

Gaining Ground

the
Landscape of the Human Heart
and the
Ideological Ground
which we
Endeavor to Conquer for Christ

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Mark W. Weaver

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THE LANDSCAPE of the human heart yearns for a visitation from the Lord.

A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Isaiah 40: 3-5

The prophetic voice of the Lord prepares a highway for God which leads into our very hearts. The voice brings down mountains of haughtiness in our prideful hearts and elevates valleys of despair and insecurity in our fearful hearts. The prophetic voice of the Lord smooths the rough edges of our bitter hearts and converts the desert of our hearts into fruitful fields.

And in the Church which is comprised of imperfect people, the prophetic word of the Lord brings mountains and valleys together for service and fellowship. He smooths out the rough places of our uneven relationships as iron sharpens iron.

THE IDEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE. False ideas ultimately fail. True ideas ultimately succeed. False and failed ideas litter the land in which we live. The last 150 years have witnessed an accumulation of false and failed ideas. In our daily walk through the cultural landscape we stumble and trip over them everywhere we go.

False and failed ideas promise pleasure but bind us and box us in. They pledge to solve our society's ills but in the end they create

more problems. They guarantee us comfort and security but instead drive us toward selfish ambition. And sometimes they promise utopia but provide us with bitterness and disappointment.

God desires to occupy this ideological landscape, to conquer it, to subdue it with the truth. We the Church, like Israel of old, are commissioned to take the ideological ground and turn it into a land of fruitfulness.

GAINING GROUND. Americans reside in a land once sparsely populated by native tribes whose religion and culture respected the land—a land blessed with fertile meadows, deep, uninhabited forests, rivers teeming with wildlife, vast open prairies, two continent dividing mountain ranges, seemingly limitless resources and almost endless possibilities. Once the land opened for settlement, millions rushed to our nation's shores, fanning out in search their own little piece of the earth to call home. For generations America and land have almost been synonymous.

Imagine you live in a small mid-western college town. It's late October. You are seated on a park bench on the school campus. It is a lazy afternoon. Above you a perfect blue sky frames a canopy of red, gold and auburn foliage. The crisp air brushes your face in a fresh coolness. You breathe in autumn's pungent wafting aroma. A knapsacked student zips past you on a bicycle. Hand holding lovers saunter along in the opposite direction, decked in their college team's colors, leaves crackling underneath their feet. Across the street, the team's marching band practices for tomorrow's big game, the bass drum filling in underneath trumpets, trombones, tubas, flutes, piccolos and xylophones. Your senses

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imbibe autumn's flavor. It's football season again!

Football, the new American pastime, is all about land possession.

The ACC. The Big Eight. The Big Ten. The Pac Ten. College football dominates autumn Saturdays. And Sundays are no different. The NFL has grown into a billion dollar industry. Somewhere in our lifetime, football surpassed baseball and became America's favorite pastime.

So, what's the big deal about twenty-two men facing off in a flat field and pushing each other back and forth? What gives American football its appeal?

Land. Football is about pure brute strength, power and land possession. Other team sports also require skill and conditioning. But while hockey, soccer and basketball focus on getting a ball or a puck into an opposing team's goal and baseball concentrates on getting players safely around three bases and back home, football is all about controlling turf! Land is an American obsession.

Football is organized, civilized warfare for fun and money. No one dies. No real estate is permanently surrendered. And everyone has a good time.

From late August's heat through January's icy air our ears ring with the announcer's prose.

- ◆ He's the team's leading ground gainer this year!
- ◆ He's piled up more yardage in the first seven games than he did all last

season!

- ◆ The Redskins are deep in Cowboys territory!
- ◆ The Packers retain possession!

Turf talk. Land language. Even in the enjoyment of our national pastime, we Americans remain fixated on real estate.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP. The Bible brims with discussion of property ownership. Several commandments deal directly with respecting those things which belong to others. Do not steal. Do not murder. Do not covet another man's possessions. And in His teachings and parables, Jesus clearly acknowledged the concept of property ownership.

“Driven from every other corner of the earth, freedom of thought and the right of private judgment in matters of conscience direct their course to this country as their last asylum.”

Samuel Adams Speech
Philadelphia, PA August 1, 1776

The document titled 31 DAYS TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF PROPHETS AND PROPHETIC WORDS introduces John Locke, the pre-Revolutionary thinker and writer. During the waning years of the Protestant Reformation, when men wielded truth as weapons of warfare, Locke wrote about property and espoused the principle of property ownership. And odd as it may sound, Locke claimed that “the most sacred of all property” is the individual human conscience.

In the unfolding days of freedom, when men were shaking off chains of oppression, kings

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could no longer tell a man what to believe or where to worship. A man's conscience became his most treasured possession.

What is a conscience? Let's briefly examine the nature of the human conscience.

When God created the world, He crafted two types of creatures. Angels and humans possess a common thread—volitional power. Volitional power grants a creature the ability to make choices. Volitional power, or free moral agency as it is sometimes called, is in fact, a critical concept, foundational to any serious understanding of God's order, purpose, government and work of reconciliation.

Supporting our volitional power, or our human will as it is usually called, lies our conscience—"the most sacred of all property." When God created Adam and placed him in the garden, Adam had choices to make. He could partake of the tree of life or any other tree in the garden. But God forbid Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam's conscience, informed by God's word, was to guide him.

God's goal is to possess
the territory of the
human conscience and will
that Adam failed to yield.

Adam possessed the ability to respond or not respond to his own conscience and thus to God. He had been given that privilege, that property, to manage as he chose.

God desired to possess Adam's will. Not by force, but by Adam's surrender. God viewed Adam's will as ground to be gained. Either God would gain it or the serpent would gain it. Both desired Adam to choose them. Note

that God's desire for Adam's soul is pre-fall. Adam had not yet rebelled. Had Adam chosen God's path, God would have gained the ground of Adam's soul. But as history records, Adam chose the wrong path. The Devil gained ground. God lost ground.

Read the booklet from THE CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW SERIES titled THE FALL for a more thorough explanation. But for now, what's important is that we understand how Adam's soul, and the souls of all those who came after Adam, became foreign territory to God.

In His work of recovery, God's goal is to gain territory which Adam did not yield. The salvation experience is only the beginning of a lifetime battle for the ground of our souls. And the battle for our souls is only the beginning of the battle for all that belongs to God.

WARFARE. We are engaged in warfare. The first objective in this war is to take our own souls and make them subject to Christ. We do this through the renewing of our minds and by working out our own salvation in fear and trembling before God. Then, from our new position of renewed strength, we join with other renewed friends who share similar vision and complementary gifts and wage war together in the world of ideas, first to win other souls and then to win nations and kingdoms for God. Governments, institutions, educational structures, business and the arts are all designed by God to be under His rule and authority. Each of these areas represent ideological territory or land to be inhabited with the truth and, as with Moses' burning bush, the sanctifying presence of God. This is the ultimate mission of the Church (Matt. 28:19), to disciple the nations.

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Jim, a long-time believer and follower of Christ fondly remembers the years he engaged in a protracted war for the ground of his own soul.

In the early seventies, God graced Jim with teachers who laid out principles of spiritual engagement. He read books written by Christian fathers who provided instruction in working out salvation in fear and trembling. A vision captured him. Jim began to see that his own soul was born a prisoner needing freedom from its master, a deadly, deceptive darkness—the same deadly darkness which holds every human soul under its power.

But inside Jim a faint light flickered—his own human spirit, rekindled by the new birth and quickened by the Holy Ghost. Jim's soul suddenly became ground to conquer. And so, in the privacy of his own home Jim began to spend endless hours—hours which grew into years of prayer, praise and worship. Jim learned how to make the sacrifice of thanksgiving. He graduated to the sacrifice of praise. He learned to enter in and enjoyed worship in the presence of God. Jim studied His word. And he discovered the power of quietly waiting on his King.

Jim even had a special chair which he called his “waiting on God” chair. He sat waiting for the presence of God, meditating upon scripture, anticipating a word from Him. Slowly, Jim's disquieted soul began to quiet.

Over the course of several years, Jim's spirit grew in magnitude and influence in his life. Jim can recall a specific moment when God's presence was no longer elusive to him but something he could tap into almost at will. Jim's soul slowly succumbed, his mind giving sway to the truths of scripture, his

emotions now under the management of the spiritual knowledge of God's sovereignty and Lordship.

Jim's war had been intense hand to hand combat fought against demons both real and imagined. But in the end Jim had gained the ground of his own soul!

He once had a special
“waiting on God” chair.

Have you seen the film *Braveheart*? In a powerful scene on the battlefield the forces of King Edward I approach a rag-tag army led by William Wallace. Before the armies rush to the field of battle, the king's archers release their arrows. They spring from their bows and sail on a trajectory for Wallace's army. His men duck beneath their shields. Finally, after several volleys, hand to hand combat begins.

In the film *Gettysburg*, Southern General James Longstreet prepares his assault on Meade's forces across the mile wide field between Cemetery Hill and Seminary Ridge. Before the Confederate foot soldiers commence their advance, Longstreet orders cannon fire. Batteries blast the Northern positions preparatory to the Confederate charge. Finally, on Longstreet's reluctant command, Southern soldiers break into a run across the field of battle and engage in bloody hand to hand combat.

In the most recent major engagement of US forces in Desert Storm, we Americans sat glued to our television sets each night as the air strikes over Sadaam's Iraqi army pummeled Baghdad. Two days of actual hand to hand fighting ensued and the war ended. The air strikes had won the war!

In spiritual warfare for the land, prayer must

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go before the hand to hand battles. We are currently in a day of a great intercessory work. God is raising up visionaries to teach and instruct in the intricacies of intercession to equip armies of intercessors. But the day will come when the ground forces will have to enter the fray and take the land back for God house by house.

Yes, we are called to win souls. But we must also win back education, business, governments and other institutions. In the end we must win nations, kingdoms and cultures for the glory of God.

Our battlefield is the realm of ideas. Our weapon is the word of God. We must prepare ourselves. We cannot rely solely upon the air force to win the battle. If we fail in our preparation we will be struck down on the battlefield. We must outfit ourselves with a clear-headed view of God. We must understand the complexities and subtleties of His created order. We must familiarize ourselves with His nature, His character, His attributes, His ways, His plans and His purpose. We must possess a broad knowledge of God. We must arm ourselves with biblical principles that have been proven in our own lives.

We must possess a rounded knowledge. What are the issues? What is at stake? What is our mission? What are our handicaps? What are our strengths? What are our weapons? How do they work? Who are the players in this war? What are our short term objectives? What are our long term objectives? What personal role are we to fill in God's army?

It is also imperative that we understand where the enemy's strongholds are located, what his weapons and methods are and where his points of weakness lie.

We must ourselves become true disciples before we can expect to disciple the nations.

And above all, we must resolve issues of authority, sovereignty and Lordship. God's army cannot endure the curse of too many renegades. In the ideological struggle for God's territory, desertion in the face of fire and poor judgment in battle will weaken our attack and cause our fellow soldiers to suffer.

In short, we must ourselves become true disciples before we can expect to disciple the nations.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS. In summary then, the land is the tangible earth, the soil of the human heart and the cultural or ideological landscape. The land is where we make our homes, where we reside in search of comfort, rest and security.

Whether a country, state, city, county or the parcel of ground where we live, the land is first a geographic location somewhere on planet earth. The physical ground where you reside belongs to God. We have a mandate from God to subdue it, to bring everything that is under your jurisdiction under His jurisdiction.

But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

Numbers 14:21

Secondly, the land is the human heart, the soil and seedbed receiving the seed which is the prophetic word, whether good or evil. At its center the land of the human heart is the conscience, that area where we first reject or respond to the voice of the Lord. The

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conscience is ground to be occupied by God. For the Christian, the human heart has been made new by re-birth in Christ. It is capable of receiving good seed and producing good fruit.

Thirdly, the land is the ideological landscape which shapes the culture in which we live. It is the land of media, philosophy, art, film, education, government, employment, business, recreation and all other areas of our lives. God's plan and our commission is to subdue everything to His divine authority

through the proclamation of His prophetic word.

The land is God's in all its aspects. God desires a response to His call and commission. As free moral agents in Christ, we can gain the ground lost by the entry of sin into the human equation. Christ won the victory on Calvary, sent His Holy Spirit and gave us His word. Now we, like Israel of Joshua's day, must in the power of His Spirit and word, enter in and take the ground for Him.