

GROWING UP

(With)

R. C.

*Truths I Learned About Grace,
Redemption, and the Holiness of God*

R. C. Sproul Jr.

Copyright © 2019 by R. C. Sproul Jr.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Our goal is to provide high-quality, thought-provoking books that foster encouragement and spiritual growth. For more information regarding Ichthus Publications, other IP books, or bulk purchases, visit us online or write to support@ichthuspublications.com.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked KJV taken from the King James Version, public domain.

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover image licensed by Shutterstock.

Growing Up (With) R.C.

Truths I Learned About Grace, Redemption, and the Holiness of God

ISBN: 978-1-946971-49-4 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-946971-50-0 (ebook)



www.ichthuspublications.com

Contents

<i>Foreword</i> by Tullian Tchividjian	v
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
1 Becoming R. C.	1
2 Growing Bigger Eyes	11
3 Cosmic Treason	19
4 Temperature's Rising	27
5 Patriarchal Principle #1	35
6 Looking for Wisdom in All the Wrong Places	43
7 Beyond Freedom and Dignity	51
8 My Hometown	61
9 Dreaded Locks	69
10 My Droogs	79
11 Whatcha Got?	89
12 Santini!	99
13 Angels Dancing on My Pinhead	107
14 Those Angry Young Men and Their Haughty Cacophonies	115

15	Mice on the Doorstep	123
16	Treasure Without a Map	131
17	Not a Piece of Chalk	139
18	“As Is”	147
19	Now Is the Time	155
20	Honor Your Father	163
21	He Is My Friend	171
22	Great	179
23	Two Words	187
24	Me and My Shadow	195
25	The Good Fight	203
	<i>Afterword</i> by Lisa C. Sproul	213

Foreword

In his book *The Autobiography and Deliverance of Mark Rutherford*, William Hale White describes Mr. Rutherford's childhood pastor, Brother Holderness, and his willingness to confess publically that he was a sinner, a broken man just like everybody else. White writes that Holderness would openly "confess sins" which, while many, "were never given in any detail which would have made his confession of some value." He never prayed without "telling all of us that there was no health in him, and that his soul was a mass of putrefying sores, and everybody thought the better of him for his self-humiliation." But, White says, if the pastor would have confessed one *actual* indiscretion, he "would have been visited by suspension or expulsion."¹

White makes a profound point: It is one thing to confess that you're a sinner; it is another thing altogether to confess your sins. I have observed that people love it when preachers or Christian leaders say they are fallen just like the rest of us, until that preacher or Christian leader does something that the rest of us fallen people do. When that happens, the love and admiration quickly turn to disgust, disillusionment, and, all too often, social expulsion.

*** Pages vi–viii not included in free sample. ***

Introduction

My head hung in shame as I shuffled my feet toward the jury box, chained and shackled along with the other accused men. As I stood in an Indiana courtroom, I did so not as a juror but as a prisoner. I would much rather report that my imprisonment was unjustly initiated for protesting the ongoings at an abortion mill or for publicly proclaiming the gospel in violation of a city ordinance. But such was not the case. Instead the reason was far more disturbing.

Despite the fog of confusion about the day's preceding events, I knew where I was and, tragically, why I was there. The intervening hours, however—the ones that lay between emptying that bottle and emerging from inebriation in the “drunk tank”—remained empty. I had no memory of them, but I was sensible enough to be haunted by my actions as I recalled them. My shame was twofold: Not only had I driven drunk, but I had done so with my two sons in the car, putting them in potential danger.

Overcoming whatever sense of shame I felt at the moment, I raised my head slowly in fear, unsettled by what might be. I now wanted answers to two important questions: *Were my boys okay? And did my new bride still love me?* As I looked around the court-

room, my eyes met my wife, appearing dignified and beautiful. She mouthed two compelling sentences: “The boys are okay. I love you.” My fears were gone. My shame, however, remained.

When my turn came before the court, I stood and gave my opening plea—not guilty. Was that a lie? I knew what I had done, but I didn’t yet know all that it would mean.

I was led out of the courtroom, still in chains, and back to the holding cell. There, surrounded by lawbreakers just like me, my fears returned. What extraordinary burdens had I just laid on my bride? What was she doing at the present? Would she be okay? Would I be safe inside here? How long would I be here? How exactly would this impact the future?

To make matters worse, my wife and I had been together so briefly, and with the magic of smartphones, I didn’t even know her phone number to reach her in the event that I had the opportunity. She loved me. That much I knew; she had told me so. But I didn’t know exactly what to do in that moment, how to help her wade through this newfound mess that I had foisted upon our family.

Thoughts of what I’d done flashed through my mind and left me with a sense of disquiet. My stomach churned as I reflected on my actions—after all, what else did I have to do just sitting there, waiting?—and I arrived at a more raw, existential awareness of my sins and weaknesses. Minutes passed into hours, and the disconcerting recollections playing over and over in my mind left me restless, sickened. I didn’t even have the stomach to eat a meal, a bologna sandwich, so I passed. Instead I studied the men around me, not joining in with them, but taking in their conversations.

And I prayed. My shame weighed me down, pinning me to the cold concrete bench in that overcrowded ten-by-ten cell. I knew the future looked bleak, yet I knew enough in that moment to ask my Lord to forgive me. The past, the night before, remained—as it still remains—beyond my reach, yet I knew enough to ask Him to comfort me with His certain promises.

My mind raced to the coming revelations. It struck me that my downfall would probably surprise few. I had already had scandal in my life. None, however, could be summed up by a breathalyzer test, a police report, and the dutiful, graphically-detailed recounting of my case on the World Wide Web. I drew some small comfort in knowing that what others would learn about me was no more and no less than what I already knew about myself: I was objectively guilty.

Despite having logged many hours through the years watching and reading crime dramas, I wasn't prepared for that surreal moment. I didn't know what else to expect. My phone, my wallet, even my watch and wedding band had been confiscated at booking. All I could do was hope and wait as, one by one, my fellow inmates were led away, either to the general population of the jail or, having made bail, to the general public. I gave thanks that I had been kept safe, that the police had treated us all with an aloof dignity.

As I watched others being brought in, booked, fingerprinted, having their mug shots taken, I acquired a sense of the process I had been through the night before. The shame doubled down, not only because I had been through that process but because I had no memory of it.

*** *Pages xii–xxiii not included in free sample.* ***

1

Being R. C.

Though I was there for it all, I have no memory of it. It was, however, a red-letter day, in more ways than one. It was July 1, 1965, the day I was born, and I suspect I will never live through a more traumatic day. My mother was going through the agony of giving birth, and I, the agony of being born. My father, I suspect, was pacing the waiting room at St. Francis Medical Center in Pittsburgh, the smoke spewing out of him, a mirror of the belching steel mills along the three rivers.

My parents had planned to name me Steven Audent Sproul. I don't know for sure what prompted that, but if I had to guess, Steven was probably for the New Testament's first martyr. Audent is a Latin word that means, roughly, "One who dares." My father, however, didn't dare. That is, while my mother was in the hospital recovering from giving birth, my father also had an aunt who was dying in that same hospital. He went to visit her, gave her the good

news, and she took the occasion to make as her dying wish that my father continue the family tradition and name me “Robert C.”

My father was the third generation in a row to follow this pattern—his father had named him Robert Charles. My grandfather had been Robert C, with no middle name (like Ike). His father before him had been Robert Cecil. Thus, I was named Robert Craig. And my great aunt went to her grave a satisfied woman.

My birth, however, was not the only excitement that day. My father’s father had died while my father was still in high school. His mother had bravely finished the job of raising her only son while cherishing two deep goals: She wanted to have a grandson born to carry on the family name, and she wanted to see her son ordained to gospel ministry. The day the stork delivered me to my mother, the mailman delivered to my grandmother two tokens of her second goal—an invitation to my father’s ordination service and the dress she had ordered to wear for that event.

On the morning of July 2, my sister Sherrie, all of three years old and giddy with delight over my birth, went into our grandmother’s bedroom to wake her for the day. Our grandmother, however, either overwhelmed with excitement or drifting in contentment, had awakened in Paradise sometime during the night. The lifeless shell of her body refused to respond to my sister. My father had gained a son and lost a mother in the same 24 hours. “The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away” was made real to him on that day. She was buried in the dress she had ordered for my father’s ordination.

From that day forward, my father faithfully poured his life into me. His method, which was profoundly biblical, was the very antithesis of flashy. Some years ago I published a book on homeschooling, entitled *When You Rise Up*. That brief work was mostly an exposition of the principles found in Deuteronomy 6, wherein Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, enjoins God's people:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength. And
these words which I command you today shall be in
your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your
children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your
house, when you walk by the way, when you lie
down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as
a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets
between your eyes. You shall write them on the
doorposts of your house and on your gates (verses 4–
9).

I laid out in that book three principal points: the message, the method, and the means. God here commands His people to speak to their children of the things of God. They are to tell their children who God is, what God has done, what God requires, and what God has promised. That is the message.

The method is simple and organic. Parents are to speak with their children and to do so in the context of life. “When you sit in your house” does not exclude when you sit in your fields. “When you walk by the way” does not exclude when you go for your

morning jog. “When you lie down, and when you rise up” does not exclude any of the hours in between. The pedagogy is an antipedagogy. Just talk to your kids.

The means is as simple as the method. God here calls parents to do the job. He does not command Israel to hire professionally trained tutors or highbrow scholars. It’s the job of the parents.

Although I was not homeschooled as a child, my parents took this command to heart. We learned not by following someone else’s curriculum but by talking. And we talked not by scheduling time to talk but simply by talking in the ebb and flow of our days.

I did not so much learn from my father as absorb him. One of the blessings of organic learning is that it does not just encourage the learning of propositions but it trains the mind in how those propositions relate. The harmonizing of information, the unifying of the diversity, is as important as the disparate bits of truth themselves. Let me illustrate with a story.

I was still in high school and was speaking—or should I say debating?—with the man who then disciplined me. We embraced the same theological system, the very one my father had taught me. But on matters of apologetics, we differed. I aligned myself with my dad’s view, which was out of the mainstream in our circles. My teacher was trying to win me over to his point of view on apologetics, and he explained to me that we all believe what we believe because someone in authority tells us what to believe.

“You believe that a ball is a ball,” he said, “because when you were a baby, your father showed you a ball and said ‘ball.’”

I knew that all I needed was one counterexample to destroy his argument. And one came immediately to mind, a theological issue

on which my mentor and I agreed and with which my father disagreed: infralapsarianism versus supralapsarianism. Simply put, this is the understanding of *when* God ordained the salvation of His people.

“If that’s so,” I said, “then how come my dad is an infralapsarian and I am a supralapsarian?”

My mentor didn’t skip a beat but just smiled down at me and said, “Because your father taught you to be logical.”

He did do that. I remember him giving me logic exercises in junior high school. I remember, not long after that, sitting in my bedroom listening to cassettes of a six-part lecture series he had prepared on logic. This will not surprise those who are familiar with my father’s teachings over the years; he was known for the laser precision of his reasoning.

While his book *The Holiness of God* was perhaps the most widely read, it is likely that his book *Chosen By God* had an even greater impact. Untold thousands came to embrace the sovereignty of God over our salvation by reading that book and by coming along for the ride as my father relentlessly pursued that vexing question of how God’s freedom and our freedom relate.

The trouble is this: We tend to equate careful, logical thought with a corresponding coldness of heart. Those who knew my father only from a distance could understandably have jumped to the wrong conclusion about him and presumed him cold. My father’s heart, however, was as warm as his mind was sharp. I learned from him more than simply sound theology. As my father modeled Jesus, I learned forgiveness, compassion, humor, loyalty, and love.

What follows then is not by any stretch a biography. That will be handled by far more competent hands than mine. Rather, what follows is more a remembrance, a looking back at the lessons I learned in the backyard, in the car, in the woods, and at the dining table.

I know I have been deeply and profoundly blessed to have R. C. Sproul for a father. As I like to remind people, however, the blessing wasn't because he was such a great theologian but because he was such a great father. And the best thing about him was that, because he knew how much he needed Jesus, he told me about Jesus. My father was not a perfect man, but every day of our lives together, he pointed me toward our perfect elder Brother. Which is why, when we laid my father's remains into the ground, these are the words I was privileged to speak:

From an early age there was a call on his life. Though raised in what appeared to be a normal family, one swaddled in love, it was apparent early on that this one would be used mightily by God. He was, in a manner of speaking, pushed into gospel ministry, both by his heavenly Father and by his earthly mother. While he was still a young man, his labors in God's vineyard were blessed. He spoke as one with authority, and before long, crowds began to gather. Like David versus Goliath, he went into battle with theological liberals and stood firm on the Word of God, on the promises of God.

Crowds began to flock to him as he travelled around his home country, though from time to time those crowds would wax and wane. When he gave the people what they wanted, the crowds grew. When, however, he spoke of the sovereignty of God, the crowds tended to shrink. This man was deeply loved by a select few who knew him intimately, apart from his public ministry, the man in private. Too often, however, even they let him down.

I'm speaking, of course, of the man we have gathered here today to honor, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. For surely we would dishonor R. C. Sproul were we to gather to honor R. C. Sproul.

There are myriad ways to describe my father's life mission—to awaken as many people as possible to the holiness of God in all its fullness; to show people the character of God; to defend the faith once delivered. The best description, however, is the simplest: He lived to tell people about Jesus.

We would be wise to remember that the serpent is more crafty than any of the beasts of the field. He is able to take the most humbling of truths and turn them, in us, into an occasion for pride. R. C. Sproul had the intellectual firepower to describe with precision that biblical gospel. He had the communications gifting to reach millions with the message. He possessed the moral fortitude to stand

strong in defense of the gospel. And God blessed his reach, his impact.

As we lower this body into the ground, however, we must embrace, to our core, that R. C. Sproul, like each of us, was a sinner saved by grace, justly deserving God's displeasure. His greatest success was in recognizing his failure, that he fell short. His most heroic act was to rest in the Hero. We do not, in taking this occasion to remember this truth, dishonor the man, but honor the message. More important still, we honor the meaning of the message, Jesus, the Savior of sinners.

The scope of his ministry, the love of his family and friends, the respect of his peers—these were not where my father found his comfort. Rather, his only comfort, in life and in death, is that he belongs to his faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of His own blood, has fully paid for all our sins and has completely freed us from the dominion of the devil; that He protects us so well that, without the will of our Father in heaven, not a hair can fall from our heads. Indeed, that everything must fit His purpose for our salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures us of eternal life, making us wholeheartedly willing and ready to live, and to die, for Him.

Therefore, as we commit these earthly remains to the ground, we do so with confidence. We do not

bury the body, but plant it, knowing it will blossom in perfection when the Perfect comes.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still and live and left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

And the just shall live by faith.

*** *End of free sample.* ***