



August 1993

Dear Friends,

With your indulgence, I would like to devote my letter again this month to the subject of "Lessons From the Holy Land." Earlier this summer, Shirley and I spent 19 days in the Holy Land with Ray Vander Laan, a gifted historian and teacher. It was a wonderful experience we will never forget. So many of the historic places we visited had direct implications for today's world and for the ministry of Focus on the Family.

Two main themes emerged as we stood among archaeological digs and ancient battlegrounds. I mentioned the first in my letter last month: *Very little has changed in the past 4,000 years.* Our spiritual ancestors in Abraham's family were engaged in a life-and-death struggle between good and evil. Their world, like ours, was divided between God's Kingdom and the domain of Satan. The people of that day dealt with violence, sexual sin, deceit, idolatry and wickedness in high places, even as we.

When we look around us today and see so much immorality and apostasy, we are inclined to despair. "Surely," one could easily conclude, "the world has never seen such evil as in our time." But it is an illusion. Sin has always infected the human family. And the historic conflict between righteousness and wickedness will continue until Christ comes to rid the world of the Great Deceiver.

The second observation focused on Jesus' confrontation with the forces of darkness. In today's jargon, we would say He "played offense rather than defense." Let me illustrate:

Throughout most of His ministry, Jesus lived and taught around the fishing village of Capernaum on the northern coast of Galilee. Devout Jews resided there and along the western shore of the Sea. They worshiped God, studied the Scriptures and traveled south to the temple at Jerusalem to sacrifice lambs as an atonement for sins.

On the eastern shore, however, lived people known to be the enemies of God. They were primarily Canaanites whom Joshua had driven out of the Israel and who practiced the Greek form of the fertility cults. Among the cultural influences of that area was the ancient worship of Baal, the god of nature—lightning and thunder—and the presumed giver of fertility in the spring. Unlike the Jews, these pagans sacrificed pigs to gain their "god's" favor. Accordingly, the people of this region opposed everything the Israelites believed.

The Jewish people living on the western shore referred to Baal as "Beelzebub," which by Jesus' time was synonymous with the Devil. Needless to say, they viewed the territory across the sea as profoundly wicked and frightening to them. They did not go there unless absolutely necessary.

Amazingly, Jesus and His disciples got in a boat and began rowing *directly* toward the forbidden world. We all remember the story. On the way across the Sea of Galilee, a fierce storm arose and threatened to sink their small fishing vessel.

Isn't that what might be expected as the Son of God approached the domain of Beelzebub? Though the Scriptures do not spell it out, the disciples' terror must have been intensified by where they were and what lay ahead. In desperation, they awakened the Master.

Jesus uttered a command, and instantly, the wind and the waves became calm. In so doing, He not only revealed His authority over nature—but also Satan.

When Jesus and the disciples landed on Galilee's eastern shore, the first person to meet them was a man possessed by a legion of demons. It figures, doesn't it? And when He cast the beings out of the man, they entered a herd of pigs—which were routinely sacrificed to Baal. As with so many of the biblical stories, this event can hardly be understood without comprehending the Jewish culture and the period during which it occurred (Mark 4:35 - 5:13).

This entire episode, as I now understand it, is symbolic of the battle between God and Satan. Again, notice that Jesus did not remain in the safety of western territory. He constantly sought out evil and confronted it head-on, regardless of the consequences.

Another illustration of this assault on evil was apparent at Caesarea Philippi, a beautiful city built by Herod Philippi, son of Herod the Great. It was constructed at the base of Mount Hermon, near the mouth of an enormous cave, a center of Baal worship. Even today, one can see niches in the rock where small statues were placed and people bowed before them.

The cave was one of the most powerful symbols of the dark world, because Baal was thought to descend into its mouth every winter. He went into the bowels of the earth until spring, when he emerged to have sexual relations with his mistress, Asherah. From their union, the world was supposedly blessed with fertility.

It was in Caesarea Philippi, and perhaps in front of that cave, that Jesus spoke to his disciples shortly before His crucifixion. This is how the Scriptures report their conversation:

When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He sayeth unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:13-16).

As I stood in front of the cave at Caesarea Philippi, I grasped for the first time the significance of Peter's emphasis on "the *living* God." Baal, of course, was merely a creature of evil supernaturalism.

Then Jesus said something very important to our understanding:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

I have always interpreted that reference to the "gates of hell" as a defensive statement. In other words, I presumed Jesus was assuring us believers that we would not be overcome by the forces of evil. But look at the wording again.

When Jesus spoke of "the gates," He referred to the entrance to a walled city—a fortress. We would all agree that a fortress is not an offensive weapon—it is a defensive structure. "Gates" do not attack anyone. They are designed to protect those who are huddled within. Jesus was not telling the disciples that the church would somehow survive Satan's assault. He was assuring us the enemy would not prevail against *our* onslaught! We are to take the Good News directly into his territory and penetrate the stronghold of wickedness. This is accomplished not with the weapons of war but with the powerful force of love and persuasion.

Having thus defined our mission, the Master turned His face toward Jerusalem, where a horrible death awaited Him. He took the Jericho Road through the Judean wilderness and into the very cauldron of evil. One of the most emotional moments during our visit to Israel occurred as we walked several miles on that narrow path in the footsteps of Jesus. He willingly trudged over those same rocks to die in

our place. He and His disciples didn't have to make that final 14-mile journey. They could have hidden in the hills. They could have fled to Egypt. But Jesus led them straight into the custody of His executioners. That had been His approach throughout His ministry, taking no thought for His own life.

As I studied this and other historical events in the light of Jesus' culture, a new understanding of the Focus on the Family ministry began to emerge. I saw in them a confirmation of what I had known intuitively from the beginning: Our mission in support of righteousness must also be offensive in nature, not merely defensive. Our responsibility in 1993, just as Jesus modeled it 2,000 years ago, is to engage society confidently and compassionately on the great moral issues of the day.

That's what we have been attempting to do since the early 1980s, when traditional Christian values came under such vicious attack. We have tried to awaken and mobilize people of faith to use their influence in this great democracy. It has been this almost inexpressible concern for families, and especially for children, that motivated my participation in government, including 18 months' service on the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. I was following what I felt, and still believe, was the Lord's calling at a time of national crisis.

While many thousands of people have written or called to support this involvement (we recently received 49,500 phone calls in one day!), the response from a few of our friends has been less enthusiastic. They have worried about the security and reputation of the ministry. To them, issues related to abortion, homosexual activism, safe sex, infanticide, euthanasia and family taxation are divisive and can only damage our credibility. "Back off," they've said, "before you get hurt!" They have advised me to talk exclusively about the safer subjects—such as marriage and parenthood—but to stay away from topics that could only bring us criticism.

Others, and perhaps some of you, have feared that I was becoming political. One Christian publisher told his readers in 1987 that I would soon make a mad dash for the presidency. What a ridiculous assertion! I have never been even remotely interested in political office, as the intervening years have shown.

My passion from those early days was driven not by a desire for power but by a conviction that our society was rejecting the Christian ethic. I became convinced that the issues being debated were profoundly moral in nature—not merely political. Washington and the ultra-left had invaded the church, not vice versa.

It is now abundantly clear that God has not called us to "protect" this ministry and keep it above the fray. What would it profit us to preserve our popularity while the essential truths of our faith are systematically rejected and a generation of children grow up thinking immorality is normal and healthy? No, we're instructed to storm the fortress of Satan's kingdom, and the gates of hell will not prevail against us.

Is there a price to pay for taking the offensive? Very likely! It cost Jesus and most of His disciples their lives, but what a glorious investment! As they willingly walked the Jericho Road, we too must "take up our cross" and follow. If we get crucified in Jerusalem, so be it.

Obviously, it is inappropriate to stretch this point too far. Jesus was crucified to atone for sin, and He was hated because He claimed to be the Messiah. But the pattern of His ministry is clear. He did not flinch from confronting wickedness, and as a result was forsaken by many.

I'm grateful that so many of you have also decided to speak out against evil in society. From your telephone calls and letters, I know you have forsaken a life of safety and comfort to identify with the cause of righteousness. Some have already suffered for your boldness. Many men and women have lost their jobs and their reputations for defending an unpopular tenet of their faith. Some sit in prison today for praying in front of an abortuary. There have been thousands of similar sacrifices in recent years including the examples that follow:

• In Santa Barbara, Calif., four men and women stood in the parking lot of Planned Parenthood to protest the killing of babies. The abortionists obtained a preliminary injunction from a liberal Superior Court judge, James Slater, and through a complex legal procedure, he awarded Planned Parenthood \$36,000 in attorneys' fees. These four people, who were responding to the dictates of their conscience, have very little money and can't even defend themselves in court. The decision against them was outrageous, but it will apparently go unchallenged.¹

• *Scientific American* rescinded its offer to Forrest Mims to write a regular column for the journal because of his Christian views on creation.²

• Robert Vernon, Los Angeles' former assistant chief of police, was subject to an intensive police commission investigation because of his Christian beliefs. He was essentially hounded out of office by the commission and the *Los Angeles Times*, although no charges against him were ever substantiated.³

• Two newspaper reporters were fired by the *Fairfield (Iowa) Ledger* in 1990 simply because of their involvement in the local pro-life group.⁴

• Dr. Dean Kenyon has taught Biology 101 at San Francisco State University since 1977. He was told in June by the biology department that he is no longer capable of teaching the course. The problem: He believes that God had a role in creation.⁵

• Thomas and Linda Mintonye, owners of a small advertising company, have been sued by homosexual activists because they refused to put a gay message on their billboard.⁶

• Paul and Ronald Desilets, devout Roman Catholics, were taken to court by the state of Massachusetts for refusing to rent an apartment to an unmarried couple. The Desilets were eventually acquitted after an expensive two-year legal battle.⁷

• Home schooler Peggi Williams of Hale, Mich., was arrested in March for teaching her children at home. A truant officer for the local school district filed a petition with the county probate court to gain control of her kids. The charges were later dropped, but only after the Rutherford Institute intervened.⁸

Yes, there are plenty of examples of bad news from the cultural war. The good news is that we *are* making headway in many arenas:

• You may have heard that the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that a public school district in Long Island was wrong in refusing to rent a school auditorium to a local church, Lamb's Chapel, for a church function. Attorney Jay Sekulow took the case to the high court and won a unanimous decision. This ruling will assure Christians equal access to public property and prevent an important form of discrimination against them.⁹

• The Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation has produced a series of absolutely wonderful pro-life television ads using the theme "Life: What a Beautiful Choice" and placed them on CNN and many local TV stations. (The four major networks refused to air them, despite their tasteful and appealing presentation.) Actual polling data reveal 11 percent of the people watching four of the messages changed their minds from pro-abortion to pro-life. This, in a gentle way, exemplifies the biblical obligation to engage the culture—without being assimilated by it.¹⁰

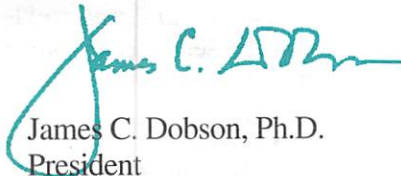
• Focus on the Family continues to support numerous campaigns of its own. For example, we've had phenomenal success with our advertisement entitled "In Defense of a Little Virginity." This full-page statement has appeared in 1,038 newspapers in the United States and 114 in Canada. More than 126 more are pending. The combined circulation of these publications exceeds 40 million households, and there are more to come.

• On that same topic, 15,000 public schools have now shown our video "Sex, Lies and . . . the Truth." Many school teachers and administrators support it strongly, and parents are equally enthusiastic. More

importantly, young people are beginning to understand that they have been tragically misled. "Safe sex" is not safe at all. Abstinence is the only real protection from the ravages of disease and unwanted pregnancy.

Let me conclude with this further word of encouragement: To those who are depressed about the recent setbacks pro-family supporters have suffered in Congress and in the state houses of government, I have wonderful news for you. It comes to us from the Savior, Who said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). Tuck that Scripture away in a safe place and quote it every time the situation seems hopeless. We're going to be all right. It's the gates of hell that are in for hard times.

Sincerely,



James C. Dobson, Ph.D.
President

P.S. I've enclosed an updated edition of the "In Defense of a Little Virginity" advertisement I mentioned above. New medical findings are included validating its message that condoms will never solve the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. These facts are unassailable, and they should be read in your local community. Contact Focus on the Family if you'd like a reproduction for use in your hometown newspaper. I would also appreciate you sending a contribution to the ministry, if that is possible. Our resources are particularly thin here at the end of summer.

God's blessings to you.

Endnotes

1. Personal contact with Craig Parton, attorney for the accused, July 23, 1993.
2. "Unbelievers Unwelcome in the Science Lab," Phillip E. Johnson, the *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1990, p. 7.
3. "Inquiry Clears Vernon of Religious Favoritism on Job," Richard A. Serrano, the *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1991, p. B1.
4. *National & International Religion Report*, Vol. 6, No. 10, May 4, 1992, p. 6.
5. *Academic Freedom Committee Report*, June 3, 1993, San Francisco State University.
6. American Family Association Law Center press release, February 8, 1993.
7. "Lots and Blocks," Matt Carroll and Jerry Ackerman, *The Boston Globe*, March 7, 1993.
8. The Rutherford Institute press release, June 9, 1993.
9. "Center Uses Free Speech to Defend Religious Rights," Nancy E. Roman, *The Washington Times*, July 18, 1993, p. A1.
10. The Wirthlin Group opinion researchers.

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