

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE CORNER

Lita Cosner chats with Randy

Alcorn, writer and founder

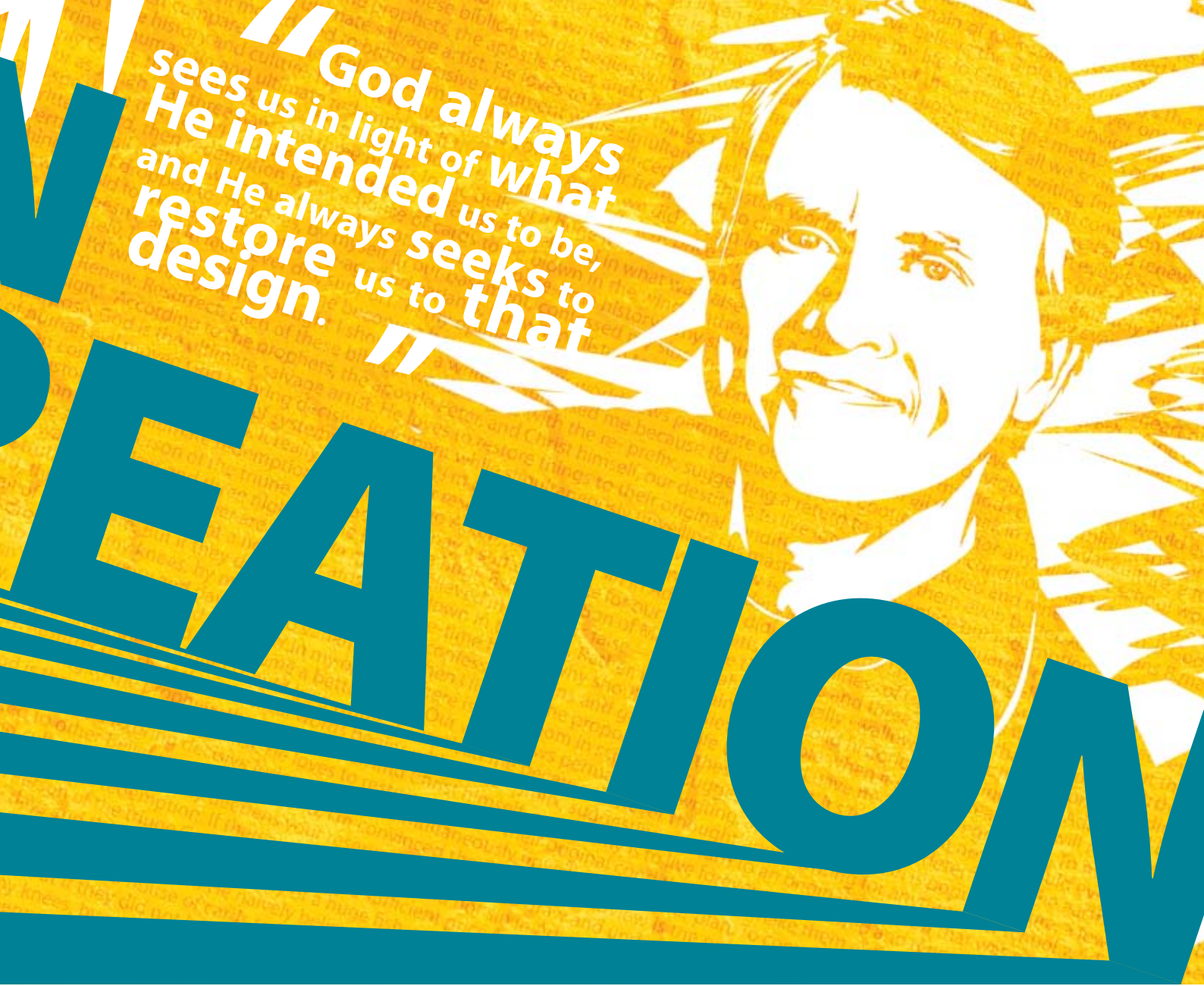
of *Eternal Perspective*

Ministries (www.epm.org)

RANDY ALCORN is a prolific modern Christian writer, the author of over 40 books. He is a former pastor, with a B.A. in Theology from Multnomah Bible College, an M.A. in Biblical Studies and an honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Western Seminary. He and his wife, Nanci, have two daughters and five grandsons.

Randy Alcorn grew up without Christ. In high school, he began going to church because of a girl (who, years later, became his wife). There, he heard the Gospel for the first time and soon began reading the Bible regularly. “Though I started by reading it as if it were fiction, I came to realize it had the ring of truth. One day in August, 1969, I realized I believed what it said about Jesus and everything else. I dropped to my knees, by myself in our basement, confessed my sins and gave my life to Christ. I have never once regretted it.”

One month after he was saved, he started studying evolution in his first biology class and noticed the disconnect with Scripture: “To me it seemed difficult to find positions in Genesis 1 other than



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CREATION

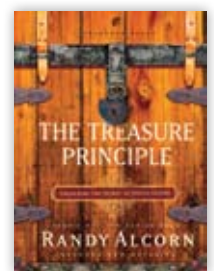
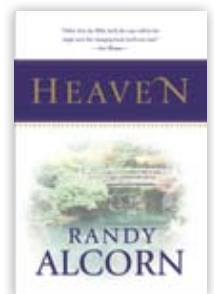
the literal 24-hour days position without importing them.” He seriously entertained the gap theory for a while, but eventually became a biblical creationist because “the straightforward reading of the text seemed to me to say it’s a young earth.”

He also realizes that many dedicated evangelicals have differing views. “I have friends who hold to the gap theory and day-age and variants, but when I listen to the proponents of these theories, it’s obvious that no one would ever have come up with such interpretations except to solve a perceived problem. And how many times has a problem of one era of history disappeared only to leave believers with a strange biblical interpretation the text doesn’t, and in fact never did, support? In my opinion, there is more room in science to suggest that the methods of determining the earth’s age may be faulty than there is room in Genesis for millions or billions of years.”

Writing ministry

Randy’s writing stems from a lifelong love of reading, beginning when he was a child with comic books, science fiction short stories, novels, and Greek mythology. “I loved having my imagination stretched, and instead of confusing me about reality, I think it helped me see reality in deeper ways. Ultimately, loving to read helped me become a better writer. Our worldviews permeate our writing, and if all we soak in is popular culture, a few hours a week at church won’t be sufficient to give us depth and durability. We need to read great books by great Christian thinkers.”

But it was a word of encouragement from a professor that made him begin to consider writing as a vocation. “When I was in Bible college, one of my professors jotted a note on a theology paper I’d written, saying he thought I should be a writer.



It surprised me because I'd never thought about writing for anything but school work. But I never forgot that comment."

Heaven: creation restored

One of Randy's best-known books is *Heaven*, perhaps the most comprehensive resource on the subject. A key point he brings out is the *physical reality* of the New Heavens and the new Earth to come, a restored creation.

"God has never given up on his original creation. Yet somehow we've managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear. *Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Resurrect.* Each of these biblical words begins with the *re-* prefix, suggesting a return to an original condition that was ruined or lost. God always sees us in light of what He intended us to be, and He always seeks to *restore us* to that design. Likewise, He sees the earth in terms of what he intended it to be, and he seeks to restore it to its original design."

Randy argues that, "According to the prophets, the apostle Peter, and Christ himself, our destiny is to live forever on a restored and renewed Earth. If God had wanted to consign us to Hell and start over, He could have. But He didn't. Instead, He chose to redeem what He started with—the heavens, Earth, and mankind—to bring them back, in a sense, to His original purpose. God is the ultimate salvage artist. He loves to restore things to their original condition—and make them even better. As Romans 8 makes clear, that includes not only human beings, but the entire creation."

From this viewpoint, the biblical doctrine of Heaven depends on Genesis being historical. Regardless of how one understands the Edenic restoration themes in Revelation, they make no sense and give no practical comfort to Christians unless there was an actual Eden.

The only answer to the problem of evil

One of Randy's latest books, *If God is Good*, tackles the problem of evil. If God is all-powerful and all-good, how can the world be full of death, disease, and so many forms of suffering? "The problem of evil lies at the very heart of the biblical account and serves as the crux of the unfolding drama of redemption. The first act of human evil moved God to bring decisive judgment while simultaneously unveiling His master plan. To complete our redemption—as well as that of the entire fallen creation—He sets in motion His strategy of Jesus' incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, and ultimate return. The Christian worldview concerning this central problem is utterly



Randy with 4 of his grandsons

unique when compared to other belief systems. In the end, I'm convinced the Christian worldview is the only one that adequately deals with evil and suffering. It cannot be properly understood without accepting Creation, the Fall, and Redemption as real history."

If Jesus was wrong, He wasn't God

Randy emphasizes that it's impossible to divorce the Bible's history from its theology, because the latter draws on the basis of the former. "When I used to teach college-level hermeneutics and Bible study methods, I always emphasized Bible history and culture. I think it really deepens your reservoir from which to draw and understand Scripture."

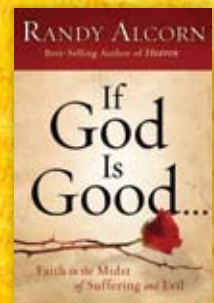
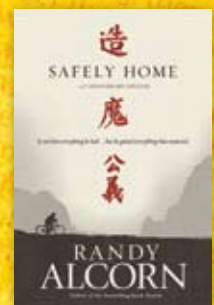
And Genesis is clearly part of that history:

"I know evangelicals, including some bestselling authors, who believe that there really wasn't, in any literal sense, an Adam and Eve. But without the biblical doctrine of creation, there is not only no objective biblical authority, there is no doctrine of human sin and ultimate redemption. If there was no Adam, we did not sin in Adam, and did not need the last Adam, Christ, to come to redeem us. (If the first Adam was a figure of speech, was the last Adam, Christ, also a figure of speech?)

"If Paul was wrong, then so much for biblical inspiration. If Jesus was wrong, then so much for our salvation. Only Christ, the second Person of the triune Godhead, could pay a sufficient price for our sins to satisfy the holiness of God. If Jesus was wrong about there being a real Adam and Eve, then He was not God."

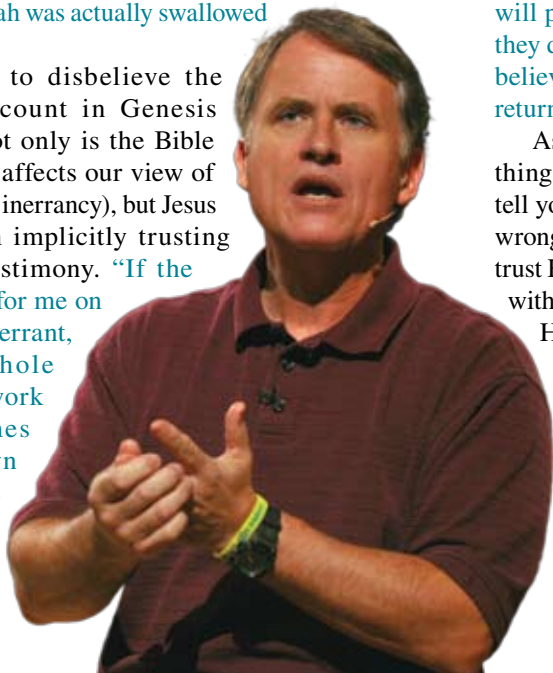
This historical perspective applies even to points that may seem minor at first glance:

"When I hear Christians say that Jonah really wasn't swallowed by a fish, because that's just impossible, I consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:40: 'For as Jonah was three days and three



nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' So I guess if it wasn't true about Jonah, we don't need to believe in Christ's literal death, burial, and resurrection either, right? And more to the point, why should we believe Christ's claim to be the truth and speak the truth and 'I and the Father are one' if He naively believed in what was false—that Jonah was actually swallowed by a fish?"

Likewise, to disbelieve the historical account in Genesis means that not only is the Bible wrong (which affects our view of inspiration and inerrancy), but Jesus was wrong in implicitly trusting Scripture's testimony. "If the one who died for me on the cross was errant, then the whole redemptive work of God comes tumbling down like a house of cards. But if Jesus was the infallible



living Word, affirming the infallible and authoritative written Word, then redemption is *not* a house of cards to be blown in the wind. Rather, it is a chain of rock-solid historical truths involving Adam and Eve, a garden, a flood, Abraham, David, Christ, a crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The future return of Christ and His establishing a new heavens and a new earth will prove as real and certain as all of these were. But if they did not happen in space-time history, why should we believe the Bible when it says the real Jesus will really return and set up a real kingdom?"

As Jesus said in John 3:12, "If I have told you of earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" In other words, if Jesus was wrong about things that we can see and test, how can we trust Him about things like how to be in a right relationship with God, which requires faith in the trustworthiness of His testimony? For Randy Alcorn, we can be sure of what Jesus tells us about how to have a right relationship with God because His testimony about the past is accurate. ■

LITA COSNER

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