

## THE EMPEROR IS NAKED...

In the fabled story, The Emperor's New Clothes, it is the children by and large who notice that the Emperor is naked. It is only the rare child who hangs on to this insight. Most of them soon learn to see the "beauty and elegance" of his clothes, so to speak. Personally, I think the Lord may be reminding me of some insights that I have come to ignore. I hope this letter finds you well and may the Lord be with you.

### Russian Love

I just returned from a trip to the Kostroma Region in Russia where Children's Hope Chest works with an orphanage in Galich as well as a Ministry Center near a university in Kostroma. This was a return trip for me, though that does not make the trip even remotely similar to last year. There were less kids and those that were there were older teenagers (that should say enough!). The reality is that this particular type of institution is being phased out while something akin to a foster care system is coming in. Young kids are already in foster care or adopted while the older ones remain until graduation. It is these older kids we took back to Kostroma to help them become familiar with their next stage in life and hopefully inspire them to think ahead. It was a challenge, quite messy, and well worth the effort. They were exposed to a number of new experiences and only time will tell how it has impacted their thinking. Just the change in scenery and exit from Galich was powerful for their esteem. This had never been attempted before, but it seems like it should have been tried long ago. I am grateful to have been a part of this ministry experiment. You can see pictures on [www.adfontes.us](http://www.adfontes.us) by clicking on the photo on the "our work" page.



*"Truth is not relative, but rather personal. Reason can never be discarded, but its role in decision-making is more brittle than many believe. The kinds of truths for which a man is willing to live and die can only be known personally. A truth held only by the mind is not a truth on which the individual has a firm grip." - Soren Kierkegaard, Christian philosopher*

### On The Academy

Regarding my History of Science endeavor, you catch me at an odd junction. I am indeed in a graduate program learning about the historical interchange between science and religion as well as becoming far more conversant in such areas as philosophy, history, and culture. The grades go well and my writing style continues to improve. I recently had my first program evaluation and they are more than satisfied with my progress thus far. However, I often feel alone. Regardless of the final outcome, I have been reminded that modern ministers simply are unable to understand these things at the level required to really engage people. I am hoping to remedy that in myself. This is an odd time for me in that the further I go through this program, the more I am noticing my desire for ministry. And what I mean by ministry is something more pastoral and centered around discipleship. Isaiah says, "The Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary." I will finish the Master's program in about a year. Typically this is when one dumps all of that into the PhD program and continues for another couple years. My struggle is both pragmatic and personal. Many are aware of how little Biblical literacy there is amongst believers today and how the ancient process of discipleship is all but abandoned. I have looked upon these realities with ambivalence and perhaps even some anger...deciding to go my own way. However, I am beginning to think this is not the virtuous response the Lord requires.



My heart is for seeing disciples produced and I know what I mean when I say that. The church is changing and there is a hunger for what has been missing for so long. Strong denominational ties and formal institutions may be weakening, but people still gather and desire to know. Thus, perhaps an opening has been made. I have had the blessing of having incredible mentoring, good education, and unique experiences that I think could contribute mightily to the problems that plague the church. It is not a messiah-complex or even that I am the best equipped. It is just that I think it is time for me to pay attention to these realities and no longer stand aside. I have begun to question whether or not I have been resisting my true calling. Calling in the sense of how God wants me to engage life and the world, not calling in terms of position or title at any institution. These are the rumblings of a quiet struggle that is not being so quiet. I would appreciate your prayers and your thoughts.

### Long Live Discipleship

In conjunction with the above, I would like to share an interesting story about the ministry of Ad Fontes in Russia. Near the end of the trip, I decided to take a small risk and to test the “ministry waters.” For an hour and a half, I worked with nearly all of our translators and some Americans on how to study their Bibles for themselves. We examined the Russian Bible as well as the English translation to make sure we got the grammar right, all the while communicating to them the importance of understanding the Scriptures since they are the only reliable witness to knowing God. Afterwards, we compared the lives of two 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian novelists, Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Though both professing Christians, their spiritual lives could not have been more different. One characterized by hard obedience and a lack of personal forgiveness while the other enraptured by the idea of the grace of God. The Russians in the room were silent, but not because they were bored. I learned afterwards that they are usually quiet when they are fully engaged and will not speak because they are ruminating on some hard questions. Afterwards, I received great encouragement and was inundated with questions by a number of them. One of the translators who is an English teacher at the university spoke with me at length about returning to Kostroma to speak and teach at her church. Others agreed and would like to spend time in the evenings if I returned learning more about the Scriptures. Make a long story short, I tested the waters and they are really hot! It is experiences like these that are slaps in the face, if you will, as to what I need to be doing and perhaps where I should direct my limited hours and energies. There is more that can be said, but I have been writing a number of them to begin to ponder what this might look like. If the desire is strong enough, I will begin saving and raising funds in order to coordinate a return trip in 2009 for this express purpose.

His Servant & Your Friend,

*Jason Brogden*



*“Declare, ye sages, if ye find  
amongst animals of every kind,  
Of each condition sort and  
size, from whales and  
elephants to flies,*

*A creature that mistakes his  
plan and errs so constantly as  
man!*

*Each kind pursues its proper  
good, and seeks enjoyment, rest  
and food,*

*As nature points, and never  
errs in what it chooses or  
prefers;*

*Man only blunders, though  
possessed, of reason far above  
the rest.*

*Descend to instances and try:  
an ox will not attempt to fly,*

*Or leave his pasture in the  
wood with fishes to exploring  
the flood.*

*Man only acts of every creature  
in opposition to his nature.”*

*C.H. Spurgeon*

