

the Banner *of Sovereign Grace Truth*

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The Puritans on Coming to Christ

Losing Count... Forgiving Others

The Sinkhole Syndrome

A Periodical for Young and Old

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TRUE RELIGION

MARTIN LUTHER

"The heart of religion lies in its personal pronouns."

JOHN CALVIN

"Justification by faith is the hinge on which all true religion turns."

MATTHEW HENRY

"The root of religion is the fear of God reigning in the heart, a reverence of His majesty, a deference to His authority, and a dread of His wrath."

JONATHAN EDWARDS

"True religion consists in holy affections. True religion is a powerful thing, a ferment, a vigorous engagedness of the heart."

MEDITATION
MATTHEW 7:24–27



the Father's Wisdom

REV. DON OVERBEEK

We all need wisdom as we enter the year 2011. Wisdom is needed for life-changing decisions with which we will be faced, for daily discernment as we stand against the Devil, and for split-second choices we will need to make as we strive to be agents of good in the world. Wisdom dwells in God as Father, it is revealed through Christ His Son, and it is made ours by the Holy Spirit.

God the Father's wisdom is at the heart of Christ's "parable of the two builders." Just as the Father is in view at the end of Matthew 5 and 6 (5:48; 6:32–33), so Christ exalts Him at the end of chapter 7. Christ is building upon the rock of His Father's wisdom, while the wisdom of many of His contemporaries was based on the shifting sands of acceptance with people. By concluding as He does, He is drawing our affections to the Father's wisdom and away from the passing wisdom of men.

First, Christ stirs our affections for the church of God. The Old Testament often refers to the visible church as "house" (e.g., the "house" of Abraham, the "house of Israel") and usually it was attended with the promise of God to be "built by Him." We know what happened as sin worked as a wrecking ball through the centuries; houses fell one after another. But God's saving wisdom would withstand the assaults, and Christ attests to its lasting presence. To many today, the church is foolish, riddled with scandals, world conformity, and practical impotence; they take a pass on her. Our view must be different; we mourn the state of the church but rejoice in the wisdom of God as He works in her and through her.

Jesus would also give us new affections for the Law of God. Repeatedly in the Law, we read the demand to "hear and do" (Deut. 6), which is the language Jesus uses here (Matt. 7:24, 26). It is so sad that our affections can be dulled toward God's laws by "legalism." We paint the Law and obedience to it in the worst possible light. Christ will not allow this. The Law points us to God's wisdom and to our sinful folly, not to our wisdom and God's folly. As your affection for the Law is right, your gospel affections will be enlarged, and you will make a difference in everyday acts of love and service.

Jesus puts His finger on our affections by using poetic verse to make His point. His words and images are poetic like as in the books of Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Job built his house, a storm came, and it fell. The Psalms speak of life in the miry clay in comparison to being on the rock (Ps. 40:2). Jesus knew wisdom was to be worked out by the Spirit in the experiences of life. Every spiritual assault we face, every sin we commit, and every weakness we feel will be turned into long-term wisdom when they lead us to rest on and worship God alone.

Christ also attracts us to the Father's wisdom by speaking prophetically. Just like the Old Testament prophets before Him, Jesus targets the heart. The prophets were like a storm, bearing down on the "house" of Israel and by raining God's Word upon them while seeking the Spirit's wind to blow through them. Often this storm would lead to a great collapse because it did not result in a returning to God with repentance of sin. But, at other times, Christ, knowing it was a prophecy of Himself, would take the greatest "storm" of judgment and exile and merit the Spirit of repentance and faith. The wisdom of the cross is wisdom which no life-defining problem or perplexity can ultimately shake. Rather, in so being brought to Christ, He will form them into the glorious "building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

Will you now ask the Father for wisdom? He has answered by giving Christ to be with us—also in 2011.

The Puritans on *Coming to Christ*

EDITORIAL

Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, the great question has been: “How can sinful man be brought back to God?” In Genesis 3, God sent Adam and Eve away. Genesis 3:24 says, “So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” But Scripture makes it clear that there is a remedy. In Revelation 22, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven. In it we discover again the tree of life planted by a refreshing river flowing from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1–2). John therefore testifies, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (v. 17). Man was *sent away* from God, but now he is *brought to* God. Man was barred from the Tree of Life, but now a way to God has been opened through Christ (cf. Rev. 2:7). The question that remains is: *How do you and I come to Christ?*

Today, as in Puritan times, many people do not understand how a fallen sinner comes to Christ. Mistaken views abound. In some evangelistic meetings, people are asked to make a decision for Christ in their own strength. They may be asked to raise their hand during silent prayer, to recite the sinner’s prayer, or to walk forward during an altar call.

Some teach that baptismal regeneration is the key to coming to Christ. Others equate coming to Christ with mental assent; they think they only need to know and assent to some basic truths about Christ to come to Christ. Others require unbiblical, mystical experiences to come to Christ. They claim to have received revelations from the Holy Spirit or miraculous experiences that assure them of having come to Christ.

Still others never fully grasp what it means to come to Christ. They wrestle with a fearful lack of assurance, always asking, “Have I come?” “How do I know if I have come?” “What does it truly mean to come?” “Has God truly begun His saving work in me?”

The Puritans grappled with these and other false views as they tirelessly labored to show people how sinners come to Christ. In this article we will briefly examine the biblical doctrine of coming to Christ through the Puritan lens. Next month, we will consider the impediments of coming to Christ. Thus, we will deal with *how* we come and *why* some do not come. Our prayer is that, with the Spirit’s blessing, this examination may encourage those of you who question whether or not you have truly come to Christ.

The Universal Call to Come to Christ

The first encouragement Puritan ministers offered is that Christ’s call to come to Him is universal in scope. Christ

says, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The Puritans viewed the *extent* of this call as universal—that is, it comes to everyone who hears the gospel. Whether you are young or old, rich or poor, male or female, Christ calls, even commands you, to come to Him. As Thomas Boston (1676–1732) said, “This I will ever preach, that all, under pain of damnation, are obliged to come to him” (*The Beauties of Thomas Boston*, 263). God commands all people everywhere to repent and come to Christ (Acts 17:30).

The terms *labor* and *heavy laden* in this verse are universal in scope. Jesus is not saying that only those who have awareness of their sin are invited to come. He is not saying, as some hyper-Calvinists teach, that only sensible sinners are welcome to fall at Jesus’ feet. He is not saying that only those in whom the Holy Spirit has begun to stir the waters of soul-interest are to come. Christ calls *all* people who are weary and feel the heaviness of life (cf. Eccl. 1:8; Isa. 55:2) to come to Him for rest.

This universal call that comes to all who hear the gospel is made even clearer when we consider the extent of the gospel, Boston said. For the gospel *is* the call to come to Christ. By its nature, the gospel demands our faith, so a lack of faith in the gospel is the sin of unbelief. But if the gospel call is restricted to a select group of individuals and is not universal, then the obligations of the gospel are not universal. Those who reject the gospel, then, are not guilty of unbelief because they were never called to believe the gospel. As far as sinful corruption reaches, so does the call to come to Christ.

Do you realize how this universal call magnifies the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you see how willing Christ is to save sinners? He calls sinners to Himself to receive His rest with the promise: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29–30). Christ calls sinners to Himself because He alone is the willing Savior—not because of our good works, our righteousness, or anything else. He calls sinners to Himself as the exclusive means of coming to God (cf. John 14:6). He is willing to save us, and we must come to Him to be freed from our sins and burdens.

Some might question this, saying, “If the call is universal and goes out to everyone, and not everyone comes, then the invitation must be insufficient.” This is false reasoning. Think of Christian fleeing the City of Destruction in the tale of John Bunyan (1628–1688). Christian went all about the city, warning people about God’s wrath that would soon destroy their city. Most people responded to the warning by mock-

ing Christian and his warnings. But their refusal to listen did not make Christian's invitation to go with him insufficient or insincere. The warning itself was not insufficient.

When you invite someone to a wedding reception and they decline to come, does that mean the invitation was not sufficient? Does it show a weakness in the people who issued the invitation? No, the insufficiency in Christian's case was not the warning but rather the people who refused to respond to the warning. There was no insufficiency in the wedding invitation, but in those who refused to come.

So it is with the call to come to Christ. There is no fault, insufficiency, or lack of sincerity in Christ's invitation; all blame rests upon those who refuse to come to Him for eternal life. The Canons of Dort explain this well in Head III-IV, articles 8-9:

As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word, what will be acceptable to Him; namely, that all who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him. It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, offered therein, nor of God... that those who are called by the ministry of the word, refuse to come, and be converted: the fault lies in themselves.

The Canons make plain that there is no insufficiency in God's willingness to save sinners. The invitation is not a lie; it is a true, rich, full, free invitation. The gospel is a well-meant offer. Christ is ready and willing to save sinners. This is what Bunyan referred to as the conditional promise. To all who will come to Him, Christ freely gives eternal life. This call is based on the condition of faith and is a true invitation. But no one comes to Christ simply because of this universal calling. We who are called are insufficient to respond to that call; we cannot and will not come. The insufficiency is in us. Our sin keeps us from responding to Christ's call—the blame is wholly on us. Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

Judgment Day will confirm this truth. No one will stand before God on the Last Day and say, "The invitation was not for me. The invitation was not sufficient to save me." Christ stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. He will enter the heart of *anyone* who opens that door and dine with that person (Rev. 3:20). But that leaves us asking, "What must I do to come? How can I come? How can I be assured that I am coming to Christ?"

The Effectual Call to Come to Christ

We have not been left to doubt whether sinners like us *may* or *do* come to Christ. From Genesis 3 through Revelation 22, the Bible reveals to us the steps God takes to bring us back to Him. Coming to Christ is an experience that we may have in this life. Union with Christ can become a present reality. We

would be remiss to put aside the question of coming to Christ. We would fail to understand God's graciousness if we thought that coming to Christ was something so mysterious that we could never understand it.

There are two extremes we must avoid in seeking proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of coming to Christ. On the one hand, we should avoid the problem of *easy belief*, usually called *easy-believism*. The meaning of this term varies accordingly to its usage. We do not want to state that coming to Christ is effective when we cite a little prayer, raise our hand, or respond to an altar call. We do not want to make light of this doctrine of coming to Christ. But the other extreme we should avoid is presuming what we cannot know. We do not want to give up, saying, "There is nothing I can do to assure myself of coming to Christ." This usually involves *spiritual distortion* and/or *spiritual laziness*.

Between these two extremes, the Puritans clarified how we truly come to Christ. They took care to show us that coming to Christ is possible because Christ is not only willing but also able to save sinners. Not only does He hold out His hands, but He also takes sinners into His arms. Not only does He offer salvation, but He also secures salvation.

In addition to God's universal call, there is His effective call, often referred to as the effectual call of Christ. This effectual call is inseparable from what the Puritans called God's unconditional promises. Unconditional promises *give* what conditional promises require, the Puritans explain. John Bunyan wrote, "The conditional promise calls for repentance, and the absolute promise gives it (Acts 5:31). The conditional promise calls for faith, and the absolute promise gives it (Zeph. 3:12; Rom. 15:12). The conditional promise calls for a new heart, and the absolute promise gives it (Ezek. 36:25-26). The conditional promise calls for holy obedience, and the absolute promise gives it (Ezek. 36:27)" (Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, 55).

The unconditional promises grounded in Christ's atoning work reveal that Christ is able to bring sinners to Himself. The unconditional promises are given to His elect, fulfilling the conditions of what He requires of us when we come to Him. John Flavel (1628-1691), commenting on the *need* of the effectual call, stated, "But yet, all the preaching in the world can never effect this union with Christ in itself, and in its own virtue, except a supernatural and mighty power go forth with it for that end and purpose. Let Boanerges and Barnabas try their strength, let the *angels* of heaven be the preachers; till God draw, the soul cannot come to Christ" (Flavel, *Works*, 2:67). Thus, a universal calling is not sufficient to draw people to Christ. But Christ does not stop at a universal call. He goes further, penetrating the hearts of the elect through an effectual call, which is rooted in the unconditional promises to bring sinners to Christ.

Christ clearly proclaims the effectual call in John 6:37, 44: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.... No man can

come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” What we observe here is that no one can come to Christ unless he or she is drawn by the Father, and those who are drawn to Christ *will* come to Christ. The unconditional promise in these verses is that those whom the Father draws will by God’s sovereign grace come to Christ, and Christ, being an able and willing Savior, will not cast them out.

“This is good news indeed!” you say. “But I am still unsure. How do I know if Christ is effectively drawing me? How do I know if I am a recipient of this inward, effectual call? How is this call *applied* to the hearts of unworthy, yes, even hell-worthy sinners?”

Because of its effectual nature, this call is a *spiritual* call, not primarily a physical or volitional call. What we mean is that the effective call is not a physical coming to Christ. It is not evident by raising a hand when the pastor asks, or coming forward during an altar call, making the sign of the cross, or taking the elements in the Lord’s Supper. Bunyan, who was well aware of the deceitfulness of equating the effective call with a physical act, said that many people came to Christ “carnally, or bodily, that had no saving advantage” (Bunyan, *Come and Welcome*, 24). A physical act is not the true means of coming to Christ for salvation.

Likewise, coming to Christ is not merely a volitional act. Making a decision to follow Jesus is not what makes Christ’s calling effective. The Bible says that no one is able to come to Christ of his own volition. We cannot meet the conditional promises of this calling; we are so helpless that we need something more than our volitional act. If salvation were left to our wills to come to Christ, we would all be hopelessly lost. None of us would come. None would follow Christ. God makes the call effective by a *spiritual* act, which, as John Flavel says, is a “supernatural and mighty power” that causes us to come to Christ. Effectual calling, therefore, is the Holy Spirit’s powerful work in us (John 6:63) which then results in our volitional act of coming to Christ. We are made willing (Ps. 110:3) and enabled (Eph. 2:1) to come in the day of God’s power.

The Puritans labored to show *how* sinners can know if they have come to Christ, or, as they often put it, have closed with Christ, or appropriated Christ, or apprehended Christ. All of these terms are synonymous in the Puritan mind. The Puritans defended their explanations by anchoring them in Scripture. We come to Christ, they said, when we are (1) *drawn actively by faith to Christ* (2) *as He offers Himself in the gospel*, (3) *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. Let us look at each of these briefly.

1 We must be *drawn actively by faith to Christ*. Bunyan spoke of coming to Christ as a mental act. He said those who come to Christ are so affected in their hearts that they mentally come to Him. What he means is that the person who comes to Christ is made willing to come; he comes voluntarily. This coming

is by no means easy belief, which we have already repudiated. Rather, Bunyan says, “the Lord Jesus positively determines to put forth such a sufficiency of all grace as shall effectually perform this promise” (Bunyan, *Come and Welcome*, 23).

Christ does not force us to come to Him; He changes our mentality so that we can do nothing other than come to Him. He makes us willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3). Faith willingly believes from the heart what the Scriptures teach about man’s sinfulness, God’s holiness, and Christ’s saving work. As the sinner encounters God’s awesome holiness, his faith repudiates self-righteousness. It brings him to need Christ as revealed in Scripture. Faith abandons all self-merit as it is increasingly allured to Christ and His merits (Rom. 7:24–25).

It is important to emphasize that Christ is the object of this active faith. Properly speaking, faith has never saved anyone. As believers, we do not have faith in our faith; we exercise faith in Christ. True faith lays hold of Christ, embraces Christ, and rests upon Christ for total salvation. As J. G. Pike said, “This central truth is the principal and proper matter of faith, and Christ or God in Christ appearing in it, is the proper and only object of faith” (Brown, 261).

The two brief words *to Christ* refer to two important causes of coming to Christ. Bunyan says, “Firstly, there is in Christ a fullness of all-sufficiency of that, even of *all* that, which is needful to make us happy. Secondly, those that indeed come to him, do therefore come to him that they may receive it at his hand” (Bunyan, *Come and Welcome*, 67). It is *to Christ* we go. It is *to Christ* we come. It is *to Christ* we turn to receive bounty at His hand.

Faith surrenders to the gospel and falls into the outstretched arms of Christ. Faith looks away from self to Christ, moved entirely by grace. It flees with all the soul’s poverty to Christ’s riches. It moves with the soul’s guilt to Christ as Reconciler, with the soul’s bondage to Christ as Liberator. Faith confesses with Augustus Toplady (1740–1778):

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

Faith unites a sinner with his Savior. As John Calvin (1509–1564) said, “Faith justifies in no other way than as it introduces us into a participation of the righteousness of Christ.” It apprehends (*fides apprehensiva*), closes with, and grasps Christ in a believing embrace, surrendering self, clinging to His Word, and relying on His promises.

Christ is not only the object of faith; He is also present in faith. For faith rests in the Person of Christ by coming, hearing, seeing, trusting, taking, embracing, knowing, rejoicing, loving, and triumphing in Him. It leaves its case in the hands of Christ as the great Physician, following His directions and

trusting in His finished work. As Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote, “Faith clasps Christ as a ring clasps its jewel.” Faith wraps the soul in Christ’s righteousness. It appropriates with a believing heart Christ’s perfect righteousness, satisfaction, and holiness of Christ. It tastes the efficacy of Christ’s blood-righteousness as the righteousness of God Himself (Rom. 3:21–25; 5:9; 6:7; 2 Cor. 5:18–21). It wedds the soul to Christ, experiences divine pardon and acceptance in the Beloved, and makes the soul partake of every covenant mercy.

2 We come to Christ by active faith *as He is offered in the gospel*. The Christ we come to is not an abstract idea. He is not a Christ of our imagination. He is not a Christ of our own picking and choosing, but the Christ of Scripture revealed to us by God in sacred writ.

The Christ we come to is held out to sinners in the gospel. This means the only way you can come to Christ is in your sin. Bunyan explained, “It is a moving of the mind towards him, from a sound sense of the absolute want that a man has of him for his justification and salvation. Indeed without this sense of a lost condition without him, there will be no moving of the mind towards him” (Bunyan, *Come and Welcome*, 27).

The Puritans said that an awareness of our need of Christ for justification and sanctification is a primary means by which we come to Christ. Flavel said the Law is given to “kill vain confidence, and quench carnal mirth in the hearts of men” (Flavel, *Works*, 2:295). We come to the Christ of the gospel, who lived, died, rose again, and ascended on high to fulfill our every need. David Clarkson (1622–1686) argued that since we must understand our misery apart from Christ, many people fail to come to Christ because they do not see their need.

By the Spirit’s grace, have you turned in faith to Christ as He is offered in the gospel as your only hope for salvation? This is a sure sign of coming to Him!

3 Finally, we come to Christ only *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. The Spirit is the efficient cause of our coming to Christ. Faith comes by God through the hearing of the Word (Rom. 10:17)—the Word of the offered Christ. Those who hear can do so only because the Spirit’s power has regenerated them. This is the only effective faith that a person coming to Christ can have. Only after the Holy Spirit works upon sinful men, removes their blindness, unstops their ears, and regenerates them can people have any hope of heeding God’s spiritual, unconditional promises. Thus Paul wrote that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3).

As the Spirit applies salvation in the offered Christ to the hearts of the elect, He gives supernatural power to sinners to stretch out their withered arms and hands to embrace Christ by active faith. What we do not want to do and cannot do ourselves, the Spirit enables us to desire and *do*. Flavel put it this way: “For though God does not force the will contrary to its nature, yet there is a real internal efficacy implied in this *drawing*, or an immediate operation of the Spirit upon the heart and

will, which, in a way congruous and suitable to its nature, takes away the rebellion and reluctance of it, and of unwilling, makes it willing to come to Christ” (Flavel, *Works*, 2:70).

Thus, we conclude with the Puritans that we come to Christ when we are (1) *drawn actively by faith to Christ* (2) *as He offers Himself in the gospel*, (3) *through the power of the Holy Spirit*.

Let me conclude this article with two Puritan convictions. First, the Puritans stress that *the works of the Trinity are undivided* in a sinner’s coming to Christ. Christ makes the promise in John 6:37 that all the Father gives to Him will come to Him. In John 6:44, Christ says that only those whom the Father draws will come to Him. Jesus says in John 6:63 that the Spirit gives life but the flesh profits nothing. Christ is saying that He is willing to save by the operation of the Holy Spirit all those whom the Father is willing to draw to Himself. There is no division in the Godhead. The Father freely, graciously, and mercifully draws souls to His blessed Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when Christ offers His unconditional promises, we can be assured that the Father and the Holy Spirit are of the same mind. Christ is a willing Savior, the Father is a willing drawer (Eph. 1:4–6), and the Holy Spirit is a willing enabler (Rom. 8:15). All three persons of the Trinity are equally able and willing to save sinners through Jesus’ atoning work.

Second, *the marks of saving grace* are an important method of assuring us that we have truly come to Christ by faith. The Puritans were fond of giving us many marks. We can sum up what they say by pointing to a few characteristics.

- Those who come to Christ know the urgency of the gospel. They know the seriousness of their sin and whom they have sinned against.
- They know that only Christ can relieve them of their sins and burdens, so they covenant with Him and He becomes theirs.
- In so doing, they fight their sinful flesh by the Spirit.
- They share in communion with Christ and walk in newness of life.
- They despise their own righteousness and the accolades of the world, and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The Puritan understanding of coming to Christ is, therefore, a holistic approach. Those who come to Christ learn throughout the remainder of their lives that God must be glorified in *everything*. Their purpose for living, as the Puritans say, is to “glorify God and to enjoy Him forever” (WSC, Q. 1).

Have you, too, come to Christ holistically? Is your earnest prayer that you might “glorify God and enjoy Him forever”?

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Losing Count... Forgiving Others

Read: Matthew 18:23–35

This parable is set within the teaching of Christ to His disciples about the church and church discipline. Christ's will is that His church be a place where humility and service thrive. It should also be a place where there is joy when straying disciples return. And if a brother sins against another brother, there should be reconciliation through truth and repentance.

At this point, Peter raises a practical question for the group of disciples: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" It is reported that the rabbis specified that forgiveness should be issued as many as three times. In our society, we have the slogan, "Three strikes and you are out." Peter's suggestion of seven times seems generous. But Jesus responds to him by saying not seven times, but "seventy times seven." Jesus uses this way of speaking in order to say that our forgiveness of a repenting brother or sister cannot be bounded, much like the forgiveness that God grants is unbounded. In other words, we should lose count forgiving others.

Scenery

This parable is often seen as divided into three scenes. The first scene (vv. 23–27) introduces us to two of the main characters. On the one hand, there is a king. He is a prominent figure in this parable and clearly a wealthy king. This king wanted to settle accounts with his servants. Whether his servants were tax collectors, money handlers, or officials in his kingdom isn't told us. But we can assume that at least one servant dealt with a lot of the king's money. The king summons one particular servant to him who is in great debt to the king.

Christ says the servant owes the king ten thousand talents, an exorbitant amount of money. Commentators say that this man owed anywhere from 150,000 to 200,000 years' worth of wages to the king (equivalent to several billion dollars today). He clearly didn't have the finances to afford this great debt and thus the king ordered the servant and his family to be sold into slavery.

In desperation, the man falls down before the king (v. 26) and begs him to have patience with him. He promises to pay everything he owes. In response, the king forgives him his large debt.

The second scene (vv. 28–31) introduces the third main character, a second servant. The first servant, who has just been forgiven his debt, finds this second servant, who owes

him money, and demands that he pay. This second servant's debt is substantially less than what the first man owed, but the first servant quickly resorts to physical violence, grabbing the man by the throat.

The second servant pleads with the first servant to have patience with him. He uses the exact same words as the first servant did when he begged for mercy from the king. We hear the parallelism, but apparently, the first servant does not. He orders the second servant to be taken away and put in prison until he can pay his debt.

The king's other servants, knowing what had happened with the first servant, were so bothered they brought word back to the king.

The third scene is the climax of the parable (vv. 32–35). The king summons the first servant. Seeing what he has done, the king orders him to be taken away and tortured in prison until he has paid his entire debt. Jesus then concludes by showing that the king represents His Father, and the parable is meant to warn the disciples of the consequences of not forgiving "from the heart...every one his brother their trespasses" (v. 35).

Substance

A number of things need to be stated for clarity. Christ is not saying that we are forgiven only because we forgive. Nor is He saying that it is possible for someone to lose his salvation once he has truly been forgiven. Such teachings would conflict with what Scripture says elsewhere about forgiveness. Christ is not speaking here about the *way* of salvation, but rather the *result* of salvation.

Moreover, within the larger context of Matthew 18, Jesus is relating to His disciples how to confront, discipline, and receive back offending brothers and sisters. This parable is a clear demonstration of what Jesus means. The huge debt the first servant owes the king is a debt of sin. This is illustrated for us by the use of Jesus' words: the king "forgave" him his debt. We could compare this to the general proclamation of forgiveness that God gives to sinners who cry to God for mercy. The gospel issues a wide and general proclamation. This is part of the beauty of the gospel. However, the general proclamation of pardon should not be confused with the actual transaction of pardon. For that, there must be true faith that embraces such a benefit with a believing heart. Christ is

the benefit, and we will not, indeed, cannot be unaffected by it. Though God's pardon does not renew our nature, genuine justification is accompanied by a new nature as becomes evidenced in sanctification.

When David received mercy from God, he in turn looked for someone to whom he could show the "mercy of God" (2 Sam. 9:3). On the other hand, if we continue to hold our brother's sin against him and find no place for mercy, we are acting like the hypocritical servant. We are standing over our brother in judgment, a position that belongs ultimately only to God.

This shows why Jesus ends His chapter on the life of the church with this parable about forgiveness. Our life among the people of God should show whether we belong to the people of God. All of us are prone to sin and be sinned against. But if we have sought and received unbounded divine forgiveness, can we not through the power of divine grace also show forgiveness to others that is unbounded?

Savior

Where can we see the Savior in this parable? Mind you, Matthew does not go into an in-depth discussion of soteriology at this point. He does not mention imputation, righteousness, or faith, as the Apostle Paul will in Romans 3–5. Nevertheless, we need to remember that Christ is on His way to the cross, and there can be forgiveness only on the basis of His work on the cross. Let me elaborate in three ways:

1. Christ is a *meticulous* Savior. The massive debt the first servant owed the king is explicitly stated as ten thousand talents. There doesn't appear to be much rounding; Matthew doesn't simply say that the man "owed a lot of silver to the king." Rather, there is an accurate number placed on this debt and this number is equal to billions of dollars. Jesus is not an imprecise Savior. He knows the records of wrongs that we do. Even when we fail to take account of our own sins, God keeps a close tally. And Christ meticulously brings all of our sins to Calvary. Jesus' death for our sins wasn't an imprecise death. Rather, His death covered every little sin His people have ever committed. He knew what sins and how many sins He was dying for when He laid down His life for His sheep.

2. Christ is a *gracious* Savior. It is good news that is proclaimed in the gospel, namely, that "there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Ps. 130:4). Not everyone who thinks he is forgiven is actually forgiven, but that is not because of a shortage of forgiveness with Christ. We find it very difficult to forgive the same person three times, much less seven, but in His mercy Jesus casts all the sins of His people "into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19).

3. King Jesus is also a *judging* Savior. Those who abuse His gospel in order to continue in sin and hardness of heart will meet the wrath of the slighted Lamb. This is clearly seen in the king's final treatment of the first servant. The king's declaration is removed from the servant and he is handed over to be imprisoned and tortured until his unpayable debt

is paid. Psalm 2:12 says, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."

Searchlight

The parables are given not only to relate positive and affirming messages to us, but more often to reveal the vileness of our hearts. This parable is poignant in revealing to us the following:

1. *Our insurmountable debt of sin.* The demands of the law are strict obedience. Every jot and tittle must be fulfilled. By nature, we break God's law constantly, consistently, and easily. To use the language of our parable, our debt runs into the billions and is unpayable. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we need to feel the sting of our helpless and dire state. This parable serves to remind us how truly great our debt is to God. The only hope we have is to be truly forgiven.

2. *Our double standard with respect to others and ourselves.* How often have not we metaphorically stood with our hands around an offending brother or sister's "neck" while our own debt to God is infinitely worse? In order to forgive others more easily and quickly, we should think of our great debt before God. That should loosen our grip on our brother's throat.

3. *Our need of Christ.* In order to forgive others, we need Christ. We need not only His forgiving grace, but also His enabling grace to forgive in an unbounded way.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between "seven" times and "seventy times seven," both mathematically and spiritually?
2. The king's other servants were bothered (v. 31). Does this have any connection with the church discipline spoken of in verse 17?
3. Must we forgive a brother or sister who is not repentant?
4. Can the Lord revoke His forgiveness? How then do you explain verse 34?
5. Is it a contradiction that Christ is both a merciful Savior as well as a judging Savior?
6. What do you say to a person who says that unbounded forgiveness is not really possible?

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LEADING THROUGH OFFICE-BEARING: 2

Godly Manhood in the Home under the Offices of Christ

PRIEST IN THE HOME

When the Heidelberg Catechism asks why Jesus is called the Christ, or Anointed One, the second part of its answer is, “He has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be...our only high priest who has redeemed us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father.” Christ’s priestly work was His loving self-sacrifice for our sins and His compassionate intercession for us (Heb. 5:1–2; 7:23–27).

The Bible says that we who trust in Christ are a royal priesthood, authorized and anointed to perform priestly service in God’s spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). We can never repeat the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ for sin because Jesus has finished the work to make His elect people perfect (Heb. 10:12, 14). Nor do we stand as mediators between God and man, for there is one Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5–6). Thus, your children do not need to go to God through you but through Christ, the only way (John 14:6). Yet, because of our union with Christ, we actively share in His priesthood in other ways. The Bible calls the redeemed priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), who offer sacrifices of praise, good works (Heb. 13:15–16), and “supplications, prayers, intercessions...for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1). Let us look at two ways in which a man should operate as a priest in his home.

1 *Sacrifice yourself for your wife.* Paul says in Ephesians 5:25–26, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” William Gouge wrote in 1622 that all the duties of a husband are comprised under this one word: *love*.¹ When we love with a Christ-like love, we serve as spiritual priests who offer a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. We know this is true because Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:2, “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.”

What does it mean to love your wife like a priest? It means loving your wife as Christ loved the church (Eph.

5:25). The church is a particular group of people, whom God chose before time began and called to salvation. Though the Lord loves all people and commands them to turn back to Him (Acts 17:25, 30), He has a particular and exclusive love for His elect (Rom. 1:7; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:4). So men must love their wives with a particular and exclusive love in which no other woman may share. Reserve that love as a seal on your heart. With this love, you are not just avoiding adultery; you are intentionally pouring out your affections upon your wife in rich and regular ways. Say to her, “You have captivated my heart” (Song 4:9). Set her “as a seal upon your heart” (Song 8:6). You may not realize how important it is for your wife to know that you have forsaken all others to love her alone until death separates you, but it is. Neither can you estimate the security and happiness your children receive as they see you love their mother with an exclusive, binding love.

Love your wife, too, with a self-giving love. Scripture says “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” Jesus voluntarily died as the surety, substitute, and representative of His elect people. He stood under the curse of God for our sins. In giving Himself, Christ gave His most precious treasure, for He was and is of infinite value. Though He was crucified on the cross as a man, the One who died was also Immanuel. And He died for the unworthy, ungrateful enemies of God.

So, husband, love your wife with self-giving love. Sacrifice for her. Provide for her and cherish her just as you love your own body. Give her your thoughts, your time, your talk, your tenderness, and your touch—but make sure you touch her heart before you touch her body. Stop measuring out your love in small spoonfuls according to what she has done for you lately. Start pouring out your love by the bucket according to the infinite riches of Christ’s love for you.

Also, love your wife with a sanctifying love. Christ gave Himself for His bride “that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” His sacrifice aimed at purifying our lives from sin so that we would be holy for Him. He applies His sacrifice to us in the living water of the Holy Spirit and the living truth of the Word. Paul viewed his gospel ministry as a priestly work of presenting the nations



1. William Gouge, *Domestical Duties* (Edinburgh, Ind.: Puritan Reprints, 2006), 251.

holy to the Lord, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16). In the same way, love your wives with the priestly goal of making them holy to the Lord.

The most important gift you can give your wife is not money, a house, a car, jewelry, or even yourself. The best gift you can give her is to bring her to God so that she can glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. So speak the Word of God to her. Pray for her soul, both in your private prayer times and with her. Do not make her feel like she has to badger you into being a spiritual leader. Put your heart into leading your family to Christ. Invest your time into her spiritual growth. Sacrifice yourself so that she will have time to read the Word and participate in Bible study or women's conferences.

Brothers, God calls you to a priestly ministry with your wives. While you cannot be her Savior, you can be a flesh-and-blood image of the Savior. God loves our believing wives so much. It is astonishing that He would give poor, weak, foolish, and corrupt men like us such an influence over them. But in Christ our Priest, we have everything we need to serve our wives in a priestly manner.

2 *Intercede for your children.* A significant part of Christ's work as our Great High Priest is His intercession for us at God's right hand. It is an important part of the teaching of the book of Hebrews (Heb. 2:18; 4:14–16; 6:20; 7:24–8:2; 9:12, 24; 10:21; 12:2). Christ's intercession is effective to save us to the uttermost. Our prayers cannot compare to His, but Christian fathers can and do share in Christ's priestly work by praying for their children.

We see this priestly work in the way Job ministered before the Lord for his family. We read in Job 1:1, 4–5:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.... And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.

Like Job, intercede for your children out of reverence and godly fear. Job showed his reverence for God by interceding for his children. If you do not pray for your children, how can you say that you fear the Lord? It should not take some tragedy or moral disaster to make you pray for your family. The more I study this passage, the more I am convinced that it does not say that the children of Job were doing anything ungodly. Apparently, they were gathering at each other's homes, each taking a turn in hosting fellowship together, but apparently with little or no concern for their own souls. Their father, knowing the tendency of our hearts to sin in secret thoughts and desires, continued to pray for them. Similarly, we should pray for our children, knowing that we must bring

even the secret sins of their hearts to the Holy One. Let us not rest in the mere outward conformity of our children to godliness. Let us pray in the fear of the Lord, knowing that our hearts, and theirs, are deeply corrupt.

Intercede for your children with urgency. We are told that Job offered burnt offerings for his children "early in the morning." Spurgeon says, "He wanted to hurry to the cross every morning with his children." He did not offer those sacrifices before bedtime, saying, "I'd better say a quick prayer for my kids." No, early in the morning Job committed his children to the Lord. We must do likewise for ourselves and our children. These early morning sacrifices indicate Job's earnestness, constancy, and priorities. Praying was the first and most important thing he did every day. How grateful Job must have been in his later years that he had prayed for his children so faithfully before their lives ended in tragedy. We do not know how much time we or any one of our sons or daughters will remain on this earth. Pray for them.

Intercede for your children with perseverance. The Scripture says, "Thus did Job *continually*." Are you faithful in the priestly work of intercession? I am not asking if you pray enough for your children; no one prays enough. But do you pray *daily* for your children, one by one, that each may know his sin, each may be kept from sin, each may fly to the Savior, and each may live a life of holiness? Have you given up on a particular child? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Keep on praying; while there's life, there is hope.

Intercede for your children by faith in Christ. Even before the Law was given to Israel, Job understood there could be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. He had to kill a bullock for each child. This involved a great investment of time, energy, and money, but Job did so willingly. He killed an animal, laid it on the altar, and offered it to the Lord. In doing so, he was declaring his faith in the Holy Sacrifice to come. Today we do not have to kill animals; we can go directly to Jesus who has shed His blood for us once and for all. Inspired by faith, we turn continually to the covenant-keeping God, committing our children to His blood. We serve our families as priests by looking to the Great High Priest, whose blood and righteousness can save the most hard-hearted child and drive out the most stubborn sin of a believer.

What an amazing privilege Christ has granted us, to be priests in Him and unto Him! Let us not neglect this opportunity. Make your home a holy temple in which you offer daily sacrifices of love for your wife. Lift prayers for your children like sweet-smelling incense to the throne of grace. Generally speaking, the more you exercise your priestly ministry as a husband and father, the more you will discover the presence of the living God in your family.

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THE SINKHOLE SYNDROME



You know the story. The man has been a believer in Christ for decades. To all outward appearances he's a man of Christian faithfulness and integrity. He has maintained a reputation as a fine example of public and private faithfulness to the things of God for decades. Then, without warning, it all collapses into a sinkhole of sin. Everyone wonders how it could have happened so quickly. In most cases, it soon becomes known that—like most sinkholes—the problem didn't develop overnight.

Several years ago, this man likely had a relatively consistent devotional life through which the Lord often refreshed, strengthened, and matured him. But with each passing year, his busy life became ever busier. Increasingly, he saw his devotional life more as a burden—a mere obligation sometimes—than a blessing. Because of the massive doses of Bible teaching he'd heard, in addition to the knowledge gained teaching church Bible classes himself, he began to imagine that he needed less private prayer and Bible intake than when he was younger and not as spiritually mature. Besides, he had so many other God-given responsibilities that surely God would understand that he was too busy to meet with Him every day.

One small concession led to another; one plausible rationalization led to the next, until the devastating day when a tipping point was reached, and the spiritual weakness developed by too many private compromises could no longer sustain even the appearance of Christian integrity. And into the sinkhole fell his reputation, witness, ministry, and perhaps much more.

If you're a strong young Christian, passionate about the things of God, and you find it impossible to imagine yourself coming to such a condition: *beware*. This situation could easily be yours in a few years. The words of 1 Corinthians 10:12 are an apt admonition here: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

I've been in pastoral ministry for twenty-four years. For fifteen years, I've been a professor of biblical spirituality. I've written several books and many articles related to spirituality. I speak on the subject to future ministers and missionaries on a daily basis in the seminary classroom, and in churches and conferences around the country almost every weekend. And yet I will freely admit that it's harder for me to maintain my devotional life now than ever in my life. That's because I'm busier now than ever. I have many more responsibilities than I had as a young man. And they all take time, time that must come from somewhere.

As the pressures of life increase and more deadlines loom, it becomes harder to maintain time for the devotional life. "Who will know if I abandon a consistent prayer life? Who can tell if I seldom turn the pages of Scripture? I know the Bible pretty well already, and I hear it a lot at church. God has given me this busy life; surely He understands." And the erosion begins.

At the outset, it's likely that very few will know when the hidden part of your spiritual life begins crumbling. Just as imperceptible movements of water underground can carry away the earth beneath long before anyone on the surface perceives it, so the pressures of life can secretly displace the soil of our private spiritual disciplines long before the impact of their absence is visible to others. The more public parts

of a Christian's life, such as church involvement and various forms of ministry, can often continue with little observable change right up until the awful moment of collapse and the hypocrisy is revealed.

I'm sure you're already familiar with many factors that undermine intimacy with Christ. Realize that it's almost certain that the number of time-thieves trying to steal from your time with God will only increase as the years pass. My hope is that this article will alert you to this subtle, creeping tendency so that it won't overtake you.

Never be deceived by the temptation to think that with the increasing spiritual maturity you expect to come with age, the less you will need to feast your soul on Christ through the Bible and prayer. What Jesus prayed in John 17:17 for all His followers—"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth"—applies to us all throughout our lives.

Jesus practiced what He prayed for us. While Jesus is infinitely more than our example, nevertheless He is also our example of sanctified living, of living *coram deo*. The Bible tells us (Luke 4:16) that Jesus regularly attended when God's people assembled to hear the Scriptures, and also that He would get alone to meet with His Father (Matt. 14:23). Jesus' followers need both the sustaining grace that comes through the public worship of God as well as that which comes to us when we meet with Him individually.

I don't want to minimize the role of the church in preventing spiritual shipwreck in the life of the believer. In this piece, however, I am writing to warn those who will increasingly be tempted to think that frequently meeting God with others can compensate for seldom meeting with Him alone.

There are seasons of life when our devotional habits may be providentially altered. But the general rule is that those reconciled to God through the cross of His Son need conscious, personal communion with Him every day until the day they see Him face to face. And the ordinary means by which He gives it is through the personal spiritual disciplines found in Scripture, chief of which are the intake of the Word of God and prayer.

Pursue the Lord with a relentless, lifelong, obstacle-defying passion. Resolve never to let your daily life keep you from Jesus daily.

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The Sowing of the Heavenly Agriculturalist

I will sow her unto me in the earth.

—HOSEA 2:23

What's the point of a land full of fruit if there are no people to eat it? Having promised to fructify the land in the previous verses, God now promises to populate it. He will not only sow corn, wine, and oil, but people. Because of sin, Israel's fields and towns lie empty and still. But that barren and empty land will be filled with produce and people by God's great "I will." He will take the remaining seed of His people—few and weak as they are—and sow them in the land again. Onlookers might scoff at the dim prospects for such a seed in such a land. But in God's time and with His blessing, that handful of seed will flourish and fill the land again to the astonishment of all. "Look!" says the now startled scoffer. "Look at what God has produced! What a farmer!" Weak seed plus almighty sowing results in glory for the Sower rather than the seed. I will sow her "unto me" in the earth. When the Lord sows, it is unto Him, it is unto His praise and honor.

Barren soul, frail seed of humanity, the divine "I will sow her unto me" is your great and only hope. Plead with the heavenly Agriculturalist to sow you unto Him in the earth. You look at yourself and see deadness and dryness, and you conclude that God can find better seed to work with. This is true. But He is looking for weak and worthless seed. That should be your hope, not your despair. Reverently argue your poor condition with Him: "Lord, I am poor and needy. Many scoff at me. I scoff at myself. For I am truly hopeless and helpless. But if Thou wilt sow me in the earth, all scoffing will be silenced. Think of what they and I will say if Thou wilt sow me in the earth with Thy divine benediction. No more will they mockingly say, 'What pathetic seed!' But, rather, 'What a great Sower!' O sow me unto Thee in the earth. Make me an exhibit of what divine sowing can accomplish with the least promising of materials." God always rises to the challenge of this persuasive argument.

—David Murray (taken from the new daily devotional, *Milk and Honey*)



Christian Courage Under Persecution in north korea

One of the most moving presentations at the Cape Town 2010 Congress on World Evangelization was presented by an eighteen-year-old North Korean girl, Gyeong Ju Son. Gyeong Ju Son was born in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. Her father was a high ranking communist government leader, an assistant to the North Korean leader Kim Jongil.

In 1998, when Gyeong Jun was only six years old, her father fell out of favor with the political leadership and the family fled to China. There her parents encountered the grace and love of God and were converted to Christ. A few months later, her pregnant mother died of leukemia. Gyeong Ju said, "It was in the midst of this family tragedy that my father joined a Bible Study led by missionaries from South Korea and America and after a time his strong desire was to become a missionary to North Korea."

In 2001, her father was arrested by the Chinese police and deported to North Korea, where he was imprisoned. Her father's faith was only strengthened during his three-year incarceration in North Korea. After Gyeong Ju Son was reunited with her father, he chose to return to North Korea. "Instead of enjoying a life of religious freedom in South Korea," she said, "he chose to return to North Korea to share Christ's message of life and hope among the hopeless people of his homeland."

In 2006, her father's work was discovered by the North Korean communist government and once again he was imprisoned. As far as she knows, he was later executed for refusing to renounce his faith in Christ.

In China, Gyeong Ju was adopted by a Christian family. Their love, compassion, and protection of her made a deep impression. When they left for America, she was given the opportunity to go to South Korea. While waiting at the

South Korean Consulate in Beijing, Gyeong Ju's life dramatically changed when she felt that the Lord powerfully spoke to her that she was to walk with Him unconditionally. She felt that the Lord assured her that, though she had lost her earthly father, He would be her heavenly Father.

By grace, Gyeong Ju surrendered her heart, soul, mind, and strength to the Lord Jesus Christ to do with as He wills. She was flooded with a deep love for the lost people of North Korea and of the need to bring the message of Jesus to them. This became her life's purpose.

Gyeong Ju then movingly said, "I look back over my short life and I see God's hand everywhere: six years in North Korea, eleven in China, and now in South Korea. Everything I suffered, all the sadness and grief, all that I have experienced and learned, I want to give it all to God and use my life for His kingdom. In this way I also hope to bring honor to my father."

Gyeong Ju is still a student and she intends to study political science and diplomacy at university and then to dedicate her life to working for the rights of the voiceless in North Korea. She concluded: "Brothers and sisters here in this place, I humbly ask you to pray that the same light of God's grace and mercy that reached my father and my mother and now me will one day soon dawn upon the people of North Korea, my people."

As one, the thousands of participants at the Cape Town 2010 Congress on World Evangelization rose in a standing ovation with the most thunderous applause in praise to God and in solidarity with this young Korean girl and her vision for reaching North Korea for Christ.

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the parent & teacher Abiding in Christ

James W. Beeke

Christian Education/Family Guidance

Imagine walking in a vineyard between the rows of grapes. You look at a branch full of promising fruit. What would happen to these grapes, however, if you severed their branch from the vine? The grapes, of course, would die. Why? Because the vine gives the grapes nutrients and life.

Jesus teaches us an important truth here for our personal lives, but also as parents and teachers. We need Him in order to bring forth fruits of love to God and to others for God's glory, including in the lives of our children and students. In fact, we need to abide in Jesus. Imagine, if it were possible, to sever a branch of grapes from its vine and then to re-attach it, pull it loose again and reinsert it, over and over again. What would the condition of the grapes be? Certainly not healthy! Jesus teaches us that to bring forth healthy fruit we, the branches, must abide in Him. To "abide" means to dwell permanently, to live there. We abide at home, but we do not abide at a hotel. Likewise, we are not called to travel to Jesus and connect with Him on occasion. We are not to stay with Him for a few minutes a day or for one day in the week. He is not to be like a hotel that we visit on our travels but He is to be our home—the Person in whom and the place where we live and abide.

Parents and teachers, our children and young people learn from what we say but most from who we are—not from what we confess at church, not from what we may say when we have visitors, but from how we live; from where we abide.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means to be inseparably connected to Him as the living branch is inseparably connected to the vine. The more I abide in Christ, the more my motives, goals, emotions, thoughts, words, and actions become Christ-like. The more my life is found in Him, the more Jesus' life flows into me. This produces wonderful, God-glorifying fruit!

This verse also teaches us the opposite truth. The less we abide in Him, the less godly fruit we produce. In fact, the Lord instructs us, "Without me ye can do nothing." This means that you can take your children to church, enroll them in a Christian school, read the Bible at the table, and pray with them before they go to bed. It is good to faithfully do these things. But if you do them without abiding in Christ, severed from the Vine, you will achieve little. Your spiritual fruit will wither. The recipe is there, but the key ingredient is not. Spiritual life is missing. Christ is lacking in the Christian activities described. Parents, it is good that you read Christian materials on how to parent and use the means that you can to grow as a parent. Teachers, it is important that you study and use professional development opportunities diligently to learn more about your students and how they learn and develop, and how to teach and connect with your students. But the most critical thing—the life of it all—is that you personally abide in Christ.

How can I abide more in Jesus? Verse 7 in this chapter tells us. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." Immerse yourself in Christ's words, in the Bible. As the living Word, Jesus spoke the written Word. Study the Scriptures; they testify of Him. Then Jesus tells us, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." If we abide in God's Word, then we abide in Him. When we abide in Him, then God's will is our will. When we ask what we want, it is what God wants and teaches in His Word, for our will reflects His. Verse 7 is not referring to a "name it and claim it" gospel, as some teach today; it is not a case of me asking or commanding God to do my will. Just the opposite: it is me doing God's will. This is me abiding in Him.

Yes, we are totally dependent upon God. But what a wonderfully rich and gracious God to depend on! The more we realize this and the more we abide in Christ, the more fruit there will be; genuine, healthy, beautiful, Christ-like fruits of "not my will, but thine be done." These fruits will be witnessed by our children and students, and they will be exposed to real experiences of glorifying God and worshipping Him!

Are you a dependent parent, an "abiding in the vine" teacher?



I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

—John 15:5

Paradoxes in the Christian

Herbert Palmer

Experiential Christianity



Herbert Palmer (1601–1647), one of the Westminster Assembly Divines, issued a pamphlet entitled, *The Character of a Christian, in Paradoxes and Seeming Contradictions*. These paradoxes were tagged on to an edition of *Bacon's Remains* and became mistakenly ascribed to him. A. B. Grosart of Kinross, a Puritan devotee of the last century, republished these paradoxes with other writings of Herbert Palmer.

The Puritans engaged themselves with interpreting hard texts and solving experimental mysteries hour after hour. At times, they enjoyed sharpening their wits and exercising their ingenuity by composing *apparent* contradictions, which were nevertheless matters of clear understanding to illuminated minds. No theme is so common in their paradoxes as the spiritual state of the believer. Certainly, this theme is so complex, so diverse, and so unique that it is a wonderful riddle to Christians.

Paradoxes

1. A *Christian* is one who believes things which his reason cannot comprehend....
2. Who hopes for that which neither he, nor any man alive ever saw....
3. Who labors for that which he knows he can never attain.
4. Yet in the outcome, his *belief* appears not to have been false; *hope* makes him not ashamed; *labor* is not in vain.
5. He believes Three to be One, and One to be Three; a Father not to be older than His Son, and the Son to be equal with His Father, and that One proceeding from both, is fully equal to both.
6. He believes in one *Nature* three *Persons*, and in one *Person* two *Natures*.
7. He believes a *virgin* to have been a *mother*, and her *Son* to be her *Maker*.
8. He believes Him to be *born in time*, who was from *everlasting*, and Him to be shut up in a narrow room, whom Heaven and Earth could never contain.
9. He believes Him to have been a weak child carried in arms, who is the *Almighty*; and Him to have *died*, who alone has life and immortality in Himself.
10. He believes the God of all grace to have been angry with One who never offended Him; and the God who hates all sin, to have reconciled to Himself those who sin continually, and never make Him satisfaction.
11. He believes the most just God to have punished a most innocent Person, and to have justified those who are most ungodly sinners.
12. He believes himself *freely* pardoned, and yet that a sufficient satisfaction is *paid* for him.
13. He believes himself to be precious in God's sight, yet he loathes himself in his own sight.
14. He dares not justify himself, even in those things concerning which he knows of no fault in himself; yet he believes God accepts even those services in which he himself is able to find many faults.
15. He praises God for His justice, and fears Him for His mercies.
16. He is so ashamed that he dares not open his mouth before God; yet comes with boldness to God, and asks anything that he needs.
17. He is so humble as to acknowledge himself to deserve nothing but evil; yet so confident as to believe God means him all good.
18. He is one that fears always, and yet is bold as a lion.

19. He is often sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; often complaining, yet always giving thanks.
20. He is most lowly minded, yet the greatest aspirer; most contented, yet ever craving.
21. He bears a privileged, victorious spirit in a humble frame; and when he is uplifted, thinks poorly of himself.
22. He is rich in poverty, and poor in the midst of riches.
23. He believes all the world to be his, yet dares take nothing without special permission.
24. He makes no deals with God, yet looks for the greatest reward.
25. He loses his life, and gains by it; and even while he loses it, he saves it.

He thinks sometimes that God has no mercy for him, and yet is ready to die in the pursuit of it.

26. He lives not to himself, yet out of all people is most wise for his own interests.
27. He denies himself often, yet loves himself more than any self-seeker.
28. He is the most reproached of people, and the most honored.
29. He has the most afflictions, and the most comforts.
30. The more injury his enemies do to him, the more advantage he gets by them.
31. The more he himself forsakes worldly things, the more he enjoys them.
32. He is the most self-controlled of all people, yet fares most deliciously.
33. He lends and gives most freely, yet is the greatest gainer of interest.
34. He is meek towards all men, yet not persuadable by them.
35. He is the best child, brother, husband, friend, yet hates father, and mother, and wife, and brethren, etc.
36. He loves all men as himself, yet hates some men with perfect hatred.
37. He desires to have more grace than any in the world, yet he is truly sorry when he sees any man have less than himself.
38. He honors no man after the flesh, yet gives to all their due respects.
39. He knows that if he pleases men he is not the servant of Christ; yet for Christ's sake he pleases all men in all things.
40. He is a peacemaker, yet continually fighting, and an irreconcilable enemy.
41. He believes him to be worse than an infidel that provides not for his family, yet he himself lives and dies without care.
42. He is strict to his children, because he loves them; and kind to his enemies, so bringing divine vengeance upon them.
43. He accounts all his inferiors his equals, yet stands firmly upon his authority.

44. He believes the angels to be more excellent creatures than himself, yet counts them his servants.
45. He believes he receives many good turns by means of the angels, yet he never asks their assistance, nor craves their prayers, nor offers them thanks (which yet he would not withhold from the lowliest Christian).
46. He believes himself a king, no matter how poor or how great he may be, and is never too high to be servant to the poorest saint.
47. He is often in prison, yet always at liberty, and a free man though a slave.
48. He accepts not honor from men, yet highly prizes a good name.

49. He believes that if people do good to him, it is because God has ordained it, yet he is, of all people, most thankful to those that do it.
50. He would lay down his life to save the soul of his enemy; yet will not risk one sin to save the life of someone who has saved his.
51. He will tell the truth to his own disadvantage and not relent; and cannot lie to get an advantage.
52. He believes Christ to have no need of anything he can do, yet diligently gives gifts of charity as if done to Christ.
53. He knows he can do nothing of himself, yet labors to work out his own salvation.
54. He confesses he can do nothing; yet just as truly professes he can do all things.
55. He knows that flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God; yet believes he shall go to heaven, body and soul.
56. He trembles at God's Word, yet counts it sweeter to him than the honey and the honeycomb, and more precious than thousands of gold and silver.
57. He believes that God will never damn him; and yet he fears Him for being able to cast him into hell.
58. He knows he shall not be saved by his works, and yet does all the good works he can, and believes he shall not be saved without them.
59. He knows God's providence orders all things; yet is he diligent in his business, as if his survival depended on himself.
60. He believes that God has purposed beforehand what shall be; and that nothing can make Him alter His purpose; yet he prays and strives, as if he would persuade God to hear him and satisfy him.
61. He prays and labors for what he believes God means to give him, and the more assured he is that he will receive it, the more earnest he is to pray.

62. He prays for things he knows he shall not obtain, and yet does not give up.

63. He prays and labors for things which he knows he may be just as happy without.

64. He prays with all his heart not to be led into trial, yet rejoices when he falls into it.

65. He believes his prayers are heard, even when they are denied, and gives thanks for that which he prayed would not happen.

66. He has within him the flesh and the spirit; yet is not a double-minded man.

67. He is often led away captive by the law of sin, yet it never gets the dominion over him.

68. He cannot sin, yet he can do nothing without sin.

69. He can do nothing against his will; yet he does those things that he does not want to do.

70. He wavers and doubts, and yet obtains; he is often tossed and shaken, and yet is like Mount Zion.

71. He is a serpent and also a dove; a lamb and also a lion; a reed and also a cedar.

72. He is sometimes so troubled, that he doubts his faith, and yet if he did really doubt it, he would never be troubled.

73. He thinks sometimes that God has no mercy for him, and yet is ready to die in the pursuit of it.

74. He believes, like Abraham, in faith and hope alone, and though he can never understand why God should require this of him, he hopes (like the woman of Canaan) to prevail with the pleadings of need.

75. He wrestles with God and prevails; and though realizing he is unworthy of the smallest of the blessings he enjoys already, yet (Jacob-like) he will not let God go without a new blessing.

76. He sometimes thinks himself to have no grace at all; and yet, no matter how poor and afflicted he is, he would not change place with the most prosperous worldling on earth.

77. He sometimes thinks that the ordinances of God do him no good at all, and yet he would rather part with his life than be deprived of them.

78. He believes he was born dead, and yet capable of being murdered.

79. He believes life was put into him some time after his birth, with some, not until they learned to speak, and with others in adulthood, and with others, when they are ready to drop into the grave.

80. After he begins to live, he is constantly dying; and though eternal life has begun in him, yet he believes he has yet to pass through death.

81. He regards self-murder as a most heinous sin, yet he is continually crucifying his flesh, and putting to death his earthly, bodily passions.

82. He believes that his soul and body shall in eternity be as full of glory as those that have more, and yet not more full than those that have less.

83. He has a spiritual life invisible to those that know him best; yet they sometimes see further into him, and judge more truly of him than he does of himself.

84. The world sometimes counts him a saint, when God counts him a hypocrite; and the world brands him a hypocrite, when God owns him for a saint.

85. In the end, his death does not make an end of him. His soul, which was created for his body, and is not to be perfected without his body, is more happy when it is separated from it than it was all the while it was united to it. His body, though torn in pieces, burnt to ashes, ground to powder and putrefied, shall be no loser. His Advocate and his Surety shall be his Judge. His mortal part shall become immortal. What was sown in corruption, shall be raised in incorruption and glory. His spiritual part, though it had a beginning, shall have no end; and he, though a *finite* creature, shall possess *infinite* happiness.

Palmer's life

Born to a titled family in 1601, Herbert Palmer was apparently an exceptional child, reading the Bible at four, mastering French shortly afterward, and completing his degree at Cambridge at eighteen.

Ordained in the established church, he was first appointed to a lectureship at Canterbury Cathedral, where he immediately showed his Puritan views. (When admonishing the clergy, he would switch to Latin.)

At thirty-one, he became Rector of Ashwell in Hertfordshire, where he organized special classes for the doctrinal instruction of all the people, particularly the children. Finding that the official Catechism was not suitable for young children or for young people of scant education, he prepared his own, which earned him the reputation of being the best catechist of his generation.

Soon, very few people in Ashwell were not enrolled in one of his classes. For servants and farm laborers he had a special, large class following the Sunday afternoon sermon.

In 1643, he became a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. While in London, he preached at so many services that other Puritans became convinced he would lose his health. He told them, "My strength will spend itself though I do nothing, and it cannot be spent better than in the service of the Lord."

In 1644, he was appointed Master of Queen's College, Cambridge. He is credited with the spiritual reformation of the life of the college, and the establishing of decidedly evangelical tutors, all being accomplished in three years, terminated by his death at 46.

The Character of a Christian, in Paradoxes and Seeming Contradictions is included in *Palmer's Memorials of Godliness and Christianity*, assembled by A. B. Grosart, with a biography, and published in 1865. Reprinted from *Sword and Trowel*.

Gambling

David Clark

Online gambling concerns are focused on making money—a lot of money. While statistics are difficult to find since much of what happens online is unregulated, one estimate suggests revenues of \$27 billion worldwide in 2009, rising to \$36 billion by 2012¹. In Europe, online gambling alone (about 8% of all gambling) is predicted to generate \$25 billion by 2012. So much money is involved that governments around the world have been trying to find ways of getting their share, legitimizing gambling so as to apply taxation. Every day, some two million people deposit additional funds into their online gambling account. The US State of Iowa, keen to capitalize on gambling revenue estimated at \$80 million per year, is planning to set up an online poker site that “would allow them to provide a safe online poker environment for their citizens.”² Several commentators have noted that governments seem to be addicted to gaming revenue, one newspaper going as far as accusing the Canadian government of “fueling the spread of a destructive disease.”³ In light of the reforms brought about by President Obama, one organization which ironically calls itself “the safe and secure Internet gambling initiative,” claims that taxation from regulated Internet gambling would raise nearly \$42 billion in new revenue, which would help Congress “pay for health care reform and other critical programs”⁴



An online gambling site⁵

Gambling odds

While some people gamble out of desperation and others see it as a form of entertainment, it is not unreasonable to suggest that people gamble, whether online or not, because they have an expectation of winning—however slight. But the odds of winning are always against the gambler and in favor

of the “house.” The odds of winning at a national lottery are smoothly passed over by those who run these games—often government sponsored—as they raise considerable sums of money in a kind of “stealth tax.” While lottery advertising claims that “someone must win,” an amusing website (<http://webmath.com/lottery.html>) will quickly show that the chances of winning are astronomical! The likelihood of winning the British Jackpot lottery is estimated at around one in fourteen million.⁶ In contrast, the chance of being struck by lightning is one in two million, of a woman giving birth to quadruplets one in 705,000, to say nothing of the chance of being killed in a car crash—one in 5,000.⁷

Professor Tyler Jarvis, chair of the Department of Mathematics at Brigham Young University in Utah, has contributed to several academic papers on the odds at gambling. He writes:

Almost everyone has trouble understanding the huge and tiny numbers involved in gambling odds. But learning about these odds has convinced many people that gambling is not the harmless pastime they thought it was. The main thing to understand is that the odds always favor the house. For example, the house’s take on a slot machine can be as high as 35%. This means that if you bet ten dollars, you can expect to walk away with only \$6.50; if you bet \$100, you can expect to keep only \$65, and so forth. The more you play, the more you lose. Although some gamblers are ahead temporarily, in the long run the odds will prevail, and the gambler will lose.⁸

A cornucopia of choice

Almost every form of gambling is available online, from betting on just about any sport to online casinos, lottery, bingo, blackjack, poker, and so on. Author Mark Balestra, in his *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Online Gambling*, waxes eloquent about the delights (as he sees them) of online gambling:

This is gambling like you’ve never experienced it before. Could you have imagined that hundreds of casinos, several dozen horse racing tracks, and a handful of bingo halls could be folded neatly into a box small enough to be carried in a briefcase? That’s right, casinos, lotteries, sports books, racetracks, and bingo halls from all over the world are at your fingertips 24-hours-a-day (p. 5).

Why do people do it?

In a BBC web forum,⁹ gamblers past and present speak of the lure of gambling. “Dan” from Peterborough explains that he is a “recovering compulsive gambler” and that “a lot more people have a gambling addiction than actually real-

ize it. I didn't realize I had a gambling problem until it had destroyed my life. I nearly lost my job; I did lose my car; I nearly lost my girlfriend, and my family didn't really want to talk to me. I was a total waste of space."

A scholarly paper¹⁰ on the impact of Internet gambling warns that "the proliferation of online casinos raises fears that the social harms of gambling will spread exponentially because of easy access and an inability to regulate Internet activity. Among these societal harms are addiction and problem gambling, access by minors, consumer vulnerability to fraud, and criminal activity. Gambling is addictive.... Youth are particularly vulnerable to addiction. Unlike brick-and-mortar casinos, Internet gaming sites have no reasonable means of verifying age at the door; therefore, minors have an easier time accessing gambling."



In a letter to the US Congress, Focus on the Family¹² warned that "the prevalence of gambling addiction is three to four times higher with Internet gambling versus non-Internet gambling. When all factors are considered—24/7 availability, in-home accessibility, speed of play, secrecy, anonymity, extremely addictive, no real age verification—online gambling represents a highly invasive and reckless form of taxation dependent on human exploitation."

In a tragic story of addiction to Internet poker,¹³ "Jane" explains that "even though we only had £20 [\$30] a week for food, I was spending £100 [\$150] a day gambling on my credit card while [my husband] was at work. I knew it was wrong to beg him for money while spending so much on Internet poker, but I just couldn't stop." She goes on to explain some of the allure of online gambling: "with Internet gambling, you can just click a button and money is transferred into your account, but the money slips away really quickly.... Online anyone can gamble. I know of 15-year-olds who play on their dads' accounts. It's really easy to bet with money you can't see, and you can lose £1,000 [\$1,600] in a night."

The dark side...

Gambling is not only psychologically destructive but can also have a very dark criminal side. Writing in the Interna-

tional Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences,¹⁴ Wojciech Filipkowski from the Faculty of Law, University of Białystok, Poland says:

Internet gambling has been identified—by experts in the field of money laundering and tax evasion—as a potentially ideal web-based service to legitimize ill-gotten gains. In the real world casinos are used to launder dirty money. The same thing can be done by on-line gambling sites. There are two possibilities: launderer exploits legitimate web-based service or launderer sets up an on-line gambling company in order to clean money.

Because many online gambling websites are based in offshore financial centers which lack regulatory or prudential measures, money is taken from gamblers through legitimate credit cards, and paid as "winnings" from unregulated accounts based on income from illegitimate activities such as crime, drug sales, or prostitution. In this way, dirty money is laundered into the system as legitimate winnings.

Biblical principles

Gambling is a difficult area for many Christians. Some believe with passion that no form of "chance" should ever be part of the Christian life. For some, all forms of chance are deemed inappropriate, whether gambling, lotteries, or even the stock market. Others take a somewhat different view, believing that a little money spent on games of chance is no worse than paying for many forms of entertainment, provided there is no expectation of a return. They see little wrong with the thrill of "taking a chance," something, it is claimed, that businesses do every day. One should hasten to add that while businesses do indeed take risks, these are usually taken after much consideration and with the expectation of a solid return. This cannot be said of gambling, an activity carefully devised so that the "house never loses"!

The Bible lays down key principles that must be observed:

- A man should work for a living: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). It is sad to see gambling being the last resort of the desperate—perhaps someone who has got into a tricky financial situation. In contrast, the Christian work ethic is clear. We spend within our means, we work for a living, and we do not squander our money on things like gambling.
- Greed is always wrong; it comes from a sinful heart (Mark 7:22, Luke 11:39) and is a sin. Gambling encourages greed, wanting more than we have been given by God and, worst of all, without any effort on our part.
- Addiction to anything is wrong. Scripture gives examples of addiction (1 Tim. 2:3, Titus 2:3). It is clear that we live in this world but are not part of it. Any addiction is wrong; our lives are lived for the glory of God, not to be squandered. Time is a precious commodity which, once gone, can never be recov-

ered. Online gambling sites are geared to addict users, drawing them in with enticements of winning. This is especially concerning because of lack of regulation and age verification. The young and the easily swayed are particularly vulnerable.

Practical Advice

The best practical advice that I can offer is to stay away! Gambling, particularly online, offers real dangers. Such activities can ruin lives; draw people away from legitimate activities; isolate them; and bring despair, financial difficulty, and addiction. On top of it all, because online gambling is so unregulated, money spent and received has been tied to organized crime. All in all, we must have no part in this.

In the article on pornography, we explored the use of accountability websites such as “Covenant Eyes” (<http://www.covenanteyes.com>). As Basil Howlett from Carey Baptist church explained, “This website helps a person stay pure online by monitoring their internet use and sending an e-mail report of all websites visited to an accountability partner—who may be their pastor, an elder, youth leader or relative. The idea is that if the user knows the accountability partner will be keeping track of his or her Internet usage they will be less likely to visit questionable sites.”

Finally, block the gambling sites. There are several ways of doing this. Many modern Internet broadband modems (or routers) offer filters that can block gambling sites. Software can also be installed on each computer you use—many of the modern antivirus programs now bundle firewalls and filters. These filters can be set up so that they are password protected. This allows parents to prevent children from accessing these and other undesirable sites. A word of warning here: there are ways around the password schemes, but they require some significant technical knowledge. However, since teenagers tend to share this knowledge, it is always best to keep the family computer in an open area, rather than a bedroom. You can also configure web browsers to block such sites.¹⁵

While all these blocks can be overridden, particularly by the adult that knows the password, they provide a first-defense mechanism. Above all, pray for strength to avoid temptation. Ask yourself if the Lord Jesus would be happy with your current activity if He was sitting next to you. Go further. Pray that the Lord will bless the activity you are about to engage in. If you are not comfortable doing this, then don't take part in whatever you were going to do on the Internet.

In the next article, we will consider how the way we get our news and information has changed because of the Internet. Is it really the “wild West” out there, where every shade of opinion is represented or do we now have direct access to the source of information, unfiltered by journalistic bias?

1. From <http://www.h2gc.com>
2. <http://pokernewsboy.com/legal-poker-news/online-poker-to-give-iowa-80-million/2172>
3. The National Post, November 1, 2008.
4. http://www.safeandsecureig.org/news/press_releases/09-10-29_TaxScore.html
5. This picture taken from <http://www.legalfrontiers.ca/2010/03/fear-and-loathing-of-e-vegas/>
6. <http://lottery.merseyworld.com/Info/Chances.html>
7. <http://www.webspawner.com/users/maddo1029/>
8. “Gambling: What are the Odds?” Found at <http://www.math.byu.edu/~jarvis/gambling.html>
9. <http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk>
10. http://www.law.northwestern.edu/journals/njtip/v7/n2/2/#note*
11. picture taken from www.primarytimes.net/parent_times_lifestyle.php
12. <http://fota.cdnetworks.net/pdfs/2009-06-04-gambling-letter.pdf>
13. <http://www.thesite.org/community/reallife/truestories/internetpokeruin-edmylifex>
14. Vol. 3, Issue 1, January–June 2008.
15. See http://www.ehow.com/how_4899306_block-gambling-websites.html for instructions.

David Clark lives in England where he has served on the Boards of Evangelical Press and *Evangelical Times*. He has worked with information technology for over thirty years. Comments from ET readers on this series can be posted on David Clark's blog (<http://parentsandtheinternet.blogspot.com>) or sent via email to ParentsAndTheInternet@googlemail.com. Where possible, posted contributions and emails will be answered anonymously in the final articles of this series.

Best Wishes for New Year

DEAR FRIENDS,

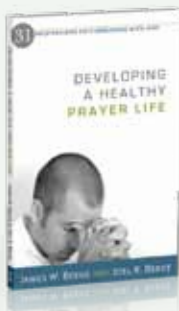
Our Banner staff and I wish you and yours a blessed New Year. May it be for you a Word-grounded, Christ-centered, God-glorifying year.

May you and your loved ones be truly granted to worship and adore the living God in Spirit and truth, so that you may experience this year an increasing measure of what Herbert Carson writes: “To adore God is to be lifted outside our selves. To bow in wonder before this transcendent majesty whose glory fills the heavens and whose mighty power spans the wide compass of history and reaches with unerring accuracy into every crevice of time and space, this is to mount up from a grovelling obsession with our own needs to an awe-inspiring glimpse of the glory of the eternal God.”

Warmly, in the Master's bonds,
Rev. Joel R. Beeke

Book Talk

New RHB Books



Developing a Healthy Prayer Life

James W. Beeke and Joel R. Beeke

Is your prayer life characterized by such things as sincerity, urgency, and delight? Engagement in prayer is a vital part of our communion with God, making a profound impact on our growth in grace. In this book, you will find 31 thoughtful meditations on prayer in the life of the believer, as well as ample encouragement to cultivate this spiritual discipline in your own life. If you want to be more devoted to prayer, or simply want to assess the health of your prayer life, read this book. It provides both a helpful examination and a needed tonic for those concerned about growing in godliness.

(112 pages, PB) \$10.00/7.50



Sing a New Song

Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, eds.

The book of Psalms occupies a unique place in Scripture, being both the Word from God and words to God from His people. Unfortunately, psalm singing no longer plays an integral part of worship in most evangelical churches. In this book, thirteen ministers and scholars urge the church to rediscover the treasure of the Psalms as they examine the history of psalm singing in the church, present biblical reasons for the liturgical practice, and articulate the practical value it provides us today. In addition to the editors, contributors include Robert Cathcart, J. V. Fesko, W. Robert Godfrey, D. G. Hart, Terry Johnson, Michael Lefebvre, David P. Murray, Hughes Oliphant Old, Derek Thomas, Rowland Ward, and Malcolm Watts.

(208 pages, PB) \$18.00/14.00

Other New Books



Jesus Christ: The Prince of Preachers

Mike Abendroth

Preaching is the means by which the Spirit proclaims His truth and builds faith in the lives of believers. This book sets forth Christ as the standard example for all those who are called to preach. In our day of postmodern liquidity and changing fads, Abendroth draws solid examples from the life and ministry of Christ to instruct men how to faithfully preach the gospel of our Lord.

(PB, Day One, 176 pgs.) \$15.00 | \$11.25

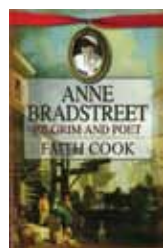


The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel

James M. Boice and Philip Graham Ryken

Throughout history, the Christian church's greatest periods of expansion and faith have occurred when Christ and the cross have been the centerpiece of its vision. If God's people will, once again, widely and fearlessly proclaim the doctrines of grace, great days may yet be ahead for a floundering church. Boice and Ryken explore each of these essential truths and also consider current challenges, leaving no doubt that the church suffers when the doctrines of grace are neglected.

(PB, Crossway, 240 pgs.) \$17.00 | \$13.00



Anne Bradstreet: Pilgrim and Poet

—*Faith Cook*
This is a moving, delightful biography packed with heavenly piety. Cook shows us that Bradstreet exemplified how a godly woman can balance standing in the limelight while raising eight children and battling illness, all the while maintaining a biblical posture of submission and humility. This stirring biography is great reading for men and women of all ages, but is a particular gem for young women looking for godly mentors.

(PB, Evangelical Press, 176 pgs.) \$14.00 | \$10.00



Killing Fields, Living Fields: Faith in Cambodia

Don Cormack

The Cambodian Church was first planted among the rice farmers of Northwest Cambodia in the mid-1920s. Growth was slow and painful. Then fifty years of nearly fruitless toil culminated in the incredible decade of the 1970s, when joyous spiritual awakening was juxtaposed with indescribable devastation. This book takes us to

the days of the underground Christian remnant and how, amid trial and suffering, they exploded into a young and dynamic church numbering in the thousands.

(PB, Christian Focus, 450 pgs.) \$14.00 | \$10.50

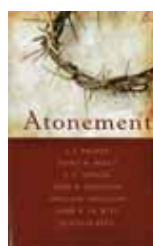


Outback Adventures

—*Jim Cromarty*

Australia's outback is one of the most exciting and adventurous places you can be. There are so many wide-open spaces, such stunning scenery, amazing animals—and it was all made by God for us to enjoy and look after. This book contains many interesting facts about this incredible country and shows us how we can also learn about God when we think about His creation.

(PB, Christian Focus, 91 pgs.) \$8.00 | \$6.00



Atonement

—*Gabriel N.E. Fluhner (ed.)*

This book is a compilation from presentations given at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Gathering together some of the church's best-known pastor-theologians, this work is about the blood of Jesus Christ's atonement. It covers subjects such as the necessity, the nature, the satisfaction, and the language of the atonement. This book seeks to put Christ the Sin-bearer front and center in a day which is so quickly abandoning this emphasis.

(PB, P&R, 142 pgs.) \$12.99 | \$9.75

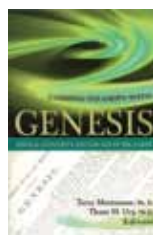


Welcome to a Reformed Church

—*Daniel R. Hyde*

Many of the doctrines and practices of a Reformed church can seem strange or arbitrary to those who are not used to them. In laymen's terms, Hyde has set forth a wonderful historic, scriptural, and confessional guide to understanding how a Reformed community functions. This helpful introduction will prove invaluable to any who have asked the question, "Who are these people?"

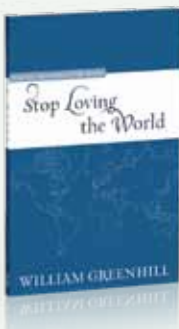
(PB, Reformation Trust, 178 pgs.) \$12.00 | \$7.50



Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth

—*Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (eds.)*

More and more evangelicals are realizing that the creation-evolution controversy is every bit as much about philosophic assumptions as it is about empirical evidence. One pertinent question with serious theological



Stop Loving the World

William Greenhill

The Puritans were greatly concerned with suppressing worldliness in the church. Today, worldliness is an even greater problem, exacerbated by the fact that so few dare to speak out against it. In this book, William Greenhill provides modern readers with a healthy antidote to our love affair with the world. He explains what it means to love the world, exposes the dangers of cherishing it, shares how we ought to relate to it, and gives encouraging directions for removing our hearts from it. This is a book with a timeless message, demonstrating the relevance of the Puritans for today. By God's grace, it will help persuade you that the world and all its charms are not what you should live for. (88 pages, PB) \$8.00/6.00



Preaching in the Holy Spirit

Albert N. Martin

Good pastors pray for the Holy Spirit's help in preparing biblical sermons that will adequately feed God's sheep. They also hope for the Spirit's work in the hearts of the hearers so that they effectively receive the preached Word. But are these the only ways that preachers must depend on the Spirit in their preaching? In this book, Albert N. Martin reminds gospel ministers of their need to rely on the Holy Spirit as they proclaim God's Word. He explains the necessity of the agency and operations of the Holy Spirit, describes its specific manifestations, and discusses ways it is restrained or diminished. Here is a prophetic call to reliance on God in the very act of proclaiming His Word. (88 pages, PB) \$8.00/6.00

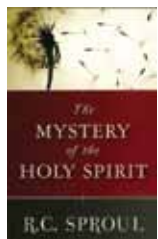
consequences is found in the age-of-the-earth controversy. This book is a full defense of a literal history of Genesis 1–11, making exegetical arguments for a young earth and engaging with contemporary theories. (PB, Masters, 478 pgs.) \$17.00 | \$13.00



Awakening: The Life and Ministry of

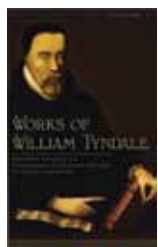
Robert Murray M'Cheyne — *David Robertson*

When Robert Murray M'Cheyne came to pastor St. Peter's Church, it was a dying church with only a few members attending. Today, he stands as perhaps the leading Christian figure that Scotland has produced in the last three hundred years—and yet, this powerful gospel minister died at the early age of 29. Does M'Cheyne still matter for today? Robertson says yes. This fresh presentation gives a fine account of that godly minister who was a dangerous weapon in the hand of the Almighty. (PB, Christian Focus, 282 pgs.) \$20.00 | \$15.00



The Mystery of the Holy Spirit — *R.C. Sproul*

Some people have noted that Trinitarian Christianity has faltered in recent years; there seems to be a lack of or wrong-headed understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In this short book, Sproul deepens the understanding of readers as he explores the different roles the Spirit has in our lives and deals with some of the most perplexing and frequently discussed issues with his trademark pastoral sensitivity. (PB, Christian Focus, 158 pgs.) \$13.00 | \$9.75



The Works of William Tyndale, 2 Volumes

William Tyndale

Tyndale is perhaps best known as a Bible translator, but he also gave himself to a defense of the Reformation faith and threw himself into the midst of several controversies. This collected work gives readers a full picture of Tyndale's brilliance and his wide range of abilities. (HC, Banner, 1216 pgs.) \$59.00 | \$48.00



Jungle Doctor Operates vol. 14 — *Paul White*

The Jungle Doctor has many challenges to deal with—for example, running a surgical room in the middle of the African jungle. There are urgent operations to perform but they don't have all the necessary tools. However, a football, an ancient foot pump, and an empty pickle bottle provide an anesthetic machine that saves lives. (PB, Christian Focus, 159 pgs.) \$7.00 | \$5.25

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for our children
diana kleyn :

Around the beginning of a new year, people wish each other “Happy New Year!” It is a way to say, “I hope your new year is filled with happiness.” But what is it that people are actually wishing one another? When you say, “Happy New Year” to your friends and family, what are you wishing for them? Do you think that God’s people would answer this question differently than non-Christians and unbelievers? What do you think unbelievers or “the world” would say? I think most people would wish one another good health, strength to carry out our tasks, loving family and friends, enough money to live comfortably, and nothing that would cause sadness or pain. There is nothing wrong with wishing this for others; it is good and kind to wish nice things for other people. However, God’s definition of “happiness” is not the same as ours. He does not think like we do. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8).

The word “happy” appears twenty-five times in the Bible. Some of these passages help us understand what brings real, lasting happiness. Some of these sources of happiness are listed in this month’s puzzle. Some, such as children (Genesis 30:13; Psalm 127:5) and work (Psalm 128:2), are obvious blessings that bring much happiness. There are other sources of happiness, however, which might surprise most people. Many of these are summed up in the Beatitudes, which are part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes can be found in Matthew 5:3–12. Each one begins with the words, “Blessed are they...” Children, how would you fill in the blanks? Would you write down, “Blessed are they...who have many friends,” or, “Blessed are they...who can travel wherever they want to,” or “Blessed are they...who can buy whatever they want to”? These are the things that our human nature (and the world) believes are most important. But what did Jesus say? “Blessed are...the poor in spirit [verse 3],...they that mourn [verse 4],...the meek [verse 5], and...those who are persecuted and reviled [verses 10 and 11].” That doesn’t sound anything like our list of things that bring happiness, does it? Why are they so different? It’s the difference between

what the Bible calls the battle between the flesh and the Spirit (Romans 7 and 8). Unless we are renewed spiritually by the Holy Spirit, we only want to please ourselves. Those who are born of the Spirit begin to fight against this selfish love and begin to love God above all and their neighbor as themselves.

So what does this all mean? Does it mean that God’s people are sad and gloomy all the time—or at least most of the time? Does it mean that God’s children will only be happy when they get to heaven? No, children, that would be a lie. In this life, everyone suffers and endures hardships. No one escapes pain and sorrow. The difference between true joy and short-lived pleasure is *from where their joy comes*. The unbeliever and the non-Christian try to find happiness in things that don’t last: health, wealth...things that fall apart and disintegrate. God’s people, however, find joy and happiness in God, who is eternal and to be enjoyed eternally.

There is another difference between believers and unbelievers. The unbeliever turns away from God when he is sad, while God’s child turns toward Him in his pain, finding comfort and joy. When you read all of the Beatitudes, you will notice God’s promises. The poor in spirit receive the kingdom of heaven; the meek will inherit the earth; those who mourn will be comforted; and those who are reviled and persecuted will have a great reward in heaven! God is not mean or cruel: He does not give His people hardships just to make them cry. He does it for their good. “For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:33). For instance, your parents do not buy you every toy you ask for, nor do your teachers give you a perfect grade on every paper. They discipline you when you are disobedient and teach you what is right and wrong. In the same way, God tells you the truth about what brings true happiness. The world lies to you and tells you that you can only be happy when you get everything you want.

God the Father loves His children more perfectly than the best parent on earth. His children may shed tears when they suffer grief and pain or when they are

mocked for Christ's sake, but, at the same time, they rejoice because they are filled with God's love. They have a secret that the world doesn't understand; they find happiness in God and in His Word. Satan cannot harm them; their sins are forgiven through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will live forever with Him in heaven. They are filled with gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed them, and they want to tell others about this precious Savior, even if it means they must suffer because of it. That is real happiness, children! Do you think a man who is dying is comforted because of a toy he received when he was a boy? Do you think an old woman is still full of happiness because she received a pretty new dress when she was a girl? Millions of people who have wealth and fame are terribly unhappy. Where can you find lasting happiness? Listen to the wisdom of God's Word: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy

presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). Only the Lord Jesus, who sits at the right hand of His Father, gives fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore. That is the secret of true happiness.

I wish you and your families a happy 2011. I wish you a year filled with the joy of the Lord and of His salvation. I pray that you may rejoice just like Peter did when he wrote, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:7-9).

Diana Kleyn is the author of several books for children.



New Year Bells

In her tiny room at the top of the lodging house, Carina Allen was making ready to "watch the old year out," as her family called it. Four months ago, the young girl had come to the big city from her home in a small New England village to study under a master violinist at a famous conservatory

of music. Unusually talented and eager to progress, she had promptly become a favorite with her teacher. She quickly realized that her clothes and accent were different from those around her, and at first Carina would hurry away by herself when lessons were over. As time went on, however, she lost some of her shyness and began to respond to the smiles and greetings of her fellow students. She was friendly and outgoing and soon had many friends.

Just before Thanksgiving, Carina admitted to a group of girls that she could not afford to go home for the holiday and was going to spend it in her lodging house room. Helen Roberts, a pretty, dark-eyed girl, said, "Poor Cara, you must not stay here alone! You should come home with me."

Carina was not sure what to think of Helen. She was a cheerful, friendly girl, but Carina had heard her laugh at people for going to church. Still, the thought of escaping a lonely day was appealing and her eyes were wistful even as she refused the invitation. "No, thank you," she said slowly.

"Don't be shy," chuckled Helen. "My parents and I would love to have you. We are all missing my brother John, who was killed in France, so, having a guest for Thanksgiving would be good for us."

After hearing that, Carina accepted the invitation and spent a happy day with her new friends. Other visits to Helen's home followed, and now, on New Year's Eve, she had been invited to join a group of young people from the conservatory for a celebration. Helen's mother and father planned to accompany them to an elegant inn about ten miles from town, where they would feast and party until the clocks announced the new year. When Helen had first suggested this, Carina had feebly protested. "I've always gone to church to watch the old year out."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Helen, laughing. "How could you ever stay awake in church? I couldn't! Cara, you've got to come with us! We'll have a wonderful dinner, and everything will be beautifully decorated, and when the clock strikes twelve everyone will sing, and blow whistles, and ring bells. It will be so much fun!"



Now, as she waited for Helen to come and get her, Carina stood looking out of her bedroom window. The city with its myriad lights lay stretched below her. All around her was peaceful and quiet, but Carina's heart was restless and uneasy. Suddenly, across the great town came the sound of church bells. Softly at first, then swelling to a sweet and tender melody, rang out the notes of an ancient hymn. The words of the tune instantly came to mind as the bells rang out. Carina flung the window wide open, and leaned out to hear.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!¹

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

Suddenly, Carina was crying. "I have wandered a long way from the shadow of His throne," she thought. The bells chimed on and she sang softly with them:

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

"How true!" Carina whispered. "And I've been forgetting it all, and giving my time and thought to things that don't matter and are of no real benefit. This party tonight is not a good beginning for the new year. Going to church, drawing

close to the Lord, making Him my defense—that will give me a right start."

Closing the window, she ran hastily down to the telephone in the lower hall and called Helen.

"You're going to miss a great party," Helen said. "If you change your mind, call me."

"I won't be changing my mind," Carina said firmly.

Back at school, Helen admitted, "I had a horrid time. The dinner was good, but the inn was too crowded and some of the people became very rough. One thing after another spoiled my evening. Mother made us leave right after twelve, which was lucky, since we had a flat tire on the way home." She paused and looked at Carina closely. "How was the church service, Cara? You look so happy."

"I am so glad I went. God showed me what is truly important. I had been feeling bad because I don't have fashionable clothes or lots of money. But, as I listened to the bells and remembered the words of that song, I realized how unimportant such things are. I must pay attention to the things that last."

"If they make a person feel as happy as you look this morning, I believe I'll try them myself," Helen said. "I used to go to church, but stopped when I started college. Take me with you some day soon, will you, Cara?"

Carina slipped her arm around her friend. "I will," she promised.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Adapted from *Heart's Treasure, Stories for Christian Young Folks*, gathered and translated by Theo Graebner. New York: Ensslin & Laiblin, n.d., pp. 21–26.

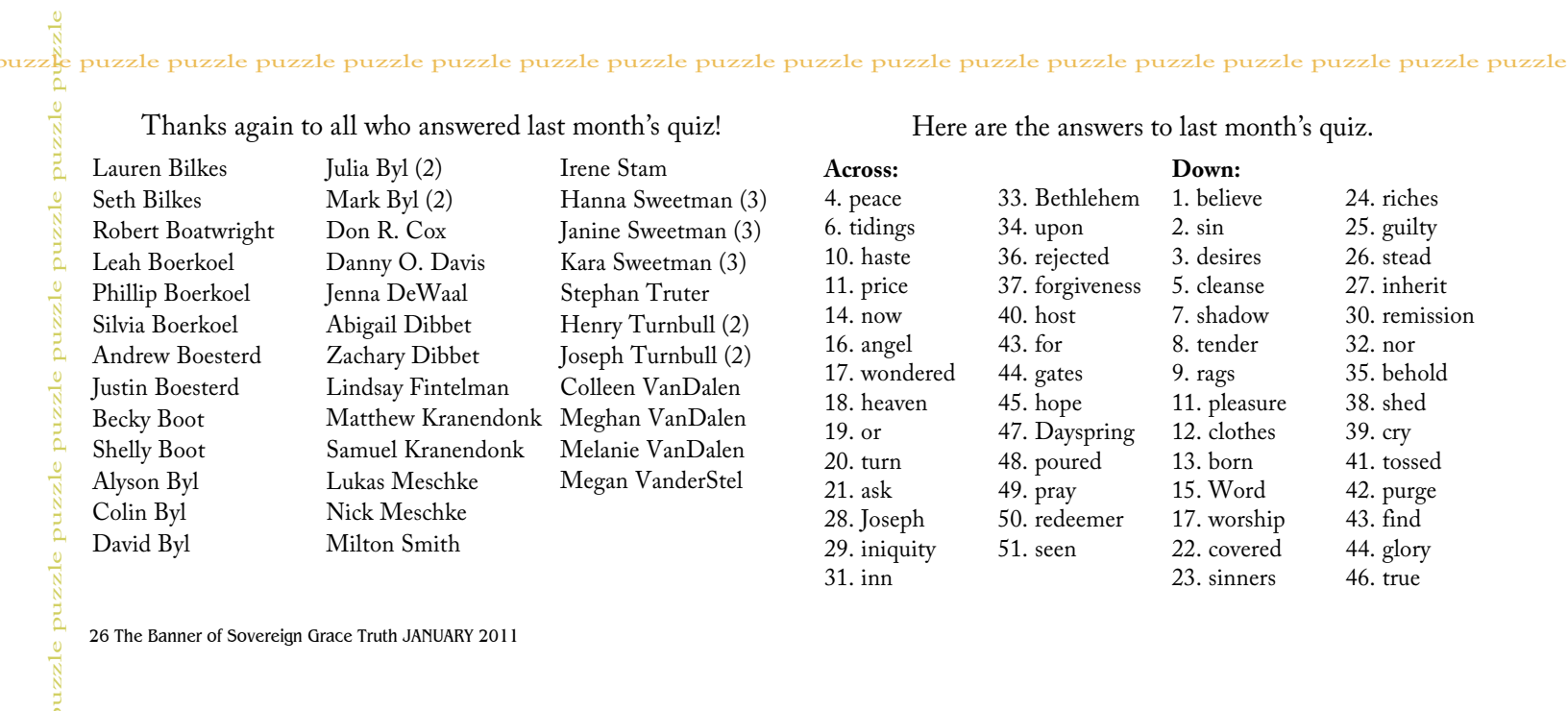
1. This song was written by Isaac Watts in 1719.

Thanks again to all who answered last month's quiz!

Lauren Bilkes	Julia Byl (2)	Irene Stam
Seth Bilkes	Mark Byl (2)	Hanna Sweetman (3)
Robert Boatwright	Don R. Cox	Janine Sweetman (3)
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Justin Boesterd	Lindsay Fintelman	Colleen VanDalen
Becky Boot	Matthew Kranendonk	Meghan VanDalen
Shelly Boot	Samuel Kranendonk	Melanie VanDalen
Alyson Byl	Lukas Meschke	Megan VanderStel
Colin Byl	Nick Meschke	
David Byl	Milton Smith	

Here are the answers to last month's quiz.

Across:		Down:	
4. peace	33. Bethlehem	1. believe	24. riches
6. tidings	34. upon	2. sin	25. guilty
10. haste	36. rejected	3. desires	26. stead
11. price	37. forgiveness	5. cleanse	27. inherit
14. now	40. host	7. shadow	30. remission
16. angel	43. for	8. tender	32. nor
17. wondered	44. gates	9. rags	35. behold
18. heaven	45. hope	11. pleasure	38. shed
19. or	47. Dayspring	12. clothes	39. cry
20. turn	48. poured	13. born	41. tossed
21. ask	49. pray	15. Word	42. purge
28. Joseph	50. redeemer	17. worship	43. find
29. iniquity	51. seen	22. covered	44. glory
31. inn		23. sinners	46. true



puzzle

Fill in the blanks by looking up the texts (using the KJV).
Put the letters from the light green spaces in order on the lines of #32 and they will spell out a text about lasting happiness.

1. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they _____ see God" (Matthew 5:8).
2. "Who is like unto thee, O _____ saved by the LORD" (Deuteronomy 33:29).
3. "Nevertheless afterward it _____ the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).
4. "Being much more precious than of gold that _____" (1 Peter 1:7).
5. "And Leah said, Happy am I, for the _____ will call me blessed" (Genesis 30:13).
6. "He that _____ his heart shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 28:14).
7. "Happy are thy men, happy are _____ thy servants" (1 Kings 10:8).
8. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after _____" (Matthew 5:6).
9. "Happy is the man that findeth _____" (Proverbs 3:13).
10. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver _____ of them" (Psalm 127:5).
11. "_____, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12).
12. "If ye be _____ for the name of Christ, happy are ye" (1 Peter 4:14).
13. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall _____ mercy" (Matthew 5:7).
14. "_____ despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17).
15. "For even _____ pleased not himself" (Romans 15:3).
16. "Blessed is the man whom thou _____" (Psalm 94:12).
17. "Whoso trusteth in the _____, happy is he" (Proverbs 16:20).
18. "He that _____, happy is he" (Proverbs 29:18).
19. "But and if ye suffer for _____' sake, happy are ye" (1 Peter 3:14).
20. "Happy is that people, _____ God is the LORD" (Psalm 144:15).
21. "My son, _____ not the chastening of the LORD" (Proverbs 3:11).
22. "As having nothing, and yet possessing all _____" (2 Corinthians 6:10).
23. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall _____ the earth" (Matthew 5:5).
24. "I have _____ thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10).
25. "For our light _____, which is but for a moment" (2 Corinthians 4:17).
26. "When he hath _____ me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).
27. "Behold, we count them happy _____ endure" (James 5:11).
28. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and _____ you" (Matthew 5:11).
29. "He _____ it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2).
30. "He that hath mercy on the _____, happy is he" (Proverbs 14:21).
31. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye _____ them" (John 13:17).
32. "_____

_____ " (Psalm 146:5).

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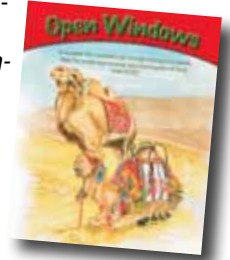
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OBITUARY

STOUTJESDYK, John M., aged 89, passed away on Sunday, November 7, 2010, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Preceding him in death were his wife, Louise, his parents, and his brother, Clayton (Bud). Surviving are his sons—John A. (Carol), Steven J. (Laurie), and Mark S. (Christine); Brother—Martin (Shirley) Stoutjesdyk; Sisters-in-law—Edith Bazen, Marilyn Stoutjesdyk, Jeanette Berman, Elizabeth VanRee, Dorothy DeMaagd; 12 grandchildren; 8 great-grandchildren. (Rev. J. B. Zipp, Luke 16:19–31.)

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of our dear parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

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1955 – November 23 – 2010

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Herb & Janie Krul, children & grandchildren
In memoriam, Johnny (1961-1977)

Bert & Jennifer Den Hertog, children
Tim & Renee Lagemaat, children & grandson
Terry & Hilda Van Oort, children

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Youth Camp 2011 will be held, Lord willing, Tuesday, July 5 through Friday, July 8 at Camp Michawana, Hastings, MI. All young people (grade 10 through age 25) are encouraged to attend. Registration forms will be available in April 2011. Mark your calendars, and plan to join us as we parallel the Book of Daniel with our lives today and take the challenge to stand alone for the truth.

VOLUNTEER TEACHER IN ZAMBIA

The Molenaar family is looking for a volunteer teacher who can take responsibility for the homeschooling of Joas (10) and Rhoda (8) from January to June, 2011. If you are interested or know someone who might be, please contact us for more details: ceesmirjam@gmail.com

BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

From a prisoner in California:

I am thankful to God for your ministry and teaching presented in the *Banner*. I have studiously and prayerfully read your magazine and many books, all from the Reformed Christian faith, which have built me up in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. I pray that God continues to bless His saints through your work and to provide you the means to accomplish His work.

I will keep you all in my prayers. I look forward to your next issue and the words of God's truth that you send on each page. Thank you for everything. You have been a light on a mountain shining forth in a world of darkness. Praise God and all glory to God our Savior and Lord.

INHERITANCE PUBLISHERS

From a friend in Canada:

I have just read your booklet "Perseverance in Christ" by J.C. Ryle. It is excellent! God has given me a ministry of placing good literature in care apartments in hospitals. I long to have some of these booklets for the boxes which I am now working on. I'm eighty-six years old and have many health problems, but am still able to sow the seed.

PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

From a friend in Grand Rapids:

Dear brothers in Christ,

The amazing atonement provided by our LORD is the highest reason for thanksgiving.

Yet beyond that, He has given so much for which to offer thanks. For me, PRTS is a wonderful reason.

Please accept this gift for the scholarship fund as a portion of my Thanksgiving offering.

REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

From a friend in prison:

I wanted to write to tell you "thank you" for compiling the book *365 Days with Calvin*. Every morning and evening I read the daily writing and meditate on the meaning. Reading from this book is like taking a breath of fresh air.

After reading *365 Days with Calvin* it only reassured me that my understanding of God's will, character, and purpose is correct.

SERMON AUDIO MINISTRY

From an internet listener:

I've been listening to sermons every day for a while. Thank you for walking my soul into the gardens of Christ and for explaining my experiences and how to manage them in Him (or rather let Him manage them).

I am really enjoying the quotes and exposition on Calvin and the subject of prayer. I am virtually writing every quote... so amazing and refreshing! Yes, I've read these things, I tell myself and others these things (in part) but to hear them again in this way has reminded how far short I am and how simple prayer really is. Yet, it's a strong battle to win, but can't be if we don't understand all the things you are explaining. Hope and pray this will bear fruit in my life.

From an internet listener:

I think the sermon entitled: "Forgiveness, 9 Ingredients" is very beautiful and rich.... Yes, that is what we need every day and really the only thing! I think I understand justification better now and see why it's really the source of sanctification.

NEW CHURCH BUILDING

HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATION OF NEW JERSEY

On Sunday, October 31, 2010 our congregation gathered with thanksgiving as we held our first worship services in our newly purchased and renovated church building. In God's good providence, He has provided this church building in Kinnelon, New Jersey, in a location near the center of our membership living areas. During our first thirteen years, our congregation worshiped in leased facilities that God graciously provided for us, first in Pompton Plains and then in Franklin Lakes, NJ. As the gospel is preached and God's Word is expounded in this new location, we pray for the continued work of the Holy Spirit. Our new address (and mailing address) is:

129 Boonton Avenue, Kinnelon, NJ 07405

If you live nearby or if you are traveling in the area, you are heartily welcome to our worship services. All are also invited to the new church building dedication service planned for Friday, January 14, 2011 with a snow date of January 21.

Obituary notices, church events, and marriage and anniversary notices will be printed free of charge and under no obligation of a gift received. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.

NATIONAL NEWS....

Feds Drop “Christian roommate” Investigation

A Christian woman seeking a Christian female roommate is free to do so for the time being. The woman’s request originally was posted on a church bulletin board, but when the Michigan Department of Civil Rights found out, a complaint was filed against her. Now the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has dropped the investigation. Attorney Joel Oster with the Alliance Defense Fund says the problematic “anti-discrimination” rule remains: that it is against the law to seek out a roommate based on religion, gender, or race. “We think that it is ridiculous to interpret this statute in such a way as to keep someone from seeking a Christian roommate,” Oster remarks. “But what the Feds said in this letter is that if the allegations in the complaint are true, then it would amount to a violation of the Fair Housing Act”—and that his client could be sued within the next two years, he adds. But would that mean that ADF’s client could be in hot water for seeking a roommate of the same gender? “Well, oddly enough, if you look at this statute, it does not provide even an exception based upon gender,” states the attorney. “So according to this statute, she can’t even discriminate based upon gender. If you look at this, this lady would have to accept a male roommate of an opposite or an opposing religious belief into her house. It’s preposterous.” Oster believes the rule needs to be clarified, and says his client is considering a lawsuit to bring about that change if necessary. (*OneNewsNow*)

Election Day Victories for the Unborn

Pro-life victories in Kansas and Iowa will boost two major campaigns being led by Operation Rescue. For years, the Kansas legislature has passed pro-life measures only to have them vetoed by former Governor Kathleen Sebelius, a pro-abortion Democrat. But Operation Rescue’s Troy Newman believes that situation is likely to change now that former U.S. Senator Sam Brownback, a staunch pro-lifer, will be moving into the governor’s office. But there is more good news for pro-lifers and unborn children in the Sunflower State, he says. “Another major change...was the attorney general’s office, [which] has slipped from a radical, pro-abortion, [Kathleen] Sebelius appointee to a pro-life attorney general that is expected to further the prosecution of Planned Parenthood,” he explains. Currently, 107 criminal charges are pending against Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri—23 of them felonies—but prosecution has been “thwarted by pro-abortion politics,” says Newman. His group is pushing for action to the fullest against the abortion provider. (*OneNewsNow*)

NC City Council Approves Christian Flag Display

After having previously voted to remove it, the city council in King, North Carolina, has voted to allow a Christian flag to fly at a veteran’s memorial as part of a limited display. The *Winston-Salem Journal* reports that the council voted 4–0 Monday to develop a policy to eventually fly the flag as part of a display allowing religious flags recognized by the U.S. military. The council voted in September to remove the flag on the advice of the city attorney after they got a complaint from a resident about it. The American Civil Liberties Union said displaying the Christian flag violated the First Amendment. The September vote prompted some veterans to camp out at the park to guard their own Christian flag in front of the memorial. (*AP*)

Notre Dame Pays Price for Hosting Obama

After honoring President Barack Obama during last May’s commencement ceremonies, the University of Notre Dame has seen fewer contri-

butions and is feeling financial heat. In May 2009, debate was heated over the fact that Notre Dame, a Catholic university, invited President Obama to speak at its graduation. It was controversial mainly because some of Obama’s policies are contrary to church doctrine. Katie Walker of American Life League (ALL) tells *OneNewsNow* the school has paid a price. “Notre Dame has come out \$120 million short for the fiscal year in which President Obama spoke during commencement and received an honorary law degree,” she reports. She believes that staggering number is in direct response of alumni and others around the country who feel scandalized “that Notre Dame would host this man and give one of the most pro-abortion presidents in the nation’s history an honorary law degree.” Walker feels the drop in funding should send a loud message to the university. (*OneNewsNow*)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

Afghanistan

Muslim extremists in Islamabad beat with bricks and hockey sticks a Christian clergyman who is the subject of a *fatwa* demanding his death. The Rev. Dr. Suleman Nasri Khan, a former fighter in Afghanistan before his conversion, suffered a serious head injury, a hairline fracture in his arm and a broken bone in his left ankle in the assault by ten Muslim extremists. The attack in Chashma, near Iqbal Town in Islamabad, followed Islamic scholar Allama Nawazish Ali’s *fatwa* (religious ruling) to kill Khan, pastor of Power of the Healing God’s Church in the Kalupura area of Gujrat City. The *fatwa* was issued after Khan protested anti-Christian violence in Kalupura. Muslim extremists who learned of his conversion had first attacked Khan in 2008, killing his first child, three-month-old Sana Nasri Khan. While fighting in Afghanistan’s civil war in 2000, he said, he found a New Testament lying on the battlefield. Through reading it, he was convicted. Later he began preaching and studying—ending up with a doctorate in biblical theology from Punjab Theological Seminary in Kasur in 2005. (*Compass Direct News*)

Deadly Raid Targets Iraqi Christians

During worship services at one of Baghdad’s largest churches, gunmen took more than 100 worshipers hostage in what is being called the bloodiest attack in Iraq since August. Jerry Dykstra of Open Doors USA says the guerrillas demanded release of al-Qaeda prisoners in Iraq and Egypt. “And what happened in ensuing battle is that there [were] reportedly 52 people killed, including hostages and...security forces, and many [were] wounded,” Dykstra reports. He says this attack is just another example of Iraqi Christians being targeted for their faith, which is likely to get worse when American troops leave. The missionary points out that, since 1991, “the number of Christians in Iraq [has] been reduced from 850,000 to half of that. And so many of them have left the country into neighboring countries; many of them have fled to northern Iraq.” Dykstra decides the incident marks a clarion call for prayer. “Every time something like this happens, people are going to be more unlikely to attend church services,” he notes. “And like in many other countries, they’ll have to go underground—which many of them are already—and pray for the healing of the trauma of the survivors of this brutal act.” (*OneNewsNow*)

John Goudzwaard is a member of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.



How Do I Know I'm Saved?

REV. MARK KELDERMAN & REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

The question that plagues many who are seeking salvation is, How do I know I am saved? How do I know that the Spirit has made me alive? A pregnant mother will know that her baby is well when she feels kicking and movement. If there are a few days without movement, alarm and worry sets in. Something similar takes place in the life of a sinner who has been powerfully brought from death to life by the Spirit of God. There is life. There is movement. There might be times where it seems there is little life, but those who have been regenerated will have life and will show the fruits of repentance and faith.

Some of you might be into restoring old cars. You pick up old cars that are rusting and no longer working, and you begin to work. The engine gets new parts, crumbling tires are replaced, the body is patched, the car is repainted, and you see the effects of what you have done. The car is converted from a useless piece of metal into a road-worthy machine. We can use that illustration to begin understanding how God works in conversion. He takes useless, unworthy sinners and He breathes into them the Spirit of life. He begins to change them through conversion. He grants the gifts of repentance and faith. The car illustration breaks down because you do all the work on the car but, in conversion, God works and He gives us the grace to repent and believe. In conversion, we become active by repenting of sin and believing in Christ. Both are works of God in us, and yet He enables us to repent and believe.

Let's begin with repentance and see what it means and what it ought to look like in our lives. Repentance in the Old Testament is often referred to as turning—turning from sin to God. In the New Testament, it has a similar meaning and focuses on the inner behavior of the mind and heart. When we hear the call to repent, it means that we are called to turn from sin to follow God and pursue a life of holiness. By ourselves, we are unable to, but when the Spirit regenerates, God converts sinners. He gives a new understanding so that sinners can grasp the truths they hear and read about in Scripture. He gives new emotions so that our love for sin

is destroyed and a new affection is given for God and His people. He gives a new mind so that sinful thoughts are changed to God-honoring thoughts. He gives a new will so that old sins and habits are no longer desired and done, but God-honoring deeds are desired. In short, when a sinner repents, his entire inner being is changed and he is given power to turn from sin.

Zacchaeus is a good example of this in Scripture (Luke 19:1–10). We do not know at what point he was regenerated, but we do know that he began to show the fruits of regeneration by repenting of his sins. Jesus called out to him as he sat in the sycamore tree. He came down and Jesus spent time at Zacchaeus's home. After that, Zacchaeus went out and demonstrated repentance. "And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

How do we know this was a change of heart? Tax collectors had a poor reputation. They made money hand over fist at the expense of the taxpayers. They required much more than what the taxpayers actually owed. That is why Zacchaeus was rich; he was rich through dishonest gain. When he came face to face with Jesus, he was brought to see his sin. He was led to repentance by demonstrating a change of heart and restoring what he had wrongfully taken. He did so at his own expense and most likely even to his own disadvantage. God led him to repentance and worked in him the desire to make things right with God and with his fellow man. Are these fruits of repentance visible in your life? This is one way to know that you are spiritually alive.

Rev. Mark Kelderman is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Burgessville, Ontario. **Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven** is a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a Th.M. theological student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Feel free to email either of them: makelderman@execulink.com; kuivenhoven.maarten@gmail.com.

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WILL YOUR ANCHOR HOLD?

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand,
For 'tis well secured by the Savior's hand;
And the cables, passed from His heart to mine,
Can defy that blast, thro' strength divine.

It will surely hold in the Straits of Fear—
When the breakers have told that the reef is near;
Though the tempest rave and the wild winds blow,
Not an angry wave shall our bark o'erflow.

It will firmly hold in the Floods of Death—
When the waters cold chill our latest breath,
On the rising tide it can never fail,
While our hopes abide within the Veil.

When our eyes behold through the gath'ring night
The city of gold, our harbor bright,
We shall anchor fast by the heav'nly shore,
With the storms all past forevermore.

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.

—PRISCILLA J. OWENS

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