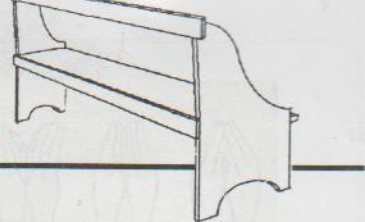


# The Back Bench



## Lending God a Hand

by Stan Thornburg

Admit it, you want to be God! Everyone does. I learned this from noted psychologists. They should know. Psychologists are people who spend years and thousands of dollars watching dogs salivate, frogs undergo electroshock, and rats run around in boxes with lots of walls. One can readily see that this qualifies them to ask people about their mothers and conclude: "Everyone wants to be God."

Most of us realize that since we have no *omni*'s in our résumé, we aren't likely to get God's job even if it became available. Even so, it never hurts to dream.

If I were God, I would first eliminate the most annoying prayers by making it known, probably through a book written by a noted psychologist, that there would be no more blessing the food. Next, I would redesign the human body.

I find it embarrassing to be a human, supposedly the crown glory of God's creation, made in the very image of God, and yet be designed in such a way that unless I am really careful, I fall over.

Suppose that an alien from another universe landed on your patio and you tried to convince it that human beings were the object of God's deepest love.

You: "Humans are the object of God's deepest love."

Alien: "Yeah? Then why do humans fall over so easily?"

You: "Your mother wears army boots!" See what I mean?

From the moment that a child takes its first step and falls gashing its head against the corner of the coffee table, to the time she/he calls 911 and says, "I've fallen and I can't get up" that person will waste most of life's waking hours concentrating on not falling over.

So if I were God I would make our feet bigger or have a third leg grow from between our shoulder blades to give us something to balance us.

Secondly, I would do something about our obscene looking nostrils. I would include nostrils in the category of "private parts" so that it would be a sin to uncover them (with exceptions for small children, medical patients, and actors in socially redeeming nostril scenes).

As God, I know I would enjoy the challenging dilemmas requiring split-second decisions. For example, Earlham College and George Fox College are competing in soccer. Both teams pray, "Lord help us to win!" Two weighty Friends are speeding toward the same traffic light, one driving east and one driving south. They are late for a meeting for business during which they plan to share opposite leadings over whether to record a person who has the gift of healing small appliances. Both pray, "Lord, please turn the light green." Someone with a lethal cholesterol count scrambles a dozen egg yolks for breakfast and prays, "Lord, bless this food to my body's use." You make the calls!

But surely the most difficult part of being God would be deciding what is sin and what isn't. Sure, some things are obviously sin like committing murder or being water baptized, but other situations are tough. What if someone just pretended to be a hypocrite but really wasn't? Sin or not? What if someone coveted another person's humility or lusted after righteousness? Does this person fly or fry? (Note: *Fly or fry* is an evangelical term meaning *turn or burn*.)

It's plain from the above real life

dilemmas taken from God's personal diary that being God involves extremely difficult choices about the subject of sin. The really great thing about human beings though is that out of our compassion for God we have done our best to protect God from these painful decisions by making them ourselves. I expect that at the great awards banquet in heaven God will personally commend us for volunteering to handle the most difficult part of God's job description.

God: "I want to especially thank Christians for not taking my obviously co-dependent inclination to justify folks on the basis of faith too seriously. The dedication of these men and women in reviving the law has given the Gospel and the idea of righteousness the boundaries and definitions they so sorely need."

Of course, if we were honest, upon accepting the award we would have to acknowledge that not all the benefits of our taking over the criteria for righteousness accrue to God.

Us: "Thank you, God, for your kind words, but to be honest we must acknowledge that in wresting the Gospel from your hands we have found a clear way to be sure that we are good people, and to decide who is "in" and who is "out" in a way that is consistent and impartial."

Of course noted psychologists would argue that the help we have provided for God is in fact a refusal to acknowledge that God is God and that we are each only accountable to God. They would say that this just proves the theory that everyone wants to be God. However, I have learned that the rats, frogs, and dogs that noted psychologists use in their research actually come from secular backgrounds thus distorting beyond credibility their conclusions about religious matters.

Meanwhile, if we could find out what God actually does to food when God blesses food, maybe we could do that ourselves, freeing God up to answer prayers for things we really need. What do you think?

Stan Thornburg chairs the pastoral team of Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon.

