

Reformed

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

MARCH 2013
Volume 32 Issue No. 5

PERSPECTIVE

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For Subscriptions or to Change your address, contact:

Reformed Perspective, 322 Caradoc St N., Strathroy, ON N7G 2N2
subscribe@reformedperspective.ca
1-888-773-7780

For Letters to the Editor, Advertising and Submissions contact:

E-mail: editor@reformedperspective.ca

Editor: Jon Dykstra

Regular Contributors:

Sharon Bratcher, Christine Farenhorst, Margaret Helder, Anna Nienhuis,
Michael Wagner

Board of Directors: John Voorhorst (Chairman); Henry Stel (Managing
Editor); James Teitsma (Secretary/Treasurer); Bob Lodder

Secretarial Address (Board Matters): James Teitsma
8 Granite Cove, East St. Paul, MB, Canada, R2E 0L6

Art Direction, Design and Layout: Compass Creative Studio Inc.
compasscreative.ca

Contact Address for South Africa:

Arie Roos, Box 584, Kuilsrivier, 7580 Republic of South Africa

Contact Address for Australia:

Pro Ecclesia Publishers, PO Box 189, Kelmscott, W. Australia 6111

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WHERE: First Baptist Church
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WHEN: 10:00 a.m. May 9, 2013

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A free, paper-bag lunch is available for all those who RSVP attendance to Andre@ARPACanada.ca

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TITUS 2 YOUNGER MEN

- Clarence Bouwman p.18

Photo by DJ Chuang / Flickr.com



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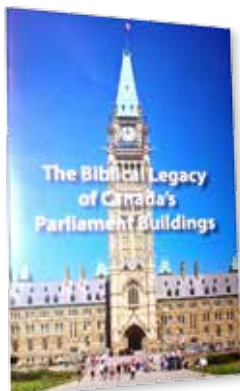
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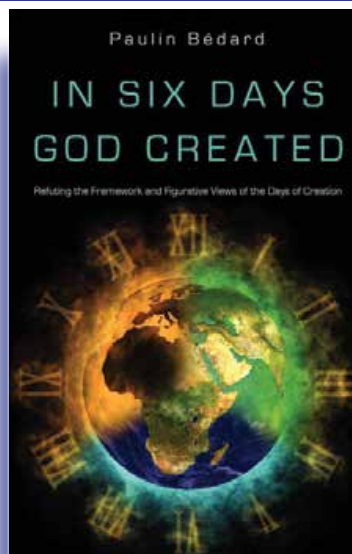
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FROM THE EDITOR

APOLOGETICS IS...

This month we're featuring an article on the apologetics of popular author and Reformed pastor Timothy Keller.

So what is apologetics? It isn't an every day sort of word, but it can be an every day sort of activity. When someone asks you *why* you believe *what* you believe, they are calling you to the task of apologetics – you are being asked to defend and explain Christianity. The apostle Peter makes it clear this is something we should all be prepared to do. In 1 Peter 3:15 he writes:

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, *always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...* (emphasis mine)

But how should we go about defending our faith? There are three general approaches, and the first two can be combined, which leaves us with two.

1. OUTSIDE IN

The first, the Evidential/Classical approach, begins with arguments and evidences from outside the Bible to prove the truth of the Bible.

As its name indicates, **Evidential Apologetics** emphasizes evidence. It points to findings in fields like archeology, history, biology, human genetics, astronomy, physics, philosophy, mathematics, etc. to validate the Bible. For example, the complexity of the human eye might be presented as evidence of a Divine Designer, or the Tel Dan Stele, an ancient bit of inscribed stone that mentions the royal "House of David," might be used to argue that there really was a king of Judah named David.

Classical Apologetics is more philosophical, but both approaches look for evidence *outside* the Bible to prove that what's *inside* the Bible is true – an *outside/in* approach. To put it another way, these methods don't treat the Bible as the authority by which all other things are evaluated, but instead evaluate the Bible via evidences from these various fields.

The problem with this is that it seems to treat these evidences as more authoritative than the Bible. For example, if the Bible says the world was created a few thousand years ago, but scientists tell us that evidences from outside the Bible say it evolved over billions of years, these outside/in Christian apologists are liable to accept what the scientists say over what the Bible says.

It is no coincidence, then, that theistic evolutionists (professing Christians who believe God used evolution) use this first approach. Not all Evidential/Classical apologists are theistic evolutionists (far from it!) but it's probably safe to say all theistic evolutionists rely on Evidential/Classical apologetics.

Notable Classical/Evidential apologists include C.S. Lewis, R.C. Sproul, and Josh McDowell. While this approach has a foundational flaw, there are many godly men using it.

2. INSIDE OUT

The second approach starts with the Bible, presupposes it is true, and then uses what's inside the Bible to explain and shine a light on the world outside the Bible – it could be called an *inside/out* approach. This is the Reformed apologetics that Dr. Bredenhof advocates in his article this issue, more commonly called **Presuppositional Apologetics**.

Though C.S. Lewis was, generally, a classical apologist, he has a famous quote that can be used to sum up the Presuppositional approach. He said:

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

Presuppositional apologists start with the Bible, and use it to make sense of the world – "by it they can see everything else."

For a more detailed understanding of Presuppositional Apologetics, see Dr. Bredenhof's article, and his description of the Reformed approach – it is the one and the same thing.



Jon Dykstra can be reached at editor@reformedperspective.ca. His favorite book on presuppositional apologetics is Dr. Jason Lisle's *Ultimate Proof of Creation*.

Notable presuppositionalists include Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen and Jason Lisle.

BUT WHAT OF TIM KELLER?

Tim Keller is a prolific writer, whose books can be found on many of our bookshelves. So it's important for us to understand his theological strengths and weaknesses.

As you'll find in Dr. Bredenhof's article "The apologetical method of Tim Keller" his apologetics are a weakness, and one that has led him to support theistic evolution, and question the historic understanding of the first chapters of Genesis.

But when he treats Scripture as sacred, as he does in many of his books, Keller is insightful, engaging, and edifying. He challenges readers to delve deeper, and to rely entirely on God. That is quite a strength!

And that is why in this issue readers will find both a critique of his apologetical approach as it is found in his book *The Reason for God* (starting on page 12) and recommendations for two of his very best books: *Prodigal God* and *Counterfeit Gods* (see pages 30-31).

NOTA BENE

News worth noting

IS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF PRICING ERRORS THE SAME AS STEALING?

BY ANNA NIENHUIS

Recent fare errors by some major airlines have led to online discussion regarding what constitutes theft, and whether someone who knowingly books a flight at an obviously incorrect price is stealing. For example, one woman booked an international business class flight that was listed at \$13 but actually should have cost over \$9,000. She was then outraged when her seat was cancelled after the airline discovered the mistake.

While many would agree that the mistake was the airline's, as Christians we also need to consider the "do unto others" Golden Rule (Luke 6:31). If we made such a glaring error when depositing a cheque, entering into the ATM the amount as \$30 instead of \$3,000, would we understand if the bank considered it our mistake and pocketed the difference?

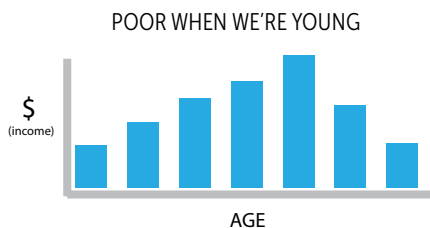
So what would you do? If you are given \$20 change instead of the accurate \$2 at Wal-Mart, do you speak up or count it as a happy accident?

While it may be tempting to take advantage of a large company who we feel won't even miss the money, as Christians we should feel wrong in knowingly taking advantage of anyone, regardless of their position. While it may not constitute stealing from a dictionary perspective, it also cannot be considered a Christian way of living.

SOURCE: Christopher Elliott's "What airfare thieves can teach you about business ethics"; linkedin.com; Feb. 4, 2013

NOT ONLY THE RICH ARE GETTING RICHER

BY ANNA NIENHUIS



Many believe the rich are getting richer at the expense of the poor. However a new study, *Measuring Income Mobility in Canada*, authored by two Fraser Institute economists, shows this is not the case here. The economists,

Niels Veldhuis and Charles Lamnam, argue that people usually start out in a low-income bracket when they are young, inexperienced, and new to the working world, but then their income increases steadily until middle age. It doesn't show significant decline again until they reach their retirement years. This trend has been strong for the past two decades. The poor aren't getting poorer - those who started poor, end up getting significantly richer as they age. Movements such as "Occupy Vancouver" would do well to study such data before setting up camp and decrying the economic injustice of our society.

SOURCE: Niels Veldhuis & Charles Lamnam's "Canada's 'poor' getting richer," troymedia.com, Nov. 22, 2012

GERMANY BANS BEASTIALITY... FOR THE WRONG REASON

BY ANNA NIENHUIS AND JON DYKSTRA

In February Germany was expected to ban bestiality, after originally legalizing it in the 1960s as part of a shift away from "morality-based law." While its previous legality may be shocking to some, what's also shocking is that

German politicians are managing to ban bestiality without reference to the immorality involved. The ban is coming in now under the guise of protection of animal rights. As Hans-Michael Goldmann, head of the Parliamentary committee pursuing this law, explained, "It's not proven that animals would enjoy sexual interaction with humans."

So they've done the right thing...but for exactly the wrong reason. In the Garden of Eden God made it clear only

woman was a suitable match for man, and that together we are the pinnacle of creation – only Mankind is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). However, the German law elevates concerns for animals' welfare over any concerns about people. The government has framed this in a way that ignores what bestiality does to *Man* and instead worries about the harm done to *animals*.

SOURCE: Oliver Moore's "Zoophiles' vow to fight after Germany re-bans bestiality"; theglobeandmail.com; Dec. 14, 2012

ARUN SMITH: FREE SPEECH WARRIOR?

BY RAOUL KINGMA

 In January 23 a plywood and paper “free speech wall” was set up at Carleton University by the Carleton Students for Liberty. Passersby were encouraged to write all and anything on the wall to demonstrate that free speech at Canadian universities still has some vim and vigor. Just a few hours later, with such comments as “Abortion is murder” and “Traditional marriage is awesome” adorning its face, the wall was torn down by Arun Smith, a 7th year human rights and sexuality major at the university.

Smith claimed full responsibility via social media, explaining via Twitter that “not every opinion is valid or deserving of expression.” In a longer explanation on Facebook, he further justified his vandalism by saying that:

We are supposed to be creating safe(r) spaces for ourselves, and for other students, but there can be no safe(r) spaces where there is potential for triggering the invalidation or questioning of the identities of others, and/or the expression of hatred.

The thrust of Smith’s argument is that

true freedom of speech requires limits on speech for the sake of the greater good – absolute freedom of speech will result in the marginalization and oppression of certain social or ethnic groups and, as such, is no freedom at all.

As Christians, we can agree with this sentiment to a degree. One thinks, for example, of the application of the 9th commandment – “Do not bear false witness against your neighbor” – to the civic realm. Indeed, not all opinions are valid or worthy of expression, which is why death threats and libel are rightly punishable.

However, when “champions of human rights” like Arun Smith throw out words such as “bigoted” and “oppressive” to describe speech they want to censor, they do it without explaining or justifying the standard by which they determine what qualifies as bigoted and oppressive. The truth is they are the standard – activists such as Smith arrogantly assume that they and only they have been granted objective truth.

Christians should be deeply suspicious of any such censorship of ideas and fight it earnestly. We




Arun Smith recently ran for student council - this is a slightly altered version of his election poster

follow a God who speaks, and whose Word conquers nations and peoples, not through the censorship of opposition but through the potency of the Truth. And we should not become discouraged as free speech in our western world faces increased suppression. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). Those who hate God may strive endlessly to suppress the Word, but it is that Word that cannot and will not be muzzled.

NEW ONTARIO PREMIER TO RAMP UP SEX-ED

BY ANNA NIENHUIS



 Ontario’s new Premier, Kathleen Wynne, is intent on bringing back a sex education program that was set aside

in 2010 after significant backlash from parents. The program begins discussing “gender identity” in Grade 3, and covers oral and anal intercourse by Grade 7.

Following in the less-than-stellar footsteps of her predecessor, Dalton McGuinty, Wynne is also in favor of fully funded abortions and, as Minister of Education, she developed the sex-ed program she plans to implement. Wynne, a lesbian, was also responsible for pushing through Ontario’s “equity and inclusive education strategy,” which forced Catholic schools to allow gay-straight alliance clubs.

Ontario is led by leaders committed to forcing their agenda of “equality” onto all groups. Parents sending their children to private school in the province may no longer be able to avoid this influence, despite the absence of government funding in private schools. So we need to remain vigilant and prayerful – this program was postponed in 2010 due to a loud parental outcry, and if it was held off once, it can be done so again.

SOURCE: Patrick B. Craine’s “Ontario’s new lesbian Premier promises to bring back explicit lower grades sex-ed curriculum”; lifesitenews.com; Jan. 30, 2013.

LAW DEANS JUDGMENTAL ABOUT TWU LAW SCHOOL PROPOSAL

BY NEIL DYKSTRA



Trinity Western University (TWU) recently announced plans to start a law school on the Evangelical Christian university's Langley, BC, campus. Janet Epp-Buckingham, well known in pro-life circles, is leading the effort. She argues it is important to have a Christian law school since Christians in secular law schools continually find their beliefs to be marginalized.

Indeed, almost as if they are trying to provide the proof for her point, the Council of Canadian Law Deans has already expressed its opposition to Trinity's application, sending a letter of protest to the Canadian Law Societies. They object in particular to Trinity's community covenant, which asks students and faculty to refrain from drinking alcohol, premarital sex, and homosexual behavior. As always, the sticking point is the ban on gay sex. They believe the proposed law school will therefore produce graduates who will be biased against gays and lesbians.

This road has already been traveled almost a decade ago. When TWU applied for its teachers' college, the

accrediting body denied their license over the same clause in the covenant. That fight made it all the way to the Supreme Court which, in an 8-1 decision, agreed with Trinity that the BC College of Teachers (BCCT) had overstepped its bounds when it refused them accreditation.

The key to the Supreme Court's decision was that the BCCT had incorrectly inferred that religious beliefs automatically translate to discriminatory conduct. As the Court's decision read:

In considering the religious precepts of TWU instead of the actual impact of these beliefs on the public school environment, the BCCT acted on the basis of irrelevant considerations.

Lost on those who object to Trinity's participation in higher education is the fact that a similar argument can be made about every other clause in the covenant. If refraining from homosexual behavior while attending Trinity makes one anti-gay, a similar rule about premarital sex or drinking would predispose Trinity's teachers and law graduates against students and clients who drink and fornicate. The inordinate focus on homosexuality belies the driving forces behind the criticism of TWU. It is critical that the Christian community, and Reformed Christians specifically, maintain the effort to establish our own schools. Secular humanism is not only the official religion within state-run institutions, persecution of other beliefs is becoming increasingly common.

HEIDELBERG-CATECHISM.COM GOES LIVE!

BY JON DYKSTRAS



In January the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary launched a new website to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism. The site, www.heidelberg-catechism.com, is simply enormous, and includes hundreds of resources about or inspired by the Catechism, including:

- speeches
- sermons
- study notes
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- even choir performances

The Catechism has been a treasure to the Reformed churches for four and half centuries. This website allows us to more fully explore this great gift, and makes it easy to share this amazing resource with our friends, neighbors, coworkers, and anyone we know who might have questions about God and His Word.

HOW GENEROUS ARE CANADIANS COMPARED TO AMERICANS?

BY ANNA NIENHUIS

The Fraser Institute recently published their *2012 Generosity Index*, which examines the levels of generosity in Canada and the United States. Based on data from 2010 tax filers, Manitoba is the province with the highest percentage of people donating

to charity, at 26.2%. However, this places it only 39th out of 64 North American states and provinces – the top 38 spots on the index are taken by American states. Charitable giving in Canadian jurisdictions actually fell across the board in comparison to previous years.

Not only do a higher percentage of Americans donate to charity than Canadians, they also donate a greater amount – the study authors note that if

Canadians had shown the same depth of generosity as Americans it would have meant an additional \$9.2 billion in private donations, based on percentage of income donated.

So Americans would seem to be much more generous than Canadians. But perhaps the more pertinent question for each of us to ask is, how generous am I?

SOURCE: Gabler, Palacios, & Lammam's "Generosity in Canada and the United States"; fraserinstitute.org; Dec. 2012

"MORGAN FREEMAN": STOP SHINING SPOTLIGHT ON MURDERERS

BY JEFF DYKSTRA



Picture credit: Ron Frank / Shutterstock.com

The supposed reaction of actor Morgan Freeman to the December 14 shooting of twenty elementary school students and six staff members in Newtown, Connecticut, gives us two insights into the media. Freeman supposedly said that the reason these massacres keep happening is due, in part, to the typical response of the media:

...Disturbed people who would otherwise just off themselves in their basements see the news and want to top it by doing something worse, and

going out in a memorable way. Why a grade school? Why children? Because he'll be remembered as a horrible monster, instead of a sad nobody.

...Any articles or news stories yet that focus on the victims and ignore the killer's identity? None that I've seen yet. Because they don't sell. So, congratulations, sensationalist media, you've just lit the fire for someone to top this and knock off a daycare center or a maternity ward next....

What made this statement even more striking is that Morgan Freeman never said it, as his press agent revealed within two days of the shooting. The true source of the quotation is a blogger named Mark from Vancouver.

"Don't believe everything you read" is the most obvious lesson here, but Scripture is more emphatic than that. One of the tasks that David accepts as ruler of Israel is to banish liars from his presence (Psalm 101:7). As prophets, priests, and kings, we need to do the same in our use of media – we need to

stop tolerating the lies. And we need to replace them with media sources that we can trust, which will include good Christian sites, newspapers, and magazines.

But what about the statement itself? Does the blogger have a point? Does the media bear responsibility for shooting massacres by glorifying the killers after they have ended their own lives?

Certainly, a disturbed individual's motives are not necessarily that clear, but given that the only "reward" that many evil people have sought after death is their own glory, the blogger's comments point to the need to focus less on the killer and more on the victims. The psalmist indicates that one of the greatest possible punishments for the wicked is simply to be forgotten: "May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation" (Psalm 109:13). Let us also be careful not to glorify evil in our consumption of either news or entertainment.

SOURCES: <http://www.sott.net/article/254820-Morgan-Freeman-hoax-Statement-is-false-but-what-did-the-actor-really-say-about-the-Newton-school-shootings?>

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THE APOLOGETICAL METHOD OF TIM KELLER by Wes Bredenhof

IT IS POPULAR, BUT IS IT REFORMED?

In the last number of years, many atheist books have come on the market. Authors like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins have done their best to convince the public that belief in God is not only misguided or wrong, but even dangerous and evil. Because of these efforts, Christians were presented with the need to again state and defend their convictions. One of the more popular defenses has been Tim Keller's 2008 book, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. This book even made it on to the *New York Times* bestsellers list.

Tim Keller has become a well-known figure, not only in the United States, but around the world. I was recently in Cagayan de Oro, the Philippines. As I turned on the TV in my hotel room and flipped through the channels, I came across Tim Keller delivering a sermon or speech. His books have been translated into several languages. For instance, *The Reason for God* has been translated into such languages as Portuguese, Dutch, Chinese, and Korean. There's little question that Keller is a big celebrity in the Christian world.

Many Reformed Christians also find him appealing. He is, after all, the pastor of Redeemer PCA in New York City. The PCA (Presbyterian Church of America) has a range of local churches

that span from broadly evangelical to strictly confessional, but most would locate the PCA in the world of Reformed churches. Certainly the PCA is a member church of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), an organization that also includes the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches. For some, the reasoning then goes like this: if Tim Keller is a PCA pastor, he must be Reformed, and what he writes must be Reformed. But such reasoning is fallacious – being PCA does not guarantee that one is consistently and confessionally Reformed.

It's not my intention here to answer the broad question of whether or not Tim Keller is Reformed. Instead, I want to focus on his apologetical method and whether

it is Reformed. As he attempts to defend and promote the Christian faith, does he use a method which reflects Reformed foundations and principles of apologetics?

We have a limitation when we want to answer that question. To my knowledge, Tim Keller has not written directly about his method in any extensive systematic way. We have *The Reason for God* and that book is primarily addressed to unbelievers. It's primarily an *illustration* of his method, not an outline or explanation of the method itself. As we shall see, he does briefly identify his method in the book and we can examine that. However, it is the *outworking* of his method that will receive more of my attention.

KEY PRINCIPLES AND FOUNDATIONS

Before proceeding to look at Keller, let me outline for you some Reformed foundations and principles of apologetics.

1. "WHATEVER WORKS" DOESN'T WORK

Some might be tempted to approach this area from a pragmatic perspective. With such a perspective, whatever works to convince unbelievers should meet with our approval and/or would meet with God's approval. However, Reformed believers should immediately recognize the danger in such a pragmatic approach. Arminian evangelistic practices might "work" to bring someone to a confession of Christ – should they meet with our approval? Do they meet with God's approval? We recognize that God can use whatever means he wants to accomplish his purposes, and sometimes that might even include means that are lacking or incorrect. The Puritans used to say that God can strike a straight blow with a crooked stick. However, that does not absolve us of our responsibility to employ means that are ordained by God and therefore most honoring to him. In apologetics that means we have a responsibility to search for the method God would have us follow.

2. REFORMED APOLOGETICS STARTS WITH THE BIBLE

Where do we find God's will in this respect? That question is about the foundations of Christian apologetics. We need to have a solid foundation where we can be certain we have God's will in hand. That solid foundation is found in only one place: God's Word. We say we believe in the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone is the authoritative source of theology and ethics. The Bible is the standard by which everything and everyone else is to be judged and evaluated. We need to apply *sola Scriptura* to apologetics, too. The Bible must be our starting place. One of our foundational non-negotiable beliefs is the unfailing truth of the written Word of God, that there is absolute, public, objective truth outside of ourselves in the Bible.

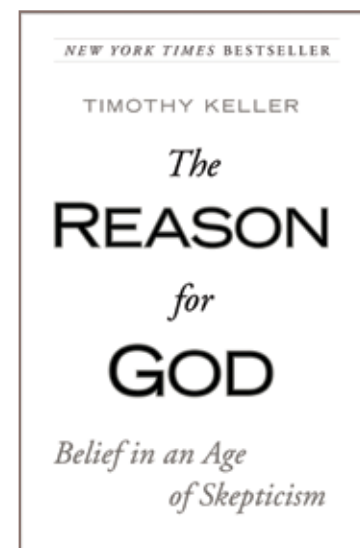
3. THE BIBLE IS AUTHORITATIVE, SO NOTHING OUTSIDE IT CAN "VALIDATE" IT

The Bible teaches us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). Similarly, Psalm 111:10 says the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Colossians 2:3 reminds us that in Christ are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that must include the knowledge by which the Christian defends the knowledge of Christ. In Psalm 36:9 we find that it is in God's light that we see light. Likewise, Psalm 18:28 tells us that God is the one who illumines our darkness.

All of this means that God's Word must stand supreme over us in apologetics from beginning to end. The late Orthodox Presbyterian apologist Greg Bahnsen put it well when he wrote:

If the apologist treats the starting point of knowledge as something other than reverence for God, then unconditional submission to the unsurpassed greatness of God's wisdom at the end of his argumentation does not really make sense.¹

“As he attempts to defend and promote the Christian faith, does he use a method which reflects Reformed foundations and principles of apologetics?”

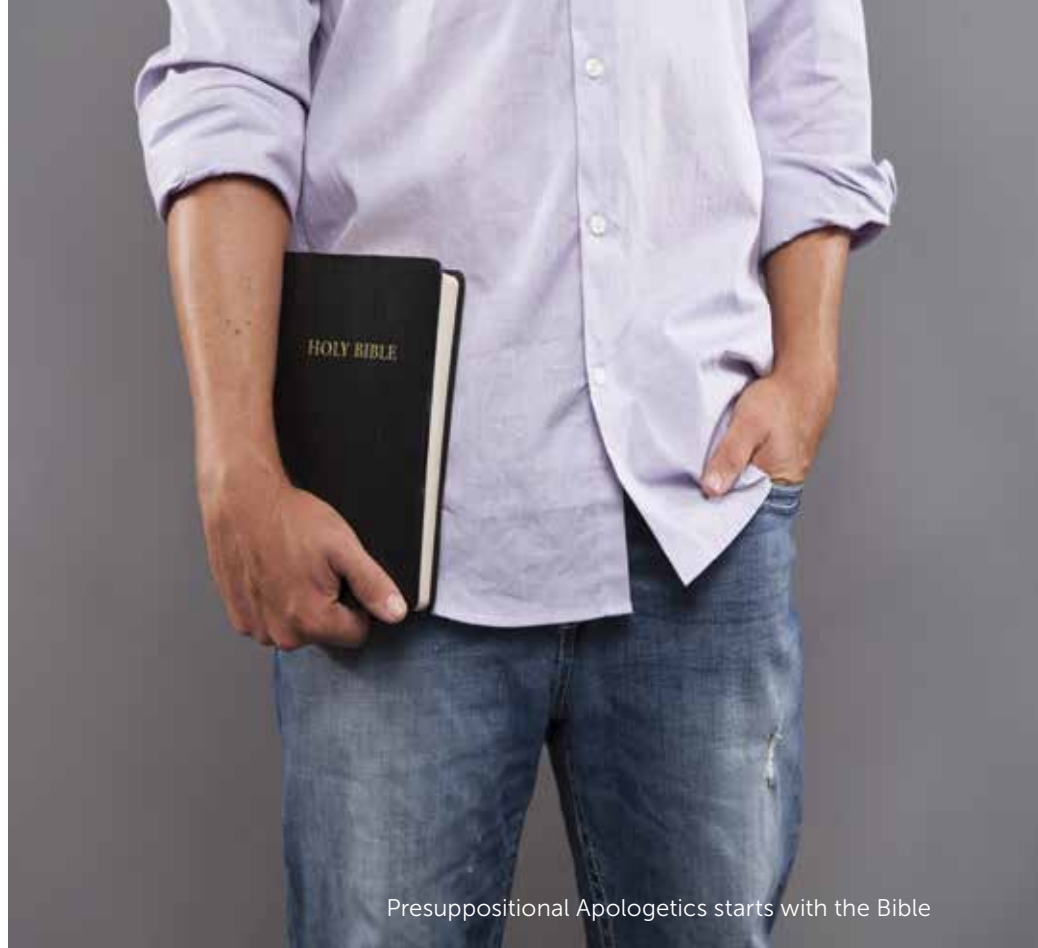


Tim Keller's *Reason for God* is hugely popular. But is its apologetical approach biblical?

In other words, unless we start with the presupposition that God's Word is true and authoritative, we have betrayed our cause. We cannot expect God's blessing if we betray his authority at any point. Therefore, when we discuss method, our starting point must be the Word of God and, indeed, Scripture must guide us throughout. Any method which does not consistently employ *sola Scriptura* cannot claim to be Reformed.

We should expect such a method to include a proper understanding of God. According to Scripture, God is independent of his creation. He does not need or depend on anyone or anything else. He exists entirely of his own strength and power. Furthermore, God alone is absolute, and he alone is autonomous – a law unto himself. God is incomparable. As Psalm 89:6 says, "For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD?" Building on that, God is transcendent, highly exalted beyond us and all creatures. Yet he is also personal, and he interacts with people in a variety of ways. Here we can think especially of the activities of the Triune God. He loves us as Father. He lives in us with his Holy Spirit. The Spirit works with the Word to create faith and to draw us into a vital union with Christ. Therefore, we say that God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. He is near, and he is involved with our lives.

A Reformed method, therefore, must be a biblical method from beginning to end.



Presuppositional Apologetics starts with the Bible

4. GOD IS THE ORIGIN OF TRUTH, LOGIC & REASON

We also confess from Scripture that God is the creator of all things, and he upholds and sustains all things. Paul says in Acts 17:28, "In him we live and move and have our being." In Romans 11:36, he writes, "For from him and through him and to him are all things." The same thought is expressed in Colossians 1:17 though in reference to Christ, "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Without the Triune God, nothing can exist. Truth, knowledge, reason, facts, laws – everything depends on God's existence. The Bible tells us that these things exist because God exists. Recognizing that goes a long way to establishing an apologetic method that gives proper honor to God's Word.

5. FALLEN MAN'S REASONING IS UNRELIABLE

A method that consistently honors *sola Scriptura* will also have a proper understanding of humanity. Man was created in the image of God (sharing some of God's attributes), but yet still with limitations. Man was created dependent on God. The fall into sin

led Adam and Eve to the desire for autonomy. They wanted to be free of God – to be a law unto themselves. Fallen man rebels against his Creator and wants to live his own life without any interference from above. The problem for the unbeliever is that this autonomy can only ever be a pretended autonomy. The unbeliever deceives himself into thinking he is independent of God. Meanwhile, Scripture tells us he is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Deep in his heart, the unregenerate knows that there is a holy God with a holy law, but because of sin he continues to assert his independence (Romans 1:32). He will also sometimes act, think, and speak in terms of the absolutes embedded in the Christian worldview. These inconsistencies only confirm the biblical teaching that unbelievers hold to their unbelief as a form of foolishness and rebellion. Ultimately, sin is irrational and illogical.

6. IT'S ONLY ONCE WE ARE REGENERATE THAT WE HAVE EYES TO SEE

Regeneration changes this picture. The believer acknowledges his complete

In general, Tim Keller is someone who takes the Bible seriously... However, I wonder whether Keller is consistent in applying his commitment to the authority of Scripture in his apologetics.

dependence on God in all things. In principle, the believer can consistently receive all manner of revealed truth from God. Yet in practice, it is true that the believer still struggles with sin. Therefore, there will be inconsistencies also in a believer's life and in his thinking and speaking. Still, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christians are open to having these inconsistencies exposed and resolved.

7. THERE IS NO NEUTRAL, COMMON GROUND

There is much more that could be said about a Reformed apologetical method. But let me end here by pointing you to one last key biblical teaching related to the doctrine of man and the fall into sin: the antithesis. This teaching, so strongly stressed by Abraham Kuyper and others in our Reformed theological heritage, is in grave danger of being lost in our day. This is what the Bible says: people are lost in falsehood and in principle unable to recognize truth, and certainly not able in principle or practice to recognize saving truth, or they are in allegiance with the source of all truth, the one who can save.

You are on one side of the antithesis or the other. Second Corinthians 6:15 says, "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" Amos 3:3 confirms this, "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?"

There is no neutral ground between the believer and the unbeliever. Though they live on the same earth, they are in different, antithetical worlds. One is completely given over to pretended autonomy, and the other confesses dependence on God and his revelation. The only way forward in apologetics is to apply the Word of God. The Holy Spirit will use the Word to open the eyes of an unbeliever and give him the heart transplant he desperately needs. A Reformed method, therefore, must be a biblical method from beginning to end.

TIM KELLER'S METHOD

Now we can proceed to outline Keller's method and consider whether it is biblical. Again, we can only restrict ourselves here to *The Reason for God*.

This is a well-written and persuasive book. Keller is an effective communicator, both on the printed page and from behind the pulpit. He is winsome and comes across as someone who understands his audience. That said, we need to recognize that persuasion is not an indicator either of truth or of a method being correct. After all, many people are persuaded to wrong positions by silly and even stupid arguments.

As mentioned earlier, *The Reason for God* is addressed to skeptics, not to Christians. It is an effort to commend "belief in age of skepticism." The title might lead one to think that Keller is arguing for bare belief in a deity. However, the book is clear enough that he is seeking ultimately to win people over to the Christian faith and worldview. For example, he has chapters on sin, the gospel, the cross, and the resurrection.

One question to ask is whether Keller begins and ends with the Bible in addressing these subjects. In general, Tim Keller is someone who takes the Bible seriously. In the introduction to

The Reason for God he says that he came to New York City to establish a church that would hold to orthodox, historic tenets of Christianity, including the infallibility of the Bible. Excellent!

1. HE ASSUMES FALLEN MAN'S REASONING IS BASICALLY RELIABLE

However, I wonder whether Keller is consistent in applying his commitment to the authority of Scripture in his apologetics. He describes his method as "critical rationality." This is how he introduces it to readers of *The Reason for God*:

It assumes that there are some arguments that many or even most rational people will find convincing, even though there is no argument that will be persuasive to everyone regardless of viewpoint. It assumes that some systems of belief are more reasonable than others, but that all arguments are rationally avoidable in the end. That is, you can always find reason to escape it that is not sheer bias or stubbornness. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we can't evaluate beliefs, only that we should not expect conclusive proof, and to demand it is unfair. Not even scientists proceed that way.

Keller's method, as described here, does not do justice to the Word of God. It appeals to fallen man as a rational creature, and it assumes that the unbeliever's intellect has not been affected by the fall into sin. Further in the same section, he speaks of the need to find theories that are "empirically verifiable." He concludes by proposing to the unbeliever that we weigh the evidence for various religious beliefs and opt for those which are "the most reasonable." This method demonstrates a failure to reckon with the effects of sin on the mind. Keller therefore flatters the unbeliever instead of confronting him with his plight. By starting with reason, rather than Scripture, Keller really betrays the cause he seeks to defend and promote.

...CONTINUED PAGE 32

Coming to Neerlandia

It's all God's money!

A one-day event on practical, faithful, financial management

How can we best honor God with our household finances?
On March 16th, from 9 AM, to 4 PM Rev. Hank Van der Woerd will be conducting a one-day seminar in Neerlandia, AB on topics including:



- What does the Bible say about money?**
- Why, and how, should Christians budget?**
- Are we prepared? Estate planning, wills and insurance**
- Tithing - guidelines on giving God thanks**
- Debt, and getting out from under it**



Rev. Van der Woerd worked 20 years in the financial industry before becoming a URC pastor, and is eager to equip the saints in this area. To further equip them, attendees will be given \$70 in related materials, including a copy of *The Wealthy Barber Returns* by Canada's most popular personal finance advisor, David Chilton.



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We would too, and together we can make it happen.
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IN A NUTSHELL

TIDBITS RELEVANT,
AND NOT SO,
TO CHRISTIAN LIFE.

BY JON DYKSTRA

describe the following four words:
Grace, Mercy, Justice and Persecution.

- A. *not* getting what you *do* deserve
- B. getting what you *do* deserve
- C. getting what you *don't* deserve

Test yourself. Do you know what definition applies to each word? The answers follow:

- A. *Not* getting what you *do* deserve, is *Mercy*. God is merciful when He doesn't send us to hell. We deserve hell, but fortunately Christians don't get what we deserve.
- B. Getting what you *do* deserve, is *Justice*. God's justice requires that sinful man be punished. Jesus took our deserved punishment on himself and thus fulfilled God's requirement for justice.
- C. Getting what you *don't* deserve is *Persecution*. If justice is about getting punished when you do something bad, then persecution is about getting punished when you've done nothing, or done something good (like handing out a Bible in Saudi Arabia). Persecution is getting something *bad* that you don't deserve. However, it can also be a *good* thing to get what we don't deserve. That's exactly what *Grace* is! Our salvation and adoption as God's children is ours entirely out of grace – we have done nothing to merit this reward. It is through grace alone.

SIMPLY AND TRULY...

There once was a man whose parents had given him the highly unusual name of "Amazing" when he was born. They gave him the name hoping that he would live up to it and achieve great things.

But as far as most people were concerned, Amazing never seemed to do anything to live up to his name. He never even got far from where he was born. He worked in the family business, and had some limited – one might even say quite normal or ordinary – success and married his highschool sweetheart. While she thought him quite extraordinary, no one else did, and his name left him as the unfortunate butt of countless jokes. These jokes so bothered him that he told his wife that when he died he didn't even want his name put on his tombstone; maybe then the jokes would stop.

Well, when Amazing did finally die, his wife honored his request. But she also wanted to have people finally understand how extraordinary her husband had been. So in place of his name she had this inscription placed on the tombstone: "Here lies a man who was loving and faithful to his wife for 60 years."

And now, whenever people walk by, they point and say, "Well, isn't that Amazing!"

SOURCE: A joke passed along by my father-in-law

MAN VS. BEAST

"...our best moralists tell us to treat other animals well — never dreaming of telling the animals to treat us well!" – C. John Collins explaining how even those who say we came from the animals can't help but acknowledge how distinct we are from them.

O CANADA!

A Canadian woman and a Saudi woman were arguing about which country was better.

The Canadian said, "Canada is far from perfect, but at least here I can freely walk up to Parliament Hill, head to the Prime Minister's office, and loudly complain, 'Stephen Harper, I don't like the way you're running this country.'"

"But I can do that in my country, too!" the Saudi woman exclaimed, "I'm free to walk up to the palace, go to the King's office, and loudly complain, 'King, I don't like the way Stephen Harper is running Canada!'"

SOURCE: Adapted from a Reagan joke about Russia and the US

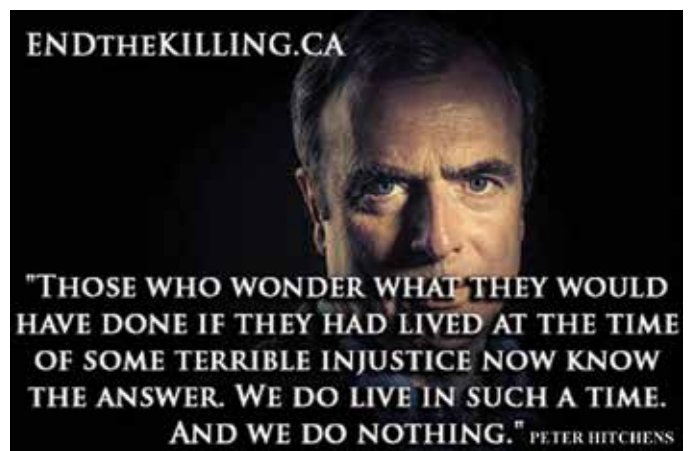
WHY WE DON'T WANT GOVERNMENT RUNNING OUR LIVES

"Any man who thinks he can be happy and prosperous by letting the Government take care of him better take a closer look at the American Indian!" – commonly attributed to Henry Ford, (but without any clear sourcing).

4 OF A KIND

Grace and *Mercy* are two words with distinct meanings... but do you know what they are?

Through sheer repetition some Christian words seem to blend into each other, and we forget their distinct meanings. But their differences do matter. Below are three short definitions that





Titus 2

YOUNGER MEN

— by Clarence Bouwman —



In Titus 2 Paul gives instructions to older women, younger women, older men and younger men, and gives instruction concerning the care of children. Every age group is covered ...except for one. Why doesn't Paul say anything about adolescents?

**"Likewise, urge the younger men to be sober-minded."
– Titus 2:6**

Adolescent males typically have the strength of adult men, and in many ways the freedoms and opportunities of adults too. And at the same time these adolescents have nowhere near the responsibilities of an adult; we say of them, they're "boys who shave." We've accepted that the teenage years are when boys do dumb things, and we're quick to forgive them because, well, they're just kids, so what can we really expect? However, Scripture speaks of just two main age brackets: children and adults. This third grouping, adolescents, is simply not Scriptural. And that, of course, is why Paul makes no mention of them in Titus 2.

In God's eyes teenagers are responsible for their conduct (as is a tween!), and need to repent of sin as much as any 50-year-old. The Bible simply does not know of a "boy who shaves." In the Bible, if you are no longer a child you are a man, albeit a "young man." So, when, in Titus 2:6, Paul talks of the need for younger men to be self-controlled, he has in mind any male who is not a child and not yet an "older man."

So let's take a closer look at what Paul has to say in Titus 2 to the younger men of the church in Crete, and take from it what we can for the instruction of our own younger men.

While our focus is on the younger men, we should note that the Lord has preserved this passage of Scripture for the benefit of more than just the "younger men." In this same chapter older men (Titus 2:2) are to give leadership, and part of the leadership they provide is surely that they ensure that younger men are what God wants them to be. Older women (Titus 2:4) are to teach the younger women to love their husbands (Titus 2:4,5) – and those husbands are invariably included in the group described as "younger men." Both the older women and the younger women, then, have a vested interest in what the Lord expects of the younger men. The whole congregation, then, can and must learn from God's instruction to the younger men.

SOURCE

It is important to remember that Paul's instruction to Titus in this chapter, in relation to what Titus must teach the "younger men," did not come out of the blue. As in all his teaching, Paul is building on God's earlier revelation – what he says here must be understood in the context of the Old Testament, and of the example of the perfect young man, Jesus Christ.

So let's consider first the instruction from Genesis, then the instruction from Jesus Christ.

PARADISE

Adam was surely no child when God created him, and surely no old man either. In the eye of our minds we see Adam in Paradise as a "younger man" of some 20 to 30 years old, in the prime of strength and ability. Notice what responsibilities God expected him to satisfy. In Genesis 1:26-2:18 we learn he was to:

- **Image God** – Just as the almighty Creator was loving and just and holy and kind and generous, so Adam was to be loving and just and holy and kind and generous. Creatures, angels, even God Himself, should be able to see in the young man Adam something of what God was like.
- **Rule over all creation** – This young man received a kingly function, with all creatures under his dominion. Please note that God did not let Adam hang around for many years until he was older and/or wizened through a lifetime of experience before all creation was placed under his feet. Right away God put him in the Garden with the mandate to "work" it and "keep" it (Genesis 2:15). The term "keep" describes the function of protecting the Garden from enemies – and God knew full well that Satan would attack the Garden through his insidious temptation. Yet God entrusted the Garden to the care of this young man!
- **Be fruitful** – The command to be fruitful does not refer simply to

making babies, but includes the responsibility of raising the children so that the next generation has learned how to image God and be effective rulers of God's world, too.

- **Be a leader** – God said, too, that it was not good for the man to be alone, and so God created a woman to be “helper” to the man (Genesis 2:18). The man in turn was to accept the helper God gave him, and give her leadership and protection.

God's instructions to Adam in Genesis 1, then, point up that Adam was expected to *embrace responsibility*. Young men of subsequent generations were, obviously, to do the same. The Biblical picture of manhood is not characterized by loafing or playing games, let alone *letting* things happen. Rather, a Biblically faithful man welcomes responsibility and takes *initiative*.

This is what older men are to impress on the younger, and what older women are to teach younger women to

beneath the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 2:22).

After the fall the creature that had been fashioned to image God, rule over God's world, and raise more image bearers, now bumps into so much frustration. How humbling for a creature endowed with such glorious responsibility!

UNDERSTOOD

Despite the destructive effects of the fall into sin, several figures of the Old Testament demonstrate that they fully understood God's intent for young men. Consider the examples of Joseph, David and Daniel:

- **Joseph** – He was 17 years old when his father sent him to check up on how his brothers were faring as they tended the family flocks (Genesis 37:2). He was also, then, 17 years old when he was sold as a slave to Egypt. As a young man he ended up in Potiphar's house and readily embraced the responsibility his master entrusted to

- **David** – Already as a teenager he was entrusted with his father's sheep. As a teenager he fought off a lion and a bear, and was called to play the lyre to King Saul. As a youth he volunteered to fight Goliath (1 Samuel 17:42). In his 20s he led Israel out to battle as Saul's commander, then fled from Saul and, though persecuted, refused to kill him. Young though he was, he understood what manhood was about; he embraced responsibility and so made hard decisions. By the time he was 30, he was king over God's people Israel.
- **Daniel** – He was a young man, likely yet a teenager, when he was taken as prisoner to Babylon. Young though he was, he refused to eat the food the palace prescribed (Daniel 1:8ff). Again, though young, he made use of the opportunities he received to learn what he could learn. So, when God elevated him as a very man to a position of power and leadership in a foreign land, he was ready for the challenge.

These three young men acted in line with God's expectation as revealed in Paradise. They understood that youth was not a time for loafing, nor a time to live off others; being young men meant that they were to embrace responsibility to image God and rule over what was entrusted to them – especially *themselves*.

JESUS

The Biblical example of what a “young man” is to look like is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. He was “like his brothers in every respect,” and that includes the reluctance some have to embrace responsibility. But the Scripture says of this young man that though he was tempted in every respect as we are, He never gave Himself to sin (Hebrews 4:15). That's to say that in his teenage years, and in his 20s too, He made it His business to image God in all He did, and made it His business, too, to rule over whatever God entrusted to His care – including first of all *Himself*, be that in guarding His mouth or restraining his sexual urges.

Adam was expected to embrace responsibility. Young men of subsequent generations were, obviously, to do the same...”

encourage in their husbands.

FALL

The fall into sin made carrying out this glorious responsibility immeasurably difficult. Work became a slog and a burden, and weeds appeared not only in gardens and fields (Genesis 3:18-19), but also in one's character and in interpersonal relations. Tensions characterized marriage (Genesis 3:16b), and children would reduce a man to tears (Genesis 4). We can understand why the Preacher describes all as vanity, a burden, a groan (Ecclesiastes 1:2). “What has a man from all his toil and striving of heart with which he toils

him when he “put him in charge of all that he had” (Genesis 39:4). Not too many years later, perhaps in his early 20s, Joseph was imprisoned “where the king's prisoners were confined” (39:20), yet even there he took the initiative to embrace whatever responsibility rolled his way. So “the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners” (39:22). He took control of his feelings so that he did not waste his energy with feelings of anger at his brothers or pity for himself. When his family came to Egypt 20 years after he was sold, he was still a relatively “young man” – but now ruler over the entire country.

At 30 years of age – truly a young man still! – He took up His public ministry in Israel, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, healing the sick and raising the dead. In the process He denied Himself for the benefit of those the Father entrusted to Him, even embracing the cursed cross and the heavy judgment of God for the benefit of the undeserving. Herein He demonstrated precisely what God intended for all men back in Paradise already; they are to embrace responsibility, and so take initiative to further the Lord’s kingdom.

Paul drew out for the Ephesians what this means for men.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that he might sanctify her.... In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies... (5:25ff).

Jesus’ embrace of the responsibility that belongs to being a man means that, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Titus 2:11). Jesus is *the* (young) man, whose example all men are to follow.

TITUS 2:6 - “SOBER-MINDED”

Let’s return, now, to Paul’s instructions for young men in Titus 2.

Paul’s objective is to build up church life in Crete. He turns to God’s Old Testament instruction and to Jesus’ example to consider what gifts the Lord has given to His church and what this example needs to look like in



Some teenagers today find picking up their socks and making their bed too much for them. When David was a teenager he knew that fighting and killing lions and bears was too much for him. But he relied on the Lord, and because the Lord delivered him “from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear” he was able to kill both lions and bears. If you are teen with an unmade bed, socks on the floor, or any other chore undone despite repeated reminders from your mom or dad, go to God in prayer, repent, and then ask Him to help you take on the tasks He has given you, both big and small.

practice. It is this material he unpacks as he tells Titus to “urge the younger men to be sober-minded.”

The term Paul uses to describe what young men are to be is difficult to translate. The NIV and the ESV render it with the term “self-controlled,” the NKJV has “sober-minded,” the NASB has “sensible.” The same term appears in Mark 5:15 in relation to the demoniac man – after the pigs, driven by the demons that used to possess the man, were drowned in the sea, the locals found the man “in his right mind.” In Romans 12:3 Paul instructs his readers

“not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with *sober judgment*.”

The point is this. God created us to “rule over” all creatures, including ourselves. With the fall into sin we became slaves to sin so that Satan ruled over us.

However, Christ – perfect *man* that He was – conquered sin and Satan and so brought salvation for all people (Titus 2:11). Sin, then, is no longer our master, no more than the exorcised demons were now master of the demoniac of Mark 5. Instead, Christ has poured out His Spirit so that we can again be the *men* God wants us to be.

Men are meant to embrace responsibility. The victory of Christ has given renewed opportunity to embrace responsibility. Paul would have Titus urge younger men to take seriously the victory of Jesus Christ as they make decisions day by day about what to do. They are, in other words, to think of themselves with the “sober judgment” that comes with believing the gospel of Calvary: since you are no longer slaves to sin – that’s real! – but once again God’s

The Biblical picture of manhood is not characterized by loafing or playing games, let alone *letting* things happen. Rather, a Biblically faithful man welcomes responsibility and takes *initiative*.”

...there is a problem if one spends no time or energy to prepare oneself for increased responsibility tomorrow. It's for responsibility that God created men, so men must read, study, and prepare for leadership roles tomorrow."



Boys let things happen, but the Bible tells men to take initiative.

possession through Jesus Christ – that’s reality, too! – you don’t *have* to give in to sin and temptation; you can *resist* the evil one. Factoring that victory into one’s decision-making process is being *sober-minded*, and yes, it leads to a life of self-control.

TITUS 2:12

Titus 2:12, logically follows what we read in verse 6, and works out what this level-headedness looks like in the midst of life’s temptations. We read there that Christ’s victory,

train[s] us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

And yes, the word translated as “self-controlled” in verse 12 is the same critical word as the apostle used in verse 6 about the younger men needing to be “self-controlled,” “sober-minded,” level-headed, realistic. Christ has broken Satan’s back; let younger men factor that reality into their decisions. That’s taking responsibility properly.

I need to add: “the present age” is *not* a reference to the younger years but is instead referring to the time before Christ’s return in glory (see vs. 13). His victory on the cross guarantees the final great act of history, the day when He comes to judge the living and the dead. That reality again prompts the “young man” to a particular level-headedness as he factors this return into the decisions he makes – whether driving his car, spending his money, raising his family, deciding on his recreation, etc., etc.

CRETE

This sort of lifestyle represented a huge challenge for the younger men Paul was writing to on the island of Crete. The culture of the island is caught in that proverb Paul earlier quoted: “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12). It’s a mindset that encourages the more energetic to do whatever they feel like doing. With the Christian faith new to the island, the “younger men” had very few role models to look up to.

That’s why Paul told Titus that he

needed to be a good example for these young men. We read in verse 7-8: “show yourself in all respects to be a model of good work, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned.”

Titus was the apostle’s “true child in a common faith” (Titus 1:4), which is to say that Titus learned how to do the Christian life, and teach it too, from the apostle himself. As preacher on the island, and a young man at that, Titus needed to be aware that other young Christian men on Crete would be watching how Titus himself lived out the gospel of Christ’s victory in his daily responsibilities. His own way of factoring in Christ’s triumph in his daily decisions needed to demonstrate that he said “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and instead gave himself to good works. Moreover, his teaching couldn’t have the empty ring of liars’ big talk (1:10ff), but needed to exude integrity, dignity and soundness.

Here is a reality true for every preacher/teacher of all times, indeed true of all office bearers and leaders. Anyone entrusted with the task of preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ’s victory needs be aware of his role as a model of Christian living. Brothers, we are created and recreated to image God, and so to rule over whatever God has entrusted to our care in the same way as the Lord does it. Christ Jesus emptied Himself for the sake of His bride, the church. As teachers and preachers of this good news, we must – if we wish the gospel to be credible – obviously factor in the reality of Christ’s victory into all our conduct and our words.

VITAL ROLE

Paul, then, sees a vital role for younger men in building up church life, be it on Crete or be it in Canada. Younger men are to take seriously whatever responsibility God gives them (be it for a vehicle, a house, a wife, children, themselves, work, etc.) and *consistently factor in the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross* as they make decisions pertaining to the responsibilities God has given. Then there’s no place for ungodliness, and plenty of place for godly lives.

Such a lifestyle advertises the church wonderfully.

CONCLUSION

What do we see of today's younger men in the churches? From teens to 50s, are these men making responsible decisions, and so contributing positively to church life?

There is, I'm convinced, so very much for which to be thankful on this point. We see young men making profession of faith and presenting their children for baptism. We see younger men devoted to their wives and families, and stretching themselves for service in God's kingdom. It's reason for gratitude.

We also see younger men who do not stretch themselves all that far at all. We see some younger brothers content with a basic job, content to come home from work and chill in front of TV or on the Internet, and we see some, too, who pour themselves into sport.

There is nothing wrong with sport, nor with relaxing in front of the TV, or even doing simply a "hands-on" job. But there is a problem if one spends no time or energy to prepare oneself for increased responsibility tomorrow. It's for responsibility that God created men, so men must read, study, and prepare for leadership roles tomorrow.

Manhood is not to be measured by how much hair you can grow, or how big a truck you can drive, or how much beer you can drink, or how good you are on your skates, or how big a fish you can catch. Without knocking any of these things, none of them catch what God created men to do.

What God wants of men is that we *embrace responsibility*, to the point that we work with Christ's victory in every decision we make, 24/7. What does that look like? It *follows the example of Jesus Christ* in His self-emptying for His bride. He is *the younger man* who took responsibility for those God entrusted to His care, and so he laid down His life for His own. That's the sensible, sober-minded, level-headed example the Lord gives us.

RP

DO HARD THINGS

A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations

by Alex & Brett Harris



MULTNOMAH BOOKS, 2008
256 PAGES; HARDCOVER; \$17

REVIEWED BY YVONNE HARINK

Twins Alex and Brett Harris – nineteen-year-old website designers, filmmakers, and now authors – want to challenge Christian youth to live by a higher standard.

Some people look at our generation and the challenges we face and despair. We don't. In every generation that faces intense challenges, God raises up those who will be his representatives to do his work. And often those representatives are young. We see this in Scripture when young people like Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Jeremiah, Esther and Mary were chosen by God for the time in which they lived – and they changed the course of nations.

The Harris boys argue that a large reason for low performing teens is that we believe in the myth of adolescence. Because we expect low performance, we get it – ideas have consequences.

While our society says that teenage

years are a time to avoid responsibility, the Bible teaches otherwise. Alex and Brett want to inspire teens with a simple but very big idea. Teen years give a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for huge accomplishments – as individuals and as a generation. This alternative path can be described with three simple words: "do hard things."

In the context of stories and anecdotes from their personal experience, Alex and Brett examine five "hard things":

1. Things that are outside your comfort zone - taking that scary first step.
2. Things that go beyond what is expected or required – raising the bar.
3. Things that are too big to accomplish alone – learning about the power of collaboration.
4. Things that don't earn an immediate payoff – doing small, painful hard things.
5. Things that challenge the cultural norm – daring to take a stand and go against the crowd.

In conclusion, this generation of teens is urged to respond to the Gospel. Responding means that we must repent of our sins, and trust and believe that Christ has done the ultimate hard thing for us. Believing this truth allows us to confidently and joyfully do hard things to the honor and glory of our Creator.

I found this book encouraging and would recommend it, not only for teens, but for any age, and for both individual reading or group discussion (a study guide is also available).

*This book is available for \$12 on the Harris brothers' website
www.therebution.com*

THE BRIDE

Before the Fall

No tale enraptures half so well
As that of love – true love. I tell
You but a version poor
In which my words perhaps obscure
Wisdom displayed by God.

Remember how, when days were young,
God said with measured Holy Tongue,
My work is good. Then He
Conversed within the Trinity
Before creating man.
From earth our Lord Compositor
Formed Adam, our progenitor,
But Adam was alone.
And was by Wisdom's council thrown
Into a deep, deep sleep.
Opening flesh, piercing his side,
God took a rib as Adam's bride,
And from the bone did weave
A helper comparable, Eve,
And brought her to the man.

After the Fall

No tale enraptures half so well
As that of love – true love. I tell
You but a version poor
In which my words perhaps obscure
The mystery of love.

Remember Baptist John's rejoice
On hearing sound of bridegroom's voice
Seeking a bride to wed?
And how with steadfast, even tread
Groom sought Jerusalem?
Oh, how He wept for her He sought,
Oh, how He paid for her He bought,
Outside the city's gate.
Oh, how he carried all the weight
Of sin to win her hand.
On place of skull His form was hung,
To soldiers were His garments flung,
Naked was He, alone.
For sake of her, bone of His bone,
For sake of her, His bride.
And in His sleep of death a spear
Pierced open wide that side so dear,
Occasioning a flood
Of water mixed with crimson blood,
The new Jerusalem.

by Christine Farenhorst



Parenting

by Sharon L. Bratcher



Many different approaches - only one set of guiding principles

Empty threats – that’s what they are called – and some are more ridiculous than others. I once overheard an employee at Target, a young mother, telling her co-worker:

He keeps hitting [his brother] Steven all the time. So the next time he punches Steven in the face, I’m gonna say, “Robert, next time you punch Steven in the face, I’m going to punch YOU in the face.” ...Of course, you can’t really punch a 4-year-old in the face, so I never would.

That’s extreme, but then there are also the more common variety that we’re likely to hear at church, or at school, or coming out of our own mouths:

- “If you don’t get into the car *right now*, I’m going to leave without you.”
- “Stop crying. This restaurant doesn’t allow any crying, so if you cry they’re going to kick us out of here.”
- “If you don’t stop fighting back there *I am turning this car around and we are not going anywhere.*”

Empty threats can seem effective, at least in the short-term. But is “effective” the measure by which we evaluate our parenting approach?

WE ALL NEED PARENTING HELP

There are strong differences of opinion regarding the discipline of children, and not all techniques work for all kids, even in the same family. We do have to consider the different ages and

personalities of different children, so what works with one child may not be a good approach for another.

But we also know that all approaches are *not* equal. That’s because some techniques and methods align with what God has revealed in his Word, and some run at right angles to what God has said. So we need to seek out the scriptural principles of discipline, and we need to hear what God says about love and kindness, and then make this foundational for all of our interactions with these small brothers and sisters in Christ.

And, in addition to these scriptural principles, we can also seek out tried and tested methods from older, godly parents. God puts us in a community so we can learn from one another (Prov. 15:22).

Finally, there are excellent Christian books on the topic of parenting. We *need* to read such books because of our own sinfulness, which we too often overlook when we are frustrated with our disobedient children. It is way too easy to justify our own behavior, and prayerfully reading through these books will help us analyze where and when we are a part of the cause.

For instance, if we scream in anger because our children have gotten angry with one another for the tenth time in the day, we teach them that screaming in anger is the proper response to a frustrating situation, even though that

is *not* our intention. If we force them to endure a shopping trip without regard for their hunger, thirst, fatigue, and need for movement, we are more to blame for their meltdown than they are. We must plan wisely for delays and not expect them to have more patience than we do.

If we fail to educate them as to what they will soon encounter and the specific behavior that is expected (because they do not know good behavior by instinct) then we are not helping them to behave properly.

Most children love their parents and feel grateful whether they say it out loud or not. They need our love and acceptance, and they struggle with the constant tension between wanting to please us and, like all of us, wanting to follow their own sinful nature. They are sinners and they will behave badly. Sometimes we forget to apply our Bible beliefs to the situation and realize that “There is none who does good, there is not even one” (Romans 3:12). Or, as it says in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 2, “[We] have a natural tendency to hate God and [our] neighbor.”

IN COMMUNION

One of the very best of the books available is *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* by Tedd Tripp.

Tripp explains that there is a “circle of God’s favor.” When a child is, from love and gratitude to God, being obedient, he or she is in this circle. When a child strays

outside of this “circle of favor” the parents’ job is to pull the child back inside. If he lies, we must teach him not to lie. If he throws a selfish tantrum or punches his brother in the face, we must teach him that this is not acceptable behavior. We may not abuse him, but we must find an effective way to influence him to end that behavior.

When discipline is needed, Tripp says we should start with a statement giving the reason for the punishment, then give the punishment, and then remind them why they were punished (preferably when everyone is calm). Then comes repentance. Their “Sorry, dad” may or may not be sincere, but the pattern will be established. Last of all, there must be forgiveness and restoration, just as our Lord gives to us. This usually

use a time-out location, which, to be effective, requires a timer and constant monitoring by the parent, especially when it is first being established. But to be effective it must be a true punishment to the child. For example, if they think time-outs are no big deal, then something that is a big deal to them must be substituted.

ANTICIPATION

Parents should, with experience, be able to steer their children clear of situations that might otherwise lead to the need for discipline. For example, inexperienced parents tend to overestimate the amount of noise stimulation that a young child can handle, even for “fun” times like DisneyWorld or an overcrowded family get-together. As

serious. These threats may even cause a rebellious child to disobey just to see whether we really meant what we said. They can also be counter-productive to the fellowship goals of your family. Would you really cancel Christmas or attendance at a friend’s birthday party because of a child’s disobedient behavior? That would punish people outside of your family as well. Should you frighten your children, as some have, with abandonment at an orphanage, leading them to experience fear and lack of assurance of your love and acceptance, and therefore desperate to please you? Children take our words very literally. Our goal is to teach them about sin and repentance and forgiveness by modeling it, not to beat them physically or emotionally into subjection to us.

AN AWESOME AND BRIEF TASK

It is important to plan our system of discipline ahead of time so that mom and dad will both know what they are going to do when their kids behave badly. You need a plan, and a backup plan and perhaps even a third plan for the stubborn. Don’t let disobedience surprise you. Don’t let it make you angry as though it were a direct attack on you. God has called us to teach our children to do what is right, and that task exceeds any housework or leisure goals that we might have had for the day. Pray for patience, because your effective plan may need a hundred applications!

I overheard a conversation at 11 pm in a restaurant parking lot between a father and his sobbing three-year-old. He yelled at her to “Stop crying and behave” inside the restaurant. It was tempting to intervene and point out that he was being selfish – caring more for his social goals than he did for the welfare of his little girl, who pretty obviously needed to be home in bed.

“Children are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 127:3). Though it feels like we will always be raising and disciplining them, it is less than a third of our lifetime that we have this privilege.

Something to keep in mind. 

“ We should start with a statement giving the reason for the punishment, then give the punishment, and then remind them why they were punished. Then comes repentance. ”

includes a hug and a statement, *but most importantly: the freedom from having the sin mentioned again* (Psalm 103:12: “as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us”). Here we must squelch our own anger rather than sin by constantly bringing up their wrongs, or humiliating them by relating the deeds to other people, *especially* within their hearing. We ruin our child’s good name when we tell about his sins, and if we tell the child he is a “brat” or a bad boy, even jokingly, we reinforce to him that we do not have higher expectations.

As far as specific punishment methods go, some use a careful spanking (a slap on the hand or thigh for a toddler – their bottom has too many layers to feel the sting! – or a few spanks on the bottom for someone already potty trained). Others

we learn how much our children can handle, we can, when we see them being overwhelmed, remove them from these situations. (Ephesians 6:4 is relevant here; these are both examples of parents heeding the instruction for “fathers [to] not provoke your children to anger...”)

Another example: we can take a suggestion from Dr. Raymond Moore of *Home Grown Kids* who always used this rule of thumb for birthday parties – the number of guests at the party should not exceed the child’s age. Adults tend to think more is better, but a young child will do better to have a couple of play dates than one big bash.

ONLY TRUTH

Empty threats should never, ever be made. They are ineffective when smart children realize their parents are not

IF YOU WANT TO SPANK YOUR KID, DON'T

by Jon Dykstra

The photo website I use for most of the pictures in the magazine has more than 24 million stock pictures, so no matter what the topic, I usually have piles of options to choose from. But when I tried to find something to illustrate Sharon Bratcher's article "Parenting" by typing in the search term "parents" along with "discipline" or "punishment" I got only one sort of picture: glowering, shouting, finger-waving moms and dads. The variety from one picture to the next was only whether the parent had already lost it or was just about to.

If this is the world's idea of parents doing discipline, then no wonder that they want to ban spanking. No one wants to allow enraged adults to vent their frustrations by hitting kids!

But, of course, this is not what discipline should ever be. In Proverbs 13:24 we see that God both clearly encourages corporal punishment, and prescribes the boundaries under which it is to be administered:

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

It can be easier not to discipline our children, to let things slide, to pretend we don't see and don't know what they are up to, and to just hope that they will smarten up without us having to get up from the couch. But if we love our children more than the TV program we're watching, the book we're reading, or the friend we're talking to on the phone, then we will stop what we are doing and apply the corrective that is needed when it is needed, which is immediately.

But this verse is about more than a willingness to discipline; we're told that this discipline is motivated by love.

"Discipline is corrective, and it is applied for the sake of the one receiving it. It is not punitive, and it is not rendered for the sake of the one giving it."

There was no love to be seen in any of the website's stock pictures. These screaming, reddening, out-of-control parents looked like they *wanted* to hit their kids. As Douglas Wilson explains:

Discipline is corrective, and it is applied for the sake of the one *receiving* it. It is not punitive, and it is not rendered for the sake of the one *giving* it. When you are spanking a child, you are either being selfish or you are being selfless—one or the other. You are doing it because you are exasperated, frustrated, beside yourself, and frazzled, or you are doing it as a fragrant offering to the God of your fathers.... When you are highly motivated to discipline your kids, you are not qualified. When you are qualified, you don't feel like it. *

Screaming and spanking simply don't go together. Or rather, they often *do* go together, but as parents we need to recognize this for the sin it is. Discipline must be an act of love.



The world seems to think parental discipline involves screaming, out-of-control parents.



ENDNOTE

* www.dougwils.com/Parable/Loving-Little-Ones-I.html



Problem to Ponder #197 – “Going Bananas on the Food Intake”

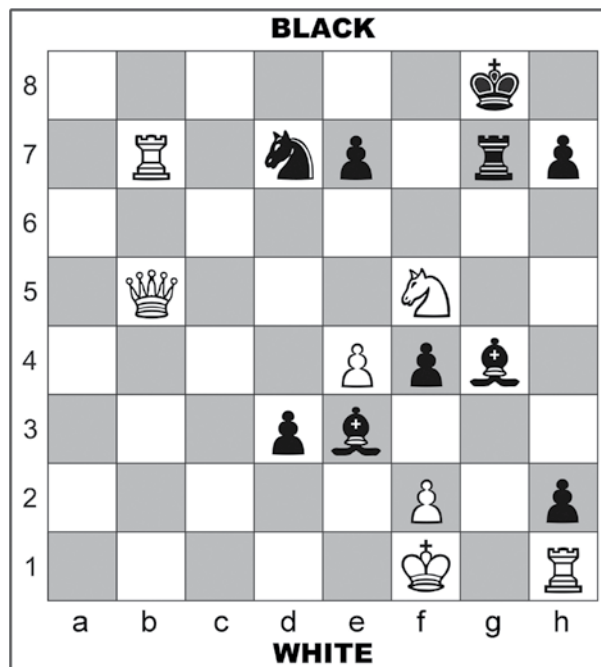
Ten monkeys, over a period of ten days, each climbed one tree a day (a tree that no other monkey had climbed). On each of those ten trees grew ten clusters of bananas with, on average, ten bananas in each cluster. Each monkey ate, on average, one half banana every ten minutes for ten hours of each day (during the ten-day period). What was the total number of bananas eaten by the monkeys in the ten days, and what percent of the bananas on the trees claimed by the monkeys remained uneaten?

Riddle for Punsters #197 – “Distinguished for Daring”

What metal was used in a plaque given to an exceptionally brave policewoman?

It was a _____ award.

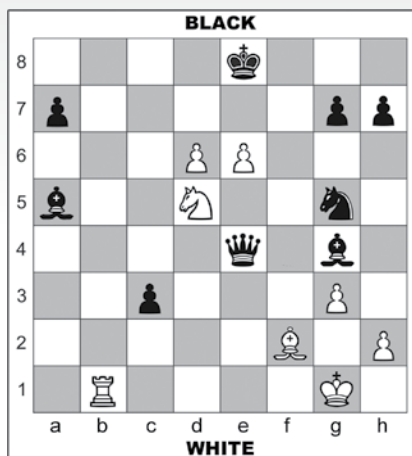
Chess Puzzle #197



WHITE to Mate in 4
Or, If it is BLACK's Move,
BLACK to Mate in 3

Last Month's Solutions

Solution to Chess Puzzle #196



WHITE to Mate in 3

Descriptive Notation
1. R-N8 ch B-Q1
2. P-Q7 ch K-B1
3. RxB mate

Algebraic Notation
1. Rb1-b8 + Ba5-d8
2. d6-d7 + Ke8-f8
3. Rb8xd8 ++

BLACK to Mate in 3

Descriptive Notation
1. ----- N-R6 ch
2. K-B1 Q-R8 ch
3. B-N1 QxB mate

Algebraic Notation
1. ----- Ng5-h3 +
2. Kg1-f1 Qe4-h1 +
3. Bf2-g1 Qh1xg1 ++

Send Puzzles, Solutions, Ideas to Puzzle Page,
43 Summerhill Place, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4V4 or
robleach@gmail.com

Answers to Riddle for Punsters #196

“Not an incidental to brush off!”

What did the gardener do when he had a tooth knocked out?

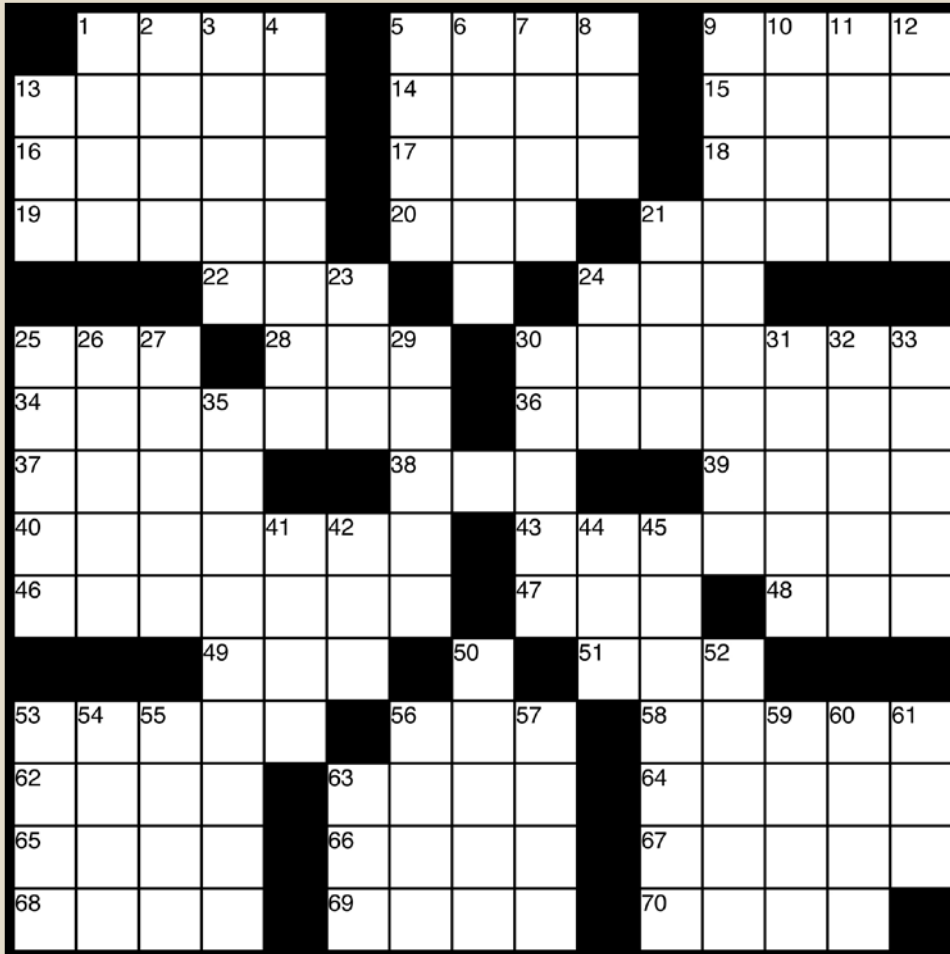
He requested a dental implant. When told that he would have to wait for days and meanwhile could only eat soft foods, he decided to polish off all the jello and pudding in his house. He read a lot to help with filling in the time. He had the gumption to ask to be treated sooner if at all possible. Coincidentally, that is just what happened!

Answers to Problem to Ponder #196

“BEDMAS Order of Operations”

- $3^2 \times 4 - 14/2 = 9 \times 4 - 14/2 = 36 - 7 = 29$
- $4 + (8 - 2)/2 - (5 \times 3) + 4^2 = 4 + 6/2 - 15 + 16 = 4 + 3 - 15 + 16 = 7 - 15 + 16 = -8 + 16 = 8$
- $(12/3 - 2)^2 - 4 - 2 \times 6 = (4 - 2)^2 - 4 - 2 \times 6 = 2^2 - 4 - 2 \times 6 = 4 - 4 - 12 = 0 - 12 = -12$
- $9 + (7 \times 2 - 4 \times 4) - 12/3 + 1 = 9 + (14 - 16) - 12/3 + 1 = 9 + (-2) - 4 + 1 = 7 - 4 + 1 = 3 + 1 = 4$
- $(2 - 3 \times 4) - 2 + 3^2 = (2 - 12) - 2 + 3^2 = -10 - 2 + 9 = -12 + 9 = -3$

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



SERIES 19 #12

PUZZLE CLUES

ACROSS

- 1. A variant of the name Sarah
- 5. Large plant
- 9. Freedom from concern or anxiety
- 13. Another way to spell djebel, a mountain
- 14. British nobleman
- 15. Someone on their computer
- 16 A corn pancake, in South America
- 17. A hoax
- 18. Wee veggies
- 19. Hebrew spy
- 20. Third letters of the Arabic alphabet
- 21. Oil-yielding rock
- 22. Local area network
- 24. Each
- 25. What Stewart's friends call him
- 28. Mother, informally
- 30. A sheep groomer
- 34. An Indic language of the Punjab
- 36. Not friendly, antagonistic
- 37. Other than
- 38. A winglike part
- 39. Evenings before a holiday
- 40. Incense cedars of Chile
- 43. Examine minutely, part by part
- 46. Brings back
- 47. Former name of Tokyo

- 48. Map abbrev.
- 49. Turf
- 51. Not young
- 53. Jacob's father
- 56. Noah's son
- 58. Speak pompously
- 62. Expose an orange
- 63. Jacob's son
- 64. The "golden" king of mythology
- 65. Dry and withered
- 66. Leave out
- 67. Not concealed or secret
- 68. Jacob's brother
- 69. One surface of an object
- 70. Bird's home

DOWN

- 1. Thin plant fluids
- 2. Eve's son
- 3. Resist effectively
- 4. American state
- 5. A trying method
- 6. Joshua's accomplice
- 7. Periods of time
- 8. Type of tree
- 9. River that meets up with the Tigris
- 10. Seaward
- 11. Water mammal
- 12. Gaelic
- 13. A jacket, informally
- 21. Observes
- 23. Catch a criminal
- 24. Vietnamese noodle soup
- 25. One way to catch a fish
- 26. Thin machine-made net, used by ballerinas
- 27. Not gelled yet
- 29. Russian city
- 30. Tree's blessing
- 31. Body of water

- 32. Choose by voting
- 33. Remainder, or remnant, in French
- 35. Holy city of Israel
- 41. Crocodile, informally
- 42. Put a stop to
- 44. A bachelor's last words
- 45. Third king of Israel
- 50. Second king of Israel
- 52. Operate a vehicle
- 53. ___ dixit (he himself said it, Latin)
- 54. Plant beginning
- 55. For aircraft
- 56. Special kind of engine
- 57. Tiny arachnid
- 59. Sweet drinks, suffix
- 60. Dessert
- 61. French direction
- 63. ___ Angeles

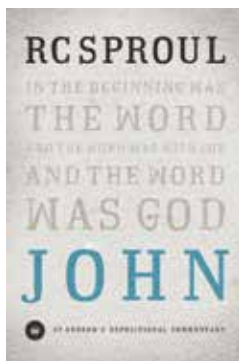
LAST MONTH'S SOLUTION

A	D	A	M		H	A	G	I		S	A	R	A	H		
D	I	V	A		O	R	I	G		O	L	I	V	E		
O	V	E	N		E	A	R	N		L	I	G	E	R		
R	E	N	O	I	R		T	O	D	O		A	R	E		
E	R	A		N		S	H	R	I	M	P					
					S	T	O	P		E	M	O	T	I	N	G
R	P	P			O	R	A	L		N	A	V	A	L		
E	A	R	L		B	R	O	O	M		S	A	M	E		
T	R	O	O	P			B	R	I	T		N	E	E		
D	I	S	D	A	I	N		C	A	R	P					
					E	R	R	A	T	A		I		D	S	S
E	C	T			A	K	I	N		J	O	S	I	A	H	
C	L	I	M	B		L	O	P	E		H	A	L	O		
C	A	N	A	L		E	T	A	S		E	R	S	T		
L	Y	T	H	E		R	E	N	T		E	Y	A	S		

SERIES 19 #11

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

BY R.C. SPROUL / 409 PAGES



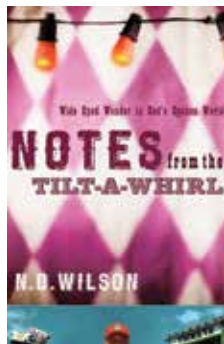
In Acts 8 an Ethiopian studying God's Word asks a question that will sound familiar to most of us: "How can I [understand it] unless someone explains it to me?" While the Bible is generally clear, there are sentences and even chapters that defy the average lay person's understanding.

That's why I'm always on the look out for a great commentary; a really good one can be like a teacher coming alongside to offer personal instruction. And I've found nothing better than RC Sproul's commentary on *John*. I've never before read a commentary front to back. I've never before found a commentary that so completely answered my every question. And I've never before been midway through a commentary and felt the urge to skip to the back of the book to get a sneak peek at how it all turns out!

Sproul has helpfully integrated the entire text of *John* into his commentary, which meant I could walk around with it, reading snatches whenever and wherever. While there are some commentaries that may be even more thorough, Sproul does dive deep – I felt like I was learning something new every page. I would recommend it to everyone: this was an edifying, educational, joy-filled encounter with the book of *John*. – JON DYKSTRA

NOTES FROM THE TILT-A-WHIRL

BY N.D. WILSON / 224 PAGES



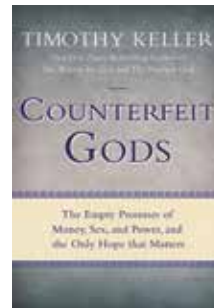
If this title seems an odd fit for a philosophical treatise on the nature of life and existence, just wait until you get between the harlequin-patterned covers, where you'll find babies, ants, carnival workers, and giant balls of fire, but none of the pretensions and highbrow abstractions that characterize the philosophy genre.

The message is straightforward: Lest we miss the exquisite display that God has placed all around us, Wilson urges readers to open our eyes and see God's grace in the big and the little things of our earthly lives.

We do live, after all, on a giant sphere hurtling through space at Mach 86 and, by God's grace, don't usually need to hang on for dear life. Addressing such difficult questions as hell, the problem of evil, and the makeup of matter (not to mention the bizarre mating habits of wasps), Wilson makes the case that reality is, in essence, God's spoken word made flesh; that God is the great Artist and Poet, and creation is His masterpiece; and that this world is, in the very real sense of the term, magic. A book that now has its own film to complement it (indeed, it's own genre: the bookumentary), this work of art comes highly recommended and might leave you, like the author, clinging to the grass every now and again just to make sure you don't fly away. – JONATHAN CHASE

COUNTERFEIT GODS

BY TIMOTHY KELLER / 240 PAGES



The brilliance of *Counterfeit Gods* is that it shows how idolatry has played out both in the Bible and in today's world – and it shows the solution. For example, Keller looks carefully at the lives of Jacob and Leah to analyze our own and our culture's idolatrous attitude to sex and love. He examines how the first sight of Jesus casts down the idol of greed in the life of the tax collector Zaccheus – an idol institutionalized in our day as "the culture of greed." The self-glorification of Nebuchadnezzar foreshadows our own and our culture's idolatry of power.

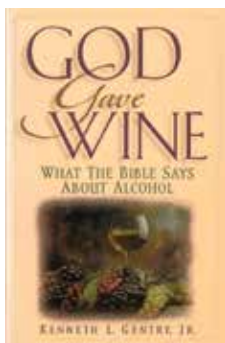
Exposing all our idols would merely be disheartening if God did not provide a way of escape in the person of Jesus Christ. But, as Keller shows, the fact that Christ has shared our suffering turns the loss of even loved ones, prosperity, and success, from causes of sinful despair to sources of sorrow in the midst of hope. We can resist the incursion of idols into our hearts by learning to make Christ our true and lasting blessing – the Way, Truth, Life, food, drink, and love of our hearts.

One caution: Keller has also written *The Reason for God* in which he shows a willingness to accommodate Biblical truth to the supposed authority of secular evolutionary scientific theory (in it, he arguably and ironically makes an idol out of secular science). But while I cannot recommend it, I highly recommend *Counterfeit Gods*. – JEFF DYKSTRA

Longer reviews of some of these titles can be found at ReallyGoodReads.com

GOD GAVE WINE

BY KENNETH L. GENTRY JR. / 148 PAGES



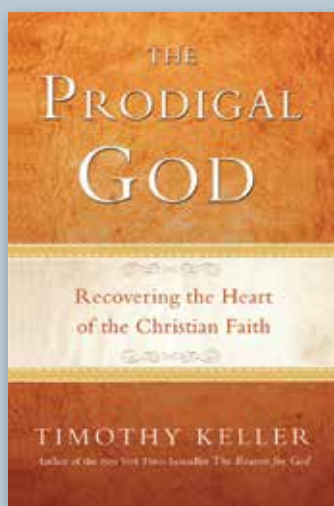
Ken Gentry dismantles the notion, common in some Christians denominations, that alcohol use is a sin. He also tackles a second, more compelling anti-alcohol stance that says partaking isn't sinful, just unwise. Since the Bible condemns drunkenness, it's argued it would be best for Christians to abstain entirely.

But does this logic hold? As Gentry notes, the Bible also condemns gluttony; should Christians then abstain from food? And God condemns prostitution; should we respond by taking vows of celibacy? Clearly we go too far when we discourage *proper use* just because something can be *abused*. God has placed boundaries within which all these things can be enjoyed to His glory; God has not called us to abstinence, but instead to self-control and moderation.

Gentry works through the New Testament and Old to methodically rebut every anti-alcohol argument - his book is the very best on this topic.

But his point can also be applied more broadly. For example, our young people are taking up dancing, and the gyrating they do gives God no glory. However, the Bible is clear that dancing *can* be godly (Eccl 3:4). So, rather than take an "anti-dancing" stance shouldn't we respond to this abuse by teaching our young people dancing's proper godly use?

It's a question worth considering, and one that might be best discussed over a couple of cold ones! - JON DYKSTRA



THE PRODIGAL GOD

BY TIMOTHY KELLER / 134 PAGES

My pastor recently concluded a series of sermons on a single 21-verse passage of Scripture. I was delighted to discover just how much God has to tell us in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

I felt that same delight while reading Tim Keller's *Prodigal God*, which is also on Luke 15:11-32. Keller begins by explaining why he doesn't call this passage the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He notes that the word "prodigal" means "recklessly spendthrift" and the term is "therefore as appropriate for describing the father in the story as his younger son" since the father "was literally reckless because he refused to 'reckon' or count his [son's] sin against him or demand repayment." Thus Keller arrives at his book's title, *Prodigal God*.

But that still isn't what he calls the parable. He calls it the parable of "The Two Lost Sons." *Two* lost sons? Wasn't there just one? After all, the older brother never left home!

But as Keller explains, the older son was just as lost as the younger. The younger son's rebellion was more obvious, but the older son shows that he isn't interested in his father's happiness either. If he had been, he would have rejoiced when his father rejoiced. Instead it becomes clear that he has only been obedient with the expectation of reward, so when that reward doesn't come to him like he expected, he gets bitter.

Keller argues there are a lot of older brothers in the Church. We all know we are sinners, but because we don't fully understand how all we receive is a matter of grace, we still find ourselves looking down on "younger brothers" caught up in "big sins" (like homosexuality or prostitution, etc. - we may be sinners, but at least we don't sin like *that!*). This is rebellion of a more subtle kind, a form of works righteousness, because even as we acknowledge we aren't sinless, our gracelessness to those caught in "big sins" shows we think ourselves in some way deserving of the goodness God has showered on us.

Prodigal God is very engaging and a quick read. I believe it is a very relevant and challenging book for our churches and would recommend it to anyone 16 and up. The only caution I would note is an echo of my brother's (see his review of *Counterfeit Gods*): the care, rigor and reverence with which Keller plumbs the depths of Luke 15 here is absent in his treatment elsewhere of Genesis 1 and 2. So I would recommend this book without reservation but not its author. - JON DYKSTRA

THE APOLOGETICAL METHOD OF TIM KELLER

2. HE BELIEVES REASON IS AUTHORITATIVE, SO WE CAN USE IT TO VALIDATE THE BIBLE

This is further illustrated when he discusses the relationship between science and Christianity, specifically when he addresses the matter of origins. While he rejects evolution as an “all-encompassing theory” or worldview, Keller believes that “God guided some kind of process of natural selection.” He discusses how Christians have different understandings of the relationship between science and the Bible, and he leaves the door open for theistic evolution. In so doing, he wants to make the Christian faith seem reasonable to doubters. After all, who could be so unreasonable as to question the assured conclusions of science? In Keller’s approach here, science trumps Scripture, and Scripture has to be reinterpreted to fit the reasonable conclusions of science. This is lamentable and indicates an inconsistency in his method.²


3. HIS APOLOGETICS START OUTSIDE THE BIBLE

Another notable example is found in his chapter dealing with sin. Keller recognizes that many today find the concept of sin offensive or ludicrous. He suggests that perhaps this is because the Christian doctrine of sin is being misunderstood. Keller then seeks to explain “the meaning of sin” by appealing to the definition provided by Søren Kierkegaard, “Sin is: in despair not wanting to be oneself before God.” Keller then makes a jump, identifying Kierkegaard’s reasonable sounding view with the Bible:

So, according to the Bible, the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into *ultimate* things. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God.

Keller assumes that Kierkegaard’s position is the biblical position. The only appeal he makes to Scripture itself is to the first commandment, “have no other gods before me.” But that commandment says nothing about one’s identity, and so it is a long leap from Kierkegaard’s definition to there. Why start with Kierkegaard, not exactly a paragon of biblical orthodoxy? Why not start with 1 John 3:4, “sin is lawlessness”? Or, since Keller is a Presbyterian, why not start with QA 14 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God’s law in any way.” As it is, Keller’s failure to start with Scripture puts him in danger of defining or portraying morality in a way that fails to account for the holy character and nature of God as the very basis for morality.

The problems only continue when Keller discusses the consequences of sin. He describes the personal, social, and cosmic consequences of sin. However, he fails to draw out the eternal consequences of sin in this chapter. Yes, in an earlier chapter he does attempt to answer the question “How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?” But even there, the idea that an eternal, conscious hell is a divine punishment for sin is muted at best. Keller prefers to emphasize that “hell is simply one’s freely chosen identity apart from God on a trajectory into infinity.” Does the Bible teach this? How does this square with the suffering and death of Christ? Did Christ freely take on a “chosen identity apart from God” as he experienced hell for us on the cross? No, the Bible teaches that hell is a place where one cannot escape from God and his wrath (Matt. 25:41,46; Rom. 2:5,6). The unrepentant wicked will have an eternal identity intimately close to God’s hand of judgment.³ On the cross, Jesus was attacked by the wrath of God in the place of the elect. In theology, we say that his sacrifice was a propitiatory substitution.



In Keller’s approach here, science trumps Scripture, and Scripture has to be reinterpreted to fit the reasonable conclusions of science.

Keller does not properly present the eternal consequences of human sin, and so he is also weak here on the full meaning of the cross.

On these important points, Keller’s method fails not only to build consistently on the foundation of Scripture, but he also misrepresents God and inadequately addresses the unbeliever in sin. With his attempts to be “reasonable” and avoiding offense as much as possible, he is minimizing the unbeliever’s real problem. The unbeliever’s real problem is rebellion against a holy God. The unbeliever attacks God’s honor by suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. By downplaying this, Keller fails to work out consistently the biblical doctrine of the antithesis. He is really doing the unbeliever no favor in this regard. Rather than being flattered with apparent intellectual sophistication, unbelievers need to be confronted with the fact that they are rebelliously living in God’s world. They eat God’s food. They breathe God’s air. They use God’s math to take care of their family finances. They use God’s physics to travel virtually anywhere they want. Yet they pretend that this Triune God does not exist, or, if there is some kind of God, he will not judge and justly punish them for their sin.

4. HIS BEST ARGUMENT DOESN'T TRY TO PROVE GOD, BUT INSTEAD PRESUPPOSES HIM

At one point in *The Reason for God*, Keller comes close to making this kind of biblical case. It's in chapters eight and nine. At the end of chapter eight, "The Clues of God," Keller writes the following:

Those who argue against the existence of God go right on using induction, language, and their cognitive faculties, all of which makes far more sense in a universe in which God has created and supports them all by his power...I don't want to argue why God may exist. I want to demonstrate that you already know that God does exist. I'd like to convince the reader that, whatever you may profess intellectually, belief in God is an unavoidable, "basic" belief that we cannot prove but can't not know. *We know* God is there. That is why even though we believe with all our minds that life is meaningless, we simply can't live that way. (Emphasis is Keller's)

In the following chapter, Keller develops a case for God in connection with morality. He discusses different options for moral obligation and demonstrates how each fails. He concludes, "If there is no God, then there is no way to say any one action is 'moral' and another 'immoral,' but only 'I like this.'" Keller indeed attempts to demonstrate that the unbeliever already knows that God is there and that He is behind our sense of moral obligation.

This is the best part of *The Reason for God*. I wish Keller had developed this argument further and built his book around it, because this actually is a biblical argument and approach. It fits with what Paul writes in Acts 17:28 and Romans 11:36. He could have developed it further by arguing how science, logic, mathematics – everything! – can only be adequately accounted for in a biblical Christian worldview.

CONCLUSION

More than one reviewer has drawn a parallel between Tim Keller and C. S. Lewis. Keller himself repeatedly references Lewis.⁴ On at least one occasion, Lewis used a similar argument to the one found at the end of chapter eight and through chapter nine of *The Reason for God*. But more often, we find Lewis using the traditional apologetic approaches that had been developed in the Church of England, especially under the influence of Bishop Butler. This approach was consistent with the Arminianism of Butler and others. Lewis, too, was not Reformed in his theology, and so it does not surprise one to find him mostly using a method of apologetics from which a Reformed theologian would dissent. But Keller is a PCA pastor. On paper, he is a Presbyterian, committed to the Westminster Standards. At one point, he even taught at Westminster Theological Seminary – the very institution where Cornelius Van Til led a reformation

in apologetics in the last century. Unfortunately, *The Reason for God* bears little evidence of that reformation.

Perhaps God has used Keller's book and his ministry to truly bring people to Christ. I rejoice if that is the case. But because of the shortcomings outlined above, I cannot recommend the method of Keller. We need to strive for faithfulness to the Word of God in our apologetics. That faithfulness needs to be consistent – we have to honor the authority of the LORD from beginning to end. Only when we do that can we expect that our gracious God will bless our efforts.

END NOTES

¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1998), 3.

² For a Reformed treatment of these issues, see Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: resolving the origins debate* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2009).

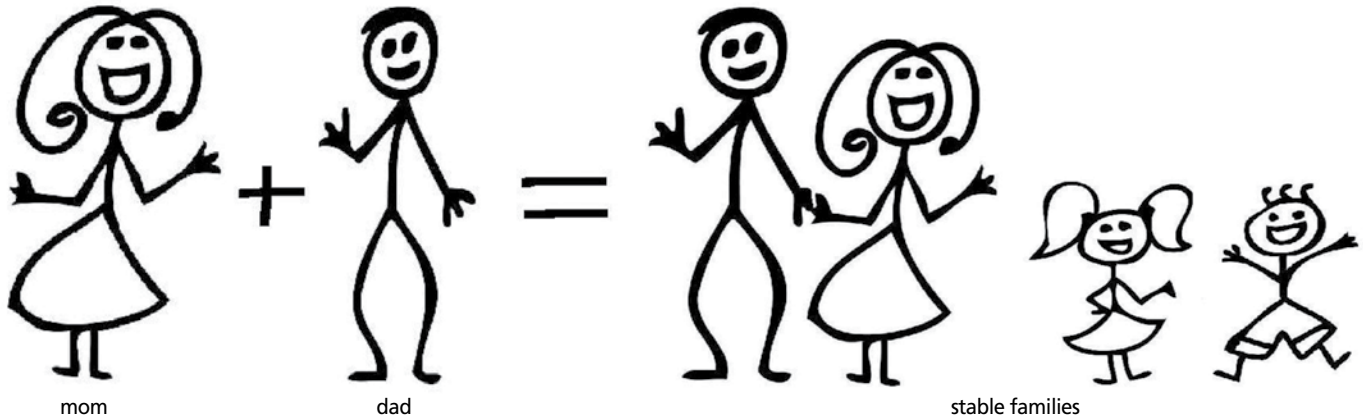
³ But what about 2 Thess. 1:9 you might ask? The NIV translates, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power." One solution might be to understand "the presence of the Lord" to mean "the blessed presence of the Lord," his presence in which he blesses people. However, a better solution is found in the translator's footnotes of the *ESV*. They note that the Greek can also be translated, "They will suffer the eternal destruction that comes from the presence of the Lord..."

⁴ See Keller, *The Reason for God*, 269. Footnote 10 suggests that Keller's method of "critical rationality" was drawn from Lewis.

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