



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Issue 129

The Kingdoms of This World

Select Readings on *Human Governments*

(Part 1)

"Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8-9).

"Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence'" (John 18:36).

RESIDENT ALIENS

Scripture ... teaches that we are to view ourselves as soldiers stationed in a foreign country and, thus are not to let ourselves get overly entangled in civilian affairs [*"the affairs of this life"* – II Timothy 2:4] ... Whatever country we may naturally belong to, Paul says, we are to remember always that our real citizenship is in heaven (c.f. Philippians 3:20). Whatever opinions we have about how to solve society's problems, we are to remember always that we cannot serve two masters (Luke 16:13).

Our allegiance, therefore, can never be to any version of the kingdom-of-the-world, however much better we may think it is than other versions of the kingdom-of-the-world. Our allegiance is to our heavenly Father, whose country we belong to and into whose family we've been adopted (Romans 8:29; Galatians 1:2; 6:10; Ephesians 1:4-5) ... We are to see ourselves as "alien residents."

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Page 70, 71

THE WARFARE STATE

Christians who condone the warfare state and its nebulous crusades against "evil" have been duped. There is nothing "Christian" about the state's aggressive militarism, its senseless wars, its interventions into the affairs of other countries, and its expanding empire.

Laurence M. Vance
*Christianity and War
And Other Essays Against the Warfare State* (2005)
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WHAT DO WE WAR AGAINST?

What about those of us who know "right division," what should our response be to military service and the waging of war? To get an answer to this question we must go to the pen of the Apostle Paul.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)" (II Corinthians 10:3-4).

(continued on page 1355)

Dear Saints,

The field of candidates for President has dwindled from a couple dozen only a few months ago, to three major recognized contenders. This past week former President Bill Clinton came to an area high school to speak at a political rally for his wife Hillary. It seems that the Presidential political attention has arrived in small town PA.

Since he would be only a few minutes from the house, my wife, my son and I decided to go see the 42nd President of the United States for ourselves; after all none of us had ever seen a President in person before. We were not politically motivated to attend; the last election that I voted in was 1992. It was our interest in history that sent us off to see any former President speak!

We sat only a short distance from him as he spoke; it could be measured in feet. Clyde III took his camera, getting us a great picture of the former Commander-in-Chief for my upcoming book on the subject of Human Government.

Early in my Christian life I was a political activist. I served as a political party youth chairman, coordinating party functions and even working the polls.

A little over 15 years ago I began to see my role very differently in relationship to the power-play scheme perpetuated by the influence of the religious-political world system. The course of this world is currently under the dominion of the “*god of this world*” (II Corinthians 4:4), he giving governmental power to “*whomsoever he will*” (Luke 4:5-6).

As believers we are not of this world; we are strangers and foreigners here. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20);¹ our King is the Lord Jesus Christ (I Timothy 1:17; 6:15). For this reason we never see our Lord Jesus Christ, Israel’s twelve apostles, or Paul our own apostle involved in the governmental-political arena.

In this issue of the *Bible Student’s Notebook*[™] we will begin a series of quotations from other believers related to the theme of Human Government.

Your fellow,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

1. The *King James Version* translators show us in their marginal notes that “conversation is in heaven” carries the meaning of being “citizens of heaven.”

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God’s abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God’s purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization” or “mission.”

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Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God’s Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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Paul very clearly states that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, that is to say they are not physical. I cannot help but wonder every time I watch the news if the Body of Christ fully understands this important truth. I watch the world wage a war on terror with physical weapons trying to inflict a mortal blow on enemies who would try to destroy our way of life. Our weapons are not carnal ... are not those of the flesh, not such as the people of the world use. They are not such as are employed by conquerors; nor are they such as people in general rely on to advance their cause. We do not depend on eloquence, or talent, or learning, or wealth, or beauty, or any of the external aids, on which the people of this world rely. They are not such as deriving advantage from any power inherent in themselves, or the weapons, which can be mass-produced. Their strength is derived from God alone. But they are mighty through God. They are rendered mighty or powerful by the agency of God. They depend on him for their efficacy. Paul has not here specified the weapons on which he relied; but he had before specified them so that there was no danger of mistake. The following verses state what these weapons are:

“By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (II Corinthians 6:6-7).

Bill Petri
War and Grace (2006)

FRIENDLY ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND

The Christian is called to be a pilgrim and a stranger. He must suffer quietly the present discomforts and risks of being out of gear with the world's mighty machinery, national and international. ...

Christ's follower is to “set” his “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2) ... No one can be both a pilgrim passing through a given country and a citizen of it. In relation to this present world system we cheerfully adopt the former status. To the end of his sojourn the right-minded alien, wherever he may be, will do his utmost to benefit those about him; but his activities must be conducted by his alienship.

The heart of an alien should be set on the things of

his fatherland, where are his sovereign, his home, and his permanent estates, and should not be ‘set’ on the land where he is only a stranger and sojourner ... Now an ambassador is never a citizen of any state save that which sends him.

G.H. Lang
(1874-1958)
The Christian a Friendly Alien

CHRISTIAN KILLERS

There is no doubt that many of the soldiers responsible for the recent death and destruction in Fallujah are Christians. And there is no doubt that many Americans who call for more death and destruction in Iraq and elsewhere are Christians as well.

Christian Killers.

The phrase should be a contradiction in terms. If someone referred to Christian adulterers ... most Christians would get an extremely perplexed look on their face. But when Christians in the military continue killing for the state, and Christians not in the military call for more killing in the name of the state, many Christians don't even raise an eyebrow.

Laurence M. Vance
Christianity and War
And Other Essays Against the Warfare State (2005)
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AMERICA: NO FAVORED NATION

The Religious Right argues that, given its rich European and Christian heritage, America has been blessed by God because of its adherence to Judeo-Christian values. They set America apart and above all other nations. This is heresy ... We are no more favored by God than Russia, Cuba, or Brazil. Such thinking is idolatrous ...

Leaders of the Religious Right have waxed eloquent on their belief that America was founded as a “Christian” nation ... But America never was, is not, and very likely never will be a Christian nation ...

“Reclaiming America for Christ” ... presupposes that America was thoroughly Christian at one time and that Christ wants it back. Both presuppositions are wrong ...

Study the teachings of Jesus, and you will discover that He never intended His disciples to claim or reclaim nations for Himself ...

The Christians in Uzbekistan do not expect their government to reflect their values. The believers in Egypt and elsewhere do not expect their government to reflect their values. The only people who expect their government to reflect their religious values are countries where religion and politics are synonymous. In Iran, the religious zealots expect the government to reflect Muslim values. But in America, where there is no systemic connection between religion and state, believers somehow expect the government to reflect their values. Are we looking for the Christian equivalent of a Muslim state? Do we want religious clerics dictating what we wear and what we do? ...

We should never expect our government to reflect our values. We should expect them to be hostile. This is what Jesus predicted.

Ed Dobson (with Cal Thomas)
Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America? (1999)
Page 165-168

HEALTHY SUSPICION

Far from aligning any version of the kingdom of the world with the kingdom of God, kingdom-of-God participants must retain a healthy suspicion toward every version of the kingdom of the world – especially their own (for here it is most tempting to become idolatrous). After all, on the authority of God’s Word, we know that however good a particular government may be by world standards, it is nevertheless strongly influenced by fallen principalities and powers ...

In fact, the kingdom-of-God citizen should know that, far from holding the ultimate answer to the world’s problems, even the best versions of the kingdom of the world are part of the world’s problem ...

Every version of the kingdom of this world defends itself and advances its cause by rallying the self-interests of its citizens into collective tribal force that makes each citizen willing to kill and be killed for what it believes to be the good of society. It survives and advances by uniting and motivating its subjects around their distinct collective identity, ideals, self-interest, and desire for security – over and against any individuals

or governments whose own tribal ideals, self-interest and desire for security might impinge on or threaten their own. To this end, every version of the kingdom of the world demonizes its enemies when necessary to generate the motivation to go to war and to convince those who must spill blood that their cause is righteous.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Pages 55, 56

NOT A CALLING, BUT A DIVERSION

Even the noblest political causes can be a form of corruption when they divert our attention and effort from the work of Jesus in the world. For believers, this vision of worldly power is not a calling, but a distraction – another case of the good being the enemy of the best. It is a temptation Jesus rejected – not because it was dangerous, but because it was trivial compared with His greater mission.

Cal Thomas (with Ed Dobson)
Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America? (1999)
Page 94

THE AGENDA OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The church that belongs to Jesus is not part of anyone’s agenda. In fact, people who belong to Him provide the only agenda that ultimately counts. It is the agenda of the Kingdom of God breaking into human history – the central feature in the history of the world. It is the only force that can make an enemy into a friend, a criminal into a saint, a biological father into a real parent. And it makes the most ambitious political agenda we can possibly imagine look trivial by comparison.

Cal Thomas (with Ed Dobson)
Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America? (1999)
Page 97

WARFARE A FALSE SYSTEM

Is not the whole system of war in this age of grace just one more false system? It is a system set up against flesh and blood, using for its weapons carnal things. In essence it is the ultimate ungrace [sic] act. Warfare

is contrary to everything that God is instructing us to be. It calls us to perform the most unchristian acts conceivable. War causes those of a baser nature to sink even lower as the recent prison abuse scandals in both the U.K. and the U.S.A. attest.

Bill Petri
War and Grace (2006)

WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

Christians who support or remain silent about Bush's "war against terrorism" are terribly inconsistent. If the state were to say, "Here Christian, put on this uniform, take this gun, go to your hometown, and kill your father," Christians would recoil in horror and refuse to obey the state. But if the state were to say, "Here Christian, put on this uniform, take this gun, go to Iraq, and kill someone else's father," I am afraid that many Christians would reply, "When does my plane leave?"

Why is it that the same Christian, who would not do the former, has no qualms about doing the latter?

Laurence M. Vance
Christianity and War
And Other Essays Against the Warfare State (2005)
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PEACE THROUGH VIOLENCE?

Any peace achieved by violence is a peace forever threatened by violence, thus ensuring that the bloody game will be perpetuated. Followers of Jesus must realize – and must help others realize – that the hope of the world lies not in any particular version of the kingdom of the world gaining the upper hand in Babylon's endless tit-for-tat game. The hope of the world lies in a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom that doesn't participate in tit-for-tat, a kingdom that operates with a completely different understanding of power.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
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HOW TO GET A WAR TO WORK

To get a war to work – to get men to kill other men that have never aggressed against them and that they don't

even know – the state must do two things: convince men to love the state and to hate the members of other states. The first is always cloaked in patriotism, and leads to an acceptance of interventionism. The second is always cloaked in nationalism, and leads to hatred toward foreigners within one's country.

Laurence M. Vance
Christianity and War
And Other Essays Against the Warfare State (2005)
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THE TIT-FOR-TAT KINGDOM

It's hard not to get pulled into the fallen passions that fuel the violence of the kingdom of the world. Indeed, the demonic, tribalistic passion that sets "us" over against "them" seems completely natural to us in our fallen condition. If you hit me, my natural (fallen) instinct is to hit you back – not turn the other cheek! Tit-for-tat, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth – this is what makes the bloody kingdom of the world go around.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
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MYTH OF A CHRISTIAN NATION

I believe that a significant segment of American evangelicalism is guilty of nationalistic and political idolatry. To a frightful degree, I think, evangelicals fuse the kingdom of God with a preferred version of the kingdom of the world ...

What gives the connection between Christianity and politics such strong emotional force in the U.S.? I believe it is the longstanding myth that America is a Christian nation.

From the start, we have tended to believe that God's will was manifested in the conquest and founding of our country – and that it is still manifested in our actions around the globe. Throughout our history, most Americans have assumed our nation's causes and wars were righteous and just, and that "God is on our side." In our minds – as so often in our sanctuaries – the cross and the American flag stand side by side. Our allegiance to God tends to go hand in hand with our allegiance to country. Consequently, many Christians who take their faith seriously see

themselves as the religious guardians of a Christian homeland. America, they believe, is a holy city “set on a hill,” and the church’s job is to keep it shining.

For many in America and around the world, the American flag has smothered the glory of the cross, and the ugliness of our American version of Caesar has squelched the radiant love of Christ. Because the myth that America is a Christian nation has led many to associate America with Christ, many now hear the good news of Jesus only as American news, capitalistic news, imperialistic news, exploitive news, anti-gay news, or Republican news. And whether justified or not, many people want nothing to do with any of it.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Pages 11-13

AN IDOLATROUS CELEBRATION

Shortly after the Gulf War in 1992 I happened to visit a July Fourth worship service at a certain megachurch. At center stage in this auditorium stood a large cross next to an equally large American flag. The congregation sang praise choruses mixed with such patriotic hymns as “God Bless America.” The climax of the service centered on a video of a well-known Christian military general giving a patriotic speech about how God has blessed America and blessed its military troops, as evidenced by the speedy and almost “casualty-free” victory “He gave us” in the Gulf War (Iraqi deaths apparently weren’t counted as “casualties” worthy of notice). Triumphant military music played in the background as he spoke.

The video closed with a scene of a silhouette of three crosses on a hill with an American flag waving in the background. Majestic, patriotic music now thundered. Suddenly, four fighter jets appeared on the horizon, flew over the crosses, and then split apart. As they roared over the camera, the words “God Bless America” appeared on the screen in front of the crosses.

The congregation responded with roaring applause, catcalls, and a standing ovation. I saw several people wiping tears from their eyes. Indeed, as I remained frozen in my seat, I grew teary-eyed as well – but for entirely different reasons. I was struck with horrified grief.

Thoughts raced through my mind: How could the cross and the sword have been so thoroughly fused without anyone seeming to notice? How could Jesus’ self-sacrificial death be linked with flying killing machines? How could Calvary be associated with bombs and missiles? How could Jesus’ people applaud tragic violence, regardless of why it happened and regardless of how they might benefit from its outcome? How could the kingdom of God be reduced to this sort of violent, nationalistic tribalism? Has the church progressed at all since the Crusades?

Indeed, I wondered how this tribalistic, militaristic, religious celebration was any different from the one I had recently witnessed on television carried out by the Taliban Muslims raising their guns and they joyfully praised Allah for the victories they believed “he had given them” in Afghanistan? ...

This is the way *all* versions of the kingdom of the world operate.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian
Pages 87-89

WAR AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

The early Christians were wholly opposed to warfare and violence. They were certainly not cowards, while they refused to serve in the Roman army they apparently did not flinch from lions in the arena, or being beheaded, rather than kill a fellow human being.

Bill Petri
War and Grace (2006)

WAR PERPETUATES HATRED

The recent war on terror that the United States finds itself engaged in has not decreased terrorist activity, but rather has seen it escalate to the highest levels ever known. Bloodshed creates more bloodshed, which creates more hatred, which ensures more violence, and hatred. This is what waging a physical war produces. Its end is never good, and it never brings peace that can last. The United States is not eliminating terrorists, but with every act of violence they create more terrorists, who hate Americans more than the ones who preceded them. The whole world system is fortified against Christ; and the peoples of

the earth have been engaged in little else than in raising and strengthening such strongholds for the space of 6,000 years. The doctrine of grace goes forth against all the combined and concentrated powers of resistance of the whole world; and the warfare is to be waged against every strongly fortified place of error and of sin in the spiritual realm. These strong fortifications of error and of sin are to be battered down and laid in ruins by our spiritual weapons of knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, love, and the Holy Ghost as we have already seen.

Bill Petri
War and Grace (2006)

THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD

“And the Devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, shewed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the Devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine.”
(Luke 4:5-7).

In Luke 4 the Devil tempted Jesus by showing Him “all the kingdoms of the world” while saying, “All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. Jesus, of course, would not worship the Devil to acquire these kingdoms. But note: He doesn’t dispute the Devil’s claim to own them.

Apparently, the authority of all the kingdoms of the world has been given to Satan. It’s not clear from this text whether we humans gave the Devil this authority when we surrendered to him in the Garden (Genesis 3) or whether God originally entrusted Lucifer with this authority before he rebelled. What is clear is that, however it came about, God’s cosmic archenemy now owns the authority of all versions of the kingdom of the world and gives this authority to whomever he pleases.

This teaching is in various forms found throughout the New Testament ... This kingdom is symbolized as “Babylon” ... Certainly some governments are better than others ... But no earthly kingdom, however good, is exempt from the scriptural teaching that it is a part of “Babylon,” a worldwide kingdom ruled by Satan.

Along these lines, Jesus three times refers to Satan as the “*prince [ruler] of this world*” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The term “*prince [ruler]*” was a political term used to denote the highest ruling authority in a given region – and Jesus applied it to Satan over the whole world! Functionally, Satan is the acting CEO of all earthly governments. Paul agrees, for he refers to Satan as “*the god [magistrate] of this world*” (II Corinthians 4:4) and as “*the prince [ruler] of the power of the air*” (Ephesians 2:2).

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Pages 21-22

A DIFFERENT KIND OF KINGDOM

Fallen humans tend to identify their own group as righteous and any group that opposes them as evil. If they were not evil, we tend to believe, no conflict would exist. Hence, the only way to end the conflict is to “rid the world of this evil,” as President George W. Bush said after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The “good” (our tribe) must extinguish the “evil” (their tribe), using all means necessary, including violence. This is the age-old “myth of redemptive violence.”

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Page 26

CHRISTIANS IN THE MILITARY

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Ephesians 4:31-5:2).

There is an alternative to this ceaseless, bloody merry-go-round: it is the kingdom of God ... It is to live the life of Jesus Christ ... to opt out of the kingdom-of-the-world war machine and manifest a radically different, beautiful, loving way of life. To refuse to kill for patriotic reasons is to show “we actually take our identity in Christ more seriously than our identity with

the empire, the nation-state, or the ethnic terror cell whence we come,” as Lee Camp says [*Mere Discipleship*, page 148.]

So, while I respect the sincerity and courage of Christians who may disagree and feel it their duty to defend their country with violence, I honestly see no way to condone a Christian’s decision to kill on behalf of any country – or for any other reason.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Page 173

ISLAMIC ANIMOSITY

Much of the profound animosity Islamic terrorists feel towards “satanic” America is fueled by a cultural memory of what Christians did to Muslims during the Crusades. Believing that America is a Christian nation, they direct their collective, historically acquired hatred toward it ...

The Christian version of the kingdom of the world was actually the *worst* version the world has ever seen. For this was the version of the kingdom of the world that did the most harm to the kingdom of God. Not only did it torture and kill, as versions of the kingdom of the world frequently do – it did this under the banner of Christ. If violence and oppression are demonic, violence and oppression “in the name of Jesus” is far more so. The church of Christendom thereby brought disrepute to the name of Christ, associating His kingdom with the atrocities it carried out for centuries. The resistance most Islamic countries have to Christianity today, in fact, is partly to be explained by the vicious behavior of Christians toward Muslims throughout history.

Gregory A. Boyd
The Myth of a Christian Nation (2005)
Pages 25, 81

UNDERSTANDING THE MUSLIM CONTEMPT

Historically, the most prominent of church-ordained “just wars” were the crusades of 1095-1291 C.E. The Roman Catholic Church has not given any apology or expression of remorse for the

crusades; they are still considered to be just wars. Using “crusade” terminology today shows an utter disregard for the atrocities committed during the crusades and a lack of understanding at the Muslim contempt for “Christian” nations, which became ingrained because of those atrocities. Many historians even take the position that the Crusades actually helped Islam become a viable religion in the Middle East, by uniting Muslims against a common enemy.

Heads of state with heavy Christian populations have used the rhetoric of just war since the term was first used in order to gain favor for military operations. Once a war is declared “just” all moral obligation seemingly disappears and Christians can support and even become combatants for the cause.

The Middle East harbors grudges against Christians and Jews, which date back to the Crusades. Our wars have created a gap, which only the grace of God can bridge. While we may be able to free some Muslims from tyrannical regimes, this good does not counteract the evils and hatred we spawn from our military activities there.

Bill Petri
War and Grace (2006)

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

We are not citizens of this world trying to make our way to heaven; we are citizens of heaven trying to make our way through this world. That radical Christian insight can be life-changing. We are not to live so as to earn God’s love, inherit heaven, and purchase our salvation. All those are given to us as gifts; gifts brought by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and handed over to us. We live as God’s redeemed, as heirs of heaven, and as citizens of another land: the Kingdom of God ... We live as those who are on a journey home; a home we know will have the lights on and the door open and our Father waiting for us when we arrive. That means in all adversity our worship of God is joyful, our life is hopeful, our future is secure. There is nothing we can lose on earth that can rob us of the treasures God has given us and will give us.

The Landisfarne (magazine)