

Culture Wars and the Soul: Part 1

By J.P Moreland

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Dennis Gaines is one of those people at least prima facie strikes you as being a pretty nice guy. On the surface of it, at least, he appears to have a pretty reasonable character; it's fairly well-developed sense of virtue. But don't let appearances fool you. The man is really a vicious scoundrel deep down. You asked me how I know this. Well at the faculty retreat this August I got a call before we went there, and it was Dennis and he said, "J.P. would you and Walt Russell be interested in playing a little friendly game of golf during the faculty retreat."

Well, I said, "Sure. Are you are... Are you very good?" Hoping he wasn't

"Oh no no I'm a duffer you can rest assured him that."

"Oh fine. Well yeah. We love to play."

Well, he sets it up and we get out of the golf course and he proceeds to whip all the rest of us desperately. And it turns out that this guy was setting us up for that game. He wanted to showcase his skills and, and humiliate Wlat and me, and he did accomplish that. It didn't help matters though that I got thirteen on one hole so.

And that's no kidding. It was... it was rather nightmarish. So there are many scars within my soul, and there might be culture wars going on in there and one of the scars might be due to that bad performance.

But just kidding of course. Thank you very much Dennis. I just had a chance, I just flew in yesterday from New York, Schenectady, New York, where I'm sure during the course of our time together, I will communicate some things I saw there. I was asked to come and speak and to

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...defend the Christian religion in public, at a local college where Jonathan Edward's son was the second president of the college and to hold a seminar on apologetics in a church there where Jonathan Edward's son was buried right outside the church door; it's quite an experience. But there are some remarkable things happening in that church. And the reason that they are happening is because the church for the first time in probably 20 years, is starting to get involved in the culture wars that we see raging around this. Albert Camus was a French atheist and an existentialist, and he made the following statement about the field of philosophy that I would like to focus your attention on.

He says, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide.

Judging whether life is or is not worth living, is answering the fundamental question of philosophy.

All the rest whether, the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine categories or twelve categories come afterwards. These are games. The other question is ultimate".

Now I don't know about accepting Camus statement in detail but I do think he has something to offer us and it is simply this: those of us who engage in reflecting on various academic disciplines need to ask ourselves the question, given that we are human beings, and given that we are evangelical Christians, what issues in our disciplines are most important and most fundamental for the health and life of the church and for my own growth as a human being and my flourishing and my following Jesus of Nazareth? And there will not be an equality of all issues.

Some issues will be more important than others. Now that doesn't mean that all of us will

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...focus on the same thing because we might have different talents and gifts, but we ought to ask under the lordship of Christ, what are the things that you would want me to do Lord Jesus in my field or my discipline to bring the greatest glory to you, and the greatest good to your people, and those who are outside the camp, Very same thing is true in the ministry, and I know some of you are planning on going into Christian ministry. And you must ask yourself the question: what are things that I have got to be sure get done out there?

What are the non-negotiable and what are peripheral. I believe, if you ask that question and if you're in touch with modern culture, one of the things that will be evident in the local church is the importance of engaging and returning rigorous intellectual discussion, and debate, and ideas to the local church. RC Sproul made the statement that we live in the most anti-intellectual period in the history the Christian church. When I was at this church yesterday in Schenectady, New York and was preaching, they had a children's message. And then the children's message they read from a bulletin that had been printed 100 years ago.

This church building was built in 1780. And this this bulletin discussed an examination of a 10 year old boy who wanted to join the church, and the elders of the church examined him. And I am telling you, they asked this 10 year old boy some serious the theological questions, and I backed off of that and I said cowabunga dude. If you tried to ask those kinds of questions today, you'd probably be fired because people wouldn't have to look up some of the words in the dictionary, and in a user friendly generation it just wouldn't work.

But my view is that in the churches and those of you who are going into church ministry, and for the rest of us who are involved in various things. It is important for us to realize that we really are involved in a warfare for the minds of men and women.

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Earlier in the century J. Gresham Machen, a great reformed pastor, put it this way: he said, "False ideas are the greatest hindrance to the progress of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there. If we permit the whole collective thought of the culture to carry on in such a way as to regard Christianity as nothing more or less than a hopeless delusion." Machen point is the same point Luther made.

If we defend Christianity in points where nobody is criticizing it and leave it undefended in places where it's really being challenged, we are really not defending Christianity. And we are involved in without any question the most rigorous attack on Christianity in the history of America, certainly. Some of my colleagues, not not at Talbot, but some of my colleagues at Biola that I've talked to do not like the idea or don't like the metaphor of warfare. They...they're concerned about it, and I can understand that. Because there are certain negative features of saying that we're in a warfare. It has a tendency to polarize people too much, and it does have a tendency to make us label people inordinately in an unhelpful way. And I'm very, I want to be sensitive to that because I think that we do need to use very... a number of metaphors to describe our relationship to culture, and I certainly am not recommending that a warfare metaphor is the only one that should be used but I must dissent from the idea that it is altogether inappropriate because the simple fact of the matter is that we are in a warfare of ideas. And Christianity and the university today is really the primary heresy and I think I could document that. Historic Orthodox Judaism and Christianity are regarded among most intellectuals today as being outdated, as being ignorant, naive, and indefensible. Petrim Sorokin was a sociologist at Harvard, and Sorokin made the point that we have shifted in our culture from what he called a sensate culture to...from an ideational culture to a sensate culture. What's the difference? In an ideation

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...culture, you believe that the world that the senses can experience does not exhaust reality.

In addition to the world made available by the five senses, there is an unseen world that really does exist and gives significance to the visible world. I will tell you that in the history of thought, at least in the history of philosophy, the ideation of view of the world has been advocated by probably 95 percent of the philosophers who have ever philosophized until this century. The idea that the senses exhausted what is real was not advocated by any more than just a very very small handful of serious thinkers in my field anyway. But today we have shifted says, Sorokin, from an ideation of culture to a sensate culture. And in a sensate culture.

The view is that what is real is exhausted, but what can be sensed with the five senses. And according to Sorokin, that shift has generated an incredible number of social problems and all kinds of difficulties. If you will live in a sensate culture one. One of the things that will go will be values, because values can no longer exist in any real sense in a world exhausted by the senses.

I mean you're not going to see a bumper sticker that says, 'I break for moral values.' They're just... if they exist at all, they're not the sorts of things that you can, let's say, you know is that is the statement: don't murder color purple. Does it weigh 15 gram? You know you know moral values just don't appear to be those kinds of things. In addition to that, it is obvious that God will go because God is embarrassingly invisible, and he will not be observable in any interesting sense of the word by the five senses.

Furthermore, the soul will be abandoned and we will no longer believe that people think with their souls but we will believe they think with their brains or something like that.

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Immortality will be gone. Questions of immortality are not the kinds of things that can be settled by an appeal to the five senses at this point. Abstract objects will no longer be seen as existing. I...I had a couple of public discussions on Friday and Saturday night in Schenectady, New York on the existence of God, and there were a bunch of atheists that came; they invited a number of atheists and this one scientist and mathematician came up and was very very antagonistic to me after the talk. And he began to accost me and he... his basic view was that you really cannot believe in anything that you can't see. And I asked him the question, and I said well please tell me, you're a mathematician, what do you study? I mean, do you study numbers? Or what is it that you study? And he said mathematics doesn't study anything, it's invented - it's just created. Mathematicians invented their... their work. And I said, "Well, I have no doubt that they invent some of it." But I said, "Are you trying to tell me, let's say, that before any human beings live two and two wasn't four? You're saying that two and two equals four is a product of language or something like that. So if there were no language users somehow there wouldn't be any twos and twos or anything like that?"

I had a professor at USC named Hartry Field, who was probably one of five or six leading philosophers of mathematics in the western speaking world. He wrote a book called "Science Without Numbers". And the reason that he wrote the book was because, he knew, that science uses mathematical language, and since science uses mathematical language that would appear to imply that scientific that mathematical language is true. OK. At least some of it.

And if mathematical language is true there has to be something that that language is describing in the external world. If I say an apple is red there's got to be app an apple out there doesn't there? Well if I say two and two is equal to four there have to be a number two and a
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...number two and there have to be a number four. Well he doesn't want numbers to exist. Why? In his own view, because if they do exist, there are a lot like God. They're invisible, they don't exist in space and time. They're not composed of matter and you can't see them with the five senses. And so field wrote a book to try to show that mathematical statements really aren't true.

And in his view two and two equals four is not a true statement. It is what he calls a useful fiction, and he is adopt an instrumental wisdom in mathematics - that mathematics is a nice tool that helps us produce technology and so on but no mathematical statement in the history of the world it's ever been uttered by anybody's true. I'm wondering if his statement about that was considered true, but in any case, his view was that abstract objects don't exist because of the commitment to the senses and a commitment to the fact that only what science says is real is real.

So abstract objects, the laws of logic, et cetera go. Something else that goes is other minds... other minds. I can't see your consciousness. It is forever beyond my gaze. And this was the main movement behind behaviorism and Skinner and other behaviorists were motivated by something called operationalism, which is a desire to define conscious terms like desiring, wishing, and hoping, feeling, and thinking, which are all invisible, if they are in fact states of consciousness, you see because I can't see your desiring, and wishing, and hoping, and feelings. And so according to Skinner and others, what these things turn out to be are are publicly observable behavior or tendencies to behave in certain ways given certain stimuli. And so pain, for Skinner, turns out not to be an invisible occult entity in soul that you feel after stuck with a pin.

No pain turns out to be the tendency to grimace and say, "ouch" after you're stuck.

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...to to take conscious states of others and to reduce them to what can be sensorably observable. But it doesn't stop there. If you were committed to the existence of what you can sense only, I'm afraid you're going to have to abandon the existence of physical objects as well, because you can never observe a whole physical object that is three dimensional and that continues to exist when it's not being observed. This may sound like a trick but it isn't.

And there was a movement in the first half of this century that was called phenomenism that denied the existence of material objects because you can't sense a material object completely. And they wanted to commit themselves only to two dimensional surfaces that exist while they're being observed. So to say a podium is in the room is simply to say then, that if I walk into the podium and orient my head in a certain direction, I will have a podium sensation for a certain period of time and that's all. For you to go on and ask the question well, what is it really that's out there that's causing me to have these impressions, the phenomenist would go: "Bad question. You're using a word of really that can't be tested with the senses, and I have no idea what that word really...you're giving it a capital 'R' now... I have no idea what that word really even means because it's not sensorably testable.

We live in a sensate culture, and in that context you see, questions about religion will be privatized and marginalized, and they will not be part of public discourse. They will be reduced to the realm of individual opinion and private religious views of the world that if you like them that's fine for you. Now it's in that kind of a situation that I believe that we must return to what Camus said. We must prioritize what we do in the church, and in our vocations, and what we must do is argue effectively for a view of the world, where, in within which God, the soul, objective values, and immortality are plausible, sensible, and brought back into the public

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...square. I want to focus my remarks for the rest of the day, and tomorrow and, Wednesday on arguing about the existence of the soul and what happens once it's abandoned. I think I'm in good company here, I have a manuscript here by Richard Baxter who ministered in the sixteen hundreds and because my eyesight isn't very good, I was going to read the quote but I can't see it. So, I'm getting my arms are too short these days but I'll just tell you what he did.

Baxter was it was a wonderful pastor who was facing lukewarmness in his church, and he asked himself the question what should I do? Well, he didn't start small groups. He didn't try to make his Sunday school class a little bit more attractive. He didn't try to get a bigger parking lot. Those are all located within certain context, but what Baxter said is, "I'm going to have to write a work, and preach, and give people philosophical and apologetics arguments that God really exists, that the soul is real, and that life after death is actually true.

And he said it shames me that the ensigns of Christ army spend their time debating some minor points of theology. This or that sub point of theology when the far more fundamental important questions are left to be accepted on blind faith. And if you do that, says Baxter, then people will lose their courage when it comes to wanting to proclaim Jesus Christ to those that don't believe. And he said in order to re-energize the back sliders, he says, and to confound the infidels. Interesting way of putting it, and I would probably use that today, but in any case what we need to do is to get back and prove that there's a soul.

We need to argue for the soul's reality, and in my view one of the first things that a pastor needs to do when he takes up a ministry at a local church is start giving apologetic lectures and sermons and reminding his people that the Christian faith is actually true and that might be worth a little bit more than say 90 minutes a week. Learning to defend and to understand issues about
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...the soul's reality, is then for me, a priority for ministry because the issue of the soul's reality is merely the tip of a much larger iceberg and that is a worldview shift that has taken place in our culture. a shift from an ideational culture, within which, God immortality and the soul and values are very much at home, to a sensate, culture where those questions appear to be bogus naive and hopelessly out of date.

What I'd like to do in the remainder of my time here is, I would like to give you some factors that have contributed in the modern world to a demise of belief in the soul and immortality. And after we discuss these factors very briefly, I would like to say a closing word about strategy and overview the rest of the series. I want to list four factors that have contributed to this shift of world view. These are philosophical factors, that I think have made belief in the soul a matter of blind faith and have caused those of us who believe in the soul, to not let the soul's reality do any cognitive work for us, or any explaining or any intellectual labor. The first factor has been the rise of scientism; the rise of scientism.

The idea is, that if something is scientifically testable, then it's rational to believe in true. And if it isn't, then it's a matter of relativity, blind faith, and just personal opinion. Only what it can be scientifically tested is true and reasonable, if it's not scientifically testable, then it isn't true and reasonable. And what usually turns out then is this: in this culture the world of facts, the world of facts is what the scientists focuses on and their reason and truth matter.

You ever had somebody say, whether it's hydrochloric acid in a beaker well gee... you know if that's true for you that's fine, but it's not hydrochloric acid to me. No, well nobody would do that. Because... because this is this is an obvious scientific area, and we have the idea that if a person says it with a lab coat on, or if it's something... if you can get science behind you, then

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...your stock goes up in the world cognitively speaking. The world of...of it's kind of like that George Carlin football and baseball thing. You know, if football you score a touchdown, in baseball you play in a park, that remember that well some of you need to loosen up a little bit. And I've seen Nancy Duvall and Keith Edwards and I'm sure they'd be glad to help you. I'll tell you that. They know more about that than I do. But the... the scientist. He scores he plays with facts, and hard data, and reason and intellect, and you got to make your case. Good old, our old friend Carl Sagan, was beating that drum again in the parade magazine last week. God bless his heart. He's going to probably beat this horse until its dead, but in any case the scientists, this is where it's at - truth. Now religion, and values, and the soul. Oh this is... this is feelings. This is.... did these ideas help you? I'm so happy. That's fine for you. I'm glad these ideas are helpful to you. Just wonderful. Don't tell me they're true, by the way, don't tell me they're true because if you do that as Sproul points out, if you actually have the guts to assert Christianity is true and rationally defensible, then Sproul points out that this little benign smile will turn to a snarl. Why did I experience that this last weekend?

Now what happens then, in this kind of a context, is that questions about this of religion and the soul become just a matter of personal ideas, if you like them. A year ago I saw on the on the TV, the Catholic Church came out with a 900 number to give a sense... ethically sensitive movie evaluation. And on the evening news channel 9, of course they didn't like this idea, and so they went out to some movie theaters and interviewed some Catholics, and they interviewed them: "Well... what do you think of the Catholic Church's 900 number?" This one gal, and this was typical of three responses, "Well the Catholic Church. I'm a Catholic but I got to tell you, they practice this dinosaur morality that virginity is still matters and there nobody listens to him
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...anyway. It's kind of irrelevant I don't care. I love movies I'm going anyway."

Next segment in the news, 'UC Irvine neuro physiologist discovers why we like music'. There he was in his priestly garment - lab coat, with beakers behind his head. We've got... we've got it's an authority system. We have the authority system set up and now we're going to get an ex cathedral pronunciation. And the idea was that the reason we like music is because the read the physical waves of the music are in harmony with our bio rhythms.

Now I thought I liked music because it was a aesthetically pleasing. But of course the notion of something being aesthetically pleasing is not a scientifically testable notion. But the but the message was quite... quite clear. Scientists deal with the real stuff, religious people and... we'll let them have values, but even there they kind of dropped the ball. Scientism, the navigators did a study, and they found out that 40 percent of university students are immune to the gospel because of scientific naturalism. Did you hear that? 40 percent of university students are immune to the gospel because they believe in scientific naturalism.

Pastors have got to quit preaching the Bible only and must start addressing these questions and equipping people to understand these issues. The next one that I point out in addition to scientism, I've already mentioned it, is empiricism. Empiricism is the view that I can only believe what my five senses contest and of course as I said this you can have a slide in the brain, but it would be pretty tough to put a slide of the mind up here, quite difficult as a matter of fact. And so since the soul is embarrassingly invisible it must not exist, and we tend to be heavily oriented toward our senses.

Now let me tell you how this spells itself out. There was a book called amusing ourselves to death. It was about how we're hooked on television, and the idea was that in a culture that is
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...overly committed to the senses because of television and watching television a lot, then this the makeup man will ultimately be more important than the speech writer; because what we will do is we will make our decisions based upon images, not abstract ideas. And the makeup man is the one who deals with images. Empiricism is the reason why there has been a shift from virtue as a definition of success in life, to personality, to pleasure to happiness....=

Professor Duvall and I are team teaching a course on the self and she put me onto this, and she showed me an article where on the history of the self where this one psychologist makes a very good point, that there has been a shift from viewing a successful person in terms of having virtue and character, which is I hope you'll be able to see now, you can't see character. If I have a tendency here, in my into my bosom, to show to be kind, you can't observe a tendency to be kind.

That's not something that can be observed. That has been substituted for image and for pleasure, and pleasure is something by the way, that you can be directly equated with, Hume told us,, and so there's been a shift from virtue to pleasure. Scientism, empiricism... a third reason that the soul has been abandoned today, has been a shift from final causes to efficient causes. And this really started off with Francis Bacon. You wonder where the beef is. Well you ought to be thinking about where the bacon is as well. Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes said that we we don't need final causes. What we really need to focus on are efficient causes. Now what's the difference? A final cause is that for the sake of which something happens. So you say, why do we have eyes? The answer would be, in order for us to see. You explain why eyes are there in terms of the purpose they're here, or the or the what they are there for the sake of. OK. Now the soul, and you you must understand, that the soul's existence has been and should be deeply tied

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...to the notion of final causality in the body. It is the soul that unifies the parts of the body and organizes the development of the body in order for the body to become a mature human body. And the concept of a soul has always been intimately tied up with the notion of final causality. How do I know I have a soul?

Well many reasons but one reason is because my body parts are organized in such an intimate deep way, and my arms, and hands, and chemicals, and the various systems, and these various systems get their meaning from their function and myself as a whole. And when I view myself as a whole organism, I realize that my body develops and grows in order to become a mature human body. There is an appeal to something in me directing my development for some future goal. But once final causes are gone, there is less work for the soul to do. And the attempt to explain why you have an eye now is done in terms of efficient causes. And an efficient cause is that by means of which something happens. That by means of which, it's like one billiard ball hitting another billiard ball. The first billiard ball is the efficient cause of the second one, it is that by means of which, the second billiard ball moves.

And the reason I have an eye now is because a struggle for survival and chemicals and atoms got together in a certain way as a result of that struggle and it produced something and it just turned out that it helped me survive. And a shift from final causality, purposes, the notion of a soul is that which directs the development of the body to efficient causes which is reduced to matter in motion, and chemistry, and physics. Another and final factor that I'll mention, has been that is to contribute to the demise of the soul, is the general theory of evolution. Darwin was very clear in his... M and N notebooks where he wrote notebooks to himself.

Darwin was very clear when he said, if there is any part of an organism that cannot be
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...explained by evolutionary theory and that needs a god to create it, then that tends to make my whole theory somewhat superfluous because my theory assumes that everything can be explained by natural causes. Theistic evolution for Darwin would have simply been an abandonment of his theory. I saw an article in the paper at UCSD... at the San Diego paper. There are two professors down there named Paul Churchland and Patricia Churchland, and they hate Christianity and they are serious antagonists.

I had a student come up that studied under them, and come and come up here and ask for some advice because they had been so badgered in class for being a Christian. Patricia Churchill was interviewed about the soul, and she says the soul and this is a huge entire page ad where they're interviewing her, she says we don't need any of that spooky religious stuff. The brain will do quite nicely. That's all we need. And Paul Churchill, her husband has said, here's why we know the soul doesn't exist. He said, "If evolution if naturalistic evolution is true then physicalism is true."

That is, there can only be... we can only be material objects. Second premise naturalistic evolutionary theory is true. Conclusion we are only made out of matter. His reasoning is very very obvious, look. If you and I are the... are solely the result of a material process operating on physical materials, what is going to be the product of that? What is going to be the product of a physical process operating on physical materials? It's going to be something physical, totally. Can you see that? If evolution then is described as a purely physical process operating on a pre or... organic soup and so on, Then whatever that process produces by operating on those physical materials, is going to be totally physical. And Churchland is very clear. He says, "Once we
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...understand this is how we got here. There is neither need nor room to postulate any immaterial reality in any living organism including a human being." And so evolutionary theory rules out and makes it much less plausible the existence of the soul.

Now my argument against that, and I state this immortality is, I agree with the structure argument. If naturalistic evolutionary theory is all there is, then... then there's no soul. But it's not the case that there's no soul, therefore, it's not the case that naturalistic evolutionary theory is the total account of how we got here. Do you know that evolutionary ideas have been around since before Aristotle. And do you know nobody even gave them a second thought. And you know why. Because they knew that, even if evolution was true, the only thing it could account for is where my body came from, but it could say absolutely nothing about where my soul or where the that I came from. And so they found it to be relatively uninteresting because they were more concerned with where the soul came from, not with where the body came from and they didn't give it much thought.

In summary now, I'm trying to say that it's important for you and me to realize where the culture has come from because of scientism, empiricism, the shift from final causality to efficient causality, and because of the naturalistic understanding of evolutionary theory. We now live in a culture that Machen said, "Can do nothing by its own inner logic but regard Christianity as nothing more than a hopeless delusion". And because of that we will be marginalized; and it's in that context that it is important for us to argue for God, immortality, and the soul. This church that I visited brought a youth pastor who's done an M.A. and Apologetics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School when they had their program.

He has turned that church around. He showed me a notebook of a thousand pages that he
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...is using to teach his parishioners, philosophy, apologetics, the history of ideas, systematic theology, Greek and Hebrew, biblical studies, certain things in psychology and counselling - for which he's probably not completely trained but he's doing the best he can, hermeneutics. And I'm telling you these people are coming unglued because for the first time somebody has treated them as adults that have them that could possibly have a ministry if they just knew what they were talking about. I submit that part of his ministry has been, he told me, tried to demonstrate to people that the soul was real.

We are in a culture war, contending for the reality of the soul is very important. Tomorrow, I'm going to try to show you what has happened in euthanasia infanticide, suicide, and abortion because of the abandonment of belief in the soul. Wednesday, I'm going to give you a little bit more of a statement about what the soul is and why we should believe there is one. Let's pray: our father and our God We thank you that You have called us to have humble gracious hearts, and to be men and women of character, and to be appropriate ambassadors for you in this world. We are in a war and we know it, but we don't want to be little people and be defensive, and to be reactionary because we're defensive. We want to have confidence, and calmness, and courage; and we want to contend rigorously, but do it in a way that adorns the gospel with graciousness and humility. Please help us in this great task. For your good and our glory we ask you. Amen.