

RIGHT NOW
COUNTS
FOREVER
R.C. SPROUL

1977-1986

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FOREVER
VOLUME I
R.C. SPROUL

“R.C. Sproul was a rare theologian who explained the deepest of subjects in the simplest of terms, and he did so in a way that grabbed people’s attention and interest. His gifts shine in the column he regularly wrote, *Right Now Counts Forever*. On subjects from sports to politics to sexuality, and of course, the life of the church, Sproul’s wisdom and wit show us how the truth of God’s Word illuminates and transforms all of life.”

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President and professor of systematic theology and homiletics
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids, Mich.

“R.C. Sproul’s legacy is vast, including visual, audio, and print resources stimulating countless believers worldwide. Now, Ligonier has added to it with this thrilling thesaurus, gathered from more than forty years of his monthly contributions to *Tabletalk*. In the early years, he shared his spiritual perception of current affairs, including politics, economics, inflation, the newest A-list books and ‘the American dream’; it was as if he had all of these in one hand and his Bible in the other. In the later years, he was more immediately concerned with theological and doctrinal truths. His exposition and application of biblical revelation on subjects such as the doctrine of God, Christology, Jesus’ substitutionary death, atonement, the true nature of sin and the new birth, theodicy, the measure and manner of God’s forgiveness, conscience, Christian liberty, and scores of other subjects are brilliantly handled.

“I do have a quibble. At one point he wrote, ‘There is nothing in my thought that hasn’t been said before far more eloquently than I can ever hope to articulate’—commendably modest, but thankfully untrue.”

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Preacher, teacher, apologist, and author
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—DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON
President, OnePassion Ministries
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President, Reformation Bible College
Chief academic officer, Ligonier Ministries

“Spanning more than forty years, Dr. Sproul’s prophetic insights on a wide range of ethical and theological issues provide a fascinating historical narrative of cultural change, both in society at large and, sadly, the evangelical church, as well as a breathtakingly clear Christian (biblical) response. Cultural attitudes may have changed as the effects of postmodernity took hold in the late twentieth century, but it is clear from these pages that the Bible is sufficient to address each one. I will be consulting this volume often as issues arise for which I need a clear biblical response.”

—DR. DEREK W.H. THOMAS
Senior minister, First Presbyterian Church
Columbia, S.C.

Right Now Counts Forever

R . C . S P R O U L

RIGHT
NOW
COUNTS
FOREVER

Volume I: 1977–1986



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FOREWORD

DR. R.C. SPROUL WAS MY FRIEND. When I first came under his teaching, I immediately appreciated him—not only because he was such an articulate teacher but because he taught with passion—passion for truth and passion for God. That passion arose out of a genuine concern to communicate the unvarnished truth of sacred Scripture. His fundamental aim was not to please man but to please God, and the ultimate goal in his teaching was to honor God. I trusted R.C. because he never attempted to tell me what I wanted to hear but always told me what I needed to hear. And he did so first as my teacher, then as my mentor, then as a colleague and friend, and, in many ways, as a father.

One of the things R.C. and I shared was the death of our fathers when we were teenagers. I believe it was in part the death of R.C.'s father that instilled in him an intense passion to help people realize that we don't know how many days the Lord will give us, and so we must recognize that every day counts and that right now counts forever. His desire for people to grasp this truth was out of his deep concern for their souls. That is one of the reasons there was such urgency in R.C.'s teaching and writing. He understood the stewardship the Lord had entrusted to him. He would not squander any opportunity to help people grasp God's truth, because it was that truth alone that could set them free.

For that reason, R.C. desperately sought to make the truth of God accessible to everyone. He sincerely believed that theology isn't just for theologians but is for everyone. Though he was a theologian who could have pursued a purely academic track in his career, R.C. realized that what the church most desperately needs is to have the theological truth of Scripture explained in a simple and accessible way. Thus, R.C. gave

himself to the lifelong task of helping God's people know the truth of who God is. Yet, he wasn't satisfied with simply helping people know who God is—he also wanted people to know the depths of how that knowledge affects every aspect of their lives. That desire came through in every aspect of R.C.'s ministry: in the classroom, behind the lectern, and in the pulpit.

Most who sat under R.C.'s teaching and preaching knew that R.C. didn't use a manuscript, an outline, or notes. What most people don't realize, however, is that it wasn't always easy for him. R.C. had a brilliant mind and memory, but as he aged, he sometimes—though rarely—found comfort in scribbling a few notes or a brief outline on a napkin or scrap of paper, some of which I still have in my possession. The reason he labored so hard not to rely on a manuscript or an outline wasn't because he wanted to demonstrate his amazing memory or his vast knowledge but because he wanted to communicate with people in such a way that they would be fully engaged from the beginning to the very end of his message. Sometimes with humor and often with great intensity, he worked to keep eye contact with his audience in order to help them remain completely focused. He was never just delivering a lecture, only providing information, or merely delivering a sermon. Rather, he was striving by the power of the Holy Spirit to get people on their knees to repent and to rise up to worship and serve our Lord. In every sermon, he gave his all to reach people's hearts and minds with the truth they so desperately needed to know.

When I first began preaching at Saint Andrew's Chapel, I was only twenty-eight years old, and it was terrifying—particularly when R.C. was present. What's more, R.C. didn't want me to use a manuscript, an outline, or a single note when I preached, and I obliged. A couple of years later, I admitted to R.C. how nervous I was to preach in his pulpit, and I will never forget his response. He said: "Burk, that's not my pulpit, and it's not your pulpit. It's God's pulpit, and God is present every time we step into the pulpit. He alone is the One we are to fear, and we preach for His honor and glory alone—not for any man." That reality dominated

R.C.'s preaching and teaching. He had a great sense of the presence of God and a great desire for the glory of God. Ultimately, that is what made R.C. the preacher he was. That, in essence, is what compelled him to try to help others realize that right now counts forever.

—Dr. Burk Parsons
Senior pastor
Saint Andrew's Chapel, Sanford, Fla.

ROOTS IN THE PEPSI GENERATION

MAY 1977

WE ARE MOVING TO A new format for our monthly newsletter. Our desire is that the newsletter be not only an update on news and current events of the Study Center, but a modest educational tool as well. Consequently, I've been asked to write a monthly column commenting on current events and issues from a theological perspective.

The column's title, "Right Now Counts Forever," is designed to focus attention on the relevancy of our present lives to the eternal destinies we all face. We live in a culture that places the stress on "Right Now." It's called the "Pepsi Generation"—we are told to live life with "gusto" because we "only go around once." Short range goals, pragmatic methods of problem solving, a quiet hysteria to make it happen "now," all point to modern man's despair regarding the future. The unspoken assumption is that it's "now or never" because there is no ultimate future for mankind.

Our Christian assertion is that there is more to our lives than "now." If there is not then even the now is meaningless. But we say now counts. Why? Now counts because we are creatures who have an origin and a destiny which is rooted and grounded in God.

Did I say "rooted"? Why is that word so important? Recently we've experienced a cultural phenomenon of epic proportions. The televised drama *Roots* has already had a shaking effect on our people. Can we explain the national reaction to Kunta Kinte and "Chicken George" merely in terms of our raw feeling of years of racial strife? I don't think so. Neither does Alex Haley. *Roots* typifies a problem that transcends race. It is the problem of identity for all of modern man. Who am I?

The question of identity can never be answered merely in terms of the

present. To know who I am involves a discovery of my past (my origin) and at least a glimpse of my future (my destiny). If I am a cosmic accident springing from the dust and destined for more dust then I am nothing. I am a joke . . . a tale told by an idiot. But if my ultimate roots are grounded in eternity and my destiny is anchored in that same eternity, then I know something of who I am. I know I am a creature of eternal significance. If that's so then my life counts. What I do today counts forever. Now, the now means something.

Roots stirred us deeply because it provoked the hope that if we go back far enough we might find continuity and stability. *Roots* had its messiah figure in Chicken George. The program went through an entire episode with Chicken George never visibly present. Yet his "invisible presence" permeated every scene. I have never seen a television production where a character was so obviously present while not appearing on the screen. When George did appear he led his family in a new exodus to a new land of promise. *Roots* looked backward and forward in such a way as to give the present meaning.

As TV treated us to *Roots* so Hollywood has treated us to *Rocky*—this film has captured the public imagination in a fresh way. Perhaps it represents merely an exercise in nostalgia, a throwback to Frank Merriwell and the original happy ending. Or perhaps it represents a protest to the age of the anti-hero and the story line of chaos that characterizes modern filmdom. Whatever the motive the movie reflects not in the Cinderella motif but the portrayal of human sensitivity displayed in Rocky's mercy as a bill collector for the loan shark and his tenderness on the ice rink.

Applaudable warmth is seen in Rocky's "Lennie-like" love for animals and wayward teenagers and his sentiment for his manager. The fruit of discipline, endurance, and devotion to dignity are actually cast in roles of virtue. Rocky worked and fought not for a momentary prize but for a stand of valor that lasts.

Maybe *Rocky* is a milestone. Maybe we are beginning to see there is more to life than Pepsi-Cola. It's not now or never, but now and forever. Right now counts. It counts . . . for eternity.

THE SEX REVOLUTION AND THE CHRISTIAN

JULY 1977

CULTURAL CHANGE IS ONE THING; revolution is another. As the word suggests, a revolution does not bring mild protest or dissent to existing forms and structures—it brings revolt. When we examine the changes in our own nation’s mood and atmosphere regarding sex we see dramatic upheaval with the overthrow of classic ethics and attitudes of sex.

Sometimes we imagine that times are changing when in fact they are not. Sometimes we become alarmists and reactionaries in the midst of small and insignificant cultural changes. Some say about the sexual revolution, “What’s the big deal? Sexual problems are as old as the hills. Prostitution is the world’s oldest profession.” To be sure we have always had sexual problems to deal with but what is happening now is a change, a big change. The sexual revolution is for real.

Think back twenty years (a short span of cultural history). . . . Less than 20 years ago a film was censored in this country for using the word “virgin” on the screen. Outrageous complaints were lodged when *From Here to Eternity* won an Oscar. Why? Because Burt Lancaster appeared in a love-scene embracing his girl in the surf while in a prone position, clad only in bathing suits. Such a scene today would warrant not a whimper and would not even earn a PG rating. Do you remember in the ’50s when Frank Lovejoy shocked us with the line “Retreat Hell! We’re just attacking in a different direction!”? Gable didn’t talk like that on the screen. Profanity was absent from the lips of Bogart, Cagney, Ladd, and Power.

TV situation-comedies in the ’50s saw Lucy and Desi having a crisis over sticky wallpaper. *Father Knows Best* had to deal with teenage jealousy over school awards. Today’s “situations” concern abortion, homosexuality, and

adultery. The new explicitness is heralded as sophisticated realism that prepares children for mature adulthood.

We have our new realism and our new freedom. But how much does it cost? The revolution has not been unbloody. It has brought with it child pornography, a vast increase in sadomasochism for those needing still more intense sexual thrills, a breakdown in the institution of marriage, the abortion business, and black-market babies for sale. These are but a few of the “benefits” of our new enlightenment.

How does the Christian deal with all this? The New Testament makes it clear that chastity is a prime ethical mandate for the Christian. The early apologists of the second century pointed to the exemplary chaste conduct of the Christian community as an “evidence” of its truth-claims. We may not lower our standards to accommodate the drifts of the secular culture.

Several factors need to operate for the Christian to maintain integrity:

1. We must maintain a clear understanding of the New Testament sex-ethic.
2. We must pray for the grace to have moral courage.
3. We must be understanding and patient with those who fall.

This point requires elaboration. It is one thing for a person to fall in a perfectly chaste environment. It is quite another to fall when people all around us are falling. The contemporary teenager is literally bombarded with erotic stimuli and lives in a culture where the peer-pressure to participate in the sexual revolution is overwhelming. Parents, especially, must be aware of these dynamics.

Only a generation ago parental sex-counseling went something like this: “Don’t get involved with sex or (1) you’ll get pregnant (2) you’ll get an STD (3) you’ll get a bad reputation.” These were the standard “deterrents” used for an ethic of chastity. Today’s teenagers have quick answers to these “deterrents.” The fear of pregnancy has been neutralized by the pill and abortion-on-demand. The threat of STDs has been minimized by an optimistic view of the power of modern antibiotics. The problem

of reputation has been totally reversed to the point that young people who are not involved acquire reputations for being out of it or square.

So what deterrent is left? In the final analysis we are left with the deterrent we started with—the holiness of God and His authority to command obedience from us. We need a new and clear vision of who God is. We need encouragement from the Christian community as a model. We need to see the “more excellent way.”

On a community level the Supreme Court has left a crack open in the door for establishing standards of public displays and sale of erotic material. The city of Chicago is taking legal action against child pornography. Cincinnati, Ohio, has been a pioneer city in passing local ordinances prohibiting the sale of pornographic material. This city has avoided the chaos of Boston’s “combat zone” and San Francisco’s strip district. The same procedures so effective in Cincinnati can be used all over America.

Civil legislation may make a dent in the *atmosphere* of the culture but in the final analysis the Christian must depend on grace and a personal commitment of obedience if he is to maintain chastity in the midst of revolution. How we as Christians deal with the revolution now will count forever.

We have our new realism and our new freedom. But how much does it cost? The revolution has not been unbloody.

“Blessedness is
the ultimate form
of happiness.
There is no
happiness in sin.”

—

THE AMERICAN DREAM

AUGUST 1977

201 AND COUNTING . . . SKYROCKETS, sparklers, and other hooplah return to the closet for another year. Only 99 more years until we celebrate the tricentennial of our nation. The annual summer event of Independence Day passed with differing reactions. For the older generation it was a time of nostalgia, a fond rehearsal of the American dream. Gone were the days of elm-lined streets in our town with a motor-car outing on Sabbath afternoon. Gone were the parades of World War I Dough Boys with their little tin hats. The 48-star flag they proudly waved is now a relic.

For the middle-aged the 4th was a time of sober reflection and confusion. With one leg standing in the residue of the optimism of the fifties and the other straddling the struggles of the seventies this generation didn't quite know whether to salute or sleep in.

For the young it was a time of cynicism with memories of the tragedy of Camelot, the slaying of Martin Luther King, Kent State, and a vision of a former Attorney General of the United States being escorted to a new sanctuary of walls in Alabama.

But the dream goes on . . . Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, inalienable rights endowed by God. In our dream we find visions of these rights. Some sparkle with scintillating radiance that gives a euphoric quality to our dream. Others take on a purple hue of nightmarish torment.

Life—Indeed an inalienable right—But not to unborn infants. The abortion battle casts a shadow of gloom on this right as “life” is abstracted out of its context of sanctity. The right of life is rooted in the holiness of God. Its sacred character rests not in the complexity of human biology, but in its foundation in creation. The human life bears the image of God Himself. The image-bearer derives his dignity from his God. If life

is isolated from sanctity the dream becomes a nightmare and the value of human life is cheapened.

Liberty—When men are enslaved their exodus of liberation is always a cause of celebration. Relief from tyranny and oppression brings with it the highest expressions of human jubilation. But what happens when freedom is confused with autonomy? What happens when the liberated person demands the “right” to do whatever he pleases with no moral restraint? The individual who lives without restraint becomes himself, one who tyrannizes those around him. With the inalienable right of liberty comes the divine obligation of law. Just law does not destroy liberty but is the prerequisite of it. Liberty cannot exist without law. Without law liberty is anarchy. Without liberty law is tyranny.

The pursuit of happiness—If anything will destroy the American dream it will be the confusion of happiness with pleasure. If God is God there can be no happiness in disobedience. The law of God is designed for the welfare and happiness of the entire creation. The obedient person is blessed. Blessedness is the ultimate form of happiness. There is no happiness in sin. But there is pleasure. Disobedience to God would hardly be a temptation if it offered no pleasure. The diabolical lie that torments us is the false promise that unless we sin we cannot be happy. Our lust for pleasure enslaves us and again turns the dream into a nightmare. The lust of pleasure is not our inalienable right. To do our own thing is not our inalienable right. The pursuit of happiness is our right and our duty.

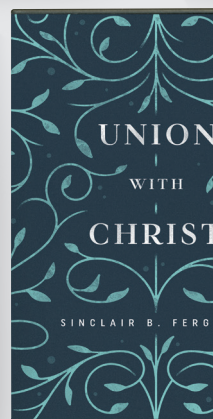
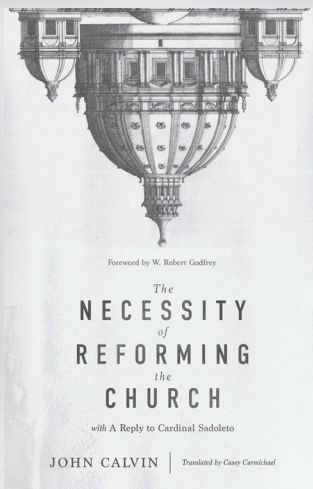
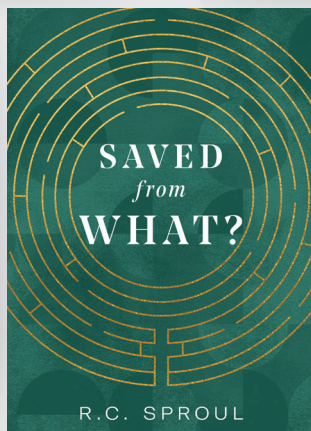
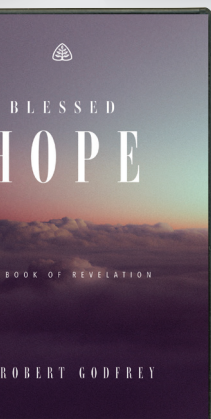
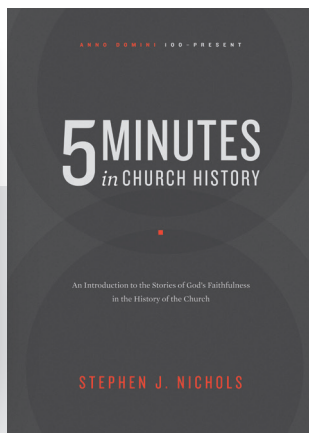
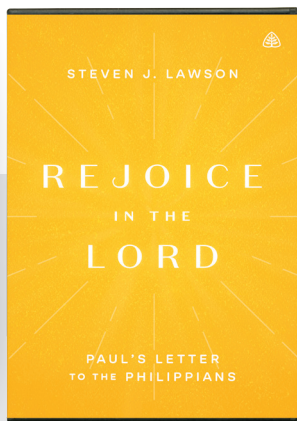
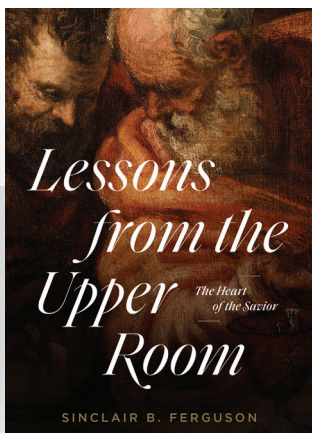
Life . . . Sanctity

Liberty . . . Law

Happiness . . . Obedience

Divorce them now and it destroys forever.

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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