and bond slave.

2. Dispensing with the rest of the apostolic salutations, I must forthrightly explain that I am disquieted at the latest report from our brother Stephanas, who was with you but a short while ago.

3. Upon his return to me, Stephanas told of your renaming the church that I, laboring in the Lord, so dutifully planted only a handful of years ago to see it flourish as a mustard tree, which, once grown tall and broad doth become a home for all God's creatures great and small.

4. Now Stephanas reports you have tagged that local body with the monstrous moniker "Gorpo Living Springs Fellowship Center."

5. This, brother, ticketh me off.

6. It is an all-too-prevalent thing these dreadful days. It seems fellow ministers of our Lord will call their congregations anything but a church. It's "Such-and-Such Christian Fellowship" or "Name-that-Town Christian Center." 7. A smattering of examples from the very town which the Lord has deemed it good to place me includes: "Horizons Ministries," "Grace Harvest Fellowship," "Vine Life Ministries," "Gospel Lighthouse," "Abundant Life Fellowship," and "Times of Refreshing Ministries."

8. As the local rabbi would say, "Oy vey!"

9. As with the local bodies listed here, you didn't have the decency to include "Christian," as our precious faith has been called since Paul's work in Antioch.

### **Wrestling With the Problem**

10. There is one very absurd example only a few miles hence. This body of believers simply calls itself "The Rock"—which, unless your head has been tucked inside your toga for the last few years, you know is also the name of one of the most popular gladiatorial champions in Rome, where he is known for his bulging muscles and crowd-pleasing wrestling

skills. 11. Not that this is thoroughly reproachful by itself. You'll remember from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that he was an athlete. 12. But the confusion of propitiation and the pugilism is lamentable indeed.

13. So, why must we call ourselves something other than "church"?

14. If it were for fear of Rome I could understand the desire, however misplaced, to obscure the nature of our assemblies. While the whip and lash are not with us at this present time—thanks be to God—few can forget the persecutions, and lions are ample reason for many to change names every second day. 15. But these days the lions are filled with different meats, and Caesar tires of using Christians to light his gardens (only novel for a season, the blood-curdling screams of our dear brothers and sisters made evening strolls unnerving, even for him).

16. So I venture it is not for your fear of persecution that you misname the body of Christ, as do so many others; rather, I fear, the reason for avoiding the word "church" is that our minds are numbed in these more pleasant days to what the church really is.

### **The Meaning of Church**

17. Far from the ever-popular mutual admiration societies, clubs, guilds, and friendship circles, the church is a distinct institution on earth. 18. It is God's chosen vessel to administer his Word by preaching, discipline believers in love, aid in sanctification by the Spirit, bring believers together for edification, honor the Lord in worship, and administer the sacraments.

19. Certainly a group calling itself by any other name can do all of these things. 20. Preaching can be done at "center." Believers can grow in unity at a "fellowship." The deserts are fine for worship. Pot lucks can administer the bread and wine, and the local bath house can baptize; but, my dear Sillius, isn't that just the point? 21. Any one of these majestic and wonderful things can be done under any number of

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