

# The FCM Informer

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## Christ's Crucial Question

by George R. Brunk II

That question was addressed to Simon in one of ten appearances of our Lord during the 40-day interval between His resurrection and ascension. The question was this: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

This conversation followed a night of unsuccessful fishing on the Sea of Galilee. But they went back to their nets, according to the instruction of Jesus, and the catch was so great that "they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

After dining with these seven disciples, we are told, "this is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead." It was after they had dined together that Jesus addressed the crucial question to Simon whose name had been changed to Peter. This reminds us of the words of Jesus on another occasion when he said, "Go tell my disciples and Peter." Addressing him now by his old name, Simon, was our Lord not reminding him of the fact of his awful sin of denial?

The personal conversations of our Lord would make an interesting study. This is one of them.

In this conversation, we observe at least three things – the distinction of love, the definition of love, and the expression of love.

### The Distinction of Love

Mark gives us a very interesting conversation which Jesus had with His disciples on the night of His betrayal when He said to them, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all" (Mark 14:27-31).

Some commentators maintain that since Peter denied the Lord three times, he is now being asked to make restitution

by confessing three times. We doubt that that is the reason.

Let us think of all the questions Jesus might have asked Simon. We can think of several, such as these: Simon, are you sorry for what you did? Simon, do you promise to do better? Or, are you ready to make another try? Or, do you promise that you will do better hereafter?

No, Jesus did not say, "Believest thou me?" or "Understandest thou me?" Jesus did not ask, "Lovest thou my word?" or "Lovest thou my work?" or "Lovest thou my brethren?" Rather, He asked, "Lovest thou me?"

This is not to suggest that all of the above questions might have been very appropriate, but what question would remain about them if there were certitude about Simon's love.

In other words, if one's love for Christ is what it ought to be, there will be no question about obedience, no question about loyalty, no question about service, no question about the work of the Lord, and no question about one's associations.

Here is the distinction of love. If you love Me, you will love My word. If you love Me, you will love My people. And, if you love Me, you will obey My word.

Does not this crucial question about love indicate that our Lord is concerned primarily with this?

Here is the distinction and the primacy of love.

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## **The Definition of Love**

The original language indicates that there are three levels of love – agape love, phileo love, and eros love. Agape love is the highest, eros love the lowest. Phileo love lies in between. With this understanding, we can see at once why it was that Jesus confronted Peter three times with this question.

In Jesus' first question, He said to Simon, Do you have agape love for me? We note that in Simon's response, he said, Yes, Lord, I have phileo love for you. Likewise, in the second question, it was the same – agape vs. phileo.

But, in the third question, Jesus abandons His reference to agape love and asks Simon whether he does, indeed, have phileo love. It was with this that Peter was grieved, because the Lord had said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? In Peter's reply, he said, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee."

It becomes abundantly clear now, why the Lord asked him the question three times. Was it not because his answer was unsatisfactory? Perhaps Simon was too ashamed to use the agape word.

But this is the quality of love which believers are expected to possess and express. Husbands are commanded to have agape love for their wives. It is this kind of love that one is to have for his neighbor (Matthew 5:43). It is this kind of love that one is to have for his enemies (Matthew 5:44). It was with this love that God so loved the world (John 3:16). If one has this kind of love, he will rejoice (John 14:28). It is with this love that we are commanded to love one another (John 15:17). It is with this kind of love that we are to love His appearing (II Timothy 4:8). It is with this level of love that we are to love righteousness and hate iniquity (Hebrews 1:9). For those who have this kind of love, chastening may be expected (Hebrews 12:6). It is to those that have this kind of love that the crown of life is promised (James 1:12). Whoever has this kind of love for his brother, abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him (I John 2:10). Whoever has this kind of love for the world is without the love of the Father (I John 2:15). Further, John warns against loving in word and tongue, not in deed and truth (I John 3:18). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

This helps us understand the definition of agape love.

## **The Expression of Love**

In what ways does one express love for the Lord? It may be expressed in confession as Peter did; it may be expressed in words of praise and admiration; and it may be expressed in numerous other ways. But the real proof of love is more than spoken words.

In response to Peter's first confession, our Lord said unto him, "Feed my lambs." In response to his second confession, our Lord said, "Feed my sheep." Those words are repeated in response to his third confession.

Love expresses and proves itself in action.

It has been said that love to Christ is the foundation of Christian service. It is the first condition of the divine commission. "This is the distinguishing characteristic of Christian morality, that Jesus seeks first for the surrender of the affections." Does not our Lord assume that if one's love is settled and sure, then all else will follow in terms of loyalty, service and obedience?

Our Lord seems to say, "Give me thine heart." Is this not the essence and substance of His message?

In the words of G. H. Knight, "What Christ wants is a practical expression of theoretical love, an expression in act, as well as on the lips; and though it may be a hard answer, it will always be a blessed one. Our love to Christ ought to be a visible love. Let us ask ourselves, therefore, what proofs of our love to Christ we are giving.

"From my demeanor and conversation in my home, would anyone gather that I love my Lord and Saviour with an ardent love? If I never talk about Him as worthy of love, how can others believe that I regard Him so? If I never boldly take His part when His laws are despised or His authority is condemned; if I see, and do not rebuke, the sins that dishonor and grieve Him, how can I make good my profession of loyal love to Him? If I never think of Him or speak of Him as a dear friend, who has gone away for a time, but is soon to come again; if my heart never thrills with joy in the hope of His 'glorious appearing' so that I am setting everything in order to meet His eyes, how can I prove my possession of the love to which separation is a sorrow?"

The same may be said about our relationship to one another in the church, the body of Christ. How can we say that we love our Lord and fail to give it expression in our congregational relationships?

And, how can we fail to love, even our enemies, and claim that we have Christ's love in our heart? It is our observation that there are many congregations of believers today that are having love problems when there is contention, jealousy, and confusion.

True love will find its expression in obedience. "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him" (I John 2:5).

True love will find its expression between believers for, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20).

True love will find its expression in service as expressed by our Lord when He said, "Feed my lambs" and "Feed my sheep." ■

# Sound An Alarm!

*By Daniel Stetler*

This scenario is familiar to every Christian leader. It goes something like this: We have a beautiful little church and a lovely parsonage, but we do not have a pastor. In fact we have not had a pastor for over a year and our church has dwindled until we just have a handful of people left. I'm afraid the church will close completely if we are not able to find a pastor soon. So you know of ANYONE who would help us?

Unfortunately, scenarios like this can be repeated over and over in a wide variety of ministry settings. Schools lack teachers. Mission fields need missionaries. Ministries of all kinds are working with insufficient staffing and being stretched to the breaking point to cover those vacancies. The needs and opportunities are greater than they have ever been, but unfortunately there is an alarming decline in the number of young people committing themselves to and preparing for Christian ministry.

Confronted by this situation, we are forced to ask ourselves some difficult questions. Did God make a mistake? Has our situation "slipped up on Him" or "caught Him off guard?" Did He somehow fail to realize how great the needs and opportunities would be in the 21st century? Did he fail to call enough people, and is He even now scrambling about heaven wringing His hands in despair over a shortage of workers?

Of course the answer to all of the above questions is NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, and NO! Absolutely NOTHING "takes God by surprise!" He is NEVER "caught off guard." Past, present, and future are concepts which are very real to humans, but totally foreign to God. He exists in the eternal present. He inhabits eternity. He identified himself to Moses as the "I AM!" He instructed the prophet Malachi to write "I AM the Lord thy God, I change not." (Malachi 3:3) The source of this problem is not God!

So, if the problem does not lie in God being "caught by surprise," where does it lie? Obviously, the only other possibility is that the problem lies with us! Somehow, we have failed to hear His call when He said, "Go ye!" We have failed to sense the urgency that stirred His heart when He was moved with compassion as He looked upon the multitudes. We have not heard Him when He cried, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (John 4:35).

Has it ever occurred to you that being a Christian is not part of the job requirement for most occupations? A person need not be a Christian to be a contractor, a factory worker, a physician, an accountant, a dental hygienist, or an engineer. But

being a Christian is a part of the job requirement for Christian ministry. If "Christian" young people are not available to fill the needs in Christian ministry, who will fill those vacancies?

I am well aware that God wants Christians to be "salt and light" in all legitimate occupations and in every walk of life. But, I am afraid that in some cases we have been impacted by the materialistic spirit of our culture, and lost our vision for ministry. We seem to have little tolerance for sacrifice of any kind. We have been so busy making the point that "God needs Christians in all walks of life" that we have failed to realize the ominous signs all about us that there is a growing and increasingly serious shortage of high-caliber Christian young people preparing for a lifetime of service in Christian ministry.

The prospects for the future of a denomination or movement may be predicted with a high degree of accuracy by evaluating the training centers which prepare future workers. Many of the mainline holiness denominations no longer have ANY Bible Colleges specifically committed to the training of Christian workers. They have been replaced with Christian liberal arts colleges which have large enrollments of young people training for an array of secular careers, but painfully small religion or ministry departments preparing young people for a life of ministry.

In the Conservative Holiness Movement, of which we are a part, EVERY ONE of our Bible Colleges showed at least some statistical decline this year. All of our schools may be accurately described as being "financially challenged," and one Bible College closed this year. If this trend continues, the future for local churches, Christian schools, and mission organizations is grim at best.

Throughout my entire ministry I have tried to look at the problems of life from the optimistic perspective, but in this case, I believe it is time to sound an alarm. The secular company which makes no investment in the research and development for its product lines is a company whose days are numbered.

So, is there hope for our future? Certainly! Trends can be reversed! If that is to happen, however, it will require the combined efforts of our families, our churches, and our denominations to surround our young people with a godly environment which makes a lifetime of ministry a top priority. When we put the romance back in ministry and make serving God our highest priority, I am confident our young people will respond!

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# Rediscovering the Radical Legacy

*by Javan Lapp*

When the Anabaptists tired of persistent persecution, the fires waned and the “Radicals” were tamed into farmers and merchants who expended their primary energies into just that – the material world. Their zeal for excellence and completion was thrown into agriculture, engineering and trading. They soon became known as diligent worker, becoming the domesticated “lap-dogs” of the monarchs of Europe. They often won favors in exchange for their support of the ruling powers.

Sick of warring monarchs and facing the rising power of their rivals, the peasants, Mennonites eagerly reached for new freedoms and economic opportunities in America. But for many, their zeal on this continent was for prosperity and self-betterment. Their churches became a religion of maintenance programs to hold the community together for the sake of economy – this is, until integration and assimilation came to be seen as an acceptable route to economic success. After 300 years in North America, what have we done; what have we changed? There is no doubt that we have had some impact, but the influence of hundreds of thousands of people over three centuries pales in comparison to what several thousand early Anabaptists accomplished in a few decades. What is keeping us from showing our world the vision that the Anabaptists proclaim to their world?

For starters, many of us have become servants of mammon, the power of money. We tend to serve our own interests. Even our defenses against this fact – that we make money to share – sound empty and hollow to the rising generation. Jesus declared the Kingdom to outcasts, the down-trodden, and the losers of the world. In some ways, the power of the Kingdom runs counter to the power of economic systems. Jesus Himself said noncommittally, “With God all things are possible” when asked who could be saved if a rich man cannot enter the Kingdom. Our practice, I fear, does not reflect very well this part of God’s Kingdom.

When weary descendants of the Anabaptists traded their birthright for the quietist vision, they moved from being viewed as traitors to being some the best citizens,

from being the enemies of civilized governments to being their allies. In the quest to be left alone at all costs they paid a very dear price.

If we trust in worldly governments for protection, we trust in their power. We tend to think that they are the primary bearers of history, that they really “make things happen.”

We must see the Kingdom of God as the primary agent of history. Governments have a function in preserving the world from self-destruction, but that preservation is meant to give the church time to offer a message of redemption. One day the Kingdom will have crushed the powers of political systems. Our calling is to be a part of that Kingdom now as well as then.

One of our greatest weaknesses lies in our tendency to rely on visible patterns to the degree that many of us seldom stop to evaluate honestly who we have become, what we are doing, and where we are going. We have emphasized practice, and rightly so, but too often we have emphasized it to the point of excluding critical thinking, resulting in a nonconformed practice, but not nonconformed thinking. If we have bought into other models of thinking, we have had to hold tenaciously onto an irrational ethic to preserve our nonconformity.

The fact is that our practice needs to be reevaluated, but how can we do that when we have trouble thinking of new ways to approach issues in a helpful and constructive way? We also need to face up to and realize our preconceived ideas. We will always have preconceived ideas; we cannot be fully objective. I cannot and you cannot. But we need to realize our subjectivity and look carefully at our approaches and interpretations.

Possibly our largest problem lies in what Protestantizing has done to our understanding of Jesus and His mission. The ethic of Christ has become something to fit around the edges. Salvation has become chiefly escapism – an individual contract that gives us the promise of escaping this world, of insuring us against hell fire, rather than being a redemptive presence in the world. Once we realize that Christ heralded a new world order that will

*Continued on page 6*

# Communication Lines and Limits

*by Eby W. Burkholder*

In all areas of life, wholesome communication is needed to help make life pleasant and productive. Failure to communicate lays a groundwork for misunderstanding and ill will. Tension among families will destroy harmony and happiness.

We recognize the need for interchange and communication among extended families. But reasonable limits must be established for the benefit of all. Each family must be recognized and respected as a separate unit. Healthy interest should be expressed without undue interference. The advice in Proverbs applies to all relationships: “Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor’s house; lest he be weary of thee” (Proverbs 25:17).

For some parents, their family lives nearby, which gives many opportunities for contact. For others, hundreds or thousands of miles separate the family. At times, parents of children may be called to distant fields of service. From a human viewpoint, these developments can be very heart searching and difficult. Family interchange may be very limited. Resting in the will of God will bring peace to the soul. Even though many miles separate us, the occasional times of interchange can be very fruitful. We are grateful for the many means of modern communication that span the miles.

Interfamily visiting is important and profitable. Parents need to make their rounds and attempt to share their time and visits fairly among the family. Favoritism should be avoided. In these visits, some spiritual inspiration should be shared. When opportunity affords, plan to share together in family worship.

Letters and cards have a value of their own. They are little keepsakes that can be saved for future reference and inspiration. The family circle letter is a profitable channel of communication. In addition to family news, letters should include some spiritual inspiration and challenge. Occasionally, one “circle” could focus on a special subject, such as memories of grandparents or impressions from childhood days. Each family must assume personal responsibility to keep the letter moving on.

Parents should monitor relationships in extended

family and give some help when needed. Too much comparison and criticism among the families will produce tension and strife. Methods of home management and child training will vary somewhat from family to family. Certainly a measure of uniformity should be evident in our Christian homes, but a certain amount of variation will also be present. We should not allow these differences to produce tension. Rudeness and gossiping should never be named among us. Rather the “law of kindness” should always prevail. We should recognize the potential for family strife, and address and resolve it “while there is hope” (Proverbs 19:18).

Parents can become too involved and critical with the extended family. Everything does not need to be done exactly the same as in the parental home. On the other hand, to completely ignore an evident problem is not the answer either. Relationships should be of a quality that invites meaningful interchange. Jonathan assured David that “what I see, that I will tell thee” (I Samuel 19:3). When advice is given, it should be given in charity. Perhaps the concern can be addressed in a letter. If the method of personal address is used, it may be advisable to include both partners. This will help to build respect and confidence.

Discussion about family problems should be closely guarded. As parents, we should not freely receive complaints from our children about marriage partners or marital difficulties. To give a listening ear or to take sides in these problems can be very devastating. Generally parents are too biased in favor of their children to provide the needed solutions in these critical situations. Encouragement should be given to resolve their problems together or to include an unrelated spiritual brother for advice and problem solving.

Family relationships should never replace the need for the church. The potential for this becomes greater when a family lives close together and is a part of the same congregation. We must be willing to share our family and our affection with the church. Something is wrong if our family gathers frequently for fellowship but rarely includes other families or takes time for congregational visiting.

Wise families will sense the need for broader fellowship, which protects them from becoming socially ingrown. In a spiritual sense, we are all one inclusive family within the church.

Communicating the faith to the rising generation is a primary parental responsibility. If parents fail in this they have indeed failed. Parents and grandparents may think that at this stage of family rearing their potential for communicating and influencing is mostly in the past. But this is not correct. Commitment and faithfulness to the Lord and the church will communicate volumes of value to the rising generation. Christlikeness and stability will be observed and appreciated. For children and grandchildren to stray from the faith is indeed tragic, but for parents and grandparents to follow them is doubly deplorable. Too

often wayward children are supported in their downward course by compromising parents. The penitent prodigal found his father where he had left him. He said, “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18).

Meaningful communications are not built in a day. Rather they are a product of lifelong efforts. The quality of communication between parents and married children generally follows the pattern established in the parental home. Parents and children should live in peace and harmony in the home, which will establish a good foundation for future communications.

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*Continued from page 4*

crush the powers of the present age, we will need to throw all our energies into the battle of Kingdom living. This shift, however, will not be easy because it means a new realization of how God works in this world.

I fear that in altering Anabaptism, we have tamed Jesus and domesticated God. Love and peace are God’s declaration to the world, as well as the way of the future – not something to be ashamed of.

Once we understand the present reality of the Kingdom of God and its progressive realization in this world, we will need to function as an eschatological community. By living with an eye to the future among the present realities, we will give prophetic witness against the current systems. This entails separated thinking. And indeed, it is the undergirding of a nonconformed witness. Our separateness, our faith, which is a way of living based on yet-to-be-realized realities, must speak to the world. After all, we go about proclaiming – yea, living – the new creation of God in a fallen world. Our duty is to be bearing witness to the new way because the old things are passing away. We must critique the present by living the future as revealed to us in the ethics of Christ. The way God has declared that things will be must be more basic to us than the way things currently are.

The rural Mennonite communities scattered throughout North America have resources waiting to be tapped. If

the Holy Spirit can have His way, a powerful witness for the kingdom of God will follow and the result will be unimaginable in magnitude. But as of yet, it seems to be that Mennonites are known mostly for their quaintness, their quietism, their exclusiveness, and their millionaires.

Meanwhile, many of their youth grow up enjoying recreation and being trained to be the next generation of prosperous Mennonites. Some of those who dare to think seriously, honestly and critically are marginalized and in their quest for truth often leave because the half-breed Protestant theology and the common Mennonite lifestyle fails to convince them. It is time to re-evaluate what is happening.

We would do well to start from the vision of the first-generation Anabaptists who seemed to follow closely the original disciples of Jesus. It is time we grasp a new vision of God’s Kingdom and serve as a witness against the goals and methods of this world by refusing to bow to ungodly influences. The result of communities of disciples living out such a display of what a close relationship with Jesus produces can be nothing less than New Testament Christianity. Indeed, that would be the world itself turned on its head.

*Reprinted with permission from the Calvary Messenger,  
October 2006.*

# Pointed Preaching

by John Meador

People need pointed preaching. Now, I'm not just talking about preaching that is blunt and to the point, although if the text is blunt, so should the preaching be. What I mean by pointed preaching is preaching that clearly and memorably conveys the point(s) of the text.

There is an old maxim that says, "People remember the stories." Well, in fact, they do! But the preacher's responsibility is far greater than to leave the congregation with stories that have no memorable point. The communicator of God's Word must by necessity work hard in seeing and sharing the points clearly enough so that the hearer can connect the words of the text with the points of the message. The stories simply illustrate the point. The point must first be made!

Narrative passages often lend themselves to messages that are less structured, but what you'll find in the end is that people will eventually remember one or two of the high lights of such a message – even when they weren't given. They are needed!

Points are anchors that people can hold onto. They are reminders of how the text spoke to them through the preacher. Points are the steps of the ladder that the hearer climbs in order to reach the overall impact of the text. They are summaries of what God has said to the one who delivers the Word – and what he communicates when the time comes.

Points can be plain or they can be complex. They can be old or they can be new. They may be either traditional or contemporary in wording. There are two priorities when it comes to the points of the message: First, the points must accurately reflect the original meaning and intent of the author in that particular text. Other articles have explored how that is discovered. Second, the points must connect with the particular congregation you are communicating with.

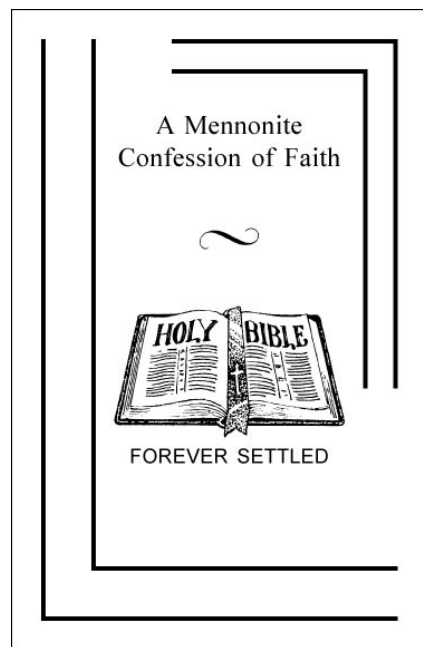
Recently I preached the text of Deuteronomy 8:1-6 to a group of students preparing for the ministry. As I studied the text in preparation and as I realized the background of this part of the book is the groundwork of the children of Israel for entering the land, I began to see the overall point of the text. Moses was calling the next generation to "remember all the way..." (v.2a) that God had led them. He was reminding them of the "Wilderness Lessons" taught in forty years of wandering.

This was Moses' last message, and he wanted the lessons to be known thoroughly, so that the new generation

could finally conquer the land. His statements are packed with key words and powerful admonition. I took my points right out of the text, and nearly all the words of the first six verses relate directly to these points:

1. The wilderness is about your heart.  
"...that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart..." (v.2)
2. The wilderness is about your humility.  
"...that He might humble you...He humbled you..." (vv.2,3)
3. The wilderness is about your hunger.  
"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know..." (v.3)

By taking the actual words of the passage to be part of my main points, I am keeping the points clearly attached to



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the Scripture. It sheds light on Moses' original message, it reveals what the Holy Spirit has recorded for us in this age, and it keeps the message anchored on truth. These points served as "boundaries" for my time of preaching that day. They kept me in the context and within the key points of the text.

But here's what really gets me going. When the hearer is listening to me preach, he/she is able to make the connection between verses and message. Points help provide the "a-ha!" moment in the mind that is listening and encourages the hearer to say, "I can see what God means here." It opens wide the door to an encounter with the God of Truth! When people begin to see what God's word says for themselves, it fuels an enthusiasm for God's Word. They open the Bible at home and read for themselves. They gain confidence in how to hear from God. They learn how to let the key points of a text emerge in their reading. They grow.

And that's the point.

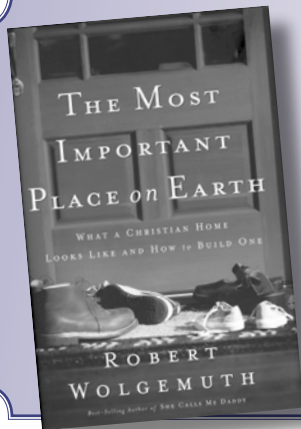
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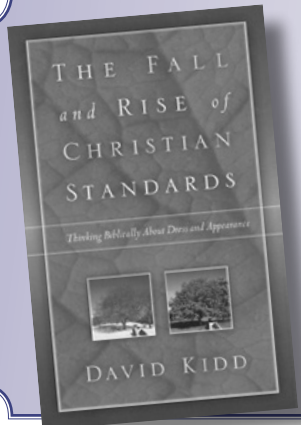
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