



REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Lord Jesus, the Law, the Prophets and the other writings of the Hebrew Bible all pointed to You and anticipated, in unparalleled detail, the significant events of Your first and second comings. You are the Messiah. You came in humility as the Suffering Servant in Your first advent, and I anticipate the day when You will come in power and glory as the Reigning King in Your second advent. You are the Light of the World; You are the Bread of Life; You are the Good Shepherd; You are the Resurrection and the Life; You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and You are the True Vine. You did not come to be served but to serve, and to give Your life as a ransom for many. You came to seek and to save that which was lost. And You came to accomplish the work which the Father gave You to do. I glorify Your Name for who You are and for what You have done.

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



OUR COMPETENT GOD

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:5–6)

No one would have guessed that a young Swiss pastor named Karl Barth would become one of the 20th century's most important theologians. The son of a professor, he attended excellent schools, became a pastor, married, and began raising a family. But when many European pastors became enamored with Hitler's ideologies prior to World War II, Barth grew disenchanted with liberal theology. A life-shaking encounter with sin and grace in Paul's letter to the Romans led Barth to pen a church-shaking commentary on Romans in 1918. In it, he repudiated the liberal teachings of his professors and the professing European church. The book catapulted him to the center of the world's theological stage.

In 1931 his *Church Dogmatics* began publication. *Church Dogmatics'* nearly 8,000 pages clearly established Barth as a competent theologian—indeed, the most competent of all in his day. Yet, toward the end of his life, this great theologian is quoted as saying: "When once the day comes when I have to appear before my Lord, then I will not come with my deeds, with the volumes of my *Dogmatics* on my back. . . . No, then I will only say one thing: 'Lord, be merciful to me, a poor sinner!'" For all of his scholarly brilliance, Barth learned he was inadequate to save himself apart from God's grace.

Another young man, Saul of Tarsus, started out life in the first century on a track that paralleled Karl Barth's—excellent training in a bankrupt theological system. Studies in the Mosaic law and the best rabbinical training schooled him in the Pharisaical liberalism of his day. But in the midst of a personal crisis of faith (Acts 9:1–19), Saul found his theology inadequate. Through newfound

faith in Christ, he became Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles—the greatest theologian and evangelist in the history of the church. But even Paul knew that, apart from God, he was still "incompetent," declaring, "Our competence comes from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Many Christians who, in the world's eyes, are totally competent intellectually and vocationally, have declared that it is only God's competency that makes them anything at all. That's why God allows our inadequacies to be revealed—so that we might see His adequacy.

GOD'S PROMISE:

You will always be competent while you are depending on Him.

REFLECTIONS MINISTRIES

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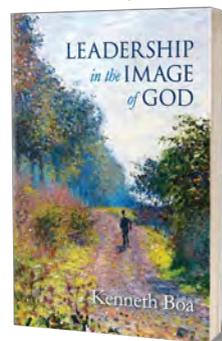
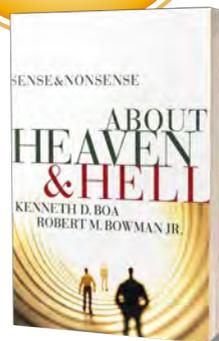
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LOVING YOUR WAY THROUGH CONFLICT

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, PART 4

Few tasks a leader faces are more emotionally or mentally challenging than that of managing conflict. And yet, conflict is a fact of life in this world, so it's crucial that a person in a leadership position learn how to manage it with an eye toward positive closure. Over the course of a career, every leader will have countless opportunities to work through relational, philosophical, and methodological differences with others. On occasion those differences may lead to personal strife, and the leader's opponent may appear to be an enemy. At such times the words of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount will take on added significance:

You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:43–45)

On Christmas Day of 1957, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.¹ It was based on this very passage of Scripture, and the sermon's title was "Loving Your Enemies." Through the course of his sermon, Dr. King suggested three ways by which we can do just that.

► **First, we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive.** Such forgiveness doesn't mean that we ignore the wrong committed against us. Rather, it means that we will no longer allow the wrong to be a barrier to the relationship. "Forgiveness," according to King, "is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a

new beginning. It is the lifting of a burden or the canceling of a debt."² This definition rings true with Scripture, which tells us that our ability (and obligation) to forgive others is based on the forgiveness we ourselves received by the grace of God because of Christ's finished work on the cross (Matthew 5:12; 18:21–35; Ephesians 4:32).

► **Second, we must recognize that the wrong we've suffered doesn't entirely represent the other person's identity.** We need to acknowledge that our opponent, like each one of us, possesses both bad and good qualities. We must choose to find the good and focus on that rather than on the negatives. We must view others through the lens of the love of Christ rather than, as Paul wrote, "from a worldly point of view" (2 Corinthians 5:16), which tends to emphasize others' performance and appearance. Each of us, as Dr. King reminds us, "is inefably etched" with the "image of God," and none of us is "beyond the reach of God's redemptive love."³

► **Third, "we must not seek to defeat or humiliate our opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding."** Such an attitude flows not from ourselves, but from God as His unconditional love works through us. With this view, we assume the attitude of our heavenly Father, who was patient and compassionate with us even "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8) and does not treat us as we deserve (see Psalm 103:8–10). We need to see others as people in need of redemption and whom the Father wants to save (2 Peter 3:9).

As followers of Christ who seek to lead as He led, we must remember that the more freely we forgive, the more clearly we reveal the nature of our heavenly Father.

RESPONDING TO CULTURAL CHAOS

Earlier this spring, Ken Boa spoke on the topic, "How should we respond to cultural chaos?" in a Q&A with Michael Stewart, a ministry associate of Reflections Ministries. Following are edited excerpts from the discussion. Watch or read the full interview at <http://bit.ly/culturalchaos>.

MS = Michael Stewart KB = Ken Boa

MS: The back of your book *An Unchanging Faith in a Changing World* says, "The world is changing so drastically—by the day, by the hour, by the minute—that sometimes you hardly recognize it. You face more and more challenges to our Christian convictions but have less and less support to stand up for our faith. You wonder if it is still possible to be ready to give a defense for what you believe." That was over 20 years ago. Where are we today?

KB: There are wonderful things that we do not want to overlook—great advances. At the same time, there has been a loss of a collective, moral consensus. Every civilization—the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians—all had some moral consensus of sorts. Whether they followed it is another matter, but now, it's up for grabs. Ours is the first generation that has lost the quest for the truth, goodness, and beauty and has relativized all three of those transcendentals. That said, I don't end in despair but in the perspective of Daniel (see verses 7:13–14): We're part of a story that's going to end well.

MS: What are the most powerful influences in our culture today?

KB: One is the relativistic notion. And, of course, as soon as you embrace relativism, then by definition, "Says who?" is your argument. What's your authority? And as soon as you eschew any absolute basis for authority, everything is up for grabs. But people live better than the logical implications of a relativistic worldview. They know that some things are true, good, and beautiful. That is why I use film and media, art and literature—story, narrative.

Because if you can speak to the heart, people know. They live as if there's meaning, value, purpose, and hope, even if their worldview provides no basis for that.

Public education, media, and entertainment are the primary sources of culture shaping. And the power sources behind those spheres—the sociological elite—are radically left of the center (left of the typical left). It's a small number of people percentagewise that exerts a radically disproportionate influence, which is multiplied because of the technological vehicles available.

MS: One sociologist points out that our technology gives us the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship.⁵ Why is that dangerous?

KB: There are about 400,000 nonverbal cues. When we reduce our communication only to texting, we've lost the vast bulk of the information and relational dynamics of a message. We get an illusion of intimacy and relationship without the reality of it. With technology-mediated "relationships," there are no obligations, no commitments—if it doesn't work out, you go to another chat room or whatever you want to do. So people are basically emaciated. They long for authenticity in relationships, but the vehicles that are being used diminish that. My desire would be for us to leverage technology but not use it as a substitute for a personal encounter.

MS: Some argue that Christians really shouldn't engage in political debate. What's your response?

KB: It's not a question of *whether* you're going to talk about politics and religion; it's the *way*

you're going to do it—with civility or a lack of civility, with dignity or indignity, with name calling or reason. Christians should actually set the table for more robust dialogue.

MS: The buzzword of the day is socialism. What is that, and what is its effect?

KB: Socialism says that the individual is here to serve the state, the collective whole. The problem with that is the individual loses dignity and becomes part of a herd being collectively moved into a certain direction. It never works that way, though. Always, in spite of talking about the collective, there is a tremendous jockeying for position along with the elitism that drives it. It sounds very good, but who controls the controllers? The potential for abuse is extremely great.

MS: There are a lot of slogans out there regarding race: Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter. Is this issue too serious to be consolidated into little catchphrases like these?

KB: I think it is, because it is a diminishment of people's true humanity to vilify or focus on just one side (like race). And the unity that we have in Christ transcends race and consanguinity (Galatians 3:28). No longer are we in Adam; we're in Christ. We have a new derivation, a new dignity, a new destiny. Doesn't that give me a lot more in common with a person of another race than anything else?

MS: Do you have any final thoughts about our individual responsibilities?

KB: I'm to be an agent of grace, love, civility, kindness, fruitfulness, and flourishing, rather than an agent of spite, resentment, and division. We're to be agents who love one another in spite of all the thin distinctions that people use to shape identity, whether it's race, economics, or gender. The great saints become increasingly aware of two things, the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin. The more that barrier increases, that huge yawning gap, their vision of grace increases, because He is the One who still reaches down, more than you ever thought.

¹Today, the church bears his name, Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. ²"Loving Your Enemies" chapter in King Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 45. ³Ibid., 46. ⁴Ibid., 43. ⁵Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 1.