



PARENTING

IN THE NAME OF

God

NO GREATER JOY MINISTRIES AND THE BIBLE

DAVID J. DYCK & C.L. DYCK

PARENTING IN THE NAME OF GOD:

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By David J. Dyck and C.L. Dyck

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless specifically indicated otherwise.

Getting the Most From This Review

Summarized materials are cited with footnotes, and we encourage readers to look them up and to read this review’s information in conjunction with NGJ’s materials in order to evaluate the issues addressed for themselves.

The Pearls make large portions of their material freely available on their website, NoGreaterJoy.org.

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PREFACE

Who We Are

We are Christian homeschooling parents of four children, mid-teens down to late elementary, at the time of writing. David's background is Canadian Mennonite. Cathi-Lyn was saved at the age of 18, having grown up with an atheist/agnostic perspective.

We had heard of No Greater Joy Ministries only once before 2010; several years before then, a friend lent us two issues of the magazine. That was around the time our youngest was born. When online homeschoolers began debating over the Lydia Schatz biblical chastisement death case, we felt it important to do our own research and come to our own understanding of what was being discussed.

This review was written as a result of that research, initially as a series of blog posts at ScitaScienda.com. The e-book edition was expanded for clearer explanations, greater detail and additional support materials. It has been reviewed by an eight-member spiritual advisory team and professionally edited. We have chosen to include terms and definitions at the beginning of chapters as necessary, and in expanded form as an appendix, because the level of discussion in the homeschooling community varies widely. It's our desire that interested parents be equipped to access all information they may wish to, and to respond at all levels without feeling intimidated by the language used by others.

Because this is an e-book, intended to be accessed via the internet, we've taken the approach of using online articles as the preferred footnote resource. Many of these parallel the No Greater Joy books. We attempt to note where online and print texts differ, but the web is subject to change, as are various print editions. We recommend that you check sources for yourself.

Our primary calling has been raising our children together in the Lord. Here's a bit about our secondary activities.

David J. Dyck is a founder and board member of Westman Bible Conference, an annual day of presentations held in Manitoba, Canada to provide rural churches with support, scriptural exhortation, and information on defending the faith "yet with gentleness and reverence." Conference audio and information can be found online at WestmanBibleConference.ca.

Cathi-Lyn Dyck is a freelance writer/editor whose articles have been published in *Homeschooling Today*, *The Old Schoolhouse*, and the Canadian magazine *Homeschool Horizons*. She writes a bi-monthly women's column on marriage for PositivelyFeminine.org, a non-profit web ministry to Christian women.

I.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter we set the ground rules for how we'll discuss this topic. We talk about types of discussion that interfere with biblical discernment. We explain why it's not necessary to put the lives of practitioners of various methods under a magnifying glass in order to determine whether a Christian method is true or false. Finally, we talk about the difficulty involved in knowing where spheres of authority and group responsibility begin and end. How should we react to controversy, and what should we expect of others?

Terms and Definitions:

Ad hominem, appeal to emotion, genetic fallacy

Types of false reasoning which are both logically false and counter to biblical discernment. See Appendix B: Glossary.

Anecdotal evidence

Evidence based on eyewitness account or personal stories.

Edification

Building up; an archaic term that remains in Christian language and refers to building each other up in spiritual wisdom.

Theology

Human system of explaining the knowledge of God.

Before we get into any analysis of the theology expressed by No Greater Joy Ministries (hereafter called NGJ), some groundwork is needed.

The intention is not to examine the life of Michael and Debi Pearl, or the lives of those who use their material. If the material of NGJ stands, it must stand on its own merits, regardless of the imperfections of its creators or users. If it fails, it also fails on its own merit, without regard to the lives lived by those who use it. It cannot be condemned, nor can it be rescued, by genetic fallacy, ad hominem, or appeal to emotion: Biblical truth is the only source by which to measure its accuracy. So, while this is a very emotional issue, it requires a careful, reasoned look.

Whether or not the Pearls are nice people or cold-hearted spankers, and whether or not the families of Sean Paddock and Lydia Schatz¹ were nice people, or angry spankers, misled or self-deceived, or anything else, is not in view here.

The biblical value of instructional materials for marriage and parenting can't be determined by how individuals use the materials, whether they do so for extreme benefit or extreme harm. Many other factors contribute to people's behaviour, such as other teachings, community and relational input, and (mis)understanding of how to filter out non-constructive information or reject inaccurate doctrine.

The continued compilation of anecdotal evidence does help to establish related factors and trends, and their interplay with one another. We certainly encourage this in balance.

But our key responsibility is to examine our own lives, what we bring into them, and what we share with others as a result. Our focus is to look at core teachings and examine their faithfulness to

Scripture, which we believe to be the full, verbally inspired word of God in the original manuscripts, transmitted to us with full and verifiable reliability despite time and translation.

In answering questions for oneself, we would strongly suggest that the place to start is biblical theology, and commonsense defined thereby, rather than personalities and anecdotes. This does not in any way negate anecdotal evidence. The concern is to first establish some means of understanding and interpreting the various positions put forward.

SCOPE OF THE QUESTION AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

We will look at the theology of the TTUAC book itself, and review articles and audio from the website and the NGJ print compilations for context and balance. We will not be forming conclusions, either in agreement or disagreement with NGJ, on any parenting philosophy which is found to lack clear biblical mandate. Also, the scope of this writing will not include political or legal considerations not directly related to the examination of NGJ's theology.

Our intended audience may be information-seekers of any beliefs or background, but we're writing primarily for the use of those who are considering the following:

- Is it wise and worthwhile to voice support or criticism for a particular position or ministry on this issue?
- Should I use or discontinue using the materials of NGJ?
- What is the controversy all about?
- Should I ask my homeschooling organization to take a position on NGJ and its materials?

The Christian homeschooling community has its supporters and detractors of NGJ. Emotions and peer influence can make it difficult to ask and answer questions (yes, we adults have these struggles too). We hope to be of some small service to those seeking further information within the Christian community. As such, our main address is to those of conservative Christian beliefs, and we'll be using language and cultural references which are familiar to that group.

ADDRESSING BLURRED LINES OF AUTHORITY

In the Christian culture, and particularly in the homeschooling subculture, it's sometimes very difficult to draw a line between personal life and ministry life. We recognize that, for some, there is no felt distinction between doctrinal examination and personal examination. This can be a point for those involved in pastoring or other formal public work; those operating a home-based business to the Christian market; or those for whom homemaking is a form of interpersonal/community ministry.

Those in such circumstances often share their lives fully and sacrificially with their circles, the personal and social blending seamlessly with more formal ministry. For homeschoolers, children may go almost everywhere with their parents, and are directly involved in public contact relating to ministry or business. Likewise, the ministry group or the customer base often has direct contact with the home. [Deut. 6:5-7](#), which have been popularly co-opted as "the homeschooling verses," are often referenced to express a pragmatic non-distinction between the teaching of doctrine and personal Christian living. However, this does not change the distinction between the God-breathed and the human-inspired ([2](#)

[Tim. 3:16-17](#)), and that's where Christians must focus.

The Word of our Lord stands forever. Here, in God's Word, we can begin a walk together in fruitful, edifying discussion, hopefully for the benefit of everyone concerned as well as that of our children.

DEFINING COMMUNITY AND ITS ROLE

In this case in particular, the idea of community is shifting and vague. Michael Pearl does pastor a church. It constitutes one form of community unit. The Pearls' materials and influence are reasonably widespread throughout conservative Christian homeschooling circles, which may include churches, local homeschool groups, online networks, or loose associations of people across large geographical distances via internet friendships.

The Pearls also teach on marriage and Christian living. As we begin to review their material, some vibrant discussions are already ensuing within our marriage itself. Dave's childhood background is conservative Christian; Cat's original background is atheist-feminist. While we've built our own personal life in Christ, and our own convictions about the details of living it, we still tend to filter information in different ways, with different emphases or assumed implications. Going by the philosophy that the home is the basic social unit, many marriages and families like ours are involved in this discussion as microcosms of community.

For many who do not have direct association with the Pearls, this issue will be one of deciding whether or not to own, retain, or share their materials; whether to include their material and those similar to it on recommended resource lists, in libraries, or perhaps on book fair tables for those who participate in conferences. Each group and set of relationships must and should act independently, within its own context and convictions, with Scriptural consideration, prayer and sincerity of heart before God.

We will likewise attempt to do that for ourselves, and God willing, for the information and edification of others along the way. We welcome discussion, questions, clarifications and corrections. At the same time, we realize that our work may be appealing to no one in the end. We can only offer to do our imperfect best, and ask for assistance in our attempt, in the desire that we—and you with us—might express devotion to Jesus Christ, and love for the fellowship of sinners who are redeemed in Him.

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1. Both children died as a result of their parents' corporal chastisement methods. Sean Paddock was killed in 2006; Lydia Schatz in 2010. See Appendix for further information.

NOTES

There are many book reviews and many opinions available on the Pearls' book, *To Train Up a Child*; however, our recommendation is for people to read the book for themselves and form their own conclusions.

An older full text is apparently available online:

http://www.achristianhome.org/to_train_up_a_child.htm (Accessed April 24, 2011)

It appears to correspond to many of the quotes being used in reviews around the web. It is useful for overview purposes; some content is slightly different from the 2008 print edition, which contains updates that are, in some cases, apparently based on articles written in the interim between editions. Some of the 2008 wording is clarified, some expanded or reduced,

some rendered into more generic terminology than the older edition. The changes do not affect the overall context or argumentation of the book.

II.

ADDRESSING PARENTING TECHNIQUES

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, we look at the limitations of discussing Christian parenting using a human focus. We talk about why doctrine is foundational to understanding individual behaviour.

WHY WE DON'T INCLUDE PARENTING TECHNIQUES

First, online discussion of parenting techniques often fails to take into consideration the international dynamics. Here in Canada, the law states as of this writing that it is illegal to spank a child under the age of 2 or over the age of 12, and it is considered abuse to use an implement other than the hand or to spank hard enough to leave a mark.¹ In our country, the Pearls' material advocates illegal behaviour which may tend to endanger families. In the United States, it's increasingly being determined that religious values are no shelter for abusive treatment (a definition which may vary by local jurisdiction),² negating any defensive weight to NGJ's *In Defense of Biblical Chastisement* articles³ which claim to present a religious justification to naysayers of the *To Train Up a Child* (hereafter called TTUAC) method. It is important that parents understand their religious values do not protect their child-raising method from legal consequences.

Even more importantly, we do not believe in analyzing this topic solely based on outward actions and consequences. There are a variety of opinions across the spectrum on spanking, breastfeeding, rewards and consequences, and the relationship of men and women within the marriage. Every behaviour (the things we do) is a tool for seeking an outcome (we can reasonably expect results from our actions). On a range of events, you might look at it something like this:

VALUES FORMATION — BELIEF — INTENTION — ACTION — OUTCOME

Where only the last three components are considered, the core of the issue is never really addressed. We can argue back and forth all day about intentions, actions and outcomes, but without understanding how people's values are influenced, and how their foundational beliefs are structured, we'll accomplish little in terms of sharing knowledge and growth.

GOOD PARENTS, BAD METHODS AND OTHER CONTENTIONS

Here, we use the word “good” in an everyday sense, of course, not a theological one—that would be a whole other can of worms. For the purposes here, it just means parents who are a benefit to their children. However, notice already that we can’t even begin to measure the idea of beneficial parenting without encountering debate, because it’s a values-based term. The instant reflex is to go straight to arguing about what actions benefit children, to debating the value of intentions, and to dissecting a surface layer of professed or assumed beliefs.

How can some parents derive good out of a method that has bad traits? How can bad parents exist in a milieu of what we’d call “good” parenting philosophy? Both happen. We’ve all seen it.

While the core of parenting revolves around intentions, the associated actions and outcomes are based not on those intentions, but on the underlying beliefs. In order to understand how the actions of individuals within a basic category could have hugely variant outcomes, we have to take a good look at the intent behind the action.

The pattern is illustrated in a negative context in the book of James:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. — James 1:12-16

In being carried away, we see a shift of values. This is about Christians, people who have a commitment to God and knowledge of His Word. But James has already warned about a lack of strong-mindedness. While that kind of personality often gets reviled for being unsubmitive, troublemaking, divisive or uncharitable, being easily led in our human relationships is not actually a good Christian trait. It reveals a lack of faith, a preponderance of doubt. It’s a symptom of vacuum in the area where beliefs are meant to reside. As a result, the values are constantly being formed and reformed, and the troubled soul is like one tossed in the waves of the sea.

So, blessed is a person who sticks it out when their personal values are put under heavy pressure, *provided those values are grounded in the character of God and loving relationship with Him.*

And then, an interesting thing: James warns specifically about making martyrs of ourselves for the cause of Christ. Yes, there’s the more blatant blaming of God for bad things. But there’s also the less blatant version of blaming God, where God is “testing” us, and it’s up to our righteousness and spiritual fibre to pull us through. Considering how much James has to say about pride and surface goodness, we lean in favour of that less-obvious interpretation of his warning.

No created goodness is exempt from the problem of potential slide into unrighteous self-reliance, *because only God can successfully rely upon His own goodness.* A subtle ingress of spiritual pride is the key factor in the fall of Lucifer from heaven, if we read the metaphorical story of Isaiah 14 as illustrative of that angelic event. But regardless of how one reads it, one can see the influence of pride in Isaiah’s story because it’s everywhere in the human story too: “*I will be as good as God.*”

EXERCISING BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT

So subtly do the values reform, and so subtly does the foundation of belief shift. When lust for goodness—a deceptive, false kind of goodness—has conceived, it brings forth sin. And when sin is accomplished, even if it wears a garment of light, it brings forth death.

Evaluating one another's actions and intentions—without deeper consideration of beliefs and values—is a slippery slope which leads to this very thing. Instead, we absolutely must ask questions about the underlying beliefs and their relationship to God's Word. We must take a look at how the values of a system of beliefs are formed. In what direction and by what forces are the beliefs reshaped by the teachings proffered? Is it in the direction of open and free relationship to God, freedom of conscience and conviction? Or are the values being shifted in the direction of placing one's trust in the teachings or the teacher? Or even simply in oneself?

Discernment is the ability to recognize distinct ideas. Biblical discernment refers to “rightly dividing the word of truth” ([2 Tim. 3:16](#)), but also to exercising obedience to the command of God to “be wise as serpents, innocent as doves.” The reason? Because Christ sends His servants forth “as sheep in the midst of wolves.” ([Matt. 10:16](#))

The verse-numbering divisions of the English-language Scripture are not canon, but they do have an interesting quirk. Counted front to back and halved, this turns out to be at the center of them all:

It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to trust in man.

—Ps. 118:8

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1. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/researchpublications/prb0510-e.htm> See Section A in particular for an explanation of the reasoning used in determining the bounds of Canadian law. (Accessed May 16, 2011)
 2. See the National Training Center for Child Protection website: *When a Child Abuser Has a Bible: Investigating Child Abuse Sanctioned or Condoned by a Religious Leader*. <http://ncptc.nonprofitoffice.com/vertical/Sites/%7B8634A6E1-FAD2-4381-9C0D-5DC7E93C9410%7D/uploads/%7B6F94085B-08C3-4A60-B213-6CAE504841C9%7D.PDF> (Accessed May 16, 2011)
 3. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/may/01/in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-1/> and <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/may/01/in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-2/> (Accessed May 16, 2011)

III.

EXAMINING THE DOCTRINE OF NO GREATER JOY MINISTRIES

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, we give a first impression of encountering the NGJ faith statement. We summarize a back-and-forth between husband and wife as new teachings are encountered and examined. We seek to illustrate using discernment to dissect jargon, because jargon often obscures meaning. What traits of thinking should Christians watch for in discerning doctrine? How does a person sift the language involved?

Terms and Definitions

<i>Atonement</i>	The reconciliation of God and humankind through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ; reparation for an offense or injury.
<i>Condemnatory</i>	Adjective form describing condemnation.
<i>Dichotomy</i>	A division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.
<i>Eisegesis</i>	Reading outside meaning into a text; creating a personal interpretation which relies on information or assumptions not arising from the text being interpreted.
<i>Hermeneutics</i>	The study of correct biblical interpretation.
<i>Hypothetical</i>	A guess or conjecture, often based on small amounts of observation but lacking a wider, proven body of evidence.
<i>Moral culpability</i>	Being held guilty before God for moral reasons.
<i>Proof-texts</i>	Portions of a text quoted in isolation from their original context, so that their wording supports the quoter's point whether or not it was the original intention and meaning of the text.
<i>Salvation</i>	Deliverance from the power and effects of sin; alternately, can mean liberation from ignorance or illusion, preservation from destruction or failure, or deliverance from danger or difficulty.
<i>Substitutionary</i>	Describes the act, process, or result of substituting one thing for another.

The faith statement¹ on the NGJ website opens with the declaration, “In these days and times, it is important that you know what a ministry believes.”

We heartily agree.

THE NGJ FAITH STATEMENT

Two points in particular leap out from a first glance at the Pearls’ faith statement: the doctrine of man, and certain specifics of the doctrine of salvation. There is also some suggestion that the Pearls’ first point, their stance on the inspired value of the King James Version, may affect their understanding of child-training passages.²

Our purpose here is to advocate careful thought and freedom of personal conviction. While recognizing there is always worldview conflict in social ethics, politics and legislation on this topic, we remind the reader that our focus is on critical thinking regarding theology and hermeneutics.

We advise those who read NGJ’s doctrinal statement to also read the Scripture references listed as supporting passages, particularly where the Gospel is concerned. This is a key practice in discerning the meaning and interpretation of any ministry’s theology.

The points we’ll look at here are not totally foreign to conservative Christians (many are young-earth creationists, many believe in an age of moral accountability, and many cherish the belief that infants who die will go directly to heaven without condemnatory moral culpability). For those who hold such convictions, the insertion of modified theology may not immediately stand out.

We’ll open with Cat’s concerns, followed by Dave’s doctrinal analysis. As women often tend to be the ones who read and absorb homeschooling and child-training materials before their husbands do, we include the following exhortation.

Cat: Does the Bible specifically instruct women to be discerning?

Dave: If it speaks to them about salvation, it speaks to them about discernment. In the Bible, discernment is not gender-specific. Also, the Proverbs woman is not just an active woman, she’s a thinking woman.

Cat: I see that she knows how to do good and not evil throughout the full span of her marriage ([Prov. 31:12](#)). That’s *highly* discerning, actually.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

We’ll begin with some thoughts from the NGJ faith statement on the doctrine of humankind, as conveyed by Michael Pearl. Points of interest to us are in bold text. On the doctrine of man, the faith statement says,

We believe that man was created in the span of a twenty-four hour period. He was created perfect physically and constitutionally, including the moral and spiritual essence. Man, though complete and entire, wanting nothing, was, in his innocence, **without character**.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil, **a moral testing ground, was, in the wisdom of God, the perfect opportunity for spiritual development.** The natural constitution of man (desire for food, etc.) became the basis for temptation.

Because there's no Scripture from which this assertion can be drawn, it's impossible to say what it means in biblical terms to claim that sinless humans existed "without character," or what precisely they lacked in "spiritual development." However, *To Train Up a Child* makes the following claim:

When God wanted to "train" his first two children not to touch, He did not place the forbidden object out of their reach. Instead, He placed the "*tree of knowledge of good and evil*" in the "*midst of the garden*" ([Gen. 3:3](#)). Since it was readily accessible in the middle of the garden, they would be exposed to its temptation more often. God's purpose was not to save the tree, but rather, to train the couple.

Note that the name of the tree was not just "knowledge of evil," but, "*knowledge of good and evil*." By exercising their wills not to eat, they would have learned the meaning of "good" as well as "evil." Eating the tree's fruit was not the only way in which they could come to knowledge of good and evil, but it was a forbidden shortcut. [*all emphases in original*]³

CAT: CONCERNS

I note that the plain purpose of the origins account—to give an account of origins—has been co-opted into an unsupported hypothetical about God's purposes, His thoughts, and His "training" in an ideal world. There is a subtle false dichotomy created here: the idea that, in choosing to disobey, Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of evil; whereas, in choosing to obey, they would have learned the knowledge of good. However, from the greater context of Scripture, the knowledge of good is not founded on our perfect obedience, nor the exercise of our will to good, but in the character of God.⁴

The explanation is attractive because it inserts a sense of reasoning into the passage regarding the tree's name. However, in this very passage, we see the same sort of eisegesis⁵ committed by a character defined in Scripture as the epitome of anti-God.

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." — Gen. 3:5

This, too, makes unsupportable claims about what God is thinking and what His motivations are. In order to be true to my profession of being a Bible-believing mother, I cannot accept eisegesis as foundational grounds for a system of child-rearing. It is not doctrine—it is personal speculation about hypothetical doctrine. [2 Pet. 1:20](#) gives the Bible's take on that: no Scripture is of any private interpretation.

Almost immediately upon encountering this ministry, I am prompted by its handling of Scripture to exercise caution when it claims theology as a basis for the resources it provides. What I must next determine is whether the ministry's theology forms the basis of the parenting materials.

DAVE: DOCTRINE

The fact that Adam could commune with God ([Gen. 2:15ff.](#)) meant that he *had* moral character. God says that He made man in His own image ([Gen. 1:26](#)). God would have been lying to make that statement if He created them “without character.” God Himself, in His own image, has moral character.

Moral testing ground? How much more developed, spiritually, can you be than being “without sin”? That is our ultimate goal as believers, to be sinless in the presence of God ([Rom. 8:29](#), [1 John 3:2](#)).

The natural constitution of man as the basis for temptation? Pearl is blending two states. The natural constitution of man today is sinful ([James 1:13-15](#)), but that's not the basis for Adam's temptation. Adam was in a sinless state, as Christ (“the last Adam,” [Rom. 5:14](#), [1 Cor. 15:45](#)) was when He was tempted. We, on the other hand, are not born in a state of sinless perfection or moral neutrality. “In sin my mother conceived me” ([Ps. 51:5](#)).

So we have to ask: if the natural constitution is the basis of temptation, and if Adam was created in the image of God, how does that correlate to Christ's temptation? ([Matt. 4](#)) Was the temptation of the Son of God based on His natural constitution? Was His triumph over temptation due to His mastery of his constitution—His hunger, His physical human drives?

No. The basis for temptation in both cases was Satan's lies. And the victory of Christ came through applying the truth of the Word of God.

CAT: FURTHER CONCERNS

In TTUAC, Mr. Pearl also states, “By your enforcement, your children are learning about moral government, duty, responsibility and, in the event of failure, accountability, rewards and punishment.”⁶

For those versed in the history of American theology, this creates a problem of indistinct definitions. Moral government had a different meaning two hundred years ago than it has had since the mid-twentieth century. While those who have read Jonathan Edwards or John Wesley may take it to mean God's governance of moral beings (as distinguished from His governance of nature), the 20th-century meaning of the term has an eerie alignment to Pearl's description of a “blank slate” state for mankind at creation and at birth.⁷

While Mr. Pearl does not expand here on his intended meaning of the theological phrase “moral government,” his repeated use of the term in connection with his private interpretation of child development gives the appearance that modern moral government theology is a contributor to his ideas.

As the GotQuestions.org doctrine website puts it, “Moral government theology claims that man is born morally neutral and is always capable of choosing whether or not to sin, and his moral character is determined by his choices.”⁸

This is not a standard view of sin, and has deep implications for how we relate to God and to other human beings. What we have here is at best another example of how easily jargon can confuse the underlying meaning, and at worst a jargonized expression of a deeply unbiblical idea.

I find it very telling that, at the conclusion of his doctrinal statement on the nature of man, Pearl states, “Apart from the free gift of God through the substitutionary work of Christ there is no hope of salvation,” and then proceeds to redefine that common Christianese language regarding the cross with the following verses:

Romans 12:3-8 (summarized due to length; click to view in full at BibleGateway.com)	Encourages humble character, discusses the different spiritual actions of Christians.
1 Cor. 12:4-11 (summarized due to length; click to view in full at BibleGateway.com)	Teaches on the diversity of gifts, administrations and operations given to believers by the triune God.
1 Cor. 12:28	“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”
Eph. 4:7-12 (summarized due to length; click to view in full at BibleGateway.com)	As above; also discusses Christ’s descent into the lower parts of the earth and ascent into heaven, leading captivity captive.

Again, Pearl’s chosen jargon words in this situation are: *substitutionary*, *salvation*. This is a bait-and-switch of atonement language normally focussed on Christ with proof-texts focussed on the spiritual actions and character of Christians. We’ll see if this strange repurposing of language is ongoing, as we’ll add greater context by examining further doctrinal themes and claims.

Elsewhere, along with the creation account, Pearl uses teachings on the “age of accountability” to shoehorn his beliefs about morality, sin and salvation into language which may be less alien on the surface. However, age of accountability too is a point that, he acknowledges,⁹ has no clear Scriptural definition, though he seems willing again to commit massive eisegesis, inserting a number of ideas into the passages he references on the topic. Pearl acknowledges that he holds “a singular view” about moral development, yet he is not deterred from presenting it on the authority of years of practice (see NGJ web article *The Salvation of Children*, 2007).¹⁰

Again, as a Bible-believing mother, the fact that an individual holds and practices a conviction for years cannot be my rationale for accepting it. Beliefs must be clearly founded on Scripture, not on eisegesis.

DAVE: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Pearl has a very unusual view of the Garden of Eden, the nature of man, and what God intends us to learn about ourselves and our children from the biblical origins account.

If the moral nature is not what Pearl says it is, then the only thing children are learning from not touching a “no-no” object is not to touch it, or they will be punished. Not even 100% cheeriness, joy and consistency¹¹ changes the fact that physical discipline is being used as a spiritual tool against the lusts of the flesh—which apparently means the physical body and its drives, rather than the sinful nature. In Pearl’s doctrine, those lusts are not spiritual traits as Scripture records in Gal. 5:19-21:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Instead, Pearl claims that natural physical desires lead from a moral blank slate to the development of sinful choices and actions.

Along with that comes the claim that child-training will lead to the ultimate “good choice,” an expression of belief in Christian religion. But which Christ? Which Christianity?

It all depends what is meant by “substitutionary work” and “salvation.” What is being substituted? Christ’s *what* for our *what*? Why does Pearl say substitutionary “work” rather than substitutionary “atonement,” as is the more common terminology? The verses he references place that little word under a magnifying glass, because the verses are all about the works Christians do by God’s power.

Pearl might say he puts the Bible first, and everything should be defined and understood by the Bible. If so, we get something that looks like this:

1. Verses on Christian works define the meaning of the word “work.”
2. “Work” has an adverb attached to it: “substitutionary.”
3. The meaning of “substitutionary” is defined by what the adverb is modifying: “work,” which is defined by the verses Pearl has chosen. The substitution is not the familiar reference point of Christ taking our place in paying the satisfaction of God’s righteous wrath against sin. Rather, Pearl posits/presents spiritual works substituting for works of the flesh.
4. The statement, “Apart from the free gift of God through the substitutionary work of Christ there is no hope of salvation,” would then mean our only hope of salvation is doing spiritual works as gifted by God, rather than the free gift of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross.

Also, Pearl does not say “the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross.” He only says, “the substitutionary work of Christ.” None of the verses referenced speak about the cross. They speak about church order and giftings in the body of believers. That means the expected context has also been

removed from the familiar jargon.

Hopefully this is not actually the line of reasoning involved. If it is not, we would be delighted to see Mr. Pearl correct his doctrinal statement so that the religious jargon doesn't interfere with what he intends to bring forth from the verses he points to.

This brings up another question. What are we being saved from? As we found when compiling the glossary for this chapter, there is more than one definition for "salvation." Even if we say "salvation from sin," we have already seen that Pearl has a different idea of how sin works in people than what most Bible-believing Christians hold to.

What if Michael Pearl is wrong? What if we parents are wrong? We're fallen creatures ourselves. Pearl leaves no allowance for the possibility of being wrong about moral development and child-training, because eternal loss is staked on this question.¹² TTUAC kids are supposed to obey without questioning, even if their perception is that the parent is wrong.¹³ Are children *always* wrong in those perceptions?

If we succeed in teaching those around us of any age that it's wrong to think differently than the person in charge, their reactions will never provide us with accurate feedback about the real impact of our decision-making.¹⁴

What then shall we say to these things? Do we continue unquestioning, that grace may increase?

May it never be. Rather, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, "that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." ([James 1:5](#))

And upbraideth not. God grants wisdom freely and without reproach.

This Scripture is effectual for you, reader.

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/who-is-ngi/what-we-believe/> (Accessed Oct. 31, 2010)
 2. See <http://www.biblechild.com/#book> for further information on *Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me: Christians and the Spanking Controversy* by Israeli biblical scholar Samuel Martin. You may wish to evaluate the contrasting original-language examination of rod-training verses by Mr. Martin, locate other viewpoints along the spectrum, and study through to your own conclusions. We do not intend this to mean that we advocate any particular resource, but to encourage readers to carefully examine the wide variety of available messages and ideas about Christian parenting in light of the Bible.
 3. Michael and Debi Pearl, *To Train Up a Child* (self-published, 2008 edition), 5.
 4. For advanced commentary on God as the source of goodness, please see web articles *Less Real Than We Think, More Real Than We Want* (<http://www.marcschooley.com/blog/?p=546>) and *Thoughts on the Euthyphro Dilemma* (<http://www.marcschooley.com/blog/?p=39>) by theologian Marc Schooley.
 5. See also: *The Garden of Eden* (<http://www.averynearlytea.com/2006/04/garden-of-eden.html>) by Dana Hanley
 6. Pearl and Pearl, *To Train Up a Child*, 5.
 7. <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/crj/crj-jrnl/web/crj0184a.html> (Accessed May 12, 2011)
 8. <http://www.gotquestions.org/moral-government-theology.html>. (Accessed May 12, 2011)
 9. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2007/august/15/the-salvation-of-children/>. (Accessed May 12, 2011)
 10. Ibid.
 11. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2009/december/03/cheerful-authoritative-consistent/>

(Accessed May 12, 2011)

12. In the web article “In Defense of Biblical Chastisement Part 1,” Pearl states, “To give up the use of the rod is to give up our views of human nature, God, eternity, judgment, etc. Most of all, to give up the use of the rod is to abandon our children to a fate that is more cruel than jail—a life of self-will and unruliness.” Further on, a section of the article is titled, “Proper application of the rod is essential to communicating the Christian world-view.” <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/may/01/in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-1/> (Accessed May 12, 2011)
13. Pearl writes, “The first level of child training is to constrain them to obey all direct commands...” He continues, “When I suspected that the child was giving half-hearted obedience, I instinctively went after it as if it were overt rebellion. You must cause the child to let go of all expressions of defiance. Demand that the little one surrender her very body language and every gesture to authority...” (“More Than Obedience?”) <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2005/march/06/more-than-obedience/> Accessed May 12, 2011)
14. For potential consequences of this type of training, see web article *The 49 Character Qualities of Ruth #11*. (<http://nolongerquivering.com/2010/03/13/the-49-character-qualities-of-ruth-11/>) Rather than teaching the knowledge of good and evil, it teaches children to *deny* both their innate conscience and their taught knowledge of good and evil, which can in fact open them to abuse by adults around them, even in a “gated” spiritual community. The unavoidable problem with abusers is that they are highly skilled at manipulating a community’s “gating” rules and abusing trust, including our trust as parents. Something more than rules and obedience to them must prevail.

IV.

CONCERNS ON THE PERSON OF CHRIST

By C.L. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, Cathi-Lyn continues to examine the theological roots of the parenting material she is presented with, and to consider the implications for her life and faith as a mother and woman of God. Her husband pointed out some important questions in the last chapter: *Which Christ? Which Christianity?* Following Dave's lead, she seeks to discern answers by studying NGJ's doctrine of Christ and its relationship to the Pearl child-training concept.

Terms and Definitions

<i>Assumption</i>	In logic, this simply means what ideas we accept, rather than referring to jumping to a conclusion.
<i>Eisegetical</i>	Using eisegesis, or founded on eisegesis.
<i>Premise</i>	In logic, a thing that is assumed to be true (it may or may not actually be true, depending on what previous premises were used to form the assumption under discussion).
<i>Thesis statement</i>	A thesis statement provides a clear summary of the writer's position by making a definite assertion which will then be supported by further discussion. It shows the writer's main emphasis and the method of reasoning used to make the writer's case.

ON AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT IN WORDING

Commonality of Word Choice

Let me note up front that NGJ does use the language of fundamental evangelical-style belief in many cases; the Pearls present Spurgeon, for instance, as a witnessing resource. They often use "Christ alone" in speaking of salvation and the effectiveness of God's Word. That's recognized. But Dave has brought up the point that a deeper layer of premises seems to be at work, affecting the meaning of surface language. This comes out in comparing NGJ's Scripture references to their doctrinal statements, as is the case with any ministry or faith statement.

Commonality of language is useful only when assigned word meanings are in agreement. If, for example, the word "sinful" means something different to me than it does to you, then we may say the same sentences and still totally disagree in foundational beliefs and resultant practices.

Discerning Differences

One way to determine this, as mentioned previously, is to look at the verses associated with each point in the doctrinal statement. When people compose such documents, if they are eisegetical, each doctrinal jargon phrase forms a framework which acts as a lens. The view of associated Scripture verses is through that lens. If the statements and the verses don't seem to say the same thing, or if the verses don't seem to make sense next to the doctrinal statements (particularly when you read the verses in the surrounding context of their chapter and book of the Bible), then reinterpretation is happening.

Christians often don't look at the verses. They also have a reflex whereby, if the verses don't make sense, they ignore them—assume they must not understand, or some such—and read doctrinal claims through their own built-in religious filters, according to the jargonish understanding they're accustomed to, rather than questioning the writer's jargon.

This is how error creeps in. It's a solid antidote to discernment. When things don't line up according to biblical teaching, warning bells should go off, rather than the spiritual reflex going to sleep. Wives and mothers, we have the right and responsibility to trust what our eyes plainly see, rather than assuming we just don't get it.¹

We have looked at NGJ's concept of humankind, and in the process we've uncovered further ideas which seem to be based on unusual premises. I'll now take some time to examine NGJ's ideas about man's relationship to God.

CHRIST'S PERSON

Dave pointed out a serious concern about possible shifted meanings surrounding familiar language of Christ and the atonement. I begin here, with Christ, because the doctrine of Christ's person will define the doctrine of Christ's atonement. The doctrine of Christ's atonement will define the doctrine of man's salvation.

From the NGJ Faith Statement:

We believe Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin and walked this earth in human flesh, is the creator of Heaven and earth, ([John 1:1-3](#)) the eternal God, mutually, voluntarily, eternally, sustaining to God the Father that relationship of a son.²

I look to NGJ's other materials in order to understand more about what this means. As one example, in the web article *Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space*,³ Pearl states,

No human (apart from Jesus) has ever kept the commandments of God and **maintained a character sufficient to merit** him a place in God's presence.

The Son of God came to the earth as a human being and **succeeded where the first Adam failed. By his faithfulness and good works, he became the first man since Adam to live his life in a way that merited favor with God.** So God gave him authority over the human race. He became the legitimate and **legal** representative of the entire race...[*emphases added*]

WHAT DOES THIS WORDING MEAN?

Unfortunately, rather than challenging the strange pattern of reasoning Dave pointed out regarding substitutionary work, this seems to reinforce the idea of works and character as being essential in salvation.

Pearl writes in another web article, *The Salvation of Children*,⁴ that children are born morally neutral, fitting with the modern, unbiblical idea of moral government theology. He states that children are just as Adam and Eve were—a claim that makes no distinction between the pre-fallen state and the current fallen world. However, it can be fitted with Pearl’s claim that Adam and Eve were also not created righteous (i.e. they were meant to learn good).

Pearl goes on to say in the article, on the basis of [Isaiah 7:14-15](#), that “[e]ven Jesus was born thus,” and constructs a doctrine of Jesus’ age of accountability from the prophecy of Israel’s kings’ dethronement in that passage. I find it curious that he claims Jesus, the sinless Son of God, had a human age at which He was held accountable for His knowledge of sin.

Please refer to the article and notice how Scripture has been used eisegetically again. Once more, from the NGJ doctrinal statement on salvation:

When man reaches his state of moral accountability, and, by virtue of his personal transgression, becomes blameworthy, his only hope is a work of grace by God alone. Jesus Christ, in human flesh, lived a life of obedience to God, and by virtue of his humanity and Deity, was accounted a worthy substitute for sinning souls.⁵

While on its own it has the ring of the familiar, there is a greater context developing from Pearl’s overall writings, a complex system of moral weights and balances.

NON-RIGHTEOUS CHRIST?

Let’s back up for a moment. “Even Jesus was born thus”? What does this mean? In TTUAC, Pearl claims,

As the child’s reason and moral faculties develop, he gradually understands his moral responsibility and duty. At some point (as moral perception grows to a point where he can be held fully accountable), every child faces his own “tree of knowledge of good and evil”

(see [Deut. 1:39](#)). So far, everyone (except Jesus) has “eaten” (personally violated his own God-given understanding of right and wrong), resulting in personal condemnation.⁶

As we saw previously, NGJ doctrine divorces “moral character” from sinlessness. Pearl writes in the web article *Insulate Your Children From Within*, “God created Adam and Eve to be righteous, but he did not create them righteous.”⁷

Again I'm compelled to ask: Even Jesus was born thus? Further reading in TTUAC⁷ fits this emerging picture.

It appears that Pearl teaches a modified Christ, a “Jesus” not based on the clear teaching of Scripture regarding God’s person and the nature of the Trinity. Having gained context from reading NGJ’s related materials, I now see these statements in their relationship to one another:

- **“sustaining to God the Father that relationship of a son”**

The keyword I see here is “sustaining,” which appears to be related to Christ’s moral success in NGJ doctrine.

- **“Character cannot be created. It comes out of choice.”⁸**

It appears that the child-training method is linked to an unscriptural view of the importance of choices and works in Christ’s person and life, and in our eternal destiny.

- **“[Christ] maintained a character sufficient to merit...succeeded where the first Adam failed”**

Much emphasis is placed on Christ’s character development and maintenance. Cumulatively, Pearl teaches that Jesus

1. had no innate moral character (was not innately righteous in His incarnation),
2. faced a “day of accountability,” but did not choose as the rest of us do in spite of being born without moral character as the rest of us are,
3. “overcame”⁹ his “tree” moment, and
4. earned the (apparently optional?¹⁰) right as a “good enough man” to go straight to heaven or take up the position of Saviour.

THE OBEDIENT LIFE OF CHRIST

While it’s biblical to affirm that Christ could not have been the Saviour of humanity had He not lived a life of perfect obedience, it is not biblical to lay the grounds of that perfect obedience in anything other than the *inherent* moral righteousness and perfection of Christ’s deity. Nor is it biblical to assert that Christ’s merit arises from obedience, rather than His obedience arising from his merit. The cart is before the horse.

Elsewhere,¹¹ Pearl teaches a distinction between “sinless” as meaning “not able to sin” and the Christian “sinning no more.” However, the word “sin” itself is redefined by the NGJ version of the creation account and Pearl’s teaching on morality and accountability.

Pearl's use of the phrase "moral government" in a theological sense prompted me to question what that term might mean. Some further research brought up the following explanation:

"God came to be viewed as a benevolent Ruler exercising control over moral beings by good and wise laws designed for mutual happiness of Himself and them. Regulation in a moral government is by means of promised blessings for conformity and penalties of suffering for disobedience. While God in compassionate mercy is willing to forgive or relax His just claims against rebellious moral beings upon evidence of a willingness to cease from rebellion and return to happy submission, He cannot wisely do so without some terrible **measure of enlightenment** and suffering by a Being of profound dignity. This must demonstrate before all the dreadful nature and consequences of sin and **provide an eternal moral force against further indulgence and heart-break to Himself as well as to them...**" [emphases added]

-Gordon C. Olson, summarizing the teachings of Grotius on moral government theology¹²

Overall, I find that Pearl's words do not mean what they do in standard conservative evangelical jargon. More importantly, they are not being used the way the Bible uses them.

Pearl closes Chapter 2 of the TTUAC 2008 edition with the words:

Just as the child Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" ([Luke 2:52](#)), so your child is going to experience a growth of understanding. God's grace reaches out, providing the Holy Scriptures which are able to make him "wise unto salvation" ([2 Tim. 3:15](#)). You, the parents, must equip your child to save himself from this "untoward generation" ([Acts 2:40](#)). God already has a prototype of the finished child: It is that he might be "conformed to the image of his Son" ([Rom. 8:29](#)). You must work with God toward the day when your children will be conformed to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" ([Eph. 4:13](#)). The promise of God is still operative: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" ([Prov. 22:6](#)). You can begin the child's "sanctification" long before his salvation. [*emphasis in original*]

This is the key thesis statement for *To Train Up a Child*. It invokes the verse from which the book draws its title and summarizes the message of NGJ's child-training method. For the sake of discernment and edification, I broke this down into NGJ statements and referenced verses. The verses are given within their immediate surrounding scriptural context, alongside the application made by Pearl in the above quote, with analysis where applicable.

BIBLE PASSAGE IN CONTEXT	NGJ APPLICATION
<p>And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.</p> <p>And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.</p> <p>And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?</p> <p>And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.</p> <p>And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:46-52)</p>	<p>Like Jesus, “your child is going to experience a growth of understanding.”</p> <p>Analysis: This interpretation uses a non-standard, unique act of the Son of God—who is a non-standard, unique being—to present a claim about general child development. This is the logical fallacy of appeal to a non-representative sample.¹³</p> <p>Scripture is clear that prior to salvation, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14)</p>
<p>But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.</p> <p>I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Tim. 1:10-4:4)</p>	<p>God’s grace provides the Scriptures which are able to make the child wise unto salvation.</p> <p>(Unclear from the punctuation whether this means the entire Bible or specific Scripture passages.)</p> <p>Analysis: The chapter break after 3:17, of course, is not inspired by God. In the original flow of the text, Paul exhorts Timothy to stay true to Scripture and make the most of his time as a preacher. This context suggests an alternate point besides the Scripture’s power to lead Timothy to salvation through its wisdom: rather, it suggests that if his preaching is biblical, the hearers of Timothy will have access to the wisdom of salvation.</p> <p>If Mr. Pearl views our only hope of being “wise unto salvation” in terms of substitutionary works, rather than substitutionary atonement, then his interpretation fits all too well.</p>

BIBLE PASSAGE IN CONTEXT	NGJ APPLICATION
<p>Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.</p> <p>Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.</p> <p>And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.</p> <p>Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. (Acts 2:36-43)</p>	<p>You, the parents, must equip your child to save himself from this untoward generation.</p> <p>Analysis: It is certainly true that we need to teach our children not to follow the ways of the world which can harm them, break their hearts and destroy their spiritual life. However, in the original context of the passage, Peter is speaking to adults and calling them to trust the death of Christ on the cross as payment for their sins, in contrast to the prevailing perception of Christ's person and work in the society of that time.</p> <p>This passage is not about child-training, and to use it as such is to allegorize the Scripture's plain sense. These verses provide a snapshot of the historical division of thinking between Judaism and Christianity over the person of Jesus.</p>
<p>For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.</p> <p>Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.</p> <p>And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.</p> <p>Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.</p> <p>What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:24-32)</p>	<p>God already has a prototype of the finished child: It is that he might be “conformed to the image of his Son.”</p> <p>Analysis: This passage speaks of the resurrection, not moral character development, as we see by the contextual thread linking “the redemption of our body” and the Son being “the firstborn among many brethren.” It speaks in a transcendent, outside-of-time way about God's completion of our salvation, sanctification and glorification.</p> <p>Mr. Pearl has ripped 8:29 from its context of resurrection and the power of God, sandwiching it between his own two statements that parents must equip children to save themselves, and that parents must work with God to achieve the child's conformity to the fullness of Christ.</p> <p>By contrast, the apostle Paul goes on to assure believers that no trial or personal failing—even death—can prevail over God's love for us. The passage concludes with: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39)</p>

BIBLE PASSAGE IN CONTEXT	NGJ APPLICATION
<p>And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;</p> <p>For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:</p> <p>Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:</p> <p>That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;</p> <p>But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (Eph. 4:11-15)</p>	<p>You must work with God toward your children’s conformity to the fullness of Christ.</p> <p><i>Analysis:</i> Once again, this is not a passage about children. It uses the naivety of children to illustrate a trait that can become a vulnerability, if we fail to mature in our thinking as adults. It is address to groups of adults who are seeking to organize themselves as local bodies of believers, rather than to parents raising children. Pearl’s proof-texting uses allegorization of the Scripture.</p>
<p>A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.</p> <p>The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.</p> <p>A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.</p> <p>By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life.</p> <p>Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.</p> <p>Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.</p> <p>The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.</p> <p>He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.</p> <p>He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.</p> <p>Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.</p> <p>He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend. (Prov. 22:1-11)</p>	<p>By Pearl’s child-training method, you can begin a form of “sanctification” before your child accepts Christ as Saviour. It’s God’s promise that this child-training will keep a child on the desired path throughout life.</p> <p><i>Analysis:</i> Sanctification simply means “setting apart.” Once again, jargon obscures the intended underlying meaning.</p> <p>Proverbs is a very concrete, practical book of wisdom, extremely literal. The Proverbs are literally not promises. Note how the word "promise" is not in the verse, nor is it in any verse surrounding it. “Promise” is Pearl’s word, inserted alongside in the context he’s created for this verse.</p> <p>Scriptural promises are recognizable primarily by two forms:</p> <p>(1) The absolute “I, the Lord, have sworn it”</p> <p>(2) Conditional if-then propositions in the form of if you will obey, then I the Lord will bless. Or, where the absolute or the conditional are implied, a promise may be contextually deduced.</p> <p>There is no implication of that here. Otherwise we would be forced to say that everyone who humbly fears the Lord will necessarily be rich, etc.</p> <p>Prov. 22:6 says nothing about the rod in child-training, nor do its surrounding verses. In order to force those two ideas together, further proof-texting and eisegesis would have to be used.</p>

To recap, in the key paragraph which defines the ideas of TTUAC, Mr. Pearl wrests, allegorizes and commits eisegesis against the holy Word of God by forcing various passages together to support his assertion of the necessity of moral training.

- Pearl claims that Christ was born morally neutral, without a moral character, and had to develop moral character.
- Pearl claims that children are not born sinners, but must be trained to follow Christ's example in order to foster character development before salvation.
- Pearl claims that parents must enforce this development in order to communicate their faith to their children.
- Pearl claims that God promises that the NGJ method of child-training will work.

Mr. Pearl's unbiblical concept of Christ is forced through the lens of his notions of moral character. These notions do not arise from a correct scriptural context of the person and work of Christ, but from Mr. Pearl's eisegesis of Genesis. Mr. Pearl then transfers those false ideas about Christ onto the backs of children, encouraging parents to be the agents who apply his ideas.

As a Christian wife and mother, I'm reminded of the admonition of Scripture that there are those who are:

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
— 2 Tim. 3:5-7

It is clear that Mr. Pearl does not profess the same Christ described in the Bible, and therefore no surprise that his reasoning from his understanding of Christ doesn't express a biblical reflection of what it means to lead our children to Christ. On the other hand, there is great hope in knowing the eternally existent Saviour and His character, as we shall see next.

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1. See also this article at Quivering Daughters on the marginalization of biblical women's voices: <http://quiveringdaughters.blogspot.com/2010/03/torment.html> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2010)
 2. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/who-is-ngj/what-we-believe/> (Accessed Oct. 31, 2010)
 3. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2005/january/12/living-parallel-lives-in-the-same-space/> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2010)
 4. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2007/august/15/the-salvation-of-children/> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2010)
 5. See note 2.

6. Pearl and Pearl, *To Train Up a Child*, 20.
7. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/march/01/insulate-your-children-within/> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2010)
8. Pearl and Pearl, *To Train Up a Child*, 21.
9. In *Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space*, Pearl also writes on sanctification, “Finally, as Christ is now the reigning Adam, the **fully overcoming** man restored to the glory intended for the human race, a man with authority, so I am the fully reigning man, bathed in eternal glory, filled with all the fullness of God, an overcomer in every way that he is an overcomer...” [emphasis ours]
10. In the same article, Pearl writes, “After he had met and defeated the devil, after he had kept the commandments for 33 years, after he had been tempted and tested in every way that any man has ever been tested, and he maintained his integrity, **he was good enough as a human being to step into heaven and sit down on the right hand of God**...But, at the moment that he could have gone into heaven, he took upon himself the complete sin debt of the entire human race.” [emphasis ours]
11. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2008/february/06/mike-answers/> (Accessed Mar. 30, 2010)
12. http://www.revivaltheology.net/8_mgt/hisatone.html (Accessed Mar. 30, 2010)
13. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fallacy/#Unrepresentative%20Sample> (Accessed May 24, 2011)

V.

TEACHINGS ON THE PERSON OF CHRIST

By David. J. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, Dave discusses the impact of subtle shifts in thinking about the person of God, and Christ in particular.

Terms and Definitions

<i>Ad infinitum</i>	And so on to infinity.
<i>Immutability</i>	The quality of being unchanging and unchangeable.
<i>Infinity</i>	The innate quality of infiniteness.
<i>Propitiation</i>	The act of simultaneously appeasing and conciliating; contains the ideas of satisfying God's wrath and restoring man to harmony with God.

To quote from the previous chapter, “The specific underlying context must also be examined. Commonality of language is useful only when assigned word meanings are in agreement.”

As I read NGJ quotes, the picture that comes to mind is a house built without floor joists—looks good, same materials as other houses on the surface, but you walk in and fall through because there's no support.

SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIP

Pearl describes Christ as “...Jesus Christ...the eternal God, mutually, voluntarily, eternally, sustaining to God the Father that relationship of a son.”¹

This sounds pretty good on a first reading. But the word “sustaining” stands out. Sustaining implies it could fall apart and that it has to be held together. The eternal, infinite character of God demands that this be impossible. The immutability of God demands that no “sustaining” be necessary within the Godhead. We are sustained, creation is sustained, God *is*. [John 8:58](#) says: “...before Abraham was, I AM.” Not was, but *am*. Outside time, eternal, infinite.

Infinity cannot be sustained. Otherwise it wouldn't be infinite.

Pearl claims that Christ “kept the commandments of God and maintained a character sufficient to merit him a place in God's presence.”

Again, what kind of being are we talking about here? According to Scripture ([John 1:1-2](#)),

- Christ *was*, already existing, in the beginning.
- Christ *was*, and *is*, God.

In addition, Scripture says:

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. — Heb. 1:3-4

Inheritance isn't earned. It is based on who you are. By definition of who Christ is, He has a place in God's presence. There was no need to merit (work for) anything. Christ could do no other thing but to fulfill the law; after all, He was perfect, being the express image of God's person, and He wrote the law. The biblical law is based on who God is, rather than Christ's person being formed by keeping the law.

To add to this, there was only one time in all history ([Mark 15:34](#)), and prehistory ad infinitum, that Christ was separated from the Father. This was by mutual choice of all members of the Godhead and was short lived, as Christ Himself said on the cross to the one thief, "...today thou shalt be with me in Paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)).

If He was God, then apart from the special conditions of the cross and the condemnation of sin which took place there, how could He be out of His own presence?

FAITHFULNESS AND THE QUESTION OF MERIT

I return to the NGJ doctrinal statement. Pearl says of Christ that "By his faithfulness and good works, he became the first man... that merited favor with God" ²

Christ did not do it by faithfulness, but by being Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is the object of our faith.

Let's talk about "his faithfulness and good works[.]" He was faithful and obeyed the Father in every way, including following the law. But unlike what is stated by Pearl, this was not what merited Him favour with God. He was never out of favour with the Father. God could not look on our sin that was laid on Him at the cross, but Christ was never out of favour. Yes, He did good works. Perfect works, actually. If He didn't do these things, he would not have been God, but that is a backward way to look at it. He is God, so what He did was and is perfect.

There was *nothing* that He could do to *merit* God's favour. He never lost it, therefore he couldn't gain it.

Pearl says, "So God gave him authority[.]" ³Yes, God gave Christ authority, but not because he merited it. This was the plan since before creation. Mutually agreed upon before man ever existed. Christ had the authority by definition of who He is ([Eph. 1](#)).

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. — Eph. 1:4

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. — Eph 1:10-11

The inheritance that we receive from God as believers is based on who Christ is and His substitutionary atonement—not a substitution of His works.

Pearl says, “[Christ] lived a life of obedience to God...was accounted a worthy substitute.”⁴

This statement implies that Christ’s finite (human) actions could shoulder the burden of an infinite penalty by rendering Him a worthy sacrifice. It was an infinite offence. Christ was the only person able to propitiate for us because He is the only person that is infinite. Yes, He came to earth and was in human form, lived a perfect life, but He was to be sent as our substitute and conqueror from the beginning ([Gen. 3:15](#)). His life didn’t make Him worthy. He *was* worthy, and His life on earth was a result of that.

ADAMIC RIGHTEOUSNESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Pearl says, “Everyone has violated his own God-given understanding of right and wrong, resulting in personal condemnation.”⁵

This whole statement runs against everything Pearl is teaching. He has said that we are born morally neutral, not born in a state of violation against our conscience. How then has *everyone* violated their own conscience? He has said that we as parents have to work with God to help our children achieve moral understanding. Is it a God-given understanding, or one mediated through human agency?

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.
— 1 Tim. 2:5

It is not wrong that we have personal sin and are accountable for that, but we were accountable in Adam before we ever personally sinned. (Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, [Rom. 5:12-22](#)). This faulty logic comes from Pearl’s unbiblical view of the state in which Adam and Eve were created—in one of his articles, he claims that “God created Adam and Eve to be righteous, but he did not create them righteous.”⁶

Pearl divorces goodness from God, making morality an abstract concept—a set of rules, a law book. Moral neutrality is true of objects, not persons. Humanity was created in the image of God, but corrupted by sin. Christ is the express image of God’s person. God is good—He is the source and definition of what is good.

We have to start our moral reasoning from the character of God Himself.

God created man in His own image.	So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Gen. 1:27)
God is righteous. He has an eternal moral character. God expresses wrath toward sin, love toward believers, and moral choices toward His people. Biblically, sin is the violation of God's character, and it is His inherent moral character which led Him to provide salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.	Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God. (Ezek. 22:31) And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. (Luke 18:19) In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)
Adam and Eve, as created, had no sin. "Very good" is a moral evaluation of them, demonstrating God's inherent moral character.	And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Gen. 1:31)
Adam and Eve were created righteous, in the image of God. Christ, the express image of God's person, was born righteous. Those born of Adam's race under sin are neither neutral nor righteous, but sinful.	Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Ps. 51:5)

As believers in Christ, we are counted as righteous, though we do not always think or act righteously. This is the effect of substitutionary atonement. As believers in Christ, we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds as we learn to walk in relationship with Him ([Rom 12:1-2](#)). We will enter into a perfect state and realization of righteousness when "we shall see Him as He is."

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
— 1 John 3:2

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/who-is-ngj/what-we-believe/> (Accessed April 6, 2010)
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.
 6. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/march/01/insulate-your-children-within/> (Accessed April 6, 2010)

VI.

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, CONCLUDED

By. David J. Dyck and C.L. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, we return to the NGJ faith statement and exchange final concerns and thoughts on the Christ of NGJ versus the Christ of the Bible.

Terms and Definitions

<i>Imputation</i>	To lay responsibility or blame, often unjustly or falsely; to credit or attribute to a person.
<i>Preconception</i>	A pre-formed idea or prejudice.
<i>Preincarnate</i>	Refers to the personal existence of Jesus Christ before his physical conception as a human being.
<i>Reconciliation</i>	The act of restoring to friendship or harmony.
<i>Transcendent</i>	Surpassing; extending beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge.

As previously discussed, the person of Christ defines the atonement of Christ, and the atonement of Christ defines salvation. By the time we get down to salvation, these three simple but deep touchpoints should make it easier to evaluate what falls out of the equation of NGJ's theology.

Here's a summary of concerns and doctrinal perspective for this point.

CAT: CONCERNS

In reading NGJ materials, the things which stand out to me are two subtly different doctrines of the person of Christ—one for the eternal pre-existent Christ, and one for the incarnation. Back in Chapter I and Chapter III we noted that it's important to actually look at the verses quoted to make doctrinal points. If the language of the doctrinal statement is substantially different from, or shows different “quiet emphases” than, the verses attached to it, then the doctrine is being used to filter the teacher's understanding of the Bible. What should happen is for the Bible to filter the teacher's understanding of doctrine. But, as we saw, that does not mean using “proof texts” to force common religious jargon into the box of the religious teacher's preconceptions.

NGJ's faith statement says:

GOD

We believe in one triune God, creator of all that is, existing in the Godhead, in perfection, before and independent of His creation. He is entire goodness, benevolent, all wise, and infinite in His attributes ([Deut. 6:4](#); [Matt. 28:19](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [John 14:10, 26](#)).

Here are the cited verses:

Deut 6:4	Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one Lord.
Matt. 28:19	Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
2 Cor. 13:14	The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.
John 14:10	Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.
John 14:26	But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

This is one area where the Bible makes no distinction between Old Testament and New Testament, the preincarnate Christ or Christ come in the flesh. The nature of God is the nature of God. Yet for some reason, NGJ's statement makes the point of applying these verses to God "before and independent of His creation." This seems common enough, but we are now paying close attention to anything that reads like familiar jargon.

NGJ's faith statement says this about Jesus' incarnation:

JESUS CHRIST

We believe Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin and walked this earth in human flesh, is the creator of Heaven and earth, (John 1:1-3) the eternal God, mutually, voluntarily, eternally, sustaining to God the Father that relationship of a son. His death was eternally ordained, and carried out under the reign of Pontius Pilate for the express purpose of providing a vicarious, legal, and just payment for the sin of the entire human race ([Is. 7:14](#); [9:6](#); [Luke 1:35](#); [John 1:1-2, 14](#); [2 Cor. 5:19-21](#); [Gal. 4:4-5](#); [Phil. 2:5-8](#)).

Is. 7:14	Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
Is. 9:6	For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
Luke 1:35	And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
John 1:1-2	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.
John 1:14	And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
2 Cor. 5:19-21	To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.
Gal. 4:4-5	But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.
Phil. 2:5-8	Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Note that in these verses, there is much about Christ being made flesh. John 1:14 is in there, but we've seen elsewhere that Is. 7:14 in this context, to Pearl, means Christ *achieved* the state of being "full of grace and truth," rather than innately possessing it. Pearl doesn't deny Christ's deity in the incarnation, but he does deny Christ's innate moral nature as God. When Christ comes in the flesh, He becomes a subtly different being in encountering moral formation. This is very important.

Then the faith statement speaks about imputation and reconciliation—we'll discuss those in the next chapter—followed by verses mentioning law and Christ's obedience, and how we are to be obedient as Christ was obedient. In fact, much of the ministry's context speaks to a particular understanding of [Phil. 2:5-8](#).

In the greater context of the quotes we've brought out, and in doing the same exercise with the rest of the doctrinal statement, we see a subtle shift in thinking between Christ's deity and Christ's humanity—small things, but with a major outworking when it comes to the topics of holy living and the theology of child-raising, as reflected in the articles and TTUAC book.

DAVE: DOCTRINE

Let's revisit the previous chapter for a moment: If Christ was born without moral character, then of course people were born without moral character, because we were created in His image. The two ideas go together. NGJ speaks of Christ "sustaining to God the Father that relationship of a son." Let's focus this time on "that relationship of a son," since we're discussing a parenting ministry.

Pearl quotes John 14:10, but 14:9 says, "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?"

This is Christ in His earthly form. He hasn't been to the cross. According to [Gen. 3:15](#), and according to His own statements of His purpose in the incarnation, His work is not complete. If He hasn't done that, He hasn't been obedient. If He hasn't been obedient, He hasn't fulfilled the terms that NGJ sets up for Him to qualify as the Saviour. The Scripture says, "And we have seen and do testify that the Father *sent the Son to be the Savior* of the world" ([1 John 4:14](#)). However, Michael Pearl writes:

After he [Christ] had met and defeated the devil, after he had kept the commandments for 33 years, after he had been tempted and tested in every way that any man has ever been tested, and he maintained his integrity, he was good enough as a human being to step into heaven and sit down on the right hand of God. ([Matt. 4:1-10](#); [John 16:10](#); [Heb. 4:15](#); [Acts 5:31](#); [John 17:4](#))¹

Matt. 1:1-4 (Partial quotation of the cited passage)	Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
John 16:10	Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; [a very strange snippet to pull from its context, not even a full sentence]
Heb. 4:15	For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.
Acts 5:31	Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.
John 17:4	I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

John 16:10, 17:4, and Acts 5:31 are completely out of context in their historical chronological sense here. They're also not in the order in which they appear in the Bible, which suggests they're intended to be read as a series of statements in the order here presented, creating a different context for them than what they have in Scripture.

Pearl writes that, after achieving moral perfection, Christ made the choice not to go to heaven,

but to take on humanity's sins. However, Christ *could not* have gone to heaven yet, even in Pearl's teaching. It was not until He was on the cross that He cried, "It is finished!" ([John 19:30](#)) And there is a reason for that.

NGJ teaching sees Christ's life as *only* an act of obedience—an act of obedience which sustains His sonship throughout the Incarnation, throughout God's encounter with moral development. But what was the real purpose of Christ's incarnate life?

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. — 1 John 1:1-5

It was this same apostle who penned the words, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" ([3 John 4](#)). Here, John writes, "that your joy may be full."

Christ's very purpose was the atonement, and His earthly mission was not complete until His death—and His resurrection.

What about [John 17:4](#), which says that, before the crucifixion, Christ finished the work the Father gave Him to do? In context, it refers specifically to Christ's fulfillment of Messianic prophecy, so that His followers believed and understood that He was the Saviour. He said ([vv. 7-8](#)) that His teaching demonstrated His person. But directly before that, and directly after the verse Pearl quotes to show Christ's completion of obedience, the Lord says this:

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. — John 17:5

There is something about the resurrection which is at the heart of God's nature—the express image of His person.

CONCLUSION

Here, in the moments before the atonement, we see the continuity of God's character in action, from

Alpha to Omega, beginning to end. If Christ's divine glory were absent in the Incarnation; if God had no moral character; if Christ had to develop and maintain moral character, then this, if anything, would have been an appeal to ascend to heaven in His completed moral perfection. Instead, it's a look back at a life lived toward a final purpose, and a look forward beyond its end.

Heaven is not Christ's "could have." It's His "for sure." Even as He acknowledges the nature and the span of his work, Christ, fully God and fully man, is going to the cross. There He will glorify the Father by taking on a penalty which overflows with transcendent divine moral outrage. And only then would He cry, "*Tetelestai*"—paid in full—it is finished.

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2005/january/12/living-parallel-lives-in-the-same-space/> (Accessed Apr 13, 2010)
 2. See also <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/august/01/god-made-jesus-to-be-sin-article/> Aug. 1996, in which Pearl asserts that Jesus is "a sinner by faith," having accepted the sins of humanity by "believing and receiving" in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Accessed Apr 13, 2010)

VII.

CONCERNS ON THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

By C.L. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, Cathi-Lyn follows up on Dave's remarks about the connection between the person of Christ and the nature of His work on the cross. If the person of Christ is altered in NGJ's theology, does the ministry's idea of God's saving work remain uninfluenced by that?

It's normative in healthy, doctrinally solid Bible-preaching churches to regularly hear the cross mentioned, and not just mentioned, but explicated. So I felt that before I could go any further with the NGJ books, I would need to listen to some of Pearl's actual Bible teachings on the atonement. Perhaps it's possible to make too much of too few words, even working from four NGJ books (TTUAC 2008, *No Greater Joy 1, 2, 3*) and the ministry's extensive web archives.

I recognize that when a person is teaching on parenting, their emphasis and flow of thought will be different than when teaching on something like the cross. Perhaps, in the structure of NGJ materials, the two things function somewhat separately. So, I decided to check.

EARS TO HEAR: WHAT I HEARD

I looked for audio messages, since these are apparently NGJ's main preaching materials, which focus on the atonement. I found several on the topic. What follows is a transcription from freely available materials on the NGJ website.

The title of this message is "The Man Christ Jesus." **Not the Son of God, but the man Christ Jesus.** The Bible emphasizes Jesus' manhood throughout. In fact, one of the marks of Antichrist is that he will deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Now why would that be significant? We would expect the Antichrist to be denying that Jesus is God. But no, he comes denying that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Why? Because Jesus Christ coming in the flesh is absolutely essential for him to obtain our eternal salvation...¹ [*bold emphasis mine for clarity, underline indicates vocal emphasis in recording*]

In this sermon, Pearl goes to great lengths to emphasize the term "Son of Man" in a variety of passages. This explicitly expands on the implication we found in the doctrinal statement's wording. He states that

the important thing about Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father is that Jesus is the Son of Man, the son of Adam. Let me point back into the written materials for a moment, because what he's saying sounds merely confused if not taken in the ministry's greater context. However, within that context, Pearl is remarkably clear and understandable.

OBTAINED HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS

I am reminded of previous statements from Pearl's web articles and TTUAC itself, which state that character “cannot be created. It comes out of choice”² and focus on the self-made righteous character that Christ supposedly obtained. Returning to the audio track, around 21:30, Pearl states that God gave Adam a crown of glory, but Adam lost it through sinning. He then claims that Jesus, as a man, regained what Adam lost. We see again the emphasis on overcoming the human flesh.

At 21:36 of *The Man Christ Jesus*, Pearl states,

But we see Jesus. Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, see Him crowned with glory and honor. You see, the same thing that God placed on Adam—a crown of glory and honor—along comes—the word ‘Jesus’ is a human word—down in Mexico, every third person is named Jesus [Spanish pronunciation] or somethin’. Naw, they’re called Jesus. [Anglicized pronunciation] Why? it’s just a human name, like George or Bob. He didn't say, “We see the Christ.” He didn't say, “We see the Son of God...”³

At this point, I turned to Strong's concordance for a bit of Berean-style discernment on wording. I learned that Jesus, Yeshua, has a much more specific meaning in the Hebrew of His time than George or Bob does in modern English. It means, “God saves.” As in Matthew 1:21—“Thou shalt call His name Jesus: [God saves] for He shall save His people from their sins.”

Defined as Matthew has it, it's the farthest thing from a merely human name, and certainly does include the deity of Jesus. I am wary at this point, because the overemphasis of the point approaches a wresting of Scripture.

Pearl goes on to say that Jesus was crowned with glory and honour *so that* He should taste death for every man. But Philippians 2:7-13 says,

But [Christ] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now

much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Pearl states that Jesus “bringing many sons unto glory” refers to the standing before God which Adam lost, lifting it from its Scriptural context of eternal life and repositioning the idea into a framework of spiritual overcoming against an evil bodily flesh.

OBTAINED HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED?

Pearl strongly divides the saving and judging humanity of Christ from the resurrecting power of the Son of God, and yet in the Scripture (including many places in the Old Testament which speak of Yeshua/Jesus prophetically), I see Christ’s divinity firmly linked to the points which Pearl insists on attributing strictly to His humanity. We will look into this further in the chapter entitled “Sin and Salvation.”

The term “imputed” does appear to have different connotations in NGJ doctrine than the standard biblical meaning. What sticks out is the use of the word “sinless” and its relationship to Pearl’s doctrine of “righteousness” and “moral accountability.”

For instance, in a “Mike Answers” column from 2008,⁴ Pearl asserts,

The one belief that is most popular—believed by 99% of Christianity—is that the grace of God works in our hearts to bring us to repentance of sin and faith in his son, Jesus, transforming us into obedient children, thereby making us acceptable to God. This we can call Imparted Righteousness... This is the Roman Catholic position as well as what most Protestants believe in practice...

Imparted righteousness changes the individual so as to make him **righteous**. Imputed righteousness just changes the man’s **legal** standing with God. [*emphases mine*]

As noted in the definition of imputation at the start of the last chapter, it also includes the idea of “attributing to.” Attribution means more than a legal switch-off. It means to recognize a thing as *belonging* to the person to whom it’s attributed. For that matter, an *attribute* is not defined as a legal standing, but as a personal characteristic.⁵

From here, I turned to NGJ’s Isaiah 53 sermon,⁶ since, if anything, it should define atonement doctrines in the clearest terms.

THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE

I just want to note that the idea of chastisement is reflected in NGJ’s two main articles on spanking, “In Defense of Biblical Chastisement,”⁷ in which they exhort parents not to use the rod in anger, not to use chastisement as the primary means of training (note that they differentiate “chastisement” and “training

with the rod” in their books), and that the rod should not be used for anything but the good of the child.⁸

The following are transcriptions from the Isaiah 53 audio file available on their website, with the playing time listed at the beginning of each quote.

17:22 Yes, He was stricken by God, yes, Jesus was smitten by God, yes, He was wounded by God, but it was for our transgressions that he was wounded, He was bruised for our iniquities. So here’s the prophecy: that the Messiah will be struck, and He will be bruised. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. That is, he’s telling us, the purpose, the nature of this bruising, this beating He was receiving, it was not on His behalf. It was the punishment, the chastisement that you and I deserve for our sin...

21:22 ...some of the Christian religions deny that, the idea that Christ could die for us, on our behalf. It just, it seems so preposterous. It said, God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. [Pearl then quotes [Isa. 53:6](#)] So God put our iniquity on Jesus, so that God in the New Testament made Him to be sin for us...so Messiah’s going to be oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth...

24:54 Now here’s an astounding response in all of this: **yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him.** That God the Father—see, if you were hearing this for the first time, you’d start to get angry and irritated. How dare they do that to Messiah? How dare they? Why is He so weak? Why is He letting this happen to Himself? Why is He suffering so? It’s not right, somebody’s got to stop it. **Then all of a sudden it says, ‘Yet, it pleased the Lord to bruise Him.’ In other words, the Father was satisfied to have His son bruised.** You see, it could be said of Abraham, it pleased Abraham to kill his son. Now, Abraham found no personal pleasure in the act of his son dying, or in what suffering might have been inflicted, but Abraham chose to do it because of his love for God. And so the Father was pleased that His Son should die on our behalf.

28:01 And it says, look, **by His knowledge** shall My **righteous** servant justify many. So now, He’s gone from His priestly ministry now to his prophetic ministry. As a priest, He died, but as a prophet—with knowledge—He justifies many, for He shall bear their iniquities. [*emphases mine*]⁹

With knowledge? It appears this again refers to the obtained, learned righteousness which Jesus the man acquired in His incarnation. At this point, the language borders on a gnostic assertion of esoteric revelation.

In the web article “Imputed Righteousness,” Pearl writes:

What did Christ do to have our sin imputed to him? He, kneeling in the garden, believed and received the weight of sin. God “*made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin...*” — 2 Cor. 5:21. Jesus became what we are, a sinner—no, more than that, He became

sin itself, “...that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” God was willing to see Jesus as a sinner, so He could see us as righteousness. Jesus became what we are, so we can become what he is. **He became a sinful son of man, so we could become sinless sons of God.** It was a trade. He traded his righteousness to us for our sin. He then carried the consequences of our sin before God, **so we can carry the consequences of Christ’s righteousness before God.** He walked to Calvary, so we could ascend to heaven. The God who “*calleth those things which be not as though they were*” called His Son something He wasn’t—a sinner, so he could call us something we are not—righteous. “*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*” – Rom. 4:8.¹⁰

There is a word game going on here. When I look at the term “imputed righteousness,” I realize it must be understood in the context of NGJ’s idea of “righteousness.” (So must the idea of imputation.) It doesn’t mean the inherent righteousness of God. It means the obtained, learned, acquired righteousness that Christ developed over the course of His humanity. Whether or not the nuances of imputation are used correctly by NGJ thus becomes orders of magnitude less relevant on the whole, since *what is being imputed is not biblically accurate*, either in terms of sin or in terms of righteousness.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In speaking of Christ’s substitutionary atonement and the hope of salvation, Pearl’s concept of “overcoming” rules his choice of supporting verses in his doctrinal statement. When he speaks of “hope of salvation” through “Christ’s substitutionary atonement,” his choice of verses illuminates his context and the particular view he has in mind of “the overcoming life”—one where the Christian remains “able to sin,” but “sins no more.”

The atonement of Christ is reduced to a legal transaction of debt reconciliation which neither produces nor truly imputes the righteousness of God, a direct contravention of God’s Word: “You shall be holy, for I am holy,” (1 Pet. 1:16).

In his article on imputation, Pearl writes that Christ became sinful so that we could become sinless. Yet, rather than using the word “sinless” in reference to Christ, Pearl seems to greatly prefer “righteous,” which may go back to his claim that “Adam and Eve were created to be righteous, but they were not righteous...Character cannot be created. It comes out of choice,” and “even Jesus was born thus.”

The implications are mind-boggling.

This man has a different Jesus than I do; a different Jesus than the Bible does; and a substantially different atonement theology than that of Scripture. It’s here that we see the threads of moral government theology woven in—not necessarily because Pearl intends it so, but because due to his concept of morality, his core understanding of the person of Christ may simply render it the nearest recognizable theology.

And there are other threads with it, all of which revolve around this foundational idea of character development, and thus, are deeply interlinked with the parenting methods put forward by the ministry.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. — 2 Corinthians 11:3-4

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/podcasts/view-podcast/archive/2008/september/04/the-man-christ-jesus-1/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2010). Transcription begins at 1:14.
 2. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/march/01/insulate-your-children-within/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2010)
 3. See note 1.
 4. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2008/february/06/mike-answers/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2010)
 5. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/attribute> (Accessed June 4, 2011)
 6. http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/fileadmin/template/Audio/2006-Calendar-Messages/Isaiah_53.mp3 (Accessed Nov. 4, 2010)
 7. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive////in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-1/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2010) and <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive////in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-2/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2010).
 8. Pearl and Pearl, *To Train Up a Child*. The book expresses the idea that God chastises his true children for their good. Thus, in the Biblical Chastisement articles, when the Pearls admonish parents to use the rod only for the child's good, they are not de facto ruling out extreme corporal methods described elsewhere in the book, merely speaking to parental attitudes in dealing out such methods.
 9. See endnote 6.
 10. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/march/01/imputed-righteousness/> (Accessed June 4, 2011)

VIII.

DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

By David J. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, Dave examines the difference between a doctrine of obtained moral character and inherent moral righteousness, and the implications for God's character and person.

Terms and Definitions

Remission The act of releasing from guilt or penalty.

Without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (See [Lev. 16:5-30](#)). The entire focus on the Day of Atonement is on the substitutionary blood, not on beating the flesh into submission. The symbolic deaths are not deaths of beating or parental chastisement. We have to consider what the Old Testament says about Christ, about the pouring out of blood. Even with the burnt offering, the blood is a focus.

The Old Testament is not going to contradict the New. If it contradicts, God is a liar.

For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. — Lev. 16:30

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. — Lev. 17:11

This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. — Luke 22:20b

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; — Rom 3:24-25

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. — Heb. 9:22

THE LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD

Unto Adam also and to his wife did **the LORD God make coats of skins**, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, Behold, **the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil**: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. —Gen. 3:21-23

The sin was already covered by the sacrifice in verse 21 (not paid by this animal sacrifice, which looked forward to the cross). God shed the first blood Himself. God had already given Adam and Eve the prophecy of the Saviour in [Gen. 3:15](#). After the prophecy of the Saviour, He sacrificed the animal.

God Himself said that man now understood good and evil as God Himself did. What Adam supposedly learned by his “character-forming” choice at the tree—for good or for evil—*God already knew*. And He knew it perfectly, sinlessly. God, the Creator, the source of life, is inherently righteous. Nevertheless, Pearl asserts that Christ's “faithfulness and good works” allowed Him to *attain* His position with God.

By this line of logic, if Adam had not failed, he could have been the saviour—at least of himself—negating the need for Christ. If character isn't created and must be learned, then Adam had something to be saved from even before the Fall. To take this a step further, according to this, Michael Pearl could potentially be his own saviour through obedience. Yet,

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. — Gal. 2:20-21

This can only be true in the case of an inherent righteousness which sacrificed itself for us. Any obtained righteousness focussed on meriting favour could be found in God's Law, which gives God's rules and standards for living. But the Law is focussed on the cross, rather than the cross being focussed on the Law. The whole point of the Law is to point us to the cross and our need for it—not to show us how to obtain merit, whether learned and obtained by Christ or by ourselves ([Gal 3:23-26](#)).

But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. **Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.** — Gen. 6:4-6 (*Emphasis added*)

It's not “the obedience of the flesh is in the beating.” Christ's conquered flesh (physical body with its passions) did not take the punishment for our unconquered fleshly passions. It's “the life of the flesh is

in the blood.” Why? Because life is from God, in whose image we are made. Christ's *eternal* life is given in place of our *eternal* death.

The life, the blood and the image of God are all connected. They all come together in the Person of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

SOMETHING THAT GOD DIDN'T KNOW?

Christ *is* God, yes? God cannot sin, right? Therefore Christ cannot and could not sin. Yes, He was given the opportunity and was tempted “in all ways such as we are.” ([Heb. 4:15](#)). On the other hand, if He had sinned, he could not be God. Inherently. Yet, as we noted before, NGJ's teaching on the cross doesn't mean the inherent righteousness of God. It means the obtained, learned, acquired righteousness that Christ developed from a point of moral neutrality, over the course of His humanity, as He conquered the fleshly body into which He was born.

Here we have the crux of the problem. NGJ teaches that Christ had to learn righteousness. That means that his earthly parents had to teach Him righteousness. God had to learn righteousness? From sinners? That is just not Scriptural. Not only that, but this learned righteousness (from sinners) was how Christ secured our salvation? Again, I think I need not go further. The Scriptures are *very* clear on how we are supposed to treat those that teach a gospel other than the one put forth by Christ and the apostles.

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. **For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross,** by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. — Col. 1:15-20 (*Emphases added*)

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, **which he hath purchased with his own blood.** — Acts 20:28 (*Emphases added*)

IX.

SIN AND SALVATION

By David J. Dyck and C.L. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, we discuss the “nature” of a “nature,” and how Pearl must misconstrue the term to sustain and further his unbiblical view of mankind and the manner with which it applies to practical Christian living. The Greek term underlying the New Testament English word *flesh* is examined in detail, specifically with an eye on the sinful nature as expositied by New Testament authors. Pearl’s deviant views of the flesh are discussed along with their correlation to first-century variants of Platonism. Lastly, Pearl’s errors are considered in light of a biblical view of sin and salvation.

Terms and Definitions

<i>Dualism</i>	The division of something into two opposed or contrasted states.
<i>Methodology</i>	Intentions, actions, and results
<i>Sarx</i>	Greek underlying the English New Testament word for flesh; can mean physical body or spiritual sinful nature.
<i>Soma</i>	Greek underlying the English New Testament word for body.
<i>Straw man fallacy</i>	A ‘straw man’ is an argument that misrepresents or ignores the actual beliefs of an opposing party, setting up a false representation of those beliefs and then ‘refuting’ the false representation rather than actually addressing the real opposing opinion.
<i>Theology</i>	Study of God; also, values formation and belief that arise from that study

We have established that NGJ’s view of human nature diverges from the biblical account due to their basic presuppositions on the origin and essence of the moral nature. We have established that NGJ’s view of God is distorted from that of Scripture by the same. If the child-training theology cannot at least find some biblical grounds in eternity and judgment—two of the points which the Pearls state are inextricably bound up in their views on child-raising,¹—then the ministry’s entire reason for existence is in question.

Because we are looking at theology (values formation and beliefs) rather than methodology (intentions, actions and results), we will focus on the nature of sin and salvation. In October 2010, Michael Pearl issued a declamation² against the writing of Pastor Matthew Raley, who was publicly involved in speaking to the news media on behalf of his local faith community after the beating death of Lydia Schatz. Schatz’s parents were allegedly found to have NGJ’s books in their home and to have used the plumbing supply line that Pearl advocates as a spanking tool to spank their adopted daughter repeatedly until she died of massive soft-tissue injuries. This prompted an outcry against Pearl’s methodology in TTUAC, in particular statements such as:

A spanking (whipping, paddling, switching or belting) is indispensable to the removal of guilt in your child. His very conscience (nature) demands punishment . . . parents are encouraged not to allow the child's crying to cause them to lighten up on the intensity or the duration of the spanking. Parents' emotions can stand in the way of a thorough cleansing.³ (emphases in original)

In hearing this quote read aloud, our ten-year-old daughter asked, “If they can't understand about Jesus, then why do that instead?”

We shall see the answer to that soon enough. Key to that idea is the word “nature” and Pearl's peculiar definition of it.

In his response article, Pearl stated that anyone who listened to his audio teaching on the sin nature would not be so misled as to grossly misrepresent him as Pastor Raley had.

So, we've listened.

THE SINFUL NATURE

Around the three-minute mark of Pearl's sermon, *The Sinful Nature*,⁴ we get straight to the crux of his thesis:

“I'm going to get right to the point: no one in this room tonight has a sinful nature. No person on the face of this earth has ever had a sinful nature. No Christian has two natures...Now, you say, ‘That's heresy! That's not what I been taught!’ You been taught incorrectly.”

Pearl spends this hour-long sermon setting up a straw-man definition of the word “nature” in order to knock it down as inapplicable to the real human case. While he's correct that his false redefinition of “nature” does not apply, he is incorrect in claiming it to be the standard, accepted definition used within orthodox biblical Christianity. For instance, the New Testament book of 1 John is specifically devoted to combating this variant of Platonism which persisted in Greek thinking. Since the time of Christ, godly thinking has been *opposed* to this pagan concept of the human soul and body.

Let's take a look at three steps which lead from fairly average-sounding surface language into the depths of a major doctrinal wrestling.

STEP 1: HERESY POSITED

In the 16:24-16:55 range of the sermon, Pearl states:

“So when Adam sinned and God was driven from him, Adam then was not changed in his

nature. He was changed in his relationship to God. And without God, Adam had no hope in this world of being an overcomer. The body took on proportions more significant after God departed from Adam's spirit. In other words, the body, in its lusts, in its passions, in its drives, overrode the mind, the will and the emotions of Adam.”⁵

This is a variant of the old gnostic heresy—that the flesh is the source of evil (in this case defined as the wrong use of the neutral state in which God made us due to the power of bodily lusts) and the spirit the source of good (in this case defined as acts of obedience and character development produced via an overcoming will). It is no wonder that, as Pearl correctly claims, most churches don't teach this. The apostles expended much effort in addressing its root misunderstandings, and those well-grounded in Scripture will have a natural immunity to it as a result.

Part of the misconstruction arises from Pearl's misuse not only of the English word ‘nature,’ but the Greek word *sarx*. Pearl claims that *sarx* refers only to the physical body. In fact, two Greek words are used to refer to the body in the Bible: (1) *soma*, which always refers to the physical body and has been transliterated into the English in words such as “psychosomatic,” and (2) *sarx*, which can refer to the physical body but does not always. For instance, it is *sarx* which appears in Gal. 5:19-21:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

It is possible to see how sins such as adultery and fornication arise from physical drives. However, how might witchcraft arise from the flesh as defined by Pearl? What about hatred? The desires which bring us into conflict with others may sometimes arise from the drives of the physical flesh, but hatred itself? Which bodily lust is that? Perhaps we might take Pearl's approach to reasoning throughout this sermon and ask: where do witchcraft or hatred reside? In one's arm? In one's arteries, or in the tissue of the heart? In the bile of the organs? If no human being has a sinful nature, then where in the “nature,” as redefined by Pearl, might we find these?

This doctrine is not biblical, but arises from Platonism and was carried forward from Plato in the form of gnosticism. As such it is among the things warned against in [Col. 2:8](#):

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Pearl's method of building an explanation for the existence of such sins must thus default to what is known as the “soul-making defence.”⁶ This term does not imply that man does not necessarily have a soul or spirit or that God must make one for him, but refers to the idea that man's initially-neutral character (often thought of as located in the spirit or soul) is necessarily formed by his reaction to evil in the world. We will address the validity of that explanation in our concluding remarks.

STEP 2: STRAW MAN BUILT

Furthermore, Pearl claims:

“Now it is taught that at regeneration, God adds a spirit to the human. That the spirit is dead. It's talking about when Adam sinned, all died, that the spirit died. Now if you...look up all the times the word 'spirit' is used in the Bible, you will find that there are dozens of times that the Bible attributes a human spirit to unregenerate people.”⁷

This is a straw man argument—a caricatured effigy of doctrine set up for the sole purpose of burning it. We're taught that the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us upon salvation. But we do not confuse this presence or absence of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit's existence or nonexistence. Nowhere in Bible-based theology is it taught that “dead in the spirit” means *does not have a spirit* or that God “adds a spirit to the human.”

“The Bible never teaches at any time or intimates in any way that the spirit of an individual's dead. There's no verses that teach that, that you have a dead spirit. That your spirit needs to be regenerated. That's not taught. That's a matter of theology, it's not in the Bible.”⁸

Since the definition of “theology” is “the knowledge of God,” we suggest that any doctrine which is divorced from God's Word is inherently a matter of *wrong* theology. Pearl continues:

“What the Bible teaches needs to be regenerated is your body. What your soul needs is to be rightly related to God in the forgiveness of sins. When Adam sinned, he lost proximity to God, he no longer walked with God.”⁹

The straw man is used to reinforce the presentation of the heretical twist on doctrine: the secret knowledge which most churches don't teach, or that, supposedly, they teach incorrectly. Similar language to familiar Christian jargon is used, e.g. “be rightly related to God in the forgiveness of sins.” The jargon overlap can be a key factor in doctrinal confusion and reinvention, as we see yet again in the next step.

STEP 3: REINVENTING COMMON LANGUAGE

Once again, Mr. Pearl redefines familiar jargon to suit his private interpretations:

“Let's do an autopsy on this word ‘nature.’ Not only do you not have a nature, there's no such noun. No such thing as a nature. In other words, nothing in the universe has a nature. Let's take this book here. We speak of the nature of the book. Does this book have a nature? No, it doesn't. If it had a nature, where would I find it, on what page? Would it be in the binding, in the cover? In here? Where would the nature of the book be?”¹⁰

Mr. Pearl goes on to consider the book in his hand (we sorely hope it was not the Bible) and to define its “nature” as referring only to its physical properties—size, materials such as paper, ink and cardboard, weight. He does the same with the metal microphone stand, then asks whether the nature (physical properties) of the microphone stand can be given to the book or vice versa. He further suggests that finding two uses for a thing does not give it two natures. Pearl says:

“[T]he word ‘nature’ is simply a word we use to define the essence of a thing, its characteristics, its basic substance. So to speak of anything having a nature is a contradiction in terms. That exists nowhere except in rhetorical language. So to say that we have a sinful nature is to say what? If I say I have a sinful nature inside of me, where is inside of me? Where's the sinful nature? If you took the sinful nature out, would there still be a nature here?”¹¹

Of key importance are the parameters Pearl sets upon the word in addition to its standard definition. The defining nature of a book is not found merely in its materials, but the thoughts and intents of the author. Hence we have audio books, digital books such as this one, or paper books, and the unique nature of each is uncompromised by delivery medium. This is basic information theory: the nature of the information carrier can be defined separately from the nature of the message; the nature of the message is not likely to be so easily separated from the nature of the message's originator.

How badly Pearl's analogy to *human* nature fails. Unless we default to the starkest atheistic materialism, we would never claim that the message a human being brings to the world is in any way summed up by their DNA or physical traits. Quite the opposite: fair-minded parents teach their children early on not to evaluate others primarily by physical properties. The nature of a thing taken as a whole is often something that transcends the physical properties. Otherwise nothing differentiates the nature of the Holy Bible from, say, a pornographic romance novel.

Pearl states that in bending the microphone stand or in melting it down and recasting it into a gun, a person can affect some change on the nature of the thing—but that, ultimately, these are different applications of a raw material whose nature (physical properties) remains the same. However, even as he speaks, one can hear him wrestle against the raw assumptions inherent to a native English speaker, using phrases such as “the properties *and nature*” of a thing. It's an unavoidable reflection of the linguistic understanding that the English word “nature” can and often does refer to much more than a physical essence.

In referring to the Greek, we find that Romans 7 is in fact a treatise on the biblical meaning of *sarx* and its relation to what the King James Bible calls “concupiscence,” the older terminology which

is commonly replaced in modern English with “lust,” “coveting” or other untoward desires. [Romans 7:5](#) begins the discussion of being in the *sarx*, followed by detailed descriptions of how the *sarx* acts in response to the holiness of God. Then, in conclusion, [Romans 7:18](#) states, “for I know that nothing good dwelleth in me, that is, in my *sarx*.” (E-text hyperlinks are to whole Bible passage.)

Why do we fail to follow through on the desire for good? Because we know that the Law is spiritual: “but I am of *sarx*, sold into bondage to sin.”

This illustrates the importance of looking beyond intentions, words and actions to determine the means of values formation and the resulting beliefs, as we discussed in Chapter II. By redefining the sinful nature, Mr. Pearl could well claim to hold to an Enlightenment Era, Jonathan Edwards/Charles Wesley-style definition of moral government. That definition refers to God’s governance of the natural realm (which includes human flesh in the physical sense), as opposed to referring to the spiritual realm.

But by unbiblically linking and confusing the natural and spiritual realms, Pearl still ends up operating from a definition in line with the later concept of moral government. That idea states that man is a blank slate whose choices are paramount.

When a foundational idea is changed, that change filters up through the layers of jargon and various areas of doctrine to affect the contextual meaning of everything else.

This audio closes with an interesting Q & A between Mr. Pearl and a questioner who asks what the Scripture means when it says we were by nature children of wrath ([Eph. 2:2-3](#)). Eph. 2 is another passage which opens with a major emphasis on the term *sarx*, and in fact, Eph 2:2 refers to the *spirit* which works in us. It is in agreement (accord) with the devil, but it cannot itself be Satan, for not all unbelievers are demon-possessed. What spirit is it, then? Drawn from our interlinear Greek/English reference Bible, Eph 2:3 continues the thought: “...among whom also we all conducted ourselves then in the lusts of the *sarx* of us, doing the things willed of the *sarx* and of the understandings, and were children by nature of wrath...”¹¹

How the physical body might have a will and understanding of its own is a matter for another time; suffice to say the gnostic argument, coupled with the soul-making defence, does not sound like a refutation of dualism in the human makeup.

In answer to the questioner, Mr. Pearl first claims (though the track is audibly cut, so we are unsure of the whole conversation) that “that’s what made it sinful, that it was against their nature.” This seems an odd statement after going to such great pains to prove that nothing in this universe has a nature.

When the questioner asks, “Okay, why is the word ‘by’ in there? ‘By nature?’” Pearl then states that the verse refers to the nature of the penalty incurred by those who act against God’s will.

How can a penalty have a nature? Is a penalty an idea or a physical thing? What if it is both? What is its physical substance, and where is the penalty located at this moment, when so many walk free in this world without a thought for Godliness or holiness, bearing no immediate tangible consequences?

Though the topic descends to an absurd level of wresting in Mr. Pearl’s word games, these questions regarding penalties, natures and sin are of great worth in the context of our next topic.

CAT: CONCERNS ON SALVATION

Once again, I turned to NGJ's audio resources to find out what precisely their teaching is on these specific matters. *To Train Up a Child* certainly makes some statements of concern, but what is their greater context? Is it possible they're unclear or easy to misunderstand due to brevity or due to being a secondary topic?

What follows is a rather long transcription from the free audio sermon *Righteousness, Temperance and Judgment* (hereafter referred to as RTaJ), because I wanted to be sure to include the full context of statements in fairness to Mr. Pearl.

One of the faults of modern preaching is to preach the person of Christ without preaching His message. To disassociate Christ from His message. **To preach Christ simply as a personal relationship or as the satisfaction of a need, be it accurately defined, but fail to preach His message.** Jesus didn't present Himself as a person who needed to be accepted. He didn't do that. **He didn't prove His deity so that men would accept Him based on His person. Jesus presented a message of righteousness, and challenged people to believe what He said, and do what He said.**

The song that the kids sang awhile ago—'The Wise Man Built His House Upon the Rock, The Foolish Man Built His House Upon the Sand'—that's a nice little song, but you know, when you look at the parable, Jesus said, 'the rock'—**He didn't say 'the rock is Me'—He said 'the rock is a man doing My sayings. When a man hears what I say, and does it, he's like a man who builds his house on the rock.'** In other words, you build your house on the rock when you obey the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus didn't teach, you build your house on the rock by establishing a relationship with Me, He said you build your house on the rock when you do what I said to do. And when you hear these sayings of Mine and *don't* do them, you're like a man who built his house on the sand. Now how many Christians know that? How many Christians consider that? It's right there in the Bible, but over and over again, preachers preach it so that they disassociate the person of Christ from the message of the man. And the message is critical, because the message brings one to repentance. The message causes people to tremble. So many people have come to religion without coming to the door of trembling. So many people have come to religion and faith without first facing the call to righteousness, the call to temperance, and the warning of judgment to come.¹² [*bold type, my emphasis; underscore reflects vocal emphasis in the recording*]

In this sermon, Pearl says of himself that he sounds “a whole lot like a holiness preacher.”¹³ Pearl uses a surface structure that could be associated with holiness teaching, but, as referenced earlier, he also emphasizes the need to “train” children in holiness and “begin their sanctification” *before*, in his own teachings, they are capable of choosing Christ. Why? Because of the “message of righteousness,” keeping in mind that this righteousness was a moral state developed by Christ in the Incarnation, one that is supposed to be developed through TTUAC-style child training as well.

So, then, it seems we are training this unquestioning obedience in order to train our children to accept and carry out “the message.”

The essence of the message is focused on obedience (“righteousness”), not the Person of Christ.

It is at this point that I cannot but admit the justification of atheists who object to this sort of indoctrination to religion for the bolstering of religion’s authority. I stand with them in it. My Saviour is not a circular argument for unquestioning conformity, but a Person.

In NGJ’s teaching, “sin” does not mean the corrupt state of man in Adam, as it does to most conservative Christians, but a moral state a person grows into as he indulges the flesh and then becomes morally accountable for whatever tendencies he has cultivated.

... There are as many scales of judgment as there are individuals. Each of God’s judgments are tailored to the individual. So if a child grows into a functional knowledge of good and evil at 6 years old or at 18 years of age, that will be the point of his accountability before God. A child might have a 50% knowledge of good and evil at one point and the next year mature to a 70% and the following year to 95%. But **only when the child reaches that place of a fully functioning conscience would he be deemed accountable...**¹⁴

Although there is a variance in Christian teachings on the age of accountability, to propose a mathematical-sounding formula surrounding the “knowledge of good and evil” is nowhere supported by Scripture.

A final concern comes from the response article Pearl wrote regarding Pastor Raley's remarks. Pearl clarifies that he does not consider parents to be a mediator of their child's salvation, but that the early childhood relationship between child and parent is *analogous* to the later relationship between believer and God (which coheres with TTUAC's teaching). But in this, he says something with even more serious implications: “Such early training assures parents that when their child is old enough to relate to God he will already be familiar with and surrendered to the principles of submission to the loving rule of law.”¹⁵

I would like to know this: since when do we relate to God through submission to the loving rule of law, rather than through the shed blood of Jesus Christ? We cannot have it both ways—“For you are not under law, but under grace” ([Gal. 2:20-21](#)).

DAVE: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

The doctrines that we believe and teach have to come out of the person of Christ as shown in the Bible. [John 14:6](#) says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” It doesn’t say, “My message is the way.”

In Christ’s discourse with Nicodemus ([John 3](#)), Nicodemus asks, “How can a man be born...?” He misses the whole point. “How can these things be?” And Jesus pretty much shakes his head and says, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand?”

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. —John 3:18

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins ([1 John 2:2](#)). Not His message. Not His righteous living. He Himself. That is the Gospel in a nutshell.

And by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments ([1 John 2:3](#)). Knowing Christ comes first. We come to Christ, we don’t come merely to “overcome.” All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags ([Is. 64:6](#)). Anything developed out of “training” is useless. The commandments exist to show us our depravity. The righteousness imputed to us exists in the nature of God, not in Christ’s obedience to the commandments.

If we use the biblical definition of righteousness, NGJ teaches that we have to become righteous enough to make the right choice (obeying the message) before we can repent and believe and receive Christ’s perfect righteousness. NGJ admits we can’t get to heaven on our own righteousness, but then teaches we must achieve an operational righteousness in order to be able to choose Christ.

Followed to the end of its line of reasoning, this is the way things fall out: That’s why children have to be absolutely obedient to their Christian parents. They are not capable of choosing, understanding or achieving righteousness. Their obedience to their parents’ sense of righteousness is their absolute guide until they believe and receive Christ’s ability to obey, which their parents are supposed to have.

If my children had to depend on my maintenance of Christlike righteousness at any point, they’d be doomed.

I’m very thankful that through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and ultimate payment for my and Adam’s sin, that I am imputed Christ’s inherent righteousness, not merely His obedience. Perfect though His obedience was, it was not the core of the propitiation. And I count all such things loss that I may gain *Christ*.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, this is not primarily a debate about child-training methodology, but what makes a biblical motivation and a biblical direction for overall child-training.

If this child-training method is intended specifically to lead children to Christ, does it lead them to the real Christ of the Bible? And does it do so in accurate reflection of the character of God? In accurate reflection of the way God made for sinful man to be restored to relationship with Him?

If the entire thing is based on a misconstruction of “human nature, God, eternity, judgment, etc.,” particularly in terms of salvation, it behooves us to consider that this child-training method may actually *hinder* our children’s faith. They may come to biblical faith, but they will have to fight the conflicting messages of this alternate teaching about who God is and how people relate to Him. The more the teaching is absorbed and implemented alongside genuine biblical living and teaching, the greater the conflict—for us parents, as well. The more it imposes its redefinitions and reinterpretations on God’s Word and ways, the less we and our children have as a true foundation of Bible-believing Christian knowledge.

God Himself is always the final factor, and His Word, enlivened by His Spirit, is always the final power in any person’s life, grownup or child. We are not dependent on our own obedience, but on Christ, who in obedience to the Father gave His life for our sins—past, present and future. There is always room at the cross for parenting failure. That, not our ability to implement success, is our source of peace and joy.

That said, if we know some element of our lives misses the mark set by Scripture, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” ([Rom. 6:1, 2](#)). May it never be! Indeed, it’s in laying these things at the cross that we demonstrate to our children the ways and means of relationship to Jesus Christ.

We encourage you, parents, to place your eyes upon the Author and finisher of faith ([Heb. 12:2](#))—not to become ensnared in subtle messages of faith for its own sake, or obedience for its own sake. Know Christ. Count all else rubbish that you may gain Him ([Phil. 3:7-8](#)). As you have received Christ, so walk in Him ([Col. 2:6](#)). It is in that relationship that we find rest for our souls: Relationship with a Person whose nature is the first cause and definer of that which we mortals call Truth.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. — 3 John 4

He is the way, the Truth and the life, and He takes joy in us when we seek to know Him. That's His call and His promise to you, dear parent. In that we may find rest for our souls.

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive////in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-1/> (Accessed April 13, 2010).
 2. Compare the October, 2010 NGJ article *Michael Pearl Says WHAT?* (<http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2010/october/08/michael-pearl-believes-what/>) with the original, fully-linked post by Pastor Matthew Raley, written in March 2010: <http://tritonelife.com/2010/03/03/is-michael-pearl-responsible-for-a-girls-death/>
 3. Pearl and Pearl, *To Train Up a Child*, 46.
 4. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/podcasts/view-podcast/archive/2008/september/23/sinful-nature-1/> (Accessed Apr. 20, 2010)
 5. Ibid.
 6. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/#SouMakThe> (Accessed May 28, 2011). The soul-making defense is one of several attempts by theistic thinkers to justify the existence of evil.
 7. See footnote 4. Transcription begins at 17:22.

8. See footnote 4. Transcription includes 17:52-18:26.
9. Ibid. (Continues previously referenced audio excerpt.)
10. See footnote 4. Transcription begins at 18:26.
11. See footnote 4. Transcription includes 21:23-21:59.
12. The Interlinear Hebrew Greek English Bible, Vol 4 (The New Testament), ed. Jay Green, p. 448; Associated Publishers and Authors, Lafayette IN, 1979.
13. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/fileadmin/template/Audio/2006-Calendar-Messages/Right-Temp-Judge.mp3>. Transcription includes 05:43-08:04. (Accessed Apr 19, 2010)
14. See footnote 13. Quoted statement begins at 10:16.
15. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2007/august/15/the-salvation-of-children/> (Accessed Apr 19, 2010)
16. Ibid.

X.

EXAMINING SANCTIFICATION

By David J. Dyck and C.L. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, we contrast the biblical view of sanctification with NGJ's unscriptural teaching of sanctification.

Terms and Definitions

Appropriation The action of taking something for one's own use.

Sanctification To be set apart; to be made holy.

CAT'S CONCERNS: THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION

In the web article *Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space*, Michael Pearl writes:

He died on a cross and was made the vile sinner I am, yes, even as if he were all the vile sinners who ever lived. The perfect man became the perfect substitute for imperfect sinners. The wages of sin is death, so he died that death for every man. We accumulated the debt, and he paid the price in his own blood. ([Gal. 3:13](#); [1 Pet. 2:24, 3:18](#))

He now invites all to come and share in the salvation he has provided. It cost him everything; it costs you nothing. ([1 John 2:1, 4:10](#); [John 3:16](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#); [Romans 11:6](#))

The sole condition for salvation is repentance/faith. Repent—acknowledge your worthiness of judgment and eternal death. Faith—give up all other confidences, and believe on Christ as God come in the flesh, who paid the price for your sin and offered himself as the only way to God. ([Acts 16:31](#); [John 3:15, 36](#); [Acts 11:18](#); [Acts 5:31](#); [Acts 20:21](#))

But, this is not all. This is only half of the gospel.¹

Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone. These are the core summary of the biblical gospel. We have

previously discussed imputation, but here we see that in NGJ's terms, it's actually a matter of *appropriation*:²

So, **here is what most Christians have missed.** When a person believes on Jesus Christ, God immerses him into the very body and life of Jesus Christ ([1 Cor. 12:12-14](#))...Christ's actions become the actions of all who are in him ([1 Cor. 15:22](#); [Rom. 6:8](#)). Just as when Adam sinned, I sinned ([Rom. 5:12](#)), so **when Christ didn't sin, I didn't sin** ([2 Cor. 5:21](#))
....³

As an aside, if you go to [2 Cor. 5](#) and read 5:21 in its surrounding context, you'll notice it's part of a call to salvation. Its relationship to Pearl's point becomes curiously unclear when the Bible is used as the interpretive standard for the verse, rather than the NGJ commentary given. Further, Pearl states:

...Here is the crux of sanctification. **When Christ died, he not only died for sin, he also died to it** ([Rom. 6:10](#))...As sin was defeated in Christ, and because I am now in him, sin was likewise defeated in me. **I am as dead to sin as is Jesus** ([Rom. 6:7](#); [Romans 6:2](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#))....⁴

Again, Rom. 6:10 is wrested from its biblical context, which states that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again. So we are to reckon ourselves, though we are not resurrected yet, as those who will be sinless one day, and we are not to let sin reign over us—be in charge of our life path, our decision-making—as long as we are in this mortal body. The next three verses are short phrases removed from all biblical context (we have included surrounding verses in the hyperlink).

The believer's responsibility is to believe that what God says is true—that he is dead to all sin and alive unto God, that is, he is now freed from the power of sin. We should and can sin no more! (Rom. 6:11 especially, but [all of Romans 6](#); [Gal. 2:20, 5:24](#); [1 John 2:1](#); [Col. 3:1-4](#); [Rom. 8:3-4](#); [Col. 2:11-15](#))⁵

Interestingly, in Rom. 8:6-7, just after the two verses lifted from that chapter for this article's purposes, we encounter the phrase “carnally minded.” If a person's “nature” is simply and only their physical, bodily attributes, then one wonders how that flesh can have a mind of its own, or how it can seize control of ours.

In listening to Pearl's audio sermons, I heard great weight placed upon the necessity and efficacy of our “believing and receiving.” In tracing the threads of the doctrinal statement, what emerged was the implication that one sin will cast a believer into a state of lost salvation. From the doctrinal statement on the NGJ website:

SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

Believers, and believers only, are absolutely and eternally secure in Christ ([1 Cor. 15:1-2](#); [Hebrews 6:3, 14](#); [Gal. 5:1, 4](#); [Hebrews 10:35-39](#); [Colossians 1:22-23](#)).⁶

Let's briefly summarize the gist of the verses Pearl cites (the e-text above is hyperlinked to references).

- First Cor. 15:1-2, removed from its context, closes with these words: “if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.”
- Heb. 6:3 and 14, pulled from their individual contexts, make no sense at all here without special reinterpretation provided.
- Gal. 5:1 and 4 refer to not being “entangled again” and not falling from grace.
- Heb. 10:35-39, removed from its context, speaks of “those who draw back to perdition.”
- Divorced from its context, Col. 1:22-23 contains “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

These are not verses which believers in eternal security normally use to refer to the steadfastness of the Christian's faith. While not all Christians hold that salvation is absolute, permanent and unconditional to the believer's ongoing walk, those who do, refer consistently to Scriptures on the work of God in the believer's life rather than the works of man. A bait-and-switch has been performed here, in that this is not a statement of faith in the believer's security, but their lack of it.

Elsewhere, Pearl says he believes in “once lost, once saved, twice lost, never saved again.”⁷ I did not understand precisely what this implied until I began to look at his idea of sanctification.

NGJ teaches that salvation is maintained by not sinning, moment by moment. They claim that everyone retains the *ability* to sin, distinguishing believers from the sinless Son of God in that Jesus did not have the ability to sin. A contradiction in thinking immediately emerges: If Christ did not have the ability to sin, what moral character did He have to learn and earn?

In the 1996 web article *God Made Jesus to be Sin*,⁸ Pearl presents some confused teaching on the imputation of sin to Christ which implies that Christ became a sinner in somewhat different than an imputative sense—again, the word “appropriation” comes to mind.

At this time, the main concern is that we can see the reason for the core emphasis on training children to reflexive obedience, and the reasons Pearl refers to this as a sort of pre-salvation “sanctification,” though he states he does not mean this in a theological sense. His behaviour-modification technique⁹ appears intended to impress a reflexive obedience that will equip the grown child to retain their sanctified state through obedience and avoid falling into irrevocable condemnation. Once again, we encourage you to go to the NGJ doctrinal statement and read the verses associated with the statement of faith where it touches on sanctification for illustration.

DAVE ON DOCTRINE

This reminds me of talking with some friends from a church we used to attend. “He says salvation is through Christ alone and His sacrifice on the cross. That’s good enough.” Initially, I may have agreed, but we can now see that Pearl adds to that. This is where things go awry.

Only half the gospel, Pearl claims? The other half is for us to achieve and maintain. That just can’t happen. I used to say that all teachings have to be taken back to the cross; if they don’t line up there, then something is wrong and has to be scrapped or changed. The point is, the cross is a reflection of the character of God Himself, and as such *has* to line up with His person and Word. The idea that Christ had to learn sanctification before it could be passed to us, or that there is any way we could lose our salvation once we are in Christ, or do anything to ‘prepare ourselves’ to receive salvation is outside of the character of the infinite God of Scripture.

I love it when preachers say things like “here is what most Christians have missed.” They are bookmarking where they are going to stray from Scripture and head off on a new track.

The reference that Pearl uses ([1 Cor. 12:12-14](#)) about being immersed in the body and life of Christ does speak of being in the body of Christ, but makes no mention of the life of Christ. It’s referring to all believers as the body of Christ. Pearl’s connection of our salvation to the life of Christ is rather disturbing: “Christ’s actions become the actions of all those that are in Him.”

Really? I have a will, and it gets me in trouble all the time. [1 John 1:8](#) says, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” This is active, current, not past tense.

I guess Paul just didn’t get it. He wasn’t godly enough. If that’s the case, the human agent involved in writing large portions of the New Testament won’t be in glory to meet those of us who do measure up.

After all, Paul says, “...I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” ([Rom. 7:15b](#)).

And in v. 17 and 20, “...But sin which indwells me.” And again in v. 18, “...but the doing of the good is not.” And then in v. 21, “I find then the principle that sin dwells in me...”

Yet Michael Pearl has said quite clearly, “Christ’s actions become the actions of all who are in him...Just as when Adam sinned, I sinned...so when Christ didn’t sin, I didn’t sin...”¹⁰

To follow this logic, when Paul says that sin dwells in him, does this mean that as the body of Christ, sin dwells in Christ? So when I *do* sin, that Christ sins? That doesn’t line up with the character of the Creator God that I’m familiar with.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. — Rom. 7:24-8:1

Paul always admitted his sinfulness, even so far as to refer to himself as the chiefest of sinners, present tense. He knew he wasn’t able to ‘not sin’ and that any righteousness that may be found in him was not his own, nor the work of the life of Christ, but the gift of Christ through His sacrifice on the cross.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. — 1 John 3:2

We're not sinless yet, but we will be. Praise the Lord.

ALL YE WHO ARE WEARY

Come to Me, all ye who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart; and My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. — Matt. 11:28-30

Anytime we see sanctification (Heb. *qadash*/Gk. *hagios*) used in a real and concrete sense in Scripture, it refers to the work of Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit in us.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. — Cor. 6:9-11

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. — Heb. 2:11-12

Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. — Heb. 10:8-10

In reference to what we do as believers, the terms take on a sense of ceremonial observance or reckoning. Much is said of the Judaic priests, for instance, and the outworking of our salvation is expressed in terms of reckoning (Rom. 6, as previously noted).

In other words, only God actually works sanctity. We are not to allow the *sarx* to dominate our daily living, but God is the one who is at work in us, to will and to do of His good pleasure, even as we reject evil by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit ([Phil 2:12-16](#)).

It's the same idea as the *infinite* coming out of the *finite* (impossible). Just as only infinitude can effect an infinite thing (such as infinite love or infinite wrath), holiness can only come from the perfectly holy.

So then, what happens when a professing believer sins? What happens if we fail to “sin no more”?

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. — 1 John 1:8-2:2

John writes these things to us so that we “may not sin.” Does that mean ceasing from sin entirely in our walk as Christians? No, in context, it means that to say we either *do not have sin*, or *have not sinned*, **is in fact sin**. John writes this warning (designed to combat gnostic heresy, in fact) to prevent us from falling into the sin of denying our nature. “And if anyone sins,” he says, we have the advocacy of Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. Let me repeat: *The Righteous One*.

In 1:7, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, present tense. This is an ongoing process in the believer's life. And He Himself is the propitiation—the satisfaction and appeasement of God. Christ is the One in whom God is pleased.

It is not our yoke which we must carry in our daily walk. That was taken up by Christ. The biblical overcoming life is relational, personal. It's one in which we return constantly to the place where we began: the cross of Jesus Christ.

For as you have received Christ Jesus, so you are to walk in Him. From a human standpoint, this is both very simple and utterly impossible. When we focus on our own actions—sinful or obedient—the focus is off Christ and on ourselves. We can't “sin no more” by the power of believing, appropriating, praying, or any of the religious tools we tend to rely on.

We once heard the following benediction given in a southern church after the Scripture reading:

“May God add His blessing and His Holy Spirit to the reading of His Word. Because you can know it inside out, front to back and upside down. But without the Holy Spirit, you ain't nothin' but a devil.”

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.
— James 2:19

Our focus must be on the Person of Jesus Christ, who “became to us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification” ([1 Cor. 1:30](#)). It is He who gives us rest. Temptation is common to man, but the constant in all temptations is God's availability to those who trust in Him.

Our responsibility is to stay in His Word, reading it and allowing its light, which is a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path ([Ps 119:105](#)), to be applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. God carries the weight of our lives in His hands, which never fail.

CONCLUSION

It seems safe to say that the theology of NGJ stands without a scrap of eternal hope. This is a grievous, grievous thing—no cause for joy at all. The “hope” expressed is entire loss. We are sobered to consider it.

However, the Bible does indeed offer great hope. We have a Saviour who lives to intercede for us: a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. — Heb 4:16

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2005/january/12/living-parallel-lives-in-the-same-space/> (Accessed May 11, 2010).
 2. In fact, Mr. Pearl uses the “appropriation” terminology around the 53-minute mark of his audio sermon *The Sinful Nature* in reference to this point. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/podcasts/view-podcast/archive/2008/september/23/sinful-nature-1/> (Accessed Apr. 20, 2010)
 3. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2005/january/12/living-parallel-lives-in-the-same-space/> (Accessed May 11, 2010).
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.
 6. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/who-is-ngj/what-we-believe/> (Accessed Oct. 31, 2010)
 7. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/bible-teaching/article-display/archive/2010/february/08/the-kingdom-of-god-is-not-the-kingdom-of-heaven/> (Accessed May 11, 2010).
 8. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/august/01/god-made-jesus-to-be-sin-article/> (Accessed May 11, 2010).
 9. See Pastor Matthew Raley's online article summarizing the toxicity of using Behaviourism to promote religion. Further expansion of the topic is contributed by commenters. <http://tritonelife.com/2010/03/18/the-behavior-modification-gospel/> <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2005/january/12/living-parallel-lives-in-the-same-space/> (Accessed May 11, 2010).

XI.

TO DISCERN GOOD AND EVIL

By David J. Dyck and C.L. Dyck

Key Points for This Chapter

In this chapter, we conclude by discussing the bedrock of values formation: what people think about good, evil and God. We then examine several examples of the surface layers of NGJ's teachings to see how that bedrock percolates upward through their thinking.

By this point, having determined that NGJ's underlying theology is not biblical, though it uses many common expressions recognized by Bible-believers, we must now examine the fruits of the teaching. Is it possible to still find good practical applications in NGJ's parenting method? Is it possible to separate the misguided theological teachings from the child-training advice and anecdotes of success?

Let us begin by asking Michael Pearl's opinion of the matter.

The Bible calls it chastisement with a rod. We call it training. The spankings we give our children do not resemble punishment. We are not angry. We don't lose control. We are not desirous to make children suffer for their misdeeds. Application of the rod is only a small but essential part of our training technique...

It is not just a difference of opinion about what technique is best in rearing children. It is a matter of basic presuppositions. To give up the use of the rod is to give up our **views of human nature, God, eternity, judgment, etc.**¹ [*emphasis ours*]

At the core of any theology is *theodicy*, an explanation of how a good God can exist when evil exists. For large numbers of Christians there is either a logical conflict or an emotional tension—or both—between a good God who is fundamentally in charge of the universe, and an evil world and/or evil human beings—those originally created in God's image! How can this be?

In living true to their faith, committed Christians will sooner or later hear the question of why their God would allow suffering, wrongdoing, or even why a just God would allow sinners to go to heaven. From pre-Christian times, the conflict has been stated along these lines:

*If God is willing to prevent evil, but is not able to, then He is not omnipotent.
If He is able, but not willing, then He is malevolent.
If He is both able and willing, then whence cometh evil?
If He is neither able nor willing, then why call Him God?*

—Attributed to Epicurus

The informed non-believer asserts that this problem means that the “good” God of the average Christian is either a cosmic practical joke, or nonexistent. That's just enough information for such a person to consign themselves to Christlessness. As such, part of the Gospel imperative involves expressing biblical understanding which answers this complaint in such a way as to assure true seekers of God that their search is not in vain.

We have seen that NGJ attempts to do this by redefining the very nature of “good” and “evil” in relation to the entrance of sin into the world and the character and work of both God and man. However, the explanation is insufficient.

For example, evil exists in ways which have no bearing on the moral formation of anyone. If a small, helpless deer dies in a forest fire, akin to Disney's famous Bambi scenario, and no one witnesses it, to whose moral character does such an event contribute?

The same can be asked of a sunrise which no one sees—who then learns from that event to glorify their Creator God?

Rather than a toy placed upon a table to intentionally teach a child not to reach for their desire, what about a succulent edible fruit which grows undiscovered in the wilderness and falls to the ground without ever tempting anyone at all to take it?

There is more to this world than the supposed necessity of character formation can answer for. Pearl's is a weak explanation of evil indeed.

Erasing the moral nature of God and mankind, and proposing character development as the key which unlocks the problem of evil, is in fact an atheist's answer to life's heights and valleys, one which Cat grew up with in a non-theist background. Framed in pseudo-Christian thinking, it is an answer to the problem of evil which, instead of resolving the conflict or the tension, simply attempts to proclaim that the “good God” of the true biblical faith is dead—long live God.

DOES CRITICISM OF TTUAC JEOPARDIZE PARENTS' LEGAL AUTONOMY?

We have seen that there are much, much deeper issues of eternity in the balance of this discussion, not only temporal legal freedoms. However, many parents have expressed reluctance to criticize or engage in debate because it may encourage public lobbying by anti-spanking advocates.

Whether spanking is used calmly or in anger is beside the point in determining the use of NGJ's materials. Whether gentle parenting techniques are incorporated by NGJ or not is also not the question. The real question is: Is this material faithful to the standards of Scripture?

It is beside the point to either defend or reject the Pearls' materials based on concerns over the

political and legal considerations of child discipline and parental autonomy. Parents should not be intimidated by that point. They should not refrain from discussing the issues involved, *because spanking is not the main issue*. We should not fear that the discussion will contribute to legal activism against those who wish to use corporal discipline.

Legal activism against spanking is a separate matter which conjoins the NGJ controversy only in a secondary manner, and NGJ cannot be taken as representative of those Christians who advocate parental autonomy in deciding discipline—or general autonomy in raising our children. Rather, NGJ is representative of influences that can enter the family environment when parents *give up* their intellectual and spiritual autonomy to a religious ministry without fully examining its foundations and maintaining the inalienable right and duty to exercise critical thinking and biblical discernment at all times.

Unless we take the lead in demonstrating our ability to exercise that discernment and thoughtfulness, we risk inviting the world to usurp the right to do the thinking for us through legislation regarding parenting and parental freedoms. It's just as unbiblical to allow a religious ministry to think for us as it is to allow a government to think for us. We all stand responsible before God. It's unavoidable; so then, let us take up our responsibility.

EXERCISING DISCERNMENT

At this time, we want to review the anecdotes offered by NGJ's articles and books of newsletter reprints. If anything, the theology of conditioned morality and holiness is fully connected in the object lessons and examples offered by the Pearls. We'll see if we can trace the doctrinal threads of:

1. revision of the moral nature of man,
2. revamping the nature of God,
3. restructuring the work of the cross, and
4. redefining human sin and holiness.

Rather than breaking it down by categories, we'll look for any elements of these in several quotes. Since Mr. Pearl has on several occasions claimed that those on the web merely paraphrase him or place words in his mouth (even when those words are cited),¹ we quote copiously in order to allow Mr. Pearl to speak for himself. Let's take a look at what he writes:

You may ask, **“If he is still motivated by selfishness, how is the conditioning going to be morally beneficial?”** Though he [the child] may still be acting out of self-interest, you are causing him to **exercise his own will to deny his passion**. This will equip him for exercising self-discipline when his moral faculties are fully developed. The rod and your manipulation of his responses can't force a change in the child's heart. However, it can completely check the “evil” manifestations of his heart and serve him with a very teachable and disciplined body that is, regardless of the reason, exercising self-restraint. [*emphasis in original*]²

Note that “evil” is in quotes here, reinforcing the concept that children develop a moral nature rather than having one at birth (*Point #1*), and that the goal is to subdue physical, bodily lusts. The idea of a sort of conditioned (note that the specific word is used) pre-holiness is the stated reason for moral training (*Point #4*).

Likewise, one of the better articles which advocates not breaking the child’s spirit is predicated on parental attitude and the idea that children mirror what their parents model.

The law of condemnation and shame is such that it only produces more disobedience...your children will begin to develop positive character only in an atmosphere of forgiveness and acceptance...If ‘the joy of the Lord is our strength,’ then surely the joy of the parents is the strength of a child.³

In the case of gnostic-style dualism between flesh and spirit, the directive not to break the child's spirit takes on a new angle (*Point #4*). It is the spirit which is enabled by God to “overcome” the bodily passions. While the above article closes with the idea that we must set the bar of obedience by what our children are willing to do, and slowly raise it in positive ways (*Point #1*—development into a state of moral accountability), we also see it reflects the concept in TTUAC that parents fulfill a role analogous to God’s rightful place in the child’s life until the child becomes morally aware (*Point #1, 2*). At that point, the believe-and-receive appropriation idea of salvation comes into play (*Point #3*). The article, while phrased in relatively gentle parenting terms, is about developing the moral character necessary to salvation in the NGJ theological system.

SPANKING IS ONLY A PART OF TRAINING

Mr. Pearl writes:

She screams because it works. If it didn’t work, she would not scream. If the parent and other caretakers see to it that screaming is always counterproductive, she will cease forever. When we employ the rod, we do so as part of the training, not punishment. One need not even resort to the rod. If you are a foster parent for the government child-care system, not allowed to spank, you can still, though with more difficulty, train them not to scream.

...[T]urn and walk away [from a child who has screamed to make a request known to the parent]. If she were to scream again, turn back and give her a spanking and then proceed to the house without her. If for some reason you are prevented from spanking (someone else’s child, you are a foster parent, you are in a very public place, etc.), then just the denial of her desires will suffice to eventually stop the screaming—since it is the most necessary part of the training experience.⁴

If it can be done without the rod, then why are we to spank in this situation, exactly?

In their article on “Screaming” (NGJ Vol. 1 pp. 25-26),⁵ the Pearls advocate spanking first and asking questions later, because the child must be constrained from the disapproved behaviour, regardless of what another child in the room may have done to cause the screaming. This fits with the theological necessity of restraining the flesh as a primary spiritual goal in the Pearls’ system (*Point #1*).

In their article “The Emotional Squeeze,” the Pearls reference a family with “very obedient and pleasant” children, apparently being raised according to the NGJ method. However, one child’s problem is that:

[The] little three-year-old girl seems to be fearful and anxious when disciplined. She seems to withdraw into an “I’m being hurt mood.” There is no rebellion. There is instant compliance. When spanked, she stands rigid and stoically accepts her “just due.” Afterward she looks anxious and fearful...

So I asked the mother, “Does she begin to be withdrawn and hurt before the spanking?” “Yes, as soon as I begin to talk to her, she acts like she is going into some kind of a trance or something. She just acts like it is hurting her so much to be rebuked. If I tell her to stop crying, she does. If I tell her to smile, she does, but I don’t feel like I am getting through to her soul.”

Just to make sure of what I already believed, I asked, and she assured me, that she was spending time building her child up as a worthy and valuable member of the family...

In such a situation as this, my first thought is to search out any emotional or physical abuse. That trance-like, non-resistant submission is symptomatic of a child scared to death. That not being a possibility here, I was puzzled until she told me that the child began to withdraw as soon as the lecture began.⁶

We note that there is recognition of the symptoms of abuse by the Pearls. However, the article goes on to blame it on the mother for being excessively emotional—not casual and smiling (joyful) enough about the discipline/punishment administered.

This is combined with other articles which instruct mothers not to pick up their crying 3-month-old/9-month-old babies⁷—only pick them up or give them attention when they’re already content (reinforcing joyfulness, *Point #1, 4*).

The article *Sitting Down Inside* recommends that if an 18-month-old refuses to get in the car seat compliantly, the child be left with a babysitter every day (we are compelled to ask, will the Pearls pay for this?) while the mother goes out and comes home making a big deal of how much fun she had, and isn’t it too bad the child couldn’t come along. On the one hand, emotional manipulation is decried, and on the other, promoted. The car seat child is to be spanked five lashes for not complying immediately, and this to be repeated as many as three or four times, according to the article, before the child is left with the sitter. Finally, if compliance is not achieved after two weeks of going out regularly to convince the child of what they’re missing,

[i]n the unlikely possibility that she continues to refuse, after say two weeks, take the car seat inside the house and tell her to get in. If she refuses, calmly use minimal force to strap her in. Designate a length of time that she must sit there, and let her out when the time is up. Try to make it long enough for her to tire and cease rebelling (two or three hours). It is most effective if she is in a state of surrender when she is released. Repeat this until she grows out of the car seat or until she willingly gets in.⁸

As with potty training of newborns⁹ (elimination communication), note here that the Pearls feel the need to instruct their followers *not* to use excessive force. Why? If the method is reasoned, measured, calm and cheerful, and the parents have subdued their own flesh through the work of the spirit, then should Pearl's methods cause any concern about this?

At this point in the car seat saga, we encounter a conflict of information. In the web article, the next paragraph states, "We have taken this thing to the absurd. You will never have a small child who continues her rebellion once she is convinced that it is futile."

In the book (the 4th printing, 2001), the next paragraph reinforces NGJ's theology of moral development (*Point #1*), the Pearls' perspective on God's authoritarian nature (*Point #2*), and the demands of perfect Christian holiness (*Point #4*). In spite of 5 years between the original and this printing, no caveat of absurdity is given for the forcible confinement strategy suggested:

Remember, your strategy goes beyond the obvious fact that you are bringing such constraining circumstances that she eventually surrenders her will. Your main objective is to convince her of the nature of authority. Through your former inconsistency, Suzy came to believe that all authority was subject to manipulation—that through steadfast defiance she could gain the upper hand. You have taught her to respect authority. Now her soul can heal in the security that calm authority provides.¹⁰

The emphasis on authority and discipline is related to the Pearls' view of God and relationship to Him (*Points #2,3*). Their view of God's nature, expressed through the cross and salvation, is that one who fails to live out the appropriated moral standards of Christ may never have been saved, and, if "fallen away," can never return to repentance.¹¹ It all depends on the adult's appropriated ability to be holy.

What if you neglect your children's training? Certainly we cannot expect children to be automatic Christian gentlemen and ladies. Yes, children benefit the most from proper training. There is no alternative.

If you are the parent of a teenager who is in rebellion, you may feel that I have been hard on you. You scream, "Don't just tell me what a failure I have made. Tell me what to do to make it right." I am hard on you because there is nothing you can DO to make it right. There are no external principles, no tricks to making it all right. I am hard on you because your greatest need is to repent. You need a broken heart. You need to face the fact that it is all your fault. — "Training Fleishy Flesh"¹²

Note the connection here between the disobedient adult's alleged bratty scream and the previous articles on training screaming out of a child. While Pearl uses the word "repent," his sense of repentance is far removed from the Bible by his combination of gnosticism and moral theology.

Where children fail to thrive—whether resorting to defiance against the methods espoused by NGJ, or withdrawing into crushed compliance—the fault and failing is placed on the parent's disobedience—lack of consistency, emotional weakness, over-mothering (particularly of sons, where it's alleged¹³ that the mother becomes an unfit teacher by the time a boy is 13 to 14, and either his homeschooling education should all but cease or be completed by the men), or the untrained character of the parent in need of repentance.

CONCLUSION

Even the articles which advocate moderation, kindness and gentleness are shaped by the unbiblical moral theology of NGJ. The qualities of parental meekness are cast as tools for training within a greater theological framework, and their inherent, unconditional value is minimized as a result. While some principles may intersect on the surface with the ideas of genuine biblical Christian living, the underlying concepts taken as a whole have the potential to produce much confusion, conflict, pain and negation of the Scripture's teaching on true godly character.

For those who believe in spanking their children, we highly recommend seeking alternate resources and avoiding the NGJ materials. For those who do not spank, we suggest that parents not feel intimidated by the beliefs of others. In our years of absorbing Christian parenting materials, we've often heard it said that even within a family who believes in spanking, there may be one or more children for whom that discipline method just doesn't work. Each family will need to function in response to the unique individuals within it, including you, the parents.

Every family is imperfect, but Christ's work on the cross is perfect. Every family will have its points of struggle, but Christ restores, heals and completes what is lacking in our human frailty. Regardless of how you choose to parent, there is no "best result" formula. As the parents of four diverse young personalities ranging from late elementary to teen, we can say that it's always changing, always a journey. God is the one unchanging, certain factor.

There are much worse things a parent could do than to find themselves in the middle of a journey of discovery over their own parenting convictions. If you are uncertain about your convictions, and find yourself in the process of molding them, fear not: He will never leave you, nor forsake you ([Heb. 13:5](#)). We encourage you not to covet the claimed certainty of various ministry tools, whether NGJ or any other, but be content to let God cause your growth. Ask in faith, stay in the Word, seek healthy community, and know that our God shall supply all your needs—not because of what you choose, but because of who He is.

Evil exists, therefore good exists. Good exists, therefore God exists.

And therefore, sighting the existence of evil should never deceive us into complicity with it.

May God richly bless you, beloved one.

1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive////in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-1/> (Accessed April 13, 2010).

2. "Twinkie Twerp," No Greater Joy Vol. 1, p. 4 (original article written Sept. 1996). Also available online at: <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/september/01/twinkie-twerp/>
3. Pearl, "Bad Attitude," NGJ Vol. 1, pp. 43-44. Also online at: <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/january/01/bad-attitude/>
4. Pearl, "The Volleyball Bawler," NGJ Vol. 1, p. 28. Also online at: <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1998/january/01/the-volley-ball-bawler/>
5. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1995/august/07/3-year-old-screamer/> (Accessed June 23, 2011)
6. Pearl, "The Emotional Squeeze," NGJ Vol. 1 p. 17 Also online at: <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1995/july/07/emotional-squeeze/>
7. See <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/january/07/training-at-3-months/> (Accessed June 23, 2011)
8. Pearl, "Sitting Down Inside," NGJ Vol. 1, pp. 85-86. Also online at <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/august/01/sitting-down-inside/>.
9. Pearl, "Potty Training Answered," NGJ Vol. 1, pp.10-11. Also online at <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/june/07/potty-training-answered/>.
10. See endnote 8.
11. See the Pearls' doctrinal statement and compare verses to statements on salvation and sanctification/Christian living. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/who-is-ngj/what-we-believe/> (Accessed Oct. 31, 2010).
12. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1998/april/01/training-fleshy-flesh/> (Accessed May 18, 2010).
13. See Pearl, "Pubermania," NGJ Vol. 1, pp. 57-61, also online at <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/1996/march/01/pubermania/>. "When a young man (going through puberty) experiences this change, it is time for him to be engaged in hard work with the men. It is against nature to place a developing young man in the care of his mother." We are unsure what recourse this leaves for a single mother.

APPENDIX: WHAT IS THE SCHATZ CASE?

A SUMMARY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS IMPLICATIONS

By Cynthia Mullen Kunsman, RN, BSN, MMin , ND

Excerpted with permission from an online article available at Under Much Grace blog (see endnotes).

On February 6, 2010, an eight year old child collapsed in her Paradise, California home after a spanking with plumbing line, reportedly for mispronouncing a spelling word. She died from the complications of acute kidney failure due to rhabdomyolosis (rab-doh-my-o-low-sis). Her eleven year old sibling Zariah was hospitalized for renal failure but survived. The other children in the family were removed from the home and placed in the foster system. Their parents, Kevin and Elizabeth Schatz, faced charges of torture, cruelty to a child resulting in harm, and murder in Butte County Superior Court on April 11, 2011.

CONCERNS

Are some parents causing kidney damage that's not severe enough to produce visible symptoms in their children at the time of "child training"? Does this method cause a level of compromise that could only be detected by a physician who notes these changes in the blood work of these children? How will these people know until it is too late?

If, as Michael Pearl claims, the TTUAC method of child discipline is followed in approximately 1 million homes,¹ and we have seen cases of muscle cell destruction from parents who were described as mild, kind and gentle in the care of their children,² then other TTUAC-raised children may have suffered some degree of significant kidney damage that will remain undiagnosed until later in life.

If parents regularly discipline some of their more "problematic"³ children with the Pearl method, cumulative damage could occur over time, and future acute damage (rapid onset of symptoms) may also occur in other, less "problematic" children.

I believe that this population of children will be at increased risk for kidney disease in their later years. For example, with the rising incidence of diabetes, which is very damaging to the kidneys, a dose of the wrong antibiotic or too many NSAIDS could pose a clinical problem.⁴ I'm also concerned that the church may never find out about most of these cases and cannot get the information needed to truly evaluate the safety of Pearl's method.

WHAT IS RHABDOMYOLOSIS?

Exactly what happens in the kidney when so much muscle tissue breakdown product is released into the bloodstream?

Rhabdomyolosis describes the condition which follows massive skeletal muscle deterioration, liberating large amounts of muscle cell waste into the bloodstream. As a nurse in critical care, working

in critical care for more than ten years and in nursing for twenty-five, I've cared for about four patients in active and severe rhabdomyolysis, two of which were related to metabolic/medical processes and two of which were trauma related. The trauma cases were patients that had major muscles that were torn apart in car crashes, and the damage was extensive and very visible.

Some marathon runners and people in or training for triathlons can develop clinically significant rhabdomyolysis because of extreme and abnormal muscle cell rupture, showing high levels of muscle cells⁵ in their bloodstream after these types of events. However, moderate to severe rhabdomyolysis is not a common occurrence. It certainly should not be a consequence of spanking or discipline. The fact that it could and did occur in the Schatz children, and potentially others,⁶ suggests a unique medical concern tied to the Pearl method.

“Rhabdo” refers to skeletal muscles. “Myo” means muscle. “Lysis” means rupture, creating the word “rhabdomyolysis.” Rhabdomyolysis is the condition that results from rhabdomyolysis (the process). When muscle tissue breaks down, if it is in small quantities as happens naturally, the cells themselves contain enzymes (a natural digestive substance) which digest the tissue into very tiny particles. When exceptionally large numbers of muscle cells break down or are broken open due to great stress or trauma from beating, the muscle cells enter the bloodstream because there are so many and muscles have lots of blood vessels in them. When the blood becomes overloaded with these broken muscle cells (called myoglobin), they travel through the body. When they get to the kidney, these big broken cell pieces get pushed into the kidney and clog it.⁷

Within each kidney, there are one million tiny, very fragile structures called nephrons, tiny little special tubes which not only remove fluid and protein waste products but also absorb nutrients, acids, and bicarbonate back into the body. Each of the yellow tube-like structures (we each were given two million of them) regulates what remains in the tube, eventually becoming urine.

The muscle cell breakdown products look something like the broken muscle fragments that appear in the figure displayed above. The kidney is designed to handle only tiny particles that are dissolved in fluid, not cells or tissue breakdown products. These cellular byproducts get squeezed into the tiny tubes and clog them. During treatment in the hospital, patients are administered huge amounts of IV fluids to keep the pressure high, pumping constant fluid through the tubes so that debris does not lodge in them.

What happens when the tubes get blocked so much that fluids cannot open them? Each one of those affected tiny tubes dies, a condition called acute tubular necrosis. Necrosis means that something is dead and rotting. Those tiny little marvelous and fragile structures die. They die, turn black and rot. They don't grow back. These patients will be compromised for the rest of their lives. If too many of those tiny tubes die, the body cannot process nutrients and wastes, it cannot balance acids in the body, and the kidney failure causes anemia, because another part of what the kidney does involves telling the bone marrow to make red blood cells.

In cases where rhabdomyolysis has produced acute kidney failure, as much as 20% of people die. (This is sometimes what happens to marathon runners who die the day after a race.) The lack of function of the kidney creates a metabolic state in the body that can be inconsistent with life. Sometimes, treatment of the conditions that result are not enough to save a person's life. This was the case with Lydia Schatz.

Zariah Schatz will live with compromised kidneys for the rest of her life because a part of her kidneys died. She may have enough function after treatment, but she will be compromised somewhat. As she ages, this will be a health concern for her.

ARE THE DANGERS WORTH THE RISKS?

Considering all of these factors, I am concerned that there are numbers of children who actually suffer some degree of rhabdomyolysis that results from the use of the Pearl method. If enough muscle damage occurs in a short period of time, a part of the kidney could clog and die, but not enough to produce symptoms. If children are spanked on a chronic basis, it is possible that chronic damage could occur—not bad enough to cause kidney failure, but bad enough to cause damage.

Unless a child undergoes blood tests at some point, “renal insufficiency” (inefficient kidney function that is lower than a normal, healthy level) could be present and no one would be the wiser. It is conceivable that at least some children have experienced some damage, but not enough to produce symptoms of kidney failure.

My other concern involves the unreliable or absent reporting of cases of children who have suffered renal failure as a consequence of the use of the Pearl method. This is not about witch-hunting parents who spank, but rather about the lack of availability of real, hard data from genuine cases where this specific method has been involved. Parents have no way to know how widespread the health consequences of Pearl’s method may be, and may not know how to evaluate those consequences.

Individual states may keep records of children who have suffered renal failure because of these spankings and were removed from the home, but they may not be identified and tracked as being associated with the Pearl method. State Child Protection Agencies also do not typically share information with other states unless trends have been recognized on larger scales. Healthcare agencies will not be aware of these discipline methods, and it is my guess that families which were using the Pearl method will seek to keep the specifics a secret. Because a subgroup of the population is involved, the cases may not occur often enough for intervening doctors and nurses (and CPS agents) to notice and track possible trends on a broader scale.

Even if parents are prosecuted in Family Court, these individual cases may not be easy to identify. Prosecution may not result in some instances, or the specifics may not become a matter of public record. We only know about Lydia and Zariah because Lydia died.

Have there been several cases of renal failure in children whose families utilized the Pearl method? Further cases are coming to light (see endnote 5), but I don't think there's any way to know on a broad scale. Many of the communities of people who rely on the Pearl method eschew traditional healthcare. Some children are never issued birth certificates, born with the assistance of lay midwives. In some instances, the lay midwives and the families of the children may sometimes opt out of documenting the births of these children. In such cases, there is no record that these children even exist in the first place.

In addition, Child protective services and healthcare providers cannot report individual cases to the press because of privacy laws and concerns. Families, church members, and individual pastors would have to report occurrences of renal failure related to the use of the Pearl method, and given the embarrassment factor, I do not believe that many if any would be forthcoming.

What about undiagnosed cases of rhabdomyolysis? Could it occur on a chronic basis, producing renal insufficiency in some children?⁸

In my opinion, it would be wise for the church to take notice of these matters before one more child suffers. God blesses each individual with 2 million nephrons in life (those tiny little wonderful miracle tubes in the kidney), and they don't grow back if they get severely damaged in this type of rhabdomyolysis.⁹ Could Pearl’s plumbing line be ironically destroying a child's own metaphorical plumbing?

Those low protein, low potassium diets don't sound like a whole lot of fun, and dialysis is no picnic. Renal insufficiency and failure limits the treatment of arthritis pain, as NSAIDS strongly affect the pressure of blood in the kidney and cannot be used in patients with damage. Certain antibiotics and other medications cannot be used in people with weak kidney function, and others medicines must be used sparingly and monitored.¹⁰ Is it really worth the supposed divine right of spanking with plumbing line, if it puts little ones at risk?

What is the church going to do about it, or will we ignore it until Caesar does something for us?

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1. <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/answers/response-to-schatz-case/> (Accessed June 5, 2011). In his initial response to the Schatz case, Pearl also claimed that “millions” of children are raised by his methods: <http://pearlchildtraining.blogspot.com/2010/03/michael-pearl-laugh-at-critics.html> (Accessed June 6, 2011)
 2. See <http://lauriemo.blogspot.com/2010/02/in-which-i-speak-of-unspeakable.html> for an eyewitness account of the Schatz family's personalities and conduct. See also “Why Good People Make Dangerous Choices” by Cynthia Kunsman at http://undermuchgrace.blogspot.com/2011/04/why-good-people-make-dangerous-choices_05.html.
 3. See also the “First Time Obedience” topic, by Cynthia Kunsman, at <http://undermuchgrace.blogspot.com/search/label/First%20Time%20Obedience>.
 4. **Hardman, et. al.** (1996). Goodman and Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics (9th ed., pp 17-20, 622-624, 685-690, 704-706, 743.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
 5. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/6742286> (Accessed Apr. 1, 2011)
 6. For another case which emerged about a year after the Schatz incident, see blog post by Cynthia Kunsman referencing Jocelyn Andersen at <http://undermuchgrace.blogspot.com/2011/04/another-report-of-acute-renal-failure.html>.
 7. **Cotran, et. al.** (1989). *The Kidney*, Robbins Pathologic Basis of Disease (4th ed., pp 1011-1081.). Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders.
 8. A list of symptoms and management of early and chronic renal insufficiency can be found at <http://www.igan.ca/id76.html>. (Accessed Apr. 1, 2011)
 9. **Cotran, et. al.** (1989) *Cellular Damage and Adaptation*, Robbins Pathologic Basis of Disease (4th ed., pp 1-19.).
 10. Ibid. Hardman, et. al.

NOTES

Under Much Grace is an online resource for discussion and documentation of the phenomenon of spiritual abuse in evangelical churches. This information is excerpted from an article available online at <http://undermuchgrace.blogspot.com/2011/04/how-do-we-track-kidney-failure-in.html> It is reprinted here with the permission and consultation of the original author.

A full listing of further resources on No Greater Joy and the Pearl method is available from Under Much Grace blog at: <http://undermuchgrace.blogspot.com/2011/04/links-related-to-lydia-schatz-michael.html>

ADDITIONAL NOTES / BIBLIOGRAPHY

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In Memory

...of Lydia Schatz.

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Special Dedication From Cat

To the Schatz children, one and all.

I have thought of you as we worked on this. Your parents were neither utterly depraved nor utterly insane. They were utterly deceived, and utterly isolated by that deception even as loving hands in their community tried to reach out to them. They made their choices based on things that were not right or true. As we have sifted that deception, you have become the children of my heart.

The world can be dark, but it is not all dark. There is love. There is peace.

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to *nocham*.

Peter wrote in Greek. However, in the original Hebrew of the Bible, what we call “repentance” in English means several things. It means both ruefulness and consolation. To seek rightful restitution for oneself, and to take pity.

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to this place.

May you find your way to peace.