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Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Editor
2965 Leonard St., NE,
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525
(616) 977-0599; fax (616) 285-3246
e-mail: jrbeeke@aol.com

Dr. Robert D. Johnson, Assistant Editor
Raybrook Estates II, 2105 Raybrook Dr., SE, #4029
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546; (616) 464-3241

**Brenda Pols, Subscription Manager
and Accounts Receivable**
540 Crescent Street, NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-3402
(616) 977-4304; fax (616) 285-3246
e-mail: bsgt@hnr.org

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When the Lord Jesus Christ had our sins laid upon Him, He did give more perfect satisfaction unto divine justice for our sins than if all of us had been damned in hell unto all eternity.

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Don't ever get over the cross. Don't ever fail to be moved by the cross.

The article in this issue, "The Rewarded Parent and Teacher," completes a series of sixty articles written to encourage parents and teachers in their awesome task of raising and training children in the fear, nurture, and admonition of the Lord. We thank James W. Beeke for writing them, and pray that they may have been a blessing to many of you.



THE GREAT EXCHANGE

MEDITATION

REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

Would you give up your possessions to help a good friend? You probably would. Would you give up all your savings so that your child might survive cancer? Undoubtedly you would. Would you sacrifice your life for your country and for freedom? Many have before you. But would you give up your life for someone who insulted your goodness, who provoked you, defiled your name, who even declared war against you? Your answer is probably an emphatic “No!” Have you ever considered that Christ has done that for sinners?

This exchange of life is the truth that the prophet Isaiah sets before us in Isaiah 53:5: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” On the face of it, this verse is full of unspeakable brutality, yet it is also full of unspeakable benefit for sinners.

The brutality of this verse is pictured in the words “wounded,” “bruised,” “chastisement,” and “stripes.” It gives a picture of the unspeakable agony and pain Christ has undergone. Christ was *wounded*, or pierced. The cold, sharp nails drove through His hands that had so tenderly touched the blind man’s eyes and the young man’s coffin. The iron spikes were shoved without remorse into the feet that Mary had so lovingly anointed. Christ was *bruised*. Cruel hands ripped at His garments. His accusers threatened Him, punched Him, beat Him, and pounded His body. Christ was *chastised*. His captors laughed at Him, taunting Him to save Himself. Christ was *whipped*. He was stripped and lash after lash was laid down on His back, ripping open His flesh. He was then made to hang in excruciating agony on the cross. This is a stark picture of the physical brutality that Christ has undergone in the place of sinners.

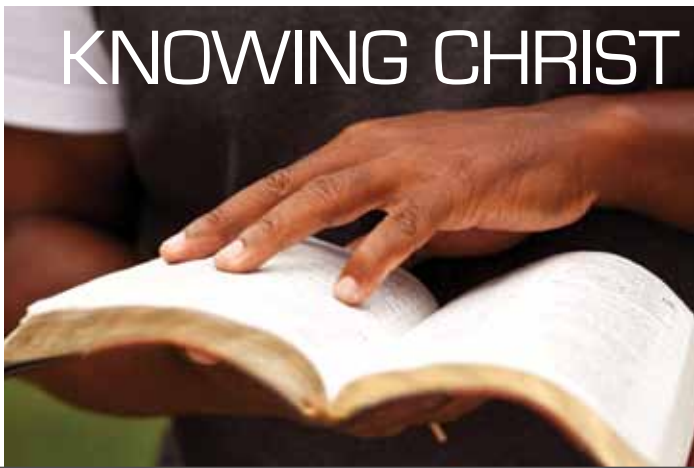
Underlying this physical agony of Christ was spiritual agony. Not only was Christ buffeted by the crowds, but He was beset by hordes of devils and Satan himself. The powers of darkness were unleashed upon Christ, and He suffered hellish agony, wounding Him in spirit. It seemed that in His moment of apparent weakness in Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha, the powers of darkness would prevail. Darkness of soul descended on Christ as He wrestled with

His cup of suffering. He utterly lost the sense of the favorable presence of God, suspended between heaven and earth on the accursed cross, experiencing the terrors of hell. On Golgotha, the place of crucifixion, the Servant of God bore the weight of the sins of His people. He drank His cup of suffering to the last drop. He was pressed down into darkness, fully exposed to the naked flame of the wrath of God, bruised by experiencing being forsaken of God.

This is what we deserve. We deserve this agony and pain, but Christ stood in the stead of sinners. Isaiah speaks of the unsurpassed benefit of Christ’s suffering: He was pierced for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement which brought us peace was upon Him; with His stripes we are healed. Christ laid down His life for sinners. He deals with our transgressions and our iniquities. He brings us peace through chastisement and healing through His stripes. Are you carrying your load of transgressions and iniquities? Do you not know what to do with them? Bring them to Christ who can deal with them because He has paid the price. Are you at war with God? Is there war in your soul with the evil one? Do you long for rest? See in Christ your peace, that He has borne your chastisement. Are you torn spiritually and backslidden? Is your life a body of oozing sores and no soundness because of sin? See in the suffering Christ the stripes that He has taken to bring healing to sinners.

Christ for our transgressions. Christ for our iniquities. Christ for our peace. Christ for our healing. Can the contrast be made any greater? Can the glory of Christ’s suffering be brought out in starker terms? Can the love of God for His Son and for sinners be brought out in any other way? This is the great exchange that Christ has made for sinners which He freely offers to all who come to Him recognizing that they cannot earn their salvation, but that “[i]t is finished.”

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.



AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

MEDITATION
REV. MARK KELDERMAN

Do you know Christ? If I polled the people in North America, there would be a vast number of people claiming to know Him. Sadly, however, a majority of these would simply mean they know *about* Him while they do not live out of Christ or have a personal knowledge of Him. They are not united to Him by faith and do not live in obedience to Him. And, if you know Him, would you not agree that your desire is to know Him better and become more like Him than you presently are? Or do you rest content with the knowledge that you have been saved by Christ? That is a sad condition to be in. It was not so with Paul. A man who was led deeply into the mysteries of the kingdom, he still cried out, “[T]hat I may know him and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). Paul was not asking to know Christ initially in salvation; of that he was already confident: “For I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12). Yet he realized that he had not arrived at the completion and fullness of what he was one day going to be. He still struggled with his remaining corruptions. He did not count himself to have apprehended or already attained, but followed after, pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12–14). Paul understood the remaining infirmities of his sinful flesh; he battled daily with remaining corruptions, and therefore he cries out for a greater, fresher view of Christ whom he knew and loved. He wanted to know Him more in order to live out of Him more. Paul was currently dissatisfied with his present knowledge of Christ.

Do you understand this language of Paul? If not, it may be that you do not understand or believe your standing in Christ to be secure and firm—that by faith you are justified (cf. Phil. 3:8–9). If you do not believe you are even in the race, then you will not understand Paul, but you are still asking the question, have I ever known Christ? Another reason you do not experience what Paul is saying here could be because you are not dissatisfied with your present understanding and knowledge of Christ. You imagine that you have arrived and expect that soon you will just pass on to glory.

However, if your desire is like Paul’s, do you realize what you ask for? It means that if we would be like Christ, we also must be like Him in His sufferings, and this suffering will

lead to death. Is this perhaps the reason why we are content where we are and are not ready to suffer, to die?

We need a power that is greater than ourselves. Paul is asking for precisely this power so that he could live this way. And this power is available through the resurrection of Christ. Paul prays for the Ephesians in chapter 1 that “they might know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.” The resurrection power Paul knew was like no other; it was the power of God which gives life and regenerates dead sinners, but it was also the power in sanctification to put off sin, to crucify the old man, and to put on the new. Daily, we sinners realize that we have no power in ourselves, but glory be to God that this power is found in Christ and in His resurrection.

Paul says in Romans 6:4–5: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Doesn’t the believer learn more and more of Christ as he learns more and more what it means to live by faith and not by sight? As we learn more of our own inward remaining corruptions and lack of conformity to Christ, we lean more and more upon Him. As we lean more upon Him, the more we speak of Him. As we live and speak more of Christ, the more we suffer for His sake; and the more we suffer for His sake, the more we need His power to be upheld and strengthened.

Are you leaning upon Christ and His resurrection power? Do you wonder how God is going to make you more like Christ in the coming months—how He will enable you to suffer for Him cheerfully, to speak a word in due season, to love your neighbor and your enemy as yourself, to resist temptation and take up your cross and follow Him? It is only through this resurrection power. Our prayer and desire should be with Paul: “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.”

Rev. Mark Kelderman is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Burgessville, Ontario.

the Rewarded Parent & Teacher

His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. —Matthew 25:23

James W. Beeke • Christian Education/Family Guidance



We know the context of this verse. It is taken from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30. The unprofitable servant went and buried the talent given to him by his lord, but the profitable servants used the talents they were given to gain more. The unprofitable servant was punished, but the profitable were rewarded.

We know that when we perform any good works—works of faith in God and love to God and others—we do so from a faith and love that God has planted and nurtured in our hearts by His Spirit. We know that whatever abilities we have are given by God. All opportunities that come our way are provided by God; if we have been a positive influence on anyone, be it our child or student or someone else, the impact made is also the work of God. Yet, the Lord speaks of rewarding us as His servants.

This reward is a reward of grace. God graciously rewards what He has graciously given. If this were not true, we would boast that our rewards were for what we did. We could proudly think that we were better than other parents or did a better job than other teachers and therefore the Lord rewarded us (Eph. 2:7–9; Rom. 3:20–28; 1 Cor. 1:26–31).

What is a gracious reward? Imagine a father whose birthday is approaching. He gives his two young children some money to go buy his birthday present. They do, and he then buys ice cream cones for the “wonderful” gifts that they “gave” him. This father graciously rewarded his children for what he had graciously given. He did not need to give them the money or the ice cream, but chose to do both.

Scripture also speaks of gracious rewards, crowns, heaven, and glory for God’s children. In our text, it speaks of faithful servants being rewarded. Notice that the language used to describe the reward for the servant who was given five talents and gained five more (v. 21) is the same as that used for the servant who received two and added two more. The Lord rewarded each servant’s faithfulness. Our Lord is more interested in how faithfully we serve than how many talents we have.

We often err like Samuel who, when considering who God would choose among the sons of Jesse to be anointed king, looked at appearances and abilities. But the Lord had to instruct him and us, “For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the

LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). This means, dear parents and teachers, that the Lord is not searching for who is the most gifted parent and most talented teacher. He looks at our hearts. He searches for a serving heart—for one that serves faithfully.

We should be encouraged when we think about this and when we read God’s Word, “how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:26–29).

Dear parent and teacher, God will indeed reward your labors—not because you were so wise or great in the world’s eyes, but because by God’s graciously given faith you served faithfully. It is not the great things you did that count, but the real things. It is the little things in daily life that really matter in the end. Children and students learn more from our daily example and teaching than from great accomplishments we once achieved or some profound words of wisdom we once uttered. Therefore, parents, what an encouragement to serve faithfully! Keep your hands on the plow. Teachers, do not aim for recognition but for servant faithfulness; not for great things, but for real things.

All God’s faithful servants shall be rewarded. This includes parents and teachers. Yes, this will surprise them and they will ask, “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee in prison, and came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:37–40).

Dear parents and teachers, your reward shall exceed all your expectations! No wonder we will cast our crowns at our Savior’s feet (Rev. 4:10). Let this encourage you. Even the little things you do, in Christ’s name, will be graciously rewarded by Him.

Are you a rewarded parent, a graciously honored teacher?

James W. Beeke is an elder in the Chiliwack, B.C. Heritage Reformed Congregation and an international educational consultant.



The Separation of the Sheep from the Goats

READ: MATTHEW 25:31–46

Many of Christ's parables address the coming judgment. Think of the harvest of the tares (Matt. 13:24–30), the net of fish being divided (Matt. 13:47–52), and the unjust servant being handed over to the tormentors (18:23–35). This theme of judgment returns in Matthew 25. First we hear about the foolish virgins who are kept outside the wedding (vv. 10–12). Next, we hear of the man with the one talent cast into outer darkness (v. 30). Finally, we have a section that deals exclusively with the judgment, otherwise referred to as the parable of the sheep and goats (vv. 31–46). Strictly speaking, it is not a parable, but a prophecy with parable-like comparisons mixed in it. However, if this slight difference is understood, we may still classify it with the other parables.

The Scenery

There are several details that need to be addressed before moving to the interpretation of the parable. The first is the matter of context. The disciples asked in Matthew 24:3, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Far from giving them the answer they perhaps hoped for, Jesus highlights not so much *when* it will take place, but the *manner* of how it will take place. In chapter 25, he concludes the parable of the ten virgins by saying, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (v. 13). At the close of the parable of the talents, he encourages diligent use of the things God calls us to steward. Finally, the parable of the sheep and goats also serves as an indicator of how the end will come.

Secondly, there is the matter of the imagery. This parable harks back to Daniel 7:13–14 where Daniel receives a vision of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. Likewise here, Christ speaks of Himself coming "in his glory" to sit on "the throne of his glory" (v. 31) for a universal judgment. The imagery used of the sheep and the goats is important. Several questions surface concerning the use of sheep and goats. Why these two animals? Is this a common illustration used from everyday life (cf. v. 32)? Why are the sheep on the right and the goats on the left?

The latter point is the easier to answer. According to works of antiquity, the right hand was the place of honor and the left hand was reserved for those who did not have the special favor of the king or emperor.

The former point takes longer to answer. We can say that the term "sheep" is often reserved for the people of God throughout the whole Bible (cf. Isa. 53:6; Jer. 23:1; John 10). In Israel, many herds included both sheep and goats; nevertheless, the shepherd would divide the sheep and goats at the end of the day. Goats are known for being playful and fun; however, they are also harmful and destructive. You can tell where a goat has been because he leaves a path of destruction behind him. The book of Daniel uses the figure of a goat for worldly power that is a destructive force (see Dan. 8:5–8). Sheep will only eat grass, but goats will try to chew on whatever they can. Goats need to be tied up in the night; otherwise, they will wreak havoc among the sheep. They try to dominate the sheep if they can. They play tricks and will try to delude. Sheep can lose the way, but generally, they will listen to the voice of the shepherd. Usually with one gesture from the shepherd, they will form a flock and follow after the shepherd. Thus we can understand why God's people are compared to sheep and the wicked to goats.

It's important to note that we do not have an exhaustive picture of the judgment trial set before us here. The Bible sheds additional light on that elsewhere (e.g., Rev. 20:11–12). There is no explicit mention of Jesus' atoning work or forgiveness of sins, though the gospel is implied in statements such as "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The focus in this depiction of the judgment is the final, just, and perfect separation between the Lord's people and those who are not His.

The Substance

At one time Christ had come in humiliation for His earthly ministry, but in this parable Christ pictures Himself coming in glory with all the holy angels. As He is seated on His glorious throne, all the nations are gathered in front of Him. Like a shepherd at the end of a day, Christ divides the flock into two parts: the sheep and the goats.

The parable emphasizes separation.

Throughout time, worldly people have mingled among God's true people like goats among sheep. Here, the two are finally separated. It's true that in a way the goats and sheep were already separated when God effectually called His sheep and saved them. That was a separation *by grace*.

Moreover, there is also a separation at death as it pertains to *the intermediate state*. Between the righteous and the wicked, there is a great gulf fixed at death (Luke 16:26). But the separation in our text begins the *final separation*, in which the wicked and the righteous will never again be seen together. The wicked will go into everlasting darkness, while the righteous shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:46).

To His people, Christ will say, “Come.” To hypocrites and worldlings, He will say, “Depart.” God’s people are “blessed of my Father”; unbelievers are addressed as “ye cursed.” God’s people inherit a kingdom “prepared from the foundation of the world”; the wicked join the devil and his angels in the fire. In God’s book, you are either one or the other.

The parable emphasizes communion.

There are a number of ways in which this parable emphasizes communion. Notice, first of all, how Christ identifies Himself with His suffering people. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these *my brethren*, ye have done it unto *me*.” He is their Elder Brother and they are part of His family. Moreover, what they do to other “family members,” they are doing to Him. Clearly, the impression Christ’s words give is that the world is not a hospitable place to God’s children, just as it wasn’t to Christ Himself. And yet, despite all that, Christ is *with* and *in* His people.

This communion also shows itself in the lives and character of Christ’s people. Christ lifts up actions that display hearts filled with merciful kindness, just as His (vv. 35–40). Without ostentation or calculation, they show the “mind of Christ” through a heart of love that seeks to help and provide for others in the family of God. How can we account for this other than by pointing to the mercy of God flowing to them from Christ, their Head? It then flows from them to each other.

Finally, this communion will prove to be a lasting communion. Christ invites His people into communion with Him forever: “Come,” He says (v. 34). He welcomes them into the kingdom of His Father, where He as Elder Brother leads them into everlasting fellowship and joy with the Father, Himself, and the Holy Spirit, together with the whole redeemed family of God.

The parable emphasizes condemnation.

Christ’s response to the goats seals their condemnation. First, we note that their lives condemn them in that they reveal an absence of communion with the Savior. “Ye gave me no meat.... Ye gave me no drink.... Ye took me not in.... Ye clothed me not.... Ye visited me not” (vv. 42–44). Christ sums up how their lives were entirely graceless. The repeated “not” reveals that the language of their lives was one of rejecting the Savior.

Second, their speech condemns them before the Lord: “When saw we thee a hungred,” etc. (v. 44). Even though the righteous give the same response, their actions showed how their hearts had been captivated by the Lord, whether they understood the significance of what they were doing or

not. The wicked, however, both by their actions and in their response, show how they were entirely blind to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, Christ Himself condemns them to eternal destruction in hell. “Depart,” He says (v. 41). All their lives they had told the Lord to depart from them; now He sends them away from whatever they still enjoyed into the awful and endless pain, misery, and punishment of hell.

The Savior

Christ reveals Himself in two particular relationships in this parable. The first relationship is that Christ is King and Judge over all the nations. It is worth meditating for a moment on Christ’s office as Judge. Proverbs 20:8 says, “A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.” The One whom people like to think of exclusively as “meek and lowly” is also a great and glorious King who has ascended His majestic throne and will sit in judgment over the nations. The look of this Christ will be enough to cause all the unrighteous to be vanquished, whether they have masqueraded as sheep or not. He executes justice and judgment.

Second, Jesus is the Head, Brother, and Vindicator of His people. All three of these relationships are present in this text. What a magnificent thought that Jesus, who exercises the right of Judge, is not content to portray Himself simply as a distant sovereign, but is bound to His people as their Head and their Brother! If Joseph did not hide his affection for his brothers in the court of judgment (Gen. 45:1–15), Christ’s love for His people will be infinitely more radiant. More specifically, Christ’s use of the term “brethren” (v. 40) reminds us that He was made like His brethren, and that He is not ashamed to call His people His brethren (Heb. 2:11–12). He became like us that we might be made like Him. Christ’s identification with His brethren highlights the deep significance of His mediatorial office. Because He took their condemnation on the cross, Christ can also vindicate them before all the world and induct them into the eternal inheritance of His Father. He was made the sacrificial sheep, slaughtered for the sins of His brethren, that they might share in His glory forever with Him as their Shepherd.

The Searchlight

This parable searches us in several ways.

- *It searches our lives.* The day that Christ will judge all nations without exception has been appointed. Each man, woman, boy, or girl who has ever existed has a day in court—one day for everyone. God is the Judge and this will be the final judgment. There will be no appeals. Whatever injustice has been committed against God must receive redress. Do we live in light of this?
- *It searches our hearts.* The judgment does not draw attention to huge feats of self-sacrifice or headline-grabbing donations. It mentions hunger, thirst, shelter, clothing, visitation—small evidences of a life that is constrained

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PRAYERFUL PRAYING:

Taking Hold of Yourself and God in Prayer (1)

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

This article is the first of two adapted from the closing chapter of a new book, Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer, edited by Joel R. Beeke and Brian G. Najapfour. Six writers explore the writings and prayer lives of several Reformers and Puritans—among them Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, William Perkins, Matthew Henry, and Jonathan Edwards—seeking to guide us to growth in prayer and a more intimate and grateful communion with God.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. —JAMES 5:17

The Scripture says Elijah “prayed earnestly.” The KJV marginal notes provide the alternate translation that the prophet “prayed in his prayer.” In other words, his prayers were more than a formal exercise; he poured himself into his praying. Bible commentator Alexander Ross says that idiom communicates intensity: “A man may pray with his lips and yet not pray with an intense desire of the soul.”¹ You might call it “prayerful praying.”

After studying the prayer lives of the Reformers and Puritans, I am convinced that the greatest shortcoming in today’s church is the lack of such prayerful prayer. We fail to use heaven’s greatest weapon as we should. Personally, domestically, and congregationally, the prayer we engage in is often more prayerless than prayerful. One-half of our calling as ministers and elders is prayer (Acts 6:4), but in reality we spend no more than 5 percent of our time in prayer. All Christians are called to pray (Col. 4:2). Is anything more essential, yet more neglected, among us than prayer?

The giants of church history dwarf us in true prayer. Is that because they were more educated, were less distracted by cares and duties, or lived in more pious times? No; undoubtedly, what most separates them from us is that prayer was their priority; they devoted considerable time and energy to it. They were prayerful men who knew how to take hold of God in prayer (Isa. 64:7), being possessed by the Spirit of grace and supplication. They were Daniels in private and public prayer.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) spent the best two hours of every day alone with God.² Luther’s prayer life was legendary. When he was facing a day that was particularly challenging, Luther told his friends, “I have so much scheduled for tomorrow I must pray for that I must arise an hour earlier to have an extra hour alone with God.” On another occasion, Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560), Luther’s most able and trusted assistant, overheard Luther praying aloud as was his

custom, for Luther said he wanted even the Devil to hear what he was praying. Melancthon exclaimed, “Gracious God! What faith! What spirit! What reverence, and yet with what holy familiarity did Master Martin pray!” Yet such prayer took tremendous effort and self-discipline. Luther readily confessed, “Praying comes close to being the most difficult of all works.”³ Though people unacquainted with spiritual praying may think it is easy to recite a few words to God, Luther said, “Prayer is a difficult matter and hard work. It is far more difficult than preaching the Word or performing other official duties in the church.... This is the reason why it is so rare.”⁴

We must strive to grow in prayer. John Welsh (1568–1622) of Ayr, the God-fearing son-in-law of John Knox, prayed seven hours a day. He confessed, “I wonder how a Christian could lie in his bed all night, and not rise to pray.” He kept his robe close to his bed because a night seldom passed when he did not rise to commune with his God in a private room. Often his wife would find him praying and weeping after midnight. When she encouraged him to come back to bed out of fear he would catch cold, Welsh responded, “Oh, my dear wife, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them!”

Our prayerlessness is the more tragic because of the tremendous potential of prayer. The Puritan Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) wrote, “Ah! How often, Christians, hath God kissed you at the beginning of prayer, and spoke peace to you in the midst of prayer, and filled you with joy and assurance, upon the close of prayer!”⁵ The wife of Joseph Alleine said of her husband:

At the time of his health, he did rise constantly at or before four of the clock, and on the Sabbath sooner, if he did wake. He would be much troubled if he heard smiths, or shoemakers, or such tradesmen, at work at their trades before he was in his duties with God; say-

ing to me often, “O how this noise shames me! Doth not my Master deserve more than theirs?” From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms, which he much delighted in, and did daily practice alone, as well as in his family.⁶

Let us consider the problem of prayerlessness, before we consider some solutions in a future article. If we are faithful in our efforts to acquire more of the gift and grace of true prayer, we can be sure God will help us to “take hold of him” (Isa. 64:7).

The Problem of Prayerless Praying

Let each of us begin with ourselves. Does our personal use of the weapon of prayer bring us shame rather than glory? Is prayer the means by which we storm the throne of grace and take the kingdom of heaven by violence? Is it a missile that crushes satanic powers, or is it like a harmless toy that Satan sleeps beside?

We ministers are usually more concerned about our sermons and what our listeners think of them than what and how we pray. As laypeople, we are usually more concerned about communicating with others than with God. Where is our prayerful passion for the presence of God?

Our prayer life is often “closed for repairs,” though little repair work seems to get done. Good intentions surface from time to time, but, as the saying goes, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Good intentions without repentance and persevering implementation of better habits lead only to further deterioration and unfruitfulness.

When our prayer life is boarded up, everything else begins to shut down. How can we live to God outside the prayer closet when we so seldom meet Him in the closet? In that tepid condition, we often mistake prayerless praying for prayerful praying. We forget that in both we come with empty hands to God’s throne. Prayerless praying, however, comes with listless hands, while prayerful praying clings with one hand to heaven’s footstool and with the other to Calvary’s cross, stirring itself “to take hold” of God (Isa. 64:7). Prayerless praying freezes before reaching heaven, while prayerful praying pierces heaven and warms the soul.

What is the condition of your prayer life? Perhaps you have never experienced a powerful prayer life. You may repeat words of prayer in a religious meeting or over a meal. You may express yourself in elegant words or the stock phrases of conventional piety and yet be a prayerless person. You may cry out to God for some pressing need but never possess the Spirit of prayer. Prayer is the soul’s breath to God in faith, hope, and love. Does your soul ever pant after God in Christ? If not, your spiritual life is lifeless. If you are prayerless in your prayer, you are still dead in your sins. You must cry out to God in repentance, begging Him to make you alive in Christ.

Perhaps you once prayed in your prayers but your need for such prayer has grown dull. Backsliding usually begins

in the inner closet of prayer. You looked forward to times of prayer. You longed to be alone with the Lord, to pour out your heart to Him with all its needs, confessions, vows, thanksgivings, and praises. You spread those before the Lord with eagerness as if He knew nothing about you, and yet with the consciousness that He knew you better than you know yourself.

But gradually your prayer life began to disintegrate. Even before you were aware of it, your prayers became more a matter of words than heart-to-heart communion with God. Form and coldness replaced holy necessity. Before long, you dropped your morning prayer. It no longer seemed critical to meet with God before you met with people. Then you shortened your prayer at bedtime. Other concerns broke in on your time with God. Throughout the day, prayer all but vanished. Previously, you prayed less on your knees throughout the day than you did with your eyes open — on the road, at work or school, or wherever you went — because most of your prayers were spontaneous.

Perhaps formality and deadness in prayer have replaced power and access to God, causing the omission of prayer to seem more reverent than engaging in prayer. “My knees are still bowed, but where is my love, urgency, necessity, and dependency on God?” we ask. “Where are the ongoing intercessory petitions for my family and the church?”

The confessions of Thomas Adam (1701–1784) may resonate with you in this condition:

I pray faintly, and with reserve, merely to quiet conscience, for present ease, almost wishing not to be heard.... Prayer and other spiritual exercises are often a weariness to me; a task, and a force upon nature. I am too well pleased with pretenses for omitting them; and when they are over, I feel myself at ease, as it were, like after the removal of a heavy weight.... Whenever I attempt to pray for others, I am soon made sensible that I do it in a cold, heartless manner; a plain indication that love is not at the bottom. It is an awful moment when the soul meets God in private, to stand the test of His all-searching eye.⁷

We must confront our prayerless praying, confess it to God, and plead for the renewal of our souls in recognizing the value of prayer. Charles Bridges (1794–1869) particularly speaks to pastors about the need for revival in prayer, based on Acts 6:4, “We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” He wrote:

Prayer is one half of our Ministry; and it gives to the other half all its power and success. It is the appointed medium of receiving spiritual communications for the instruction of our people. Those who walk most closely with God are most spiritually intelligent in “the secret of his covenant.” Many can set their seal to Luther’s testimony, that he often obtained more knowledge in

a short time by prayer, than by many hours of laborious and accurate study. It will also strengthen our habitual engagedness of our hearts in our work, and our natural exercises and capacities for it. Living near to the fountain-head of influence, we shall be in the constant receipt of fresh supplies of light, support, and consolation—to assist us in our duties, to enable us for our difficulties, and to assure us of our present acceptance, and a suitable measure of ultimate success.⁸

Prayer is no less important for laypeople. How can you find a godly mate, raise your children in the Lord, and do your work for the glory of God without prayerful prayer? All things in life, from marriage to meals down to the hour of death, are sanctified by prayer and the Word (1 Tim. 4:4–5). Petitions are our sails, and the Spirit provides the wind. Without the Spirit, our prayers are prayerless, and prayerless praying results in lifeless living. Prayer is the thermometer of our spiritual condition.

1. Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 102.
2. Andrew Kosten, translator's introduction to *Devotions and Prayers of Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 5.
3. Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1081 [3451].
4. *Ibid.*, 1088 [3476, 3478].
5. Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1861–1867; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 2:369.
6. Richard Baxter, et al., *The Life and Letters of Joseph Alleine* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003), 106.
7. Thomas Adam, *Private Thoughts on Religion* (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins, 1824), 68, 73, 76.
8. Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry with an Inquiry into the Causes of Its Inefficiency*, 3rd ed. (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1830), 193.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke is president and professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

REV. JOHNNY C. SERAFINI

[The Spirit] writes our petitions in the heart, we offer them; he indites a good matter, we express it. That prayer which we are to believe will be accepted, is the work of the Holy Ghost; it is his voice, motion, operation, and so his prayer. Therefore, when we pray he is said to pray, and our groans are called his.

— DAVID CLARKSON



The Puritans on the Help of the Holy Spirit in Prayer 2

THE SPIRIT'S HELP IN THE MANNER OF OUR PRAYING

We must also be concerned with having the right frame of heart in prayer, so that, as Paul says, we may pray “as we ought” to pray. As Boston said, “We cannot put our prayers in right shape, even when we are right as to the matter of them.... We cannot put our petitions in form, in the style of the court of heaven.”¹ Among many examples of the ways that we fail to pray in the right manner, Boston mentioned the following:

- 1) We may pray with an unfit spirit for prayer, “being either entangled with worldly cares, or discomposed with unruly passions.”
- 2) We can be lifeless, formal, and cold in prayer. Boston added, “We are called to be fervent in spirit.... But even where the fire of grace is in the hearth, unless

it be blown up by the influence of the Spirit of God, the prayers will be mismanaged.”

- 3) We have wandering hearts. “Many a prayer is lost this way,” wrote Boston, “while the heart steals away after some other thing than what it should then be on.”
- 4) We may exercise the gift without the grace, that is, without giving due thought to the “exercise of praying graces, reverence, faith, love, humility, etc.”
- 5) We pray disproportionately, for “how ready are we to be more concerned for our own interest, than for the honour of God; more fervent for temporal than for spiritual mercies.” This lack of right proportion “makes the prayers like legs of the lame that are not equal, the affections being disproportioned to the matter.”

- 6) We may be prone to faint, that is, to cease praying if a prayer is not answered, for “long trials are apt to run us out of breath.”²

Left to ourselves, these failings would describe the best part of our prayers. Carnal, cold, wandering, graceless, and self-centered prayers are too common among us. It is encouraging to know that although we will always labor under these infirmities, the Spirit is ever to be trusted to help us fight against them, both in giving us new godliness and in taking away the old ungodliness.

Pouring Godly Affections into the Heart

Before there are words or expressions, there has to be a sense of our obligation and need to pray, and the Spirit works this in us. Boston referred to this as the Spirit’s work in exciting us to pray. He wrote that the Spirit “impresses our spirit with a sense of a divine call to it, and so binds it on our consciences as duty to God... He disposes our hearts for it, inclines us to the duty, that we willingly comply with it.”³ Indeed, as Manton pointed out, the duty becomes a delight as He raises “our hearts to a desire after and a delight in God...and causeth the soul to follow hard after God.”⁴ “The Spirit’s work,” said Manton, “is to raise the heart to things eternal and heavenly, that our main business might be there.”⁵ There may be plenty of words without the Spirit’s help, but, as Manton wrote, “these lively motions and strong desires [are] from the Spirit of God.”⁶

Clarkson also spoke of the Spirit’s work of giving us a heart for prayer: “He prepares and disposes, incites and inclines the heart to make requests.... He puts the heart into a praying frame, and sometimes excites us so powerfully, as we cannot withhold from pouring out our souls before him.”⁷ Owen wrote, “It is he alone who worketh us unto that frame wherein we pray continually...our hearts being kept ready and prepared for this duty on all occasions and opportunities, being in the meantime acted and steered under the conduct and influence of those graces which are to be exercised therein.”⁸ Among what Owen called “animating principles of prayer,” which are all given us by the Spirit, are faith, love, trust, delight, desire, and self-abasement.⁹ Clarkson wrote that while the Spirit stirs the heart to pray, He also gives the emotions that suit the matter to be prayed for: “He stirs up affections in prayer suitable to the subject thereof, joy or sorrow, and love and delight, with earnest desires.... [He] fills the heart with affections.”¹⁰ Gurnall wrote, “As the strings under the musician’s hand stir and speak harmoniously, so doth the saint’s affections at the secret touch of the Spirit.”¹¹

The Puritans demonstrated that this help of the Spirit translates, in our experience, into “praying aright.”¹² For the Spirit to intercede is for Him to create in us “right” prayers. Boston explained that “right” is used not in a legal, moral, or rhetorical sense but in an evangelical sense — prayers containing “gospel graces” that Boston called “the soul and life of prayer.”¹³ Right prayers always have their origin in the Spirit, though much imperfection enters them from us. Boston said,

“The water comes pure from the fountain, the Spirit; but running through a muddy channel, such as every saint here is, it cannot be accepted in heaven, but as purified and sweetened by the intercession of Christ.”¹⁴ “All that is right in our prayers is the Spirit’s work,” said Boston, “and all that is wrong in them from ourselves, either as to matter or manner.” He concluded, “In the incense of our prayers there is smoke that goes up toward heaven, ashes that remain behind on earth; it is the fire from the altar that sends up smoke, it is the earthly nature of the incense that occasions the ashes.”¹⁵

The Spirit stirs our hearts. He excites those “graces in us which incline us to God; he raiseth our minds in the vision and sight of God,” wrote Manton.¹⁶ The Spirit “stirreth up in us ardent groans in prayer, or worketh up our hearts to God with desires expressed by sighs and groans.”¹⁷ Elsewhere Manton said, “He quickeneth and enliveneth our desires in prayer.”¹⁸ The Spirit takes the knowledge of God and uses it to fill us with the love of God, confidence in Him as our Father, and the fear of the Lord. Owen wrote that the “Holy Spirit gives the soul of a believer a *delight in God* as the *object of prayer*” and explained, “Without it ordinarily the duty is not accepted with God, and is a barren, burdensome task unto them by whom it is performed.”¹⁹

Romans 8:26 says that the Spirit helps with “groanings which cannot be uttered.” What are these groanings? Whose groanings are they? The common Puritan interpretation of Romans 8:26 attributed such groanings to the person praying by the help of the Holy Spirit, and not immediately to the Holy Spirit²⁰ (compare Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6). Boston explained the groans as the natural expression of the believer’s soul living under external and internal afflictions: “Such is the imperfection of our state in this life, that if there is life in a soul, it must groan, because there is no escaping of pressures, from an evil world without, and an evil heart within.”²¹ Sin is the greatest cause of groaning in the Christian. Boston said, “This is a light burden to the most part of mankind, but it is the heaviest burden to a child of God, and causes in him, through the Spirit, the heaviest groans. For it is of all things the most contrary and opposite to the new nature in him.”²² In such groaning we experience fellowship with the suffering Savior, as Boston observed: “True Christians... will be found to resound as an echo to a groaning Saviour.”²³

Audible groans or even the silent groans of the soul may not seem impressive as a prayer. But Gurnall said, “It is a voice well understood [in heaven], and more musical in God’s ear than the most ravishing music can be to ours.”²⁴ Just as a child cries out as an expression of his trust that his father will hear and care, so the Spirit causes these groanings in our soul, mixed with trust that our heavenly Father will hear and understand them as our cries for His help. Such groanings are, in essence, the living confession of the believer’s faith in a prayer-hearing God. Clarkson said that the Spirit “fills the heart with affections and motions, as manifest themselves by sighs and groans, and cannot otherwise be expressed... so full

of affectionate workings as it cannot find vent by words.”²⁵ So we can agree with Traill, who said, “There is more of the Spirit in a sensible groan, than in many formal words of prayer.”²⁶

William Perkins (1558–1602) expressed the comfort we should have in such help:

Men in extremities of danger confounded in themselves know not what in the world to say, or do. In his sickness, Hezekiah could not say anything, but chatter in his throat, and mourn like a dove, Isa. 38:14. Some lie under the sword of the enemy, others in a tempest are cast over shipboard into the sea. Now this must be their comfort, if they can lift up their heart unto God, if they can but sigh and groan for his presence and assistance, the Lord will hear the petitions and their hearts: for their inward sobs, groans, and sighs of repentant sinners, are loud and strong cries in the ears of God the Father.²⁷

Removing Ungodly Attitudes from the Heart

The Spirit removes what is present in the heart that is not conducive to right praying. Thus Clarkson spoke of the Spirit’s work in removing “that backwardness, averseness, indisposedness, that is in us naturally unto this spiritual service.”²⁸ “He removes,” said Clarkson, “or helps the soul against distempers which are ready to seize on the soul in prayer, distractions, straitness of heart, indifferency, formality, lukewarmness, hypocrisy, weariness, pride, self-confidence.”²⁹ Flavel wrote, “It is he that humbles the pride of their hearts, dissolves, and breaks the hardness of their hearts; out of deadness makes them lively; out of weakness makes them strong.”³⁰

The Scriptures speak to the need of committing to prayer the things that would make us anxious (Phil. 4:6), but these are the very things that quench a trusting, prayerful spirit in our hearts. Gratefully, the Spirit comes to the aid of the troubled heart. Boston spoke of this help during prayer: “He frames the heart, that is out of frame for it; commands a heavenly calm in the soul, whereby it may be fitted for divine communications; saying to the heart tossed with temptations, troubles and risings of corruption, ‘Peace and be still’; and he blows up the fire of grace into a flame, 2 Tim. 1:7.”³¹ Thus, the Spirit helps by overcoming those “distempers of the soul” that might otherwise keep us from praying at all.

Another inward obstacle to prayer is wandering thoughts. We tend not to regard wandering thoughts as a serious sin. However, as Boston said, “The Spirit convinces and humbles the soul under the sense of that sin, and so makes it more serious than before, from thence shewing the corruption of nature.”³² The Spirit also manages the heart in prayer by keeping it from wanderings, “for the heart itself is apt to wander off from the serious purpose, and the powers of hell exert themselves to divert from it. But the supply of the Spirit in prayer keeps the heart fixed.”³³ We must ourselves fight against this tendency to let our thoughts wander, but the Spirit helps us in that fight: “It will always cost a struggle

to hedge in the heart in duty, and the help of the Spirit is necessary to maintain the struggle.”³⁴

Yet another failing in prayer is giving up too quickly. We do not only need to prepare our hearts to pray, but we also need to persevere in praying. The Spirit helps us do this too. “He causes us to continue in prayer from time to time,” wrote Boston, “till we obtain a gracious answer; and so makes us pray perseveringly.” He continued, “The Lord may keep his people long hanging on for an answer ere they get it. The promise may be big with the mercy prayed for, and yet it be not only many months but years ere it bring forth, as in the case of Abraham and David. This is a sore trial, and there would be no keeping from fainting if the Spirit did not help our infirmity. But he helps to hang on.”³⁵

We all know perseverance is necessary in prayer, for often good requests, such as the salvation of loved ones, may go years unanswered. Boston presented three graces that the Spirit works in us during the time a prayer goes unanswered:

- 1) *Satisfaction*. The Spirit satisfies us in His delay by accounting for it in a consistent way with “God’s honor and our good.... And so he keeps up in us kind thoughts of God’s dispensations.”
- 2) *Strength*. The Spirit strengthens faith and hope, “Hangers on at the throne of grace may get a long stand, but they will get their strength renewed, Psalm 27:13–14.” Boston explained that the Spirit does this “by shining anew on the promise; adding other promises to it tending to the same scope;...whereby the soul is refreshed in the time; and helping to observe the signs of the approaching day while yet the night continues.”
- 3) *Sensitivity*. The Spirit sensitizes our spirit to our continuing need, “which, pinching us anew, obliges to renew our suit for relief until the time we get it.” We respond, as do our senses to other stimuli, to the Spirit’s prodding, recognizing that prayer must continue although unanswered. As the eye senses light, so the Spirit helps our soul sense the need for prayer.³⁶

Without help from God, after a long time of prayer we would be tempted to seek help “from another quarter,” wrote Boston, and “our sense of need would wear off, and we would drop our petition. But the Spirit perfects what he begins; Psalm 138:8, ‘The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.’”³⁷ Thus the Spirit helps by keeping us hopeful, trusting we do not plead in vain, keeping us sensing our need of that for which we pray so that we faint not in praying for it.

Therefore by imparting gracious affections to the heart and by overcoming our infirmities, the Holy Spirit helps us to pray “as we ought.” In sum, it is His office as “the Giver of life” (John 6:63) to impart life to prayers that would otherwise be dead and barren. Boston wrote, “A prayer without life is as incense without fire, which sendeth forth no perfume or sweet savour.”³⁸ With His assistance, our prayers become fragrant and acceptable to the Father, prayers He will both hear and answer.

CONCLUSION: A MANY-SIDED WORK

The help of the Spirit in prayer is all encompassing. Truly the Christian prays “in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18), for when he prays he finds the Spirit’s help on every side. Flavel wrote that the Holy Spirit helps us *before* prayer by working upon the desires and affections; He helps *during* prayer by providing the right requests, “teaching them what they should ask of God,” as well as by instilling the right manner of prayer, “supplying them with suitable affections, and helping them to be sincere in all their desires to God”; and He helps *after* prayer, “helping them to faith and patience, to believe and wait for the returns and answers of their prayer.”³⁹ This many-sided work of the Spirit shows that true prayer is more than a matter of the words we might utter. True prayer is related to a whole way of life, for our prayer life is an extension of our life in Christ. It is not an isolated devotion we offer as a mere duty, but a breathing after God as we praise, thank, ask, and extol our great God. So we need the Spirit to breathe upon every aspect of our lives if we are to pray with understanding and faith, to pray according to God’s will, to pray fervently and effectually, to pray always and not faint.

Praying in the Spirit is both an absolute necessity and one of the great privileges of the children of God. Owen said of prayer, “If we are left unto ourselves, without the especial guidance of the Spirit of God, our aims will never be suited unto the will of God.”⁴⁰ Without the help of the Spirit, our attempts to pray would make us, as Boston put it, “like dumb [deaf-mute] people making a roar.”⁴¹ On the other hand, what a glorious thing it is to draw help in prayer from the resources of the Spirit of God, for if our prayers are Spirit wrought, they shall be heaven bound!

1. Boston, *Works*, 11:21.

2. *Ibid.*, 11:48–50.

3. *Ibid.*, 11:61.

4. Manton, *Works*, 1:351.

5. *Ibid.*, 11:443.

6. *Ibid.*, 12:234.

7. Clarkson, *Works*, 3:208.

8. Owen, *Works*, 4:259.

9. *Ibid.*, 4:269.

10. Clarkson, *Works*, 3:209.

11. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 2:488–89.

12. Boston, *Works*, 11:55.

13. *Ibid.*, 11:55–56.

14. *Ibid.*, 11:60.

15. *Ibid.*, 11:59.

16. Manton, *Works*, 1:351.

17. *Ibid.*, 12:226.

18. *Ibid.*, 12:234.

19. Owen, *Works*, 4:291.

20. Traill, *Works*, 1:73; Boston, *Works*, 11:21; Gill, *Exposition*, 8:492.

21. Boston, *Works*, 11:73.

22. *Ibid.*, 11:76.

23. *Ibid.*, 11:74.

24. Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 2:489.

25. Clarkson, *Works*, 3:209.

26. Traill, *Works*, 1:73.

27. William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1613), 3:279.

28. Clarkson, *Works*, 3:208.

29. *Ibid.*, 3:210.

30. Flavel, *Works*, 2:339.

31. Boston, *Works*, 11:67.

32. *Ibid.*, 11:68.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 11:68–69.

38. *Ibid.*, 12:234.

39. Flavel, *Works*, 2:338–39.

40. Owen, *Works*, 4:276.

41. Boston, *Works*, 11:20.

Rev. Johnny C. Serafini is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Kinnelon, New Jersey.

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by the love of Christ. We can all think of times when we have neglected the oppressed, the widowed, the poor, or the hungry.

- *It searches our confidence.* Let no one imagine that this parable allows us to put confidence in works, even after grace. If anything, the righteous in this parable are oblivious to their works. Our hope can only be in Christ and His work on behalf of sinners. This parable drives us outside of ourselves to the One who can give us what we need both now and when that great day comes! How much need we have of this Mediator, Head, Brother, and Vindicator. We need His blood, righteousness, presence, and renewing Spirit, so that we will meet an Elder Brother and Friend, not only a Judge.

Questions:

1. How does Christ’s Second Coming help us understand His first coming? What would happen to our

lives if we thought as much of the Second Coming as we do the first?

2. As He tells this parable, Christ is about to enter into His sufferings and death (see Matt. 26:1). What significance does this give to this parable?

3. Look carefully at all the things this parable says about heaven and hell. Since the devil knows he is going to hell, you might think unbelievers would know it as well. Why is this not the case?

4. Many have used this parable to promote a social gospel, saying that our good works, especially for the poor and needy, will count in the judgment. What is your response?

5. What does this parable leave us to feel and do?

Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes is Professor of Old and New Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Free Reformed churches of North America.

REFLECTING SIN:

The Pedagogical Use of the Law



EXPERIENTIAL CHRISTIANITY
DR. DAVID MURRAY

“Ouch!” That first look in the mirror every morning doesn’t get any easier, does it? In fact, I’d rather do without looking in mirrors at all. And I might get away with it—for a few days. Because, although I wouldn’t know my hair was looking like a mohawk, that yesterday’s ketchup was still on my chin, or that last night’s basil was lodged between my front teeth, my wife and children would, and so would my employer and colleagues. And that might well have more painful consequences—socially and even financially—than just looking in the mirror. So, although it is humbling, and sometimes horrifying, I still meet up with my mirror every morning. It sends me to my hairbrush, my shaver, my toothbrush, and my soap.

Similarly, although we may not always enjoy reading or hearing God’s law, we must keep reading and preaching it because it reveals His holy standards, highlights our desperate need (which is humbling and horrifying), and sends us to God’s gracious remedy—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But imagine that you stumbled into my bathroom one day and saw me scrubbing myself with the mirror or brushing my teeth with a small broken piece of it! Apart from shouting, “Stop! Are you mad?” I hope that you would also quickly convince me that while the mirror shows what needs cleaning, it is dangerous to do the cleaning with it. The attempt is doomed to fail, as it would only produce a bigger mess.

Well, that more or less sums up Paul’s ministry to the Galatian believers. They had been in the tortuous confines of Law Prison (Gal. 3:23), trying to earn release with their works of obedience. The law demanded and commanded, demanded and commanded. They tried and

failed, tried and failed. But despite the daily futility and failure, they couldn’t—or wouldn’t—dare stop trying.

Then, one day, the apostle Paul came and preached the gospel of a crucified Christ. He preached a Christ who had obeyed the law for sinners, a Christ who had suffered the penalties of a broken law, and a Christ who had abolished the Old Testament rituals and ceremonies by fulfilling them.

Many Galatians believed in Christ. Their chains fell off and they left the bondage of Law Prison behind to enjoy a new world of freedom and liberty. Who would ever give that up?

Tragically, the Galatians did. Under the influence of Judaizing false teachers, they reverted to salvation by the law. Paul wrote with great urgency to remind them of how Christ set them free by faith (3:1–3). The law had a role, but it was a preparatory role, not a final goal. The law was “our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (vv. 25–26).

God commonly shows us ourselves in the mirror of His law before pointing us to the gospel of His grace. The mirror is good and useful, so long as it is used as a mirror and not as soap and water. That’s when mirrors become dangerous. Let’s look at this mirror of God’s law more closely that we might use it rightly.

God’s law is a constant mirror. With the passing of time, some mirrors lose their sharpness and brightness. Others get damaged and cracked. But God’s moral law never changes, never fluctuates, and never “cracks,” no matter how many years pass or how many stones are thrown at it. God’s moral standards are the same today as they were on day one in Eden.

One of the reasons why human law changes so much is because human law is always flawed. It always leaves loopholes that require constant addition and amendment. But God's law is perfect. It gives us a flawless picture of God's perfections and of our imperfections. Some mirrors may flatter us. But this mirror gives us a constantly accurate picture of our spiritual state. The law gives us knowledge of our sin (Rom. 3:20).

God's law is a *complete* mirror. Most mirrors only show us parts of our bodies. Even full-length mirrors cannot show us our entire backparts. They certainly cannot show us what is inside us. But God's law can show us everything—inside and outside. It provides an x-ray into our hearts, motives, and aims.

This will not happen, however, without the Holy Spirit's work alongside the law. Without Him, God's law can be heard and repeated a thousand times without once reaching our hearts. For example, when Paul the apostle was Saul of Tarsus he regarded himself as an expert in divine law (Phil. 3:6). However, he had been studying it in the dark. One day the Holy Spirit came and "turned on the light," with a special spotlight on commandment ten. Until then, he said, he had not really known what sin was (Rom. 7:7). He had heard the tenth commandment many times, but not as he heard it that day. By the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, the law became a mirror that enabled him to see his own lust-filled heart.

God's law is a *condemning* mirror. When the Holy Spirit applies God's law to our consciences we not only feel uncomfortably guilty, we feel utterly condemned and doomed (Rom. 7:9).

As we have noted, Paul described the law as a "schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:24). The ESV translates this as "guardian." However, none of the English versions convey the original concept fully. The word refers to a specific role given to well-educated slaves by wealthy fathers in the Roman Empire. A father would commission such a slave to make sure that his child went to school, kept away from trouble and danger, and completed his studies. The father gave the slave full disciplinary rights over the child, and as the slave's own life depended on the success of the student, he was often quite brutal in ensuring the student's compliance.

It was therefore a huge relief for the student when he reached adulthood and was loosed from the slave to become a fully fledged member of the father's household. Paul is saying to the Galatians: "You are full members of the Father's household. Why do you want to go back to the harsh slave and his punishment?"

God's law is a *cross-shaped* mirror. God's moral law comprises more than the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments summarize God's moral principles, but these principles are also demonstrated and displayed else-

where: in God's providential judgments on nations and individuals, in the life and teaching of Christ, and more. But Christ's cross reveals God's law in an unprecedented way. Although the law sends us to the cross, the cross also sends us to the law. The old Scottish professor, James Buchanan, put it like this:

Does not the sinner now feel in his inmost soul, that if Sinai be dreadful, Calvary has its terrors too; that if "by the law is the knowledge of sin," the Gospel adds its sublime and harmonious commentary; that the cross of Christ is the most awful monument of Heaven's justice, the most solemn memorial of the sinner's danger.... The cross, the cross of a crucified Saviour, is the most powerful, the most impressive demonstration of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.

Buchanan's point here is that the cross magnifies and amplifies the law and carries home God's law into the conscience with massive power. At the cross, especially, I see what God thinks of my sin, what God will do with my sin, and what my sin really deserves. But, thankfully, Buchanan does not stop there:

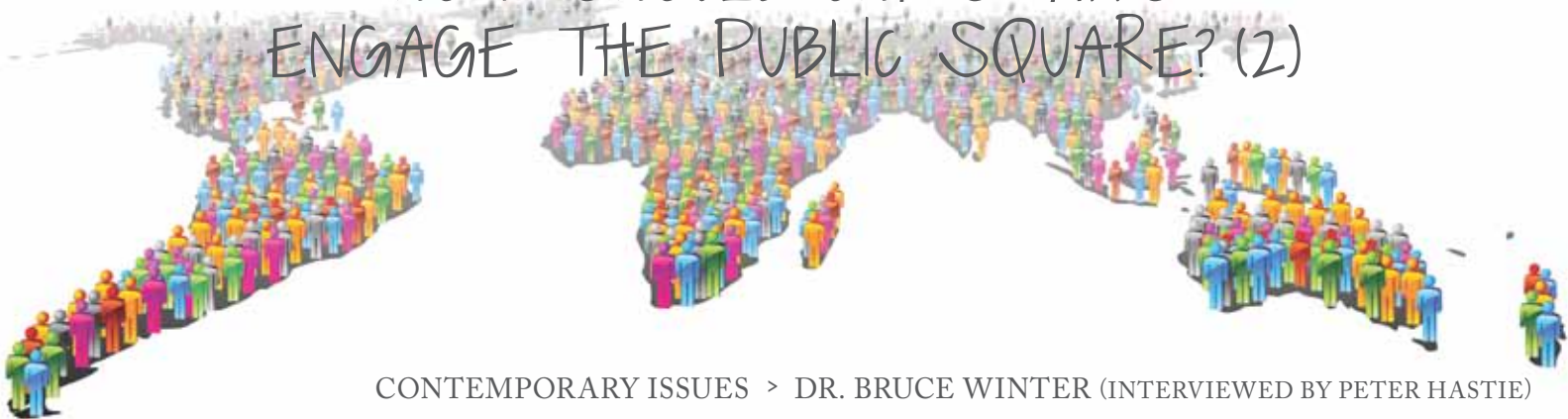
Look once more; for the same cross which wounds will also heal; the same conscience which is pierced by the arrows of conviction may be pacified by the Gospel of peace; and thus all that is terrible in the cross, when combined with the tenderness of God's mercy, and the amazing, the self-denying, the self-sacrificing love of the Savior, will then only awaken convictions in the conscience, to melt and change them into sweet contrition of heart.

The second use of the law is not to destroy us or to leave us in utter despair. It is to lead us step by step to Christ that we might seek His pardon. Feeling weak and empty-handed, we realize our need for mercy, apply for it, and rest in it. It does not send us to soap, shampoo, and toothpaste, but to the blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse us from sin. Unfortunately, one of the reasons why so many today are reaching for the ineffective soap and toothpaste of their own "good works," rather than turning to Christ, is that many preachers have hidden God's holy mirror under a large pile of seeker-sensitive, pew-filling, manpleasing strategies and excuses.

Let's get God's mirror out. Let's polish it. Let's face it. Let's be horrified and humbled by what we see in it. And let's be driven into the welcome embrace of Christ and the blood that washes us whiter than snow.

Dr. David Murray is Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Reprinted with permission from "Tabletalk."

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS ENGAGE THE PUBLIC SQUARE? (2)



CONTEMPORARY ISSUES > DR. BRUCE WINTER (INTERVIEWED BY PETER HASTIE)

DO WE HAVE ANY INDICATIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT CHRISTIANS WERE MEANT TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SOCIETY? FOR INSTANCE, DO THE APOSTLES TEACH A NEED FOR CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AND DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC LIFE?

Paul's statements in Romans 13 about Christians "render therefore to all their dues..." "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another" (13:7, 8) certainly talks of being a benefactor to one's community. Then, in Romans 16:23, we find the reference to a Christian, Erastus, who is the city treasurer of Corinth; Paul seems to speak approvingly of him. There is also the reference in Paul's letter to Titus where he makes the point that Christians are to devote themselves to good deeds. He says this repeatedly throughout the letter (2:14; 3:1; 3:8, and 3:14). The good works that Paul speaks about here are not simply a reference to specifically religious acts like prayer and Bible reading. They are an exhortation for Christians to be involved in doing good within the wider community.

WHAT EXACTLY IS MEANT BY "DOING GOOD"? IS IT RELATED SPECIFICALLY TO RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES OR DOES IT HAVE A WIDER REFERENCE?

I think it is meant to be understood in the wider sense so that it refers to our contribution to the community at large. In whatever context we find ourselves, we should be looking out for people in need. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that if someone is begging you for help, then you are to give to them (Matt. 5:42). Further, Paul makes it clear that God has created us to do good works. It is good for everyone in a community to be helping and looking out for the interests of others. Then, of course, we have Paul's exhortation in Titus 3:14, "Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." So, contrary to the thinking of many Christians, we should be involved in other people's lives and concerned to do what good we can. Everything that God did was good, and Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10:38), so as Christians we should be doing no less.

IS THERE ANY PARTICULAR REASON WHY THE APOSTLE PAUL STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WORKS TO TITUS WHILE HE WAS IN CRETE?

The culture in first-century Crete was very hedonistic. They were big drinkers and drunkenness and alcoholism were rife. They had drinking clubs to which people would bring fifteen gallons of wine, often once a month. It was also a sexually explicit culture in which people used dangerous aphrodisiacs, sometimes to the point of death. The general culture of Crete was highly promis-

cuous and self-indulgent and people were just concerned about themselves. It's not surprising that Paul tells Titus to give himself to the welfare of others and to be zealous for good works.

IS THERE SOME REASON WHY PAUL EXHORTS THE CHURCH TO BE DEVOTED TO GOOD WORKS BEFORE HE SAYS ANYTHING ABOUT DIRECT ONE-ON-ONE EVANGELISM? IS THAT A DELIBERATE STRATEGY IN PAUL'S MINISTRY?

Yes, I think that it is deliberate on Paul's part. He knows that people need to see the works before they take notice of our words. It's hard to impact a self-indulgent culture if we show no sign of being different. It was Nietzsche who said, "Christians have to show me they are redeemed before I will believe in their Redeemer." I think Nietzsche's comment is consistent with Paul's line of thinking. Of course, it is important that Christians must be sound in their doctrine, but we must also be focused on the lives of other people. It can have a remarkable impact if we do so.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN AREAS IN PUBLIC AND SOCIAL LIFE THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS IDENTIFY AS KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHRISTIANS TO MAKE SOME SORT OF CONTRIBUTION?

The New Testament shows Christians being concerned for the sick, the disabled, the troubled, as well as the care of the widows and orphans. Widows were people who had no one to support them; orphans and the hungry found themselves in the same position. In the Gospels, we frequently see Jesus showing compassion for people in these various predicaments. He was concerned to deal with need wherever it arose. It seems to me that Christians should be committed to that sort of focus.

IS THERE SOME UNDERLYING MOTIVE FOR CHRISTIANS TO SERVE IN THIS WAY, APART FROM THE SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF JESUS?

Yes, there is. Paul makes it clear that Christians are indebted to the mercies of God. Since we have been so wonderfully treated by God, there is a call upon us to adopt a different lifestyle which is focused on serving other people. There is a clear command in the New Testament that we must give a higher priority to the needs of others than our own. Paul emphasizes this in his letters to the Corinthian church where he reminds them that a Christian thinks in terms of responsibilities rather than rights. He says that he seeks to please others in everything he does. He does not seek his own advantage. Paul always seeks the advantage of other people in the hope that they may be saved. If people see

Christians' good works, then this may prompt them to realize that something supernatural is taking place because sacrificial conduct is so countercultural and contrary to human nature.

IN VARIOUS PERIODS OF CHURCH HISTORY, BELIEVERS HAVE WITHDRAWN FROM SOCIETY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS AND HAVE DEVOTED THEMSELVES EXCLUSIVELY TO CHURCH INTERESTS. DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS ON THIS TENDENCY IN LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

My understanding of the New Testament is that it doesn't regard the Christian church as a gated community. Christians are always concerned for the welfare of the outsider. Church buildings should always have doors that are open to the outsider so that they can come in and hear the gospel being preached and experience God's power and grace in the midst of the worship service. Paul hints in 1 Corinthians 14:25 that some unbelievers will be converted through this open door policy. This explains why the church must always welcome outsiders, and pastors must preach with passion.

It is true that there have been times when Christians have withdrawn from the culture altogether, and other times when they have become deeply involved in it, sometimes at the expense of the gospel. However, this doesn't mean to say that because there have been swings from one extreme to another there isn't a balance presented in the New Testament.

WE OCCASIONALLY HEAR CALLS WITHIN THE WIDER CHURCH THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD GET OUT OF THE WORK IN HOSPITALS, OR AGED CARE OR ADOPTION, AND FOCUS EXCLUSIVELY ON EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING. IS THIS A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE?

I find it hard to reconcile this suggestion with the deep sense of compassion that Jesus had for human need. If we call ourselves Christ's disciples, then we need to follow His teaching and example. Being Christ's disciple commits me to being concerned for people in need. I remember coming across a little girl in London who was begging. It almost moved me to tears when I thought that this was someone's daughter. I went and bought her lunch.

We should be ashamed that the church often seems so indifferent to people in genuine need. After all, God sends the rain to fall on the just and the unjust and constantly sustains the universe by His powerful word. Since the Lord cares for these people in His providence, we can't just say, "Our sole purpose is just to preach the gospel." Anyone who reads Paul's letter to Titus and 1 Peter knows how important good works are as pre-evangelism. Good works actually go hand in hand with preaching the gospel. Since God is good and merciful, we need to do these things hand in hand with preaching the good news.

HOW INVOLVED SHOULD CHRISTIANS BECOME IN SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES? ARE THERE CERTAIN LIMITS TO THEIR DIRECT INVOLVEMENT?

My own belief is that Christians, wherever they discover abuse or discrimination, should take up the cause of the weak. I know Christian lawyers who are deeply concerned about these questions of injustice. And so they should be. God is just and He hates unfairness. Indeed, any injustice invokes His anger and Christians should have a similar response to matters of injustice. If Christians are involved in particular callings where they have the opportunity to remedy injustice, they should do so.

I read a sermon that the English preacher Charles Simeon gave in 1803. Simeon preached to all the English judges on one occasion and stated that there are two things that are totally unchristian: first, the settling of disputes by duels in which people can be shot and killed, and second, slavery. Simeon had a very strong social conscience at that point. He and William Wilberforce fought hard for the abolition of slavery. I think Christians should be always concerned where issues of unfairness arise.

THE ANCIENT WORLD WAS A CORRUPT AND PAGAN SOCIETY. IT HAD EASY DIVORCE, ABORTION ON DEMAND, SLAVERY, AND PROSTITUTION. WHAT WAS THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE TO THESE FIRST-CENTURY PRACTICES?

The New Testament forbids Christians to be involved in any of these things. There were real temptations for Christians in the first century. In the Roman world, sexual immorality was regarded as part of one's manhood. Even in the church, many young men thought it was all right to use prostitution as an "after dinner" practice because it was regarded as acceptable in the wider society. When a man received his toga, these kinds of activities became normal. Many women in the first century did not look forward to pregnancy because they didn't want to be left with stretch marks, so they often chose abortions which were very dangerous.

OVER THE LAST THIRTY YEARS OR SO, MANY CHURCHES IN THE WEST HAVE BECOME ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN POLITICS AS THEY HAVE TRIED TO REDEEM THE CULTURE IN WHICH THEY ARE LIVING. TO WHAT EXTENT IS IT LEGITIMATE FOR A CHURCH TO BE INVOLVED IN POLITICS, OR SHOULD IT STAND APART FROM THE POLITICAL PROCESS?

I think there are some moral issues which are so serious and decadent that the church needs to speak out against them. The church should always be an advocate for the oppressed and those who are victims of abuse and unjust discrimination—for example, sex-trafficking. In some countries, there is evidence that women are specifically brought there and are caught up in the slavery of prostitution. I think Christians ought to be speaking up about that. It is an assault on the essential dignity of their humanity.

It is right for Christians to speak out on the great moral issues of the day. I would like to think that Christians are at the forefront of trying to solve the problem of abortion and helping those who have been caught up in it. I also think that Christians should be speaking out about God's concern for the created order. On the other hand, it is not enough to become preoccupied with transforming our culture so that we can call ourselves a Christian nation. I believe that will lead us to depart from the gospel perspective. Once we understand that the ultimate problem that we face is the coming wrath of God, handing out bandages and more money to alleviate social problems is not enough. Alongside doing good to neighbors we must, first and foremost, be preaching the gospel.

Dr. Bruce Winter is the principal of Queensland Theological College at the University of Queensland in St. Lucia, Brisbane. He has held this position since 2006 when he left Tyndale House, Cambridge, where he had served as warden since 1987 and as director of the Institute for Early Christianity in the Graeco-Roman World. He is also a Fellow of St. Edmund's College, University of Cambridge, and a visiting research fellow (2006–2011). This article is drawn from *The Australian Presbyterian*.



Matthew Henry on A Practical Method of Daily Prayer (2)

Joel R. Beeke

I love prayer. It is that which buckles on all the Christian's armour. —Matthew Henry

A Method for Praying the Scriptures

When a Christian devotes himself to prayer, whether privately or publicly, his prayers should be many because his burdens, concerns, needs, desires, and sins are many, and God's mercies are great, Henry said. This commends the use of some method in prayer. To be sure, there are times when a Christian's heart is so lifted up in prayer that a method is a hindrance. But those times are rare; ordinarily our prayers require method, for we do not want to speak rashly before "the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth." The Bible shows us that our prayers should consist of short, clear, potent sentences, such as those found in the Lord's Prayer, rather than a rambling stream of consciousness (or semi-consciousness) in which you forget what you are saying before your prayer is ended.

To help us form prayers that are better focused, Henry directs us to the source that is sufficient for every good work: the Holy Scriptures.¹ He said, "Hear [God] speaking to you, and have an eye to that in every thing you say to him; as when you write an answer to a letter of business, you lay it before you. God's word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your expectations in prayer."²

At the heart of Henry's method is praying in the words of Scripture—that is, praying God's Word back to God. O. Palmer Robertson wrote that "prayer in this form is nothing more and nothing less than what the old Puritans called 'pleading the promises.' God has made promises to his people. His people respond by redirecting those promises to the Lord in the form of prayer."³ Henry did not restrict himself entirely to Bible promises, however. Ligon Duncan notes of Henry, "He ransacks the Scriptures for references to God's attributes and turns them into matters of adoration."⁴ In every respect, Henry sought to fill the mouth of God's people with God's own words, although he acknowledged that "it is convenient, and often necessary, to use other expressions in prayer besides those that are purely Scriptural."⁵

Henry's method included adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, intercession for others, and a

conclusion. This pattern generally follows the Westminster Directory for Public Worship (1645).⁶ In each section, Henry briefly introduced the focus and gave an outline of its parts. Each point of the outline includes Scripture after Scripture woven together as possible expressions of prayer. Henry guarded readers against merely reading these prayers aloud without meditation, saying, "After all, the intention and close application of the mind, the lively exercises of faith and love, and the outgoings of holy desire toward God, are so essentially necessary to prayer, that without these in sincerity, the best and most proper language is but a lifeless image [i.e., a dead idol]."⁷ Henry clearly believed that our prayers should be expressed in words and phrases from the Bible that have penetrated our hearts.

Let us consider a small sample of Henry's method. Henry was first concerned that we pray in the fear of the Lord, saying, "In every prayer remember you are speaking to God, and make it to appear you have an awe of him upon your spirits. Let us not be 'rash with our mouth; and let not our heart be hasty to utter any thing before God;' but let every word be well weighed, because 'God is in heaven, and we upon earth,' Eccl. 5:2."⁸ Henry introduced the reader to the adoration of God:

Our spirits being composed into a very reverent serious frame, our thoughts gathered in, and all that is within us charged, in the name of the great God, carefully to attend the solemn and awful [awe-inspiring] service that lies before us, and to keep close to it; we must—with a fixed intention and application of mind, and an active lively faith—set the Lord before us, see his eye upon us, and set ourselves in his special presence; presenting ourselves to him as living sacrifices, which we desire may be holy and acceptable, and a reasonable service; and then bind those sacrifices with cords to the horns of the altar, with such thoughts as these....

Let us now with humble boldness enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, in the new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil.⁹

Henry then offered page after page of suggested prayers of adoration in scriptural language, arranged by topics. It is a study of the biblical doctrine of God turned into prayer. To appreciate the fullness of Henry's method, consider his outline of biblical materials to direct our adoration:

- I. Address the Infinitely Great and Glorious Being
 - A. With Holy Awe and Reverence
 - B. Distinguishing Him from False Gods
- II. Reverently Adore God as Transcendently Bright and Blessed
 - A. The Self-Existent, Self-Sufficient, Infinite Spirit
 - B. His Existence Indisputable
 - C. His Nature Beyond Our Comprehension
 - D. His Perfection Matchless
 - E. Infinitely Above Us and All Others

In particular, adore the Lord as:

 1. Eternal, Immutable
 2. Present in All Places
 3. Perfect in His Knowledge of All
 4. Unsearchable in Wisdom
 5. Sovereign, Owner, and Lord of All
 6. Irresistible in Power
 7. Unspotted in Purity and Righteousness
 8. Always Just in His Government
 9. Always True, Inexhaustibly Good
 10. Infinitely Greater Than Our Best Praises
- III. Give God the Praise of His Glory in Heaven
- IV. Give Him Glory as Our Creator, Protector, Benefactor, and Ruler
- V. Give Honor to the Three Distinct Persons of the Godhead
- VI. Acknowledge Our Dependence on Him and Obligation to Our Creator
- VII. Declare God to Be Our Covenant God Who Owns Us
- VIII. Acknowledge the Inestimable Favor of Being Invited to Draw Near to Him
- IX. Express Our Unworthiness to Draw Near to God
- X. Profess Our Desire for Him as Our Happiness
- XI. Profess Our Hope and Trust in His All-Sufficiency
- XII. Ask God to Graciously Accept Us and Our Poor Prayers
- XIII. Pray for the Assistance of the Holy Spirit in Our Prayers
- XIV. Make the Glory of God as the Highest Goal of Our Prayers
- XV. Profess Our Reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ Alone.¹⁰

Each point of the outline includes several prayers drawn from the Scriptures. For example, one prayer under the topic of God's matchless perfection is, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"¹¹ In the section on professing hope in God's sufficiency, Henry wrote, "In thee, O God, do we put our trust, let us never be ashamed; yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed. Truly our souls wait upon God, from him cometh our salvation; he only is our rock and our salvation! In him is our glory, our strength, and our refuge, and from him is our expectation."¹²

In adoration of God's power, he wrote, "We know, O God, that thou canst do every thing.... Power belongs to thee; and with thee nothing is impossible. All power is thine, both in heaven and on earth. Thou killest and thou makest alive, thou woundest and thou healest, neither is there any that can deliver out of thy hand. What thou hast promised thou art able also to perform."¹³

Other sections such as confession and petition also have detailed outlines. Henry's method would give remarkable depth and variety to our prayers if we consulted his book regularly for guidance. His method would deliver our prayers from bland repetition and thoughtless irreverence. It would help us become more specific as well as more brokenhearted in our confession of sin, leading us to pray: "We have not had the rule we ought to have over our own spirits, which have therefore been as a city that is broken down and has no walls. We have been too soon angry, and anger hath rested in our bosoms: and when our spirits have been provoked, we have spoken unadvisedly with our lips, and have been guilty of that clamour and bitterness which should have been put far from us."¹⁴

Henry's words of confession are humbling. In our glib and frivolous day, we might hesitate to give such careful thought to confessing our sins. But Ligon Duncan writes, "Henry understood that without the inclusion of sufficient confession of sin in our prayers, we will never attain a real and right sense of divine forgiveness and reconciliation.... We will be burdened by unresolved guilt—or else cope with that nagging guilt through denial, delusion, and self-deception."¹⁵

Our intercessions for the church would likewise be more pointed and powerful if we used words such as these: "Let pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, flourish and prevail everywhere; that kingdom of God among men, which is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. O revive this work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known, and let our times be times of reformation."¹⁶ We might then cry out with scriptural boldness, "Let no weapon formed against thy church prosper, and let every tongue that riseth against it in judgment be condemned."¹⁷

Henry also marshaled Scriptures for our intercession for the lost world and the propagation of the gospel to all nations. He called us to pray for all men, to cry out that the nations would praise the Lord and sing for joy, to pray for the conversion of the Jewish people, for the suffering churches in Islamic nations, and for the conversion of atheists and deists. He instructed his readers to pray, "O give thy Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; for thou hast said, It is a light thing for him to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, but thou wilt give him for a light to the Gentiles. Let all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ."¹⁸ Praying the Scriptures back to God will certainly lead us to pray for missions.

Conclusion: Pray the Scriptures

We have only scratched the surface of Henry's book. In addition to many more scriptural prayers of adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, and intercession for others, Henry also assembled Scriptures into a multi-page paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, a set of simple Bible prayers for children, prayers for children based on catechism answers, scriptural prayers for family devotions in the morning and evening and on the Lord's Day, a parent's prayers for children, prayers to prepare for the Lord's Supper, and prayers to say at mealtimes. Henry's *Family Hymns* (1694), a collection of selections from the Psalms and passages from the New Testament in poetic form, can also enrich family worship with biblical truth.¹⁹ Duncan says of the *Method for Prayer*, "Reading and rereading Henry's book will train us in the use of biblical truth and language in prayer, and thus assist and encourage modern Christians in both public and private prayer." Praying the Scriptures will "engrave in our minds biblical patterns of thought" and move us to a "God-centered way of praying."²⁰

We should learn from Henry's great maxim: pray the Scriptures. In this assertion, Henry stood with Reformed writers through the ages. William Gurnall (1616–1679) wrote, "The mightier any is in the Word, the more mighty he will be in prayer." Later, Robert M'Cheyne (1813–1843) said, "Turn the Bible into prayer."²¹ Nothing is surer or more helpful as a rule or guide in prayer than the whole Word of God. All this echoes the magisterial words of Christ, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

1. Henry, *Works*, 2:2–3.

2. Henry, *Works*, 1:204.

3. O. Palmer Robertson, introduction to Matthew Henry, *A Way to Pray: A Biblical Method for Enriching Your Prayer Life and Language by Shaping Your Words with Scripture*, ed. O. Palmer Robertson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), xii. Robertson writes of this republication of Henry's *Method for Prayer*, "This current edition does not represent simply an effort to modernize the language of Matthew Henry's original. Instead it is an effort to provide a respectful but thorough reworking of the text of Matthew Henry in light of careful exegetical considerations." Robertson has removed some of Henry's materials, added some of his own, and presented a fresh translation of the Scriptures (*ibid.*, xvii).

4. Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 241.

5. Henry, *Works*, 2:2–3.

6. Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 240. The Westminster Directory set forth this order of worship: 1) a call to worship, 2) a prayer acknowledging God's greatness, 3) Scripture reading, 4) singing a psalm, 5) a prayer of confession and petition for grace through the Mediator for the church, worldwide missions, and the governing authorities, 6) preaching the Word, 7) a prayer of thanksgiving and petition for grace, 8) the Lord's Prayer, 9) singing a psalm, and 10) dismissal. See *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, discussed by Mark Dever and Sinclair Ferguson (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008).

7. Henry, *Works*, 2:3.

8. Henry, *Works*, 1:204.

9. Henry, *Works*, 2:4.

10. Henry, *Works*, 2:4–12.

11. Henry, *Works*, 2:5. See Ex. 15:11.

12. Henry, *Works*, 2:10–11. See Ps. 31:1; 25:3; 62:1, 2, 5–7.

13. Henry, *Works*, 2:6. See Job 42:2; Ps. 62:11; Luke 1:37; Matt. 28:18; Deut. 32:39; Rom. 4:21.

14. Henry, *Works*, 2:15. See Prov. 25:28; 14:17; Eccl. 7:9; Ps. 106:33; Eph. 4:31.

15. Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 244.

16. Henry, *Works*, 2:50. See James 1:27; Rom. 14:17; Hab. 3:2; Heb. 9:10.

17. Henry, *Works*, 2:51. See Isa. 54:17.

18. Henry, *Works*, 2:48–49. See Ps. 2:8; Isa. 49:6. See also chapter 11, "Puritan Prayers for World Missions."

19. Henry, *Works*, 1:413–43.

20. Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 249.

21. Cited in John Blanchard, comp., *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 473.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke is president and professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Reprinted from *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer*.



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THE *Sweet* LAW OF GOD

In Exodus 15:23–25, we read of a very remarkable event. We are told how the nation of Israel, as it journeyed through the wilderness, arrived in Mara. The people were very thirsty, and though they found an adequate supply of water, water was exceedingly bitter so that they were not able to drink it. As a result, they began to grumble and complain. However, the Lord was gracious to His people, delivering them from this predicament by directing Moses to take a piece of wood. Upon God's command, he cast it into the bitter water, and it immediately transformed the water to be sweet and tasteful. Its bitterness had vanished completely, so that the people of Israel drank it with relish and were refreshed by it.

Beloved, it should be beyond any doubt that the Lord wanted to teach the people of Israel a spiritual lesson. By way of this miracle, He wanted to direct their attention to heavenly truths. In His lovingkindness and through His fatherly interaction with His people, He was directing their hearts to the truths of salvation, using all suitable ways and means at His disposal. This miracle served as a clear reflection or exhibition of the precious cross of Christ—a cross to which He would be nailed and where He would die. This cross would have the inherent divine power to make all that has been made bitter by sin delightful again to the poor, believing soul who takes hold of the cross of Christ and casts it into his bitter water. In so doing, he can drink bitter water again with great delight, for the cross of Christ will completely remove all bitterness. Whatever it touches will be transformed into something sweet and tasteful.

No water is more bitter to a sinner than the holy and perfect law of God. For Adam in Paradise, the law was lovely and delightful—a heavenly nectar of which he could not get enough in his perfect and holy state. However, no sooner had Adam sinned and willfully transgressed God's law, no sooner had he begun to drink unrighteousness as water, and the law changed for him and all his descendants into water so dreadfully bitter that they could no longer drink it. And

indeed, for a sinner the law spells nothing else but curse and wrath. By the works of the law, man can no longer be saved or justified.

Behold, however, how the most high God in His infinite mercy has devised a means whereby the bitter water of the law, which we ourselves have made so bitter by our willful sins, again becomes most sweet and tasteful to a poor, contrite, and believing sinner. That means is the precious cross of our Savior Jesus Christ.

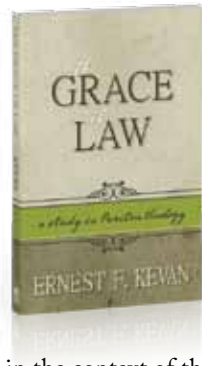
A poor sinner who truly grieves over and is sorry for all his sins will by the Spirit and with a true faith take hold of the cross of the Lord Jesus and cast it into the bitter water of the law. Eternally cursed by the law and condemned by God to be cast into hell, he will completely look away from himself and forsake all, taking refuge in the cross of the Lord Jesus in order thereby to obtain his entire salvation from God. However, as soon as he does so, the bitter water of the law, by virtue of the cross of the Lord Jesus, immediately becomes entirely sweet and exceedingly lovely. The Lord Jesus fully removes every aspect of the curse of the law and delivers those who believe in Him from the guilt of their sins. He has merited for them the favor of God and reconciliation with Him, and He internally sanctifies and renews their hearts by His Holy Spirit so that the law of God becomes the object of their complete desire and delight. They will obey it with pleasure and love, and order every aspect of their conversation accordingly.

In this manner, the bitter water of the law, by the crucifixion of Christ, again becomes sweet and delicious to our souls so that we can never have enough.

Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784) was one of the last and most well-known representatives of the Dutch Further Reformation. He was converted at age thirty during his first pastorate at Rijnsaterwoude, in South Holland, and then served at Kralingen for the last forty-four years of his life. This article is translated by Rev. Bartel Elshout from van der Groe's *Des Christens Enige Troost in Leven en Sterven* (2:165–67).

Book Talk

NEW RHB BOOKS



The Grace of Law

Ernest Kevan

In this study, Ernest Kevan investigates the works of numerous seventeenth-century theologians to provide an overview of a Puritan understanding of the law in relationship to the life of the Christian. After describing the Puritans and the antinomian controversy that developed among them, Kevan demonstrates how the orthodox view among the Puritans regarded the moral law as an expression of God's majesty established as a guide for man's blessedness and a means to expose sin. He then proceeds to show how the law relates to God's people after the fall in the context of the covenant of grace. Great care is used to explain the relation of Christ's work to the law, the ongoing moral obligation Christians have to the law, the idea of gospel obedience, and the Christian's freedom from the law's condemnation. Although the Puritans saw law and grace as opposing principles regarding one's justification, they also taught how God ultimately uses the law in the life of the believer for His gracious purposes.

(296 pages, PB) \$18.00 | \$14.00

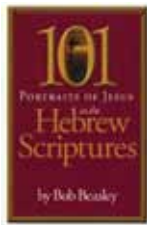
OTHER NEW BOOKS



To Have and to Hold: A Christian Minister's Affectionate Advice to a Married Couple—James Bean

Originally published in 1820, this work was intended for both newly married couples and older couples. This small book underscores the importance, seriousness, and profitability of marriage, making it immensely relevant and helpful for our day.

(PB, SGCB, 90 pgs.) \$12.00 | \$9.00



101 Portraits of Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures

Bob Beasley

Jesus said the Old Testament bore witness to Him. In this easy-to-read book, Beasley introduces readers to 101 different ways Christ is set forth in the Old Testament's types, foreshadowings, prophecies, and mighty works. Readers will learn to discern Jesus on every page of Scripture.

(PB, Living Stone, 208 pgs.) \$15.00 | \$11.25



A Refutation of Religious Pluralism

John Brown of Haddington

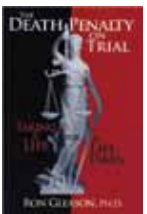
Religious pluralism is killing the broader professing church of our day with its cry for ecumenical and inclusive minds. Though it was written centuries ago, this timely book offers help for those who desire to know the mind of God and His revealed solutions against the danger of pluralism. (PB, GCP, 134 pgs.) \$18.00 | \$15.00



Power Preaching for Church Growth—David Eby

Preaching is to be at the heart of the church's ministry. Too many churches are consumed and obsessed with marketing and user friendliness in lieu of this biblical mandate. Here Eby seeks to reclaim a high and exalted view of preaching, interacting with various opponents and market-driven viewpoints. This revised edition includes a section on the emerging church.

(PB, Christian Focus, 256 pgs.) \$18.00 | \$13.50



The Death Penalty on Trial: Taking a Life for a Life Taken—Ron Gleason

This book rigorously examines the controversy over the death penalty with clarity and cogency. Engaging both sides of the debate, Gleason encourages each side to know and articulate its positions more definitively. Laying groundwork in history and law, he also defines

ethics philosophically and then presents the biblical mandate. This book will be of great value to all interested in the ongoing discussion.

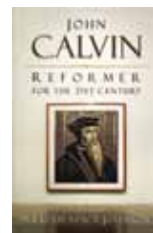
(PB, Nordskog, 134 pgs.) \$15.00 | \$11.50



God the Real Superpower—J. Nelson Jennings

The call to true Christian missions is a call to suffer as our Savior has suffered. This book seeks to bring the light of biblical teaching into the scope of twenty-first-century American missionary endeavors. Jennings's primary concern is how American Christians, in response to God's initiative and in cooperation with other believers throughout the world, can best carry out their God-given responsibilities in today's world.

(PB, P&R, 261 pgs.) \$22.00 | \$16.50



John Calvin: Reformer for the 21st Century

William Stacy Johnson

Many have heard of John Calvin, but few are actually acquainted with his theology. Johnson provides a helpful introduction to the person and work of this sixteenth-century Reformer who was infused with a passion for the reform of the church. Enhanced with questions for discussion, this is a valuable resource to understanding the thought of Calvin.

(PB, WJK, 142 pgs.) \$15.00 | \$11.25



How to Read Exodus—Tremper Longman III

In many ways, the book of Exodus is a prologue laying down three foundation principles—deliverance, covenant, and worship. The events and narratives, the themes and imagery, are key to understanding the story of Israel and of Jesus. Longman guides us through Exodus, helping us view it from the perspective of its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. This book will prove helpful to any student of the Bible.

(PB, IVP, 187 pgs.) \$15.00 | \$11.25



The Cambridge Seven—John Pollock

In a generation which emphasized social position and athletics, seven promising men from Cambridge abandoned all comforts and dedicated their lives to Christian ministry in China. This is the true story of ordinary men who gave themselves completely to the ministry of Jesus Christ and helped to not only stir a generation, but reform missions as we know it today.

(PB, Christian Focus, 125 pgs.) \$12.00 | \$9.00



“The King in His Beauty”: The Piety of Samuel Rutherford

Matthew Vogan

“*The King in His Beauty*” introduces readers to the life and writings of Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661). Matthew Vogan’s biographical introduction traces the significant events of this Scottish theologian’s life and guides readers through his writings, focusing on his distinctive insight into Christian experience. In forty-three excerpts drawn from Rutherford’s letters, major treatises, catechism, and sermons, readers will discover the depth of Rutherford’s compassion, piety, and theological wisdom, all rooted in his unwavering love for Christ.

NEW RHB BOOKS

Samuel Rutherford is the most significant devotional writer in the British Reformed tradition, and in Matthew Vogan he has found the ideal editor. This book gathers together the most important passages in Rutherford’s writing, to preserve for us his unique appreciation of the glories of Immanuel’s land.

—Crawford Gribben, senior lecturer, Trinity College Dublin, and director of Texts, Contexts, Cultures
(200 pages, PB) \$10.00 | \$7.50

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*These titles are recently published or reprinted. The first price is retail, and the second is our discounted price.
PB = paperback, HC = hard cover.*

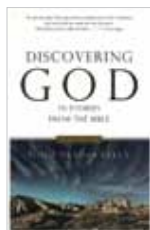
OTHER NEW BOOKS



The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford—Guy M. Richard

This book presents a modern in-depth study of the theology of one of the most influential figures in post-Reformation Scotland, Samuel Rutherford (c. 1600–1661). Although much has been written over the years about Rutherford’s political thought or about his nearly mystical piety, very little actually has appeared in print about his theology.

(PB, Wipf & Stock, 265 pgs.) \$33.00 | \$25.00



Discovering God in the Stories from the Bible

Philip Graham Ryken

To truly love someone, you have to know him. And to truly love God, we must know Him, too—not just know that He exists, but know who He is and what He is like. Ryken traces out the unchanging character of God in thirteen different biblical stories. Each chapter focuses on a different attribute and how it influences your understanding of God, and how it applies to your daily life. Includes study questions.

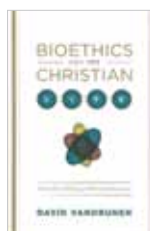
(PB, P&R, 240 pgs.) \$15.00 | \$11.00



The Walk—Stephen Smallman

There are some difficult yet practical questions that face many individuals regarding the Christian life. Smallman presents in a clear and concise way the basics of Christian discipleship. Whether you’re a new Christian or a disciple with a renewed commitment, this basic guide will prove to be beneficial to any who seek a proper understanding of discipleship.

(PB, P&R, 222 pgs.) \$12.99 | \$10.00



Bioethics and the Christian Life—David VanDrunen

Human beings have been pondering ethical questions about life and death from a religious perspective for a very long time. The kinds of questions evoked by bioethics are therefore important. Medical technologies serve as a double-edged sword, like curing diseases but also producing designer babies. Where do Christians stand on such issues? Van Drunen brilliantly

adds significantly and positively to bioethical conversation in ways that will help every pastor and thoughtful Christian.

(PB, Crossway, 256 pgs.) \$20.00 | \$15.00

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JESUS *and* PETER

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He selected twelve disciples. You can find their names in Luke 6:14–16. One of these disciples was Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter. Peter was not the kind of person you would expect the Son of God to choose as a disciple. You would think that He would select people who were pious, humble, soft-spoken, self-controlled, and trusting. Peter was none of these things. He was a fisherman, not a scribe or Pharisee (Matthew 4:18). Peter was certainly with the disciples when they argued about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). He was outspoken, often speaking before he thought, or speaking his mind when he should have been silent (Matthew 17:4). He was impulsive, lacking self-discipline and self-control (John 18:10). At times, he trusted himself more than he trusted his Master, and questioned Jesus' words, even trying to tell Him He was wrong (Matthew 16:22). Peter had so much to learn! It was pride that led to his dreadful denials of his beloved Lord Jesus. Sometimes he stood in the way of Jesus' ministry instead of following his master's example (Mark 10:13–16).

Why would the Lord Jesus choose someone like Peter as His disciple? Why didn't He select someone who was a better reflection of the sinless Son of God? It is because God wants you to know that He saves *sinners*. Jesus said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13b). This is a great encouragement particularly for those of us who are disappointed in ourselves. Are you like Peter? Do you say or do foolish things because you don't stop and think first? Are you ever sad because you just cannot be gentle, wise, obedient, humble, and self-controlled? Perhaps you question what God says in His Word, and find it difficult to believe the Scriptures that say: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalm 53:3b). Are you proud, boasting of your achievements, thinking you are stronger, faster, or smarter than your peers? Do you confess these sins and shortcomings to the Lord? Do you know that you are just the kind of person the Lord Jesus came to save? He came "to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). You must confess your sin and ask for faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Peter sinned against the loving Savior, but the Savior did not turn away from Peter. Those days between the death and the resurrection of Jesus must have been very difficult ones for Peter. Through the work of the Holy Spirit Peter learned many things about himself. He "wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62) about his pride and his fall. He learned a painful lesson about humility: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). His deepest pain, however, was that he had sinned against his beloved Savior. It was for his sins that Jesus

had to suffer and die. This disciple's sin was terrible, but Christ's love was more powerful. He sought and found His lost sheep.

Peter learned not only about his own sinful heart, but about free and undeserved salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. As Peter was sinning and in the midst of His own suffering, Jesus thought of Peter, and turned to look at him (Luke 22:61). The angels gave the women seeking Jesus at the sepulchre this message: "Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said" (Mark 16:7). Jesus wanted Peter to know this message was for him, too. Then, of course, Jesus restored Peter so tenderly on the sea shore after His resurrection. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (John 21:15–17). Just as Peter had denied Jesus three times, Peter replied three times that he loved the Lord Jesus. With the command to feed the flock of God, Peter was restored to the office of preaching the gospel to Christ's sheep and lambs. Once Peter boasted, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33). Indeed, later, Peter was imprisoned and killed for Jesus' sake, but in God's time. He learned that he could do all things—not in his own strength, but through Christ who strengthened him (Philippians 4:13). He died as a martyr because he was never again ashamed of Jesus Christ. He wrote, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:16).

Dear children, what would you answer the Lord if He would ask you, "Do you love Me?" I hope you do not think you are better than Peter. It is true that Peter sinned greatly when he denied the Lord Jesus three times. But what about you? How many times have you denied Him? Do you realize that, every time you sin, you are denying the Lord? Every sin is defiance against God. When you are sinning you are not honoring Him, and when you are not honoring Him, you are denying Him as Lord and King. "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).

Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you what you need to know in order to be saved and to live to His honor. Not every child of God is sent out to preach the gospel, but every forgiven sinner must live a life of thanksgiving. That means living for the glory and honor of God, never denying or being ashamed to speak of Jesus. Is He your Savior? Have your sins been washed away in His blood? Do you live a life that honors God? Are you ashamed to speak of Jesus and to live for His glory?

PUZZLE

Use the clues to fill in the blanks. It is important to remember that the last letter of each answer is the first letter of the next one.

1				2				3				4			5
	13			14			15			16					
												17		6	
12				22				23							
		21													
							25				24			7	
11															
				20						19			18		
								10					9		8

1. "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of ____ Christ" (2 Peter 1:1).
2. "And Jesus said unto ____, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10)
3. "Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt ____ wash my feet" (John 13:8).
4. "Thou art Peter, and upon this ____ I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).
5. "And again he denied with an oath, I do not ____ the man" (Matthew 26:72).
6. "And he went out, and ____ bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).
7. "Let us make here ____ tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Matthew 17:4).
8. "Then Simon Peter...cut off his right ____" (John 18:10).
9. "Then Peter took him, and began to ____ him" (Matthew 16:22).
10. "For we...were ____ of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).
11. "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may ____ you as wheat" (Luke 22:31).
12. "____ his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee" (Mark 16:7).
13. "And, behold, the angel of the ____ came upon him, and a light shined in the prison" (Acts 12:7).
14. "Peter said unto him,...I will lay ____ my life for thy sake" (John 13:37).
15. "And straightway they forsook their ____, and followed him" (Mark 1:18).
16. "Jesus saith unto him, Feed my ____" (John 21:17).
17. "They ceased not to teach and ____ Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42).
18. "What shall we ____ therefore?" (Matthew 19:27).
19. "Thou hast the words of ____ life" (John 6:68).
20. "And the Lord turned, and ____ upon Peter" (Luke 22:61).
21. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou ____?" (Matthew 14:31).
22. "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the ____ time, Lovest thou me?" (John 21:17).
23. "This spake he, signifying by what ____ he should glorify God" (John 21:19).
24. "Simon, sleepest thou? couldst not thou watch one ____?" (Mark 14:37).
25. "The Lord is ____ indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:34).

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LOST *and* FOUND

story for children

Years ago, people came from many different countries to settle in America, the “New World.” They worked very hard, clearing thick forests to make room for farms and towns. Homes and barns had to be built, crops planted and reaped, animals cared for, food preserved, clothes stitched, and household items made by hand. Accidents and tragedies were part of this difficult life in this vast, untamed country. One day, a child became lost. Little Aaron was out with his brothers and sisters gathering berries to bring home to their mother. Each of them was so focused on finding the biggest berries that they didn’t realize that Aaron had wandered further and further away from them. When the other children had filled their pails and decided it was time to head home, they finally realized Aaron was missing. They looked and looked for their little brother, but they could not find him. It was late afternoon when they returned home and told their parents that little Aaron was lost.

The woods were filled with dangers. Not only were they thicker and larger than most forests are now, but many wild animals lived there. The sun was beginning to go down by the time the father had gathered the neighbors to begin searching for his lost son. The mother remained at home with the other children, frantic with fear and anguish, praying that her precious little son would soon be found. One of the neighbors hurried into town to assemble more men for the search party. The church bells tolled, and as people gathered to find out the reason for the alarm, the men volunteered without hesitation. Everyone sympathized with the distressed parents. As the clouds gathered and darkness increased, the men searched through the woods in all directions, shouting Aaron’s name. But their search was in vain. They found no trace of the little boy. Their shouts echoed through the forest, but no answer returned. It is hard to imagine how Aaron’s father and mother felt during the long, dark hours of the night. Where was their little boy? Was he hurt? Was he cold? Was he afraid? They did not dare to imagine the dangers Aaron was facing. They fervently prayed that God would keep their dear child safe and that he would soon be found.

As the sun began to rise in the east, the men gathered at the home of Aaron’s family to make plans for a more intense search. No one even thought about giving up. They decided that when the child was found, three gun shots would announce the good news. After a quick breakfast and a prayer for a good outcome, the men set out again. The village was empty and quiet. Stores and businesses were closed. Mothers and children stayed at home, praying as they carried out their daily duties. Finally, at around nine in the morning, three shots were heard. Relief flooded every heart, but it was immediately replaced with a new concern: was the child dead or alive? Quickly, the men spread the good news that the child was unhurt. The shout was carried from one to the other till the whole forest and then the village seemed to ring with happy shouts. You can imagine the joy and relief of the mother and the other children! Triumphant, the men carried Aaron back to his mother, singing as they went. Aaron’s mother rushed to meet him and hugged him close, weeping aloud for joy. Every eye was filled with tears as they witnessed the happy reunion. One of the men sent up a prayer of thanksgiving, and then everyone returned to their families and their work with a new appreciation for the blessings God had given them.

That evening after supper, Aaron’s father read the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12–14. Aaron never forgot that story as long as he lived. His father explained

what Jesus meant by this parable. There was more joy over the one sheep that was found than over the ninety-nine that were not lost (Matthew 18:14 and Luke 15:3-7). Aaron's father smiled at the other children. "That does not mean we love you any less than Aaron. We would search just as anxiously for any of you if you were to be lost. But today we rejoiced because Aaron was lost and is found again."

Jesus said, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10). The joy and gladness a mother or father experiences when a lost child is found pales in comparison to the joy in heaven over the salvation of a sinner. This is something we cannot comprehend: the angels as well as the triune God Himself rejoice—what a thought! Jesus added, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14). He displayed the most astonishing love and kindness while He lived on earth, and we can read about it still today in the Bible. The ultimate expression of God's love was the gift of His only begotten Son who suffered and died and rose again so that sinners like you and me may be saved. If it were not for this amazing gift, there could have been no help for any sinner. You would have had to pay for your own sin in hell. What love can compare to the love of God?

I hope your heart is not so hard that it cannot be touched by this truth. The sinless Son of the holy God suffered the cruellest death so that even the most horrible sinners could be happy forever. It was sin, like yours and mine, that caused Jesus' pain and death. Have you ever fallen on your knees before Him and confessed your sin and guilt? Have you ever pleaded for mercy and forgiveness? I hope you have not angered Him by doubting His love; He can do no greater act of love than what He has already done. Will you offend Him by turning your back on such love and continuing in your sin?

Have you already confessed your sins and found forgiveness? Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you live a life of praise and thanksgiving to God. Ask Him to help you fight against sin and to flee from temptation. When you fall into sin, return at once and ask Him to cleanse you once again. The Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised forever and ever. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

Adapted from *The Child at Home; or, The Principles of Filial Duty Familiarly Illustrated* by John S.C. Abbott (New York: American Tract Society, 1833), 144-153.

last month's puzzle

THANKS AGAIN TO ALL WHO ANSWERED LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE!

Daniel Beeke	Don R. Cox (2)	John Rea
Joanne Beeke	Janae denHertog (2)	Anna Shin
Tara Beeke	Matthew denHertog (2)	Derrick Stubbe
Lauren Bilkes	Henry DuHart	Kaitlyn Stubbe
Seth Bilkes	Natasha Eckhardt	Sara Stubbe
Zachary Bilkes	Lindsay Fintelman	Hanna Sweetman
Robert Boatwright	Papo Hernandez	Janine Sweetman
Leah Boerkoel	Saul Hernandez	Kara Sweetman
Phillip Boerkoel	Jacob Koppert	Leah VanBeek (2)
Silvia Boerkoel	Rachel Koppert	Meghan VanDalen (2)
Andrew Boesterd (2)	Elijah Meschke	Melanie VanDalen (2)
Justin Boesterd (2)	Lukas Meschke (2)	Megan VanderStel
Becky Boot	Nick Meschke (2)	Nathan VanOosterom
Shelly Boot	Jacob Mol	Jason VanWoudenberg (3)
David Byl (2)	Joseph Mol	Luke VanWoudenberg (3)
Julia Byl (2)	Savannah Mol	Danique Veldhuizen
Mark Byl (2)	Thomas Mol	
Alfred Chambers	J. Mosqueda	

HERE ARE THE ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE.

1. own	16. atonement
2. while	17. greater
3. justify	18. world
4. purchased	19. new
5. without	20. other
6. price	21. offered
7. ask	22. salvation
8. Jesus	23. exalted
9. smitten	24. sheep
10. according	25. add
11. bruised	26. "With his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).
12. depth	
13. yet	
14. taste	
15. between	

CHURCH NEWS....

ANNOUNCEMENT OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Lord willing, the Synod Prayer Service, Theological Seminary Committee, and Synod meeting will be held respectively on April 13-15 in Hull, Iowa. The Office-bearers' Conference will be held on April 13 at 3:00 p.m. The Synod Prayer Service will be held on April 13, at 7:30 p.m.

OBITUARY....

Overbeeke, Gilles. With sadness we announce the passing away of Gilles Overbeeke on Tuesday, February 1, at the age of 83 years. Beloved husband of Mary (Sinke) for 53 years. Dear father of Carol (Dick), Lawrence (Sharon), Ken (Nel), Brian (Joyce), and Diane. Also survived by 16 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. Predeceased by his brother Cornelius. (Pastor J. Neels, Romans 5:5)

CONFERENCES....

SPRING WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan extends a warm welcome to all ladies to attend our Women's Conference to be held at church, the Lord willing, on Wednesday, May 4, 2011. Dr. David Murray will be presenting a topic on "Depression and the Christian." Registration and coffee will be at 9:30 a.m. The cost is \$23.00 (U.S. funds only) and a luncheon will be provided. Please register before April 20 with Mrs. Cathy Spaans at 616-669-0974, e-mail: cjspaans@gmail.com; or Mrs. Shirley Vandalen at 616-975-4295, e-mail: jandsvd@att.net.

FRASER VALLEY BIBLE CONFERENCE

How can God accept me?

Learn the Life-changing Answer of the Gospel

FRASER VALLEY Bible Conference

Rev. Geoff Thomas
Allied Place Baptist Church
Aberystwyth, Wales, UK

April 29 & 30, 2011

Emmanuel Free Reformed Church
3386 Mt. Lehman Road
Abbotsford, B.C.

Friday 7:30 pm & Sat. 9:00 am-1:00 pm
Telephone: (604) 794-3501
info@FraserValleyBibleConference.com

www.FraserValleyBibleConference.com

PRAYER REQUEST FOR THE KAMWENDOS IN MALAWI

On February 24, Joy Kamwendo, the dear wife of Rev. Brian Kamwendo, on of our PRTS Th.M. graduates, passed away after a short illness. Please remember Rev. Kamwendo, and his children, Stella and Praise, in your prayers, in this time of great need as they grapple with the loss of their dear wife and mother. So far, the Lord is upholding them mercifully, also through a very moving funeral, which was attended by approximately 15,000 people. Nearly all the 115 ministers in the denomination of more than 1.5 million people, together with their wives, were present, as well as thousands from various churches. Rev. Kamwendo's own church alone has 8,000 members. Please pray that God may sustain him during the coming months when so much is on his shoulders and his heart.

Stella and Praise had a difficult time after they returned from the funeral to their own home, and reality set in that their dear mother would never be there again. By God's grace, however, they are now doing as well as can be expected.

The doctors have now concluded that Joy Kamwendo actually did not die from malaria, but from diabetes. By the time they realized it was diabetes, it was too late to save her life.

Rev. Kamwendo asked me to thank all of you who wrote him by e-mail or mail or called him. He said that he felt strengthened by the love of our congregation for him and his children. E-mail continues to be the easiest way to reach him (briankamwendo@yahoo.com), but please do not expect a quick response as he is no doubt overwhelmed with so many things to do. If you should wish to speak or pray with him by phone, the number from America is 011265993381254. The best time to reach him by phone is between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. our time. (Please do not call him after 3:00 p.m.)

May God teach us all through the sudden loss of this dear 31-year-old wife and mother that our houses must ever be in order and our souls ready to meet our Maker and Creator in righteousness and peace.

HERITAGE SPRING RETREAT

Heritage Spring Retreat 2011

Luke 24:15
Questions

May 23 - 26, 2011
Brantford, Ontario

Speakers Include:
Cand. D. Baars
Cand. S. Dibbet
Dr. D. Murray
Rev. J. Neels

HeritageRetreat.ca

"I really enjoyed myself. The topics and workshops were very helpful!"

"It is very encouraging and awesome to see the Christian love and it has been a blessing."

"I had a wonderful time! The group is mature and the discussions are spiritually and practically helpful."

TEACHERS NEEDED....

OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Board of Oxford Reformed Christian School (ORCS) invites applications for elementary and secondary teaching positions for the 2010/2011 school year.

ORCS is currently located in a rural setting twenty minutes south of Woodstock in South-western Ontario. We are a parent-run school serving the needs of several local Reformed communities and have been operating for six years. Our present enrolment is 215 students and we offer Kindergarten to grade 12. We have a need for qualified, energetic elementary and secondary teachers to join our staff team. All applicants committed to the Reformed faith and to Christian education are encouraged to apply.

Applications should include a resumé, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references. Promptly send to: Oxford Reformed Christian School, c/o Mr. W. Van Brugge (principal), 308 Church St., P.O. Box 68, Springford, ON, N0J 1X0. E-mail: orcswwb@execulink.com

PROVIDENCE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Providence Christian School invites applications for the positions of Full-time Elementary Teacher and Full-time Jr./Sr. High Teacher for the current school year.

Providence Christian School is situated in a beautiful, southern Alberta rural community, minutes from Lethbridge. PCS has grades K-12 with about 120 students attending and 12 staff members. We offer a four-day school week, competitive salaries/benefits, a growing, committed school community, and a dedicated team of teaching staff.

We encourage qualified teachers who submit to God's Holy Word and the Reformed confessions, and are committed to educating children and youth in the Reformed Christian perspective to apply. Please send your resumé, references, statement of faith, and philosophy of Christian education to Mr. G. Van de Haar, Principal, Providence Christian School, Box 240, Monarch, AB T0L 1M0. For more information, e-mail: vandehaar.g@pcsmoarch.com; phone: 403.381.4418 (school), 403.824.3182 (home).

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.



2011 HRC YOUTH CAMP

DARE TO BE LIKE DANIEL

A Parallel Study of the Book of Daniel

Do you find yourself standing alone for the truth in your family, the classroom, or at work? Do you struggle with the world's demand for tolerance and political correctness? Are you anxious over the economic confusion, and does evil seem to be winning? Do you desire to move out of your comfort zone and be a stronger witness for Jesus Christ?

As teens, Daniel and his friends lived during a chaotic period of history similar to ours. They were subjected to powerful and subtle forms of indoctrination. They could have compromised and given in to the temptations of material prosperity and personal advancement, but they purposed in their hearts to please God. Their history shows us it is possible to stand alone for God in a hostile environment, but it involves a change of heart, integrity of character, and trusting God with the outcome. The prophetic visions of Daniel also show us that though all seems hopeless, God is still on the throne and is moving the events of history forward according to His perfect, sovereign will. Join us as we parallel the Book of Daniel with our lives today, and take the challenge to stand alone for the truth.

Topics will include: Standing Alone—*Having Conviction & Courage* (Daniel 1-3)
Standing Firm—*Holy Habits* (Daniel 6)
Standing for Life—Gianna Jessen, an abortion survivor, tells her story.
Standing in Society—*A Bright Light in Dark Times* (Daniel 4-5)
Standing for Eternity—*Apocalyptic Encouragement* (Daniel 7-12)
Standing on the Rock—*Daniel's God*

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. Speakers will include Rev. Mark Kelderman, Rev. David Lipsy, Dr. David Murray, Mr. James Beeke, Mr. Scott Dibbet, and Gianna Jessen. The format is similar to past years with topics, workshops, activities, and fellowship. Details, photos, and registration forms can be accessed at www.hnrc.org/ministries/youth-conference. Brochures and registration forms will also be available in the churches in April.

The fee for the camp is \$180.00 (US funds only). This includes all meals and lodging. Full-time campers may deduct \$30 if registrations are post-marked by June 1. (Please submit your application early; late registrations require a significant amount of last minute work for those providing transportation, lodging, activity supplies, and food.)

If you have any questions, please contact Tom & Mary VanRee at (616) 677-1727; e-mail: thevanrees@gmail.com, or Gary & Cindy Kwekel at (616) 281-2065; e-mail: gckwekel@peoplepc.com.

NATIONAL NEWS....

Roman Catholic Confession Goes Hi-tech

The Roman Catholic Church approved an iPhone app that helps guide worshippers through confession. Described as “the perfect aid for every penitent,” it offers users tips and guidelines to help them with the sacrament. The app takes users through the sacrament—in which Catholics admit their wrongdoings—and allows them to keep track of their sins. A spokesperson states, “The Church believes in embracing new technology and this creative app will hopefully help people make a good confession.” (BBC News)

Making a Difference

In the United States, there are some 2,300 affiliates of the three largest pregnancy resource center umbrella groups: Heartbeat International, CareNet, and the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA). Over 1.9 million American women take advantage of these services each year. Many stay at one of the 350 residential facilities for women and children operated by pro-life groups. In New York City alone, there are twenty-two centers, serving 12,000 women a year. These centers provide services including pre-natal care, STI testing, STI treatment, ultrasound, childbirth classes, labor coaching, mid-wife services, lactation consultation, nutrition consulting, social work, abstinence education, parenting classes, material assistance, and post-abortion counseling. (ChristianityToday)

Evangelical Chaplains May Face Ultimatum



Gordon James Klingenschmitt is a former Navy chaplain who was forced out of the service in 2007 for praying in Jesus' name. He says the Obama Pentagon wants to purge evangelical, Bible-preaching chaplains from the service by giving them an ultimatum: “reconcile” with homosexuality or quit. Pentagon leaders preparing to impose open homosexuality on the military are serving notice that discrimination against the deviant lifestyle will not

be tolerated. In a recently released memorandum, Defense Secretary Robert Gates directed his policy staff to move ahead carefully but expeditiously to end the ban on military service for open homosexuals. (Chad Groening — OneNewsNow)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

France Free of Euthanasia

A euthanasia bill promoted by the Socialist and Communist parties in France was recently defeated in a 170–142 vote, meaning the country will remain euthanasia-free.

“Prime Minister Fillon spoke out against the bill, and that really helped make sure that his coalition of centrists and maybe more conservative types that he has in his coalition...were able to hold together,” accounts Alex Schadenberg, head of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition (EPC). “And it was very important, because he emphasized the nature of improving how we care for people rather than kill people.”

Schadenberg says reports of abuse in Belgium came up during the parliamentary debate. “There’s been research in Belgium showing that 32 percent of all the euthanasia deaths [there] have been done without request or consent, and recent reports show that 47.8 percent of all the euthanasia deaths in Belgium are not even reported,” the EPC executive director explains.

Proponents of euthanasia have denied significant abuses of existing laws, but Schadenberg argues that the figures from Belgium prove otherwise. (OneNewsNow)

Islam Filling Britain's “Spiritual Vacuum”

A Protestant renewal organization isn’t surprised that a recent study from Great Britain shows that thousands of native-born Brits are converting to Islam, while Anglican Church membership continues to decline. A blog called The Last Crusade recently reported on a study from the Center for Migration Policy Research at Swansea University that suggests that, even though the media often portray Islam in a negative light, more people decide to adopt the religion each year. In fact, the study says 56 percent of the converts are white and 62 percent are female.

Alan Wisdom, director of the Presbyterian Action committee and vice president for research and programs at The Institute on Religion & Democracy (IRD), is not surprised by the report. “When you have a spiritual vacuum, something is going to fill it. And the Church of England, and Christianity in Great Britain in general, has become very weak in its proclamation of the gospel,” he explains. “On the other hand, Islam is not afraid to call people to conversion, and the result is that numbers of Britons are converting to Islam. [So] it may be now that the numbers of Muslims who worship every week are greater than the numbers of people worshipping in the Church of England.” As studies show that thirty Anglican parishes close every year, Wisdom is not surprised that each year, seventy new mosques sprout up throughout Great Britain. (OneNewsNow)

PERSECUTION FOCUS: INDONESIA....

Violations of Christians’ religious freedom in Indonesia jumped from twelve incidents in 2009 to seventy-five last year, according to a report from the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace. Setara Institute researcher Ismail Hasani said at a press conference that forty-three incidents involved attacks on churches and other security threats, the sealing of worship venues, and prohibition of activities, among other violations. Other incidents among the seventy-five violations included keeping churches from establishing places of worship and banning services and other religious activities. In previous years, most religious freedom violations overall have occurred in West Java Province, and that trend continued as Setara recorded ninety-one incidents against Christians and other groups in 2010. “West Java, besides having a history of radicalism, is a region that also has thriving hard-line Islamist organizations that have special agendas such as enforcement of sharia [Islamic law] and eradication of immorality, besides being anti-Christianization and anti-proselytizing,” Hasani said. After the seventy-five violations committed against Christian groups, the minority Muslim Ahmadiyya sect endured the next highest number of violations with fifty, he said. West Java officials have shown hardly any resolve to protect freedom of religion and belief, Setara’s Hasani said. (Compass Direct News)

Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven” (Luke 6:22–23).

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



ADOPTED INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD

CORNER FOR TEENS • THE REFORMED FAITH (15) • REV. MARK KELDERMAN & REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

In the last article, we studied justification, or what it means to have been declared free by faith in Christ. You are no longer under His condemnation and wrath, having been set free from the curse of the law (Christ having suffered in your place); you are set at liberty, the liberty of the children of God. This brings us to the doctrine of adoption.

At creation, we were all the sons of God. This is evident from the genealogy presented in Luke 3 and in Acts 17, where Paul declares we are all the offspring of God. Of course, we realize that this relationship of Creator-creature or Father-son is no longer in effect after our fall into sin. In John 8, Jesus clearly describes those who do not believe in Him as being of their father the devil. However, Christ indicates in His Sermon on the Mount that those who enter into His kingdom are considered the children of God and that they have a Father in heaven.

We become the children of God and understand our adoption by faith. Paul says to the Galatians, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). This means that everyone who is in Jesus Christ by faith is in fact a child of God; we are adopted by the Father into the divine family. When we are born again, we are transferred from the family of the devil into the family of God. John also affirms this in connection with his teaching on regeneration in John 1:12b: “as many as received him, to them gave he power [right, authority] to become the sons [children] of God.”

This is a most glorious truth! Should the believer understand and believe it, it would grant much comfort. Our being adopted into the family of God is a work of the Spirit of Christ: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). And Paul tells us that our adoption is one of the original purposes of God in saving sinners: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5). This is a reality for each and every one who is alive in Christ: you are a son or a daughter of God. There has been a legal transaction which has taken place when you were born again but it is also something which we experience in our spiritual walk.

Adoption occurs in natural life when parents decide to take a child who does not belong to them. They go through the legal paperwork to adopt this child into their family so that he or she can be called their own son or daughter. We understand this to some degree. The same is basically true in spiritual matters; God adopts sinners into His family freely and willingly. But a significant difference between these two is that we cannot change the nature of the child we would adopt, whereas God can and does with all His children! Everyone He adopts has been radically changed; they are born again into His new family. Another difference is that no child of God is left without belonging to a family. Although a child may not realize that he belongs to a new family right away, but needs to grow up into this knowledge and in grace; so we need to grow up in this knowledge. This is the ongoing experience of becoming more acquainted with the working of the Holy Spirit in us and resting upon the promises and Word of God. We are more assured of our relationship with God as our Father. It must certainly be God’s purpose that His people would live in the enjoyment of this relationship already now.

If you are in Christ, God has set His love upon you, the same love which He has set upon His Son. It is the mighty hand of God, a Father’s hand, which guides, directs, and preserves you in all your ways. You have the Father’s ear in a moment. And as His child, you are free—free from condemnation, free from the dominion of sin—with the liberty of the sons of God for Christ’s sake; your Father will purposefully discipline and correct you for your good.

Consider what J.I. Packer says, “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”

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.

BE GONE UNBELIEF

Be gone unbelief, my Savior is near,
And for my relief will surely appear:
By prayer let me wrestle, and He will perform,
With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.

Though dark be my way, since He is my Guide,
'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide;
Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all fail,
The Word He has spoken shall surely prevail.

His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.

Determined to save, He watched o'er my path,
When Satan's blind slave, I sported with death;
And can He have taught me to trust in His Name,
And thus far have brought me, to put me to shame?

Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation or pain? He told me no less:
The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord.

How bitter that cup, no heart can conceive,
Which He drank quite up, that sinners might live!
His way was much rougher, and darker than mine;
Did Jesus thus suffer, and shall I repine?

Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food;
Though painful at present, wilt cease before long,
And then, O! how pleasant, the conqueror's song!

—JOHN NEWTON

the Banner *of Sovereign Grace Truth*

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