

Like

Tweet

Pin

+1

in



Raising Thomas – What To Do When Our Children Doubt

Author: Marcia Harris Brim

Issue: Volume One, Number Three – June 3, 2014

Web Site: www.brimwoodpress.com

Marcia's prayer site for supporting the seriously ill: www.prayerbook40.org

Circulation: 300

What's in this Issue:

1. Welcome
2. The Thomas Story Every Christian Family Should Know
3. Some Socratic Questions about Thomas
4. What Parents Can Do for Thomas
5. What's Marcia been up to?
6. A Thank You to My Readers
7. A product Marcia recommends
8. Upcoming issues
9. Pass this newsletter along

10. Reprint Rights

11. **Supplement:** “Insights for Modern Parents Raising Postmodern Children”, Part III

1) Welcome to the BrimWood Press newsletter!

This new monthly newsletter is dedicated to *Christian parents* raising children in this postmodern, secular, Gnostic culture: parents who want their families to shine. (Matthew 5:14-16 & Philippians 2:15.)

This newsletter provides practical, relevant help for the on-going work of evangelizing our children.

My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.

Galatians 4:19 ESV

A special thanks to all those who forwarded our newsletter and especially to those who signed up. Additionally, your kind comments back were a great encouragement. This newsletter is issued on the first Monday of every month.

2) The Thomas Story Every Christian Family Should Know

Tess

She was weeping, weeping in my class. She had been asking all sorts of great questions and pushing back on answers that needed more thought. Tess was the perfect student for my worldview workshop, but now she was in tears. I wrapped up the current section, gave the class a break, then pulled her aside.

“Tess, what’s wrong?”

“I have doubts; I don’t know if I can believe that all this is true.”

“Oh, honey, let me assure you, what you are struggling with is perfectly normal for kids who grow up in Christian homes.”

“But Mrs. Brim, you don’t understand. My dad is the pastor of this church. Everybody knows I have doubts ... even the janitor talked to me about my lack of faith. I feel terrible. People are worried because of me, but I just don’t know if Christianity is true.”

I remember wrapping my arms around her, trying to reassure and encourage her to press into this journey regardless of how others respond. Wrestling with questions is a necessary part of the path towards genuine belief. To have faith in Christ, that faith has to become hers, not her parents’, not the church’s, not the janitor’s.

I don't remember how our conversation ended, but Tess' tears, shed half a continent away from where I go to church, have never been forgotten. "Tesses" live in every state of the Union. Wherever children are born into a Christian family, a Tess or two grows up. Somewhere along the childhood path, they realize their "faith" is not their own. For Christian families, preparing our children to face doubts is as important as preparing them for puberty. It is not coincidence that these two events often coincide.

Thomas

Unlike the late Renaissance masterpiece of the middle-aged "doubting Thomas" above, the early church always portrayed Thomas as a young man. Perhaps that's because they still remembered his whole story. In wanting to equip our kids to deal with their doubts, this is a story every Christian parent needs to know. This is a story every Christian child needs to hear.

To know the whole story is to pray that each of our sons and daughters become like Thomas.

Due to the space constraints of this newsletter, I've told an abbreviated version of the Thomas story below. The story is drawn from both the biblical record and the records from church history. My version is written for children.

The Larger Thomas Story

Thomas was young, but he was called, called by Jesus to be his disciple. He was of the twelve who was there when Jesus healed the blind man, made the lepers clean, and fed 5,000. Thomas walked with Jesus for three years. Then the unthinkable happened. His teacher died, a criminal's death, nailed to a punishing tree. Thomas was undone. Everything he thought was real disappeared in a day.

The Bible does not tell us what Thomas did or where he went after Jesus died. We simply know he was not there when Christ appeared to the other disciples late Sunday afternoon after Friday's crucifixion (John 20:19). Perhaps Thomas made the long walk home. Perhaps he planned to take up carpentry again. But somewhere in his walking and grieving, he must have remembered words he didn't want to hear when Jesus spoke them the first time.

"... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone;

but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day

he will be raised to life!

"What if ...?" Thomas had to find out if his question had an answer.

When Thomas finally reached Jerusalem and the upper room, the disciples all blurted out at once, "We have seen the Lord and the nail prints in his hands. Jesus is risen from the dead!" But even the testimony of these friends was not enough. Thomas had to see, had to touch Jesus for himself.

Days later, Jesus came again. He came to see Thomas, to let Thomas touch his hands and side. Can you imagine the relief this encounter brought to him? No doubt, he desperately wanted to believe what his friends told him, but he was honest, honest enough to ask for what only Jesus could provide. Having seen and touched, he fell to his knees in worship, saying, "My Lord and my God."

Thomas realized who Jesus truly was. He wasn't just a good teacher miraculously resurrected from the dead; Jesus was God in the flesh. Thomas touched the flesh of God. It took the whole life of Christ as told by the gospel writer John for anyone to figure that out. Thomas' declaration about Jesus is the highpoint of John's whole story, a gospel written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God and that by believing we might have life in His name (John 20:31).

Today we call this story "Doubting Thomas". And yet, the early church called it "The Touching of Thomas." They not only understood how important Thomas' statement of faith was; they knew the rest of the story.

Thomas was there when Christ ascended into heaven and told his disciples to go and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. Thomas took the gospel further than did any other apostle. Thomas preached and traveled through Israel and modern day Lebanon. From there he headed east. He preached the gospel in what is now called Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, but he labored longest in India. There Thomas told many people about Jesus Christ and built numerous churches to honor his Lord and God.

But India already had a religion and for most rulers, Thomas' message and churches were not welcomed. When the wife and the son of a local governor believed the message Thomas preached, he was thrown in prison. There Thomas was beaten and told to deny Christ. He refused to give up his faith. In exchange, he was stabbed to death by spears. While blood gushed from gashes inflicted by spears, do you think he remembered touching the wound in Jesus' side?

Thomas gave up his life testifying that Jesus is Lord and God.

A famous early church pastor, John Chrysostom, wrote this: "Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles, toiled through the grace of God more

bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to savage nations.”



3) Some Socratic Questions for Thomas

1. What do you think Thomas felt like when Jesus was put to death on the cross?
2. It's funny: Thomas gets labeled "doubting" for not believing what the disciples said about Jesus' resurrection, but these same disciples doubted the women who'd seen the empty tomb. Why do you think it is sometimes hard to believe things others tell us about Jesus?
3. Read John 20:29. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"? Who is he talking about? In what ways might such people be blessed?
4. Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. How did this serve the will of God?
5. Can God use a person's doubt to some good end or purpose?
6. Who was the only person who could make Thomas' doubts disappear?
7. In the Bible's story about Thomas touching Jesus, there are three essential characters: the disciples, Jesus, and Thomas. Which character is most like a Christian parent? In what ways are they like the disciples? What kind of people are like Thomas? What happened when Jesus healed Thomas' doubts?
8. Why does the rest of Thomas' story matter?
9. Why do you think the early church call this story "The Touching of Thomas"?

4) What Parents Can Do for Thomas

I opened the story of Thomas with the story of Tess. She's a lesson to us all. She was the brightest, most engaged child in my class, but she was hurting. I teach worldview classes because of children like Tess. She is the reason I say shocking things to the children like, "If you grew up in a Buddhist home, right now you'd be a Buddhist." "If you grew up in an Atheistic home, right now you'd be an Atheist." Our children are Christians because we are Christians. But when they begin that painful

process of forming a separate identity from Mom and Dad, Christianity will inevitably be a part of that mix.

Here're some suggestions for before, during, and after the process.

Suggestion #1 — Normalize

Don't make children feel guilty for their doubts. Don't personalize or associate their doubts with your poor parenting or their character flaws. Doubts are normal, so normalize them. Create an environment where doubts can be shared. (More on that later.)

Suggestion #2 — Pray

As parents, our most important role during this period of our child's life is to pray that Jesus shows up for Thomas. Like the disciples, we've already told our children about our experiences with Jesus. Thomas must touch and be touched by his Lord. It may take eight days, eight months, eight years ... but only Jesus can provide what Thomas needs. And as a parent, don't be doubting, but believe that Jesus will someday show up, and when he does everything will change.

Suggestion #3 — Bless the Question

Change our view of doubts. Questions, especially ones that reveal doubts, are indispensable in the process of making disciples. One of my other favorite stories about Thomas comes from John 14. Right after Jesus talks about the many mansions in his Father's house, he says "You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas states what seems obvious: "Lord, we do not know where you are going." Then he asks, "How can we know the way?"

Jesus answered Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Can you imagine what those words we know so well must have felt like to Thomas, peering into the eyes of Christ? Nothing less than shivers must have run down his spine. His unspoken question had to be "Is he really saying what I think he's saying?"

Our Thomases are assuredly asking the same question. Can we really know the way to heaven? Is the way truly Christ? Christ's proclamation to Thomas a statement every would-be believer has to wrestle with.

As parents of a questioner, we must remember that questions about the faith reveal a mind that is thinking about Jesus. Always validate the question even if you can't

answer it. Then create an invitation for the child to tell you more. For example, in response to some thorny question, you might say, “Wow, that’s a tough question. I really can’t answer that for you right now. But tell me more about what got you thinking along these lines.”

Remember, the child needs his own satisfying answers about Jesus. Helping him unravel his thinking through asking open-ended, non-judgmental questions may lead to answers the child discovers for himself.

Suggestion #4 — Prepare Thomas

For those of you with children still in that blessed stage of innocence, now – as you are preparing for puberty – is the time to prepare for doubts. Tell your children Thomas’ story. Then simply let them know that doubts will come, and if they feel afraid, they can always talk to you about them. It’s not good to do doubts alone.

Preparing does not mean dragging them to every apologetic speaker that visits your town. Kids don’t doubt because they haven’t been exposed to the best rational arguments or evidence for Christian belief. They doubt because they have yet to experience Jesus.

What that experience may look like is something we cannot conclusively define, but perhaps ... it may be the love of a father’s arms embracing a prodigal son. It may be a leader who humbles himself and washes your child’s feet. It may be watching a poor woman sacrifice all for a Savior worth everything. It may be the healing of some terrible wound. It may be forgiveness poured out on the unforgivable. It may be Jesus comes to us in countless ways, ways that change us forever, ways that enable us to know that Jesus is Lord and God.

Suggestion #5 — Engage Thomas

Read George MacDonald to your children. If they’ve read the Chronicles of Narnia, they have already been indirectly influenced by the writing of this great man. It was reading MacDonald that began C. S. Lewis’ transformation from unbeliever to believer. My favorite MacDonald book for children is *The Princess and the Goblin*. My favorite chapter is 22. If you read that chapter thinking of your Thomas as Curdie, Grandmother as God, and you, the parent, as Princess Irene, it will help you both in knowing how to deal with the doubts and unbelief in those we love.

Explore other religions in an age-appropriate manner. You can go to the children’s section in the library and check out other books on world religions. Compare and contrast the things you learn about to what Christians believe and practice. Teach my *Introduction to Worldview* to your Thomas. Or invite me to come teach a class. I end every one with the whole story of Thomas.

Help your children understand what is unique about the Christian story and why this story matters. *Christian Theology and Ancient Polytheism* is my resource for this

endeavor.

Suggestion #6 — For the Doubting Parent

In closing, it's important to note that Luke tells a similar story of Jesus' appearance after the resurrection, but the focus of this account is on doubting disciples. In Luke 24:38,39, Jesus said to his disciples,

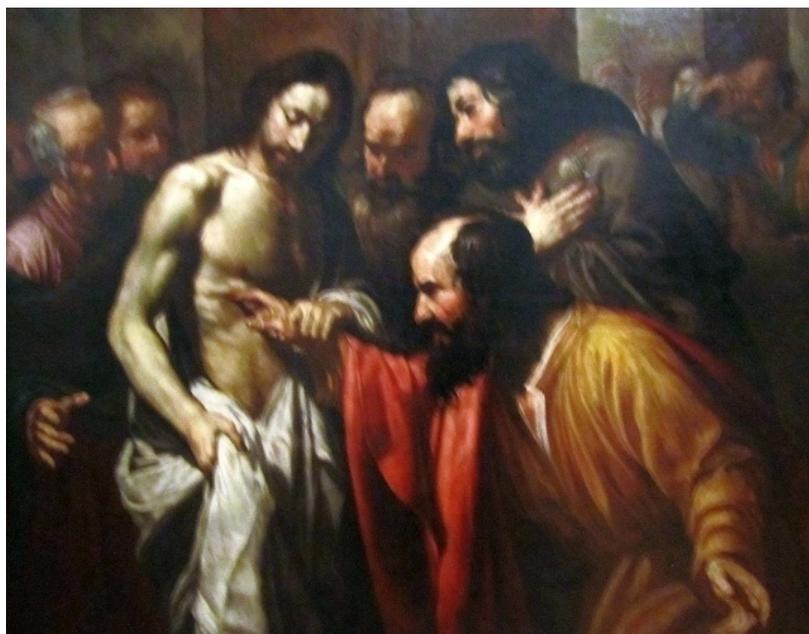
"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?

'See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see ...'"

Nothing can trouble us like worries for our children. Your Thomas may provide a new invitation for you to reach out and touch Jesus again, to confess a lack of faith, to hold tightly once more to nail-scared hands. Thomas may be His means to grow up our faith. Embrace the journey.

Suggestion #7 — Give Thanks

When Thomas gets to the other side give thanks. It's easy to be one of the nine leapers who were so overjoyed to be healed that they forgot to thank the Healer. Unbelief can be a mortal wound to our soul. When prayers are answered for someone we dearly love, we must remember to drop to our knees and praise the Maker with the wounded side.



5) What's Marcia been up to?

I was in Arlington, TX and Santa Rosa, CA last month at two homeschool bookfairs. Both were wonderful conferences. Now I am busy working on my teaching schedule

for the fall. If you are interested in flyers on my classes, drop me a line. If we've already talked about tentative dates, now's the time to get back in contact. You can reach me at Marcia@brimwoodpress.com or call me at 530.644.7538.

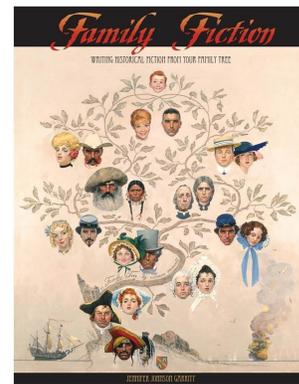
6) A Thank You to my Readers

Writing these newsletters is proving an enjoyable task. Thank you for the warm encouragement you have provided. Another way you can encourage me is to forward them along. In this crazy, commercialized, social-media world we live in, the number of people who subscribe seems to matter. And as we at BrimWood Press are the worst at marketing, this is a way you can help us. So to those who forward and especially those who subscribe, again, my thanks.

7) A product Marcia recommends

This month I'd highly recommend *Family Fiction*, by Jennifer Johnson Garrity. Looking for a creative tool to motivate your reluctant writers? Need a challenge that will draw out the best in your natural writer? Got kids motivated by contests, especially cash prizes? If so, then *Family Fiction* is a product you should check out.

Family Fiction is also terrific for teaching creative writing in co-ops. More on this next month.



Family Fiction

Our *Family Fiction* Fall Writing Contest details including timeframe, judges and prizes will be provided in next month's newsletter. If you need to know more now, send me an email.

8) Upcoming issues

1. July: Raising the Stay-At-Home Elder Brother
2. August: Raising Christian Thinkers and Feelers

9) Pass this Newsletter along

This is our third newsletter. If you know someone who could benefit from its content, please forward it and ask them to subscribe. If they don't subscribe, you'll have to forward it to them again next month. Subscribe at [BrimWood Press Newsletter Signup](#) Of course, if this newsletter was not helpful and you're unwilling to give me another chance, simply unsubscribe at the bottom below.

We do not sell or share your contact information with others, no matter who asks.

10) Reprint Rights

This newsletter is copyright Marcia Harris Brim, 2014. Permission is granted to use any of the information in this newsletter in your own newsletter or web site, as long as you include the following 2-paragraph blurb with it:

This article is reprinted by permission of the author.

Marcia Harris Brim of BrimWood Press writes a free monthly newsletter for Christian parents to provide practical, relevant help for the on-going work of evangelizing our children. Marcia's books for teaching 10 to 13 year old children Theology, History and Worldview are available at www.brimwoodpress.com



11) Supplement: “Insights for Modern Parents Raising Postmodern Children”

Truth and Postmodernism: Part III Truth is a dicey subject. Men have lived and died in the name of truth. This is not a subject to trifle with. But this section of the newsletter isn't about defining what is or isn't true. In striving to understand the culture our children are growing up in, our aim is to identify how and why truth came to hold the place of “relative” in our postmodern world. What path led to this definition of truth?

The people who study this stuff for a living agree: postmodernism follows the road

paved by its modern forbearers. Unlike the changes between medieval and modern, the late 20th century does not mark a shift from one era to a radically different era. Postmodernism takes modern values to their logical and extreme ends.

Moderns radically changed the medieval notion of how truth is derived. As I noted in a previous newsletter, both medieval and early moderns believed in absolute or universal truths, but the means for knowing truth shifted from traditional institutions and authorities to method.

In our world, the means for knowing truth is rooted in scientific methods, Bible study methods, and the will of the people and their representatives. Of all the methods employed by scientists, Christians, and politicians to do their respective tasks, the methods of science proved most influential.

When scientific evidence forced the alteration of cherished universal truths like gravity, science abandoned universals altogether. Truth became “relative.” This scientific view seeped into all of culture during the second half of the 20th century, so that even “universal moral laws” became relative too.

Moderns, not postmoderns, rid themselves of the notion of absolute truths when they choose method over traditional authorities.

But the founders of both the Protestant Reformation and modern democracy who wanted to put the Bible and the government in the hands of the people were anything but relativists. They were men of mission, men committed to truth, justice, and freedom.

The truth so evident in their era was that absolute power soiled and stained both the Catholic Church and medieval and early modern governments. The abuse of power had to be stopped. Government needed to be limited with checks and balances. What exactly men like Jefferson had in mind with “a wall of separation between church and state” is hotly debated. But at a minimum government was not to involve itself in running the church. The modern church for the most part returned the favor.

But this notion of separation has resulted over the centuries in a complete divide between religion, a thoroughly private matter, and the running of things that do matter, like the laws by which we are governed. The results for western culture have been disastrous.

How did religion, specifically Christianity, become so private? When the power to define true doctrine was wrested from the church and turned over to individuals to interpret Scripture with Scripture alone, the result was varying definitions of biblical truth. In the 1500 and 1600s, as the proliferation of various Bible-only churches began, governments were still very much in the business of aligning themselves

with the church. But now, each government got to choose which church upheld the correct truth.

Then the Wars of Religion ensued. Something was broken. Setting aside the purely political issues in these wars, was the role religion played caused by governments picking which form of Christianity is the true faith, or a divided church that gave governments options because she failed to deal with her theological disputes and abuses? Rather than identifying the culprit as the church, the Wars of Religion fueled the belief that government must steer clear of religion. When the government did so, it lost its moral rudder.

Every preceding culture in human history had significant ties between government and religion. It was a massive experiment to privatize the church, an experiment that could have huge cultural consequences, an experiment that took 200 years to judge. By the time of our nation's bi-centennial in 1976, Roe v Wade had already passed.

Marginalizing the church happened in the name of conflict reduction, power management and human freedom. Each man must be free to interpret the Bible for himself. In the countless churches that resulted, many claiming to be the one true church, we have had to learn to get along. Truth became as personal for the individual believer as it is for the society at large. A personal Christian truth ceases to have power to transform culture. Our para-church organizations, for all their worthy efforts, have not been able to rescue our culture from its moral abyss.

This perspective may be a hard to entertain, especially in light of the remarkable achievements in the West birthed by the modern world. It is undeniable that scientific methods, Bible study methods and democratic forms of government have brought huge expansions in knowledge and enormous cultural goods. But ideas have consequences, both good and evil.

The moral wasteland which is called Postmodernism is also the result of sacrificing authority for method.

As parents, it's easy to blame liberal politics, rap music, Hollywood, and the viles of technology. Or we can escape, as some do, into the fantasy literature based on Revelation and welcome the apocalypse as part of a master plan (but not before Christians are raptured to eternal bliss). But what about the great commission? What might a world filled with disciples of Jesus Christ look like? I don't know, but I do know that it would be one marked by enormous conflict. Nothing would put the enemy on guard more than a world in which it looks like God just might win. Satan would have to pull out all the stops.

Postmodernism is not the beginning of the end. It is an end we have created ourselves with much applause from the forces of darkness.

At the beginning of this trajectory stood one church, a united church, which stopped doing the hard work required to wrestle with and apply truth in the context of a whole body, a diverse body, that incorporated an array of cultures. Thus our postmodern problem did not begin with the Catholic/Protestant split, a western phenomenon. It began with what is known to history as the Great Schism, the great separation that took place between the Western and Eastern Church in 1054. The church and the world have never been the same since. At the heart of the schism was an argument over power and a specific doctrine about the Holy Spirit, the very Person who binds us to the body of Christ. This tragic irony should not be missed.

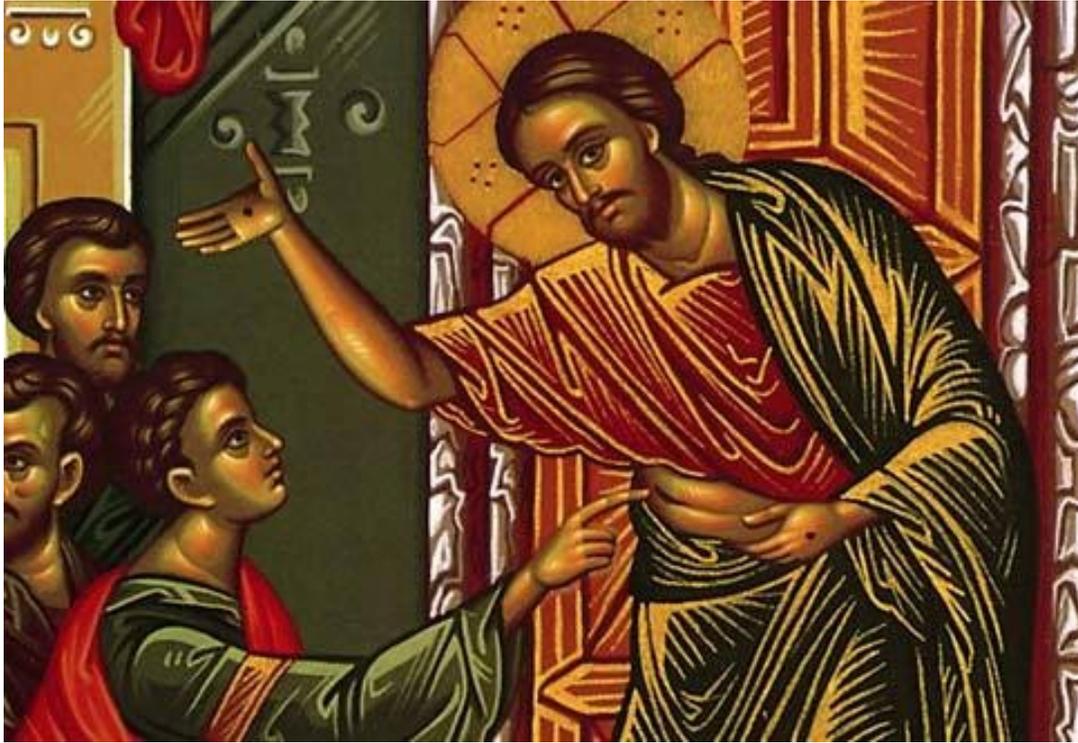
As parents, when we look at the barren landscape into which our children will live out their adult lives, we mourn. Our sadness may lead to anger at all the culture-destroying forces we see every day. Sometimes anger generates power to push into ugly places and shine Christ's light and love. Other times anger leads to fear, a fear that paralyzes. But the purpose of sadness is to lead us to repentance. Repentance is what God's people are always called to do (Nehemiah 7:14).

If I had been there in 1054, would I have understood, let alone fought at all costs, to preserve the unity of the church? Would I have suggested: "Let's take the next fifty to a hundred years to really work this out – maybe our children or grandchildren will do a better job at this than we can."? Would I have striven to revive the old church practice of convening a council? The truth is: probably not. I would have shared in the guilt of the church leaders who were there. They unwittingly believed their interpretation about the Person of the Holy Spirit was worth severing an institution, a body whose power, sourced in the Spirit, enables her to do good, whose unity reflects the love of the Trinity.

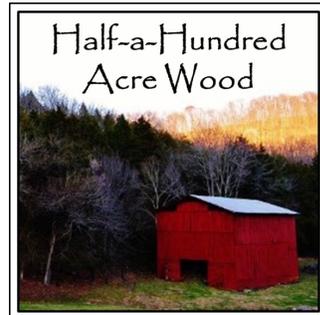
So, to we return the subject we began with, we must ask: what about truth? Are we advocating the sacrifice of truth on an altar of unity? Again, a lot depends on how it is defined. But in the Bible, Truth is a Person, who was sacrificed so that we might be one.

At his scarred feet, we must repent.

To be continued.



Check out one of our great affiliates and their review of BrimWood Press' *Family Fiction* product at [Half-a-Hundred Acre Wood's review of Family Fiction](#)



*Half Hundred Acre Wood
review of Conversations in the
Garden*

Check out one of our great affiliates and their review of BrimWood Press' *Family Fiction* product at [Half-a-Hundred Acre Wood's review of Family Fiction](#)



©2014 BrimWood Press | 1941 Larsen Drive Camino, CA. 95709

Web Version

Preferences

Forward

Unsubscribe

Powered by **Mad Mimi**®