WRITINGS OF JOHN PIPER - VOLUME 1

by John Piper

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by John Piper (Volume 1), compiled for study and devotional reading.

100 Chapters

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Chapter 2

01.01. The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth

The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth January 26, 2003 (Ephesians 5:1-16)

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not associate with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Well, here we are living as Christians in a country whose Supreme Court - not THE Supreme Court, which is Jesus Christ alone (2 Timothy 4:1) - decreed on January 22, 1973 that the taking of unborn human life is constitutionally protected up until the moment of birth. In 1982 the U. S. Senate Judiciary Committee concluded in an official report, "No significant legal barriers of any kind whatsoever exist today in the United States for a woman to obtain an abortion for any reason during any stage of her pregnancy." (John Ensor, Answering the Call:[Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 2003], p. 141) <http://www.family.org/resources/itempg.cfm?itemid=3498>

Since then about forty million abortions have been performed in America. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention about 43% of all American women will have at least one abortion by the age 45 (pp. 18). 20% of these are performed on teenagers (pp. 28). 50% are performed on women who have had at least one abortion already (pp. 31). Every third baby conceived and viable in this country is killed by abortion (pp. 35). The vast majority of abortions are performed between the seventh and tenth week when the baby is already sucking his thumb, recoiling from pricking, responding to sound. All his organs are present, the brain is functioning, the heart is pumping, the liver is making blood cells, the kidneys are cleaning fluids, and there is a fingerprint. His genetic code is uniquely and unquestionably human. And, if we are willing, he can be seen by ultrasound. In his new book from Focus on the Family, Answering the Call (2003), John Ensor points out that one in six abortions are done on women identifying themselves as "born again" Christians: and 31% are done on women who say they are Catholic. When he was a pastor in Boston in 1989 he was shocked, he said, to discover that 30% of the women in his church had had an abortion (pp. 21-22). Ensor concludes, "Indeed, the abortion industry could not

survive financially without paying customers drawn from the church (pp. 21)." Which puts me, as always, in the position of needing, on the one hand, to declare forgiveness and hope to dozens of men and women in this church who have had and have approved abortions, and, on the other hand, to declare the outrage of abortion as something we should oppose with all the wisdom and courage and perseverance and sacrifice that God will give us.

Powerful Gospel Hope So let me speak a word of powerful gospel hope into this congregation concerning the sin of abortion - even multiple abortions. Hear the great climactic words of the apostle Paul heralded to sinners in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13:38-39 : "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man [Jesus Christ] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and in him everyone who believes is justified from everything from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses" (my translation).

There is forgiveness - all sins wiped away, even abortion, and there is justification, the declaration of righteousness, over against every kind of sin you have ever done. How can this be? The life and death of Jesus Christ, God's Son, pardons all debts and provides all righteousness for everyone who believes. Those who have been forgiven much, Jesus said, will love much (Luke 7:47). Oh, how sweetly the post-aborted women and men in this church should love Jesus Christ!

Moral Outrage And now, to supplement that gospel declaration - and I pray with your heartfelt support - I want to go on record again, as I have each January for the last 17 years, that I believe abortion is morally outrageous: fatal for children,

damaging to women,

corrupting to men,

debasing to culture,

mangling to human reason and language,

and an assault on Jesus Christ, through whom all things are made.

Judge Blackmun's Supposed Suspension of Judgment When the editors at the Minneapolis StarTribune this past Wednesday celebrated the abortion rights decreed by Roe v. Wade (January 22, 2003, p. A14) they raised the question when "incipient life becomes 'protectably human,'" and said that no better answer has been given than Justice Harry Blackmun's when he wrote:

We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate.

What's the flaw here? The flaw is that, while claiming to withhold judgment, the judiciary not only speculated but authoritatively decreed on the issue: namely, it is not murder or manslaughter to destroy the unborn. That is not a suspension of judgment. That is a decisive judgment: namely, in the womb there is nothing worth protecting by law. To portray this as a sensitive suspension of judgment about the status of unborn life is false and deceptive.

How do you get from, "We do not know whether this is protectable human life," to "Therefore, we will not protect it"? Wouldn't the logic just as likely (some would say far more likely) be, "Since we

do not know whether this is protectable human life, therefore we will protect it." Why does the judicial uncertainty about the humanity of the unborn lead to unbridled license to destroy it? The Dissenting Opinion: Convenience vs. Protection of Life This is what stunned Justice White and Justice Rhenquist in the majority report of the Court. They gave the answer in their dissenting opinion in 1973: The Court apparently values the convenience of the pregnant mother more than the continued existence and development of the life or potential life which she carries. . . . I [Justice White is writing] can in no event join the Court's judgment because I find no constitutional warrant for imposing such an order of priorities on the people and legislature of the States. (Roe v. Wade, 410 US 113 [1973]) <http://members.aol.com/abtrbng/410white.htm>

There it is. To say, "We don't know if this is protectable human life, therefore we will not protect it and you may destroy it," is the "imposing of an order of priorities on the people." The convenience of the mother shall have priority over the existence of the unborn. This is not a thoughtful, delicate suspending of judgment. This is judgment against the unborn - call that life what you will, it has been condemned.

Obeying Ephesians 5:1-33

Now, I am a Christian pastor who wants to be Biblical, and gives not a rip for being Republican or Democrat. Such things mean almost nothing to me. But the glory and will and the rights of Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Judge of all men, mean everything to me. Why then have I begun the way I have? Why start with the newspaper?

Answer: we didn't start with the newspaper. We started by reading the word of God, Ephesians 5:1-16. And I have taken my cue from Ephesians 5:10-11 (Ephesians 5:11-12): "Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." That is what I have tried to do in quoting the StarTribune - expose the fruitless works of darkness. Abortion is one of most clearly fruitless works of darkness there is. And it is sustained and supported by the darkening of reason and language that runs though this editorial, and most pro-choice literature. From Ephesians 5:8-14 in Ephesians 5:1-33 (Ephesians 5:8-14) the emphasis is on the important role of Christians as light in a dark world.

8 For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Christians Are Salt This should remind us of something Jesus said about his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:13 :

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. The true followers of Jesus - not just those who are Christians in name only - are salt and

light in their culture. We often puzzle over whether our saltiness is our the flavor or radical love or the preservative of moral stability. I suspect mainly radical love, because of the context, but not excluding the preserving influences. But do we as often ponder the function of light?

Christians Are Light

Jesus says, in Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world." And in Ephesians 5:8, "At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." So both of them say, Christians are light. Not only that, they both agree that, "The fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true." The shining of your light as a Christian is bearing practical fruit in "good deeds" - "what is good and right and true." But Paul stresses a function of light that Jesus does not mention here - although he is really good at doing it in many other places: light exposes the dark. When light gets near a dark thing truth happens. Things are seen for what they are. The deceptions and half-truths are blown away.

Abortion is one of the darkest works of the human race - it is child sacrifice. And the only way it can survive is for darkness to survive. Wherever the light of truth and love comes, darkness flies away. Therefore it is one of the great callings of the followers of Jesus to let their light shine in both ways: to do good deeds and to expose darkness. The aim is partly negative: reveal the error hidden in the darkness, but mainly positive: to bring people to love the light and be made light in the Lord Jesus. This gives us some clear guidance in the Christian church. Let there be both the light of good deeds - like all the manifold ministries of crisis pregnancy centers and adoption and sidewalk counseling and education and political engagement. And let there be the light of loving analysis and critique and exposure - in reading and thinking and conversing and writing. And of course the two cannot be separated. The doing of truth in loving acts of sacrifice for the sake of life will in the end expose the darkness as much as all talking and writing.

If there were time I would love to ponder with you at least three other parts of this text relevant for the prolife cause. Let must mention them.

1. Ephesians 5:1. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." You are a child of God. God loves his children and cares for them. Now be imitators of God. One way: love your children the way he loves his children. God loves them before they exist. God loves them in the making - and even calls them in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15). God loves them on the earth. And he will love them eternally in the kingdom of God. Not one has ever been an inconvenience. So let us love children: the idea of children, children in the making, and children on the earth.

2. Ephesians 5:2. "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." The way God loved us as his children was through the sacrificial love of his Son. Christ died that we might live. This is the opposite of abortion. Abortion kills that someone might live differently. In Romans 5:6 Paul says, "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." We were weak - like the unborn are weak. Oh, how we Christians should stand up for the weak! Since this was our plight when we were rescued. And Oh, how ready we should be to sacrifice, since the sacrifice paid for us was infinite.

3. Ephesians 5:3. "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." If sexual immorality and covetousness - these two massive powers in our culture - were conquered, abortion would almost entirely vanish. It isn’t sex

by itself that makes abortion. It is sex plus covetousness: desiring things that God does not will for us to have because we are not willing to find our satisfaction in him. Illicit sex and unencumbered freedom without children: for these we covet, and abortion is the result.

How To Shine Your Life into the Darkness of Abortion But I leave those three points for another time. I want to close by making four or five suggestions for your action - the shining of your light into the darkness of abortion.

1. Consider adoption. God has overwhelmingly blessed our church in this regard. It is normal to adopt at Bethlehem. Two ministries have emerged in this regard. The MICAH Fund (Minority Infant Child Adoption Help) has helped fund the adoption of 211 children in its 12 years of existence. The much younger LYDIA Fund (Let Youths Be Delivered from Institutions by Adoption) has helped fund the adoption of 37 children internationally. Pray about this and get information. I spoke at a fund-raising banquet of an adoption agency in Macon, Georgia last fall, and that night they held up two brand new beautiful babies ready for adoption. If I were not 57 years old, I am almost sure Noel and I would have brought them home.

2. Be a regular giver of your money to Crisis Pregnancy Centers. One example of how crucial this can be: When John Ensor's ministry, A Woman's Concern, added an ultrasound unit to its crisis pregnancy counseling, the rate of women choosing life jumped from 35% to 76%. 329 women chose against abortion in the first 18 months. This cost the abortion industry $148,000. The point is: whoever funded that ultrasound unit is having a significant impact for life and against abortion. And there are many ways that these frontline ministries need our help. When you leave today give to the Helping Hand Offering which will go to New Life Family Services U. of M. branch. And take a baby bottle bank and fill it and bring it back at the end of February.

3. Be involved in spreading truth with good literature. We are giving away samples today of a paper from the Human Life Alliance <http://www.humanlife.org> called The Silent Epidemic. It is not explicitly Christian, and so may have a pre-evangelism effect of awakening people to aspects of the truth with its remarkable variety of approaches to the issue. Noel and I both read it and found it very helpful. Take one and then my suggestion is: buy a bundle from the St. Paul address and distribute them in some systematic way. In other words, think and act about how the light of this much truth might shine.

4. The other thing I would mention is more or less direct involvement: making your presence know at the abortion clinics in town </library/fresh_words/2003/012403.html>; writing or phoning or visiting and talking, if you can, with those who work there, volunteering in a Crisis Pregnancy Center, participating in Bethlehem's Sanctity of Life Task Force. Dream a new kind of ministry!

5. And always pray. And to keep you praying about abortion, keep abortion before you. Read. Read John Ensor's new book from Focus on the Family, Answering the Call <http://www.family.org/resources/itempg.cfm?itemid=3498>. It's the only book I think that I read in one day. And look at the websites that we will list for you.

Remember: "At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light . . . . Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."(Ephesians 5:8-11) And remember also: "Through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and in him everyone who believes is justified from everything from which you could not be justified in the

law of Moses." Acts 13:38-39 Websites of Interest Baptists for Life <http://www.bfl.org>

Birthright International <http://www.birthright.org%20>

Care Net <http://www.care-net.org>

Christian Life Resources <http://www.christianliferesources.com>

Focus on the Family - Crisis Pregnancy Ministry <http://www.family.org/pregnancy/>

Human Life Alliance <http://www.humanlife.org%20>

International Life Services, Inc. <http://www.life-services.org>

Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life <http://www.mccl.org%20>

National Institute of Family Life Advocates <http://www.nifla.org>

National Life Center <http://www.nationallifecenter.com>

National Right to Life <http://www.nrlc.org%20>

New Life Family Services <http://www.newlifefamilyservices.com>

North American Mission Board <http://www.namb.net>

Pregnancy Centers Online <http://www.pregnancycenters.org%20>

Prolife Across America <http://www.prolifeacrossamerica.org%20>

Prolife Minnesota <http://www.prolifeminnesota.org>

Pro-Life Action Ministries <http://www.plam.org%20>

Sav-A-Life <http://www.savalife.org>

Stand to Reason <http://www.str.org/free/bioethics/index.htm>

01.02. One-Issue Politics, One-Issue Marriage, and the Humane Society

One-Issue Politics, One-Issue Marriage, and the Humane Society Pondering One-Issue Politics and Cruelty To Animals

Investigating dog life in Minnesota has solidified my decision to vote against those who endorse the right to abortion. So then what is my response to the charge of being a one-issue voter? No endorsement of any single issue qualifies a person to hold public office. Being pro-life does not make a person a good governor, mayor, or president. But there are numerous single issues that disqualify a person from public office. For example, any candidate who endorsed bribery as a form of government efficiency would be disqualified, no matter what his party or platform was. Or a person who endorsed corporate fraud (say under $50 million) would be disqualified no matter what else he endorsed. Or a person who said that no black people could hold office-on that single issue alone he would be unfit for office. Or a person who said that rape is only a misdemeanor-that single issue would end his political career. These examples could go on and on. Everybody knows a single issue that for them would disqualify a candidate for office.

It’s the same with marriage. No one quality makes a good wife or husband, but some qualities would make a person unacceptable. For example, back when I was thinking about getting married, not liking cats would not have disqualified a woman as my wife, but not liking people would. Drinking coffee would not, but drinking whiskey would. Kissing dogs wouldn’t, but kissing the mailman would. And so on. Being a single-issue fiancé does not mean that only one issue matters. It means that some issues may matter enough to break off the relationship. So it is with politics. You have to decide what those issues are for you. What do you think disqualifies a person from holding public office? I believe that the endorsement of the right to kill unborn children disqualifies a person from any position of public office. It’s simply the same as saying that the endorsement of racism, fraud, or bribery would disqualify him-except that child-killing is more serious than those. When we bought our dog at the Humane Society, I picked up a brochure on the laws of Minnesota concerning animals. Statute 343.2, subdivision 1 says, "No person shall . . . unjustifiably injure, maim, mutilate or kill any animal." Subdivision 7 says, "No person shall willfully instigate or in any way further any act of cruelty to any animal." The penalty: "A person who fails to comply with any provision of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor."

Now this set me to pondering the rights of the unborn. An eight-week-old human fetus has a beating heart, an EKG, brain waves, thumb-sucking, pain sensitivity, finger-grasping, and genetic humanity, but under our present laws is not a human person with rights under the 14th Amendment, which says that "no state shall deprive any person of life . . . without due process of law." Well, I wondered, if the unborn do not qualify as persons, it seems that they could at least qualify as animals, say a dog, or at least a cat. Could we not at least charge abortion clinics with cruelty to animals under Statute 343.2, subdivision 7? Why is it legal to "maim, mutilate and kill" a pain-sensitive unborn human being but not an animal?

These reflections have confirmed my conviction never to vote for a person who endorses such an evil-even if he could balance the budget tomorrow and end all taxation.

* * * This article is from A Godward Life, Book I: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life by John Piper (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1997), pp. 279-280. Used with permission.

01.03. Exo_21:1-36 and Abortion

Exodus 21:22-25 and Abortion

Sometimes Exodus 21:22-25 is used by pro-choice advocates to show that the Bible does not regard the unborn as persons just as worthy of protection as an adult. Some translations do in fact make this a plausible opinion. But I want to try to show that the opposite is the case. The text really supports the worth and rights of the unborn. This passage of Scripture is part of a list of laws about fighting and quarreling. It pictures a situation in which two men are fighting and the wife of one of them intervenes to make peace. She is struck, and the blow results in a miscarriage or pre-mature birth. Pro-choice reasoning assumes that a miscarriage occurs. But this is not likely. The RSV is one translation that supports the pro-choice conclusion. It says,

22 When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. 23 If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. The RSV assumes that a "miscarriage" happens, and the foetus is born dead. This implies that the loss of the unborn is no "harm," because it says, "If there is a miscarriage and yet no harm follows . . ." It is possible for the blow to cause a miscarriage and yet not count as "harm" which would have to be recompensed life for life, eye for eye, etc. This translation seems to put the unborn in the category of a non-person with little value. The fine which must be paid may be for the loss of the child. Money suffices. Whereas if "harm follows" (to the woman!) then more than money must be given. In that case it is life for life, etc. But is this the right translation? The NIV does not assume that a miscarriage happened. The NIV translates the text like this:

22 If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. 23 But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life . . .

What the NIV implies is that the child is born alive and that the penalty of life for life, eye for eye, etc. applies to the child as well as the mother. If injury comes to the child or the mother there will not just be a fine but life for life, eye for eye, etc.

I agree with this translation. Here is my own literal rendering from the original Hebrew:

22 And when men fight and strike a pregnant woman (’ishah harah) and her children (yeladeyha) go forth (weyatse’u), and there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the husband of the woman may put upon him; and he shall give by the Judges 23 But if there is injury, you shall give life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. The key phrase is "and the children go forth." The RSV (and NASB!) translates this as a miscarriage. The NIV translates it as a premature live birth. In the former case the unborn is not treated with the same rights as the mother, because the miscarriage is not counted as

serious loss to be recompensed life for life. In the latter case the unborn is treated the same as the mother because the child is included in the stipulation that if injury comes there shall be life for life. Which of these interpretations is correct? In favor of the NIV translation are the following arguments:

1. There is a Hebrew verb for miscarry or lose by abortion or be bereaved of the fruit of the womb, namely, shakal. It is used near by in Exodus 23:26, "None shall miscarry (meshakelah) or be barren in your land." But this word is NOT used here in Exodus 21:22-25.

2. Rather the word for birth here is "go forth" (ytsa'). "And if her children go forth . . ." This verb never refers to a miscarriage or abortion. When it refers to a birth it refers to live children "going forth" or "coming out" from the womb. For example, Genesis 25:25, "And the first came out (wyetse') red, all of him like a hairy robe; and they called his name Esau." (See also Genesis 25:26 and Genesis 38:28-30.) So the word for miscarry is not used but a word is used that elsewhere does not mean miscarry but ordinary live birth.

3. There are words in the Old Testament that designate the embryo (golem, Psalms 139:16) or the untimely birth that dies (nephel, Job 3:16; Psalms 58:8; Isaiah 33:3). But these words are not used here.

4. Rather an ordinary word for children is used in Exodus 21:22 (yeladeyha). It regularly refers to children who are born and never to one miscarried. "Yeled only denotes a child, as a fully developed human being, and not the fruit of the womb before it has assumed a human form" (Keil and Delitzsch, Pentateuch, vol. 2, p. 135).

5. Exodus 21:22 says, "[If] her children go forth and there is no injury . . ." It does not say, "[If] her children go forth and there is no further injury . . ." (NASB). The word "further" is NOT in the original text. The natural way to take this is to say that the child goes forth and there is no injury TO THE CHILD or to the mother. The writer could very easily have inserted the Hebrew lah to specify the woman ("If her children go forth and there is no injury to her . . ."). But it is left general. There is no reason to exclude the children.

Likewise in Exodus 21:23 when it says, "But if there was injury . . ." it does not say "to the woman," as though the child were not in view. Again it is general and most naturally means, "If there was injury (to the child or to the mother)."

Many scholars have come to this same conclusion. For example, in the last century before the present debate over abortion was in sway, Keil and Delitzsch (Pentateuch, vol. 2, pp. 134f.) say,

If men strove and thrust against a woman with child, who had come near or between them for the purpose of making peace, so that her children come out (come into the world), and no injury was done either to the woman or the child that was born, a pecuniary compensation was to be paid, such as the husband of the woman laid upon him, and he was to give it by arbitrators. . . But if injury occur (to the mother or the child), thou shalt give soul for soul, eye for eye . . .

George Bush (Notes on Exodus, vol. 2, p. 19) also writing in the last century said,

If the consequence were only the premature birth of the child, the aggressor was obliged to give her husband a recompense in money, according to his demand; but in order that his demand

might not be unreasonable, it was subject to the final decision of the judges. On the other hand, if either the woman or her child was any way hurt or maimed, the law of retaliation at once took effect The contextual evidence supports this conclusion best. There is no miscarriage in this text. The child is born pre-maturely and is protected with the same sanctions as the mother. If the child is injured there is to be recompense as with the injury of the mother.

Therefore this text cannot be used by the pro-choice advocates to show that the Bible regards the unborn as less human or less worthy of protection than those who are born.

Keil and Delitzsch (Pentateuch, vol. 2, p. 135) suggest that the reason for the plural in Hebrew is "for the purpose of speaking indefinitely, because there might possibly be more than one child in the womb."

Besides those quoted I would mention Jack W. Cottrell, "Abortion and the Mosaic Law," Christianity Today 17, 12 (March 16, 1973): 6-9; Wayne H. House, "Miscarriage or Premature Birth: Additional Thoughts on Exodus 21:22-25," Westminster Theological Journal 41 (1978): 108-123; Bernard S. Jackson, "The Problem of Exodus 21:22-25 (Ius Talionis)," Vetus Testamentum 23 (1973): 273-304.

Chapter 5

01.04. Ten Reasons Why It Is Wrong to Take the Life of Unborn Children

Ten Reasons Why It Is Wrong to Take the Life of Unborn Children John Piper

Revised 1-21-2002 This is not a defense of the humanity of the unborn. It is an argument that if the unborn are human, they ought not to be aborted. There are some abortionists who believe that the unborn are human beings. (I have spoken with one abortionist and a nurse who think this way.) But these doctors do abortions anyway because they believe that taking innocent human life, while tragic, is justifiable in view of the difficult circumstances faced by mother and child. Some of these doctors want to be Christian and Biblical, and do not see their practice as wrong. I have written this brief paper to encourage these doctors to reconsider.

God commanded, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13).

I am aware that some killing is endorsed in the Bible. The word for "kill" in Exodus 20:13 is the Hebrew rahaz. It is used 43 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It always means violent, personal killing that is actually murder or is accused as murder. It is never used of killing in war or (with one possible exception, Numbers 35:27) of killing in judicial execution. Rather a clear distinction is preserved between legal "putting to death" and illegal "murder." For example, Numbers 35:19 says, "The murderer shall certainly be put to death." The word "murderer" comes from rahaz, which is forbidden in the Ten Commandments. The word "put to death" is a general word that can describe legal executions. When the Bible speaks of killing that is justifiable, it generally has in mind God's sharing some of his rights with the civil authority. When the state acts in its capacity as God's ordained preserver of justice and peace, it has the right to "bear the sword" as Romans 13:1-7 teaches. This right of the state is always to be exercised to punish evil, never to attack the innocent (Romans 13:4).

Therefore, "Thou shalt not kill," stands as a clear and resounding indictment of the killing of innocent unborn children. The destruction of conceived human life - whether embryonic, fetal, or viable - is an assault on the unique person-forming work of God. Can we say anything from Scripture about what is happening when a life in the womb is aborted? Consider two texts. Psalms 139:13 says, "Thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb." The least we can draw out of this text is that the formation of the life of a person in the womb is the work of God. God is the "Thou" in this verse. Further we can say that the formation of life in the womb is not merely a mechanical process, but is something on the analogy of weaving or knitting: "Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb." The life of the unborn is the knitting of God, and what he is knitting is a human being in his own image, unlike any other creature in the universe. The other, less well-known, text is in the book of Job. Job is protesting that he has not rejected the plea of any of his servants, even though in that culture many people thought that servants were non-persons and only property. The thing to watch for here is how Job argues. Job 31:13-40 "If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a

complaint against me, 14 what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not One fashion us in the womb?"

Job 31:15 gives the reason why Job would be guilty if he treated his servant as less than a human equal. The issue isn't really that one may have been born free and the other born in slavery. The issue goes back before birth. When Job and his servants were being fashioned in the womb the key person at work was God. That's the premise of Job's argument. So both Psalms 139:1-24 and Job 31:1-40 emphasize God as the primary Workman - Nurturer, Fashioner, Knitter, Creator - in the process of gestation. Why is that important? It's important because God is the only One who can create personhood. Mothers and fathers can contribute some impersonal egg and some impersonal sperm, but only God creates independent personhood. So when the Scripture emphasizes that God is the main Nurturer and Shaper in the womb, it is stressing that what is happening in the womb is the unique work of God, namely, the making of a person. From the Biblical point of view, gestation is the unique work of God fashioning personhood.

We can argue, I say, endlessly over what "full" personhood is. But this we can say, I think, with great confidence: what is happening in the womb is a unique person-forming work of God, and only God knows how deeply and mysteriously the creation of personhood is woven into the making of a body. Therefore it is arbitrary and unwarranted to assume that at any point in the knitting together of this person, its destruction is not an assault on the prerogatives of God the Creator. To put it positively: the destruction of conceived human life - whether embryonic, fetal, or viable - is an assault on the unique person-forming work of God. Abortion is an assault on God, not just man. God is uniquely at work in the womb from the moment of conception. This is the clear testimony of Psalms 139:13 and Job 31:15.

Aborting unborn humans falls under the repeated Biblical ban against "shedding innocent blood." The phrase "innocent blood" occurs about 20 times in the Bible. The context is always one of condemning those who shed this blood or warning people not to shed it. Innocent blood includes the blood of children (Psalms 106:38). Jeremiah (Jeremiah 22:3) puts it in a context with refugees and widows and orphans:

Thus says the Lord: "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place."

Surely the blood of the unborn is as innocent as any blood that flows in the world. The Bible frequently expresses the high priority God puts on the protection and provision and vindication of the weakest and most helpless and most victimized members of the community.

Again and again we read of the sojourner and the widow and the orphan. These are the special care of God and should be the special care of his people.

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. [And you were all once babes in the womb!] You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, [like the blood of Abel cried our to God from the ground, [Genesis 4:10] I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn . . ." (Exodus 22:21-24) "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation." (Psalms 68:5)

"Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psalms 82:3-4)

"They slay the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and say, 'The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.' . . . But the Lord will wipe them out for their wickedness." (Psalms 94:6; Psalms 94:23) By judging difficult and even tragic human life as a worse evil than taking life, abortionists contradict the widespread Biblical teaching that God loves to show his gracious power through suffering and not just by helping people avoid suffering. This does not mean we should seek suffering for ourselves or for others. But it does mean that suffering is generally portrayed in the Bible as the necessary and God-ordained, though not God-pleasing, plight of this fallen world (Romans 8:20-25, Ezekiel 18:32), and especially the necessary portion of all who would enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4) and live lives of godliness (2 Timothy 3:12). This suffering is never viewed merely as a tragedy. It is also viewed as a means of growing deep with God and becoming strong in this life (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:3-4; Hebrews 12:3-11; 2 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10) and becoming something glorious in the life to come (2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 8:18). When abortionists reason that taking life is less evil than the difficulties that will accompany life, they are making themselves wiser than God who teaches us that his grace is capable of stupendous feats of love through the suffering of those who live.

It is a sin of presumption to justify abortion by taking comfort in the fact that all these little children will go to heaven or even be given full adult life in the resurrection. This is a wonderful hope when the heart is broken with penitence and seeking forgiveness. But it is evil to justify killing by the happy outcome of eternity for the one killed. This same justification could be used to justify killing one-year olds, or any heaven-bound believer for that matter. The Bible asks the question: "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" (Romans 6:1) And: "Shall we do evil that good may come?" (Romans 3:8). In both cases the answer is a resounding NO. It is presumption to step into God's place and try to make the assignments to heaven or to hell. Our duty is to obey God, not to play God. The Bible commands us to rescue our neighbor who is being unjustly led away to death.

"Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'We did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not requite man according to his work?" (Proverbs 24:11-12)

There is no significant scientific, medical, social, moral, or religious reason for putting the unborn in a class where this text does not apply to them. It is disobedience to this text to abort unborn children.

Aborting unborn children falls under Jesus' rebuke of those who spurned children as inconvenient and unworthy of the Savior's attention.

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." (Luke 18:15-16) The word for "infant" in Luke 18:15 is the same word Luke uses for the unborn infant in Elizabeth's womb in Luke 1:41; Luke 1:44. And Jesus took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he

said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (Mark 9:36-37) It is the right of God the Maker to give and to take human life. It is not our individual right to make this choice. When Job heard that his children had all been killed in a collapsing house, he bowed to worship the Lord and said,

"Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) When Job spoke of coming from his mother’s womb, he said, "The Lord gave." And when Job spoke of dying, he said, "The Lord has taken away." Birth and death are the prerogatives of God. He is Giver and Taker in this awesome affair of life. We have no right to make individual choices about this matter. Our duty is to care for what he gives and use it to his glory.

Finally, saving faith in Jesus Christ brings forgiveness of sins and cleansing of conscience and help through life and hope for eternity. Surrounded by such omnipotent love, every follower of Jesus is free from the greed and fear that might lure a person to forsake these truths in order to gain money or avoid reproach.

††† My prayer is that anyone involved in the practice of abortion would consider these things very seriously and pray for the faith and the courage to stand for life and love in Jesus Christ.

01.05. An Open Letter to the Star Tribune

An Open Letter to the Star Tribune

Dear Editor, Are you aware of the fact that the same day the Senate Health and Human Services Committee approved the unconditional permission to terminate the lives of 24-week-old fetuses, the neonatology unit at Abbot Northwestern was caring for a 22-and-a-half week-old (500 gram) preemie with good chances of healthy life?

Now that is news and calls for profound reflection. Instead, your lead editorial the morning after (Feb. 26) glossed over this critical issue and endorsed abortion because it is "one of the most personal decisions a woman can make" and because "the abortion decision is undeniably sensitive." This level of reflection is unworthy of major editorials in good newspapers.

I assume you mean by "personal decision" not: having deep personal implications; but: having deep personal implications for only one person, the mother. But abortion is emphatically not a "personal" decision in that limited sense. There is another person, namely, the unborn child. If you deny this, you must give an account of what that little preemie is at Abbot Northwestern. Abortion is a decision about competing human rights: the right not to be pregnant and the right not to be killed.

I assume you approve of the Committee's action. But I also assume you would not approve of the mother's right to strangle the preemie at Abbot before its 25th week of life. If so you owe your readers an explanation of your simple endorsement of abortion because it is "personal" and "sensitive". In fact I challenge you to publish two photographs side by side: one of this "child" outside the womb and another of a "fetus" inside the womb both at 23 or 24 weeks, with a caption that says something like: "We at the Star Tribune regard the termination of the preemie as manslaughter and the termination of the fetus as the personal choice of the mother."

I have read in your pages how you disdain the use of pictures because abortion is too complex for simplistic solutions. But I also remember how you approved the possible televising of an execution as one of the most effective ways of turning the heart of America against capital punishment (a similarly complex issue).

We both know that if America watched repeated termination of 23-week-old fetuses on television (or saw the procedure truthfully documented in your paper), the sentiment of our society would profoundly change. (The Alan Guttmacher Institute estimated over 9,000 abortions after 21 weeks in 1987.)

Words fail to describe the barbarity of an unconditional right to take the life of a human being as fully developed as 23 weeks. You could never successfully defend it in the public presence of the act itself.

You can do so only in the moral fog of phrases like: Abortion must be left to the woman because it is "undeniably sensitive". This is not compelling. There are many sensitive situations where the

state prescribes limits for how we express our feelings where others are concerned. And there is another concerned. If you are willing, you may meet this "other person" face to face in dozens of hospitals around the country.

Sincerely yours,

John Piper

01.06. Abortion

Abortion You Desire and Do Not Have: So You Kill January 18, 1987 James 4:2 2 You desire and do not have; so you kill.

I want to try to answer three questions this morning with regard to abortion:

What is happening?

Why is it happening?

What should our response be?

1. What is happening? When the American Medical Association was formed in 1847 abortion was commonly practiced "before quickening". But through the efforts of the AMA and antiobscenity crusaders and (ironically) feminists, abortion became illegal every where in the U.S. by 1900. Abortions went underground or out of the country. The key reversal of this legal situation came on January 22, 1973 when the Supreme Court in Roe vs. Wade made the following rulings.

that no state may make laws regulating abortion during the first three months of pregnancy except to provide that they be done by licensed physicians.

that laws regulating abortion between the third month and the time of viability are constitutional only in so far as they are aimed at safeguarding the health of mothers.

that laws relating to the time from viability (6-6 1/2 months) until the end of the pregnancy may not prevent abortion if it is "to preserve the life or health of the mother".

that the "health" of the mother includes "all factors -- physical, emotional, psychological, familial and the woman’s age -- relevant to the well-being of the patient."

Then on July 1, 1976 the Court extended its original decision to affirm:

that abortions may be performed on minor daughters without the knowledge or consent of their parents, and

that women (whether married or unmarried) may obtain abortions without the knowledge or consent of the baby’s father.

In effect, therefore, the law of our land today is that any abortion is legal in America until birth if the mother can give reason that the pregnancy or the child will be an excessive burden or stress on her well-being.

Since that ruling 14 years ago Thursday, about 20,000,000 babies have been aborted in America. That is the first answer to what is happening. The second answer moves from laws and statistics to the event itself. Here is an account taken from the Minneapolis Tribune (May 29, 1976) of a married woman who got an abortion at a Minneapolis clinic.

Though I would march myself into blisters for a woman’s right to exercise the option of motherhood, I discovered there in the waiting room that I was not the modern woman I thought I was. When my name was called, my body felt so heavy the nurse had to help me into the examining room. I waited for my husband to burst through he door and yell "Stop," but of course he didn’t. I concentrated on three black spots in the acoustic ceiling until they grew in size to the shape of saucers, while the doctor swabbed my insides with antiseptic.

"You’re going to feel a burning sensation now," he said, injecting Novocain into the neck of the womb. The pain was swift and severe, and I twisted to get away from him. He was hurting my baby, I reasoned, and the black saucers quivered in the air. "Stop," I cried, "Please stop." He shook his head, busy with his equipment. "It’s too late to stop now," he said. "It’ll just take a few more seconds."

What good sports we women are. And how obedient. Physically the pain passed even before the hum of the machine signals that the vacuuming of my uterus was completed, my baby sucked up like ashes after a cocktail party. Ten minutes start to finish. And I was back on the arm of the nurse.

There were 12 beds in the recovery room. Each one had a gaily flowered draw sheet and soft green or blue thermal blanket. It was all very feminine. Lying on these beds for an hour or more were the shocked victims of their sex life, their full wombs now stripped clean, their futures less encumbered.

Finally, then, it was time for me to leave. . . My husband was slumped in the waiting room, clutching single yellow rose wrapped in wet paper towel and stuffed into a Baggie.

We didn’t talk all the way home. . . My husband and I are back to planning our summer vacation now and his career switch.

It certainly does make more sense not to be having a baby right now -- we say that to each other all the time. But I have this ghost now. A very little ghost that only appears when I’m seeing something beautiful, like the full moon on the ocean last weekend. And the baby waves at me. And I wave at the baby. "Of course, we have room," I cry to the ghost. "Of course, we do." That is a second way to answer the question of what is happening in our culture. There is a third. Is this woman overly sentimental in seeing "a very little ghost" when she looks at something beautiful? Was her baby anything like a real person? Suppose she had missed one period and let it go. Then when the second passed she tested and discovered she was pregnant. By the time she goes to the clinic the baby is 7 or 8 weeks old. Here is a description of her baby from Dr. Paul Rockwell of Troy, NY:

Eleven years ago while giving an anesthetic for a ruptured ectopic pregnancy (at two months gestation) I was handed what I believed was the smallest living human ever seen. . . Within the sac was a tiny human male swimming extremely vigorously in the amniotic fluid. . . This tiny human was perfectly developed, with long, tapering fingers, feet and toes. It was almost transparent, as regards to the skin, and the delicate arteries and veins were prominent to the ends of the fingers. The baby was extremely alive and swam about the sac approximately one time per second, with a natural swimmer’s stroke.

It is my opinion that if the lawmakers, and people realized that very vigorous life is present it is possible that abortion would be found more objectionable than euthanasia. (From an MCCL pamphlet, Their Lives -- A Single Issue)

Contemporary medical technology gives every woman and man who is willing to look a clear picture what happens in abortion at every level. In this case it is the taking of this little life with arms and legs and fingers and toes and head and eyes and nose and a heart that has been beating for a month and a body not quite as long as your little finger, and crushes it or poisons it, or starves or in some other way takes away its life. That is the third way of describing what is happening today. Let me give one more answer to this first question. Can we say anything from Scripture about what is happening when a life in the womb is aborted? Let me direct your consideration to two texts, one familiar and one perhaps not.

Psalms 139:13 Thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. The least we can draw out of this text is that the formation of the life of a person in the womb is the work of God, and it is not merely a mechanical process but a work on the analogy of weaving or knitting: "Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb." The life of the unborn is the knitting of God, and what he is knitting is a human being in his own image, unlike any other creature in the universe. The other less known text is in the book of Job. Job is protesting that he has not rejected the plea of any of his servants, even though in that culture many thought that servants were non-persons and only property. The thing to watch for here is how Job argues.

Job 31:13-40 If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me; 14 what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?

Job 31:15 gives the reason why Job would be without excuse if he treated his servant as less than a human equal. The issue isn't really that one may have been born free and the other born in slavery. The issue goes back before birth. When Job and his servants were being fashioned in the womb the key person at work was God -- the same God, shaping both the fetus-Job and the fetus of his servants. It is irrelevant that Job's mother was probably a freedwoman and the mother of the servant was probably a bondwoman. Why? Because mothers are not the main nurturers and fashioners during the time of gestation -- God is, the same God for both slave and free. That's the premise of Job's argument. So both Psalms 139:1-24 and Job 31:1-40 emphasize God as the primary workman -- nurturer, fashioner, knitter, Creator -- in this time of gestation. Why is that important? It's important because God is the only One who can create personhood. Mothers and fathers can contribute some impersonal egg and some impersonal sperm, but only God creates independent personhood. So when the Scripture emphasizes that God is the main nurturer and shaper in the womb, it is stressing that what is happening in the womb is the unique work of God, namely, the making of a person. From the Biblical point of view gestation is the unique work of God fashioning personhood.

We can argue till doomsday about when this little being becomes "a whole person." That argument will probably never be settled. But this we can say, I think, with great confidence: what is happening in the womb is a unique person-forming work of God, and only God knows how deeply and mysteriously the creation of personhood is woven into the making of a body. And therefore it

is arbitrary and unwarranted to assume that at some point in the knitting together of this person its destruction is not an assault on the prerogatives of God the Creator. Let me say that again positively: the destruction of conceived human life -- whether embryonic, fetal, or viable -- is an assault on the unique person-forming work of God. And therefore to the degree that we recognize even in fallen personhood a unique value, because of its potential to glorify God with conscious obedience and praise, to that degree will we shrink back with reverence and fear from assaulting or obstructing the divine work of God fashioning such a person in the womb. So the fourth way of answering our first question is to say that what is going on in America today is by and large a cavalier, irreverent assault on the unique person-forming work of God. What God is knitting together into personhood, man is tearing asunder as something less significant than flesh and bones.

2. Now the second question is Why? Why is this happening with unprecedented frequency and flippancy in our day?

One answer is given in James 4:2 (following the punctuation of the RSV and NASB):

You desire and do not have; so you kill.

Desire what? More financial security perhaps or more leisure or more education or more unrestrained teenage sex activity or more career options or the avoidance of a child who may be handicapped, or perhaps just less hassle for the next 18 years. We desire, and the desires may be good or bad. But then comes the pregnancy -- the beginning of a divine work of person-forming in the womb. And the result? The desires are threatened. We desire and then, because of the pregnancy, we cannot have. The child is going to cost money; or cramp our travel plans and our leisure; or keep us out of school; or hinder our career advancement; or consume thousands of hours with a possible handicap; and limit our freedom in a hundred ways for the next 18 years or more.

Now what? James says, "You desire and do not have so you kill." We kill marriages and we kill unborn babies because they cut across our desires; they stand in the way of our unencumbered self-enhancement. And we live in a culture where self-enhancement and self-advancement is god. And if self-enhancement is god, then the One who is at work in the womb shaping a person in his own image is not God and the assault on his work is not sacrilegious, but obedience to the god of self.

Why has abortion on demand reached such awesome proportions in our land? Because at beneath all the rhetoric it is the agenda of Satan, who, according to Jesus, has been a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). The apostle Paul said that when we love the world and follow its desires, we are following the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2-3).

Many of you know Steve Calvin, a physician with a specialization in obstetrics. He was a member of our church until he took an appointment in Tucson at the University of Arizona along side his involvement in a Hispanic HMO and a Crisis Pregnancy Center. He is an articulate opponent of abortion on demand.

He wrote me a letter a couple years ago and said, To better know the opposition I checked out the book _____ by _____(1983), the premier text on the medical, social and

logistical aspects of this grisly business. After two days of reading and analysis. . . I'm convinced we are dealing here with forces of spiritual darkness that enslave men's minds. And so James counsels us in James 4:7,

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. A heart that is deeply submitted to God no matter what, and reverences his word and his work above all worldly self-enhancement, will find the grace (as verse 6 says: "he gives more grace!") not only to conquer the frustrated desires that lead to killing, but also to be transformed with a new set of desires that find true and everlasting joy in submission to the one and only true God who speaks with authority in the Bible, and always for our good. So the answer to the second question, why abortion abounds is that men and women are not submitted to their Creator but instead have made self-enhancement their god, have fallen in step with the the ruler of this world, and so are willing to destroy virtually anything that stands in their way of unencumbered self-advancement.

3. The final question is what should our response be?

I will mention five kinds of things:

First, submit yourselves to God. Draw near to him. Live by the power of his grace. Let him shape your desires rather than the world and the feisty, self-centered temperament of our culture. Let your life and your mouth bear witness to the real delights of knowing and trusting and obeying and being shaped and guided by the Creator of all things who loved us and gave himself for us. Be a Christian -- and a visible and audible one. The world needs you so badly.

Second, pray earnestly and regularly for awakening in the churches that will spill over in city-wide and nation-wide and world-wide evangelization of the lost and reformation of life.

Third, use your imagination to see what abortion really is! Fight against the kind of social stupor that gripped Nazi Germany -- the feeling that the problem is so huge and so horrendous an so out of our control that I just can't be wrong to let it be. Use your imagination to see and feel what is really happening behind those sterile clinic doors.

If you could see each little handiwork of God and what it looks like when it is being crushed or poisoned or starved, you would say, this can't be happening. Civilized people do not do this! The children will not be saved and God's work will not be reverenced without an act of sustained sympathetic imagination. Otherwise it is out of sight out of mind -- just like Dachau, Buchenwald, Belsen, and Auschwitz. It just couldn't be happening. And so we act as if it isn't.

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your souls know it, and will he not requite man according to his work? (Proverbs 24:10-12)

Fourth, support alternatives to abortion with your money and time and prayers. I refer you to the New Life Homes Crisis Pregnancy Center sponsored by the Greater Minneapolis Association of Evangelicals, and the table that they will have in the hallway after between the services (phone: 920 1006).

Finally, use your democratic privileges of free speech and representation and demonstration to press for legal protection for the unborn.

One of the strongest arguments against legal enactments to protect the unborn is the claim that legal constraints without widespread social consensus is tyranny. And there is no widespread social consensus regarding the personhood of the unborn. The argument loses much of its force when applied to the historical situation of slaves in this country. On March 6, 1857 the Supreme Court, in Dred Scott vs. Stanford, ruled that no act of Congress or territorial legislature could make laws banning slavery. The fundamental argument was that salves are not free and equal persons but the property of their masters. The ruling is analogous to Rowe vs. Wade because today no state may make a law banning abortion to protect the unborn. The argument is similar: basically because the unborn are at the sovereign disposal of their mothers and do not have personal standing in their own right.

There was no consensus in this country on the person hood and rights of salves. We were split down the middle. But the issue was so fundamental that the states went to war and in the end the Lincoln administration overturned the Dred Scott decision. And today 130 years later we look back with amazing consensus and marvel at the blindness of our forefathers. May we not dare to believe that by the grace of God and the perseverance of his people in prayer and piety and political pressure there could emerge in the coming decades a consensus for life, and that the 21st century could look back on our generation with the same dismay that we look back on the slave laws of this land and on the concentration camps of World War II. Nationwide reformation has happened before -- with Wilberforce in England and Lincoln in America. It can happen again. May God help us!

Chapter 8

01.07. Where Does Child-Killing Come From?

Where Does Child-Killing Come From?

January 25, 1998

James 4:1-17 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Abortion Is About God At the end of this Sanctity of Human Life week, and three days after the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade, which struck down all state laws in our land regulating abortion and made abortion on demand the law of the land and confirmed an individualistic, unencumbered view of human liberty that has allowed the killing of 35 million children, I want to say this morning that abortion is mainly about God. Abortion is about God, the Creator of the universe, the Giver and Sustainer of all life, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Redeemer and Forgiver of all who trust him. Abortion is about God. To leave God out of the picture of abortion is to trivialize it. All things are trivial without God. God is the ultimate reality over the universe. All other reality is derivative and dependent and has no ultimate meaning at all without reference to God the ultimate reality. In him we live and move and have our being. If we leave him out of account, we know nothing of any lasting significance about ourselves or the world. Therefore the message that I have to give is that abortion is about God. And therefore it is not trivial. Motherhood is about God, therefore (and only therefore) it is not trivial. Fatherhood is about God, and therefore it is not trivial. Sexual relations are about God, and therefore they are not trivial. Children - inside the womb and outside the womb - are about God, and therefore they are not trivial.

Abortion is about God. The most important things to say about abortion are how it relates to God and how God relates to it. So let me mention four ways that abortion is about God. The first two I deal with briefly not because they are less important, but because they tend to be more commonly dealt with, and John Ensor has dealt with them beautifully this weekend. The fourth I bring in because of the turmoil our President is in at this moment and how it relates to abortion. But the third is from our text and will receive more of our attention.

1. Abortion is about God because the child in the womb is created by God in the image of God. The reason Genesis 9:6 is important here is that it shows that the words of Genesis 1:27 (that God created male and female in his own image) is true of all humans who follow after the first man and woman. God says to Noah, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." In other words, every member of the human race is in the image of God. And, as John Ensor showed in his seminar yesterday, the Bible treats the unborn in the same way it treats babies that have been born (Genesis 25:22; compare Luke 1:44 and Luke 2:12; Psalms 139:13). To be made in the image of God means at least that the aim of God in making us in the womb is that we might image forth God. Images of reality exist to image forth that reality. We are images of divine reality. Our meaning on earth is to image forth that divine reality. That is why we exist. To attack the human being in the womb and kill him or her is to assault God. God is making the child. God is weaving a unique image of his divine glory with the purpose of imaging forth that glory in the world. Killing the child is an attack on God's glory and is treason against the Ruler of the universe. So, fundamentally and most importantly, abortion is about God because children are made by God in the image of God for the glory of God.

2. Abortion is about God because only God can forgive the sin of killing unborn children. This is why John Ensor's book, Experiencing God's Forgiveness, is so important. The ultimate evil of abortion is not that it kills children or that it damages women - which it does. The ultimate evil is that it assaults and demeans God. Now that is what the gospel of Jesus Christ is about. How God planned and brought about a plan to forgive people who have committed the ultimate outrage of discounting his glory and treating it as less valuable than their own private preferences. The apostle Paul says in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That is the essence of sin: falling short of the glory of God, exchanging it for the preference of our own plan. But then Romans 3:24-25 say that those who trust in God are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." In short, what this means is that God is the only being in the universe who can forgive the sin of abortion and actually "justify" or set right the relationship between himself and us sinners who have so grievously offended him. He sets it right by the death of his Son in our place so that all the wrath that we deserve for the sin of abortion - and every other sin - is put on Jesus, and he dies in our place and we are acquitted and given eternal life and joy at the cost of the Son of God.

Abortion is about God, because only God can forgive the sin of killing unborn children. He can and he does, and it is the greatest, most freeing news in all the world. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

3. Abortion is about God because the root cause of abortion is a failure to be satisfied in God as our supreme love.

Let's see where this comes from in the Bible. If you start reading in James 4:1-17 and stop after James 4:2 a, what you would have is a simple, psychological, trivial analysis of where child-killing comes from. An analysis without God. Let's read this analysis:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust [or: desire] and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. The issue of murder in this text is rooted in

unsatisfied desires. "You desire and do not have; so you commit murder." We could spend a long time here examining all the desires and longings that an unplanned pregnancy threatens: a pleased boyfriend or husband, education, financial solvency, career, freedom from morning sickness and diapers and runny noses and the terrible twos and sleepless nights and homework help and sports and band and drama and transportation and teenage moodiness and college expenses. You desire all these things and all this freedom, but along comes a baby, and your desires are threatened, and you are tempted to get rid of the troublemaker, the baby. That's where abortion comes from.

I say that would be a trivial analysis. Because God is left out. But in James 4:1-17 God is not left out. In fact, he is brought in with a shocking image. Behind James 4:2-3 he sees a transaction between people and God. "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your pleasures." So he pictures people wanting something (or someone) that satisfies, and then coming to God not because he satisfies, but only to ask him for the means to get something else, and then leaving God behind to go get satisfied with this other thing. And then he names that bluntly in James 4:4 : "You adulteresses!" (A good literal translation.) Where did that come from? It came from the situation he just described. We have a great and loving husband, God. But we are in love with another man or another thing, and do not find God satisfying. But we can't afford this paramour. So we go (believe it or not!) to our husband, our God - this is prayer - and we ask him for the means to get this other lover. That's why James shouts, "Adulteresses!" to both women and men. This gives the sense of the next words in James 4:4 : "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." If you don't find God and his ways and promises satisfying, and you turn to the world as your real love, then you put emotion between you and God and bring down the wrath of God. Why? Well, it should be obvious, but James goes on to tell us in James 4:5 : "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose [when it says]: "He jealously desires the Spirit* which He has made to dwell in us?"

I think this means: God is jealous for your affection and admiration. He has created you so that he might be your supreme love and satisfaction. "In his presence is fullness of joy; at his right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Psalms 16:11). So when James says that killing comes from unsatisfied desires, he is not giving a trivial psychological analysis of the problem. He means: killing comes from rejecting God as our highest treasure and our ultimate satisfaction and our supreme love.

If we found in God what God really is, if we were not willfully blind and rebellious against him as our all-supplying portion in this life and the next, we would not abort our children. The root cause of abortion is the failure to be satisfied in God as our supreme love. And, for all the great legal work that needs to be done to protect human life, the greatest work that needs to be done is to spread a passion - a satisfaction - for the supremacy of God in all things. That's our calling.

There is at least one more way that abortion is about God.

4. The political and cultural events that will make abortion unthinkable and illegal are in the hands of God.

Beware of thinking and praying toward an impeachment of President Clinton because of his most recent turmoil. That may be the right thing to do. But our puny wisdom is not worthy of running the world. If he is impeached and convicted and forced out of office, Al Gore will become the president of the United States. That will make his chances of being elected president in the next election much higher as an incumbent. And where was Al Gore Thursday on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade? At an abortion-rights gathering, not a pro-life gathering. Richard Neuhaus points out that it is very likely that the next president will appoint four new Justices to the Supreme Court. That means that an impeachment and conviction of President Clinton would probably put a radically pro-choice president in office for the next ten years, namely Al Gore. But if Clinton has to limp to the end of his presidency in disgrace, history may take a very different turn. We don't know.

I only point this out to remind you that God is in heaven and rules over the affairs of men, and is much wiser than we are in running the world. It behooves us to pray for God's wise and just and merciful plan to unfold rather than to assume that our shortsighted guesses are the best. When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, became proud and defied the living God, Daniel 4:31-32 says, A voice came from heaven, saying, "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." This is still true. God will rule over who is chosen for the Supreme Court in the next several years and we do well to join him in his wise and just and sovereign rule of the world by praying for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth the way the angels do it in heaven, and by voting and acting in accord with God's will revealed in Scripture.

Summary The sum of the matter is this: Abortion has to do with God. 1) Because the child in the womb is created by God in the image of God for the glory of God. 2) Because only God can forgive the sin of killing unborn children. 3) Because the root cause of abortion is a failure to be satisfied in God as our supreme love. 4) And because the political and cultural events that will make abortion unthinkable and illegal are in the hands of God.

How then shall we spread a passion for the supremacy of God among abortion providers at Midwest and Meadowbrook in our neighborhood, so that they will find their satisfaction in God and turn from violence toward women and children? That is our question and our prayer.

Chapter 9

01.08. Rescuing Unborn Children

Rescuing Unborn Children Required and Right

January 5, 1989

Proverbs 24:10-34 If you faint in the day of adversity,

your strength is small.

11 Rescue those who are being taken away to death;

hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

12 If you say, "Behold, we did not know this,"

does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?

Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,

and will he not requite man according to his work?

Introduction

I want to begin with a word to women who have had abortions and to the fathers who may have agreed to it, and to the grandmothers and grandfathers who may have demanded it. This will be a painful message but it is not a hopeless one.

Alongside the death of 20 million unborn humans stands the tragedy of over 10 million women enduring abortions and dealing with that loss. In the first ten months of its existence the organization called Women Exploited By Abortion grew from two women to 10,000 members who had had abortions but were now strongly pro-life. (Cited in Abortion, by Paul Fowler, Multnomah, 1987, p. 172). In 1981 the regional director of Suicides Anonymous testified to the Cincinnati City Council like this: "This Cincinnati group has seen 5,620 members in 35 months. Over 4,000 were women of whom 1,800 or more had had abortions. The highest suicide rate is in the 15 to 24 age group. There is a direct linkage between suicide attempts and [abortion]." (Quoted in Abortion, by Paul Fowler, p. 195) The reason for this is the depth and variety of the ongoing emotional effects of abortion. These may include discomfort with children, feeling victimized, feelings of self-hate, guilt, anger, depression, grief, regret, loss, preoccupation with aborted child, frequent crying, etc. But here’s the key word of hope. I spoke with one young woman in our church recently who had had an abortion and this is what she wanted me to stress. No one is cut off from Christ because of past sin - any past sin. What cuts a person off from Christ and the fellowship of his people is the endorsement of past sin. For the repentant there is forgiveness and cleansing and hope.

Beverly Smith McMillan opened the first abortion clinic in Jackson Mississippi. After a life-changing conversion to Christ she resigned. She confessed, "The good news that makes the Gospel so relevant today is that God forgives. I know from personal experience that the blood of Jesus can

cover the sin of abortion." (Fowler, Abortion, p. 198) There are an increasing number of post-abortion support groups that help women discover and enjoy this forgiveness and healing.

One of the ironies in this whole affair is that women who have been though abortion can be one of the most powerful forces for life in our culture. And yet almost everything in the pro-life movement brings back such painful memories that it is hard to be involved. So I would just say, there is forgiveness, there is cleansing, there is healing, there is hope, and when you are ready, there is a great work to be done, and we await your help.

Exposition

We begin now with a look at Proverbs 24:11 :Rescue those who are being taken away to death;

hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

Nothing is said in the verse about the situation in mind. Is it captives taken in war about to be destroyed. Is it victims of vigilante justice? Is it an innocent person wrongly accused in court? Is it murder in the streets? Is it child-sacrifice to pagan gods? The text does not say what the situation is. This is typical of Biblical proverbs. They are often very general guidelines for how the fear of God works itself out in day to day life. God expects us to have enough spiritual wisdom and enough experience from life and enough awareness of his Word to apply these proverbs appropriately.

Proverbs 24:11 is a general statement. And the reason it’s general is so that we will not limit it to one group of humans and try to leave out another group. We must not limit it to Jews or white people or healthy people or rich people or intelligent people. It is general, not specific.

What then does it teach us to do? The duty of Proverbs 24:11 could be stated like this: "If a group of humans is being taken away to death who ought not be taken away to death, the people who fear God ought to try to rescue them." Or, to use the words of the second half of the verse, "If there is a group of humans who are stumbling (literally: slipping) to the slaughter who ought not to be slipping to the slaughter, the people who fear God ought to try to hold them back from the slaughter." What is being commanded here is some kind of intervention from us when we become aware of humans being killed who ought not to be killed.

Then Proverbs 24:12 anticipates an objection that some people will raise who didn’t do anything to try to rescue those who were being taken away to death. It says, "If you say, ’Behold, we did not know this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not requite man according to his work?" This means that the writer here has in mind the possibility that the slaughter may be cloaked; it may be hidden or concealed or secret enough that people would claim with some plausibility that they didn’t know it was going on. But the text says the plausibility will not hold with God. In other words the excuse of ignorance is not likely to stand up in God’s courtroom. It may stand up in man’s courtroom because man cannot weigh the heart. But God knows our motives and our awareness exactly. He sees through all our rationalizations and knows perfectly when we have neglected a duty out of ignorance or out of laziness or fear or apathy or preoccupation with lesser things. There will be no evasion with God.

Notice that the verse does not say, "You claim not to know about the slaughter, but God knows that you do know." It says something more radical. What it says is, "You claim not to know about

the slaughter, but God knows how your heart works." In other words God not only knows what we really know inside. He also knows when our ignorance is guilty ignorance. When we are called to account for our actions he not only will say, "Why didn't you act this way if you knew this much?" He will also say, "Why did you allow yourself, in view of how much was at stake, to remain in such insensitive ignorance?" And he will know the answer before we give it, because he weighs the hearts of everyone of us. "Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it?" So our text this morning makes three things clear.

First, it makes clear that when a group of humans are being killed who ought not to be killed, it is our Biblical duty to intervene and to try to rescue them and to hold them back from the slaughter.

Second, the text makes clear that sometimes slaughter can be done with enough camouflage that people may try to make a plausible case that they did not really know what was happening.

Third, it makes clear that the excuse of ignorance is not likely to hold with God who not only knows what we really know in our hearts but also what we have willfully neglected to know.

Now I believe very strongly that this is God's word to us today concerning the slaughter of abortion. I believe this text is a clear call to action along with many others of a similar kind (Psalms 82:3-4; Isaiah 58:6-7; James 1:27; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-17; etc.). But before I say more about that action I need to at least mention in summary form why I think the unborn who are being taken away to death are indeed a group of humans who ought not to be killed in the abortion clinics of our city. And if the unborn are human beings they qualify for protection under this text. Are the Unborn Human Beings?

Here are some of my reasons for counting the aborted unborn as human beings in their own right.

1. They have been conceived by two human beings, not by two animals or a human and an animal. Therefore they are utterly unique in the animal kingdom. Genetically they are human, not whales or horses or apes.

2. The Bible teaches that in the womb God is knitting together a person. Psalms 139:13 says, "Thou didst knit ME together in my mother's womb."

3. In the Bible the unborn are referred to in personal terms. For example, in Genesis 25:22 Rebekah's pregnancy is described like this: "The children (the ordinary word for children or sons outside the womb) struggled together within her." Luke 1:41 says that "when Elizabeth (who was six months pregnant) heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb." The word for "babe" (brephos) is the same word used in Luke 2:12 and Luke 2:16 for the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (and in Luke 18:15 for the infants being brought to Jesus). The unborn are not regarded impersonally in the Bible.

4. The unborn look like you and me when they are being aborted. The science of fetology with its photography and ultrasound has opened a window on the womb that is breathtaking. We can now look at these little beings and let their face and eyes and nose and ears and hands and arms and feet and legs testify that they are one of us. There is no question any more of aborting a mass of tissue or something like an egg yolk.

(Sheila Kitzinger’s book, Being Born, gives clear pictures of what the baby looks like at the key stages of pregnancy. Most abortions happen after the seventh week of pregnancy. Midwest Health Center for Women four blocks from our church doesn’t even quote prices on abortions before seven weeks. The 1987 fee schedule was 7-12 weeks: $195; 12.1 - 13.6 weeks: $260; 14+ weeks: $360. Much later than this they refer mothers to another facility for the abortion. In the Twin Cities St. Paul Ramsey does late abortions. I know of one several weeks ago of a twenty one week old baby.)

Pictures matter. If someone asked you to look at a group of animals and identify which was a human, you would not have any trouble. You would do it on the basis of what it looks like. There is a human likeness. And the unborn have it as early as most abortions take place.

It is not only the still life photographs that make the humanity plain but also the moving pictures of their activity and their recoiling at pain.

5. These little beings will grow up if left alone. If we do not intrude with violence on their life, they will come to maturity. They are not becoming human, they are growing "into the fullness of humanity that they already possess." (John Stott. Christianity Today, 5 Sept. 1980, p. 50f.)

6. Being tiny does not make them less human. We know this because we don’t regard born infants as less human than adults even though they are humorously out of proportion with their big heads and short arms. We’ve just gotten used to looking at them at that funny stage - and we will get used to looking at the unborn at their stages too when we open our eyes! Nor does not breathing make the unborn less human. I would not regard Noel as less human if she had to be sustained on a respirator for a few months. Nor does the lack of rational abilities and language make the unborn less human. We don’t hold that against a born infant and there is no reason we should hold it against an unborn infant. Nor does the location of the unborn inside a woman’s womb make it less human. Location is an irrelevant consideration in defining humanity. Nor does the dependence on another for its blood transactions make it less human - not any more than a person who lives by repeated dialysis. In other words the things that are unusual about the life of the unborn do not disqualify him or her from the human family.

7. Finally, the unborn are humans because more and more of them at earlier and earlier ages can live outside the womb if cared for adequately. I have a picture here of Kenya King, born in Orlando Florida (four and a half months along). She weighed 18 oz. She is shown here healthy in her mothers arms at five pounds. Alongside this picture is a dead baby the same size as Kenya when she was born. The dead baby was killed by abortion.

Now what is the difference between these babies? One was wanted and the other was not. And brothers and sisters that criterion for humanity will not be accepted in heaven! And it ought not to be accepted on the earth. The Bible is full of statements commanding love and protection for the unwanted.

I conclude then that the unborn are a group of humans who are not disqualified from the command of Proverbs 24:11 and that when the Bible says, "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter," we have no right to put the unborn in a subhuman class that does not qualify for our rescue. We ought to rescue as many as we can.

Rescuing and Trespassing

Finally I want to try to make the point that for some of us the kind of rescue efforts that involve trespassing are right and required. This is not the only way to obey Proverbs 24:11. But I want to show that it is one right way and that conscience may well require it of some of us. When those of us from Bethlehem who participated in the last rescue at Planned Parenthood were arraigned in court on January 6, each of us was given an opportunity to address the court. Here's what I said to Judge James Campbell.

Suppose that I lived next door to a very mean-spirited man who was so hostile that he put up "Do not trespass" signs all over the fence around his house mainly to keep me out. One day I hear children screaming from his back yard. I run to the fence and notice a little child choking on something. Instinctively I jump the fence, knowing it says no trespassing and try to save the child. I'm too late. After a few days this mean-spirited man seeks a warrant for my arrest. I go into court and the judge, for reasons beyond his control, finds me guilty of trespassing and fines $50. Would I be disrespectful of the law, I asked Judge James Campbell, if I refused to pay?

He answered by saying, "In that case you should appeal the decision, because of a special legal reality called the law of necessity. But there are distinguishing facts between that case and this one." So I asked if he would be willing to tell me what facts. He paused (as if to groan in his own spirit) and said, "The Supreme Court has ruled in Roe vs. Wade that abortion is not a crime."

Now this is very crucial. Listen carefully. Last August during the rescues in Atlanta where hundreds of pro-life people were being arrested, Charles Stanley, pastor of the First Baptist Church, and his deacons published a statement (attached to this message) denouncing the rescue tactics of Operation Rescue. They argued that the rescuers were not getting arrested for protesting abortion. They were getting arrested for trespassing. That, they said, does not qualify as a Biblical instance of legitimate civil disobedience. The trespass law is a good law. But the Bible only condones breaking a law that 1) "requires an act which is contrary to God's Word" or 2) "prohibits an act which is consistent with God's Word." The trespass law, they say, does neither. So it is not right to break it.

Now that I have stood before the judge in Ramsey County Court I know better why that is not true. He said very plainly that I should appeal the sentence if I were found guilty of trespassing to save the life of a child. I would NOT be guilty because of "the law of necessity." You are NOT GUILTY of crime or wrongdoing when you trespass to save life. That is what the judge said. That is what your conscience says. (See the law attached at the end of this message.)

Then why are all these people being arrested and found guilty? NOT really because of the trespass law. (I think this is the mistake in the statement by First Baptist Church of Atlanta.) Every judge in this country would ignore the trespass law when saving life is at stake. This is not the law that is sending hundred to jail and giving fines to thousands. The legal foundation of the arrests and sentences of guilt is not the trespass law. It is Roe vs. Wade.

If Roe vs. Wade had not stripped the unborn of their humanity, it would be no crime to trespass to save them. Therefore when we trespass to try to save them, we are not offending against the trespass law at all. We are offending against Roe vs. Wade. And that is Biblical, even on the criteria of First Baptist Atlanta, because in effect Roe vs. Wade "prohibits an act which consistent

with God’s Word," namely, the (legal!) protection of children. Legal, mind you, because, as the Judge said, the "law of necessity" overrules the law of trespass when saving life is at stake. A law which prohibits the legal effort to "rescue those who are being taken to death and to hold back those who are slipping to the slaughter" is the kind of law that Esther broke to save the Jews (Esther 4:16), and Obadiah broke to save the prophets (1 Kings 18:4-16), and Rahab broke to save the spies (Joshua 2:3-4), and Corrie Ten Boom broke to save the Jewish refugees, and many Germans should have broken near the concentration camps, and which many of us will break next Friday - to bear witness to the truth that even in free land there is a limit beyond which government may not violate the law of God. Amen.

Postscript On the Friday following the Sunday on which this message was delivered at Bethlehem Baptist Church Pastor Piper and four other staff and numerous members of Bethlehem were among the 130+ people arrested trying to save babies at Planned Parenthood of Minnesota on Ford Parkway, St. Paul. They were charged with trespassing and will be arraigned on February 3. When asked to leave by the police the following response was given by the leader of the rescue. He read President Reagan’s "Personhood Proclamation" (attached) and said that the people about to be killed in this building today are full citizens of the United States and we cannot move willingly and let them be destroyed. The legal explanation for the legality of our act is given on an attached sheet.

01.09. Compassion, Power, and the Kingdom of God Kingdom

Compassion, Power, and the Kingdom of God Kingdom Compassion and the Killing of Children January 21, 1990

Hebrews 10:32-39 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33 sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 34 For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. 35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Let me begin by saying this morning that in the diversity of the body of Christ some Christians should be focussing pro-life energy on the enactment of legislation that will protect the unborn. Other Christians should focus pro-life energy on educational strategies that promote the wisdom of sexual chastity before marriage and heterosexual faithfulness in marriage. Other Christians should focus pro-life energy on crisis pregnancy ministries --counseling, housing, health care. Other Christians should focus pro-life energies on adoption services --counselling, foster care, new parent connections. Other Christians should focus their pro-life energy on post-abortion ministries of counselling and care. Other Christians should focus their pro-life energy on sidewalk counselling or other forms of peaceful, public demonstration. Some Christians should specialize in extraordinary prayer, some should specialize in thinking and writing, and some should specialize in public action.

We must guard against the reverse blind spot of the pro-abortion people. They talk much about compassion to women in crisis pregnancies and about the pain of being an unwanted child. But they do not talk about the pain, the indignity, the injustice, the brutality done against the unborn in abortion. And one of their primary defenses against the pro-life efforts is to say that we talk a lot about compassion to the unborn but show little concern for mothers in crisis or unwanted children after birth. To which I respond: let’s not have this blind spot. Let’s not be imbalanced. Let’s admit (on both sides of the issue) how imperfect we are. But let’s keep the ledger straight.

You need to be able to answer people that this indictment is not true. Pro-life people as a whole are very active in providing the broad range of ministries for women and children in need. See the fact sheet "Free Help for Pregnant Women" which lists almost thirty agencies in Minnesota addressing these issues. Add to that the major efforts of evangelical groups and coalitions engaged in struggling for the health and wholeness of the family at the national and state level. And add to that the impulses for personal integrity and honesty and decency and justice and purity and love that flow out into society, unacknowledged(!), from thousands of Bible-based, Christ-exalting churches. And you will see that the indictment that we are not engaged in the larger picture is not true. And that accusation is often used as a kind of fog spread over the debate to conceal the injustice of the basic pro-abortion principle, namely, that the right of a woman not to be pregnant is greater than the right of an unborn child not to be killed.

There are two million couples waiting to adopt children today in America -- sixty homes for every child that needs one. There are long lists of parents willing to take and love children with Downs Syndrome. There are one hundred couples on the waiting list to take Spina Bifida babies no matter how severe. And the reason there are tie-ups in adopting some mixed race and minority children is not because there are not enough willing pro-life parents. It is owing to complicated legal limitations and parental rights and agency policies. The resources are there to fold all children into families who want them.

Restricting the right of doctors and mothers to kill unborn children will not result in greater misery for those children. When the heart of a nation is willing to kill its unborn children to avoid having to care for them, it is hard to imagine this heart being willing to care for them. But if the heart of the nation could be turned so that it was no longer willing to kill its unborn children, then it is not so hard to imagine that this heart could care for them.

I want to address the issue of non-violent, peaceful protesting this morning. The reason I began the way I did was simply to show that I see such protests as one of many strategies in the pro-life effort, not the only one, and not the most important one -- but one among many, and a good catalyst at this time, and one that a Christian can pursue with a clear, Biblically informed conscience. What I can say in this brief message is very limited, and I refer you to last year's message (January 15, 1989: "Rescuing Unborn Children: Required and Right") and to the booklet: Abortion, A Pastor's Perspective for a fuller treatment of the issue.

There is Rescue being planned for tomorrow somewhere in the Metro area. Many of us plan to participate as much as we can. It simply means sitting down peacefully in front of a door behind which they destroy children, and saying by our physical presence: the abortions that happen behind these doors are so unjust, so inhumane, so violent, so contrary to the legal foundations of our country (the worth of life), that today we are willing to risk unjust arrest if we can but spare one child and heighten the sense of urgency in our society that these children should be loved and protected by law.. Can this kind of public demonstration of compassion for the unborn (and for their mothers!) -- trespassing to save life and to expose laws that endorse killing -- can this kind of demonstration be part of a faithful, Biblical witness to the kingdom of Christ? Does the kingdom of God sometimes show itself in this way? I am not asking: can we establish the Kingdom of God on earth by social or political means? I have no utopian notions of a Christian America before Jesus comes? All I mean is: Can this kind of peaceful, non-violent, ready-to-suffer sit-in be one way that the truth and beauty of God's Kingdom, which is not of this world, shines in this world? My answer is yes. And I would like to look at just one inspiring passage of Scripture with you to stir up your thought and prayer about this matter.

Hebrews 10:32 says that in the early days of this Christian community there had been "a hard struggle with sufferings." "Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings." Some kind of persecution had fallen on the church. It was evidently an official kind because in the next verse there is a reference to prison. This is not just mob violence or harassment at work. It is official, state opposition.

Hebrews 10:33 shows that there are two groups in the church, the first one suffering abuse and afflictions, and the second one suffering because they somehow identified with the first group. ". . . sometimes (or better: "some") being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes

("some") being partners with those so treated." So some get the first brunt of the persecution, and others choose to come forward and show solidarity (as we might say today) with them: "being partners (sharers) with those so treated."

Then Hebrews 10:34 explains how the second group showed their solidarity with those who were being persecuted in prison: "For you had compassion on the prisoners and you joyfully accepted the plundering (or the confiscation) of your property." The first group had been put in jail for some reason. That may have meant in that culture that they would be given no food or that they would be beaten and left untended. So the rest of the believers faced a moral dilemma: "Shall we take a low profile in the present controversy and work through indirect channels, or shall we go to the prison and kindle the anger of the authorities and risk losing our possessions and maybe our lives?"

They chose to take the risk of public, compassionate identification with the prisoners and the result was the confiscation of their property (Hebrews 10:34). So it was a great risk to go to the prison to stand up for those who were suffering unjustly. It cost them their furniture and their homes it seems. Perhaps more. But it says they accepted this loss with joy: ". . . and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property." How could they do that? Where do they get the freedom and courage to risk losing everything for the sake of compassion? The answer is given in the last part of Hebrews 10:34 : ". . . since you knew that you had a better possession and an abiding one." Hebrews 12:28 says, "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." What the writer means is that the Christians were so confident that they had received the kingdom and that the kingdom was so unshakable, and that it was so much more glorious than all earthly possessions, that it was no ultimate loss to lose earthly possessions on the Calvary road that leads to this kingdom. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . . Rejoice in that day and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." (Matthew 5:10) Do you see then how the truth and beauty of the kingdom of God broke into that situation? Since it was the certainty and glory of the kingdom hope that gave the freedom and courage to risk and suffer and love, that risking and suffering and loving is the light of the kingdom breaking into the darkness of society. Love that is willing to suffer in hope of the kingdom is the power and the light of the kingdom breaking into this world. Since the kingdom is the source of the power to love, the power to love is the light of the kingdom.

Now how would you have responded in that situation if some of the Christians opposed the visit to the prison and argued like this: This is going to antagonize the government officials who put our friends in jail. God has ordained the government and we are supposed to be submissive to it. Not only that, there is no explicit Biblical command that says we have to risk animosity in this way to visit our friends in prison. We are only commanded to love them; and there may be other safer ways to work for their release. And not only that if we publicly identify with prisoners in this society it’s going to stir up so much anger that the witness of Christ will be hurt in the city. And not only that the officials could confiscate our property and we could lose everything we’ve got. Then how are we going to do the work of the ministry? This is not a prudent strategy.

There is no Biblical command that says tomorrow’s Rescue is the way you should love unborn children. It will antagonize some officials. It will irritate some in our society. You would risk losing some of your earthly possessions. There are other safer ways to work for the unborn. Getting

thrown in prison or losing possessions through fines has never seemed to the world like an effective church growth principle. But there they went, off to visit the prisoners -- with the blessing of Almighty God. And tomorrow many will rescue. Why? Because when the compassion of Christ for people who are suffering unjustly combines with the confidence of kingdom hope, the power of courage and freedom and meekness is unleashed, and some (not all) are called to let the light of the kingdom shine through peaceful, public solidarity with the unborn, and if necessary, through suffering.

I invite you all to meditate on this text this afternoon and to seek the Lord as to whether he is calling you in this way. You won't know if you don't ask. And if he is not he is calling you to the tremendously crucial role of intercession tomorrow morning.

01.10. Abortion

Abortion Shall We Listen to Men or to God?

January 27, 1991

Acts 4:13-37 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may be spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must Judges 20:1-48 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 21 And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; 22 for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

Forty years the man had been unable to walk. We know this because Acts 3:2 tells us he was lame from birth and Acts 4:22 says he was over forty years old. Yet now he was leaping and running and praising God, because Peter had said (in Acts 3:6), "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk." A great crowd had gathered. Peter had preached a powerful sermon. About 2000 people were converted and Peter and John were arrested and put in jail over night. The next morning they appeared before the court. Last week we saw how Peter moved from the local to the global in his message and brought it to a climax in Acts 4:12 with the words, "There is salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Now in today’s text we see three things that are amazingly relevant for our life in a secular world, especially our relation to the issue of abortion. The first thing we see is a description of Peter and John --the kind of people they were to stand up to the authorities. The second thing we see is the way people often respond when the evidence for truth mounts against them. And the third thing we see is how the disciples respond publicly to the unbelieving rulers of Jerusalem. Let’s look at these one at a time in the Biblical context, and then apply what we learn to our situation today.

1. The rulers and elders and scribes were astounded at Peter and John. Acts 4:13 says they "wondered." Literally, they were amazed, boggled, stumped, astonished. They saw two things that didn’t fit together. Then they saw the real explanation. What didn’t fit together were Peter and John’s public boldness and their lack of education. On the one hand Peter and John were speaking with straight-forwardness, and confidence and courage and clarity. And they were doing this in the presence of people with power and esteem and scholarship -- the rulers and the elders

and the scribes. It simply stunned the authorities. These men spoke as though they had the authority on their side. But what made this boldness so incredible was that Peter and John were not formally educated; and they didn't have the refinement of skill that comes from courses in rhetoric. That's the point of Acts 4:13 : "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered" -- they were amazed.

Then they remembered that this Jesus, whom they had tried to get rid of was just like that. John 7:15 says, "The Jews marveled--were amazed, same word--at [the teaching of Jesus], saying, How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" It was just the same with Jesus as with Peter and John. They were all bold and straightforward and clear. And they had insight into the things of God, even though they had never had the rabbinic education the scribes had. So Acts 4:13 says at the end: "They recognized that they had been with Jesus." This is the way he was. They must have gotten it from him. A disciple, when he is taught, will be like his master (Luke 6:40).

2. Then we see the response of the rulers. Acts 4:16-17 : "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name."

Here is something really amazing, and yet very common in the world. How would you describe the connection between what they say in Acts 4:16 and what they say in Acts 4:17? Acts 4:16 : a great and undeniable sign of love and power has been done by these courageous men in the name of Jesus. All Jerusalem knows this. Acts 4:17 : Let's threaten them with harm and try to keep them quiet about this Jesus.

Acts 4:16 states reasons to seriously consider the truth of what Peter and John say. Acts 4:17 describes the behavior of a people who are not interested in the truth, but only in the benefit that they get from falsehood. It's like saying: "O look, there's smoke billowing up the stairway from the basement; quick let's close the door and have dinner." Or: "Look, people with cancer are being healed by this new drug; quick lets ban it from the world." When people are getting some benefit from a wrong, they turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the mounting evidence that they should change. That's the second thing we learn.

3. Acts 4:19 tells us how Peter and John respond to this blind threat. "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." This must have been an utterly exasperating and maddening response to the rulers. Why is that? Because it assumes something that the rulers refuse to assume. Peter assumes that he has to choose between listening to God and listening to the rulers. This assumes that the rulers are not speaking on God's side. Peter doesn't express any apology for this assumption at all. He just says it. And with a kind of disarming simplicity he speaks as if they must operate on his assumption: The issue, he says, is whether we listen to you or to God. Now you judge for yourselves what we should do. Go ahead tell us: God or you! It's a question they could not answer without admitting they were not on God's side. The basis for Peter's response is the utter assurance that Peter has that Jesus is alive, that He is Lord of the universe, that He healed the man, and that obeying Him comes before obeying any human ruler. Peter and John know, because they have seen and heard. They have an experience of the living Jesus that has made

them utterly unstoppable. So they do not suggest that maybe the rulers speak a little for God, and maybe the apostles do. No. The rulers are anti-God in telling them to be quiet about Jesus. And the apostles are in touch with the living God through knowing Jesus.

How is this all relevant for us today? Let’s take each of the three things we have seen and state them as lessons for ourselves.

1. In order to be bold and forthright and clear in what you say for Christ in public you do not need to be formally educated or unusually skilled. What you need is real fellowship with Jesus -- real experience with Jesus, the kind of experience that enables you to say: "I cannot but speak what I have seen and heard."

One thing I have learned from following the educational route as far as it goes in my field and then reading what the most educated write. Namely: there is nothing in advanced education that makes a person a courageous and clear spokesman for the truth. I believe in education. I believe some of our brightest young people should make scholarship a career for the glory of God. But let us get the idea out of our head that scholarship makes a man or a woman bold, courageous, straightforward and clear. There is no positive correlation between advanced education and courageous clarity.

What makes a person bold for the truth is being utterly sure that he has seen God’s truth. What makes a person clear and forthright is a good heart that has no desire to slip anything in under the fog of ambiguity. Or another way to say it is that boldness and clarity come from spending time with Jesus. Jesus is the truth we need to see, and Jesus is good -- radically good. The more you have real dealings with him, the more confident you become in the truth, and the more good you become in not wanting to exalt yourself or protect yourself with impressive words.

You just want to speak the truth for his sake and speak it with boldness and clarity -- no fog, no haze, no bluffs, no evasions, no runarounds, no clever camouflaging of indecisiveness. I love what James Denney said about preaching. It applies to all clear, bold communication for Christ: "No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save." That becomes clearer and clearer with the more time you spend with Jesus. So the first lesson for today is that you don’t have to be formally educated or unusually skilled in order to be bold and forthright and clear in what you say for Christ in public. What you need is real fellowship with Jesus.

2. It is still true today that those who benefit from wrongdoing and wrong-thinking will usually turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to contrary evidence for what is right and what is true. This disease affects every one of us more or less. The mind perceives reality selectively in order to justify what the heart desires. Complete objectivity -- whatever side you are on -- is a myth.

If showing pictures of mutilated babies threatens your desire for abortion on demand, then the pictures are emotionally manipulative or in bad taste or irrelevant. But if showing dead sea otters or oil slicked cranes or mutilated seals helps your cause, then this is simply telling it like it is and forcing people to come to terms with what is really happening. A booklet distributed to students at South High recently in connection with sex education says, "Medically, it is best to have an abortion after the sixth week and before the 12th week of pregnancy." But abortion defenders turn a deaf ear to the question: "Medically best for whom; baby or mother; or neither?" The evidence mounts on all hands that the unborn are persons and patients along side their mothers. But

abortion providers turn a deaf ear to observations like Dr. Steve Calvin's in a letter a few years ago to the Arizona Daily Star: "There is inescapable schizophrenia in aborting a perfectly normal 22 week fetus while at the same hospital, performing intra-uterine surgery on its cousin."

Many Christians involved in abortion turn a deaf ear to the Bible when it says that the growing life in the womb is the unique creative work of God knitting together a being in His own image (Psalms 139:13; Job 31:13-15); or when it speaks of babies in the womb with the very same words as babies out of the womb (Genesis 25:22; Luke 1:41; cf. Luke 2:12; Luke 2:16; Luke 18:15); or when it warns repeatedly against shedding innocent blood (Psalms 106:38); or when it calls again and again for the protection of the weakest and most vulnerable members of the community (Psalms 82:3-4); or when it says that God alone has the right to give and to take human life (Job 1:21). So the second lesson for today -- and it applies directly to the issue of abortion -- is that when people benefit from wrongdoing or wrong-thinking, they will turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the mounting evidence for what is right and what is true. The mind selectively sees what will justify the desires of the heart. In the end that is what must be changed.

3. The final lesson from this text for today is this: Christians -- people who bank their hopes on Jesus and spend time with Jesus and obey Jesus -- should stand up in public and tell God's truth as they see it without worrying that secular listeners may not even agree with our most basic assumptions.

Isn't it amazing how Peter and John respond to the rulers! The rulers tell them to get out and not to speak in the name of Jesus any more. Then in Acts 4:19-20 they say, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

One of the great obstacles to our speaking out in public about the truth as we see it with Jesus is that we think we have to win. Or we think we have to operate with the assumptions of secular leaders. But Peter shows us that this is emphatically not what we have to do. Our calling is not to win or to borrow the assumptions of the world. Our calling is to stand up and tell it like it is in the eyes of God.

Imagine how the rulers might have responded to Peter and John when they said, "You decide if we should listen to you or God." "Who do think you are! Telling us the choice is between what we say and what GOD says! How do you know WE don't speak for God?"

All Peter says is, "We must speak what we have seen and heard." He is a witness. Now don't get me wrong. Some people are especially gifted and called to enter more extended debate and to try to find some common ground and labor to persuade. But the point here is simpler: all Christians should stand up and tell it like they see it. Let the chips fall where they will. Don't worry if the public doesn't even agree with your most basic assumptions. Your job is not to win. Your job is not to control this society. Your job is to say what God wants said. The Bible says that the law of God is written on the heart of every person (Romans 1:32; Romans 2:15). It says that everyone is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). There is reason to believe then that your witness to the truth -- about abortion, or any other issue -- will trigger something deep inside of people. It will have the ring of truth in their heart of hearts though it may be temporarily suppressed in unrighteousness. And who knows what God may be pleased to do if his truth is spoken boldly and clearly by tens of

thousands of evangelical Christians? The parent group at Roosevelt High School where my son Benjamin goes, had a forum to discuss fund raising efforts for the school. Their proposal was that they install pull-tab gambling machines in the local bowling alley. Noel went to the meeting and stood up all alone and said, "There is already a problem in this state with young gamblers. Schools are to build character as well as give information. How can we help kids be responsible if we set an example as adults that gambling is a good way to raise money? Aren't we just encouraging something that promotes greed, and lures the poor, and discourages the path of rewarding labor?"

They didn't withdraw the plan. But that is not Noel's responsibility. She said what God wanted said. God's truth was heard in public and that is what she and you and I are responsible for -- on the abortion issue and every important issue. We are not called to win; we are called to witness.

Chapter 12

01.11. Exposing the Dark Work of Abortion

Exposing the Dark Work of Abortion January 26, 1992 Ephesians 5:11 "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."

I begin this morning by making sure that we understand the difference between a Christian call to pro-life action and a non-Christian call to pro-life action. I am glad that non-Christians are calling for an end to abortion. I am glad that there are "atheists for life." One of the things that makes America work is that what Christians see as right behavior because of Christ non-Christians see as right for other reasons. This is not surprising. Some of the truth that is rooted in Jesus as the Son of God is also revealed partially in creation. The law written on the heart of all men and women (Romans 2:14), no matter how marred by sin, is still God's law. So there is always hope that in the gracious providence of God believers and non-believers in a pluralistic society might come to agree that certain behaviors are right and certain behaviors are wrong. But I am a Christian pastor, not a politician. My main job is not to unite believers and unbelievers behind worthwhile causes. Somebody should do this. But that is not my job. Some of you ought to be doing that with a deep sense of Christian calling. My job is to glorify Jesus Christ by calling his people to be distinctively Christian in the way they live their lives.

Therefore I begin by showing you from Scripture (not from natural law, as crucial as that is for social survival) what is distinctively Christian in my call to pro-life action. A Christian call to pro-life action is a call to the children of light to be what you are in Christ. This is utterly crucial to grasp if you want to act as a Christian. Let me give you four instances of what I mean from this text.

Let's start in the verse just before our text--the last verse of Ephesians 4:1-32 (Ephesians 4:32), "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." A Christian call to forgive does not say: forgive in order to earn the forgiveness of God. It says forgive because you have been forgiven by God. Look at the last half of Ephesians 4:32 : "Forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you." Christian living moves from what God has freely done for us in Christ to what we should freely do for others. It is not the other way around. A second example is in Ephesians 5:1 : "Be imitators of God as beloved children." It does not say, "Be imitators of God in order to get adopted." It begins with your standing in Christ as "loved children." "To as many as received Christ to them God gave authority to be children of God" (John 1:12). So the Christian call to imitate God in the world is not a call to earn a standing with him, but a call to be what you are--chips off the old block, loved children of God. Loved children love to be like their father. A third example is Ephesians 5:2 : "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." It does not say, "Walk in love so that Christ will start loving us and give himself up for us." It says Christ loved us and gave himself for us, therefore walk in love. Be what he has died to make you, and secured for you. A fourth example is in Ephesians 5:8 : "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light." It does not say, "Be the light of the world so that you can become children of the light." It says, "You ARE light in the Lord. You ARE no longer darkness. You are children of the light. Walk as what you are." This is the difference

between a Christian call to pro-life action and a non-Christian call. The call to forgive, the call to imitate God, the call to walk in love, the call to walk as children of the light--these are calls rooted in something that God in Christ has done for us. They are rooted in what God has already made us in Christ. They are calls to be what we are because of God's forgiveness, God's adoption, Christ's sacrificial love and God's putting his light within us.

All of that happens to you when you become a Christian by putting your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life. The rest of the story is: become what you are! Forgive--out of your forgivenness. Love--out of your being loved. Shine--with the light that Christ is in you. So the call to Christian pro-life action is first a call to conversion--to new birth--to repentance and faith in Jesus. Then it is a call to let your light shine in the darkness--to walk as children of the light. This is why in Ephesians 5:9 Paul says, "For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true." Paul calls goodness and justice and truth the FRUIT of light because it grows naturally out of light. Fruit comes out of a tree because of what the tree is. That is the Christian life: becoming what you are--bearing fruit. The opposite of the "fruit of light" is "the works of darkness." Look at Ephesians 5:11 : "Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness." The opposite of "light" is "darkness" and the opposite of "fruit" is "works". This is just like Galatians 5:1-26 where Paul contrasts the "fruit of the Spirit" and the "works of the flesh." And the point is the same: true Christian living is essentially fruit-bearing, not essentially working. It is essentially letting the fruit show what the tree is like. It is not working to become a tree.

We become a tree and stay a sound tree by trusting in the free mercy of God and all that he is for us in Jesus. The Christian life--with all its pro-life action and everything else that is good--is being what we are, God-forgiven, God-adopted, Christ-loved, fruit-bearing trees.

Now on that basis consider the distinctively Christian call to pro-life action. Ephesians 5:8 b says, "Walk as children of the light." Ephesians 5:11 gives a negative and a positive way to do that. Negatively: "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather (this is the positive part:) expose them." Walking in the light means not doing works of darkness and it means exposing the works of darkness that others do.

Therefore we learn from this text that Christians who walk in the light should be involved in exposing the dark and fruitless work of abortion. It is a dark and barren work, and we are called to expose it. The word "expose" is used again in Ephesians 5:13 where you get a clear idea of what's involved: "When anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible." The idea is that when we "walk as children of the light" we will shine into places of darkness and cause the darkness to become visible, or to become light. Or to use the words of Jesus, when we let our light shine before men the dark works of men become shown for what they really are: fruitless and shameful. That's part of our calling. In John 3:20 we see this word again. Jesus says, "Every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." So the point behind this word is that Christians are called to shine the light of truth and justice and love into the darkness and bring evil to light for what it really is.

Another way to say this is that God calls his people to be the conscience of the culture. Our individual conscience probes into our behavior and either approves or disapproves what we do. So the children of light are to probe into the life of their culture and approve or disapprove what it does.

I hope you hear the force of this. It is radically different from the passivity and moral withdrawal of many Christians. Many believers have a passive avoidance ethic and that is all. In other words they think: if I avoid the works of darkness, and don't do them myself, then I am doing my Christian duty. I'm clean. I'm in the light. But that is not what Ephesians 5:11 says. It says you are only doing half your duty. "Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness"--that's an avoidance ethic. That's half your duty. But it goes on, and in fact puts stress on the next phrase because it is easily overlooked and because it can be very costly: "Rather even expose them!" Don't just avoid the works of darkness, EXPOSE them. This is not avoidance. This is action. Do you hear a call to action in this verse? Do you hear a call to do something in 1992 to expose the darkness and the fruitlessness (the barrenness!) of abortion? God is calling us in this verse--he is calling all Christians--to expose the dark and fruitless work of abortion . . .

1 -- to expose the fact that there are 1.5 million abortions a year in America every year--27 million since the Supreme Court overturned the public conscience of 48 states 19 years ago.

2 -- to expose the fact that 30% of all babies conceived in America are killed by abortion.

3 -- to expose the fact that medically women are told not to have abortions before the 7th week of pregnancy (see the Yes/Neon booklet), and yet by the 8th week the heart of the baby has been beating for a month, there are measurable brain waves, there is response to touch, there's thumb-sucking, grasping with the hands, swimming with the arms in the amniotic fluid, distinct arms and legs and sexual organs. This much must--not may, must--be present before most abortion centers will cut the baby to pieces with a suction machine 4,000 times a day.

4 -- to expose the fact that 9,000 babies were killed after the 21st week of pregnancy in 1987, fully formed and on the brink of being able to breathe for themselves--killed, legally!

5 -- to expose the fact that in Minnesota we have a fetal homicide law that makes it "murder to kill an embryo or fetus intentionally, except in cases of abortion"--in other words, it's unlawful to kill the unborn child unless the mother chooses to have it killed. And that is a strange and dark criterion for lawful killing.

6 -- to expose the fact that "There is inescapable schizophrenia in aborting a perfectly normal 22 week fetus while at the same hospital, performing intra-uterine surgery on its cousin" (Steve Calvin).

7 -- to expose the fact that viability outside the womb is not a criterion of personhood and right to life, because we ourselves don't want to give up our personhood and our right to life if we must be sustained on a respirator or dialysis machine the way a baby has to be sustained by a placenta.

8 -- to expose the fact that the size and reasoning power of a tiny person is irrelevant to human personhood because if it were we might allow tiny and unthinking newborns to be killed.

9 -- to expose the fact that genetically human embryos and fetuses are utterly different from all other animal life; if they are just left alone, with nothing added but nourishment they will grow up.

10 -- to expose the fact that if it is unlawful to crush the egg of a bald eagle, it is not excessively restrictive to make it unlawful to crush the egg of a human.

11 -- to expose the fact that when two legitimate rights conflict--the right not to be pregnant and the right not to be killed--justice demands that we give place to the greater right, the right that does the least harm--the one that does not willfully kill.

12 -- to expose the fact that there are thousands of crisis pregnancy centers in this country ready to help, and almost all of them are free--unlike the abortion mills that charge plenty of money--and the older the baby, the more they charge.

13 -- to expose the fact that there are no unwanted babies in Minnesota. Mary Ann Kuharsky (President of ProLife Minnesota) said in the Tribune she would take any baby whose life depended on it, and there are hundreds like her.

14 -- to expose the fact that it is hypocritical to speak as though choice were the untouchable absolute in this matter and then turn around and oppose choice in matters of gun-control and welfare support and affirmative action and minimum wage and dozens of other issues where so-called pro-choice people join the demand that people's choices be limited to protect others. It's a sham argument. All choices are limited by life.

15 -- to expose the fact that trespassing to save life is not a crime and that it does not undermine our legal system but on the contrary endorses the one foundation stone without which that legal system in this land will fall, namely the inalienable right to life. There will be no law but the law of individual choice (=anarchy) if the foundations stone of life's value is destroyed. And abortion is destroying it.

God is calling passive, inactive Christians today to engage our minds and hearts and hands in exposing the barren works of darkness. To be the conscience of our culture. To be the light of the world. To live in the great reality of being loved by God and adopted by God and forgiven by Christ (yes--for all the abortions that dozens of you have had), and to made children of the light. I call you this morning to walk as children of light.

Chapter 13

01.12. Being Pro-Life Christians Under a Pro-Choice President

Being Pro-Life Christians Under a Pro-Choice President January 17, 1993

1 Peter 2:13-25 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves of God. 17 Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. In A.D. 37 a boy was born in Italy named Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. His mother’s name was Agrippina the Younger. She married the Roman Emperor Claudius who adopted her little boy and changed his name to Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus. The adoption and the name change were all part of his mother’s plotting to see him, instead of Claudius’ biological son Britannicus, become emperor of Rome. In A.D. 54 when Nero was 17 years old his mother arranged for Claudius to be poisoned to death, and the boy was proclaimed emperor of Rome. His reign would last 14 years, until he committed suicide at age 31. In the first half of his reign there was relatively good government because as a youth he received good counsel from Burrus, the head of the Praetorian Guard, and from Seneca the famous stoic philosopher.

Nero was selfish and calculating and incapable of ruling well on his own. He became paranoid of all the rumors about plots to kill him. In 55 he had his step brother Britannicus killed. In 59 he had his mother executed. And in 62 his first wife was executed. And Seneca his former counsellor was forced to commit suicide. The apostle Peter probably arrived in Rome some time around A.D. 63. The city had already become known as "Babylon"--the code word among Christians for the great urban embodiment of anti-Christian power and evil (cf. Revelation 16:19; Revelation 17:5; Revelation 18:2), because the ancient Eastern Babylon had been the place where the people of God were taken captive far from their true home. So Peter is in Rome when he writes his first letter: "She [the church] who is at Babylon sends you greetings" (1 Peter 5:13). In the night of July 19, 64 a fire broke out in the southern part of the city. It raged for six days, spreading far and wide. When it was about to die out, it suddenly broke out again in the northern part of the city and burned three more days. Ten of the 14 wards of the city were destroyed. The frenzy in the city was indescribable.

Rumors began to spread that Nero himself had started the fire because of his delirious craving for magnificence and desire to embellish and rebuild the city. To pert attention from himself, the historian Tacitus says, Nero blamed the Christians for the fire, who were hated anyway, and so were good scapegoats. The effect was horrendous. There had been no persecution like it since the Lord had risen thirty years before. In the gardens of Nero the Christians were crucified, sewn into wild beast skins and fed to dogs, drenched in flammable oil and lifted on poles to burn as torches in the night.

Eusebius tells us that Peter was crucified "because he had demanded to suffer" (E.H. 3.1.2-3).

Peter’s letter was probably written some time shortly before this terrible persecution. Christians were being slandered and mistreated (1 Peter 2:12; 1 Peter 2:15) as he wrote, but this was typical all over the empire he says in 1 Peter 5:9. The the great persecution was not there yet. But it seems that Peter could see it on the horizon with prophetic accuracy. For example, he said in 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you."

Nero was not the only ruler Peter had known. He had known of Pilate, the governor in Judea, who washed his hands of Jesus’ murder, had him beaten and turned him over to be crucified with no grounds. He had known of Herod Antipas who executed John the Baptist as a dancing prize and later put his purple robe on Jesus and mocked him with his soldiers. Peter was probably a boy in Galilee when he heard that Herod the Great had killed all the children in Bethlehem. So Peter was not naive about the vicious world of government corruption and wickedness. He did not live in a "Christian nation." He knew the depravity of human nature and the utterly ruinous corruption that political power can bring. This was the world into which he wrote our text. 1 Peter 2:13 :

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him And 1 Peter 2:17 : "Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." The point of drawing attention to Nero and Pilate and Herod is not to say that there is a Nero or Pilate or Herod in power today in America. The point is to say that if Peter could command the Christian community to honor the king and the governor, knowing the wickedness of Nero and Pilate and Herod, then how much more must we honor the governor and the president who are not in that category--even though they may endorse and promote acts which we regard as immoral and even barbaric. My question today is: How can I as a pro-life Christian honor President-elect Bill Clinton when he supports the right to kill unborn children for any reason up through the age of viability (24-23-22 weeks and falling), and for emotional health reasons even after that. We know this because he has expressed his support for the Freedom of Choice Act which is before Congress and would give federal sanction to just those "rights" and would take from the states the right to make many laws protecting the unborn that are now being proposed. This message does not aim to be political. But I realize that being a Christian today is increasingly putting us at odds with political positions. Just being an obedient Christian is increasingly becoming a social, political, legal issue. The aim of this message is to answer the Biblical-theological-ethical question: How shall we obey God’s command in 1 Peter 2:17 to honor the king--or the president, or the governor--when they promote dishonorable deeds?

What our future president endorses is not the right to scrape a few fetal cells off the lining of the uterus, but that human beings who have a beating heart, give an EKG reading, show brain waves, grasp with their fingers, suck their thumbs, respond with pain, and carry all the genetic completeness of a human--that those humans may rightfully have their life ended by dismemberment. And what I just described is the human fetus at eight weeks before which scarcely any abortions are done. To make the true position of the president-elect clear we need to see that not only that little one will receive no protection from him but neither will this 12 week old, nor this five month old (show both models).

If you are sitting there this morning and thinking that the presidential endorsement of the right to take the lives of babies like this is an honorable thing to do (either because you don’t think they are

babies or you think it’s the lesser of two evils), then your struggle is going to be different from mine. I struggle with the command, "How shall I honor a president who endorses the right to kill the unborn?" You must struggle with the command in the same verse, "How shall I honor people like this pastor who preaches what is false?" For the text not only says, "Honor the king," it says, "Honor all men." So it may be that in the answer I suggest for my struggle there will be something of use for yours.

Here is my answer to the question, "How do pro-life Christians honor a pro-choice president?"

1. We will honor you, Mr. President, by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Peter 5:6) and acknowledging that we are ourselves sinners and in need of mercy and forgiveness from God. We are not infallible. We are open to new light on this and every issue. We are not the final judge in this matter. God is. We stand before the cross of Christ on level ground with you, not above you, utterly dependent on mercy and seeking to live by the will of Christ.

2. We will honor you by acknowledging that you are a man, created in the image of God, and distinct among all the beings in the world (as it says in James 3:9). You are not a mere animal. You have the glorious potential, like all humans, of being a child of God (if you aren’t already) and shining like the sun in the kingdom of God for ever and ever. We honor you as an utterly unique, human being created in the image and likeness of the living God with untold potential.

3. We will honor you by acknowledging that government is God’s institution. He wills that there be leaders like presidents and governors. You are in power by God’s appointment and we honor that. In Romans 13:4 the Bible even calls you, "God’s servant for our good." It grieves us that you do not intend to enact laws to protect the good of the unborn the most innocent, weak, and helpless group of Americans. But we have seen from Somalia that bad government is better than no government. The absence of some laws to protect some people is better than the absence of all laws to protect anybody. We honor your stabilizing role in this sense as a blessing from God.

4. We will honor you by submitting to the laws of the state and the nation wherever they do not conflict with our higher allegiance to Christ the King of kings and Lord of lords. We will submit to the laws that take away

our "right" to chose to go 75 miles an hour,

our "right" to choose keep our lights off when our windshield wipers are on,

our "right" to choose to drive without a seat belt,

our "right" to choose to fish without a license,

our "right" to choose to make loud noises in the middle of the night,

our "right" to choose to keep our kids out of schooling,

our "right" to choose to send them to school without DPT shots,

our "right" to choose to use leaded gas,

our "right" to choose not to pay taxes,

our "right" to choose to smoke on the other side of the restaurant, etc.

We submit to the right of government to limit our right to choose in hundreds of areas, especially when the good of others is at stake. We understand that governments exist to limit the right to choose and we submit to that.

1 Peter 2:13 says that we are to submit not for your sake but for the Lord's sake. 1 Peter 2:16 says that we are free in respect to you but slaves of God. We will submit not because you have power, but because our King commands it for the honor of His institution of civil government. Yet our submission is an honor to you because under God and from God you bear the authority to enforce the laws of the land.

5. We will honor you by not withdrawing into little communes of disengaged isolation from American culture. But according to 1 Peter 2:15, we will honor you by trying to do as much good as we possibly can for the unborn, and for unwanted children, and for women in distress, so that we will not be thought insolent or inconsistent in asking from you what we are not willing to do ourselves. We do this because the Bible says, "It is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).

6. We will honor you by opposing your position as long as we can with non-violence instead of violence, with reasoning instead of rocks, with rational passion instead of screaming, with honorable speech instead of obscenities, with forthright clarity of language instead of dodging the tough realities and tough words, with evidence instead of authority, and with scientific portrayals of life instead of authoritarian blackouts (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:2). We will honor you by a relentless effort to put truth, and not mere emotion, before you in the White House.

7. And we will honor you by expecting from you straightforward answers to straightforward questions. We would not expect this from a con-man or a chimp. We expect it from an honorable man. For example, are you willing to explain why a baby's right not to be killed is less important than a woman's right not to be pregnant? Or are you willing to explain why most cities have laws forbidding cruelty to animals, but you oppose laws forbidding cruelty to human fetuses? Are they not at least living animals? Or are you willing to explain why government is unwilling to take away the so-called right to abortion on demand even though it harms the unborn child; yet government is increasingly willing to take away the right to smoke, precisely because it harms innocent non-smokers, killing 3,000 non-smokers a year from cancer and as many as Matthew,000 non-smokers a year from other diseases? And if you say that everything hangs on whether the fetus is a human child, are you willing to go before national television in the oval office and defend your support for the "Freedom of Choice Act" by holding in your hand a 21 week old fetus and explaining why this little one does not have the fundamental, moral and constitutional right to life? Are you willing to say to parents in this church who lost a child at that age and held him in their hands, this being in your hands is not and was not a child with any rights of its own under God or under law?

Perhaps you have good answers to each of these questions. We will honor you by expecting you to defend your position forthrightly in the public eye. You have immense power as President of the United States. To wield it against the protection of the unborn without giving a public accounting in view of moral and scientific reality would be dishonorable. We will honor you by expecting better.

8. Finally we will honor you by trusting that the purpose of our sovereign and loving God to defend the fatherless and contend for the defenseless and to exalt the meek will triumph through your presidency. And to that end we will pray for you as Christ our King commands us.

01.13. What is Man?

What Is Man?

Reflections on Abortion and Racial Reconciliation January 16, 1994

Psalms 8:1-9 O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Thy name in all the earth, who hast displayed Thy splendor above the heavens! 2 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast established strength, because of Thine adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease. 3 When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; 4 what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? 5 Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! 6 Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, 7 All sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas. 9 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth!

I put before you this morning two massive realities in our world -- one is abortion and one is racial alienation. My aim is not to dwell on the awful connections between these two realities -- like the fact that the biggest abortion provider in the nation, Planned Parenthood, was founded by Margaret Sanger (died in 1966) whose driving principles were explicitly racist. In her book, Women and the New Race she wrote, "The most merciful thing a large family can do to one of its infant members is to kill it." 1 She said in her Book, The Pivot of Civilization, that the so-called "inferior races" were in fact "human weeds" and a "menace to civilization." She was a part of the Eugenics movement (inspired by Thomas Malthus) that wanted to purge the human race of "defectives, delinquents and dependents" through calculated birth control, including abortion. 2

Profound and horrible things could be said about the interwoven evils of abortion and racism. But that is not my purpose this morning. My purpose for putting these two evils together this morning is first chronological and then mainly theological and Biblical.

Chronologically Martin Luther King Day comes on the third Monday of January, and the Sanctity of Life Sunday comes on the Sunday after the anniversary of Roe v. Wade on January 22. In other words in the providence of God these two issues are forced together every year. That’s the chronological reason. The theological reason is the main point of the message this morning. These two issues are about God and about the nature of man created in the image of God. What we believe about God and his majesty, and what we believe about the meaning of being human in relation to God will make all the difference in the world how we think and act about abortion and racism -- if we really believe what we say we believe.

Whatever personal imperfections Martin Luther King had -- and there were some substantial ones -- King’s life and mission were driven by a Biblically-informed vision of God and man. In January of 1956 King was receiving 30 hate letters a day. He was averaging 25 obscene phone calls a day. Death threats were normal. After being awakened again by one of these calls in the middle in

Montgomery, Alabama, of the night King went to the kitchen and put his head down on the table and prayed,

Oh, Lord, I'm down here trying to do what is right. But, Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I can't face it alone."

He tells this story in his book Strength to Love, and says that what happened next was life-changing for him. It seemed as if an inner voice was speaking to him with quiet assurance:

"Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And, lo, I will be with you, even unto the end of the world."

He saw lightening flash. He heard thunder roar. It was the voice of Jesus telling him still to fight on. And

"he promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone, No, never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone . . ." For the first time in his life God was profoundly real and personal to him. The rest of his life, with all its imperfections, was stamped by this experience. 3

Whatever one thinks of the Civil Rights movement or the Pro- Life Movement, one thing is undeniable, historically: they have been driven by a Biblically- informed vision of God and the meaning of being human in relation to God. That is the theological reason for putting these two realities together this morning.

What I want to do here is to bring a Biblical vision of God and man to bear on these two evils of abortion and racial alienation. And then I want to draw out of this vision a truth that I pray will profoundly influence our lives for the sake of the unborn and for the sake of racial reconciliation. The vision comes from Psalms 8:1-9. It can be put into words perhaps something like this: The majesty of God is great beyond words and worthy of our fervent worship and allegiance. And that majesty is manifest in the glory of God's supreme creation, human beings made in his image. And the truth that I draw out of this vision of God and man is this: You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt The vision is that God is majestic above all the majesties of the universe and this majesty -- though dimmed and besmirched and defiled by sin -- shines in the glory of God's supreme creation, human beings. And the truth that flows from this vision is that we cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt.

Let's look at the text to see this vision and flesh out the truth. The Psalm begins and ends with the same statement. That makes it the unmistakably main statement. Everything else serves this.

Psalms 8:1 : O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth, who hast displayed Thy splendor above the heavens! . . . Psalms 8:9 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth! So the vision of God in this psalm is that he is LORD, Yahweh -- the first "Lord" = Yahweh, the great I AM, the absolute God who simply IS without beginning and ending and utterly self-sufficient and free -- O LORD! And the vision is that he is OUR lord -- the God who makes a covenant with all who trust him, so that he becomes OURS. And the vision is that his name is majestic -- his name = his true identity and character and nature and reputation, all that there is

about him is majestic and glorious. "IN ALL THE EARTH" -- he is not a tribal god or a territorial deity; he is majestic and supreme over all the earth and his splendor is above the heavens.

That’s the first part of the vision. The second part is found in Psalms 8:3-6 :

3 When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; 4 what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? 5 Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! 6 Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, When Noel and I visited the Kennedy Space center on our anniversary trip to Florida a few weeks ago we saw two of those huge IMAX films of the earth from space and of the incredible power of the shuttle launches. If I did not know God I would be tempted to bow down and worship the men who created such things. And, of course, millions of humans do bow down, in one way or the other, and worship at the altar of human achievement. But they are making the same mistake that you would make if you bowed down and worshipped a computer, failing to realize that a human being thought this up and designed it and made it. So it is when we bow down and worship human intelligence and creativity -- we fail to realize that God thought up this human, God imagined us and designed us and made us, and we are as helpless without him as when a computer is unplugged. God alone is to be worshipped. That’s the point of Psalms 8:1; Psalms 8:9. But Psalms 8:3-5 teach us that, as a means of worshipping God, it is fitting that I stand in awe of the achievements of the NASA scientists. God has crowned human beings with glory and majesty. GOD has put all that he has made under man’s feet. GOD has made us lords of the earth, and perhaps of the planets. We have this role under God because God is utterly secure in his absolute majesty. We are as dependent on God as a computer is dependent on being plugged in. So the vision of Psalms 8:1-9 is that God is majestic beyond words and his majesty is manifest in the glory of his supreme creation -- the human being.

Now I hope you will agree from this psalm that the truth follows: You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt -- whatever color or whatever age that creation might be.

You cannot starve the aged human and glorify the majesty of God.

You cannot dismember the unborn human and glorify the majesty of God.

You cannot gas the Jewish human and glorify the majesty of God.

You cannot lynch the black human and glorify the majesty of God.

You cannot treat human pregnancy like a disease and glorify the majesty of God.

You cannot treat the mixing of human races like a pestilence and glorify the majesty of God.

You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt.

The next time someone asks you, "Why are you against abortion?" try answering, "Because no amount of inconvenience could ever justify treating the supreme creation of God with murderous contempt." And if someone asks you, "Why are you willing to stay in a racially changing

neighborhood when the value of your house is plummeting?" try answering, "Because no amount of real estate value could ever justify treating the supreme creation of God with contempt." And then read them Psalms 8:1-9 and show them a vision of God and of what it means to be human. That may lift them higher in their thoughts than they have ever gone before.

Tonight we will focus, with William Pannell's help, on racial reconciliation and give it our full attention. So let me close with a brief focus this morning on the other issue: the value of the life of children -- whatever color.

Psalms 8:2 is a remarkable verse in this regard. It says, "From the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou [God] hast established strength, because of Thine adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease." Now there are a few unclear things in this verse. But let's take what seems to be fairly clear. The verse says that God has adversaries, enemies, people who are revengeful. And the verse says that these adversaries are going to be stilled, silenced, made to cease. And the verse says that the means of God's triumph here over his adversaries is what comes out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies. Now how is it that what comes out of the mouth of nursing babes can put the adversary of God to nought?

Let me make a suggestion for you to consider. Psalms 8:5, I think, gives the key. David asks in Psalms 8:4, "What is man?" What is this being called ADAM -- man? And he answers, first, "Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty!" (Psalms 8:5) He answers: humans are made by God -- "Thou hast made him." And he answers, secondly, that these beings whom God makes are made in a radically different category from the animals -- "a little less than God (or "a little less than angels," elohim can mean that cf. Hebrews 2:7)." And he answers, thirdly, that these beings created by God, a little less than angels, are crowed with glory and majesty.

Now connect that with the infant humans and nursing babes of Psalms 8:2. "From the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou [God] hast established strength, because of Thine adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease." Why is it that what comes out of the mouth of these little humans has such strength that it can overcome the enemies of God? I think the answer is, at least in part, given by Psalms 8:5 - - these little ones are made by God. Job said in Job 31:15 "Did not He who made me in the womb make him [my servant], and the same one fashion us in the womb?" 4 Little infants and sucking babes are each made by God in the womb.

Moreover they are made in the womb, like no other being, a little less than the angels, and they are made in the womb by God and crowned with glory and majesty. In other words, their supreme place in creation under God (or the angels) is so profound even at the stage of being sucklings that when they open their mouth to cry or to coo or to babble as a human being, they are bearing witness to their unspeakable dignity in creation and therefore to the majesty of God's name in all the earth. God does not wait until a sucking babe is rational and independent to ascribe to him the glory and majesty of verse 5 (Psalms 8:5) -- he doesn't have to be a NASA scientist. When the suckling opens his mouth God is praised, strength is established by the sheer truth that a human creation in the image of the majestic God is here. Let all the adversaries of God take note and tremble. If they treat God's supreme creation with contempt they will lose. They will be silenced. And so I appeal to you, do not join with the adversaries of God in killing unborn children or scorning any race of human beings. Because the truth of this text stands sure: You cannot worship

and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt.

1 Quoted in George Grant, Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood, Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1988, p. 59.

2 Grand Illusions, p. 91.

3 Quoted from Stephen Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr., (New York: Mentor, Penguin Group, 1982) p. 85.

4 See Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalms 139:13 for other references to God's making the child in the womb. Also see Genesis 25:22 and compare Luke 1:41 and Luke 2:12 to see how the Bible talks of the child in the womb with the same language as the child outside the womb.

Chapter 15

01.14. Fasting for the Safety of the Little Ones

Fasting for the Safety of the Little Ones January 22, 1995

Ezra 8:21-36 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." 23 So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.

It's not my main purpose this morning to rehearse all the arguments we have given over the years in preaching and in writing for the pro- life position. There are Biblical reasons, medical and scientific reasons, philosophical reasons, legal reasons, and psychological reasons. But it is remarkable to me that, as every year goes by and this anniversary of Roe V. Wade rolls around, new validations of pro- life arguments turn up, because of the obviousness of the evil of abortion on demand even to the moment just before birth.

Let me give you just one illustration. There is a debate going on about the harvesting of organs from handicapped infants, namely, those who are anencephalic -- they are born with almost no brain and cannot live a normal life, but will usually die in a matter of days or weeks. One person said, "The qualify of life for this child is so low it would be ethically justifiable to sacrifice its life by a few days to save the life of another person."

Now that kind of reasoning is ominous for all handicapped people and all aging people who are increasingly vulnerable to those who would dictate what quality of life makes life sacred and safe from termination. But what is most significant for the pro-life argument is the reasoning of the ACLU in favor of taking donor organs (like the heart) from anencephalic babies before they die a natural death. For decades pro-life advocates have argued that there is no morally significant difference between a baby in the womb and a baby outside the womb during the weeks just before and after birth. In other words it is arbitrary in the extreme, from the standpoint of the child, to say that it is legal abortion to kill a baby in the womb but it is illegal homicide to kill a baby just after coming out of the womb. This has been a strong argument for respecting the unborn.

Now the ACLU has taken this argument and virtually endorsed it, but used it in exactly the opposite direction, namely, to justify the killing of some babies just after birth. The aim is to show that permitting the termination of pregnancy up to the point of birth is inconsistent with forbidding the termination of an anencephalic child's life in order to use his organs to save another.

Here's the actual wording of their argument:

"There is absolutely no morally significant change in the fetus between the moments immediately preceding and following birth." In other words the argument that the pro-life movement has used for years is conceded, but then used not to protect the unborn but to remove protection from the

newborn. If there's no difference between born and unborn, and we permit the aborting of the unborn, then we should permit some killing of the born in certain cases -- thus the A.C.L.U.

Now just at this point the penetrating earnestness of fasting in the Christian church comes into the picture. At least I would like to push it into the picture for us. This kind of reasoning is a great evil. Taking one of the most obvious reasons for not permitting abortion on demand and making it a justification for infanticide is morally repugnant. It is another evidence that what we are up against in the abortion industry is a great darkness. This kind of perverse reasoning is evidence of what Paul calls God's giving people over to a dark and "depraved mind" (Romans 1:28).

What I am suggesting this morning is that perhaps the Christian church has not used all the spiritual resources available to us in the effort to overcome such darkness. Have we sought the Lord with fasting for the restoring of reason and light, and for the safety of the little ones? I admit that I have not seriously, during all my years of pro-life efforts fasted specifically for the moral and spiritual renovation that this kind of darkness demands.

Don't misunderstand. I believe in the wide range of non-violent efforts of the pro-life cause. And in the present atmosphere I do stress non-violent. This war will not be won by bullets. It will be won by brokenness and humility and sacrifice. It will be won when we identify with the children in our suffering rather than with the abortionist in his killing. And this too may be a call to a new kind of fasting.

I believe that education is good, and I was thrilled with the excellent news supplement, "She's a Child Not a Choice" that was mailed to 900,000 homes in October and November of last year. This is the kind of education effort that needs to happen again and again. The words of Jesus have broad application, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

I believe, that political action of pro-life people is good. God ordains that governments exist for the protection of its people from violence (Romans 13:3 f). For many of us this was the most remarkable and gratifying thing about the elections last fall. Not a single pro-life incumbent Senator, House member, or governor anywhere in the country, whether Republican or Democrat, was defeated by a pro-abortion challenger. In contrast, about 30 incumbent pro-abortion members of Congress were defeated by pro-lifers. A fact which I did not hear or read in the News media -- another illustration of darkness.

Third, I believe in crisis pregnancy care. This is why we chose to put CareNet's insert in the bulletin. The focus of this ministry is prevention through compassion for women in distress (Luke 7:48-50). There are thousands of such centers and groups around the country. The hands of Christ's people are extended, with tangible, workable alternatives to abortion. And fourth, I believe in sidewalk counseling. Story after story is told of women who are given the truth at the 11th hour just before their appointment, and are persuaded to save their child and their conscience. (Check with Pro-Life Action Ministries (ph. 612/ 771-1500). But at root the issue we are facing is a spiritual one -- the darkness and depravity of the human heart and mind. What I am suggesting this morning is that we seriously consider the call to fasting for the safety of the little ones. That we seek the Lord through fasting for the gracious, powerful, liberating renovation of the human spirit that would cause a person to wake up and say: "How can I use the similarity between born and unborn to argue for killing the born and not protecting the unborn? I will not do that anymore. And I

will turn to the Lord, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of my sins and for new life." The true renovation of heart looks to Jesus for the forgiveness for all sins and for the gift of eternal life and the power to walk in a way pleasing to God. Might not the cry of our hearts for such an awakening of conscience and faith be made more full and earnest and fruitful through fasting? Is that not what we are seeing in these days?

I got this idea from the story of Ezra in Ezra 8:21-23. Let me give you some faith-building background to this text so you hear it with all the force Ezra gives it.

Israel had been taken into exile. They had been there for decades. Now the time had come for their restoration. But how could this happen? They were a tiny, obscure ethnic minority in the massive Persian empire. The answer is that God rules empires. And when it is his time for his people to move, he moves empires. That's the point of the first eight chapters of this book of Ezra.

Look first at Ezra 1:1-2.

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah."

God had prophesied by Jeremiah that the people would come back to their own land. God never leaves his prophesies uncertainly to be fulfilled by the mere will of man. He himself acts to fulfill the predictions he makes. So it says, "He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." So there's the answer. When God is ready to do a great thing in the world, he can do it whether it is through a Persian king or a prophet or a Christian pro-life worker. The key is God's absolute sovereignty over the empires of the world.

Then what happens is this. A first wave of refugees return -- over 42,000 of them. They start building the temple. But their enemies in Judah oppose them and write to the new Emperor, Artaxerxes telling him that a rebellious city is being rebuilt (Ezra 4:12). So Artaxerxes halts the work on the temple and it looks like God's plans are frustrated. But he had a different and better plan -- O let us learn that the lean years of trouble in our lives are preparations for God's blessing! In Ezra 5:1 God sends two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah who inspire the people to begin building again. The enemies try the same tactic. They write a letter to Darius, the new emperor. But it backfires and we see why God had allowed the building to cease temporarily.

Darius searches the archives of the empire and finds the original decree from Cyrus authorizing the building the temple. In Ezra 6:7-8 he writes back the stunning news -- beyond what they could ask or think. He says to the enemies in Judah,

7 Leave this work on the house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the River, and that without delay.

What a reversal! What a great God! It looked as though the enemies had triumphed. But God was simply working history in his time so that the enemies would not only permit the temple but also pay for the temple! Ezra 6:22 states the great fact plainly: "the Lord had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." God rules the hearts of kings and emperors and presidents and senators and congressional representatives -- even those who don't trust him..

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

but trust him for his grace,

Behind a frowning providence

he hides a smiling face.

O the lessons here for us! Do you think the crash-and-burn year of 1994 at Bethlehem is without some great saving purpose? Not if our God is the God of Ezra! Do you think the election of a pro-choice president two years ago is without some great purpose of righteousness bigger and more stunning than any of us can imagine? Is our God the God of Ezra?!

Then Ezra comes into the picture with a flashback to the reign of Artaxerxes. The king sends Ezra with a company of people back to Jerusalem. According to Ezra 7:6 King Artaxerxes gives him everything he wants for the journey. Now why would the very king who stopped the building of the temple do that? Ezra gives the answer in Ezra 7:27. He prays, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart." God did it.

He did it to Cyrus (Ezra 1:1); he did it to Darius (Ezra 6:22) and he did it to Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:27). "The kings heart is like streams of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he wills" (Proverbs 21:1). God is ruling the world. He is ruling history. We cannot understand the infinite wisdom of his ways (Romans 11:34-35). Ours is to trust and joyfully obey and worship. Which brings us to what Ezra did as he left captivity on his way to Jerusalem. He refused an army escort so that he could testify to Artaxerxes the power and faithfulness of God in protecting his company of people. Instead of the king's help he sought God's help and he sought it with fasting. Ezra 8:21-23; Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones [that's where I got the idea of fasting for the safety of the little ones], and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." 23 So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty. In Ezra 8:21 fasting is an expression of our humility -- that is our sense of utter dependence on God for what we need. "I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves." And believe me, we are utterly dependent on God if darkened minds are going to be awakened to the light of life in the battle for the sanctity of life. Reasoning has its crucial place. But unless the sovereign God moves on the mind and heart (like he did on Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes), the very best reasoning will be taken captive and twisted upside down, as we saw at the beginning. And in Ezra 8:23 fasting is an expression of seeking God with life-and-death seriousness. "So we fasted and sought our God." The result at the end of Ezra 8:23 : "He listened to our entreaty." And they and their little ones

came safely home.

I appeal to you to seek the Lord with me concerning the place of fasting in breaking through the darkness that engulfs our state and our nation on this matter of abortion. May it be that the Lord is calling the church not only to fast in general for a great awakening in our land, but also calling us to fast specifically for the safety of the little ones. If you ask him, he will show you how.

Chapter 16

01.15. Be Strong and Fervent in Spirit in the Cause of Truth and Life

Be Strong and Fervent in Spirit in the Cause of Truth and Life January 19, 1997

Romans 12:9-21 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. . . A Word I Did not Know

I chose this text on this Sanctity of Life Sunday because of a word in an article by William Bennett that I did not know and had to look up. Many of you know who William Bennett is. He has become famous as the editor of The Book of Virtues and The Moral Compass and as the former Secretary of Education under President Reagan. He was writing about how the courts in America, especially the Supreme Court, are finding various rights in the Constitution that the framers of the Constitution never dreamed of and which remove from public debate crucial moral issues that ought to be settled in the political process rather than by arbitrary judicial decision that has no clear root in the constitution.

What he said was that this problem with the courts today is not the main problem in America. Then came the word I had to look up. He said, "The problem is not simply with the Court; the problem is also with the citizenry itself. It seems to me that that is the heart of the matter: a culture of acedia has taken deep root in the soil of late twentieth century America, which has led to acquiescence and passivity. Have we lost our capacity for justifiable outrage? Can we be roused to act against the spread of foul and wicked practices?" (First Things, January, 1997, No. 69, p. 20, emphasis added). So I looked up "acedia" in my Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary and it simply said, "Apathy, boredom." So he is saying that, here at the end of the twentieth century, a culture of apathy and boredom has taken deep root in America. This is different from fear. It's also different from disinterest in moral issues that comes because one has a passion for something else. This is a cultural yawn.

"Acedia" = Boredom, Apathy

It's the sort of mood that explains the incredible prevalence of sports and video games and movies that explode with tension and danger and risk and close calls, and stunning explosions and feats of daring. In all these things we see the attempt of a culture to find excitement and adventure and strong feeling in a workaday world that is just plain boring. It's as if we were made for exploits and adventure and exertion and passion and risk-taking in some great cause, and instead what we do all day is sit in front of a computer or shuffle papers or make deliveries or drive a bus or clean a room or sell a product or shuffle portfolios or prescribe medicines or fix gadgets. Life in the real world seems to fall so far short of what our hearts cry out for that the best we can do is create substitute, artificial exploits -- football, basketball, hockey, explosive movies, shocking video games -- anything to transport us out of the boredom of the real world, and give us a little taste of passion and zeal and daring and energy and strategy and courage -- even if it is an artificial world. Somehow it seems to help satisfy the craving of our hearts.

Cultural Acedia

I think William Bennett is right -- there is in America today a deep cultural acedia -- boredom and apathy. We look like we are having a great time as we go from one entertainment event and program and mall and movie to another, but it is all artificial. We are not excited with real life. We are desperately waiting for the weekend when we can play, because real life is just not connected with any great cause that inspires in us exploits of courage or daring or risk or adventure or strategy or dreaming or deep camaraderie. We wonder why our relationships are so feeble and thin and fragile. And deep down we know that part of the reason is that relationships go deep when arms are linked in a great cause that you are ready to lay down your lives for. Deep relationships are not cultivated by watching television or going to movies. So I looked up the word acedia: apathy, boredom. As I thought about this in relation to abortion -- one of the greatest evils of our nation -- what struck me was that God's will for us in relation to the cause of truth and life is that we not be bored or apathetic, but zealous and fervent and strong in the service of Christ and his kingdom. The culture of acedia is contrary to the Christian mind and heart. That is why I chose Romans 12:9-11, especially Romans 12:9 and Romans 12:11. The words used in Romans 12:9 b are strong words. Really strong. "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." (Romans 12:9) "Abhor" and "cling" are not your ordinary, workaday words for dislike and like. They are not acedia words. They are words that say, GET UP! Think about this! Look at this! Is this evil? Is this evil? Well if this is evil, abhor this. Feel intensely about this!

Don't abhor people, but abhor evil. Abhor this evil! And cling to the good. Don't just say, "Yes, that is good. Birth is good. Life is good. Adoption is good." Take hold of the good and love the good. Embrace the good. Cherish the good. Feel strongly about the good. You can hear in these words a call to fight acedia. These are not words that fit with boredom and apathy. They are words that call our personalities into question. We may say, "Well, I am not a passionate person," and then justify lukewarm responses to evil and good. But in Christ we are all being changed into the image of God -- and God is not lukewarm about evil and good. Christianity is diametrically opposed to the culture of acedia -- the culture of boredom and apathy.

What We Already Know About Abortion For many years I have been delivering messages here at Bethlehem describe the evil of abortion and the goodness of birth and, if necessary, hardship or adoption.

· We have seen that abortion is evil because what is happening in the womb is the unique person-forming work of God, and therefore abortion is an assault on the Creator-rights of the King of the Universe to bring eternal persons into existence.

· We have seen that abortion is evil because taking non-criminal life is the blessed privilege of God alone, not man. I call it "blessed" because that's what Job called it when his ten children were killed. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

· We have seen that abortion is evil because the babies torn apart in the womb bear the image of God. It is profoundly significant that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). Therefore human life, born and unborn, has a dignity that should not be despised.

We have seen that abortion is evil because God has revealed to us that his way is to care for the weak and the helpless, and that is why any of us is saved (Isaiah 25:4).

We have seen that abortion is evil because it is a sign of unbelief in the promises of God to think that killing the unborn is the only way God can make a livable future for you. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

We have seen that abortion is evil because those who perform the act know what they are doing, with many of them admitting it is the killing of a child, but saying it the lesser of two evils.

And we have seen that abortion is evil because it is essentially a way of providing women with the same supposedly consequence-free life of unlicensed sex that men seem to get.

And there are many other reasons why abortion is evil. We have seen all these. We need to be reminded of them, lest we be become calloused to the carnage down the street. But as I asked myself about this morning's message, I said, "Do I add to the list of reasons that abortion is evil, or do I assume that the people will share that conviction and so, rather, preach to stir them up not to grow weary -- not to sink in the culture of acedia. I decided that is what I should do.

Especially when I read on in William Bennett's article, and read on in Romans 12:1-21. Let me read one more paragraph to you. Here he gives evidence that we are a nation in the grip of weak, irresolute, lazy acedia with regard to abortion.

Partial-Birth Abortion But before I read it, I wonder if you all know what partial-birth abortion is. Both the Senate and House of Representatives passed a bill banning this hideous procedure unless the mother's life were at stake. On April 10, 1996, President Clinton vetoed the bill and the override was not sustained in the Senate. The President insisted that there must be an exception clause for the "health" of the mother -- which, as in Roe v. Wade, has proved, as everyone knows, to be an abortion license whenever the mother wants one.

What is this procedure? In September, 1993, Brenda Shafer, a registered nurse with thirteen years of experience, was assigned by her nursing agency to an abortion clinic. She considered herself pro-choice and didn't see a problem. She was wrong. Here is what she said:

I stood at the doctor's side and watched him perform a partial-birth abortion on a woman who was six months pregnant. The baby's heartbeat was clearly visible on the ultrasound screen. The doctor delivered the baby's body and arms, everything but his little head. The baby's body was moving. His little fingers were clasping together. He was kicking his feet. The doctor took a pair of scissors and inserted them into the back of the baby's head, and the baby's arms jerked out in a flinch, a startle reaction, like a baby does when he thinks that he might fall. Then the doctor opened the scissors up. Then he stuck the high-powered suction tube into the hole and sucked the baby's brains out. Now the baby was completely limp. I never went back to the clinic. But I am still haunted by the face of that little boy. It was the most perfect, angelic face I have ever seen. (Quoted from the Internet Home Page for "Campaign to End Partial-Birth Abortions.")

Now this is what prompted William Bennett to say that we are gripped by a culture of acedia. Here is what he said. And I hope the words land on you with the weight they should. The Congress' failure to override President Clinton's veto of the 'partial-birth abortion' legislation is illustrative [of the culture of acedia]. When it comes to the subject of abortion, I believe that there are a limited

number of hard wrenching cases. But here is an easy one: the presidential sanctioning of a procedure that is, for all intents and purposes, infanticide. What was most striking to me was the lack of virtually any public response [I think this is a serious overstatement even if the outcry was far from what it should have been]. Now it is true that most people do not know about the partial-birth abortion procedure, that most people who do are opposed to that awful procedure; and that the pro-abortionists spread misinformation. Still, we cannot escape the fact that we had something of a national debate about infanticide -- and infanticide prevailed (because of a popular President's veto); that very little was heard from those Americans who did follow the debate; that the Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and many congressional candidates, said little or nothing about the issue during the 1996 campaign; and that Americans reelected a President, by a wide margin, the man who looked at infanticide and said yes to it." (First Things, January, 1997, p. 20) "Not Lagging. . . Fervent" That is what I saw when I kept reading in William Bennett's article. Here is what I saw when I kept reading in Romans 12:1-21 -- Romans 12:10-11 : "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

It's Romans 12:11 that I believe God wants us to hear this morning with a new responsiveness. These words are launched directly against the culture of acedia -- the culture of apathy and boredom. Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

All of life is a serving of the Lord. We do not serve the Lord one day a week and serve some other god on the other six. This is a verse about life. About living life as to the Lord, whether we are eating or drinking or whatever we are doing -- to do it in the name of the Lord and for the glory of the Lord, since all of life belongs to the Lord. That includes all your family life and vocational life and leisure life and civic life and political life. So this verse is about how we deal with significant issues in public life.

There are two phrases that describe how we are to serve the Lord. They are the opposite of the culture of acedia. One expresses the opposite of acedia negatively and the other positively. First we are to serve the Lord by "not lagging behind in diligence." Literally, "not lazy in earnestness." The RSV says, "Never flag in zeal." The NIV says, "Never be lacking in zeal." This is a rebuke to passivity and laziness and lethargy and apathy and boredom. Paul assumes that if you see this in yourself you can do something about it. We have been given the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and the power of prayer precisely to fight against the encroachments of the culture of acedia in our own hearts. So he speaks this word directly to us this morning as relates to the cause of truth and life: don't lag, don't float, don't drift, don't sit mindless in front of TV, don't have only little dreams of playing on the weekend. Stir up zeal for God and for the cause of God and truth and life. There are great things worth living for; and giving in to acedia is a sacrilege against the greatness of God and his glorious purposes in the world.

Second, in Romans 12:11, Paul says, "[Be] fervent in spirit." The Greek word behind "fervent" --"zeontes" -- means "boiling." That's where we get the English word "fervent," because it comes from the Latin word "to boil." Here is the positive side. Don't lag behind in diligence and earnestness and zeal, but rather, positively, "be fervent," "boil" in the spirit. Today we might say, "Be passionate" in your spirit. This is why our Church mission statement is not just a trendy adaptation to the use of the word "passion," but an explicit effort to capture this biblical demand.

We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things. The word "passion" is based squarely on Romans 12:11, "boil in the spirit." "Be fervent in the spirit."

"Boil in the Spirit" So my simple pastoral plea to you this morning is that you not be part of the culture of acedia, especially when it comes to abortion. That you fight against the encroachments of apathy and boredom and laziness and indifference. That you go to the word of God and let the Lord of glory speak life and energy and hope and zeal and passion and earnestness into your spirit. I'm talking to the young and the old. That is his will for you this morning. If you have it -- this "boiling in the Spirit" -- you will find ways to pour your life out in the cause of truth and life. God will give more significance to your life than you could get from a thousand artificial games. Remember, we are Christians. Our lives are linked with Jesus Christ by faith, and he is the Lord of all things.

Through him and for him all things were made (Colossians 1:16).

God calls you to invest your life in something great. There is not Christian warrant for the culture of acedia. Christ is too great for that. Boredom with Christ and his kingdom means we are blind. Open your eyes this morning and let him inspire in you afresh a passion for his supremacy in all things, including the cause of truth and life in our tired and decaying culture.

Chapter 17

01.16. Visiting Orphans in a World of Aids and Abortion

Visiting Orphans in a World of Aids and Abortion January 24, 1999

James 1:26-27 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. To Each Person According to His Deeds

Next week we will return to our series on Romans. Today’s message could be viewed as a kind of application of a recent text from Romans 2:1-29. Paul speaks to religious people who are pointing their fingers at others, but are actually hypocrites. They have a religious veneer, but are spiritually and ethically corrupt. He says in Romans 2:5-7, "Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, [he will render] eternal life."

We saw that this does not teach that we can earn eternal life by "perseverance in doing good," but that the faith that obtains eternal life by trusting Jesus and his righteousness, is the kind of faith that will, in fact, "persevere in doing good." So the path to life is the path of a transformed life of love, not just religious talk and finger-pointing.

Now James is the place where this truth is driven home perhaps more than any other book in the New Testament. There is the famous section in chapter 2 where he says,

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (James 2:14-17) This is the same message that Paul gave in Romans 2:7 - the faith that perseveres in doing good leads to life, but the faith that does "not obey the truth, but obeys unrighteousness," leads to wrath. It is worthless. So today’s text in James 1:26-27 is a particular application of Romans 2:6-8, and my aim is to relate it to the issue of abortion in the wider context of mercy to widows and orphans.

Take James 1:26 first: "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless." Here we have religious hypocrisy again: people who think they are religious, but who use their tongues the way the world does. James says the same thing Paul does: that religion, or that faith, is worthless.

"Religious" Means "Faith in Jesus" The reason I think he means "faith in Jesus" when he uses the word "religious" (in James 1:26), or talks about "pure and undefiled religion" (in James 1:27), is that this is what he continues with in the next verse (James 2:1): "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." There is no break in

the flow between James 1:27 and James 2:1; so there is good reason to think that "pure religion" is "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." That is James' religion. And his point is: If you say you are religious, or say you have faith, but you don't bridle an unloving, lying, gossiping, cursing, angry tongue, then your faith - your religion - is worthless. In other words, it is faith that saves us, but whether our faith - our religion - is real is shown by the change it brings about in our hearts and lives. He illustrates this with the use of the tongue, the way he did back in James 1:19, "Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."

Now in James 1:27, James gives another very concrete example, which is why I chose this text for today - two days after the 26th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973 that made abortion on demand, for virtually any reason, legal up to the point of birth. He says, "Pure and undefiled religion [that is, real faith in our Lord Jesus Christ] in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Stay on the Horse!

Notice the two kinds of effects that pure religion or faith in Christ has: 1) practical compassion toward orphans and widows, and 2) personal purity of life. This is important to see, because so many Christians fall off the horse on one side or the other. Some fall off by saying: What matters is personal purity - sexual purity, financial integrity, a clean thought life, and so on; but they are weak in practical deeds of compassion for the poor and helpless. But some fall off the horse on the other side, by saying: What matters is social justice and compassion and helping people, and what you do with your mind and body and your private personal life is not significant. For example, I recall some years ago one of you told me about a project your worked on with a group of very socially engaged, religious people who gave every appearance of compassion and justice, but during off-duty hours were sexually involved in fornication and other lewd practices. But James says, in James 1:27, that pure and undefiled religion - true faith in Jesus Christ the Lord - stays on the horse. It is "to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." Not either/or, but both/and. Social justice and personal piety. Public compassion and private purity. Proactive steps of kindness and protective vigilance against defiling sin. So focus with me this morning on the former: "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress." (James 1:27) What Does this Have to Do with Abortion?

What does abortion have to do with orphans? The connection I see is this: God wants us to be concerned about orphans because they are helpless without mother and father, and we should feel compassion for the helpless who depend utterly on others for life. Picture a three-year-old child riding in his safety seat on the back seat of a car with his mommy and daddy riding in the front. There is a terrible crash and both mommy and daddy are killed. The child has minor injuries, but is okay. The hospital officials check and discover there are no grandparents and no other family members known. This is a heartbreaking situation. And God says to the church, step in there and take care of that child. So orphans are children whose parents have died and left them at the mercy of others to take care of, lest they die. How does abortion relate to that? Well, abortion puts the child in a worse situation. The parents are not dead, but they have turned on the child and choose to have the child dead. This is worse than being an orphan. To have Mommy and

Daddy choose to have you dead is worse than Mommy and Daddy being dead. So it seems to me that if God wants us to care about the orphan whose life is endangered because his parents are dead, he would want all the more that we care about the child whose life is endangered because his parents choose to make him dead. Is the Unborn Child a Person? Of course, the objection could be raised that the unborn child is not a child, and so doesn't qualify for the compassion of this verse. But have you noticed? You don't hear that argument in the public debate any more. A woman may hear it in the abortion clinic, but not in public, where it may be called to account. There are several reasons. 1) Scientific evidence has shown that the fetus has all the crucial genetic elements of human life. 2) The differences between the unborn baby and the born baby are differences that don't count in determining whether this is a human life: size, shape, looks, immature reasoning capacity, physical dependence, etc. These are simply irrelevant, because they all apply to the newborn outside the womb too. And ultrasound makes this clearer every day. 3) Doctors treat the unborn as legitimate patients just as they do the born children. 4) The idea that the Bible teaches that human life begins with breath (Genesis 2:7) breaks down in view of other texts that say the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). 5) The age of viability in the womb is getting earlier and earlier, with no clear line of demarcation between human and pre-human, or between person and pre-person. 6) The insistence of President Clinton and others to keep the partial birth abortion procedure legal shows that the basis of their position is not that the unborn are not human. Here we are talking about children that are within four inches of qualifying for the right to life, and yet are legally killed. So you rarely hear anymore, in public, that the basis of legal abortion is that the fetus is not a human life and a real developing human person.

Instead, the moral bottom line is this: It is a tragic choice between a mother's plans and a baby's life. And the legal bottom line is: A baby in the womb has rights to life if the mother wills it to; and does not if the mother does not will it to. There are fetal homicide laws that stand as a stunning testimony in our culture that it is a crime to kill an unborn baby if the mother doesn't want you to. Yet abortion laws say it is not a crime to kill the same baby if the mother wants you to. The difference is not the humanity or the personhood of the child. The difference is the desire of the mother. The rights of the weak are defined by the will of the strong. So the objection that James 1:27 doesn't have implications for the unborn because they are not human persons is wrong. They are persons created by God in the womb. Therefore, James' command to have compassion on the helpless who have lost mother and father applies to them if their mother and father turn on them and become worse than dead parents; namely, killing parents. If orphans should be cared for by God's people, how much more children whose parents reject them. And when it says, visit them "in their distress" we may ask, Is there any place of greater distress than in the womb of a woman who gives herself over to abortion? This is the greatest distress any child will ever experience. To be torn limb from limb in the very place that should be the safest place in the world is "distress" if there ever is anything called "distress." "Visit orphans in their distress."

Visiting Orphans But now, lest we isolate the case of abortion, let me put it in the context of the wider need for compassionate action toward orphans. In some of the states and countries emerging from Soviet Communism, the increasing number of orphans is huge. For example, in Romania, there are nearly three abortions for every live birth, the highest rate anywhere in the world. And still, "Hundreds are abandoned daily in hospitals and at the front doors of the orphanages." An estimated 350,000 street children "huff inhalants, panhandle, and live

underneath bridges and in the municipal dumps of Bucharest and other cities" (Roy Maynard, "Disposable Children," WORLD Magazine, Dec. 12, 1998, Volume 13, Number 48, Internet).

Abortion has not solved the problem of unwanted children. It never will. Killing the unwanted will never be a solution. There is another way. James 1:27 points the way. Helpless children are a great concern to Christ and he says that our religion, our faith in him, will express this concern with radical, risk-taking acts of compassion. And speaking of risk-taking, consider the greater tragedy of AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and its impact on children. Worldwide more than 30 million people are HIV positive or have AIDS. 16,000 are being infected with HIV virus every day. Estimates are that there will be 5.8 million new infections each year, which would bring the total number of HIV/AIDS cases to 40 million by 2000. 2.3 million people died of AIDS in 1997, a 50% increase over 1996, 460,000 of these under 15. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in thirteen sexually active adults is HIV positive, and in certain countries, such as Botswana, it is 30-33%

of the adult population. One of the staggering effects of this is that 8.4 million children have been orphaned by AIDS (StarTribune, Nov. 27, 1997, pp. A1,15).

These are mind-numbing realities and evidences of the sin and calamity and futility that are in this fallen world. And the call on the church is to take this massive word "visit" in James 1:27 and apply it in radical, risk-taking, thousand-faceted ways to rescue the orphan for Christ and his kingdom. Why do I call this word "visit" a massive word? Because it is used in some massive ways in the Bible. Exodus 4:31 - "The LORD had visited the children of Israel [in Egypt], and he had looked upon their affliction." Luke 1:68 - at the coming of Jesus, Zacharias says, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people."

"Visiting" is a huge word. It carries wonderful redeeming overtones. What a great calling for the church - both to the abandoned unborn children and to the destitute born children! What a great work for the pro-life committee in our church! What a great calling for the Micah Fund, which has brought so much redemption to helpless children through adoption! What a great global dream for some of you who are wondering what to do with the last third of your lives - or the first two-thirds!

Visiting Widows But before I finish, let me tell you one thought that springs from the word "widows" in James 1:27. Many women who have abortions are worse off than widows. The pain of widowhood is great. The loss of a husband - or the one who fathers your child - in death is heartbreaking beyond words. But the loss of a husband through abandonment is in some ways worse. The amputations caused by death usually heal clean. The amputations caused by abandonment often stay infected. It does not heal the same. Women who abort are often desperately alone. They are in a worse situation than many widows.

What then should the church do? Just what it has done for the last 25 years. An infrastructure of care for women in crisis pregnancies has grown up that is so massive in this country that there is scarcely any more criticism from pro-choice people to the effect that the pro-life people only care about babies not women. It simply is not true. And everybody knows it. The evidence is overwhelming. This is exactly as it should be, according to James 1:27 - both orphans and widows. Not either/or, but both/and. So I leave you with this one very encouraging hope about the future of the "abortion wars." Dave Andrusko, Editor of National Right to Life News, said last November that some think the conflict will just go on and on, without resolution. But he pointed out

that this is based on a false assumption: namely that the two sides speak two different languages: one invokes the woman and one invokes the unborn child. Not so, he says. "In truth, pro-lifers are bilingual, lifting up both mother and child. And because they are fluent in both languages [which pro-choice people are not], they can lead American women by the most natural route imaginable" out of the impasse. He and many others see the tide turning in our culture, which is far less enthusiastic about abortion than it was in 1974 ("The Pro-Life Movement Then and Now," First Things, Nov. 1998, No. 87, p. 36).

O how I pray that the religion of our church will be "pure and undefiled religion" - pure and undefiled faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! May God grant us to speak both languages of compassion: the language of the orphan and the language of the widow. The language of the helpless child and the language of the desperate woman. There are many other languages we must speak (to the fathers and to the lawmakers and to the doctors, etc.). But whatever we do, let us not be silent. For if we are, our religion is empty, and our faith is dead (James 1:27; James 2:14; James 2:17).

01.17. Christ, Culture and Abortion

Christ, Culture, and Abortion January 23, 2000

1 Peter 2:9-25 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Over the years, in many sermons and lessons on the sanctity of human life, we have developed a long list of reasons why abortion is wrong and known to be wrong in the hearts even of pro-choice people. But new people are coming to Bethlehem all the time and might find it helpful to hear some of those reasons. So let me mention some of them.

Jesus' Word of Mercy to Those Touched by Abortion But before I do that, a word to women who have had abortions -and men who may have encouraged or even demanded it. I know you are here. I know that a message on abortion is painful for you to hear. And I want you to know that the aim is not to make you miserable. Therefore I hope you begin by receiving and savoring and resting in the forgiveness of God through the death of his Son Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners. Let this word of Jesus from my devotional reading yesterday blow like a healing breeze across your soul (Matthew 9:11-13):

11 The Pharisees . . . said to Jesus' disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" [or you might add: those who give and get abortions]. 12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' " In other words, Jesus is in pursuit of sinners, not righteous people, because he came as a soul physician to show compassion, not to commend religious observances. That is foundational for all our preaching on social issues such as racial harmony and sanctity of life. We are speaking to each other as those who have failed. We are building on forgiveness and healing. We all start there. But, we don't stay there. On that basis, we move forward and we call each other to radical living.

Some Reasons We Know Abortion Is Wrong So now, what are some of the reasons that abortion is wrong? And even pro-choice people know it is wrong.

1. In Minnesota the Fetal Homicide Law makes a person guilty of manslaughter or worse if he kills the baby in a mother's womb - unless the mother agrees with the killing. Who is willing to live with the moral implications of making a person's "being wanted" the criterion of its right to life?

2. There is an inconsistency between doing fetal surgery on a baby in the womb to save life, and at a similar stage of development, killing a baby down the hall.

3. A baby can live on its own at 23 or 24 weeks. Yet pro-choice people say it can be killed even at and beyond this age if the mother will be distressed by its live birth more than its abortion. What morally significant factor will prevent them from saying that two babies at 23 weeks - one born and one unborn - may both be killed because of a mother's distress?

4. A baby's living without an umbilical cord (that is, outside the womb) is not the criterion of human personhood and the condition of the right to life. We all know this because our own living on a respirator or dialysis machine would not jeopardize our own personhood. The source of food and oxygen does not determine personhood.

5. The size of a human is irrelevant to human personhood. We know this because we do not make a one-month-old baby outside the womb vulnerable to killing even though it is so much smaller than a five-year-old. Littleness is irrelevant to personhood.

6. Developed reasoning powers are not the criterion of personhood. We know this because a one-month-old baby outside the womb does not have these powers either, yet its life is not in jeopardy because of that.

7. Scientifically we are human beings by virtue of our genetic makeup. The human code in the chromosomes is there from the start. We are utterly different from monkeys or rats or elephants as soon as the chromosomes of egg and sperm meet.

8. At eight weeks, all the organs are present - brain functioning, heart pumping, liver making blood cells, kidney cleaning the fluids, fingerprints formed, etc. Yet almost all abortions happen later than this date.

9. Ultrasound has given a stunning window on the womb that shows the unborn at eight weeks sucking a thumb, recoiling from pricking, responding to sound. We can see the amazing pictures in Life Magazine or various books or Web pages.

10. There is a principle of justice that, when two legitimate rights conflict - say the woman's right not to be pregnant, and the baby's right not to be killed - the right that should be limited is the one that would do the most harm.

11. The Word of God says, "Thou shalt not kill." (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17) But many abortionists admit they are killing baby humans. Bill Long, who used to do abortions at Midwest Health Center for Women told me over lunch some years ago that he knew he was "killing babies." Those were the abortionist's words. But he said it was a lesser evil; women must have "reproductive freedom."

Nevertheless the killing goes on. Within walking distance of our church there is Meadowbrook Women's Clinic at Eighth Street and Chicago; Midwest Health Center for Women downtown at Fifth and Hennepin and Mildred Hanson at 24th and Chicago. Together at these three abortion centers, about 8,000 babies are killed each year. You can go on line and read their fee structures and procedures. But there are signs of positive turning as well. For example, among nurses, the approval of abortion is plummeting. Sixty percent now say that they would not work in an Ob-gyn unit where abortions are performed, up from forty-eight percent a decade ago (First Things, January, 2000, p. 75). On the home front, there were 250-300 people at Bethlehem's pro-life brunch yesterday and we took three bus loads and two vans to the capitol for the rally. That is four or five times the usual number we've had during the 13 years or so that we have been going. My prayer and aim this morning is that this concern and engagement would increase. And to that end I simply want to put this kind of social involvement in a Biblical context so that you do not feel that it is incompatible with, but in fact demanded by, a Biblical, eternity-aware, evangelistic, God-exalting orientation toward life.

Truths for Christian Involvement From 1 Peter 2:9-17 let me draw out and simply state, with very little exposition, six truths for Christian involvement in society and culture.

1. We were once all in darkness, along with the whole world.

Notice the phrase near the end of 1 Peter 2:9 : "Him who has called you out of darkness." We were once in darkness. The darkness of sin and unbelief and ignorance about God and his ways. It was the darkness of deadness in sin, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:5. This is the condition of our culture and our society. And we were once a part of it by nature. Why are we no longer?

2. God called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. This truth comes from the same phrase in 1 Peter 2:9 : "Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." We are not by nature smarter or wiser or more courageous than those who remain in darkness. The difference is that God exerted toward us an absolutely undeserved and compelling kindness: he called us. Paul put it like this in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." It was the omnipotent call of God that wakened us from the spiritual sleep of death and opened our eyes to the power and wisdom of God in Christ. Let us never forget: Free and powerful grace alone is the decisive reason that we are able to see the darkness of our culture and be free in some measure from it.

3. God's aim in calling us out of darkness is to send us back to (but not in) that darkness to "proclaim his excellencies."

Now all of 1 Peter 2:9 : "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." That is why you have been called out. That is why you are God's people, a chosen race. We exist to display with word and deed the excellencies of God. This is the way God's call came to us. Freely we received, now let us freely give. Our witness is not the same as the call of God. But God's call happens through our display of God's excellencies. When we speak and show God's excellencies to others, we provide the truth that God may grant the blind to see. If we say nothing, they will see nothing. Faith comes by

hearing (Romans 10:17). And new birth is "through the living and abiding word," the gospel (1 Peter 1:23-25).

4. God’s aim is that the way we make his excellencies known to the darkened culture around us take place both by avoidance and by engagement. This is very crucial to see. Some err here by stressing one to the exclusion of the other. One group is swept away with social action. Another is absorbed in personal holiness. The Biblical way is both/and, not either/or.

Notice 1 Peter 2:11 : "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." This is the avoidance ethic. And it is absolutely right and necessary. There are things in our culture that we should simply avoid and abstain from. But notice 1 Peter 2:12 : "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." Here we are "among the Gentiles." Here we are going on display to the Gentiles. Here we are not just avoiding their effect on us, we are aiming at having an effect on them with positive action. "They observe your good deeds and glorify God."

Over and over in the New Testament the writers stress that we were created and converted to be engaged relentlessly in a life of public good deeds. Indeed, Titus 2:14 says that Christ died to "purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." The term "good deeds" does not mean sitting at home watching wholesome videos instead of going out and watching dirty movies. Good deeds means designing ministries for caring for AIDS orphans in Africa, and feeding the malnourished, and housing the homeless, and teaching the illiterate and ignorant, and freeing the addicted and fighting crime and visiting the prisoner and befriending the lonely, laboring in the cause of protecting the unborn and relieving the crisis of unexpected pregnancies, and a thousand other visible ways of doing good to others in the name of Jesus (see Titus 2:7-8; Titus 3:8; Hebrews 10:22; Matthew 5:16). My point here is that, in relation to our sin-riddled culture, we should pursue both avoidance and engagement; both purity of heart and merciful involvement, both personal holiness and public justice. In short, we should with the mind of Christ be both culture-denying and cultural transforming. The transformed mind steeped in scripture will discern when and how.

5. Submission to cultural institutions (like the state, and places of employment and family) is not canceled out by our freedom in Christ (and our citizenship being in heaven, and our being "strangers and exiles on earth), but our submission is put on a whole new footing of submission to God.

You see the call to submission in 1 Peter 2:13 : "Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution." Christians are not self-assertive rebels who kick against the pricks of regulations in government and business and schools and home. We are eager to be supportive and compliant wherever it does not compromise our commitment to Christ our king. But notice the words in 1 Peter 2:13, "for the Lord’s sake." Or: "On account of the Lord." Once we may have been submissive out of fear, or out of conniving for advancement, or out of greed, or out of laziness, or because we believed that these earthly institutions really were our master. But that is not how Christians submit now. It is for the Lord’s sake.

1 Peter 2:16 is Peter’s interpretation of those crucial words: "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God." We are free. We are not slaves to any human institution. So why submit? Why not drive at any speed we want? Why not pay whatever tax we feel like? Why not come to class late? Why not wear perfume to the first service and park in the most convenient place for ourselves? Why not come in at whatever hour you please as a teenager? Why submit to a hundred rules and laws and guidelines in our culture and work places and schools and homes? The answer is, God freed us from these institutions as masters, and then sent us back into them to declare his excellencies as his servants, not the servants of man. We submit in freedom, for the Lord’s sake. Everything is on a different footing. All is from the Lord and for the Lord. Christ died to purify us for good deeds and we enter the world and the culture with a view to displaying the glory and the excellency of this great Christ.

6. Finally, Christians honor all persons, and seek to do it in different ways that are not the same for each, but appropriate to their roles in life.

1 Peter 2:17 : "Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." There is a special kind of honor for the king. There is a special fear for God. There is a special love for fellow Christians. But there is an honor for all persons, including the wicked.

Matthew Henry wrote: "The wicked must be honored, not for their wickedness, but for any other qualities, such as wit, prudence, courage, eminency of employment, or the hoary head. Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, the prophets, and the apostles never scrupled to give due honor to bad men" (Commentary on the Whole Bible [Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.], p. 1019).

How much more the unborn should be honored! So in conclusion, let us not simply be a passive and apathetic people priding ourselves in our avoidance ethic. Let us live in the power of the grace that called us out of darkness into light and let us turn back to that very dark and dying culture and declare the excellencies of the One who called us, and let us be rich in good deeds, so that people might see the kind of Master we serve and give him glory on the day of visitation.

01.18. Acknowledgments

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Chapter 20

02.01. Suppose You Are a Liberal Critic of the Bible

Suppose You Are a Liberal Critic of the Bible

April 14, 1998

Suppose that you are a liberal critic of the Bible. By liberal, I mean unfettered by commitment to the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. And suppose that you find in an early letter of the apostle Paul these words: "Concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge." And then suppose that you find in a letter written near the end of his life the words, "You are able to admonish one another." And suppose that, as a liberal, you are not inclined to find old-fashioned unity in Paul's various teachings, but rather are somewhat excited when you can construct new theories about how the diversity of Paul's teachings emerged. So you infer that there was an "early Paul" who was enthusiastic and optimistic and perfectionistic. And you prove it with the early words, "You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge." You argue that "full of goodness" and "filled with knowledge" clearly imply that Paul believed these people "had arrived." They had reached a state of perfection. They didn't need any teaching or any correction. They were "full of goodness." This is the "early Paul." But you also infer that Paul's thinking developed over time. He changed his mind and the "later Paul" emerged. Reality had settled in over the years, and Paul's optimism had been dashed by people's imperfections; and so he had adjusted his theology to something more realistic.

Perfectionism had given way to process. And you prove it with the later words, "You are able to admonish one another." You reason, "Clearly, if they had to admonish one another, they were not yet perfect." In fact, with scholarly flourish, you observe that the verbs "are able" and "to admonish" are both in the present continuous tense, implying ongoing action. And you argue that the imperfections must be fairly constant, because they require continuous admonition and correction. From all this, you proclaim, with liberal "courage," over against conservative commitments to the inspiration and coherence of all apostolic writings, that Paul cannot be inspired by an all-knowing God, and his writings are limited and sometimes mistaken by his ordinary human perspective. He has to correct himself when experience proves his earlier efforts erroneous.

Now here is one of the problems with such an imaginary scenario. Romans 15:14 combines both of those words (the so-called early and the so-called later) in one verse: "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another." In other words, there is nothing, in Paul's mind, inconsistent in saying both of these things about the same people at the same time. Being "full of goodness" and "filled with all knowledge" is not meant to imply perfection. It does not mean that the people are beyond the need for admonition and correction. The "fullness" is not a fullness of sinless perfection, but fullness of sufficiency for ministry, that is, the church in Rome had all the goodness and knowledge it needed to minister effectively to each other through admonition and

correction.

Here’s the point. When you find two parts of Scripture that may seem to be in tension with each other, don’t make the liberal mistake of jumping to the conclusion that the Bible is inconsistent or self-correcting or in process of moving from enthusiastic error to realistic truth. Instead, picture the things that seem in tension as spoken by a person who means both of them, and regards both of them as true. Then work toward a coherent understanding of them as best you can. This will take you much deeper into the reality of God’s truth. And you will honor the divine Author of Scripture.

Loving God’s inerrant word with you,

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02.02. Facts

Facts

Seen and Unseen

March 31, 1998 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 Jesus Christ died. He was buried. He rose the third day.

He was seen by many and diverse witnesses. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now. (1 Corinthians 15:3-7) When the Bible says, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), it does not mean that there never were any visible evidences. Nor does it mean that there are no visible evidences today. The heavens are telling of the glory of God [today!]; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Psalms 19:1)

Since the creation of the world [even to this day!] His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made. (Romans 1:20) In the first generation of believers, God did not think he was contradicting the grounds of faith by giving visible appearances of the risen Christ, and then later by confirmations of the word of truth in signs and wonders. To [the apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

After [our great salvation] was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders. (Hebrews 2:3-4) What then does Paul mean when he says, "We walk by faith and not by sight"? As usual, the context is the key.

While we are in this tent [that is, the body], we groan . . . [longing for] what is mortal [to] be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord - for we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:4-7)

Yes, Christ was seen once, with physical eyes. Yes, he did signs and wonders infallibly with a single word or touch. Yes, he died, and rose, and appeared to many. But NOW he is gone from sight. We do not see him that way now. As Paul says, "[When we are] at home in the body, [we are] absent from the Lord!" That is, we don’t see him now. Not only that, in this body of ours, we groan. That is, we do not even see the full effect of his power in our lives now. Rather, Paul says, we have his Spirit as a pledge. The Spirit is an unseen, but experienced, downpayment, in advance of the sight of Christ in glory. So in what sense then do we walk by faith and not sight? We walk by faith and not sight, because on the basis of the past, visible acts of God in Christ, and

because of the compelling testimonies to these acts in the apostles, we now trust in this living Christ and what he promises to be for us, though we do not now see him. Paul says it like this in Romans 8:24-25 : "In hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

Peter puts it like this: "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). I have never seen the risen Christ in the flesh. But his Spirit has enabled me to see his self-authenticating glory in the Biblical witnesses. The Christ that I see there, has won over my mind and my heart. So I say with Paul in Galatians 2:20, "I live by faith [not sight] in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Walking by faith (for now) with you,

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Chapter 22

02.03. Displays of God Remove the Excuse for Failed Worship

Displays of God Remove the Excuse for Failed Worship September 27, 1998

Romans 1:18-21 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. The Greatness and Seriousness of the Bible

One of the things that makes the Bible an incomparable book is that it so unremittingly deals with the greatest issues of reality. Of course, God the Creator of everything is the greatest Reality. The entire universe, with all its vast expanse of space between the stars and its vast expanse of space between the electrons, is as nothing compared to God. And the Bible is relentlessly Godward in its focus. It has to do with God and how everything relates to God. And it comes from God and speaks with the authority of God. And so there is an atmosphere of greatness and seriousness in this book that is unlike anything else.

We are at one of those places this week, in our encounter with Romans, where the intensity of seriousness and greatness and ultimate significance for humankind reaches a tremendous height. In Romans 1:18, we have seen that the gospel of the free gift of God’s righteousness (Romans 1:16-17) is needed for us sinners because the wrath of God is already "being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Two weeks ago we took up this astoundingly (even politically) up-to-date verse and pondered the suppression of truth in the human heart that kindles the anger of God.

What About People Who Haven’t Been Reached With the Gospel?

Now today we see the apostle Paul answering an objection. The objection is this: "You say, Paul, that the wrath of God is being revealed in history against humankind because the truth of God is suppressed by the human heart. Well, what about those who don’t have the truth of God? Don’t they have a legitimate excuse to protest God’s anger? How can it be right for God to be angry at people, and punish people for suppressing a truth that they never had?" That’s the objection that Paul is answering here, in Romans 1:19-21.

It’s a question that many of you have asked. What about people who have not yet been reached by the gospel of Christ? How are they held accountable before God? Paul will deal with this question again in Romans 2:11-16. For example, in Romans 2:11-12 he says, "There is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law." You see that this is the same question he is answering in chapter one. How does God deal with people who have different levels

of exposure to divine truth? In Romans 1:19-21, there are four steps in Paul's argument. We can either start at his conclusion and work our way backward to his reasoning, or we can start with his reasoning and work our way forward to his conclusion. I think it would be good to do it both ways to make sure that we see the argument clearly. So let me start first with his conclusion and work backward with you through the other three steps, and then we will turn around and move the other direction with a very special, relevant application.

Conclusion: They Are Without Excuse . . .

Paul's conclusion is found at the end of Romans 1:20 : ". . . so that they are without excuse." In other words, his final answer to the objection is that it is not valid. To those who say, "God is wrong to reveal his wrath against all people for suppressing the truth," Paul answers, "No they are without excuse." That's the issue: Are there people in the world who have an excuse or a warrant to protest the wrath of God against them? And here is Paul's answer: No. No one has an excuse. Everyone is guilty and deserves the wrath of God.

. . . For They Did Not Honor God . . .

Now how does he argue for that conclusion? There are three steps leading to this conclusion. We keep moving backward from the conclusion. So if Paul's conclusion is step four in the argument, step three is found at the end of Romans 1:21 : "For . . . they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." They are without excuse and do, in fact, deserve the wrath of God, because they do not glorify God or give him thanks. Nowhere in the world does God receive the glory or the gratitude that truly righteous hearts would render to him. The fullness of his divine glory and the extent of our dependence on his power are suppressed everywhere. So all men everywhere are guilty and without excuse.

. . . Although They Did Know Him . . . But this assumes another step in the argument. Did they have this truth about God? Were they responsible for owning up to what they didn't know? Still working backward from the conclusion, the next step is that all people everywhere know the truth of God. You see this step in the argument expressed at the beginning of Romans 1:19 and at the beginning of Romans 1:20 and Romans 1:21. Romans 1:19 a: "That which is known about God is evident within them [or better: "among them." See the similar Greek wording in 1 Corinthians 11:9]. Romans 1:20 a: "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen." Romans 1:21 a: "For even though they knew God . . ."

So, Paul says, they do know God. What can be known is evident among them. Specifically, God's eternal power and God's divine nature are known by everyone. So now we have three steps:

· Step four: The conclusion - All men are without excuse and deserve the wrath of God.

· Step three: This is because they do not glorify God as God or give him thanks.

· Step two: This failure of fitting worship is not because of innocent ignorance of God, but in spite of sufficient knowledge about God.

. . . Because God Had Made Himself Evident

Now that leaves one last step in the argument at the bottom of it all -namely, the profound statement at the end of Romans 1:19 and the explanation of it in the middle of Romans 1:20. At the end of Romans 1:19, Paul says that the reason God's power and deity are evident among them is that "God made it evident to them." "That which is known about God is evident among them; for God made it evident to them."

How did he do that? This is explained in the middle of Romans 1:20 in the words, "being understood through what has been made." God's eternal power and divine nature - what can be known of God - have always, from the beginning of the creation of man, been "understood through what has been made." When Romans 1:19 b says "God made [his power and deity] evident to mankind," it means that God did something to make himself known. Knowledge of God did not just happen coincidentally. God makes provision for it.

Creation is God's Poiema - Work of Art

What does he do to make himself evident? He made the world. He created - like a potter, or a sculptor or a poet, except he created out of nothing. In Romans 1:20, when it says that God is "understood through what has been made," the words "what has been made" stand for one Greek word (which you will all recognize), the word poiema. It's the word from which we get "poem." The universe and everything in it is God's work of art. What's the point of this word? The point is that in a poem there is manifest design and intention and wisdom and power. The wind might create a letter in the sand, but not a poem. That's the point. God acted. God planned. God designed. God crafted. He created and made. And in doing that, Paul says in Romans 1:19, God made himself evident to all mankind. The universe is a poem about God.

Now this too is extremely relevant for our day. Just as we saw that verse 18 was politically relevant, this text is scientifically relevant. Naturalistic evolution is treated as a given in our culture - the belief that the universe, and human life in particular, evolved by the sheer forces of matter, time and chance. Given enough time and some matter to work with, chance has brought about what we see in the universe and in the human species today. God as creator and designer is simply ruled out and thought to be an unnecessary hypothesis. But increasingly in our day this assumption of naturalistic evolution is being shown to be a philosophical prejudice rather than a scientific conclusion from evidence. Philip Johnson has led the way in this movement with his two books, Darwin on Trial and Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds. In 1996, Michael Behe, a biochemist who looks at the wonders of the microcosm of creation, rather than the macrocosm, wrote Darwin's Black Box, and argued that the single tiny cell is "irreducibly complex," and therefore the product of intelligent design, not chance. "Irreducible complexity" means that the immensely complex cell has a large number of parts that all work together in such a way that the absence of one part stops the entire function - which means that the functioning system of the cell could not be built up by small evolutionary steps in which the parts accumulated gradually. For example, Behe considers the bacterial flagellum. The flagellum is a whip-like rotary motor that enables a bacterium to navigate through its environment. The flagellum includes an acid-powered rotary engine, a stator, O-rings, bushings, and a driveshaft. The intricate machinery of this molecular motor requires approximately fifty proteins. Yet the absence of any one of these proteins results in the complete loss of motor function. The irreducible complexity of such a biochemical system cannot be explained by the Darwinian mechanism, nor indeed by any

naturalistic evolutionary mechanism proposed to date. (William Dembski, "Science and Design," First Things, Oct. 1998, No. 86, p. 25.) Scientific Suppression of the Truth

Most recently of all William Dembski has written The Design Inference (Cambridge University Press). He points out that many well-known scientists must constantly suppress the suspicion that there is design (poiema) in the universe. For example, he quotes Richard Dawkins, an "arch-Darwinian" who says, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." And he quotes Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA, who says, "Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved" (ibid. p. 21). In other words, to use the words of the apostle Paul, the manifest truth of God's poiema - God's "designed things" - must be constantly suppressed, lest scientists be brought face to face with their Maker and have to glorify him as God and give him thanks as dependent creatures.

Paul's Argument Applied to Urban Ministry So let me now, by way of summary, trace Paul's argument this time from the bottom up. He is answering the objection whether people - unbelieving scientists in university labs or tribal people groups unreached with the gospel - have an excuse to protest against the wrath of God upon them. But as I summarize Paul's argument, I want to give it an unusual application: not to Darwinian scientists, and not to distant tribal people groups, but to Kenny Stokes and our ministry in the urban setting of Minneapolis. This is not hard to do, because each of Paul's four steps has a direct bearing on ministry right here as Kenny begins his work among us.

1. The Creator's power and deity are evident

Step one: God is the Creator and has acted to make the truth of his eternal power and deity evident to all (Romans 1:19-20, poiema). This means, Kenny, that you and every person you will meet in this city are the creation of God and designed by God for a purpose, namely, to communicate God. You are God's poem and so are they. God has worked in Phillips and Elliot Park and Powderhorn and the Northside as the Creator of all things and the communicator of himself. He has gone before you. You will reap where others have sown -especially God, the Creator.

2. All people know God

Step two: All the men and women and young people in the urban center of Minneapolis know God. Romans 1:21 a: "They knew God." There is a profound common ground between you and everyone you will ever meet in this city. Yes, the truth is suppressed, but it is there, buried and distorted. God has not left himself without a witness - to every mind and heart. You will not be talking to trees. You will be talking to people who look at trees and see the glory of God. They know God - his eternal power and deity.

3. But they suppress this knowledge

Step three: Nevertheless, they suppress this knowledge and do not glorify God or give him thanks (Romans 1:21 b). This means at least that, since you love the glory of God and want him to receive the worship he is due, you will labor with all your strength in the power of God's Spirit to open their hearts to the truth and spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the

joy of all peoples.

4. So, everyone is without excuse before God

Step four: Everyone in urban Minneapolis and St. Paul, and indeed every person on this planet, is "without excuse" under the wrath of God. Nobody can bring any legitimate protest against God’s justice in this matter. This means, Kenny, that the great urban tragedy is not drugs or illicit sex or murder or theft or poverty or homelessness or abuse. The great urban tragedy is that people are perishing under the wrath of God with no appeal and no hope. They are without excuse. The Path of Escape And you and I, and every Christian in this room have the remedy and the path of escape - namely, that the gospel "is the power of God for salvation [from wrath!] to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek [and to the rich and the poor, and the educated and the uneducated, and red and yellow and white and black], for in it the righteousness of God [not his wrath] is revealed from faith to faith." The free gift of righteousness is the escape from God’s wrath in the city. You have in your heart and in your mouth the most powerful urban strategy in the world: the gospel of Jesus Christ. We all do.

O Lord, come, and give Kenny an anointing to mobilize us for this great saving work. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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02.04. Whence and Why the Earthquake in Turkey?

Whence and Why the Earthquake in Turkey?

August 18, 1999

"Weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). When love has wept and worked, it must have some answers. Not all the answers, but some. No earthquakes in the Bible are attributed to Satan. Many are attributed to God.** This is because God is Lord of heaven and earth. "He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him" (Luke 8:25). "He sends forth His command to the earth. . . . He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; who can stand before His cold? . . . He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow" (Psalms 147:15-18). "He looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke" (Psalms 104:32). "[He] shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble" (Job 9:6). And if the devils try to intrude on his control, "He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him" (Mark 1:27).

Earthquakes are ultimately from God. Nature does not have a will of its own. And God owes Satan no freedom. What havoc demons wreak, they wreak with God’s permission. That’s the point of Job 1:1-22; Job 2:1-13 and Luke 22:31-32. God does nothing without an infinitely wise and good purpose. "He also is wise and will bring disaster" (Isaiah 31:2). "The LORD is good" (Psalms 100:5). Therefore, God had good and all-wise purposes for the heart-rending tragedy in Turkey that took thousands of lives on August 16, 1999.

Indeed he had hundreds of thousands of purposes, most of which will remain hidden to us until we are able to grasp them at the end of the age. "How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:33-34). "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Yet there are possible purposes revealed in the Bible that we may pray will come to pass. 1) The end-time earthquakes in the book of Revelation (see the footnote) are meant as calls to repentance to warn people who deny Jesus Christ that a day is coming when unbelievers will cry to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). 2) The end-time earthquakes in Matthew 24:7-8 are meant to be interpreted as "the beginning of the birth pangs." That is, they are a wake-up call to this oblivious world that God’s kingdom will soon be born; so be alert and prepare to meet Jesus Christ. 3) God’s unilateral taking of thousands of lives is a loud declaration that "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21). The message for all the world is that life is a loan from God (Luke 12:20) and belongs to him. He creates it and gives it and takes it according to his own will and owes us nothing. He has a right to children (2 Samuel 12:15) and to the aged (Luke 2:29). It is a great gift to learn this truth and dedicate our lives to their true owner rather than defraud him till it is too late. 4) The power felt in an earthquake reveals the fearful

magnificence of God. This is a great gift since "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalms 111:10). Most of the world does not fear the Lord and therefore lacks saving wisdom. 5) When the earth shakes under your feet there is a dramatic sense that there is no place to flee. In most disasters the earth is the one thing that stands firm when wind and flood are raging. But where do you turn when the earth itself is unsafe? Answer: God. May the Lord fulfill two other purposes for this painful catastrophe. 1) That Christians repent of worldliness. "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). 2) That Christians, around the world, step forward with extraordinary, sacrificial love to show more clearly the mercy of Christ who laid down his life in the midst of the Father's judgment.

Praying, giving, trembling, trusting,

Pastor John

** 2 Samuel 22:8; Isaiah 13:13; Isaiah 24:18-20; Isaiah 29:6; Psalms 60:2; Nahum 1:5-6; Revelation 6:12; Revelation 8:5; Revelation 11:13 f; Revelation 16:18. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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02.05. Nine Ways to Know That the Gospel of Christ Is True

Nine Ways to Know That the Gospel of Christ Is True November 23, 1999

1. Jesus Christ, as he is presented to us in the New Testament, and as he stands forth from all its writings, is too single and too great to have been invented so uniformly by all these writers. The force of Jesus Christ unleashed these writings; the writings did not create the force. Jesus is far bigger and more compelling than any of his witnesses. His reality stands behind these writings as a great, global event stands behind a thousand newscasters. Something stupendous unleashed these diverse witnesses to tell these stunning and varied, yet unified, stories of Jesus Christ.

2. Nobody has ever explained the empty tomb of Jesus in the hostile environment of Jerusalem where the enemies of Jesus would have given anything to produce the corpse, but could not. The earliest attempts to cover the scandal of resurrection were manifestly contradictory to all human experience - disciples do not steal a body (Matthew 28:13) and then sacrifice their lives to preach a glorious gospel of grace on the basis of the deception. Modern theories that Jesus didn’t die but swooned, and then awoke in the tomb and moved the stone and tricked his skeptical disciples into believing he was risen as the Lord of the universe don’t persuade.

3. Cynical opponents of Christianity abounded where claims were made that many eyewitnesses were available to consult concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:6). Such claims would be exposed as immediate falsehood if they could. But we know of no exposure. Eyewitnesses of the risen Lord abounded when the crucial claims were being made.

4. The early church was an indomitable force of faith and love and sacrifice on the basis of the reality of Jesus Christ. The character of this church, and the nature of the gospel of grace and forgiveness, and the undaunted courage of men and women - even unto death - do not fit the hypothesis of mass hysteria. They simply were not like that. Something utterly real and magnificent had happened in the world and they were close enough to know it, and be assured of it, and be gripped by its power. That something was Jesus Christ, as all of them testified, even as they died singing.

5. The prophesies of the Old Testament find stunning fulfillment in the history of Jesus Christ. The witness to these fulfillments are too many, too diverse, too subtle and too interwoven into the history of the New Testament church and its many writings to be fabricated by some great conspiracy. Down to the details, Jesus Christ fulfilled dozens of Old Testament prophecies that vindicate his truth.

6. The witnesses to Jesus Christ who wrote the New Testament gospels and letters are not gullible or deceitful or demented. This is manifest from the writings themselves. The books bear the marks of intelligence and clear-headedness and maturity and a moral vision that is compelling. They win our trust as witnesses, especially when all taken together with one great unifying, but distinctively

told, message about Jesus Christ.

7. The worldview that emerges from the writings of the New Testament makes more sense out of more reality than any other worldview. It not only fits the human heart, but also the cosmos and history and God as he reveals himself in nature and conscience. Some may come to this conclusion after much reflection, others may arrive at this conviction by a pre-reflective, intuitive sense of the deep suitability of Christ and his message to the world that they know.

8. When one sees Christ as he is portrayed truly in the gospel, there shines forth a spiritual light that is a self-authenticating. This is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:6), and it is as immediately perceived by the Spirit-awakened heart as light is perceived by the open eye. The eye does not argue that there is light. It sees light.

9. When we see and believe the glory of God in the gospel, the Holy Spirit is given to us so that the love of God might be "poured out in our hearts" (Romans 5:5). This experience of the love of God known in the heart through the gospel of Him who died for us while we were yet ungodly assures us that the hope awakened by all the evidences we have seen will not disappoint us.

Loving the truth of Christ with you this Advent,

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02.06. A Call for Courage in the Cause of Truth

A Call for Courage in the Cause of Truth

April 11, 1990 Matthew 10:24-31 A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. My desire this morning is that God would use my words to inspire you with courage in the cause of truth. My prayer is that he will grant you to overcome all fear of speaking the truth of Scripture, and that you will have the boldness to speak it openly and clearly when it is unpopular or even dangerous.

There are at least two reasons I feel this burden this morning. One is that Paul had this burden for his younger apprentice, Timothy. Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:3, "The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth." In other words, "Timothy, it is likely that you are going to have to say some unpopular things that do not scratch where people itch. I want you to know this in advance so that you are not shaken when the truth you preach is rejected. It will take courage to press on in the face of that opposition, Timothy. So be courageous and take your share of suffering for the truth (1 Timothy 1:8; 1 Timothy 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:13-14)." The other reason I feel this burden this morning is because subjectivism and relativism permeate our culture and threaten to destroy churches and schools and denominations and movements. By RELATIVISM I mean the assumption that there is no such thing as absolutes. What is true or right or good or beautiful for you may not be for me. It's all relative. By SUBJECTIVISM I mean the assumption that in this relativistic atmosphere I, the subject, have the right to determine what is good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, beautiful and ugly for me without submitting my judgment to any objective reality or any objective authority outside myself. This is the air we breath in America today. Which means that it is extremely unpopular today to take a strong stand on anything except tolerance. The claim that you know a truth that everybody should believe or that you know a behavior that everyone should avoid -- that claim is enough to earn for you the name, Ayatollah or Facist or Ceaucescu.

If you commend a truth with confidence, and make a case for it on the basis of objective evidences, and call on people with urgency to change their minds and believe it, you will be viewed by the average American as arrogant and even dangerous. But if you avoid talking about truth or give the impression that truth is unattainable, and if you avoid words like "should" and "ought" and "must," then you will signal to people that there is no objective truth and there are no

moral absolutes. And then people will see you as humble.

Confidence that you know some things that all people ought to believe is seen as the essence of arrogance today. On the other hand, a sense of uncertainty about what is true and about how one ought to live, accompanied by a kind of open-ended ethic and an absence of judgment on controversial issues is seen as the essence of humility. This is one of the primary ways today that people with itching ears gather for themselves teachers to suit their own liking. It is not easy to be called arrogant and dangerous, and it feels very good to be liked as humble and open and inoffensive. And therefore the temptation to lose your theological and moral nerve is tremendous and the need for courage is immense. The text for my exhortation is Matthew 10:24-31. The aim of Jesus in these verses is to give us the courage to speak the truth of God's word with clarity and openness no matter what the cost. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. The main point of this text is plain from the three repetitions of the command not to fear. Matthew 10:26, "So have no fear of them." Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body." Matthew 10:31 : "Fear not therefore; you are of much more value than many sparrows." So Jesus' aim here is to overcome fear and instill courage. But courage to do what? Can we make the point of this passage sharper? We can. The point is made very sharp in Matthew 10:27. Jesus has something very specific in mind that is threatened by fear and advanced by courage. He says in Matthew 10:27 : "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear . . ." In other words the real danger of fear in this passage is the fear to speak clearly (in the light) and openly (on the housetops) when that speaking might get you in trouble. So here's the point of the passage: Don't be afraid to speak clearly and openly what Christ has taught you even if it costs you your church, your friends, and your life. Or to put the point positively, Be courageous to speak the truth of Scripture clearly and openly for all to hear even if it is unpopular and dangerous. The rest of this text is motivation: five reasons are given for why you and I should have courage to speak all that Jesus taught -- the popular parts and the unpopular parts -- no matter what. Here they are (far too quickly, I regret):

1. First, notice the "so" or "therefore" at the beginning of Matthew 10:26 : "So (therefore) have no fear of them." In other words, fearlessness flows from what Jesus just said, namely, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more (will they malign) those of his household." Therefore have no fear of them. Does that help make you fearless?

It should. I think the sense is this: Jesus is saying, "Your mistreatment for speaking the truth clearly and openly is not some unexpected, accidental, random, meaningless experience; it's just the way the way they treated me, and so it's a sign that you belong to me -- you are part of my household (cf. Hebrews 13:8). So don't be afraid of the names they call you when you speak out plainly, those very names bind you and me together."

2. Second, notice the word "for" in the middle of Matthew 10:26 (the NIV often drops these important words): "So have no fear of them; FOR (here comes the second reason not to be afraid) nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." How does that help us overcome fear and be courageous in the cause of truth?

It helps us by assuring us that the truth we are speaking will triumph. It will be vindicated in the end. People may reject it now. They may call it the word of Beelzebul. They may cast it out. They may try to bury it and hide it from the world and pretend that it does not exist. But Jesus says, "Take heart in the cause of truth, because in the end all truth with be revealed, all reality will be uncovered. And those who spoke it with clarity and openness will be vindicated. Do not fear.

3. Third, Jesus says, Fear not, you can only be killed! Matthew 10:28 : "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." In other words, the worst thing your opponents can do to you when you speak the truth is to kill your body. And that leaves the soul untouched and happy in God for ever and ever. But if you keep silent, if you forsake the path of truth and fall in love with the praise of men you could lose your very soul. And that you ought to fear. But don't fear what man can do to you. All he can do is dispatch your soul to paradise. Fear not.

4. Fourth, don't fear to speak the truth, but be courageous and speak clearly and openly because God is giving close and intimate attention to all you do. Matthew 10:30 means at least that much. Jesus says, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered." In other words, the suffering you may undergo in speaking the truth is NOT because God is disinterested in you or unfamiliar with your plight. He is close enough to separate one hair from another and give each one a number. Fear not; he is close; he is interested; he cares. Be of good courage and speak the truth come what may.

5. Finally, fear not because your Father will not let anything happen to you apart from his gracious will. The logic of Jesus is plain and precious. Matthew 10:31 : "You are of more value than many sparrows." Matthew 10:29 : "Not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will." The courage-giving conclusion: No harm will befall you but what God mercifully wills. As the young missionary Henry Martyn said, "If [God] has work for me to do, I cannot die." So I appeal to you, don't yield to the spirit of the age. Love the truth. What you learn of Christ in the closet speak in the light. What you hear in the Scriptures proclaim from the housetops. And do not fear the face of any man. Amen. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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02.07. There Is Salvation in No One Else

There Is Salvation in No One Else January 20, 1991

Acts 4:1-12 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The Star Tribune called attention Friday to a change in Sadam Hussein's rhetoric from a secular strategist to a Muslim zealot: "With the outbreak of war, some sense an almost messianic tone -- particularly in his speech Thursday after the first wave of allied bombing raids, using images of President Bush as Satan and courageous Iraqis as `descendants of prophets and believers.'"

What this does is make more and more clear that in this global village called earth, where we can follow minute by minute developments in a war half way around the world, there are powerful and radically contradictory claims being made on our lives. Is our president Satan? Are zealous and patriotic Muslim Iraqis the true sons of the prophets and the true believers? This is another way of saying: Is Allah, as he is known in Islam, the one true God, and is Mohammed a true prophet whose writings are the final decisive revelation for faith and life? Or another way to put it: Is the Muslim religion another valid pathway to salvation and heaven?

Let's be clear, I am not saying that this war is a conflict between Christianity and Islam. I do not see America as a Christian nation. I do not see Christianity embodied in any nation or any ethnic group. One of the glories of our faith is that there is no geographic center. There is no holy shrine. There is no national identity. We are aliens and exiles on the earth out of step with every human authority and institution, even when we submit to them for Christ's sake. And we come from every race and all social strata and every nation. This is not a war of Christians against Muslims. But it is a war with powerful religious impulses. President Bush did call Billy Graham. Hussein did kneel on his prayer rug. And he does want to cast this war in terms of a holy war. But all I am saying now is that this fact makes more plain than ever that our world is radically pluralistic. There are contradictory religions calling for absolute allegiance. This pluralism is more and more manifest in

our own land as well. The old consensus that enabled us to function with some coherency of moral expectation in our legal and social system is rapidly disappearing. And what we are finding is that the new atmosphere of pluralism is not a tolerance of all views, but rather a new secular orthodoxy. There is in its claim to tolerance an emphatic discrimination against old views that threaten the morally empty relativism of today. This is the atmosphere--a hostile atmosphere--in which we will more and more have to live as Christians and bear witness to Jesus -- the absolute uniqueness of Jesus, the global uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus. That is what today's text is about. And it is extremely relevant. Globally relevant! At this moment.

Let's recap what is happening in Acts. In Acts 3:1-26 the risen Jesus heals a man through the faith and words of Peter and John. The man had been lame from birth, but he gets up and runs through the Temple praising God. A crowd gathers and Peter preaches. As he preaches you hear that what is at stake here is not a merely a local religious phenomenon. It has to do with everybody in the world. For example, Peter says things like this: the Jesus who healed this man is "the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15); he was raised from the dead by God (Acts 3:15); he is the fulfillment of 1500-year-old prophecy (Acts 3:22); he is waiting now in heaven until the time when he will come and restore all things to what God meant them to be (Acts 3:21); and in the meantime "all the families of the earth are to be blessed" through him (Acts 3:25) --including families from Iraq and Saudi Arabia and Israel and America and the USSR. This little out of the way healing that took place in Jerusalem has global significance. Jesus is no tribal god. He is the Author of all life and the Lord of the Universe. At this point Acts 4:1 says that the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came and arrested Peter and John and put them into custody overnight. They were angry because Peter and John were telling everybody that Jesus was alive and that they could rise from the dead too if they believed in Jesus. In fact Acts 4:4 says that the number of the disciples increased to 5,000 -- that's what can happen after two sermons when the power of the Holy Spirit is poured out in fullness. The next morning the rulers and elders and scribes gather and interrogate Peter and John. Acts 4:7 : "By what power or by what name did you do this (that is, heal this man)?" Now watch how Peter moves again from the local to the universal. Acts 4:10 : "Be it known to you all," Peter says, "that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well." So Peter starts with the offensive fact that Jesus is from a particular, local village that nobody expected any good to come from -- Nazareth. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Worse yet, this Jesus was less than a local nobody. He was such a menace you crucified as a criminal. He's got a common name, Jesus, (Josh for short!); he's from a no count town, Nazareth; he was executed like a common murderer. That's who healed this man. This very Jesus.

Because he is alive. And now the unheard of claim comes out: "God raised him from the dead." Now that is not so local any more. Because God is not local. God is universal. God knows everything and is everywhere and runs the world. If God took note of this man and raised him from the dead then there is something very non-local, non-provincial, something very global about who he is and what he does.

Then (in Acts 4:11) Peter uses the words of Psalms 118:22 to say the same thing in a word picture: "This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner." If you compare the kingdom of God to a building, then the builders are the religious leaders. They examined the stone called Jesus of Nazareth to see if he could be a brick in the wall

of truth. They said No and rejected him and through him out as unusable. But God, the main architect came along and saw the stone lying in the grave and picked him up and made him not only a brick in the wall, but the head of the corner -- the chief stone in the building. Men rejected Jesus as a merely local menace with no significance beyond the killing hill of Golgotha. But God has made Jesus the universal head over all his house. As Acts 2:36 says: God has made him both Lord and Christ."

Peter draws out the implication of this universal lordship of Jesus in Acts 4:12 : "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Since God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead and since God has made him head over all his house -- over all the kingdom and all the redeemed, therefore Jesus is now the only way to heaven, and the confession of his name is the only hope of salvation from sin and judgment.

We need to feel the force of this universal claim in our pluralistic age. "There is salvation in no one else!" Do you really mean no one, Peter? Or are you just speaking in a limited Jewish context -- only among the Jews there is no other way to heaven than their true Messiah? No, he says, the reason there is salvation in no one else is that there is no other name under heaven (not just no other name in Israel, but no other name under heaven, including the heaven over Iraq and the heaven over America) given among men (not just among Jews, but among humans) by which we must be saved." But there is even more here that we need to see. Sometimes people will say, "Yes, Jesus is the only source of salvation, but you don't have to know him in order to benefit from the salvation he offers. In other words, if you are a faithful Muslim or Hindu or Jew or animist, you will be saved by Jesus. There is salvation in no one else, but you don't have to believe on him in order to be saved by him." But that is not what Peter meant. Peter focussed on the NAME of Jesus. "There is no other NAME under heaven by which we must be saved." He is saying something more than that there is no other source of saving power that you can be saved by under some OTHER name. The point of saying, "There is no other NAME," is that we are saved by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. His name is our entrance into fellowship with God. The way of salvation by faith is a way that brings glory to the name of Jesus. Peter says in Acts 10:43, "Every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." The name of Jesus is the focus of faith and repentance. In order to believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, you must believe on his name. That is, you must have heard of him and know who he is as a particular man who did a particular saving work and rose from the dead.

Paul put it this way in Romans 10:13-15 : "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" There is salvation in no one else -- and that means there must be missionaries, who make him known by name so that people can believe and call on his name for salvation. Jesus is the way the truth and the life, apart from him no one comes to the Father (John 14:6).

Peter pushed the universality of Jesus from the no-count town of Nazareth as far as it could be pushed. Jesus is absolutely unique. He is absolutely supreme among all the gods and lords of the world religions. Knowing him and believing on his name is absolutely necessary for salvation. For

since the cross and resurrection there is no other way to God and to heaven. Therefore, as Paul says in Acts 17:30-31, "God commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." This is a fundamental Biblical fact that we have to come to terms with if we aim to be Biblical Christians in a pluralistic nation and a pluralistic world. It's the kind of truth that either makes converts or makes enemies. It is not a live-and-let-live truth.

What does it call for in our lives?

1. It calls for understanding -- the understanding of our faith. If there are not many ways to God, but only one way, then the highest priority in life is to understand what that way is and to follow it. If all sincere roads lead to heaven, then understanding the road you are on to make sure it is the right one is not very important. The supremacy of Christ as the only way to God calls for understanding.

2. It calls for courage. The uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus Christ is the cause of all Christian martyrdom. There is no point in dying for one faith if another will lead you to God. What gets you killed is believing that reality is one way and not another way. So when the state says: "Confess that Caesar is Lord," or: "Confess that Allah is the one true God and Mohammed is his prophet," the Christian says, "I will not and I cannot." Why? Because Caesar is not Lord and Mohammed is not a true prophet. Jesus is Lord, and Jesus alone.

3. This truth of the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus calls for a radical interpretation of war in the Middle East. Is there a war going on in Saudi Arabia and Iraq and Israel? No, there are two wars.

One is being fought with cruise missiles and scud missiles and fighters and bombers. It is not a war between Christians and Muslims. The great majority of the American and allied troops are secular relativists who believe less in Jesus Christ than the Muslims believe in Mohammed. This war is between a Muslim state and secular states. It is a war about national boundaries, the rights of nations, the security of states and the availability of natural resources. It is not a confrontation of Christianity and Islam. But there is another war going on. A far more important one. A war for the hearts of men and women. The stakes are higher because they are eternal life or eternal judgment. The war is not being fought with missiles and bombers and tanks. Nor any other material weapon. It's being fought on the Christian side with the weapons of love: prayer, faith, spiritual wisdom, sacrifice, and the glorious good news of Jesus Christ. The Christian goal is salvation for Arab peoples. The war is being fought on the Muslim side in Iraq and Saudi Arabia with oppression and anti-Christian state sanctions. In Iraq, Patrick Johnstone says (in Operation World, p. 242), "It is virtually impossible for a Muslim to confess Christ and live." No open Christian witness is allowed. Missionaries were expelled in 1969. 14,000 Christians fled the country between 1972 and 1977. There are 12 million Arabs, 2.8 million Kurds and numerous minority groups in Iraq without Christ and without hope.

Saudi Arabia is one of the least evangelized nations of the world. There are no known Christian believers among the Saudis, no Christian workers are allowed to enter the country, and no Christian is even allowed to set foot in the city of Mecca. Christian literature and Bibles are

banned. And expatriate Christians live under strict surveillance. Ten million Muslims in Saudi Arabia live without Christ and without the hope of eternal life.

Because Jesus Christ is the only hope of the world, and "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

There are two wars going on in the Middle East. The one threatens the earthly life of thousands. The other seeks the eternal life of millions. Does not God want to deal with us this morning about how utterly preoccupied we are with the one war, and how relatively ignorant and indifferent we are about the other? By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 27

02.08. Jesus Is Precious Because His Biblical Portrait Is True Part 1

Jesus Is Precious Because His Biblical Portrait Is True

Part One February 7, 1982 1 Corinthians 15:17

Suppose that you go to visit a person who does not know how to read English and is about to drink a bottle of iodine. Because of your compassion and natural love of life you feel obliged to stop him. To stop him without force, you will have to persuade him of two things. First, you must persuade him that iodine is poison and may kill him. You will amass your evidence: "Look, this mark on the label means, Don't drink it. It is made to put on the skin. Look here are the instructions. Take my word for it. My experience is reliable. I have no reason to lie to you." You build your case and he is persuaded. You have convinced him. His doubts are gone. He is converted to your opinion. But he puts the bottle to his lips and begins to drink. "Wait," you say, "Do you want to kill yourself?" And he says, "Yes." And you immediately realize that if you want to save his life, there is a second thing he must be persuaded of--the value of living. You can convince him with irrefutable arguments that he is dead if he drinks and alive if he doesn't. But none of those arguments will save him if he doesn't care. If his depression is great, and his heart is heavy and his mind is stifled with frustration, proof that iodine is poison is powerless to save.

Something else has to happen. His desire to live has to be born again. Somehow his dead hope needs to come alive again. Something has to happen deep in his heart so that all of a sudden he senses a quiver of life. A pinhole of hope in the curtain of dread may be all it takes. And if in that instant the love of life is born anew, then your arguments about the way to life will be very precious. And he will put the bottle down.

That's the way we are as humans. We have heads, and therefore must be given facts and evidences and arguments in order to make reasonable commitments. And we have hearts with longings and yearnings and hopes and fears and desires. Therefore, if someone urges me to commit myself to a certain goal, he must persuade my head that the goal is really there as he says it is; and he must move my heart to feel the value of attaining it.

We Christians believe that God has called us to persuade men and women and children to follow Christ in the obedience of faith. The very nature of man requires, therefore, that two things be happening in the church all the time. Evidences and. reasons and arguments must be forthcoming that the Jesus we are summoning people to follow is in fact real. We must maintain a reasonable case that his Biblical portrait is true. But in addition, we must also demonstrate that he is worth following. We must show from Scripture and experience that this Jesus is not only true, but that he quenches the deepest soul thirst of all humans--that he is ultimately what all people long for.

I want to stress that if either of these efforts is neglected in the church, truth is jeopardized and people are dehumanized. If the church has no compelling reasons for believing the Biblical portrait of Jesus, then we are acting like well-trained animals who can be turned this way and that by arbitrary incentives. And in the end, faith that is not rooted in sufficient evidences will go down in

the waves of doubt and skepticism.

Christianity has been criticized in modern times as a mythological means of wish-fulfillment, the opiate of the masses. That is, people follow Christ not because they have sufficient reason to believe he is true, but because some of the things he offers seem to fulfill their wishes. That may be a legitimate assessment of some believers, but let's play fair at this game. Is it not true that just as many unbelievers have adopted their pattern of life not because of a careful and critical sifting of the evidences for the ultimate truth and value of their philosophy, but rather because it seems to meet their needs and fulfill their wishes. The dagger cuts both ways. My point is that we go against the way we are made if we neglect the question of truth and the use of our reason in apprehending it.

Therefore, my plan for the months of February and March is twofold: to begin with a brief, but I hope compelling, case for the truth of the Biblical portrait of Jesus. And then, in five messages, to show that this portrait is more to be desired than any other reality in the world. My aim for believers is to strengthen the fiber of your faith in truth and quicken your love for Christ. And my aim for unbelievers is to persuade you, head and heart, without any manipulation, that the Biblical portrait of Jesus is true and infinitely precious. In the limited time we have this morning, I will focus on only one feature of the Biblical portrait of Jesus: the claim that he was raised from the dead. I focus on the resurrection of Jesus for four reasons. 1) It is the foundation of Christian teaching; if it disintegrates, everything collapses. The apostle Paul said, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). 2) It is the object we must have confidence in if we are to be saved. Paul wrote in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." 3) The possibility of resurrection from the dead was not any more believed in those days than it is today. Paul had to deal with the problem of skepticism at Athens, where he was laughed at because of preaching the resurrection (Acts 17:18), and at Corinth, where people were denying that there was any such thing as resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12), and in Jerusalem where the only resurrection imaginable (to the Pharisees only, Acts 23:8) was the resurrection of everyone at the end of the world on the day of judgment (Acts 24:15). First century people were not any more prone to believe the report of a resurrection than we are.

4) Fourth and main reason I focus on the resurrection of Jesus is that it was the heart of the earliest Christian preaching in Jerusalem and it was this preaching of the resurrection which gave rise to the church. The preaching of the resurrection, the willingness of the apostles to suffer for it and the rise of the church are historical facts denied by no serious historian regardless of his faith. But these events must have a sufficient cause. And the one that commends itself as most probable is that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, that he left behind an empty tomb and that he appeared to his disciples. I'll try to show why I think this is so. Our main source of information about those early days of the church soon after Jesus' death is the book of Acts in the New Testament. Together, with the gospel of Luke, it forms a two volume work written by Luke, the Physician, for a certain official named Theophilus. Luke says in Luke 1:4 that his aim is to persuade Theophilus of the truth of the things he has heard regarding Jesus. The books (Luke and Acts) were written probably no later than A.D. 64 (since Acts doesn't mention Paul's death). Therefore, what we have in Acts is a book intended to persuade a Roman official of the truth of things which happened in the last 30 years or so. Even if one rejects the divine inspiration of

Scripture, it would be highly unwarranted to assume that Luke's description of public and verifiable events would be grossly inaccurate. If we are skeptical, we might be suspicious of Luke's interpretation of these events or of his reports of private meetings and conversations. But even the skeptic should not doubt Luke's broad and general description of the rise of the church in Jerusalem. If it were a gross distortion, Theophilus could discover that very easily and then Luke's whole purpose is down the tubes.

Therefore, we may take it to be historically assured that, whether or not the earliest disciples of Jesus were mistaken, they did preach that Jesus was raised from the dead and it was this preaching in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy which gave rise to the Christian Church. To illustrate: seven weeks after Jesus' death the apostle Peter preached a sermon in Jerusalem in which he said, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up having loosed the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it… This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:23-24; Acts 2:32). Some time later, Peter addressed the people of Jerusalem in the temple and said, "You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). Then in Acts 4:1-37, Luke reports that the Sadducees and captain of the temple arrested the apostles precisely for "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 4:2). When they were brought to trial before Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander (Acts 4:6) Peter said that they were only acting in the name of Jesus "whom you crucified but God raised from the dead" (Acts 4:10). Note well how Luke mentions key religious and political figures. Such things can easily be checked out by Theophilus, his reader. The rulers threatened the apostles and released them. And Acts 4:33 says they continued to "give their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." So they were arrested a second time and put in prison (Acts 5:17-18). That night they escaped and were found the next day again teaching in the temple for all to hear. They were arrested again, but defended themselves saying, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things" (Acts 5:29-32). This enraged the council and they wanted to kill the apostles, but Gamaliel argued for a lighter judgment. So they flogged them and put them out. And Luke says, "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42).

Virtually all students of antiquity agree that this is not fabrication. The church in Jerusalem grew up because the followers of Jesus, soon after his death, became convinced he had been raised from the dead, they preached it in public and before religious and political authorities and they were willing to endure suffering and the risk of death to give their testimony. Those are historical facts. The greatest question of history is: What caused these things? The answer of the apostles was, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32). One of the two most important decisions any of you will ever face is this one: Is the claim by Peter and James and John and Andrew and Philip and Matthew and Thomas and the others true or false? (The other decision is: if it's true will I follow him?).

How can we go about verifying this claim? There are three ways we generally follow in trying to decide if someone is telling the truth. One is an assessment of their character. Do they have integrity? Are they sober-minded? If someone has won our trust we will accept from them as true claims we might reject from other unstable people. Second, we take stock of extenuating circumstances to see if there may be some unusual cause for the person to be mistaken or fraudulent. For example, have they been on some mood-altering drug or is someone holding their child hostage, etc.? Third, we consider the implications of their claim. We listen to the totality of their case and then test it to see whether it coheres with our experience of the world and is logically consistent. Does their claim start to make sense out of life and death and eternity or does it cause our experience of the world simply to disintegrate further. Does it offer plausible answers to life's deepest and most pressing questions? In one or more of these three ways we should seek to decide whether someone is telling the truth. We should not flip a coin. There should be reasons for why we credit a person's claim to truth. In the weeks to come, I hope to speak of things that will show the Biblical authors and Jesus himself to have integrity and I hope to portray their claims in such a way that they begin to make sense out of your experience and commend themselves as a total philosophy of life which meets the deepest longings of the human heart. But in conclusion this morning, I want to argue briefly (by the second way of verification) that there are no extenuating circumstances in the lives of the apostles which would account for their being deceived about Jesus' resurrection or their pushing it as a fraud.

First of all, we may rest assured that the gospel reports of the empty tomb are true (Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:3; Matthew 28:1-8). The reason for this assurance is that the preaching of the resurrection could not have lasted in Jerusalem for a single hour if the authorities could have pointed to the body of Jesus. The empty tomb was indisputable and the only recourse of the authorities was to spread the rumor that the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:11-15). But the suggestion that the disciples were intentionally pushing a fraud onto the world runs into an insurmountable difficulty. It would mean that the disciples were risking their lives for what they knew to be a fraud. And that is contrary to human experience as a resurrection from the dead. So some critics have suggested the disciples all experienced hallucinations. They were so eager for Jesus to live that their imaginations got the best of them and they saw him alive and really believed he was. But what is the evidence for this suggestion? The disciples were not unstable visionary sorts from what we know of them. On the contrary, the gospels testify that after the death of Jesus the disciples had given up hope (Luke 24:21) and that they were very skeptical and slow to believe when Jesus appeared to them (Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:11; John 20:24-29). There is no evidence to support the notion that the disciples were of such a mind set as to hallucinate that Jesus was raised from the dead. This is especially true when you consider that their specific understanding of Jesus' resurrection as a bodily one, involving an exaltation to God's right hand and signifying the beginning of the general resurrection (Acts 4:2; 1 Corinthians 15:23), was unheard of in traditional Jewish thinking. It is a new proclamation and therefore probably stems from a new experience, namely the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his authoritative interpretation of that event. No matter how hard one searches for a non-supernatural explanation of the preaching of Jesus' resurrection in Jerusalem, one always encounters historical improbabilities. Therefore, the explanation of the apostles commends itself to the open mind, "This Jesus God raised up. Of that we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32). All things considered, the resurrection of Jesus is more probable than delusion or intentional fabrication by the apostles. Therefore, we have good historical reason

to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. And when this is combined with the apostles' interpretation of what that resurrection means for us and for the world, and we see the mysteries of life falling into place, and our sins forgiven and our lives renewed and empowered for authentic love, then we have an unshakable foundation and can say with confidence to the whole world: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved." By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 28

02.09. Jesus Is Precious Because His Biblical Portrait Is True Part 2

Jesus Is Precious Because His Biblical Portrait Is True

Part Two February 14, 1982

John 7:1-18

After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of Tabernacles was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For even his brothers did not believe in him. Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." So saying, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly, but in private. The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "where is he?" And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him. About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying, "How is it that this man has learning when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. My aim in the messages of February and March is to give reasons why Jesus Christ is precious, in the hopes that believers will move from a lukewarm to a white-hot love for Jesus and that unbelievers will be persuaded that Jesus is true and valuable and put their trust in him. In the weeks to come I will try to show that Jesus is precious because through his death and resurrection he takes away the guilt of all who trust in him; he takes the sting out of death and offers eternal life and resurrection and everlasting glory and joy to all who believe; he transforms fearful, greedy hearts into peaceful, loving hearts and replaces phoniness with authenticity; he puts all relationships, especially husband-wife and parent-child relations, on a new, solid footing; and he satisfies our deepest longing for beauty and wonder. If these things are true, then Jesus is precious above all persons or things and he should be trusted by all and loved with all the heart, soul, mind and strength. But the only way we have of knowing these things about Jesus is by reading the Bible, especially the New Testament. Therefore if we are to have sound confidence that this portrait of Jesus is true, we must have sufficient reasons for trusting the Bible. Last week I tried to show that there is strong historical evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, even if one does not accept the Bible as the Word of God. Today I want to enlarge our confidence to embrace not only the resurrection of Jesus, but also the trustworthiness of the Bible as a whole. Jesus is precious because his Biblical portrait is true -- not only that salient feature of the portrait, the resurrection, but also the rest of the portrait seen in the Biblical writings. The reason I began this

series of messages last week with a historical argument for the resurrection of Jesus rather than an argument for the Bible's truth is that I don't think people usually believe in Jesus because they have been first persuaded that the Bible is true. Rather, I think people gain confidence in the truth of the Bible because Jesus has come alive for them. A person is not saved by accepting the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. He is saved by trusting Jesus. Then begins to grow the conviction that the Bible which presents their Jesus is true. The foundation of our confidence in the truth of the Bible is the self-authenticating person of Jesus Christ. The outstanding features of his portrait are visible quite apart from a prior commitment to the Bible as God's Word. And therefore this portrait has a moral power to persuade even skeptics of its truth and lead finally to a full confidence in the whole Bible. This morning I want to try to illustrate how Jesus Christ authenticates himself to us in the Scripture and then how this leads us to a full confidence in the truth of the Bible.

Some words of Jesus from the Gospel of John, John 7:1-53, provide the basis of my effort. In John 7:1-4 Jesus' brothers try to get Jesus to go up to Jerusalem so that the miraculous works that he had been doing (e.g. John 2:1-11; John 4:46-54; John 6:4-14, John 6:19, John 6:21) would be more visible: "No man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." His brothers are very excited that Jesus can do such wonders as heal the sick and turn water into wine and feed 5,000 people; so they want him to get on with the business of showing himself to the world. In one sense Jesus' brothers have a lot of confidence in Jesus: they really believe he can do miracles. They have seen him. John 7:5, then, is a shock: John says that the reason they urged Jesus on in his miraculous demonstration of power was "because even his brothers did not believe in him." You can believe Jesus is a great miracle worker and yet still lack the faith Jesus wanted. His miracle working power is an insufficient basis for saving faith. The same kind of "believing-unbelief" is seen several other places in John's gospel (cf. John 8:31-46). For example, in John 2:23-25 it says, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself to them because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man." In spite of this so-called believing, Jesus would not entrust himself to them because he could see inside. He could see that this outward enthusiasm in his miracle working power left the inside of these people untouched. Why, everybody loves a friendly miracle worker! He could heal our diseases; raise our dead; he could even be our Messiah-King and conquer the Romans for us (cf. John 6:15; John 11:48). But evidently something essential to faith was missing in this "belief" because Jesus would have nothing to do with it. The same thing happens in John 6:15. Jesus perceives that a crowd was about to come and take him by force and make him king. So he withdraws again to the hills by himself. It was not enough to believe Jesus was the Messiah with great power. Genuine saving faith is more than that.

Therefore here in John 7:5 John says Jesus' brothers are unbelieving when they urge him on to glorious displays of Messiah-power. And just as Jesus refused to entrust himself to those who believed when they saw signs in John 2:24, and just as he withdrew from those who wanted to make him king in John 6:15, so also here in John 7:6-8 he refuses to go with his brothers to Jerusalem. But then in John 7:10 Jesus does go up to Jerusalem. But the way he goes up is a symbolic statement about what was wrong with his brothers' request. They said in John 7:4 : "No man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly." But John 7:10 (using the very same words)

says that Jesus went up "not openly but in secret." This is Jesus' way of saying, "Beware, brothers, of your love for glory and power and acclaim. That is not my way. The Kingdom of God now is small and obscure, like a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31); it is quiet and unostentatious, like leaven working in a lump of dough (Matthew 13:33). The only people who will ever see it are those whose hearts are humbled by its power and weaned away from the love of worldly praise. "No, brothers, if all you see is miracles and all you want is to have your worldly longings for attention and praise gratified by the crowds in Jerusalem, then you do not yet believe in me, for that is not my way."

What is Jesus teaching us here about the basis of genuine faith? He is saying that it is not enough to be convinced of his power. Something deeper is needed. But this does not mean that his miraculous works were unimportant. He says in John 14:11, "Believe me because I am in the Father and the Father in me, or if not, believe on account of the works." And in John 10:25 he said, "The works which I do in my Father's name, these bear witness concerning me." Evidently we ought to be able to look at Jesus' works and find an adequate basis of genuine faith. Why was it, then, that the brothers of Jesus looked at the works of Jesus and believed them, but did not yet have genuine saving faith?

I think it is because Jesus' brothers (like most of us) focused only on the outward show of power and had no eyes to see that there was a special character about the miracles of this man. The sign that pointed to Jesus' truth was not the raw miracle, the mere demonstration of power, but the way of his working, the motive and heart with which they were done. His miracle had a soul that gave the outward form of power its life and true meaning. Hundreds and hundreds saw the outward form of the miracles and believed them. But very few perceived the soul of Jesus' miracles (cf. Mark 8:14-21!) which is the real basis for genuine saving faith.

I think Jesus tells us plainly what the soul of his miracles is in John 7:16-18. His brothers wanted him to go up to Jerusalem and do his miracles for all to see. Instead Jesus goes up secretly and then instead of doing miracles, teaches. And his teaching reveals the soul of his miracles, namely his unswerving love for the glory of God that seeks no worldly acclaim. My teaching is not mine but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true and in him there is no falsehood (John 7:16-18).

If you ever meet a man who cares nothing for the praise and approval of men (Mark 12:14), but whose one controlling desire is to glorify God whom he loves with all his heart, believe that man. He is true. This is what his brothers should have seen in his miraculous works: not the mere display of power, but the all-consuming love to God which emptied Jesus of the typical human craving for praise and acclaim and approval. He does not speak on his own authority, nor does he seek his own glory (John 7:18), nor does he do his miracles in his own name: "The works which I do in my Father's name, these bear witness concerning me" (John 10:25). The basis of faith in Jesus is not just the raw show of miraculous power, it is the soul of the power, the heart and motive from which it comes. Only the people who saw within the miracles what the man was really like, what made him tick, could truly believe on him. It was the shining out of this inner life that marks Jesus as true: "he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true." This is the soul of all he

did and this is the true basis of saving faith: Love seeks not its own glory (1 Corinthians 13:5); it is consumed with God's glory. So Jesus lived not for the praise of men, but for their salvation. He had one all-consuming motive -- to glorify God through the salvation of men. That is the kind of man you can trust. His character is self-authenticating. It is the basis of a reasonable and saving faith. But notice also that this very ground of faith is a hindrance to believe for many. Because in order to trust and follow this Jesus you have to become like him. You have to love the glory of God more than the praise of men. You have to become, like him, a lowly servant of the needs of others for God's sake. But people do not generally like to give up the quest for glory in the eyes of this world. We would often prefer to follow someone, who allowed us to gratify our cravings for this world's power and prestige and applause. And it is precisely our love for worldly glory that keeps us from acknowledging the beauty of Christ. Listen to how Jesus puts this in John 5:41-44 :

I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Or, turning that last question into a statement, "You can't believe in me while you love the glory of men so much." In other words, the character of Jesus which distinguishes him from all us sinful humans and authenticates his truth and provides a basis for saving faith, is also the chief hindrance to faith. Jesus' life is devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of men and he is indifferent to worldly approval and applause. That is a beautiful, evidential, distinguishing mark of truthfulness. But the only person who will acknowledge it as beautiful and accept it as evidence of Jesus' truthfulness is the person whose heart is open to following the same way of life. This is what Jesus meant in John 7:17, when he said, "If any man's will is to do God's will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." If a person's heart is closed to the glory of God and instead is devoted to securing the praises and comforts of the world, that person will see nothing but threat and folly in the true character of Jesus. But if that person humbles himself and desires what God desires, no matter what, then the character of Jesus will be seen for what it really is, the incomparably beautiful, evidential, distinguishing mark of truth. And on that basis we trust him. What he says, we believe; what he commands, we obey. That is the way Jesus Christ has authenticated himself to me and to thousands and thousands through the centuries. But I am aware of a very obvious objection to this, namely: How do we know this self-authenticating picture of Jesus in the Gospel of John is not a creation of the writer, rather than a true reflection of the Jesus who really was? My answer is this: no matter how different the perspective of each New Testament writer, it is clear that they are all portraying the same person and that in each portrayal Jesus has fundamentally the same unique character and mission. That leaves us with three options: 1) Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude and the writer of Hebrews all invented this same unique character and mission independently out of their own heads; or 2) They were all dependent on some creative genius other than Jesus; or 3) Jesus did have such a character and mission and left his stamp on all the New Testament writers. Of those three possibilities my own sense of historical probability says that the third is far more likely than the other two. Nine writers do not create independently out of their heads the same figure who is so unique and powerful that he changes the whole world. And it is grasping at straw to say: There was a single creative genius who conceived this world-changing, self-authenticating portrait

of Jesus but we don't know who it was. Far more credible is the position that there was indeed a genius behind all these portraits and more than a genius, namely, Jesus Christ himself. And this becomes even more probable when you consider that no matter how far historians press back behind the written New Testament, they never find a Jesus who was any other than the self-authenticating Jesus whose life was wholly devoted to God's glory and man's salvation and who was indifferent to the applause of men. When we put this self-authenticating portrait of Jesus together with the truth of his resurrection from the dead (which I argued for last week), does there not emerge an amazingly powerful and reasonable basis for confidence in Jesus? Does he not win our hearts and our minds? Is he not worthy of our trust? I pray that God will free us all to see that he is. And if he is, then the way we view everything in the world, including the Bible, will be determined by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who is true and in whom is no unrighteousness, stands at the center of God's special revelation in the Bible. He looks back on a completed Old Testament, and he looks forward to a New Testament which would be completed in Matthew-50 years. He does not leave us without a witness regarding each. For Jesus, the Old Testament was the Word of God. Even the most radical critics of the Bible acknowledge this (cf. R. Bultmann, Jesus, p. 46). In Mark 7:13 he accused the Pharisees of using their traditions to make void the Word of God (i.e. the Old Testament law). In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus said:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, 'til heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until it is all accomplished. In Matthew 22:29 Jesus says to the Sadducees, "You err because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." In John 10:35 he said, "Scripture cannot be broken." Jesus Christ, who has won our trust by his authenticity and resurrection from the dead, believed and taught that the Old Testament scriptures were the Word of God and therefore could not be broken, but would all be accomplished. If we understand them and follow them, we will not err. The New Testament, of course, was not written until after Jesus' earthly life was ended. But even here he did not leave us without a witness. He promised that (just as God had spoken in many and various ways through the men of old in the Old Testament, Hebrews 1:1-2) so the Holy Spirit would guide Jesus' apostles into the truth as they provided the foundational teachings of the church (Ephesians 2:20). He said in John 14:25-26 : "These things I have spoken to you while I am yet with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Then in John 16:12-14 he said:

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Jesus comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. The point of these two promises is that Jesus would not leave his apostles without guidance and help in the fulfillment of their teaching office in the early church. He had taught them many things while on earth, but so much could only be understood fully after his resurrection. So it is just what we would expect when Jesus promises to be their teacher through the Holy Spirit.

John understands his own gospel to be a product of that inspiration (John 2:19-22; John 12:15-16; John 13:7). And the apostle Paul, who wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books, stated more clearly than anyone that the Holy Spirit spoke through his teaching. He said in 1

Corinthians 2:12-13 :

We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

Paul had once been a Pharisee and a wholehearted persecutor of the church, and the most probable way of explaining his grand reversal (Galatians 1:13-17) to become a life-long servant of Christ and a martyr for the gospel, is that, just as he said, the risen Christ has appeared to him and commissioned him to be an authoritative witness (Acts 22:14; Acts 26:16-18; Galatians 1:12-17).

I conclude, therefore, that if Jesus has been raised from the dead, and if his character is self-authenticating and wins our trust and our allegiance, then we will also gain an increasing confidence in the Old Testament, which he endorsed, and in the writings of his apostles, whom he promised to guide into all truth. When I preach the preciousness of Christ from these writings, I do not ask for a leap of faith, or a shot in the dark, or the flip of a coin, or any irrational or unreasonable commitment. There is a reasonable basis of faith in Christ which you can see if you are not blinded by the love of this world. Faith is not a leap. It is a resting in the evidences. It is being persuaded, head and heart, that Jesus is true and there is no unrighteousness in him. It is a cordial trust in the Son of God whose life and death and resurrection were devoted to the glory of God and to our salvation. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 29

02.10. Jesus Is Precious Because We Yearn for Beauty

Jesus Is Precious Because We Yearn for Beauty

March 28, 1982 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

I am going to assume this morning that there is a God who is personal and who created all things. There are not many atheists who come to church and so the only evidence for this assumption that I lay before you is this: if there is no personal God then the concept of beauty dissolves into personal idiosyncrasy. That is, unless beauty is rooted in God's mind rather than your mind, every time you say, "That is beautiful," all you really mean is, "I like that." Unless there is a God, your praise of beauty can be no more than expressions of your own personal preferences. But I think there is in every one of you a dissatisfaction with the notion that your judgments about beauty have no more validity than your preference for coffee over tea. And I think your dissatisfaction with pure subjectivism and relativism is a remnant of God's image in your soul and evidence of his reality. It is an echo, however faint, of a voice that once called you into being.

Suppose that you were standing by the Grand Canyon at sunset with two other people. You become deeply moved and utter the words, "This is beautiful; this is glorious." The person beside you says, "Beautiful? It's just a big ugly ditch." And the third person says, "I guess I hear what both of you are saying. And I think those are equally valid statements." And it is true that unless there is a higher aesthetic court of appeal than man, those two judgments are equally valid. But even people who say they believe in such humanistic relativism don't like it when their own judgments about truth and beauty are treated as mere personal idiosyncrasies. The reason for this, I think, is that there is in every person a God-given sense that beauty must have meaning that is larger and more permanent than personal quirks. This urge for ultimate meaning is evidence of our creation in the image of God.

Therefore I will assume that there is a personal Creator as we try to understand beauty and our hunger for it this morning. If there is a personal God who has created all things and has given everything its form and its purpose, then beauty must be defined in relation to God. Try to picture the impossible: what it was like before the creation of anything. Once there was only God and nothing else. He never had a beginning and therefore what he is was not shaped or determined by anything outside himself. He simply has always been what he is (Exodus 3:14; Hebrews 13:8).

Therefore if the beauty we behold on earth has its root and origin in God, there must have been beauty in God from all eternity. What then is the beauty of God? In one sense this is a hard question and in another sense it is very easy. It is hard because there is no pattern of beauty of which we can say, God is like that and so God is beautiful. If there were a pattern by which we could measure God it would be God. No, God himself is the absolutely original pattern of all other beauty. Therefore, the answer is simple: Beauty is what God is. His wisdom is beautiful wisdom, his power is beautiful power, his justice is beautiful justice and his love is beautiful love. But what makes each of these attributes beautiful is not merely that they are infinite, unchanging and

eternal. Power, for example, could be infinitely and eternally evil and thus ugly. The attributes of God derive their infinite beauty from their relationship to each other. Just as in paintings it is not the isolated color or shape or texture that is beautiful but rather their relationship with each other, their proportion and interplay; so it is with persons and ultimately with the person of God. It is the peculiar proportionality and interplay and harmony of all God's attributes (together with their infiniteness and eternality) that constitutes God's beauty, and makes him the foundation of all the beauty in the world.

Now how does this infinite divine beauty relate to our longing for beauty? I do believe that deeply rooted in every human heart is a longing for beauty. Why do we go to the Grand Canyon, the Boundary Waters, art exhibits, gardens? Why do we plant trees and flower beds? Why do we paint our inside walls? Why is it man and not the monkeys who decorated cave walls with pictures? Why is it that in every tribe of humans ever known there has always been some form of art and craftsmanship that goes beyond mere utility? Is it not because we long to behold and be a part of beauty? We crave to be moved by some rare glimpse of greatness. We yearn for a vision of glory. The poetry that endures from generation to generation generally does so because it gives expression to our deepest desires. And more than anything else in poetry, "'Tis beauty calls and glory shows the way" (Nathaniel Lee). Emerson speaks for every great poet when he writes ("Beauty"), He thought it happier to be dead,

To die for Beauty, than live for bread.

Emily Dickinson, too, is fond of connecting death and beauty (No. 1654):

Beauty crowds me 'til I die

Beauty mercy have on me

But if I expire today

Let it be in sight of thee. And William Butler Yeats expresses his longing for a Land of Hearts' Desire

Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,

But joy is wisdom, time and endless song.

There is in the human heart an unquenchable longing for beauty. And I am persuaded that the reason it is there is because God is the ultimately Beautiful One and he made us to long for himself. Even the most perverted desire for beauty -- say the desire to watch the excellence of strength and speed and skill as gladiators hack each other to death -- even this desire is a distorted remnant of a good yearning which God put within us to lure us to himself. And we can know that our desires are remnants of this urge for God, because everything less than God leaves us unsatisfied. He alone is the All-Satisfying Object of Beauty. Only one vision will be sufficient for our insatiable hearts -- the Glory of God. For that we have been made. And it is for this we long, whether we know it or not. But how shall we attain it? Who is worthy to behold the All-Holy Maker of the universe? Or as the psalmist asks, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?"(Psalms 24:3). We have all sinned and fallen short of his glory (Romans 3:23). We have not prized his Beauty with anything like the fervor it deserves. And that is evil. But

God is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wrong (Habakkuk 1:13). Therefore the wages of sin is eternal death (Romans 6:23). And unless someone intervenes we will perish under God's righteous judgment and be cut off forever from every vestige of beauty. The apostle Paul put it like this in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, "They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the face of the Lord and from the glory (or the beauty) of his might." The punishment of those who have not seen and loved the Beauty of God's holiness in this age will be utter exclusion from his All-Satisfying Beauty in the age to come.

What then can we do? For not only have we sinned but in our sin have become so blind and hard that the reflections of God's beauty in the world and in the Bible scarcely move us. It is as though a dark veil lies over our minds. The Word of God in 2 Corinthians 3:1-18; 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 describes for us our plight and how the pathway to eternal joy and beauty can be opened before us. Follow the thread of Paul's thought with me. Paul says in verse 6 of chapter 3 that he is a minister of a new covenant. The old covenant was a covenant of the law given through Moses on Mount Sinai. This law was holy, just and good and pointed the true way of salvation. But as a written code apart from gracious enabling work of the Holy Spirit its effect was to make people aware of sin and pronounce condemnation and death. But a new era has come since the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is the era of the Spirit which is now being poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17) as the gospel of Christ spreads through all the nations. Paul is a servant of this new covenant and his mission is to announce the good news that people who trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be forgiven all their transgressions of the law and given the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfill the just requirement of the law (Romans 8:1-4). In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 Paul contrasts the beauty of God that was manifested in the old covenant and the beauty manifested in the new covenant. 2 Corinthians 3:7 : "If the dispensation of death carved in letters on stone came with such splendor (glory or beauty) that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as it was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with a greater splendor?" The old covenant brought death because the letter kills as 2 Corinthians 3:6 says and only the Spirit gives life. And thus death here in 2 Corinthians 3:7-8 is contrasted with Spirit rather than life because the Spirit gives life. And Paul infers that if the glorious Beauty of God was awesomely evident to those in the old covenant, how much more will it be evident to those who have the Spirit and not just the letter. This same argument from lesser glory to greater glory is repeated twice, once in 2 Corinthians 3:9 (the glory of the dispensation of righteousness will surely be greater than the glory of the dispensation of condemnation), and in 2 Corinthians 3:11 (the glory of what is permanent will surely be greater than the glory of what is fading away). Therefore Paul is sure that those who become part of the new covenant relationship to God by trusting Christ and receiving the Spirit will behold a divine manifestation of beauty that vastly surpasses the glory of the old covenant. But in 2 Corinthians 3:12 ff we meet the barrier to this experience. Paul, for his part, is very bold and forthright in his preaching (2 Corinthians 3:12 says); he is not like Moses who veiled his shining face lest the Israelites see the fading glory. Paul sees in this veil covering Moses' face a symbol of the fact that the people of the old covenant by and large could not perceive that the glory of that covenant was temporary, passing away, preparatory for a new and more glorious covenant. As Moses concealed the fading glory of his face, so even to this day Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:14, the true significance of the old covenant is veiled. Its true significance was to point beyond itself to a day when Messiah would atone for sin and the law would be written on the heart by the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31 ff; Ezekiel 11:19;

Ezekiel 36:26-27). But whenever the old covenant is read there seems to be a veil over the reading, or, as 2 Corinthians 3:15 says, a veil over the mind or heart of the listener. This is not only the problem of Israel; it is our problem too. How can the veil be lifted from our minds so that we can see not only the fading glory of the old covenant but also the surpassing Beauty of God in the new covenant? Exodus 34:34 tells how Moses would remove the veil from his face when he turned to enter the tent and meet the Lord. Paul saw in this a lesson and he applied it to us in 2 Corinthians 3:16 : "When a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed." Our blindness and hardness to the Beauty of God will be overcome if we turn to the Lord. Then in 2 Corinthians 3:17 he interprets what he means: "The Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom." Since at the end of 2 Corinthians 3:14 Paul had said that only through Christ is the veil done away with, I take it that the Lord to which we turn in 2 Corinthians 3:16 is the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the meaning of 2 Corinthians 3:17 would be: the Lord Jesus is the Spirit and so to turn to the Lord means to turn to the Spirit, to open yourself to the Spirit, to seek the Spirit and his fullness. For where the Spirit is there is freedom. If we want freedom from our blindness to the Beauty of God we must have the Spirit. We are slaves to the worldly substitutes for divine Beauty until the Spirit takes the veil from our minds and grants us to see with joy the Beauty of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:18 describes the result if we are freed by the Spirit: "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." When a person turns to Jesus Christ as Lord and opens himself up to the liberating rule of the Spirit of the Lord, two of his deepest longings begin to be fulfilled. It is granted that the eyes of his heart (Ephesians 1:18) really see a captivating and satisfying divine Beauty. And he begins to be changed by it. We always tend to become like the persons we admire. And when the Spirit grants us to see and admire the Lord of Glory, we inevitably begin to be transformed into his image. And the more we become like him the more clearly we can see him and the greater our capacity to delight in his beauty. But what is it, more precisely, that we see? And with what organ of sight? 2 Corinthians 4:4 helps us with the answer. At the end it says that what we see when we are not blinded by Satan but freed by the Spirit is "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God." When we turn to the Lord and the Holy Spirit removes the veil from our heart we see light, without which there can be no beauty, but only darkness and emptiness. It is not the light which we see with our physical eyes. But that’s no disadvantage. For we all know that the beauty we crave for our physical eyes is only satisfying if we see it as the outward form of a deeper moral, spiritual and personal beauty, ultimately God’s Beauty. So the light that we are granted by the Spirit to see is the light of the gospel. And the gospel is a story about God and his Son and their conspiracy of love to overthrow the dominion of Satan and save the world. And out of this story shines above all else the glory of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. And that glory, that beauty, is an all-satisfying beauty because it is the Beauty of God. It is "the glory of Christ who is the image of God." When we see Jesus in the gospel story we see God and the very essence of his beauty.

We see the beauty of his power, for what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3). We see the beauty of his mercy, for God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them (2 Corinthians 5:19). We see the beauty of his justice, for God put Christ forward as a propitiation for our sins by his blood that he might

demonstrate his righteousness and prove that he is himself both just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26). And we see the beauty of his wisdom, for in the gospel we do impart a wisdom not of this age but of God, which he decreed before the age for our glory, our beauty (1 Corinthians 2:7).

Whether you know it or not, all the longings of your life for beauty are longings for this: the light of the gospel of the beauty of Christ who is the image of God. Turn to Jesus as Lord! Open yourself to the Spirit of Christ. And the veil will be lifted.

O most glorious God,

You are worthy of all trust and obedience and adoration.

Yet I have sinned and see you so dimly.

But I now turn to the Living Lord Jesus Christ,

And I invite your Spirit to fill my life.

Remove the veil from my heart

And grant me to behold your glory,

And help me be changed from one degree of glory to another. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 30

02.11. Jesus Came Into the World to Be Trusted

Jesus Came Into the World to Be Trusted December 25, 1988

John 18:37

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

Every year Christmas poses a question to the world == and to you this morning == namely, why did Jesus come? Or what is the meaning of Jesus Christ? Or, more personally, what difference should this man make in my life? In my marriage, in my work, in my leisure, in my thinking, in my emotions? When he was on trial for his life Jesus spoke some words which give an answer to this question. He said in John 18:37, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." The words were spoken at the end of his life, but they are about Christmas. "For this reason I was born . . ." For this reason there is Christmas. Christmas exists because Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. So what I would like to do on this Chistmas morning to think for a few minutes with you about these words of Jesus. I suggest that we focus on two implications of this verse, or two implications of Christmas, and then close with an exhortation.

Implication #1. Christmas means that there is truth == truth that everyone should believe.

Implication #2. Christmans means that Jesus came to testify to that truth == he is the key witness.

Exhortation. Don’t be like Pilate when you hear the truth.

Implication #1. There is truth == truth that everyone should believe.

"For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth." THE TRUTH! There is truth == truth that comes from outside the world and gives meaning to the world. The world doesn’t make this truth. It doesn’t shape or change this truth. It is THE TRUTH, not at truth for me and a different truth for you. But THE TRUTH for all of us. Unchanging, absolute.

There may have been a generation or a century when this simple implication of the text would not need to be stressed: that there is truth == truth outside of my own mind, truth that I don’t create but discover, that I don’t controly but submit to. There may have been a time when we didn’t have to proclaim this as part of the Christian message. But not today.

Today this simple affirmation is a stunning and controversial revelation. It meets with widespread disbelief. If you try to claim today that there is absolute truth == truth that everyone should believe and follow == you will very likely be considered misguided and immoral.

People will say you are misguided because there’s no God to give absoluteness to truth, or, if there is a God, there is no way of knowing him and what he thinks. One person’s idea of what he is

like is as good as any other person's. But not only would you be considered misguided, you would also be considered by many to be immoral if you insist on absolue truth. Why? Because to claim that there is absolute truth leads to intolerance and prejudice against what others think.

Morality today has been virtually defined in terms of relativism. If you don't believe that the truth you see is binding on me then you are humble and good and moral. But if you do believe that the truth you see is binding on me then you are arrogant and intolerant and immoral. Virtue or morality today demands relativism. This is the 20th century world to which Jesus says, "For this purpose I was born and came into the world, to bear witness to THE TRUTH."

It's a world in which his message has been nullified even before it is spoken, because TRUTH is seen as the rotten root of bigotry and intolerance and prejudice. But relativism on the other hand is seen as the wholesome mother of mutural respect and tolerance and peace. In other words the Biblical message of Christmas in America today not only runs into the obstacle that Christ has been taken out of Christmas, but also the deeper problem that truth has been taken out of reality. By and large people don't think about absolute truth any more. They are not looking for THE truth that can give meaning and purpose to all of life and history.

Instead people are trying to experience life to the full and call this experience TRUTH for them, not absolute truth, just truth for them. And the general guideline in this culture is simply: keep your monkey off my back. If works for you, fine. But don't lay it on me.

We need to be aware how deeply this view of truth is woven into the fabric of American life today. It infects all of us more or less. You can see it in the church where people resist even thinking about Biblical absolutes. Listen to Alan Bloom in his best selling book, THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND, p. 25,

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That any one should regard [relativism] as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question 2 + 2 = 4. These are things you don't think about. The students' backgrounds are as various as America can provide. Some are religious, some atheists; some are to the Left, some to the Right; some intend to be scientists, some humanists or porfessionals or businessmen; some are poor, some rich. They are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality. And the two are related in a moral intention. The relativity of truth is not a theoritical insight but a moral postualte, the condition of a free society, or so they see it.

That's our society, and very largely that is us. And the problem with this relativism is that it is self-contradictory and unbiblical.

Relativism contradicts itself. If you say, "There is no absolute truth that everybody should believe," you contradict yourself, because you make a statement that you want people to believe, but the statement you make is that there are no statements everyone should believe. The hidden agenda of relativism is that it wants to relativize everybody else's claim to truth, but not it's own.

Let me give you an illustration of this in acutal practice. Two weeks ago in Atlanta about 500 clergy gathered to discuss the new rescue tactics in the pro-life movement where people try to shut down

abortion clinics by blocking the doors and risking arrest. The pro-abortion forces in Atlanta called for a counter protest and distributed a leaflet that I have a copy of.

Near the top it says, "Defend Reproductive Rights". In other words, if the pro-life people want to view the foetus as a person with legal rights to life they can have that view, but don't put that monkey on the back of the women of this country. That's a personal, religious, viewpoint. It's relative. But then at the bottom of the leaflet in big letters it says: "WE WILL NOT TOLERATE INTOLERANCE!" Do you see what this means? "Tolerance" is moral equivalant of relativism. If truth is relative and not absolute there should be total tolerance. But to make this moral truth stick you have to put an absolute punch behind it. "We will not tolerate intolerance," is the moral equivalent of "We absolutely reject absolutes!" It is self-contradictory. It's a testimony to the fact that we can't live without absolute truth. And so it is not surprising then that relativism is also unbiblical. Jesus said "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." The first implication of Christmas then is that there is truth == truth that comes from God outside the world and gives the world its meaning, truth that is absolute and unchanging, truth that everyone should seek for and submit to and believe.

Implication #2. The second implication of Christmas in this verse is that Jesus came to testify to that truth == he is the key witness. "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth."

Now the question for us is, What became of that witness? Jesus is gone now. It's not enough to say that he has sent his Spirit in his place. That's crucial. We believe he has. But Jesus said he was born to bear witness. He said he came into the world to bear witness. If we want to hear the witness that Jesus came to bring we have to get back to those years when he was here == the years of his incarnation, when he walked and talked and worked loved and died among men. That's what we have to see and hear.

How do we do that? Suppose you are saying this morning, I am persuaded that I need to discover THE TRUTH and live my life by it. I see that relativism won't really work. But how can I get back to the testimony of Jesus? How can I be sure the Bible really gives the testimony of Jesus? And how can I be sure the testimony of Jesus is true? The answer I want to give to these questions this morning in the few minutes we have left is this. You get a copy of the four gospels == the first four books of the New Testament. And you sit down in a quiet place alone and you begin to listen to the testimony of these four witnesses, and through them listen to the testimony of Jesus as it comes through.

You ask God that if he is alive and real to help you see the truth. You watch what Jesus does. You listen to what he says. You think about the attitudes that he shows. And you make a judgment whether these writers and this man have integrity and credibility or whether they are frauds or poor religious dupes.

I believe that God has made us dependent on the Bible for the testimony of Jesus today because the Bible has the power to convince people that Jesus' testimony is true.

J. B. Phillips was translating the New Testament from Greek to modern English 40 years ago and said afterwards, "[I] felt rather like an electrician rewiring an ancient house without being able to turn the mains off." (Letters to Young Churches, London, 1947, p. xii) When he finished with the

gospels he said, "There is an almost childlike candour and simplicity, and the total effect is tremendous. No man could ever have set down such artless and vulnerable accounts as these unless some real Event lay behind them." (The Ring of Truth, London, 1967, p. 58)

What I am saying is that the way you credit a witness is by listening long and hard to him to see if you sense that he is conning you or if he has the ring of truth. That's what you must do with the Gospels. Dr. E.V. Rieu was a scholar who translated both the ancient poet Homer and the four Gospels from Greek into modern English. He was not commited to their spiritual content at the time. But he said, "I got the deepest feeling that I possibly could have expected. It . . . changed me; my work changed me. And I came to the conclusion that these words bear the seal of . . . the Son of Man and God. And they're the Magna Carta of the human spririt." (The Ring of Truth, London, p. 56) In other words if you will go to the Gospels as they stand in the Bible and listen earnestly and carefully and openly, with a willingness to do the truth if you see it, then the witness of the writers and the testimony of Jesus will prove to you their credibility.

Christmas means that Jesus was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth. The witness of his work and his words is preserved in the Gospels. Read them afresh in the coming year with a willing heart and you will know the THE TRUTH that he came to bring.

Exhortation. The closing exhortation is that you not be like Pilate when you hear the truth. Pilate's response to Jesus in verse 38 was a cynical, or perhaps hopeless, "What is truth?"

If Pilate had been listening earlier when we criticized relativism of being self-contradictory, I think he would perhaps have said, "I'm not included in your criticism because I don't say truth is relative and I don't say truth is absolute. All I say is, I don't know what truth is. It may be relative. There may be an absolute truth. I just don't know. And so I can't be accused of contradicting myself because I just don't know. I suspend judgement." And that may be were some of you are this morning. You may be non-commital about Jesus not because you think he is untrue but just because you don't know. You live with a suspended judgment on the matter.

Let me ask you a question to see if you are really being honest with yourself. Do you suspend judgement and plead ignorance on the issues that really matter to you and where your personal interest is at stake? Or do you just suspend judgment only in those areas that seem unimportant or troublesome to you?

I have never met or heard of a person who has any trouble believing in moral absolutes when he is punched in the nose. He immediately believes that the agressor is absolutely guilty. And if a judge said, "Not guilty because truth is relative and for him it was a good thing to punch you in the nose and you can't' put the monkey of your absolutes onto his back," then you would say, that this judge is a bad judge. The point is this, Pilate may say == you may say, "I don't know what absolute truth is, and I don't think I can find out." But the truth is, when your own personal interest is at stake you won't act as though you don't know truth is. We have very strong convictions when our life and property is at stake, don't we? Strange how agnosticism and relativism are blown away when our rights and our life are on the line! So I plead with you this Christmas that you realize how much is at stake in the Jesus' claim to bring the truth. It is a matter of eternal life an death. Your life is on the line. And Jesus says in another place (John 7:17), "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God."

Jesus was not born to keep secret the truth of God. He was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth, the unchanging absolute truth of God. Realize how much is at stake. Take up the gospel and read. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 31

02.12. God's Invincible Purpose Part Three

God’s Invincible Purpose Part Three Foundations for Full Assurance: God Vindicated His Righteousness in the Death of Christ

March 15, 1992

Romans 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

One of the reasons it is hard to communicate Biblical reality to modern, secular people is that the Biblical mindset and the secular mindset move from radically different starting points.

What I mean by the secular mindset is not necessarily a mindset that rules God out or denies in principle that the Bible is true. It’s a mindset that begins with man as the basic given reality in the universe. So all of its thinking starts with the assumption that man has basic rights and basic needs and basic expectations or wants. Then the secular mind moves out from this center and interprets the world, with man and his rights and needs as the measure of all things.

What the secular mindset sees as problems are seen as problems because of how things fit or don’t fit with the center--man and his rights and needs and expectations. And what this mindset sees as successes are seen as successes because they fit with man and his rights and needs and expectations. This is the mindset we were born with and that our secular society reinforces virtually every hour of the day in our lives. Paul calls this mindset the "mind of the flesh" (Romans 8:6-7) and says that it is the way the "natural man" thinks (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is so much a part of us that we hardly even know its there. We just take it for granted--until it collides with another mindset, namely the one in the Bible. The Biblical mindset is not simply one that includes God somewhere in the universe and says that the Bible is true. The Biblical mindset begins with a radically different starting point, namely, God. God is the basic given reality in the universe. He was there before we were in existence--or before anything was in existence. He is simply the most absolute reality. And so the Biblical mindset starts with the assumption that God is the center of reality. All thinking then starts with the conviction that God has basic rights as the Creator of all things. He has goals that fit with his nature and perfect character. Then the Biblical mindset moves out from this center and interprets the world, with God and his rights and goals at the center as the measure of all things. And what the Biblical mindset sees as basic problems in the universe are usually not the same problems that the secular mindset sees. Because what makes a problem is not first what fits the rights and needs of man but what fits the rights and goals of God.

What we are trying to do in these messages leading up to Easter is to focus our attention on the great, objective, divine realities outside ourselves that God has accomplished to establish his invincible purpose of salvation. And in focusing on God's great work (rather than ours) the aim is to experience the full assurance of hope. Assurance comes not only by assessing our subjective participation in salvation but even more importantly it comes by our meditation on the objective foundation of salvation.

We have looked at God's work of election by which he chooses who will be united to Christ and come to faith (Ephesians 1:4). And we have looked at God's work of predestination rooted in the good pleasure of his will and aimed at the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:5). And we have seen that these realities do not fit well with the secular mindset. Because if you start with man his rights and wants, rather than starting with the Creator and his rights and goals, the problems you see in the universe will be very different. Is the basic riddle of the universe how to preserve man's rights and solve his problems (say, the right of self-determination, and the problem of suffering)? Or is the basic riddle of the universe how an infinitely worthy God in complete freedom can display the full range of his perfections--what Paul calls the wealth of his glory--his holiness and power and wisdom and justice and wrath and goodness and truth and grace?

If you start with man at the center (with the natural tendencies of the human heart to assert its rights and wants), you will assess the Biblical teaching of election and predestination very differently than if you start with God and with his goal to manifest all that he is so that he might be known and worshipped with a reverence and awe and joy that correspond to all that he really is in perfect proportion.

I introduce today's text with this long meditation on the power of our starting points because the deepest problem that the death of Jesus was designed to solve is virtually incomprehensible to the secular mindset. What we see in today's text is probably the clearest illustration of what I have been talking about--namely, that the man-centered secular mindset and the God-centered Biblical mindset don't even see the same problems to be solved, let alone the same solutions.

We shouldn't be surprised if we find in this text that the problem God was solving by the death of his Son and the problem the secular mind likes to think he was solving are not the same.

Let's go to the text to see what I mean. Our focus today is very limited. We are going to talk about the death of Christ for three weeks, especially its power to justify the ungodly and its power to reconcile sinners to God. But today we go underneath all that to the bottom of it all--what C.E.B. Cranfield calls "the innermost meaning of the cross" (Romans, Vol. 1, p. 213).

It's found in Romans 3:25-26. What you should look for as I read this is the problem in the universe that the Biblical mindset (God's mindset) is trying to solve through the death of Christ, and how it differs from the problems that the secular mindset says God has to solve.

25) God put Christ forward as a propitiation (a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God against sinners), through faith, by his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness, on account of his passing over sins done beforehand.

Boil that down to the most basic problem the death of Christ is meant to solve. God put Christ forward (he sent him to die) in order to demonstrate his righteousness (or justice). The problem

that needed solving was that God, for some reason seemed to be unrighteous, and wanted to vindicate himself and clear his name. But what created that problem? Why did God face the problem of needing to give a public vindication of his righteousness? The answer is in the last phrase of Romans 3:25 : "on account of passing over sins done beforehand."

Now what does that mean? It means that for centuries God had been doing what Psalms 103:10 says, "He does not deal with us according to our sins or requite us according to our iniquities." He just passes over them. He does not punish them.

King David is a good example. In 2 Samuel 12:1-31 he is confronted by the prophet Nathan for committing adultery with Bathsheba and then having her husband killed. Nathan says, "Why have you despised the word of the Lord?" and God says, "Why have you despised me?" (2 Samuel 12:9-10).

David feels the rebuke of Nathan, and in verse 13 he says, "I have sinned against the Lord." To this, Nathan responds, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." Just like that! Adultery and murder passed over. That is what Paul means in Romans 3:25 by the passing over of sins done beforehand. But why is that a problem? Is it felt as a problem by the secular mindset--that God is kind to sinners? How many people outside the scope of Biblical influence wrestle with the problem that a holy and righteous God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45)? How many wrestle with the problem that God is kind to sinners? How many people struggle with the fact that their own forgiveness is a threat to the righteousness of God? The secular mindset does not even assess the problem the way the Biblical mindset does. Why is that? It’s because the secular mindset thinks from a radically different starting point. It does not start with the Creator rights of God to display the infinite worth of his glory. It starts with man and assumes that God will conform to his rights and wishes.

Look at Romans 3:23 : "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What’s at stake in sinning is the glory of God. Do you remember what God said to David when he was caught in adultery? "Why have you despised ME?"

David could have said, "What do you mean, I despised you? I didn’t despise you. I wasn’t even thinking of you. I was just red hot after this woman and then scared to death that people were going to find out. You weren’t even in the picture." And God would have said, "The Creator of the universe, the designer of marriage, the fountain of Life, the one who made you king, was not even in the picture--that’s right. You despised me. All sin is a despising of me and my glory. All sin is a preference for the fleeting pleasures of the world over the everlasting joy of my fellowship. You demeaned my glory. You belittled my worth. You dishonored my name. That is the meaning of sin--failing to love my glory above everything else." The problem in God’s passing over sin (that the secular mindset does not grasp) is that God’s worth and glory and righteousness have been despised, and passing over it makes him look cheap.

Suppose a group of anarchists plot to assassinate President Bush and his cabinet, and almost succeed. Their bombs destroy part of the White House and kill some staff, but the President narrowly escapes. The anarchists are caught and the court finds them guilty. But then the anarchists say they are sorry and so the court suspends their sentences and releases them. What

that would communicate to the world is that the President’s life and his governance of the nation are cheap. That is what the passing over of sin communicates: God’s glory and his righteous governance are cheap and worthless.

Apart from divine revelation the natural mind--the secular mind--does not see or feel this problem. What secular person loses any sleep over the unrighteousness of God’s kindness to sinners? But according to Romans this is the most basic problem that God solved by the death of his Son. Read it again (Romans 3:25 b): "It [the death of his Son] was to demonstrate God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance (or patience) he had passed over former sins; 26) it was for a demonstration of his righteousness at the present time in order that he himself might be righteous . . ." God would be unrighteous if he passed over sins as though the value of his glory were nothing. But he didn’t. God saw his glory being despised by sinners--he saw his worth belittled and his name dishonored by our sins--and rather than vindicating the worth of his glory by slaying his people, he vindicated his glory by slaying his Son.

I urge you now to embrace a Biblical mindset this morning. If you never have done so before, do so now. I urge you to think and feel the way God does about the death of his Son. And the test of that mindset is this: do you feel that, apart from the death of Jesus, God would be righteous not to forgive your sins? That he could vindicate his righteousness by requiring from us a price of suffering equal to the infinite worth of the glory we have despised? When you look at the death of Christ what happens? Does your joy really come from translating this awesome divine work into a boost for self-esteem? Or are you drawn up out of yourself and filled with wonder and reverence and worship that here in the death of Jesus is the deepest, clearest declaration of the infinite worth of the glory of God and the Son of God?

Here is a great objective foundation for the full assurance of hope: the forgiveness of sins is grounded finally not in my finite worth or work, but in the infinite worth of the righteousness of God--unswerving allegiance to uphold and vindicate the glory of his name.

Take your stand on this. Base your life on this. Ground your hope on this. And you will never fall. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 32

02.13. Jesus: Worthy of More Glory Than Moses

Jesus: Worthy of More Glory Than Moses

August 4, 1996

Hebrews 3:1-6

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. 2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. 3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

We Need Two Things

Human beings need two things: we need to hear from God and we need to go to God. We need a word from God and we need a way to God. We need to hear from God so that we know what he is like and what his purposes are for the world and what he requires of us. And we need a way to God because to be cut off from God in death would be darkness and misery and torment for ever. So we have these two great needs: to hear from God and to go to God. We need revelation from him and reconciliation with him.

Now consider how Hebrews 3:1 addresses these two needs. It says to Christians:

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."

We Need a Word from God and a Way to God

Christians are people who have heard and believed a heavenly calling, and are therefore partakers of it, sharers in it -- "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling." It is a heavenly calling because it comes from heaven -- from God. And it is a heavenly calling because it invites us and leads us to heaven -- to God. In other words this "heavenly calling" relates to the two great needs that we have: a word from God and a way to God. It’s a heavenly calling, which means it is a word from heaven, a word from God. And it’s a calling, which means it is meant to show us the way home to God. Christians are people who have been gripped by this calling. The word of God broke through our resistance, and took hold of us with the truth and love of Christ, and reconciled us to God and is now leading us home to heaven. This means that Christians are people of great hope. God has spoken from heaven, and made a way to heaven, and we have believed and our hope and confidence are firm. And the reason our hope and confidence are firm is not because of ourselves. There are sinners of every kind in this room this morning -- sexual sinners, lying

sinners, stealing sinners, killing sinners, parent-disobeying sinners. The hope of a heavenly calling does not hang on our righteousness. If it did we would be hopeless. Our hope and confidence hang on Jesus. This is why verse 1 continues: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus." This is what we are doing this morning. This is what preaching is about. It is what Sunday School is about. It is what small groups are about. Considering Jesus.

We often think that considering Jesus is something that unbelievers should do. "Consider Jesus," we say to the seeker and the perplexed. And that's right. But this book of Hebrews is devoted to helping Christians consider Jesus. "Holy brethren . . . consider Jesus." Well why say that? Don't holy brethren automatically consider Jesus? The answer is No. Remember the warning back in Hebrews 2:1, "We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." The danger is constantly in our way that we will stop considering Jesus and become more interested in other things and drift away from the word and perhaps never return and prove that we were never truly partakers of the heavenly calling. So Hebrews calls us (Christians!) again and again to "Consider Jesus."

Jesus is the Word and the Way The reason is that he is the only answer to the two great needs that we have. We need a word from God and way to God. We need revelation from God and we need reconciliation with God. And the point of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is both. This is why verse 1 ends with two descriptions of Jesus: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus,the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."

These two descriptions of Jesus correspond to our two great needs: Jesus is our Apostle, and Jesus is our High Priest. Apostle means "one who is sent." So Jesus is the one sent from God to earth with the revelation of his heavenly calling. "High priest" means one who is a go-between, who offers a sacrifice so that there can be reconciliation. So Jesus is our high priest. Look back two verses to Hebrews 2:17 to see what this more clearly: "He [Jesus] had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." That great phrase, "make propitiation" means "make a sacrifice for our sins that brings God's anger at us to an end" and makes us friends. So what the writer is saying is: You Christians, you who share in the calling of God from heaven to heaven, you have great confidence that you have heard from God (through your apostle) and you have great hope that you are going to God, loved and reconciled and secure, you Christians consider Jesus, think about Jesus, meditate on Jesus, listen to Jesus. Why? Because he is the Apostle from heaven who brought you your calling. And he is the final, once for all High Priest of God whose sacrifice of himself reconciled you to God and guarantees your homecoming to heaven. Consider Jesus, God's Apostle -- the final word from God -- and God's High Priest -- the final way to God.

Consider Jesus This whole book of Hebrews is written to help us consider Jesus. There is more to consider about Jesus than you could ever exhaust in this life. In chapter one the point was that Jesus is superior to angels. Jesus made and sustains the world (Hebrews 1:1-2, Hebrews 1:10), but the angels run errands in it (Hebrews 1:14). In Hebrews 2:1-18 Jesus takes on human flesh and fulfills the hope of Psalms 8:1-9 for all his people (Hebrews 2:7-8): "You [O God] have made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of your hands; you have put all things in subjection under his feet."

And the point at every stage of this book is: Consider this Jesus! Ponder him. Fix your eyes on him. If your mind is like a compass moving through a world of magnets, making it spin this way and that, make Jesus the North Pole of your mental life that your mind comes back to again and again through the day.

Consider His Superiority over Moses So we ask the writer of this book, and the God who inspired it, what do you want us to consider about Jesus today from Hebrews 3:1-6? And the answer is: Consider his superiority over Moses. Think about this. Ponder this. Focus on this. Why? Because in considering this, your confidence in your heavenly calling will be made stronger and your hope will be more bold.

There are two ways that Jesus is superior to Moses mentioned in Hebrews 3:2-6 and what strengthens our confidence and our hope is not just the raw fact of Jesus' superiority over Moses; it's what we see about Jesus that makes him superior. Seeing Jesus in a fresh way in this text is what helps us "hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end" (Hebrews 3:6 b). So let's look at these two ways Jesus is superior to Moses. Hebrews 3:2 introduces the comparison and shows that both Jesus and Moses were faithful in God's house, which is a picture of God's people. "He [Jesus] was faithful to Him [God the Father] who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house." So first there is a comparison before there is a contrast. The writer is not putting Moses down. That's not the point. Moses was faithful in the household of God. The writer is quoting from Numbers 12:6-8 where God says,

Hear now my words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. 7 not so, with my servant Moses, he is faithful in all my household; 8 with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. When the writer turns now to contrast Jesus and Moses, it really means something because Moses was one of a kind in his day -- with a more intimate relation to God than any other prophet.

Jesus is Worthy of More Glory So consider Jesus now; consider his superiority over Moses. First in Hebrews 3:3, For He [Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. As the Olympics come to an end, we don't have any difficulty tracking with the word "glory" and one person being worthy of more glory than another person. There's more glory in gold than in silver, and more in silver than in bronze. Unless of course you're injured, and in spite of the injury press on and do some phenomenal feat. Then there is another kind of glory that may bring even more praise than an individual gold medal.

Hebrews 3:3 says that Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses in relation to God's house. And he gives an astonishing reason. Because Jesus is the builder of the house and Moses is a part of the house. Look at it carefully. Hebrews 3:3 : [Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses." In what way? "By just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house." In other words he is saying: Jesus is to the people of God as a builder is to a house. Moses is to the people of God as one of the people of God is to God's household. Therefore Jesus is Moses' builder. In short, Jesus made Moses.

Now let this sink in. "Consider" this! This is your Apostle and High Priest. He is the one who brought you a heavenly calling from God and made you a way to God. On him hangs all your hope of heaven. If you have any confidence this morning that your sins are forgiven and that you will persevere in faith and attain your heavenly calling, this confidence depends on Jesus. The greater and more glorious he is, the greater our hope and confidence.

Jesus Made Moses

It would be as if the decathlon contestants were gathered together one night bragging about who of them was the greatest, and Jesus was one of the decathlon contestants. And one said, "I threw the javelin farther than anyone else. I'm the greatest." Another said, "I put the shot farther than anyone else. I'm the greatest." Another said, "I jumped higher than anyone else. I'm the greatest." And eventually they all look toward Jesus in his burgundy sweat suit sitting calmly in the corner, and someone says, "What about you?" And Jesus says, "I made all of you. So I'm the greatest."

Hebrews 3:3 : Jesus is worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house is worthy of more glory than the house. Jesus is worthy of as much more glory than every gold medal winner of the Olympics as the builder of a house is worthy of more glory than the house. He made the house. He made Moses. He made the minds and hearts and legs and arms of the Olympic athletes. So Jesus is the greatest.

Hebrews 3:4 makes explicit just how great he is: "For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." Hebrews 3:3 says that Jesus made the house of God. Hebrews 3:4 says that the maker of all things is God. Conclusion? The same as Hebrews 1:1-14 : Jesus, the Son of God, is God. That's how great he is. The word of our Apostle is a sure word because it is a word carried by God himself. The atoning work of our High Priest on the cross is a finished and all-sufficient work, because it has infinite value as the work of God himself. Consider this about Jesus: he made Moses. And he made you.

Jesus is the Son; Moses a Servant

One other superiority of Jesus over Moses is mentioned in Hebrews 3:5-6 a: "Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house." Moses was a servant in the house of God. Jesus is a Son over the house of God. The difference between a servant and a son is that the son, by inheritance, owns the house, and is Lord over the house, and provides for those in the house out of his wealth. But the servants don't own anything in the house, and the servants follow the word of the owner. The servants receive their provision from the owner. So again, Jesus, as a son, is superior to Moses in these three ways: he owns the house of God; he rules the house of God and he provides for the house of God. By comparison Moses is just a servant in the house. He doesn't own it; he doesn't rule it; and he doesn't provide for it from his wealth. So consider Jesus in relation to Moses. And the striking thing here in verse 6 is that the writer wants you immediately to apply this superiority of Jesus to yourself. Do you see how verse 6 ends: "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." The church of Jesus Christ is the house of God today. Which means that Jesus this morning -- not just back in Moses' day or in his won days on earth -- but this morning is our Maker, our Owner, our Ruler and our Provider. He's the son; we are the servants. We are the

household of God. Moses is one with us in this household, and he is our fellow servant through his prophetic ministry. But Jesus is our Maker, our Owner, our Ruler and our Provider. And the text concludes by saying we are his house -- we are his people, we are partakers of a heavenly calling -- if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." The evidence that we are part of the household of God is that we don't throw away our hope -- Hebrews 10:35 says, "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" -- we don't drift into indifference and unbelief. Becoming a Christian and being a Christian happen in the same way: by hoping in Jesus -- a kind of hoping that produces confidence and boasting in Jesus.

What are you hoping in this morning this morning? Where are you looking for confidence. In yourself? In shrewd investing? In physical fitness programs? In hard work? In luck? The word of God to you this morning is, Consider Jesus. And hope in him. Then you will be part of his house and he will be your Maker, your Owner, your Ruler and your Provider. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 33

02.14. What Jesus Built by Rising From the Dead

What Jesus Built by Rising From the Dead March 30, 1997

Easter Matthew 26:59-64

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death; 60 and they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" 62 And the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Why should you take the resurrection of Jesus any more seriously than you take the arrival of a UFO behind the Hale-Bopp Comet? Or another way to ask the question would be, What's the basic difference between the Christian Church - or this local church in particular - and the Heaven's Gate cult of 39 people who committed suicide together last Thursday? We believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, is alive today, and is coming again to save his people and to rule the world; and we build our lives around this reality. They, evidently, believed that apocalyptic circumstances were developing around the Hale-Bopp comet and they built their lives - and their deaths - around that belief. What's the difference? Pick your myth, right?

Differences Between Christianity and a Cult

There are differences between cults and historic Christianity. Let me mention a few before I tackle this question about the resurrection more directly.

1. Christianity is rooted in several thousand years of God's acts in history, not merely in the speculations of a charismatic leader. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob experience a covenant with God which leads to the establishment of the people of Israel. This people escapes from Egypt by God's mighty deeds, and receives a law and a land and prophets. Two thousand years of recorded history dealing with God's word and work leads to the fulfillment of prophecies in the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God, into a particular historical place at a particular time connected to secular, historical people like Herod and Pontius Pilate. This fulfillment is not narrated in the New Testament by one leader in a trance, but by nine reluctant and, at first skeptical, men who were surrounded by people who were so close to the events recorded that they could easily have falsified wild and crazy claims because it was all so public. Christianity is rooted in real history.

2. Because of this connection with history, Christianity has produced 2,000 years of schools and scholarship that are accessible to secular scrutiny and debate. Christianity is not private knowledge. It is public knowledge. Our documents are public and open to a natural reading for

anyone. We do not claim to have a holy man somewhere who dispenses impossible meanings for clear texts. The book is rooted in real history, not mythology. And therefore it has unleashed real scholarship and real schools and has held its own for 2,000 years of public controversy in the marketplace of ideas.

3. Paradoxically, this most historical of all religious movements - Christianity - has no cultural center, no holy place, no single cultural identity, and no single leader on earth. It is the most multicultural of all religious faiths. In other words, it has universal validity and relevance across all cultures. It is not attached to any place or people. It has found an indigenous home in every country of the world, and in thousands of ethnic groupings.

4. Christianity has endured the test of time. Again and again people have predicted that Christianity will vanish with the vanishing of a particular era. But again and again it has shown that it is as relevant and powerful in each new time period as the ones before, even the radically modern ones that many thought would banish all religion.

5. At the center of historic Christianity is the absolutely unique Person Jesus Christ. There is no one comparable at the center of any other cult or religion. He is unique in his teaching about God and life. He is unique in his love and his mingling of tender mercy and tough justice. He is unique in his wisdom and his miracles and his death and resurrection and appearances to hundreds of people to show that he was alive. Jesus is simply in a class by himself among all movements.

6. Interestingly, among the thousands of cults in America, the cults that seem to last the longest (say, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons) do so by piggybacking on biblical Christianity and keeping their unbiblical views of Christ hidden at the beginning of their inroads. So when I ask the question about the difference between believing in the resurrection of Jesus and in a UFO behind the Hale-Bopp comet, it's not as though the cult of Heaven's Gate and historic Christianity stand on level ground when they lay claim to our belief. There are good reasons for believing that historic Christianity should be given far more serious consideration. But the sad thing is, in many secular minds today they do stand on level ground. Marshall Applewhite, the leader of Heaven's Gate, and Jesus Christ were both deluded apocalyptic fanatics who were out of touch with reality. Because there simply is no God. We have moved beyond that. The universe is the product of matter + time + chance. So any claim to speak for God, or lead a people to God, much less to be God, is impossible. They are all in the same category. There is no God.

If He Appeared, Then I Would be Convinced

Take, for example, Norwood Russell Hanson, a philosopher of science at Yale until his premature death. He wrote a well-known essay entitled "What I do Not Believe," about why he was an atheist.

Suppose . . . that on next Tuesday morning, just after breakfast, all of us in this one world are knocked to our knees by a percussive and ear-shattering thunderclap. Snow swirls; leaves drop from trees; the earth heaves and buckles; buildings topple and towers tumble; the sky is ablaze with an eerie silvery light. Just then, as all the people of the earth look up, the heavens open - the clouds pull apart - revealing an unbelievably immense and radiant Zeus-like figure, towering above us like a hundred Everests. He frowns darkly as lightening plays across the features of his Michelangeloid face. He then points down - at me! - and exclaims for every man who man and child to hear, " I have had quite enough of your too-clever logic-chopping and word-watching in

matters of theology. Be assured Norwood Russell Hanson, that I do most certainly exist!"

Then he remarks, "The conceptual point is that if such a remarkable event were to transpire, I, for one, would certainly be convinced that God does exist."*

Now here's the connection with our text. Jesus says, as it were to all the Norwood Russell Hansons of the modern world, this great sky-demonstration of God's truth and reality is going to happen, much like you have demanded that it happen. Look at the second half of verse 64: "You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." That means that in the future the sky is going to split, as it were, and Jesus is going to appear, alive and real, at the right hand of God - above us like a hundred Everests." But that demonstration of the resurrection of Jesus and the truth of God in him, that will persuade every person on this planet, is future and not present. Which puts Norwood Hanson, and all of us, in a predicament doesn't it? If we wait to see it before we believe in Christ and surrender our lives to him, it will be too late (Matthew 25:11-13). But if we act now, what is the basis? The Whole Universe Will See Him

Well, let's stay right here in this text and back up to ask, Why did Jesus say what he said about this great future appearance of the Son of Man? He said it because in Matthew 26:63 b the High Priest, at Jesus' trial, said, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God." To this Jesus responded, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." In other words, Jesus says, Yes, you put it that way; I put it this way. In other words, I am not only the Messiah, the Son of God as you understand him to be, but I am more: I am going to die and then afterwards there will come a time when the whole universe will see me sitting at the right hand of God in glory. But what prompted the High Priest to ask this man Jesus such an outrageous question: are you the Messiah, the Son of God? Nobody has ever asked me such a question. We move back another step in the text. In this midnight sham-trial, false witnesses were brought in and said, (in Matthew 26:61), "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" This is what triggered the question of the High Priest. He said (in Matthew 26:62), "Do you make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you?" What is this? Do you intend to destroy the temple of God? And do you think you can build it in three days? What kind of talk is this? What kind of person are you? Are you crazy?" But Matthew 26:63 says, "Jesus kept silent."

What were these false witnesses referring to? The rumor was out that Jesus aimed to destroy the temple of the Jews and rebuild it in three days. At the cross, for example, Mark tells us that as he hung there, "Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!'" (Mark 15:29-30). It was ludicrous. What did it mean? Where did this idea come from? Does it tell us anything about why we should believe in this man Jesus and his resurrection before he comes in glory at the right hand of God?

Destroy the Temple? The answer is found in John 2:18-22. Jesus comes to Jerusalem and finds the temple filled with money changers and merchants turning the house of God into a market. He weaves a whip and drives them out, saying, "Don't make my Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:16). The people are indignant and say to him (in John 2:18), "What sign do

You show to us, seeing that You do these things?" In other words, they want some evidence that he has authority to act like this, calling God his Father in some special sense and taking charge of the temple which is the place where people meet God. What's your authority? What's your evidence that we should yield to you and not kill you?

Then comes the answer in John 2:19 : "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'" The people are flabbergasted by such an outrageous response. John 2:20 : "The Jews therefore said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?'" Then the writer, John, comments in John 2:21 "But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

Yes, but don't miss the point and the meaning of shifting from the temple in Jerusalem to the temple of his body. He had just purged the temple in Jerusalem with a whip. He had called it his Father's house. The disciples had recalled Psalms 69:9, "Zeal for thy house will consume me." They want a sign for this behavior. Jesus does not say, "I have nothing to say about your temple. I have only a word about my body. No. No. He does have something to say about their temple. He says, Destroy this temple . . . this temple, the one I just purged, the one you have turned into a market place. The one for which I am consumed with zeal. But how? How will they destroy it? How will they bring the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament, centered in the temple, to an end? How will they bring the entire Old Testament priesthood ministering in the temple to an end? How will they destroy the meeting place with their God? The answer is: by rejecting Jesus, the Messiah, and putting him to death. When Christ died, Judaism - as it was enshrined in the Temple - died. The final sacrifice was made. The sacrifice of Jesus ended all sacrifices. The final High Priest offered himself for the sin of his people. The priesthood came to an end. Forty years later the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. But the decisive end came at Calvary when Jesus was destroyed.

Rebuild it in Three Days?

Then, and only then - when that point has been made - does Jesus say in verse 19, "In three days I will raise it up." Now he himself speaks only of his body. >From that day on - the day of that destruction in my death - he says, I will be the temple. No building and no place will ever be the focus again of where and how to meet God. I will be the place and the way to meet God. I am the Sacrifice needed to cover sin. I am the Priest, the only Mediator between God and man. I am the habitation, the dwelling place, of God.

Henceforth wherever men and women and little children want to meet God they may come to me - anywhere, anytime. The forgiveness they need, they find in me. The intercession they need, they find in me. The God they need, they find in me. I am the new Temple, and there will be no other.

One last observation. Jesus gave this awesome word in response to the question in John 2:18, "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?" What sign? What evidence? That you take such authority and make such claims? His answer: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

These Things are History, not Delusion So to all atheists and agnostics and skeptics we urge this sign, this evidence. It has three parts:

First, they did destroy the temple. Jesus was killed, just like he said.

Second, Jesus did build the temple again in three days. He rose from the dead, and for forty days appeared to many varied witnesses, even five hundred at one time, many of whom were still living, according to the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:6) - a claim that could have been easily falsified in those days so soon after the event. But it was not, nor could the adversaries ever produce the dead body of Jesus. He had raised up the new temple.

Third, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (in A.D. 70), the sacrificial system of the Old Testament did come to and end. The Old Testament priesthood did pass away.

These things happened. They happened in history. They are not the delusions of a cultic leader. They are written large all over 2,000 years of history, both Christian and Jewish. So I say to every Norwood Russell Hanson on the one side, and every cultic dreamer on the other side, Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God. He is alive and reigning at the God's right hand in heaven. He will come one day in power and great glory and everyone will bow and admit that he is God. But, in mercy, Jesus has given a sign before that day, that we may get ready, by believing in him. He has died, and risen and replaced the Old Testament system of meeting God in the temple.

He is the temple. And he is the place - the only place - where human beings can meet God. He is the sacrifice you need, the priest you need, and the God you long for. Come to him. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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Chapter 34

02.15. The Marvelous Rising of a Rejected Stone

The Marvelous Rising of a Rejected Stone

March 30, 1986

Matthew 21:42

"The very stone which the builders rejected

has become the head of the corner;

this was the Lord’s doing,

and it is marvelous in our eyes."

Last fall Charles Colson was in India. As usual, the crowds he spoke to wanted to hear the testimony of this Watergate criminal turned prison evangelist. Here’s the way he described his experience in India: When I was in India last fall I had many opportunities to tell what Christ has done in my life. The thousands of faces in those predominantly Hindu crowds would nod and smile as I shared my experience. Hindus believe all roads lead to God -- if Jesus was my guru, that was fine. They all had their gurus, too. But when I spoke of the reason for my faith, the resurrection of Christ, the nods would stop. People’s expressions changed and they listened intently. The fact of the Resurrection demands a choice, one that reduces all other religions to mere philosophies.

(Christianity Today, March 21, 1986, p. 72)

Christianity socks you between the eyes because it is a religion that says: The really marvelous things in life are not the feelings of the heart but the facts of history. There is a world of difference between a subjective religious disposition and an objective resurrection from the dead.

Put yourself in Athens 25 years after the death of Jesus. You are a religious pluralist. You love to discuss religion. You love to hear about the religious experience of people from all over the world. It’s fascinating. Sometimes you even learn something to incorporate into your own life to help you get along better.

Then one day comes a man named Paul to the Areopagus and joins in the discussions. You ask him about his religion. Suppose he said,

I worship Jesus Christ. He was a Jewish teacher and wonder-worker. He lived in Palestine 25 years ago and taught a way of love and truth. His wisdom was unsurpassed. Even in his dying he never gave in to the lower instincts of anger and revenge. His memory is very powerful. His teachings linger on in his followers. His example can have a tremendous influence in your life if you meditate on what he did and said.

Period. That’s all.

What would the response have been? Tolerance. Benign interest, perhaps. Nods and smiles of respect. Paul has his guru. The Athenians have their gurus. If it works for you, fine. You have your inner experience. I have mine. But what if he had said (which he did in fact say, in Acts 17:31!),

"The God who made the world and everything in it ... commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead"?

Well, that is not acceptable in a polite, respectful dialogue about religious experience. Discussions about the relative value of religious experience and declarations about someone's's resurrection from the dead are just not in the same category. That's why the Hindus stopped nodding at Charles Colson. That's why Athenians mocked. That's why Christianity is offensively unique in a pluralistic age. For us everything hangs on a marvelous fact in history, not a marvelous feeling in the heart.

Therefore, in this Easter worship service I want to direct your attention to four marvelous facts in Matthew 21:42. We will approach it like this. We will read a word from Jesus. Then we will read its interpretation by the apostle Peter. Then we will fix our gaze on four marvelous things in Jesus' word. The word of the Lord is found in Matthew 21:42 at the end of the parable of the wicked tenants. The owner of the vineyard had sent servants to get fruit from the tenants. They had beaten some and killed others. Then he sent his son. But him, too, they cast out and killed. The meaning is that God owns the vineyard of Israel. It is supposed to bear the fruit of worship and obedience. He has sent prophets and wise men to gather this fruit. And finally he sent his Son. But the leaders of Israel rebel. They will give no fruit. And they kill the Son of God.

Then comes our text in Matthew 21:42 :

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

It seems obvious to you, I am sure, what this refers to, but lets go straight to the interpretation of the apostle Peter in Acts 4:8-12. Peter and John had been arrested for causing a stir by healing a man and teaching about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Acts 4:2-3). The next day the Jewish leaders (the very ones who had condemned Jesus some months earlier) asked them by what power they were acting. Peter answers, and his answer is an interpretation of Jesus' word about the rejected stone. Starting at the end of Acts 4:8 :

Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Notice Peter's interpretation, one part at a time.

Acts 4:10 : the stone is Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Acts 4:8 : the builders are the rulers of the people and elders.

Acts 4:10 : the rejection of the stone was the crucifixion of Jesus.

Acts 4:10 : the elevation of the stone to the head of the corner was the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 4:12 : the implication of this new position at the head is that there is salvation in no other. This is the same point Paul made at the Areopagus: the resurrection declares that Jesus is the Son of God in power: all must repent from other gods and seek salvation in him alone. That is Peter's interpretation of the word of Jesus in Matthew 21:42. Now we will be able on the basis of this interpretation to go back to Jesus'word and fix our gaze on four marvelous facts.

First, let us marvel at the fact that Jesus predicts his own resurrection before it happens.

He had done this before this moment, and he would do it again. Sometimes he made it plain, for example, when he said: "After I am raised up I will go before you into Galilee" (Mark 14:28; Cf. Mark 8:31; Mark 9:31; Mark 10:34; Mark 14:25). But usually he spoke of it indirectly, for example, when he said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19; Mark 14:58; Mark 15:29; Matthew 26:61); or: "No sign will be give to this generation except the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 16:4; 12:39; Cf 12:41). He often spoke only for those who had ears to hear. The reason I point out the fact that Jesus predicted his own resurrection is to sow a seed in your mind that I don't have time to develop today. The seed is simply that it is impossible to admire Jesus as a wise and loving teacher while rejecting him as your risen and living Master. It's impossible because if he isn't the risen Master, then he was deluded or deceptive in his life and teaching and so shouldn't be admired. He built his life around a self-understanding that included his own resurrection. If he didn't rise, he is to be pitied as a teacher not admired. But someone may say, "Aren't you assuming that he said everything the Gospels said that he did? Wouldn't the skeptic who rejects the resurrection but admires Jesus say that the early church made up those sayings to make it look like Jesus expected his own resurrection?" The answer to that question is that no matter how much of the Gospels you try to strip away as later additions, you never wind up with a mere man. His claims to authority and power are so woven through his words and deeds that critics are dreaming when they think they can peel the onion of supernatural tradition down to the natural core of a mere man. He vanishes. Because a mere, natural man named Jesus with a noble view of love never existed. The Jesus of history knew he was no ordinary man, and we do well to marvel that part of his self-understanding was the assurance that he would rise from the dead. So we should marvel that Jesus predicted his resurrection before it happened.

Second, let us marvel at the blindness of the builders.

"The very stone that the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." It is an amazing thing that the people who should know stones best did not recognize the best stone. Mark 6:6 says, "Jesus marveled because of their unbelief." He said to Nicodemus, one of the "builders," "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?" Jesus was astonished at the blindness of those who should have been the first to recognize him from their knowledge of the Old Testament. And while we marvel at this let us learn a lesson. Even today there is no guarantee that the "builders" -- the religious experts, the university theologians, the clergy -- will recognize the stone.

Two years ago a sixty year old theology professor at the University of Leeds in England was appointed Bishop of Durham. In the process he announced that the Resurrection of Jesus was a "conjuring trick with bones." So here is a "builder" who still is rejecting the stone.

Why should we be vigilant about such things in our own churches and colleges and seminaries?

Two reasons:

One is that the bishop's words reached Moslems in Sri Lanka, half way around the world. Immediately they began aggressive visitation campaigns to Christians saying that there is no reason for conflict any more since Christians and Moslems both agree now that Jesus was merely a prophet to be honored, not the Son of God to be worshiped. One Anglican rector in Sri Lanka said, "They are killing us with our bishop's own words." The "builders" are still rejecting the corner stone and in many churches the walls and the mission are in disarray. The other reason for us to be vigilant as we marvel at the blindness of the builders is something that Iain Murray said recently. He said that the uproar over the the Jenkins affair is puzzling since he has been teaching these things to preparing ministers in the university for years and probably doing more harm there than he can do now that he is a public figure and his cards are on the table. So let us marvel at the blindness of the builders. And let us learn that academic stature has never been a guarantee of religious insight. And let us be vigilant and examine or church leaders -- our pastors our deacons, our board members, our Sunday School teachers -- let us examine them carefully to see if they know and accept the stone which many builders have rejected.

Third, let us marvel that the stone which is Now at the head of the corner is the very stone that was once rejected.

Or, to take the imagery away, we must marvel that it is a real man who now reigns at the right hand of God. Yes, he is more than a man. He is the Son of God in power. But the astonishing thing that we gaze at now is this: God the Son came into the world and clothed himself with a human nature in order to die for sinners like you and me. A divine nature and a human nature came together in one Person. And when that Person rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to take his place as the Head of the church and the King of the world, at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, it was a man who went into heaven. He was one of us. He is the same man reigning in heaven today who ate and drank and taught and healed and suffered on earth. The very stone which the builders rejected, THIS one is now head of the corner. In Luke 24:36-43 the risen Christ appeared to the apostles. They were so amazed that they thought they were seeing a ghost. So Jesus says,

Why are you troubled, and why do questions rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have. And while they still disbelieved for joy, and marveled, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. The risen Christ who reigns in heaven today and intercedes for us with the Father is a rejected stone! He has flesh and bones! He is one of us. And this truth contains good news for now and good news for later. For now it means this:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw

near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16) For he too is a rejected stone with pierced hands and flesh and bone! But not only that. This truth is also good news for the future. Get every ethereal, ghost-like conception of the coming Kingdom out of your head. The God man is not going to rule over invisible spirits and ghosts. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies." We will eat broiled fish in the Kingdom! We will hold it in our physical hands and stand on our feet. And there will be no more wheel chairs or crutches or cancer or paralysis, or leukemia or allergies or arthritis any more. For we will bear the image of the Son of God, and we will see him and touch him and marvel at him for ever and ever because the divine stone which is now at the head of the corner is the very same human stone that was once rejected.

Fourth, let us marvel AT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE HEAD OF THE CORNER.

Paul saw it perhaps more clearly than anyone, and said,

God raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things. (Ephesians 1:20-22) So that Jesus could say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). And Paul could preach in Athens with unwavering authority:

"God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointedf, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

Therefore, (as we return to Peter’s interpretation of our text) "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

O do not be like the builders this morning! Do not reject Jesus Christ. Do not stumble over this rejected stone. The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing and may it be marvelous in your eyes. Amen. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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02.16. Who is a True Jew?

Who Is a True Jew?

Part Two February 28, 1999

Romans 2:25-29 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Gentiles Can Become Jews

Paul's purpose in this chapter is to underline the need of the Jewish people (along with the rest of the world) for the gift of righteousness which God gives freely to those who trust Christ (Romans 3:20; Romans 3:28; Romans 1:16-17). Both Gentiles and Jews are under the dominion of sin (Romans 3:9), and in need of a salvation that God is ready to give to all those who put their trust in his Son.

Now in these verses (Romans 2:25-29) the way Paul underlines this need that Jewish people have is to show that Gentiles, are actually becoming the true Jews, and will even stand in judgment over the Jews at the judgment day. This was a staggering thought to Paul and his fellow Jews - that Gentiles could be counted as Jews who inherit God's promises to Israel, while natural-born Jews are judged and perish.

How Can This Be?

How could this be?

Well, Paul's argument is remarkable and is full of rich truth for us today. There are implications in this text for us that are breathtaking. Let's quickly get into Paul's flow of thought and then broaden our horizon to another passage of Scripture that will help us understand this one even better.

Amazingly, he says in Romans 3:26 that the uncircumcised man (the Gentile) will be regarded by God as a circumcised man (a true Jew) if he "keeps the requirements of Law." "So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?" So it isn't circumcision that makes you a true Jew, it is keeping the requirements of the Law - that is, it is understanding what the Law was really all about and being changed by it in the heart and living out God's purpose for man taught in it (see 1 Corinthians 7:19).

Then in Romans 3:27, even more amazingly, Paul says that the Gentiles will be a living indictment of the disobedient Jews at the judgment day if the Gentiles "keep the law." "And he who is

physically uncircumcised (=Gentile), if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who, though having the letter of the Law and circumcision, are a transgressor of the Law?" So in Romans 3:26-27, Paul pictures some Gentiles really being part of God's people and being saved from judgment, while some natural-born Jews are judged and perish at the judgment day. This underlines the need of Jews not to presume upon their privileged place as Jews. They are sinners like everyone else and liable to judgment.

How Can Some Jews Not Be Jews?

Now, again, how can this be? How can Paul say that natural-born Jews may not really be Jews, and Gentiles, even without being circumcised, may really be Jews? Because if this is true, then you and I today may actually become true Jews and part of God's chosen people with all the privileges promised to the children of Abraham.

Paul knows this is a staggering thought for the Jews and Gentiles of his day and so he gives some supporting explanation in Romans 3:28-29. But before I show you his argument, I want to make sure you are with me and that you see this truth in at least one other place in the New Testament -namely, the truth that Gentiles actually become part of God's chosen people Israel. The clearest place to see this is Ephesians 2:11 ff.

Remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands [Note! The Jews are the "so-called circumcision" - this is the same point as in Romans 2:25 ff: they are Jews, but not true Jews] -(Ephesians 2:12) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ [=the Jewish Messiah], excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:13) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . . (Ephesians 2:19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household. So you can see how Paul thinks in this regard. In relation to Christ, Gentiles really do become part of the "commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:12). They become "true Jews." But how does Paul explain and defend this in Romans 2:28-29? What makes these two verses so remarkable is that they are given as the explanation of how Gentiles become true Jews by "keeping the requirements of the law" (Romans 2:26) and "fulfilling the law" (Romans 2:27, more literal than "keeping" the law). Romans 2:26 says that an uncircumcised Gentile will be regarded as truly circumcised "if he keeps the law." And Romans 2:27 says that the uncircumcised Gentile will judge transgressors of the law "if he fulfills the law."

Then comes the explanation for how such "Law-keeping" or "Law-fulfilling" makes a person a Jew. He answers, Romans 2:28-29 : "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." This is amazing. The reason it's amazing is that what Paul is trying to show is why Law-keeping - Law-fulfilling - makes one a true Jew, and his answer is all about internal change, not external activity. He says, in essence, that Law-keeping or Law-fulfilling makes you a true Jew because it is not mainly an external thing, but an internal thing. It has to do mainly with the sense of the heart and not the seeing of the letter. It has to do mainly with praise that comes from God in secret, not the praise of man in public (see Matthew 6:4; Matthew 6:6; Matthew 6:18). That is what the Law is

really all about. Otherwise the argument doesn't work. The argument says: "Gentile, you can be truly circumcised to God and belong to him as a true Jew, if you fulfill the Law!" "Really?" says the Gentile, "How so?" And Paul answers, "Because being truly circumcised and being a true Jew is a matter of the heart and happens by the Spirit." Now, that answer only makes sense if "fulfilling the law" means experiencing this heart-change by the Spirit, and then living in sync with that inner change. So the point is that a person is a true Jew - a true part of God's redeemed people - if he fulfills the Law, that is, if his heart is circumcised by the Spirit to love God. Deuteronomy 30:6 promised, "The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." That's what Paul is talking about here, and you don't have to be a natural-born Jew, he says, for it to happen to you. But it wasn't happening for many Jews and it was happening for some Gentiles. Why?

Draw a Picture Let me try a picture to see if I can make this plain for the children, and then maybe the adults will get it too. At the top of the picture is God. You can't see God, so we will just write the word G-o-d. At the bottom of the picture there is a heart - our heart. In the middle between God and us there is the Law -picture a book, the Bible. Now the ultimate aim of the Law is to bring our heart and God together in a personal relationship of love and trust and obedience, not just an acquaintance like you might have with the store clerk or the mailman. But a deep and personal love relationship and fellowship. But this was not happening for the very people of the Book. Most of the Jews were reading the Law and learning the Law and summing it up in lists of regulations and doing most of them. And in all this, Paul has said, they were transgressing the Law, and their circumcision was useless and didn't help them at all (Romans 2:25).

Why? Because something is missing from the picture. What's missing? Tell me on the basis of Romans 2:29 alone. "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." What is missing is the Spirit.

How shall we draw the Spirit? He is invisible. Let's use arrows. Draw an arrow from the Law in the middle down to the heart. The Spirit takes the Law and writes it on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19-20; Ezekiel 36:27) so that we love it and it becomes part of us, rather than being merely an external pressure from the outside.

Then draw another arrow from the heart up through the Law to God. The Spirit not only takes the Law through our eyes into our hearts; it also takes us through the Law into God. And that's the ultimate goal of the Law: a personal relationship of love with the living God through his Word.

Writing Equations

Without the Spirit we either reject the Law of God out of hand, or we change it into something we can manage. And in either case we lose, and the Law condemns us: you can become a transgressor of the law by rejecting it or by trying to keep it in your own strength. Paul calls the law minus the Spirit: "letter." And he says in another place, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). So let's put two summary equations in the corner of our picture.

Law minus Spirit = 1) external religious ritual (like circumcision) 2) the need for the praise of man to keep you going 3) death, because the Law becomes mere "letter," and that kills

Law plus Spirit = 1) internal circumcision of the heart 2) satisfaction in the praise of God, even if no man approves you 3) life, because the Spirit unites us to God in love

Now what's the point of all this? The main point I want you get this morning is this: Seek and cherish the work of the Spirit of God in your life to make you a true Jew. Our salvation hangs on this - the work of the Spirit -

1) circumcising our heart to love the Lord (Deuteronomy 30:6) 2) writing the Law of God on our heart (Jeremiah 31:33) 3) freeing us from our need for the praise of man (Romans 2:29) All of this is what Christ obtained for us when he shed his blood to seal the new covenant (Luke 20:22; Hebrews 13:20). But still someone may say, "Is it really important that we think this way about our salvation? Can't I just be a simple Christian, and not worry about being a Jew, or a descendant of Abraham, or circumcised in heart?

Wild Branches Grafted into the Olive Tree

I think the way I will answer that question is to take you to Romans 11:1-36 and simply walk with you through one more text and let you decide how important you think this is. In Romans 11:17-25, Paul compares the true Israel to a cultivated olive tree with natural branches, and the Gentile world to a wild olive tree with wild olive branches. I will make a few comments as we read starting at Romans 11:17.

(17) But if some of the branches [= some Jews by birth] were broken off, and you, being a wild olive [= Gentiles], were grafted in among them [= became true Jews, or the true circumcision, as Paul says in Romans 2:26-29] and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree [the root of the olive tree is the covenant God made with Abraham and his true descendants, and to become a partaker of this root is to became a beneficiary of salvation, the promise made to Abraham and his descendants that he would be their God and they would be his people; if you are grafted in -if you become a part of true Israel - that's yours], (18) do not be arrogant [you Gentiles] toward the branches [the natural Jews]; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you [O how easily we get this turned around, thinking that Christianity is the mother and Judaism is the dependent daughter, when in fact, Judaism is the mother and Christianity is the dependent daughter. Our life, our hope, our salvation is sustained only by God's commitment to the covenants he has made with Israel -"the root supports you," not vice versa].

(19) You will say then [you Gentiles], "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." (20) Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief [so we see that faith is what makes you a Jew or not, which, in view of Romans 2:26-27, means the essence of Law - keeping it in faith], but you stand by your faith [you have a part in this rich root of the promise of God to be your God if you believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as Paul said in Galatians 3:7, "It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham" - you stand only by faith; that's the essence of being a true Jew and part of the Israel of God]. Do not be conceited, but fear; (21) for if God did not spare the natural branches [Jews have been broken off and condemned for unbelief], He will not spare you either [you can be as deceived as they were about being a true Jew if you try to cling to this tree without the Spirit changing your heart].

(22) Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell [Jews who were not true Jews, uncircumcised in heart], severity, but to you [Gentiles who have the Spirit of God and faith in Christ], God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness [that is, continue in faith by the power of the Spirit]; otherwise you also will be cut off [O how many professing Christians there are whose attachment to the tree of life is simply external and ritualistic, without the work of the Spirit circumcising their hearts to love God]. (23) And they [the broken-off branches of the Jews] also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (24) For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? (25) For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery - so that you will not be wise in your own estimation - that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so [= thus] all Israel will be saved. Is it important for you to be a true Jew? All of God's saving blessings come to the world through the rich root of the olive tree, the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be their God. There is no salvation outside Israel. Paul wrote these things to the Gentile church in Rome for a reason; and I preach them to you for a reason. I want you to be grafted into the olive tree and to remain firm by faith and drink of the rich root of God's promises and be saved. So consider the kindness and severity of God (Romans 11:20) and remain in his kindness.

Other Relevant Texts to Be Studied

Genesis 17:25 - And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 In the very same day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son.

Leviticus 26:40 - If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me -- 41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies -- or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

Deuteronomy 10:14 - Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 15 Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. 16 So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 17 For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.

Jeremiah 4:4 - Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds.

Jeremiah 9:23 - Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. 25 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "that I will punish all who are

circumcised and yet uncircumcised -- 26 Egypt and Judah, and Edom and the sons of Ammon, and Moab and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart."

Matthew 8:10 - Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 15:22 - And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

Romans 9:6 - But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

1 Corinthians 7:19 - Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

Galatians 5:6 - For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

Galatians 6:15 - For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Php 3:1 - Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Colossians 2:11 - In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

Revelation 3:9 - Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie -- I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

Revelation 2:9 - I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. By John Piper. ©Desiring God Ministries.

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03.01. Infant Baptism and the New Covenant Community

Infant Baptism and the New Covenant Community February 14, 1993 1. In every New Testament command and instance of baptism repentance and faith precede baptism

Acts 2:37-38, Acts 2:41 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . ." 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

2. There are no instances of infant baptism in the Bible.

What about household baptisms (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16)?

It is an argument from silence that infants were included in these three occasions. Moreover, in Acts 16:30-33 Luke points that the Word of God was spoken to all those who were baptized, thus suggesting that not infants, but those who could hear the Word, were baptized.

Acts 16:30-40 [The jailer said], "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

3. Baptism IS described by Paul as an expression of faith.

Colossians 2:11-23 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which [i.e., baptism] you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Thus baptism is an expression of faith, and the raising with Christ that happens in baptism happens by virtue of baptism’s being an expression of faith - which infants cannot perform.

4. Baptism is described by Peter as an appeal to God by the person being baptized.

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Baptism saves in the sense that it is the outward expression of an inward appeal to God, not as a mere water ritual. It saves the way the confession of the lips saves in Romans 10:9 - insofar as the confession of the lips is an expression of the faith of the heart. But what about the sign of the covenant made with the children of Israelites in the Old Covenant?

Genesis 17:7-27 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." 9 God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised."

Heidelberg Catechism:

[Infants of Christian parents] belong to the covenant and people of God . . . they also are to be baptized as a sign of the covenant, to be ingrafted into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers, as was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, in place of which in the New Testament baptism is appointed.

Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God The seed and posterity of the faithful born within the church have by their birth an interest in the covenant and right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament . . .

Why is baptism not administered to the children of Christian parents in the New Covenant as circumcision was administered to the children of Jewish parents in the former covenant?

5. Because the New Covenant members are not defined by physical descent, as the old covenant members were, but by God’s writing his law on their heart and calling them to himself and bringing them to repentance and faith. In accord with this narrowing of the covenant people to those who are truly born of God, the new sign of the covenant is meant to signify that a person is indeed part of that new born covenant community, which is evident by faith. In the same way that a change in the sign came in to allow both men and women to participate in the sign (baptism instead of circumcision), thus making it clearer than before that women and men are equal heirs of salvation (1 Peter 3:7), so also a change in the recipients of the sign came in to make it clearer that under the New Covenant the people of God are not determined at all by physical descent, but by spiritual transformation, evidenced in faith.

5.1 John the Baptist called for baptism for those already having the sign of the covenant, showing that a new meaning was being given to the sign - no longer pointing to physical descent from Abraham, but rather spiritual descent through faith and repentance.

Matthew 3:7-17 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ’We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

5.2 Jesus affirmed John’s ministry and defined the children of God not as those born of certain parents but those born of God through faith.

John 1:12 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

5.3 Paul clarified that the children of Abraham to whom the promise was made were not those born according to the flesh, but those born according to promise. Children of promise and children of the flesh are not the same.

Romans 9:6-33 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Galatians 3:6-29 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

5.4. The children to whom the promise is made are the children who are "called," and the call of God is free and bound to no physical family.

Acts 2:39 For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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03.02. Baptism and Geneology of Jesus

The Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus February 22, 1981

Luke 3:21-38 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

23 Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, 25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, 27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, 29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, 32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, 33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, 36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, 37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

You can learn more from a book if you stop and ask it questions than if you just read it passively. That includes the Bible too. One of the great problems in Bible reading is that we move our eyes over the words and come to the end of a column and don’t know what we’ve read; we don’t feel our minds or spirits expanded because we saw nothing fresh. It was purely mechanical. There was no discovery, no life, no breakthroughs to new insight. One of the best ways to change that is to train yourself to ask questions of the text. Often the posing of the question itself will already carry its answer with it and will open your mind to new things. This fairly prosaic historical text in Luke 3:21-38 gives me an opportunity to show you what I mean. I’ll simply take you with me through this text pointing out the questions I asked and the answers I came up with. My guess is that as you follow me questions of your own will arise. Good questions usually beget other questions and that’s how insight grows and grows.

1) Why does Luke record the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Luke 3:20) before he records Jesus’ baptism by John? This is such an odd order of events that there must be some point. The answer would seem to be that Luke wants to emphasize the break between John’s ministry and Jesus’ ministry. Luke 3:15 shows that some people thought John might be the Messiah. Others

could think that Jesus was one of John's disciples. One way to keep clear in the reader's mind that a tremendous turning point in redemptive history came when Jesus started preaching, was to mention John's imprisonment even before Jesus comes on the scene. Luke 16:16 says, "The law and the prophets were until John, since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached." There is a break between the period of the law and prophets and the period of Jesus preaching of the Kingdom. John belonged to the former period and so Luke did not want to stress the slight overlap in Jesus' and John's ministry (John 3:22 f). In Luke 7:26-28 Jesus says John was a prophet and more than a prophet; the preparer of my way. "I tell you among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he." John was a great prophet but now something new has come; the Messiah is here and calling people into his Kingdom, and the least person in the Messiah's Kingdom has a greater privilege than John. So in Luke's mind there was a great break between John's work and Jesus' work and the odd order of his narrative stresses this break.

Even in Luke 3:21 I think this is confirmed in the word "all": "now when all the people were baptized. . ." This means that Jesus' baptism was not just a part of John's work but its climax. We don't have to press "all" to mean that Jesus was the very last person John baptized, but it must mean that John's ministry was virtually done when Jesus was baptized. This too shows that the coming of Jesus meant the going of John: "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This also gives us help in answering my second question.

2) Why did Jesus come to be baptized since John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3) and Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15)?

Luke shows in two ways that what is happening here is not important mainly because of the baptism but because of what happens afterward. First, Luke shows that Jesus came at the climax of John's ministry, "when all the people were baptized," and, therefore, that Jesus was not just one of the crowd. His coming had special significance. Second, the way Luke put his sentence together in Luke 3:22-23 shows that the baptism is secondary and what happened afterwards is primary: the baptism of the people and then of Jesus are simply introductory time clauses telling when the last three things happened: "After all were baptized and Jesus was baptized and praying, then (the amazing thing happened) the heaven was opened, the Spirit came and God spoke." So Luke's interest is different from Matthew's, who focuses on the baptism itself and poses the very question we have posed. He tells (in Matthew 3:14-15) how John tried to prevent Jesus saying, "'I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.'" So Luke treats the baptism of Jesus simply as the occasion when God spoke to him from heaven, but Matthew deals with the baptism itself as a problem for one who had no sins to be forgiven. The answer he gives is that it is fitting for him to do everything that is right. There was enough in John's baptism for Jesus to affirm that the event was not meaningless: negatively it meant turning from sin, and positively it meant trusting God. Jesus could affirm both: he resolved not to sin but always to turn from it and he committed himself always to trust God.

Probably then--and this is what Luke picks up on--Jesus' coming to be baptized was a decisive step of commitment to begin his public ministry. Thus he aligns himself with the people who turn from sin and trust God and resolves to fulfill his calling in that spirit. Luke focuses on God's

approval and confirmation of his Son’s resolve.

3) But before we look at God’s confirmation in Luke 3:22 there was another question on Luke 3:21 : Why does Luke mention that Jesus was praying when the heavens opened and the Spirit came and God spoke? None of the other gospels tell us this. We are going to see in this gospel that Luke loves to picture Jesus in prayer. He shows him praying at all the crucial turning points of his life: here at the baptism, at the selection of the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12), at Peter’s confession (Luke 9:18), at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28) in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41); on the cross (Luke 23:34). He tells us that Jesus went repeatedly to the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16) and that he spent whole nights in prayer (Luke 6:12). The point of all this must be to show that even in Jesus’ life there is a correlation between earnest prayer and the blessing of God. Now what blessing was Jesus praying for after his baptism? Luke 11:13 suggests the answer I think; Luke’s version is different from Matthew’s: "If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" What should obedient children ask from their heavenly Father? The Holy Spirit. Not that we or Jesus did not already have the Holy Spirit within us--even the weakest believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). But the Holy Spirit is infinite and always has more of himself to give and his means of manifesting himself are so varied there is always some new experience awaiting those who go hard after his fullness.

I assume that Jesus was praying for a manifestation of the Spirit to confirm to him his Messiahship and that God’s favor was on him as he set out on his public ministry. God answered his prayer. And that leads to a fourth question.

4) What is the significance of the Spirit’s descending in the form of a dove and God’s declaration of his love? God answers Jesus’ prayer by sending his Spirit in a visible form and then declaring verbally his delight in his Son: "You are my beloved son; in you I delight." This is a green light for Jesus. And not just a green light but a powerful enablement and directive. The way the Spirit comes gives a direction for how its power is to be used. The word "dove" occurs on Jesus’ lips one time in the gospels, namely Matthew 10:16 : "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." The dove suggests to Jesus’ purity, meekness, innocence It was not majestic like the eagle or fierce like the hawk or flamboyant like the cardinal. It was simple, common, innocent, the kind of bird poor people could offer for a sacrifice (Luke 2:24; Leviticus 12:8). This was a directive to Jesus from the Father: the Spirit with which I anoint you is not for ostentation or for earthly battle. What is it for? An answer comes from Isaiah 42:1-4. This text is relevant because this is where the words of God the Father come from which follow the giving of the Spirit: "Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law." The beauty of this picture is that he has the power to bring forth justice to the nations but he will not use it to "break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick." That is he will be tender with the weak and failing. He will be dove-like not hawk-like. So when God anoints Jesus with the Spirit in the form of a dove he directs him to use his power in meekness and tenderness and love. Which Jesus does: "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest . . . for I

am meek and lowly"--I have the Spirit of a dove not a hawk. He says in Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . ."--the bruised reeds of the world and the smoldering wicks. To these he comes with his dove-like Spirit and heals and fans into flame. So in summary, what Luke is doing in Luke 4:21-22 is setting Jesus' ministry off from John's, demonstrating that he has God's fullest approval and blessing and revealing the kind of ministry he will have--namely a dove-like ministry.

Now comes the genealogy and a whole bunch of questions leap off the page into our minds. In Matthew and Mark the account of Jesus' temptations comes right after the account of his baptism, but Luke inserts the genealogy between these two accounts. Why? Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to Adam while Matthew's goes back only to Abraham. Why? The names in the two genealogies from Jesus back to king David are almost all different. Why? And are we to imagine that man is only as old as the number of years that can be calculated for all these names back to Adam? Let's look at some answers to these four questions very briefly in reverse order.

1) No, we need not think that the sum of each of these person's life equals the age of man. The main reason is that in Jewish lineage lists "son" was often used also in the sense of "grandson" or even "descendant." In fact in Luke 3:24-38 the word "son" does not even occur in Greek. It simply says Heli was "of Matthat, of Levi, of Melchi" and so on. What matters in a lineage is not that every member be included but that the genuine line of descent be maintained.

We know from Matthew's genealogy that some names were left out. In Matthew 1:8 it says Joram was the father of Uzziah; but in 1 Chronicles 3:11 there are three other names listed between these two. One of the reasons for this is so that Matthew could have three equal groups of 14 names each (Matthew 1:17). The same motive might have been at work in Luke's genealogy because there appear to be 11 groups of 7 names each with all the important figures either at the beginning or end of a group. But Luke doesn't draw attention to this like Matthew does so we shouldn't press it. So I don't think we are bound to Ussher chronology which makes man about 6000 years old. Just how old man is is a problem we'll leave for another time.

2) Why, when you compare Matthew's genealogy with Luke's between David and Jesus are they almost completely different? All the names but two are different. A major commentary published in 1978 by I. H. Marshall says, "It is only right therefore to admit that the problem caused by the existence of the two genealogies is insoluble with the evidence presently at our disposal" (p. 159). What he means is not that the two are in unresolvable conflict. There are suggested solutions, but we just don't know enough to be sure these solutions are the proper ones. I'll just mention two. One suggestion is that from David to Jesus, Matthew "gives the legal descendants of David--the men who would have been legally the heir to the Davidic throne if that throne had continued--while Luke gives the descendants of David in that particular time to which finally Joseph, the husband of Mary, belonged" (Machen, Virgin Birth, p. 204). So, for example Luke says in Luke 3:31 that the son of David was Nathan (2 Samuel 5:14) while Matthew in Matthew 1:6 says the son of David was Solomon, who was heir to the throne. The two lines could easily merge whenever one of Nathan's descendants became the rightful heir to the throne. The other suggested solution is that Luke gives Mary's genealogy and Matthew gives Joseph's as Jesus' legal father. The key to this interpretation is extending the parenthesis of Luke 3:23 to include Joseph. So it would read, "Jesus was about 30 years old being the son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli etc." By

including "of Joseph" in the parenthesis the point is made that Jesus is really the son of Mary not Joseph and Heli is his grandfather (Mary's father). Both of these solutions are possible; the first is more probable; but neither can be proved.

3) The last two questions are more important because they help us understand Luke's message. Why does the genealogy go back to Adam while Matthew's stops at Abraham? The reason surely is that Matthew is writing for Jews who are interested in Jesus' connection with father Abraham, but Luke is writing for a Gentile and therefore is more interested in Jesus' solidarity with all men through his descent from Adam. This fits beautifully with the emphasis we have seen already on the universality of the gospel--it is open to all men; Jesus is not just a son of Abraham; more importantly he is son of Adam; he is a man. His humanity not his ethnicity is the crucial thing. That seems to be Luke's point in attaching him to Adam. But there may be more as we pose our last question.

4) Why did Luke insert the genealogy here between the baptism and temptation of Jesus which Matthew and Mark put together? I find the key in the surprising ending of the genealogy: Luke doesn't stop with Adam but says Adam was "son of God." I doubt that Luke wants us to think of Jesus as the son of God in the same sense that Abraham and David and all the other descendants of Adam were. Luke 1:35 shows that his sonship depends on his unique creation in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. So it has seemed to many commentators that the reason Adam is called the son of God is to establish a comparison between Adam and Jesus as uniquely and immediately, though not identically, created by God. This then calls to mind Paul's teaching that Christ is a second Adam, the beginner of a new humanity. In 1 Corinthians 15:47-49 Paul says, "The first man was from the earth a man of dust, the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." There is no reason to think Luke was ignorant of this idea since he was with Paul as much as anyone. If this was before his mind then one reason he inserted the genealogy here was to stress that like Adam Jesus was man and was uniquely created by God, and that therefore he is a new and second Adam whose ministry will be to create and assemble a new race of humans who are not marked by Jewishness or non-Jewishness but by the dove-like character of the Holy Spirit. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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03.03. Brothers, Magnify the Meaning of Baptism

Brothers, Magnify the Meaning of Baptism

I recall a beautiful day in 1973. Prof. Leonhard Goppelt had invited his university seminar on baptism to a retreat south of Munich in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. He was Lutheran and I was the lone American - and a Baptist. We met in a monastery and for several hours debated the issue of infant baptism vs. Believer baptism. It was a two-man show: sort of a David and Goliath affair. Only there were no Baptist Israelites cheering me on. Nor did Professor Goppelt fall. But to this day I believe the flight of my stones was true and that only the impervious power of a 17-century tradition protected the bastion of pedobaptism. But now I have come to see that the "battle of Bavaria" was fought at the wrong level. Since coming to Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, I have taught about ten four-week membership classes. Almost every time, there have been Lutherans or Catholics or Presbyterians or Covenanters or the like who were "baptized" as infants but want to join our church. Month by month my understanding of why I accept believer baptism has increased. And now I see that I never got to the root in Bavaria.

Here's the way my thought has progressed. There have been three stages (not unlike childhood, adolescence and maturity).

First I saw that every baptism recorded in the Bible was the baptism of an adult who had professed faith in Christ. Nowhere in Scripture is there any instance of an infant being baptized. The "household baptisms" (mentioned in Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 are exceptions to this only if one assumes that the "household" included infants. But, in fact, Luke steers us away from this assumption in Acts 16:32 by saying that Paul first "spoke the word of the Lord. . .to all that were in his [the jailer's] house," and then baptized them.

Besides the absence of infant baptism in Scripture, I also notice (as every Baptist schoolboy knows) that the order of Peter's command was "Repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). I saw no reason ever to reverse the order. But I gradually came to see that these observations were only suggestive, not compelling. That no infant baptism are recorded does not prove there weren't any. And that Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized," to an adult audience does not rule out the possibility of his saying something different about infants. So I grew up to my second stage and decided, "I had better turn away from the examples of baptism to the teaching about baptism." Perhaps the meaning of Luke's narrative would be clarified by the exposition of Paul and Peter. Of course Romans 6:1-11 came to mind. But this was Professor Goppelt's favorite weapon, because it contains not a word about faith or about any conscious response to God until Romans 6:11; and there the response came after baptism. So he uses Roman 6 as the classic defense of infant baptism. To me it goes either way in isolation. But Colossians 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:21 seemed to me to be devastating to the pedobaptist viewpoint. Paul compares baptism with circumcision and says, "You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." This says clearly: in baptism we are raised through faith. Baptism is effectual as an expression of faith. I did not see how an infant could

properly accept this sign of faith.

Then 1 Peter 3:21 said, "Baptism. . . saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." This text frightens many Baptists away because it seems to come close to the Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican notion that the rite in and of itself saves. But in fleeing from this text we throw away a powerful argument for believer baptism. For as J.D.G. Dunn says, this is the closest thing we have to a definition which includes faith. Baptism is "an appeal to God." That is, baptism is the cry of faith to God. In that senses and to that degree, it is part of God's means of salvation. This should not scare us off any more than the sentence, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord. . . you will be saved." The movement of the lips in the air and the movement of the body in water save only in the sense that they express the appeal and faith of the heart toward God. So it seemed to me that Colossians 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:21 sewed up the case against baptizing infants who could not yet believe in Christ or appeal to God. But that is where my Bavarian battle stopped. Since then I have been shown by a long succession of arguments in my membership classes that even these texts leave open the [remote!] possibility that an infant can be baptized on the strength of its parents' faith and in hope of its own eventual "confirmation." It is just as possible that these passages have relevance only for the missionary setting where adults are being converted and baptized. If Paul and Peter had addressed the issue of new infants in Christian homes, maybe they would have come off as good Presbyterians.

I doubt it. For there is now a third stage of reasoning in favor of believer baptism. There is a grand biblical and Baptist response to the Heidelberg Catechism, which says that infants of Christian parent "belong to the covenant and people of God . . . they also are to be baptized as a sign of the covenant, to be ingrafted into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers, as was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, in place of which in the New Testament baptism is appointed." In other words, the justification of infant baptism in the Reformed churches hangs on the fact that baptism is the New Testament counterpart of circumcision.

There is in fact an important continuity between the signs of circumcision and baptism, but the Presbyterian representatives of Reformed theology have undervalued the discontinuity. This is the root difference between Baptists and Presbyterians on baptism. I am a Baptist because I believe that on this score we honor both the continuity and discontinuity between Israel and the church and between their respective covenant signs. The continuity is expressed like this: Just as circumcision was administered to all the physical sons of Abraham who made up the physical Israel, so baptism should be administered to all the spiritual sons of Abraham who make up the spiritual Israel, the church. But who are these spiritual sons of Abraham who constitute the people of God in our age?

Galatians 3:7 says, "So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham." The new thing, since Jesus has come, is that the covenant people of God are no longer a political, ethnic nation, but a body of believers.

John the Baptist inaugurated this change and introduced the new sign of baptism. By calling all Jews to repent and be baptized, John declared powerfully and offensively that physical descent does not make one part of God's family and that circumcision, which signifies a physical relationship, will now be replaced by baptism, which signifies a spiritual relationship. The apostle

Paul picks up this new emphasis, especially in Romans 9:1-33, and says, "Not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants. . . it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God" (Romans 9:7-8).

Therefore a very important change has occurred in redemptive history. There is discontinuity as well as continuity.

Zwingli and Calvin and their heirs have treated signs of the covenant as if no significant changes happened with the coming of Christ. But God is forming His people today differently than when He strove with an ethnic people called Israel. The people of God are no longer formed through natural kinship, but through supernatural conversion to faith in Christ. With the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus and the apostles, the emphasis now is that the spiritual status of your parents does not determine your membership in the covenant community. The beneficiaries of the blessings of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham. These are the ones who belong to the covenant community. And these are the ones who should receive the sign of the covenant: believer baptism. So if I could go back and do Bavaria again, I would get to the root in a hurry. This is where our "defense and confirmation" will be won or lost. But the Lord brings us through childhood, adolescence and maturity for a reason. Every stage of reasoning is useful. Know your audience, brothers, and magnify the meaning of baptism. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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03.04. A Celebration of Baptism

A Celebration of Baptism

April 18, 1982

Acts 2:36-42

Just before Jesus came on the scene "preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel,"' (Mark 1:14-15), another man, John the Baptist, had been preparing the people of Israel by calling them to repent, turn to God in faith and obedience and be baptized. What did the baptism of John mean?

It meant that the Messiah has arrived; he will be gathering a new people for himself; the mark of this new people is not Jewishness but repentance and faith. Therefore Jews should not say to John's demand for repentance: "But we have Abraham as our father and we bear the marks of circumcision, the sign of the covenant." What counts in the new people is not who your parents are but whom you live for; and therefore a new symbol for the new covenant people is given, baptism; and it is given in John's ministry only to those who repent and believe. In other words by calling all Jews to be baptized John declared powerfully that physical descent does not make one part of God's family, and therefore circumcision which signified a physical relationship will now be replaced by baptism which signifies spiritual relationship. And so John the Baptist lays the foundation for the New Testament understanding of baptism which we in the Baptist tradition today try to preserve.

Jesus himself accepted baptism from John in order to identify himself with John's teaching and with this new people of faith. Jesus' disciples picked up John's practice and baptized as a part of Jesus' ministry (John 3:26; John 4:2). Then at the end of his earthly ministry Jesus commissioned the church to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Several weeks later the apostles preached their first sermon to the Jewish people gathered for Pentecost in Jerusalem. Peter closed with these words: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." Following in the footsteps of John the Baptist and in obedience to their Lord's command, the apostles call the nation of Israel to repent and to signify that repentance through baptism. And the promise that they hold out is not merely for this generation but for their children also and not only for those near but those who are far away. It is for everyone who hears and responds to the call of God. Forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit is offered to all who turn to follow Christ and go on to express that transformation in baptism. So we can see how the ordinance of Christian baptism began with John the Baptist, was accepted by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, was practiced by his disciples, was commanded by the Lord after his resurrection and was offered in the early church to all who would

repent and believe in Jesus Christ. And we can see the meaning it attained. It was a sign of repentance and faith in Christ as the Savior and Lord of a new people. Baptism symbolizes conversion to Jesus. It represents a turning from the old life and an alignment of ourselves with Christ. As St. Paul put it, "We are buried with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we to might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). It symbolizes death to the old, unbelieving way and the coming alive of a new person who trusts and obeys Jesus.

One of the things that makes our view of baptism distinct is that we do not think infants should be baptized. The reason is that, on the one hand, infants are not capable of repentance or faith; and, on the other hand, the notion that a person should inherit the blessings of a Christian or be considered a Christian by virtue of his parents' faith is contrary to New Testament teaching. The most credible and respectable defense of infant baptism says that just as in Israel circumcision was given to eight-day-old infants, so in the church baptism should be given to infants of Christian parents. Now we argue that there is a correspondence between circumcision as a sign of the covenant with Israel and baptism as a sign of the new covenant. We believe, namely, that just as circumcision was administered to all the physical sons of Abraham who made up the physical Israel, so baptism should be administered to all the spiritual sons of Abraham who make up the spiritual Israel, the Church. And who are these spiritual sons of Abraham? Galatians 3:7 says: "So you see it is the people of faith who are the sons of Abraham." Since the only way to enter the true Israel of God, the Church, is by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, therefore the symbol of that entry should only be administered to those who believe. Believer baptism bears witness to the teaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:9), Jesus (Matthew 21:43) and the apostles that "not all are children of Abraham just because they are his descendants … and it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God" (Romans 9:7-8). A very important change has occurred in the way God forms his people. In the Israel of old God formed his people through natural offspring. But in the Church, the true Israel, God is forming his people not by natural kinship but through supernatural conversion to faith in Christ. Yes, there is a correspondence between circumcision for the Israel of old and baptism for the Church. Both symbolize membership in the covenant community. But there is also a crucial difference. With the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus and the apostles, the emphasis now is that the spiritual status of your parents does not determine your membership in the covenant community. The beneficiaries of the blessings of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham. These are the ones who belong to the covenant community and these are the ones (in line with Old Testament practice) who should receive the sign of the covenant.

Therefore, what we celebrate in baptism today is the mighty work of God in the hearts of children and adults to bring them to repentance and faith in Christ. When we ask if Jesus is their Savior and Lord we celebrate the eternally important truth that they have received him for their own. When we baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we celebrate the involvement of the whole Godhead in their conversion and their new relation to each person in the Trinity. When we immerse them in the water we celebrate the death and burial of Jesus Christ for our sins. When we raise them up out of the water we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and their participation in it. And when they walk out of the baptismal waters we celebrate the newness of life in love and joy that Jesus gives. My prayer is that the baptismal candidates themselves and

everyone who witnesses their baptism will experience a rekindling of love to God for all he has done for us in making us part of the new covenant people through repentance and faith. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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Chapter 40

03.05. I Baptize You with Water

I Baptize You with Water The Baptism of John May 4, 1997

Matthew 3:1-17

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, "MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" 4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. 16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Baptism : part of Jesus' Ministry and Part of our Mission

Today we begin a brief series on the Biblical teachings concerning baptism. There are several reasons for this. One is that in almost seventeen years I have never preached a series of messages on the Biblical meaning of baptism. This is a gaping hole in our treatment of the whole message of the Bible for our time.

Another reason is that Jesus made baptism part of his ministry and part of our mission. Baptism is not man's idea. It was God's idea. It is not a denominational thing. It is a Biblical thing. It started with John the Baptist at the beginning of our gospels. He came, Matthew 3:11 says, to "baptize with water for repentance." It continued in the ministry of Jesus himself. John 4:1 says, "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John," although it was the disciples, not Jesus who did the actual immersing (John 4:2). And the practice was picked up by the church not because of

their own wisdom, but because of the command of the Lord. At the end of his earthly ministry Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). So Jesus made baptism part of his ministry and part of our mission.

Baptism : Universal in the Early Church

Another reason for the series is that the practice of baptism was universal in the early church. It was not just for converted Jews or converted gentiles, or any one specific church. It was practiced for all converts in all the churches. We know of no unbaptized believers (except the thief on the cross, Luke 23:43). For example, in Romans 6:1-23 Paul says to a church that he has never visited (in answer to a question whether Christians can sin that grace may abound), "How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:2-3). In other words, he bases his argument that Christians can't go on willfully sinning on the fact that we have all died with Christ, as baptism shows. Dead men don't sin. He assumes that the Roman believers were all baptized, and he was simply reminding them what it stood for. It was a universal, defining experience in the early church. If we are to be in sync with the entire New Testament and the entire early church we must take baptism seriously and practice it faithfully.

Finally, there is a reason for this series that relates to our situation today at Bethlehem. We believe that we have been remiss in not calling for a more forthright and public declaration of faith in response to the ministry of the word. Most American evangelicals are familiar with what Billy Graham does at the end of his preaching, calling people to walk to the front. Sometimes these are called "invitations." Sometimes "altar calls." When you look for something like this in the Bible there is no clear example. But what is clear is that when Paul preached the word, say in a synagogue or on the Areopagus, he got connected with those who believed (Acts 17:4; Acts 17:12; Acts 17:34). The Decisive, Public Way of Taking a Public Stand And if you ask what the decisive, public way of taking a Christian stand was in the New Testament, the answer is, baptism. The message Peter gave in Acts 2:1-47 ended with the words, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). Our renewed conviction is that we need to regularly offer baptism as the decisive public way for people to respond publicly to the gospel. But to do this we felt we needed a clearer understanding as a church of what baptism is. Hence the series on baptism.

Then, in a step of faith and hope in God's saving power among us through the summer, we are planning to have baptism and testimony services every Wednesday evening beginning in June, with some of them being off-site in lakes and pools. Our thought is that God has been and will be at work among us to bring people to faith and readiness for baptism, and that the guests and families that come to baptisms need to hear the testimonies of how God brought people to himself and what it means to be a Christian.

David Livingston is planning Sunday morning baptismal classes throughout the summer that will prepare a person in two weeks for following through on their profession of faith in baptism. We want to keep the time between the profession of faith and the baptism fairly short, because that is the way the New Testament did it, and because then the symbol feels more like a declaration of the new reality of faith.

Beginning with John the Baptist

Today we begin our series with the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist. This is the New Testament origin of Christian baptism. There is a close continuity between Christian Baptism and John's baptism. John began baptizing, Jesus continued baptizing, and he commanded the church to keep on with the practice : though now the act would be done in his name. So there are crucial things to learn about baptism from the baptism of John. The most important thing to learn is that when a Jewish person received John's baptism, it was a radical act of individual commitment to belong to the true people of God, based on personal confession and repentance, NOT on corporate identity with Israel through birth. This is one of the main reasons I am a Baptist, that is, this is one of the main reasons that I do not believe in baptizing infants, who cannot make this personal commitment or confession or repentance. John's baptism was an assault on the very assumptions that give rise to much infant baptism. Let me try to explain and show you what I mean from Matthew 3:1-17.

First of all, get the picture. According to Matthew 3:1-2, John comes into "the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" He is in Judea and he is preaching to Jews, God's chosen people. He is the promised prophet who would come and prepare the way of the Lord : make things ready for the Messiah. It's important to realize that John's ministry was to Jews, not primarily to Gentiles. The reason this is important is that the Jews are already God's chosen people in an outward, ethnic sense. So this means that John's radical call to repentance was being given to Jews who were already part of the historic people of God. These are the people John was telling to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. These were people who were part of God's covenant and they had the sign of the covenant : at least the men did : namely, circumcision.

Confess Your Sin, Repent, be Baptized To these people, who were ethnic Jews, part of God's covenant people, having the sign of the covenant, circumcision, John said, in effect, "Confess your sins, repent, and signal this with baptism, because God's wrath is hanging over you like an axe over the root of a tree." Look at Matthew 3:6 : "They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins." This is why his baptism was called "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). He called for the Jews to admit that they were sinners and needed to get right with God, and to admit that being Jews was no guarantee of being saved. In other words baptism was a sign that they were renouncing their old dependency on ethnic Jewishness and were relying wholly on the mercy of God to forgive those who confess their sins and repent.

You can see this even more clearly in Matthew 3:7 : "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'" That's the issue : the wrath of God. Not just on the nations who are uncircumcised, but even on God's own people. In other words, Jewishness was no guarantee of salvation. Being born into a covenant family was no guarantee of being a child of God. Baptism is John's new sign of belonging of the true people of God : not based on Jewishness or being born into a covenant family, but based on radically personal, individual repentance and faith. They got baptized one by one to show that they were repenting as individuals, and joining the true people of God : the true Israel, not simply the old ethnic Israel, but the true remnant of those who personally

repent and believe. Merely traditional Jews were become true spiritual Jews through repentance : at least that was John’s aim.

"We Have Abraham as our Father"

We see even more deeply into John’s position when John responds to the Pharisees and Sadducees. He says in Matthew 3:8, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." And then he reads their minds, it seems, and says in Matthew 3:9, "And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." Now what were the Pharisees and Sadducees really saying with the words, "We have Abraham as our father!"? They were saying, "Don’t talk to us about the wrath of God. Wrath belongs to the gentiles, not to the descendants of Abraham." In other words, they were saying that physical descent from Abraham guaranteed the security of their salvation. There was no threat of wrath! "We have Abraham as our father!" What was their reasoning? Well, John shows us by the way he responds. In Matthew 3:9 b he says, "I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." In other words, what they were thinking was that God had made a promise to the children of Abraham that they would be blessed, not just with temporal blessings, but with eternal blessings (he would be their God and they his people) and that God would always be for them as his covenant people. Since God cannot lie, the children of Abraham are safe, no matter what, because if God destroyed his own people, then there would be no one left of fulfil the promises to, and he would prove to be a liar. So they use the faithfulness of God as their warrant for security. To this John has a stunning response: he says, you are right about the faithfulness of God, but you make a terrible mistake in thinking that, if you perish in his wrath, he can’t fulfil his promises. He can, and he will. God can, if he must, raise up children to Abraham from these stones (or from Gentiles!). In other words God is not boxed in or limited, the way you think he is. He will be faithful to fulfill his promises to the children to Abraham, but he will not fulfill them to unbelieving, unrepentant children of Abraham. And if all of the children should be unrepentant and unbelieving, he would raise up from stones children who would believe and repent.

God Can Raise up Children Who Believe and Repent Now what does all this tell us about baptism? Three things:

1. It tells us that John’s baptism is not simple continuation of circumcision. This is important because those who defend infant baptism often appeal to circumcision as the old sign of the covenant and say that baptism is the new sign. The one was given to infants and so should the other be. Circumcision was the sign of belonging to the Old Covenant people of God. Every Jewish male received it. If you were born Jewish, you received the sign of the covenant as a baby boy. So at least some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to see circumcision as the sign of God’s favor and of their security as the covenant people. But John’s baptism was a radical attack on this false security. He infuriated the Pharisees by calling the people to renounce reliance on the sign of the covenant that they got when they were infants, and to receive another sign to show that they were not relying on Jewish birth, but on the mercy of God received by repentance and faith. A new people within Israel was being formed, and a new sign of a new covenant was being instituted. It was not a simple continuation of circumcision. It was an indictment of a misuse of circumcision as a guarantee of salvation. Circumcision was a sign of ethnic continuity; baptism

was a sign of spiritual reality.

2. John’s baptism was a sign of personal, individual repentance, not a sign of birth into a covenant family. It is hard to overstate how radical this was in John’s day. The Jews already had a sign of the covenant, circumcision. John came calling for repentance and offering a new sign, baptism. This was incredibly offensive, far more offensive even than when a Baptist today says that baptism is not a sign to be received by infants born into a Christian home, but a sign of repentance and faith that a person chooses for himself, even if he already has been christened as an infant, the way the Jews were circumcised as infants. John’s baptism is the beginning of the radical, individual Christian ordinance of baptizing those who believe.

3. John’s baptism fits what we are going to see in all the rest of the New Testament, and indeed in all the first two centuries of the Christian era until A.D. 200 when Tertullian mentions infant baptism for the first time in any historical document, namely, that all baptism was the baptism of believers, not infants. And the reason was that baptism was the sign of belonging to the new people of God who are constituted not by birth or ethnic identity, but by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The way of salvation is repentance and faith in Christ, not ethnic identity or birth to Christian parents. God calls us today, no matter who our parents were, and no matter what ritual we received as infants : God calls us today to repent and believe on Christ alone for salvation and to receive the new sign of the new covenant of the people of God : the sign of repentance and faith, baptism. So I call on every one of you who has not followed Christ in this way, "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). This is the call of God. This is the path of obedience and life. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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Chapter 41

03.06. Buried and Raised in Baptism through Faith

Buried and Raised in Baptism through Faith May 11, 1997 Colossians 2:8-15

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Does Christian Baptism Parallel Old Testament Circumcision? This is the second in a four-part series on Christian baptism. Let me tell you a bit about how I am choosing the texts to preach from. I discovered in my seminary and graduate school days that my old ways of defending believer's baptism were not compelling. I used to spend time pointing out that all the baptisms described in the New Testament are baptisms of believers and that all the commands to be baptized are given to believers. I used to point out that infant baptism is simply not mentioned in the Bible and that it is questionable to build a crucial church practice on a theological inference, without explicit Biblical teaching when all the examples go in the opposite direction. But I discovered that those who baptize infants ("paedobaptists") were not swayed by these observations, because they pointed out that, of course, we only see believer's baptism in the New Testament since we are dealing in all these settings with first generation evangelism, not with second generation child-rearing. Everybody agrees that the only adults that should be baptized are believing adults. The issue is, what happens when these baptized Christian adults have children? So they pointed out that all my statistics are irrelevant and the question boils down to one of theological inference. Specifically, does Christian baptism parallel Old Testament circumcision as the sign of those who join the covenant people of God, and if so, should not the children of Christians receive baptism the way the sons of Israel received circumcision? For example, the Heidelberg Catechism was written in 1562 as an expression of the Reformed faith. It is said by some to have the intimacy of Martin Luther and the charity of Philip Melanchthon and the fire of John Calvin : three great Reformers in the 16th century. At the end of the section on baptism, question #74 asks, "Are infants also to be baptized?" The answer goes like this:

Yes; for since they, as well as their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God, and both redemption from sin and the Holy Ghost, who works faith, are through the blood of Christ promised to them no less than to their parents, they are also by Baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be ingrafted into the Christian Church, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers, as was

done in the Old testament by Circumcision, in place of which in the New Testament Baptism is appointed.

Now this has been the standard understanding of baptism among Presbyterians and Congregationalists and Methodists and many others for hundreds of years. Lutherans and Catholics defend the practice of infant baptism differently, putting more emphasis than these other churches have on the actual regenerating effect of the act. Are New Truths Revealed in the New Covenant? So one of the most crucial questions you must face as you ponder the New Testament command to be baptized is whether you think this parallel with circumcision settles the matter. That is, is it the will of God revealed in the New Testament that Baptism and circumcision correspond so closely that what circumcision signified, baptism signifies? Or are there new truths about the creation and nature of the people of God in the New Covenant that point toward a discontinuity as well as continuity between circumcision and baptism?

Well, in my struggles with this issue over the years, especially the years in graduate school when I was studying mainly with paedobaptists, three or four texts, more than any others, kept me from embracing the argument from circumcision. One is Colossians 2:11-12. Another is 1 Peter 3:21. Another is Romans 9:8. And another is Galatians 3:26-27. I will take the Colossians text today and build on the others in the weeks to come. But first let’s make sure we don’t miss the forest for the trees. This text (Colossians 2:10-15) is a virtual rain forest of strong gospel timber. Get a bird’s eye view of it with me. It’s all about what God has done for us (in history, objectively through Christ), and what he has done in us so that we will indeed inherit what he purchased What God Has Done For Us

Take first the objective, historical, external work of God in Colossians 2:14-15. In essence, what these two verses tell us is that our two greatest enemies were defeated in the death of Christ. Nothing more powerful than the death of Christ has ever happened. The first enemy defeated was the "certificate of debt" that was filed against us in the courtroom of heaven. In other words, because of our sin and rebellion, the laws of God had become a deadly witness against us and we were in such deep debt to God that there was no way out. Colossians 2:14 says that Christ canceled that whole debt by paying it all on the cross. "[He] canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." So the great enemy of our sin and guilt and debt, Christ defeated. That happened in history, objectively, outside us. The second enemy defeated was the host of evil spiritual beings : the devil and his forces. Colossians 2:15 : "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." It’s true that we must still "wrestle with principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12), but if we wrestle in the power of Christ and his shed blood, they are as good as defeated, because the blow he struck was lethal. Revelation 12:11 says that believers "overcame [the devil] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death." We must fight. But the battle belongs to the Lord and the decisive blow has been struck at Calvary. Satan cannot destroy us.

What God Has Done in Us

Now besides these two great objective, external, historical triumphs over our worst enemies (the debt of sin before God and the devil’s hosts on earth), this forest also describes what God does in

us : not just for us and outside of us but in us so that we benefit from what was done outside of us.

He uses two pictures: one is circumcision and the other is resurrection. Colossians 2:13 focuses mainly on our resurrection: When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. So you see what he does in us: we were spiritually dead, and he made us alive. This is the miracle of the new birth. You were saved because God spoke a life-giving, resurrecting word into your heart (2 Corinthians 4:6). The other picture of what God does in us is the picture of circumcision. Colossians 2:11 : In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

Now this is harder to understand because the ideas are more foreign to us. Paul compares the saving work of God in us with the practice of circumcision. He says it's like that, only this is a circumcision made "without hands" : it's a spiritual thing he is talking about, not a physical one. And he says that what is being cut away is not the male foreskin, but the "body of the flesh." In Paul's language that's probably a reference to sin-dominated, ego-dominated use of the body. What is cut away in this spiritual circumcision "without hands" is the old unbelieving, blind, rebellious self and its use of the body for sin. And that way, Paul is saying, God makes a person his very own. So we have seen two pictures of what God does for us, objectively, historically, outside ourselves to save us: he defeats the enemy of sin and the enemy of Satan. And we have seen two pictures of what God does in us to make us part of that salvation: he raises us from the dead spiritually and he circumcises our hearts and strips away the old rebellious self and makes us new.

Baptism and Circumcision

Now, in that forest of glorious good news, here's the question about the tree of baptism: is water baptism the Christian counterpart to Old Testament circumcision? Is the continuity such that, just as circumcision was given to the children of God's covenant people then, baptism should now be given to the children of God's covenant people? The key verses are Colossians 2:11-12. Notice the linking of the two ideas of circumcision and baptism:

. . .in Him [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

It's clear there's a link here between baptism and circumcision. But it isn't, I think, what many infant baptizers think it is. Notice what sort of circumcision is spoken of in Colossians 2:11 : it is precisely a circumcision "without hands." That means Paul is talking about a spiritual counterpart of the Old Testament physical ritual. Then baptism is linked in Colossians 2:12 to that spiritual counterpart to the Old Testament circumcision. This is extremely important. Try to get it.

What is the New Testament counterpart or parallel to the Old Testament rite of circumcision? Answer: it is not the New Testament rite of baptism; it is the New Testament spiritual event of the circumcision of Christ cutting away "the [old sinful] body of the flesh." then, baptism is brought in as the external expression of that spiritual reality. That is precisely what the link between Colossians 2:11-12 says. Christ does a circumcision without hands : that is the New Testament,

spiritual fulfillment of Old Testament circumcision. Then Colossians 2:12 draws the parallel between that spiritual fulfillment and the external rite of baptism.

Notice what Colossians 2:11 stresses about the new work of Christ in circumcising: it is a circumcision "without hands." But water baptism is emphatically a ritual done "with hands." If we simply say that this New Testament ordinance of baptism done with hands corresponds to the Old Testament ritual of circumcision done with hands, then we miss the most important truth: something new is happening in the creation of people of God called the church of Christ. They are being created by a "circumcision without hands" by God. They are being raised from the dead by God. And baptism is a sign of that, not a repetition of the Old Testament sign. There is a new sign of the covenant because the covenant people are being constituted in a new way : by spiritual birth, not physical birth.

"Through Faith" And one of the clearest evidences for this is the little phrase "through faith" in Colossians 2:12. Watch this carefully. This is what held me back from paedobaptism through years of struggle, until I saw more and more reasons not to join up. Colossians 2:12 links the New Testament spiritual circumcision "without hands" in Colossians 2:11 with baptism, and then links baptism with faith:

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

If baptism were merely a parallel of the Old Testament rite of circumcision it would not have to happen "through faith" since infants did not take on circumcision "through faith." The reason the New Testament ordinance of baptism must be "through faith" is that it represents not the Old Testament external ritual, but the New Testament, internal, spiritual experience of circumcision "without hands."

Those two words : "through faith" : in Colossians 2:12 are the decisive, defining explanation of how we were buried with Christ in baptism and how we were raised with him in baptism: it was "through faith." And this is not something infants experience. Faith is a conscious experience of the heart yielding to the work of God. Infants are not capable of this, and therefore infants are not fit subjects of baptism, which is "through faith." So I urge those of you who have not yet come to faith in Christ to consider the rainforest of good news in these verses: that Christ died and rose again to cancel our debt with God and to triumph over Satan; and that he raises spiritually dead people from the grave and circumcises sinful hearts : he does all this through faith. He brings us to trust him, by showing us how true and beautiful he is. Look to him and believe. And then he bids us to express that faith in baptism. If you want to prepare for this step of obedience, you can come up after the service, or you can check it off on the worship folder leaf, or you can come to the baptismal preparation class starting next Sunday for two weeks. May the Lord draw many of you to the enjoyment of this full obedience "through faith."

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Chapter 42

03.07. What is Baptism & Does It Save?

What Is Baptism and Does It Save? May 18, 1997

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Controversy is Essential and Deadly

Let me begin today with a brief introductory word about controversy. The main thing I want to say is that doctrinal controversy is essential and deadly. And the attitude toward controversy in various groups of Christians depends largely on which of these two they feel most strongly. Is it essential or is it deadly? My plea is that at Bethlehem we believe and feel both of these. Controversy is essential where precious truth is rejected or distorted. And controversy is deadly where disputation about truth dominates exultation in truth. The reason controversy is essential in the face of rejection and distortion is that God has ordained that the truth be maintained in the world partly by human defense. For example, Paul says in Php 1:7 that he is in prison for the "defense and confirmation of the gospel." And Jude 1:3 says that we should "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." And Acts 17:2-3 says that Paul's custom in the synagogue was to "reason" from the Scriptures and "explain and give evidence" that Jesus was the Christ. So the preservation and transmission of precious truth from person to person and generation and generation may require controversy where truth is rejected or distorted. But controversy is also deadly because it feels threatening and so it tends to stir up defensiveness and anger. It's deadly also because it focuses on the reasons for truth rather than the reality behind truth, and so tends to replace exultation in the truth with disputation about the truth. This is deadly because thinking rightly about truth is not an end in itself; it's a means toward the goal of love and worship. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:5 that "the goal of our instruction is love." And he prayed in Php 1:9-11 that our "love . . . abound in knowledge . . . unto the glory and praise of God." Controversy tends to threaten both love and praise. It's hard to revel in a love poem while arguing with someone about whether or not your sweetheart wrote it.

John Owen on Controversy So controversy is essential in this fallen world, and controversy is deadly in a fallen world. We must do it and we must tremble to do it. A wise counselor for us in this is John Owen, the Puritan pastor from 340 years ago. He was involved in many controversies in his day - theological and denominational and political. But he never ceased to be a deep lover of God and a faithful pastor of a flock. He counsels us like this concerning doctrinal controversy:

When the heart is cast indeed into the mould of the doctrine that the mind embraceth - when the evidence and necessity of the truth abides in us - when not the sense of the words only is in our heads, but the sense of the thing abides in our hearts - when we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for - then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men.*

I think that was the key to Owen's life and ministry: he didn't just contend for doctrine; he loved and fellowshipped with the God behind the doctrine. The key phrase is this one: "When we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for - then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men." In other words, we must not let disputation replace contemplation and exultation.

I am keenly aware that this series of messages on baptism is more controversial than usual. I am also eager that this pulpit avoid two great errors: losing truth in the quest for exultation; and losing worship in the noise of disputation. So let us all pray that in our lives and in our church we walk the tightrope balanced by the necessity of controversy on the one side and the dangers of it on the other. The Bible itself is a great help in this because it teaches about baptism, for example, in contexts that are so rich with good news that it makes it relatively easy to exult as we deal with this practice of baptism. In fact, baptism itself is meant, like the Lord's Supper, to point to realities that are so great and so wonderful that. over all the controversy, we must hear the music of God's glorious goodness and grace.

Exulting in Christ's Substitution for Us So it is here in 1 Peter 3:18-22. Sandwiching the teaching on baptism in 1 Peter 3:19-21 there are the same great truths about Christ and his death and resurrection that we saw last week in Colossians 2:1-23. Let's get these before us for the sake of exultation before we look between for the necessary disputation.

1 Peter 3:18 : "Christ also died [literally: suffered] for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." Now here is something worth exulting over. Put it in five parts.

1. We are cut off from God.

First, the greatest problem in the world, the greatest problem in your life and mine, is that we are cut off from God. We have no right to approach him. We are alienated from him. You see this behind the words of Peter when he says that the aim of Christ's suffering was "that he might bring us to God." Now if Christ had to die that we might be brought to God, it is clear that we are alienated from God without Christ. This is the big issue. Not floods, and not cancer, and not crime, and not war, and not our job or marriage or kids. The big issue is that we are cut off from God, our Maker. And if that problem does not get solved, then the anger of God will rest on us and our eternity will be miserable.

2. It is sin that alienates us from God.

Second, we see what the problem is that alienates us from God, namely, sin. Peter says, "Christ suffered for our sins . . . that he might bring us to God." It's our sins that cut us off from God. This is true legally and it's true emotionally - as we all know. Legally, God is a just judge and does not simply pronounce the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent. He is holy and does not relax in the

living room with rebels. Every sin is serious and pushes him farther away. And emotionally, we know that as our consciences are defiled by sins we feel so dirty in the presence of God that we can't lift our faces.

3. God substituted his Son for us.

Third, God has taken the initiative to overcome this alienation from him by offering Christ to suffer in our place. You see this great reality of substitution in the words, "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the just for the unjust." Here is the great ground of our hope, that we really can and will come home to God. O let us exult in this above all the works of God - that he has substituted his just Son in our place. This is the great gospel. This is what holds us late at night and early in the morning when sin and Satan assail us with their accusations and say, you can't pray to God, much less go to heaven. Look at you! You're a sinner! To this we say, "Yes, but my hope does not lie in not being a sinner. It lies in a substitution of the Just for the unjust."

4. The substitution was once for all. And to add to the glory of it, in the fourth place, Peter, just like the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 7:27; Hebrews 9:12; Hebrews 10:10), says that this substitution of the Just for the unjust was "once for all" - once for all time. It need not be and cannot be repeated, because it was perfect and complete the first and only time it was done. The debt for all my sins - past, present and future - was paid in a single sacrifice for all time. O the glory of an objective, finished, once-for-all gospel performed by God in his Son outside of me apart from my psychological fickleness.

5. God was satisfied with Christ's substitution. And fifth, after he had offered himself once for all the Just for the unjust, God gave him life. "Having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." This means, at least, that God was satisfied with Christ's substitution. Which means that if you will cherish it as the foundation of your life, God will be satisfied with you, in Christ. God gave Christ life in at least two senses: one is that God gave him life in the spirit during the three days while his body was in the grave. We know this because Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Today, not in three days, but today. The other way that God gave Christ life is that he raised his body from the dead, and transformed it into a "spiritual body" - a new kind of body without the limitation of the old "flesh" - a body suited for the spiritual realm that "flesh and blood" cannot inherit (1 Corinthians 15:50). So God gave a mighty YES to Christ's substitution by raising him from the dead.

That's the top of the sandwich around the teaching of baptism: "Christ has suffered for sins once for all the Just for the unjust that he might bring us to God." Welcome home, are the sweetest words in the world, when God speaks them to our soul.

Exulting in the Subjection of Christ's (and our) Enemies The bottom part of the sandwich is 1 Peter 3:22 : "Christ is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Here we see the other effect of the death and resurrection of Christ. First was a substitution for our sins, now we see a subjection of his enemies. First substitution, then subjection. (Kids, ask mom and dad at lunch today, "What were the two words that started with "s" to describe the work of Christ?)

Now don't miss this: we saw the very same thing last week in Colossians 2:15. When Christ died and rose again, all the evil angels, and authorities and powers were subjected to him in a new

way. From the beginning of creation he was sovereign over them. That's not new. But now he has nullified the one thing that they could use to destroy us, our sin. It's as if the demonic world had many weapons to harm us, but only one great tank of poison that could destroy the children of God. And when Christ went to the cross, he drank the entire tank.

O there is much to contend for here, but for now, this morning, let us simply exult in this. Let us commune with our God in this. Let us revel in this reality. That the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ subjected angels and authorities and powers to him, meaning that in him the elect of God cannot be destroyed by these enemies. Our great enemies are subjected to the will of the one who died to save us, and he will save us. He will not let his work of substitution or subjection be done in vain. Does Baptism Save?

Now sandwiched between these two great truths about Christ (substitution for sinners and subjection of enemies) are the words about baptism. I preached on this text September 25, 1994. So I send you to the file cabinet if you want more, but I only have time here to go straight to the point at issue, namely, the meaning of baptism. In 1 Peter 3:19, Peter reminds the readers that, in the spirit, Jesus had gone to preach to the people in Noah's day, whose spirits are now in prison awaiting judgment. (I don't take the position that 1 Peter 3:19 refers to Jesus' preaching in hell between Good Friday and Easter.) But there was tremendous evil and hardness in Noah's day and only eight people enter the ark for salvation from the judgment through water.

Now Peter sees a comparison between the waters of the flood and the waters of baptism. 1 Peter 3:21 is the key verse: "And corresponding to that [the water of the flood], baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Now there are some denominations that love this verse because it seems at first to support the view called "baptismal regeneration." That is, baptism does something to the candidate: it saves by bringing about new birth. So, for example, one of the baptismal liturgies for infants says, "Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's Church, let us give thanks."

Now the problem with this is that Peter seems very aware that his words are open to dangerous misuse. This is why, as soon as they are out of his mouth, as it were, he qualifies them lest we take them the wrong way. In 1 Peter 3:21 he does say, "Baptism now saves you" - that sounds like the water has a saving effect in and of itself apart from faith. He knows that is what it sounds like and so he adds immediately, "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (Or your version might have: "the pledge of a good conscience toward God"). But the point seems to be this: When I speak of baptism saving, Peter says, I don't mean that the water, immersing the body and cleansing the flesh, is of any saving effect; what I mean is that, insofar as baptism is "an appeal to God for a good conscience," (or is "a pledge of a good conscience toward God"), it saves. Paul said in Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord - everyone who appeals to the Lord - will be saved." Paul does not mean that faith alone fails to save. He means that faith calls on God. That's what faith does. Now Peter is saying, "Baptism is the God-ordained, symbolic expression of that call to God. It is an appeal to God - either in the form of repentance or in the form of commitment.

What is Baptism?

Now this is fundamentally important in our understanding of what baptism is in the New Testament. James Dunn is right I think when he says that "1 Peter 3:21 is the nearest approach to a definition of baptism that the New Testament affords" (Baptism in the Holy Spirit, p. 219). What is baptism? Baptism is a symbolic expression of the heart's "appeal to God." Baptism is a calling on God. It is a way of saying to God with our whole body, "I trust you to take me into Christ like Noah was taken into the ark, and to make Jesus the substitute for my sins and to bring me through these waters of death and judgment into new and everlasting life through the resurrection of Jesus my Lord." This is what God is calling you to do. You do not save yourself. God saves you through the work of Christ. But you receive that salvation through calling on the name of the Lord, by trusting him. And it is God's will all over the world and in every culture - no matter how simple or how sophisticated - that this appeal to God be expressed in baptism. "Lord, I am entering the ark of Christ! Save me as I pass through the waters of death!" Amen. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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Chapter 43

03.08. What Baptism Portrays

What Baptism Portrays May 25, 1997 Romans 5:20-21; Romans 6:1-4

Today is the last message in this short series on baptism. I know there is so much more to say. I'm sorry if I have left unanswered some of your questions. But we will have more opportunities in various settings to discuss these things.

Recall that one of our main motives for putting this series here at the beginning of the summer is that we believe the New Testament calls for people to come to Christ openly and courageously. We want to see people who have been believers come to that point of public testimony and we want to see people become believers through your witness and through the ministry of the word here all summer long.

Why Did Jesus Ordain the Act of Baptism?

Sometimes we might wonder why Jesus ordained the act of baptism. Why is there such a thing as baptism? If salvation is by grace through faith, why institute a required ritual or a symbol to act out that faith? That is a question the Bible does not answer. But experience teaches some interesting things. For example, after my first message three weeks ago a former missionary to the Philippines came up to me and expressed her appreciation for the series and then said why. She said that in the Philippines, where there is a good bit of nominal and syncretistic Catholicism, converts were tolerated and scarcely noticed by their family - until they came to be baptized. Then the Biblical predictions of hostility and separation came to pass. There is something about this open ritual of new-found faith that makes clear where a person stands and what he is doing. In other words, in many cultures today the situation is a lot like the situation with John the Baptist. He came preaching a baptism of repentance and those who thought they already had all they needed were often enraged. That same week this missions magazine (The Dawn Report, May 30) came. On page 7 there is a picture of a man baptizing in a missionary setting in a river, with this caption under the picture: "Outdoor services and river baptisms are sometimes the best vehicles for growth." We simply do not know the whole constellation of reasons God had in his wisdom for prescribing baptism as a normative way of expressing faith in Christ and identification with him and his people. We can think of several reasons why it is a good thing, but we probably cannot come near to thinking of all the good effects that God intends. In the end it is an act of trust in our Father that he knows what he is doing and we are happy to act on his command.

Immersion or Sprinkling? But today I will try to show from Romans 5:20-21; Romans 6:1-4 a little more of the meaning of the act. This will also address the question that some of you have regarding the mode of baptism - that is, immersion rather than sprinkling. In fact, let me begin with a general word about the mode of immersion as opposed to sprinkling. There are at least three kinds of evidence for believing that the New Testament meaning and practice of baptism was by immersion. 1) The meaning of the word baptizo in Greek is essentially "dip" or "immerse," not sprinkle. 2) The descriptions of baptisms in the New Testament suggest that people went down

into the water to be immersed rather than having water brought to them in a container to be poured or sprinkled (Matthew 3:6, "in the Jordan;" Matthew 3:16, "he went up out of the water;" John 3:23, "much water there;" Acts 8:38, "went down into the water"). 3) Immersion fits the symbolism of being buried with Christ (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:12).

We won't linger over this, but let me say a word about how we may look at the fact that our church and our denomination make baptism by immersion a defining part of membership in the local covenant community (but not in the universal body of Christ). We do not believe that the mode of baptism is an essential act for salvation. So we do not call into question a person's Christian standing merely on the basis of the mode of their baptism. One might then ask: should you not then admit to membership those who are truly born again but who were sprinkled as believers? There are two ways to account for why we do not.

1) Should we call a manmade method of baptism "baptism," if we believe on good evidence that it departs from the form that Christ inaugurated? Would this not run the risk of minimizing the significance that Christ himself invested in the ordinance?

2) Local Christian communities, called churches, are built around shared Biblical convictions, some of which are essential for salvation and some of which are not. We do not define our covenant life together only by the narrowest possible set of beliefs one must have to be saved. We believe rather that the importance of truth and the authority of Scripture are better honored when communities of Christian faith define themselves by clusters of Biblical convictions and stand by them, rather than redefining the meaning of membership each time one of their convictions is disputed. When different Christian communities can do this while expressing love and brotherly affection for other believers, both truth and love are well-served. For example, the fact that many of the speakers we invite to the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors could not be members of this church says that we take love and unity seriously and we take truth seriously. Which non-essentials will be included from generation to generation in defining various communities depends largely on varying circumstances and varying assessments of what truths need to be emphasized.

What Baptism Portrays With that background let's look at Romans 5:20-21; Romans 6:1-4 to see what baptism portrays, and only secondarily what implications this has for the mode of baptism. My aim here is to help you see the glorious reality that baptism points to so that, mainly, the reality itself will grip you, and that, secondarily, the beauty and significance of the act will rise in your mind and hearts. Romans 5:20-21; Romans 6:1-4 : And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (21) that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (6:1) What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? (2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

One of the great things about this text is that it shows that, if you understand what baptism portrays, you understand what really happened to you when you became a Christian. Many of us came to faith and were baptized at a point when we did not know very much. This is good. It is

expected that baptism happens early in the Christian walk when you do not know very much. So it is also expected that you will learn later more and more of what it means.

Don’t think, "Oh, I must go back and get baptized again. I didn’t know it had all this meaning." No. No. That would mean you would be getting re-baptized with every new course you take in Biblical theology. Rather, rejoice that you expressed your simple faith in obedience to Jesus and now are learning more and more of what it all meant. That is what Paul is doing here: he is hoping that his readers know what their baptism meant, but he goes ahead and teaches them anyway, in case they don’t or have forgotten. Learn from these verses what you once portrayed in the eyes of God, and what actually happened to you in becoming a Christian.

I am going to deal with only two things that baptism portrays, according to these verses.

1. Baptism portrays our death in the death of Christ. Romans 6:3-4 a: "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death," Here is a great truth about us Christians. We have died. When Christ died he died our death. This means at least two things. 1) One is that we are not the same people we once were; our old self has died. We are not the same. 2) Another is that our future physical death will not have the same meaning for us that it would have had if Christ had not died our death. Since we have died with Christ, and he died our death for us, our death will not be the horrible thing it would have been. "O death where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). The answer is that the sting and the victory of death have been swallowed up by Christ. Remember from last week: he drank the tank. Notice the repetition of the word "into" in Romans 6:3-4. Baptized "into Christ Jesus," and baptized "into his death" (Romans 6:3), and baptism "into death" (Romans 6:4 a). What this says is that baptism portrays our union with Christ, that is, we are united to him spiritually so that his death becomes our death and his life will become our life. How do we experience this? How do you know if this has happened to you? The answer is that it is experienced by faith. You can hear this in the parallel verses. Galatians 2:20 makes the connection with faith: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God. . ." In other words, the "I" who died was the old unbelieving, rebellious "I" and the "I" who came to life was the "I" of faith - "The life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God." And the basis of all this is union with Christ - "Christ lives in me." And I live in him - in spiritual union with him. His death is my death and his life is being lived out in my life.

Another illustration of this would be Colossians 2:6-7 a: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith." Here again you can see that faith in Christ is the way you experience union with Christ. You receive him as Lord and Savior and in that faith you are united to him and walk "in him" and are built up "in him." So when Romans 6:3-4 a says that we are baptized into Christ and into his death, I take it to mean that baptism expresses the faith in which we experience union with Christ. This is presumably why God designed the mode of baptism to portray a burial. It represents the death that we experience when we are united to Christ. This is why we are immersed: it’s a symbolic burial. So know, believer, that you have died. The old unbelieving, rebellious "I" has been crucified with Christ. This is what your baptism meant and means.

2. Baptism portrays our newness of life in Christ.

Verse 4: "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Nobody stays under the water of baptism. We come up out of the water. After death comes new life. The old "I" of unbelief and rebellion died when I was united to Christ through faith. But the instant the old "I" died a new "I" was given life - a new spiritual person was, as it were, raised from the dead. The most crucial commentary on this truth is Colossians 2:12. Paul says, "Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Notice: We are raised up with Christ just like Romans 6:4 says we walk in newness of life. And there is the working of God who raised him from the dead just like Romans 6:4 says that Christ was raised through the glory of the Father. And this happens through faith in the working of God who raised Jesus from the dead. So Colossians 2:12 makes explicit what Romans 6:4 leaves implicit - that baptism expresses our faith in the working of God to raise Jesus from the dead. We believe that Christ is alive from the grave and reigning today at the Father’s right hand in heaven from which he will come again in power and glory. And that faith in God’s working - God’s glory as Paul calls it - is how we share in the newness of life that Christ has in himself. In fact, the newness of life is the life of faith in the glory and the working of God. "I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live . . but the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." The newness of life is the life of day by day trusting in the working of God - the glory of God.

Baptism Portrays What Happened to us When We Became Christians So let’s summarize and come to a conclusion. Baptism portrays what happened to us when we became Christians. This is what happened to us: we were united to Christ. His death became our death. We died with him. And in the same instant, his life became our life. We are now living out the life of Christ in us. And all this is experienced through faith. This is what it means to be a Christian - to live in the reality of what our baptism portrays: day by day we look away from ourselves to God and say, "Because of Christ, your Son, I come to you. In him I belong to you. I am at home with you. He is my only hope of acceptance with you. I receive that acceptance anew every day. My hope is based on his death for me and my death in him. My life in him is a life of faith in you, Father. Because of him I trust your working in me and for me. The same power and glory that you used to raise him from the dead you will use to help me. In that promise of future grace I believe, and in that I hope. That is what makes my life new. O Christ, how I glory in what my baptism portrays! Thank you for dying my death for me and giving new life to me. Amen." For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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Chapter 44

03.09. How Do Circumcision and Baptism Correspond?

How Do Circumcision and Baptism Correspond?

August 29, 1999

Romans 4:9-12 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

I am going to talk today about the relationship between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism. One of the reasons we are called Baptists is that we believe that the New Testament teaches us to baptize believers, but not the infant children of believers.

Some Reasons Baptists Do not Baptize Infants

There are many reasons for this conviction. Let me mention five that I will pass over quickly so that I can come to the main issue in Romans 4:11, where some of those who believe in infant baptism build their case. I pass over these quickly because I have dealt with them before in the sermon series on baptism in the spring of 1997. You can get those sermons and read them or listen to them.

1. In every New Testament command and instance of baptism the requirement of faith precedes baptism. So infants incapable of faith are not to be baptized

2. There are no explicit instances of infant baptism in all the Bible. The three "household baptisms" mentioned (household of Lydia, Acts 16:15; household of the Philippian jailer, Acts 16:30-33; household of Stephanus, 1 Corinthians 1:16) no mention is made of infants, and in the case of the Philippian jailer, Luke says explicitly, "they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (Acts 16:32), implying that the household who were baptized could understand the Word.

3. Paul (in Colossians 2:12) explicitly defined baptism as an act done through faith: ". . . having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God." In baptism you were raised up with Christ through faith - your own faith, not your parents' faith. If it is not "through faith" - if it is not an outward expression of inward faith - it is not baptism.

4. The apostle Peter, in his first letter, defined baptism this way, ". . . not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1

Peter 3:21). Baptism is "an appeal to God for a good conscience." It is an outward act and expression of inner confession and prayer to God for cleansing, that the one being baptized does, not his parents.

5. When the New Testament church debated in Acts 15:1-41 whether circumcision should still be required of believers as part of becoming a Christian, it is astonishing that not once in that entire debate did anyone say anything about baptism standing in the place of circumcision. If baptism is the simple replacement of circumcision as a sign of the new covenant, and thus valid for children as well as for adults, as circumcision was, surely this would have been the time to develop the argument and so show that circumcision was no longer necessary. But it is not even mentioned.

Those are some of the reasons why Baptists are hesitant to embrace the more elaborate theological arguments for infant baptism. But now here we are at Romans 4:11 and many of those who baptize infants see in this verse a linchpin for their position. Let me try to show you what they see and then why I am not persuaded.

Why Do Many in the Reformed Tradition Endorse Infant Baptism?

We are dealing here with a great Reformed tradition going back to John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli and other reformers. I do not despise this tradition. And for many years I have tried to be fair with the arguments, especially since most of my heroes are in this camp. The main reason that this great Reformed tradition endorses the baptism of infants of believers is that there appears to be in the New Testament a correspondence between circumcision and baptism. Just as circumcision was given as a sign to the "children of the covenant" in the Old Testament, so baptism - the new sign of the covenant - should be given to the "children of the covenant" today. For example, in Colossians 2:11-12 there seems to be a connection between circumcision and baptism: "In Him [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism . . ." So for the sake of the argument, let’s grant that there is some correlation between circumcision and baptism.

What are we to make of this correlation? Well, for 400 years a fairly elaborate argument has been made that baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant and that it should be applied in the church the way it was applied in Israel, namely, to the children of the covenant members -Israelites then, Christians now. So for example the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God (from 350 years ago) says, "The seed and posterity of the faithful born within the church have by their birth an interest [a share] in the covenant and right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church under the gospel, not less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament."* In other words, the children of Christian believers today belong to the visible church by virtue of their birth and should then receive the sign and seal of the covenant just as the eight-day-old infants of Israelites did in the Old Testament. That is the main argument.

Why Is Romans 4:11 the "linchpin" for Many Who Baptize Infants?

Now what relevance does Romans 4:11 have here? Let me quote from a letter -a very good letter (in spirit and content) - that I received from a defender of infant baptism after I preached my messages on baptism in the spring of 1997. He lamented that I had not dealt with Romans 4:11. Here’s why: "For me Romans 4:11 is the ’linchpin’ in the doctrine of paedobaptism [infant baptism].

Pull it out, and the whole doctrine falls."

Now what is it that he and others see here that makes this verse so compelling in defense of infant baptism? I'll try to explain. Let's look at the text. In Romans 4:9 Paul reminds us that "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." That is he was justified, and got right with God through faith alone. Then Romans 4:10 points out that this happened before Abraham was circumcised. "How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." The point is that Abraham's justification was not brought about through circumcision, which came later, but through faith alone.

Then comes the crucial Romans 4:11 which functions as a kind of definition of circumcision: "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised." So Abraham's circumcision is described here as "a sign . . . a seal of the righteousness of faith."

Now why is this important? It's important because it gives a spiritual meaning to circumcision that is like the meaning of baptism in the New Testament - "a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith." We say that baptism is an expression of genuine faith and the right standing with God that we have by faith before we get baptized. This seems to be what circumcision means too, according to Paul in Romans 4:11. Circumcision is a sign and seal of a faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised. So you see what that means? If circumcision and baptism signify the same thing - namely genuine faith - then you can't use this meaning of baptism by itself as an argument against baptizing infants, because circumcision was given to infants. In other words, you can't simply say, "Baptism is an expression and sign of faith; infants can't have faith; therefore don't baptize infants. You can't simply say this, because Romans 4:11 says that circumcision means the same thing - a sign of faith - and it was given to infants. This is why Romans 4:11 is considered by some as the linchpin of the defense of infant baptism. It defines circumcision in a way that gives it the same basic meaning as baptism, and yet we know from Genesis 17:1-27 that circumcision was appointed by God for the infants of all Jewish people. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . (11) and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. (12) And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. (Genesis 17:10-12)

So, even though circumcision is described by Paul as a sign and seal of Abraham's righteousness of faith, it was to be given to his infant sons, and their sons, and even to their servants who were not Jews by birth.

So, if circumcision can be a sign of faith and righteousness, and still be given to all the male children of the Israelites (who don't yet have faith for themselves), then why should not baptism can be given to the children of Christians even though it is a sign of faith and righteousness (which they don't yet have)?

What Shall We Say to This? The main problem with this argument is a wrong assumption about the similarity between the people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God today. It assumes that the way God gathered his covenant people, Israel, in the Old Testament and the

way he is gathering his covenant people, the Church, today is so similar that the different signs of the covenant (baptism and circumcision) can be administered in the same way to both peoples. This is a mistaken assumption.

There are differences between the new covenant people called the Church and the old covenant people called Israel. And these differences explain why it was fitting to give the old covenant sign of circumcision to the infants of Israel, and why it is not fitting to give the new covenant sign of baptism to the infants of the Church. In other words, even though there is an overlap in meaning between baptism and circumcision (seen in Romans 4:11), circumcision and baptism don't have the same role to play in the covenant people of God because the way God constituted his people in the Old Testament and the way he is constituting the Church today are fundamentally different.

Paul makes this plain in several places. Let's look at two of them. Turn with me to Romans 9:6-8 : But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; (7) nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac [not Ishmael] your descendants will be named." (8) That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

What's relevant in this text for our purpose is that there were two "Israels": a physical Israel and a spiritual Israel. Romans 9:6 b: "They are not all Israel [i.e., true spiritual Israel] who are descended from Israel [i.e., physical, religious Israel]." Yet God ordained that the whole, larger, physical, religious, national people of Israel be known as his covenant people and receive the sign of the covenant and the outward blessings of the covenant - such as the promised land (Genesis 17:8). The covenant people in the Old Testament were mixed. They were all physical Israelites who were circumcised, but within that national-ethnic group there was a remnant of the true Israel, the true children of God (Romans 9:8). This is the way God designed it to be: he bound himself by covenant to an ethnic people and their descendants; he gave them all the sign of the covenant, circumcision, but he worked within that ethnic group to call out a true people for himself.

How Is the Church a Continuation of Israel?

Now the question for us is: is the New Testament Church - the Church today -a continuation of the larger mixed group of ethnic, religious, national Israel, or is the Church a continuation of the remnant of the true sons of Abraham who are children of God by faith in Christ? Are we a Spirit-born, new covenant community with the law of God written on our hearts and defined by faith? We don't need to guess at this.

Paul makes the answer clear in Galatians 4:22-28 : For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman [Ishmael, born to Hagar] and one by the free woman [Isaac, born to Sarah]. (23) But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. . . . (28) And you brethren [the Church], like Isaac, are children of promise."

Now who is "you brethren"? They are the Church. The Church is not to be a mixed heritage like Abraham's seed. The Church is not to be like Israel - a physical multitude and in it a small remnant of true saints. The Church is the saints, by definition. The Church continues the remnant. As verse 28 says, the Church is "like Isaac, children of promise." The people of the covenant in the Old Testament were made up of Israel according to the flesh - an ethnic, national, religious people

containing "children of the flesh" and "children of God." Therefore it was fitting that circumcision was given to all the children of the flesh. But the people of the new covenant, called the Church of Jesus Christ, is being built in a fundamentally different way. The church is not based on any ethnic, national distinctives but on the reality of faith alone, by grace alone in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is not a continuation of Israel as a whole; it is an continuation of the true Israel, the remnant -not the children of the flesh, but the children of promise.

Therefore, it is not fitting that the children born merely according to the flesh receive the sign of the covenant, baptism. The church is the new covenant community - "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) - we say when we take communion. The new covenant is the spiritual work of God to put his Spirit within us, write the law on our hearts and cause us to walk in his statutes. It is a spiritually authentic community. Unlike the old covenant community it is defined by true spiritual life and faith. Having these things is what it means to belong to the Church. Therefore to give the sign of the covenant, baptism, to those who are merely children of the flesh and who give no evidence of new birth or the presence of the Spirit or the law written on their heart or of vital faith in Christ is to contradict the meaning of the new covenant community and to go backwards in redemptive history. The Church is not a replay of Israel. It is an advance on Israel. To administer the sign of the covenant as though this advance has not happened is a great mistake. We do not baptize our children according to the flesh, not because we don’t love them, but because we want to preserve for them the purity and the power of the spiritual community that God ordained for the believing church of the living Christ.

I pray that you will be persuaded of these things, and that many who have been holding back will be baptized, not to comply with any church constitution, but by faith and obedience to glorify the great new covenant work of God in your life. Have you been washed by the blood of the Lamb? Are your sins forgiven? Have you died with Christ and risen by faith to walk in newness of life? Does the Spirit of Christ dwell in you? Is the law being written on your heart? Come, then, and signify this in baptism, and glorify God’s great new covenant work in your life. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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Chapter 45

03.10. Strengthened to Suffer

Strengthened to Suffer Christ, Noah, and Baptism September 25, 1994

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. To catch on to what this paragraph is all about we need to see how it relates to what goes before and what comes after. Just before in 1 Peter 3:17 Peter calls Christians to suffer if that is God's will for them: "It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." Sometimes it is God's will that we suffer for doing what is right. This is not an easy thing to hear. We need help with this. We need understanding and we need encouragement and hope, if God is going to will that we suffer for doing what is right. So in 1 Peter 3:18 Peter begins this paragraph by saying, "For Christ also died (suffered) for sins once for all . . ." The word "for" shows us that Peter is beginning to explain why it is sometimes God's will for us to suffer for doing what is right. So the paragraph begins as an explanation or a reason for the call to suffer as a Christian for doing what is right.

Then look at the connection between the paragraph and what follows in 1 Peter 4:1. The next unit begins, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same purpose" -- that is, the purpose to suffer for doing what is right, like Christ did. So just before the text (in 1 Peter 3:17) and just after the text (in 1 Peter 4:1) the point is: get ready to suffer for doing what it right, if that should be God's will. Arm yourselves with that purpose.

Between these two calls to suffer comes our text, 1 Peter 3:18-22. So the main point of these verses is to help us get ready to suffer with Jesus for doing what is right, not for doing what is wrong. For all the puzzling things in these verses we must not forget this main point -- Peter's intention in this text is to help us arm ourselves with the faith to suffer for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

If that sounds irrelevant to you, it may be because you, like most Americans, are insulated from the bigger world outside our own little country (about 5% of total) and outside our own little American era (about 5% of the last 6,000 years). For most of the world and for most of history being a Christian has not been safe. Stephen Neil says in his History of Christian Missions (p. 43) that in the first three centuries, when the Church was spreading like wildfire, "Every Christ knew that sooner or later he might have to testify to his faith at the cost of his life."

Just think of it! Imagine doing evangelism in a context where you could not make any promises to people that things would go better for them on earth, but that if they believed what you offered, they would be risking their lives. Does that say anything to us about our evangelistic message and methods? That was normal in the context of this letter, and in most of the places of the world most of the time, including today. But we have invented names for places where it's dangerous to be a Christian. We call them "closed" countries. Which is odd indeed. We have taken our false assumption that safety is normal, and used that false assumption to define where the mission of the church can advance. Peter and Paul would have found the whole idea incomprehensible.

Today it is normal in most places to suffer for being Christians. To be safe and respected is the exception, not the rule. Just one example. Evangelical missionaries entered Cambodia in the 1920s. By the time they were expelled in 1965 there were about 600 believers. Between 1965 and 1975 during the civil war the Christian population soared to an estimated 90,000. It was an amazing work of God. But when the Khmer Rouge took control and Pol Pot unleashed his fury on the nation, most of these Christians died or fled the country. This story can be retold hundreds of times over and over around the world and along the centuries. It is normal not an abnormal for Christians to be hated. Jesus said the most sweeping thing in Matthew 24:9, "You will be hated by all nations on account of my name." There is a warning here for us in America. I get the impression that we are in a bitter, reactionary mood as Christians in America. The atmosphere seems to be one of acrimony and rancor and mean-spiritedness in the public square -- as if the liberal, humanistic, secular, relativistic cultural elites have taken our Christian world from us.

I think the time is right for a heavy dose of the teaching of 1 Peter -- as in 1 Peter 4:12. "Do not be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes upon you as though something strange were happening to you." Peter is laboring in this letter to say that we are aliens and exiles here and that is NOT surprising, and not abnormal when the cultural powers that be revile Christianity. "If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his house" (Matthew 10:25). So in this text today -- and in the whole letter -- Peter is laboring to help us be ready to suffer, if God should will it. That is why 1 Peter 3:18-22 were written.

Let's look at five ways that Peter strengthens us for that possibility.

1. First he insists that we not forget that Christ, our great King and Savior suffered.

1 Peter 3:17-18 : "It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. FOR Christ also suffered." Throughout the New Testament the mindset of Christianity is: our Lord suffered, we will follow him in suffering.

You have Paul saying, "O that I might know him and the fellowship of his sufferings and be conformed to his death" (Php 3:11). You have Hebrews saying, "He suffered outside the gate. Hence let us go with him outside the camp bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:12-13). You have Jesus saying, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). I bear the cross; you will bear the cross. The first great encouragement to prepare ourselves for suffering for doing what is right is that this is what happened to Jesus the greatest, most loving, caring, truthful, holy man that ever lived.

2. Peter strengthens us to suffer by telling us that Christ has triumphed over our greatest enemy and brought us safe to God.

Someone might ask, "Why would anyone become a Christian if what you could offer them was that things in this world would probably go worse for them and that their lives would be at risk. The answer is that the greatest human needs are not to live long on the earth and be comfortable. The biggest human needs are how to have our sins forgiven and overcome our separation from God and live for ever with happiness in his presence instead of living forever in misery in hell. That's ten thousand times more important than living long on the earth and being comfortable for a zillionth percentage of your existence. This is what the death of Jesus accomplishes. 1 Peter 3:18 : "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God." Notice four things.

A) Christ died "for sins". This is what separates me from God. This is my biggest need. These are my biggest enemy -- not Satan. Isaiah 59:2, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God." This is vastly more terrifying than suffering for righteousness' sake -- suffering the wrath of God because my sins have not been forgiven. But Jesus died "for sins." This is the greatest thing in the world. I do not have to die in my sins. There is forgiveness. This is why people would believe on Jesus even if it cost them there lives.

B) Christ died "the just for the unjust." His death was substitutionary. He took my place. He stood under the wrath and penalty that I deserved and bore it for me. His death was utterly innocent. It was all for others sins, and not his own.

C) Christ died "once for all" -- that is, his death was final and all-sufficient to accomplish the forgiveness of all who believe on him. He does not have to ever offer another sacrifice. It was finished. It was all that was necessary to take away the guilt of my sins. The debt is paid in full.

D) All of this brings me to God. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that he might bring us to God." This is the great comfort of martyrs and suffering Christians. Our worst enemy -- sin -- has been defeated. And Jesus has made sure that we will be at home safe with God. He has brought us to God. The separation has been removed. God is near us, and he is for us. Our lives are hid in him.

How does this help us to suffer? Because one of the terrible temptations of the devil in suffering is to make us think that God has forsaken us. What he is saying here is: Suffering is no sign that God has forsaken us and turned against us! Christ has carried our sin, absorbed the wrath of God, and brought us safe to God.

3. The third way that Peter strengthens us for suffering is with the situation in Noah's day.

After referring to Jesus being made alive in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18), 1 Peter 3:19-20 says,

"In which (i.e., in the spirit) also He [Jesus] went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20) who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water."

There is a lot of controversy over what this refers to. I'll tell you what I think and how it relates to the main point. I think it refers to the time when people in Noah's day were disobedient, mocking him as a righteous man obeying God (like the situation in the lives of Peter's readers), and that Jesus, in the spirit, was sent by God in those days to preach to those people through Noah.

Just like in 1 Peter 1:11 the Spirit of Jesus was in the Old Testament prophets predicting his coming, so the Spirit of Jesus was in Noah preaching to the disobedient people of Noah's day. They are NOW in prison -- that is, in a place of torment awaiting the final judgment (Luke 16:24). I don't take this verse to refer to Jesus' going to the place of the dead and preaching to the spirits there -- though many wise and good people take it that way. One main reason is this: if Peter's point is that Jesus went to preach to all the dead, why would he say, that they were once disobedient on the days of Noah. There were thousands and millions of spirits there who had not lived in the days of Noah. So I take it mean that Jesus went to preach in the days of Noah to people who, because they rejected that preaching, are NOW in prison awaiting final judgment.

There are three ways that this strengthens us for suffering.

One is that it assures of the greatness of Christ. He is not bound by space and time. He was there preaching thousands of years before and he is here speaking today. He will be with you, as he said, to the end of the age -- in China and Guinea and Congo and Bangkok and Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and Japan and Papua New Guinea and Siberia and the Philippines and Ivory Coast and Austria and Cyprus and Germany and Minneapolis -- wherever you may suffer, both now and for ever.

Second, it is better to obey him and suffer than to disobey and be cast into the prison of 1 Peter 3:19. That is what happened to the spirits in Noah's day. They thought it was foolish to heed the call of God like Noah did. So they staid comfortable and respectable until the rain started. This is again why people can be converted with a message that calls for suffering -- it is a suffering that will keep them out of eternal prison.

Third, it is no disadvantage to you to be a small rejected minority. That's the point in 1 Peter 3:20 where it says that in the ark "a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water." It must have felt foolish to be such a small minority. But the point is: if you are a minority with God, you will be saved and the tables will be turned. So when the suffering comes, don't throw away your confidence that has great reward.

4. The fourth way that Peter strengthens us for suffering is by describing the meaning of baptism. The flood waters that brought judgment on the world in Noah's reminds Peter of Christian baptism. 1 Peter 3:21 : "And corresponding to that [the flood], baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Verse 18 said that Christ died for sins and brought us to God. In other words Christ saves us. But the question is: who is us? Whom does Christ's death actually save? That's what 1 Peter 3:21 answers: those who are baptized. But Peter knows that this will be misunderstood if he does not qualify it. So when he says, "Baptism now saves you," he adds, "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience." This is virtually a definition of baptism. Baptism is an outward expression of a spiritual, inward appeal to God for cleansing. In other words, baptism is a way of saying to God: "I trust you to apply the death of Jesus to me for my sins and to bring me through death and judgment into new and everlasting life through the resurrection of Jesus."

Baptism may cleanse the body because it was by immersion. But that is not why he says it saves. It saves for one reason: it is an expression of faith. It is an appeal of faith. Paul said in Romans 10:13 that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Baptism is such a calling. It is an appeal to the Lord.

How does this strengthen us for suffering with Christ?

Like this: When we have come through the water of baptism we have passed through death and judgment. We have been buried with Christ and we have risen with him. We have passed from death to life. Judgment is past. The suffering we are experiencing cannot be the condemnation of God. That has already been experienced for us by Christ. We have received that by faith and we have expressed our faith by baptism. It stands as a constant reminder that the worst suffering has been averted. Christ took it for us. We will never have to come into judgment. There is now no condemnation. We have already died that death in Christ and been raised in him. Therefore our present suffering is not the wrath of God but the loving discipline of our Father and the preparation for glory.

5. One last way Peter strengthens us for suffering: he shows us that Christ is at the right hand of God ruling over all angels, authorities and powers.

1 Peter 3:22 : "He is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

Take this one thought with you in preparation for your suffering. No harassing, oppressing, deceiving, accusing demon is free to do as he pleases. All angels, authorities, powers, devils, evil spirits, demons and Satan himself are subject to Jesus Christ. When Peter says at the end of his letter (1 Peter 5:9), that the devil prowls around like a lion seeking to devour, resist him firm in your faith, THIS is the faith he has in mind. The faith that all angels, authorities and powers are subject to Jesus. This is what we rebuke and resist the devil with: you are subject to Jesus. Jesus reigns at God’s right hand and you are under him. You can do nothing without his permission. You are a cat on a chain. You cannot touch me unless he lets you. And he will only let you to the degree that your touch will turn for my good and for his glory. So stand firm believers. Stand firm in this great faith, and arm yourselves with the purpose of Christ. The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Let’s follow him. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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Chapter 46

03.11. United with Christ in Death and Life

United with Christ in Death and Life

Part Two

October 1, 2000

Romans 6:1-7

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

Since this is a communion Sunday and we have just eaten the Lord’s Supper, it seemed fitting to me to deal on the same day with the other ordinance that Jesus commanded, namely, baptism as it occurs in Romans 6:3-4. There are two recurring ordinances that Jesus taught us to practice. One is the Lord’s Supper ("Do this in remembrance of me," Luke 22:19), and the other is baptism ("Go . . . make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them," Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is an ordinance performed only once in the Christian’s life and signifies our dying and rising with Christ by faith. The Lord’s Supper is an ordinance performed over and over in the Christian life to signify that we never stop living by the spiritual nourishment that comes from the death of Jesus for our sins. It is an amazing thing that both of the two ordinances that Jesus appointed for us signify mainly the death of Jesus. I would not minimize how important the resurrection of Christ is. But don’t miss the tremendous weight put on his death in these two ordinances. We are a people whose whole existence before God hangs on the death of our Savior and Lord, Jesus.

What, then, does Paul teach us about baptism in Romans 6:3-4?

He brings up baptism because it relates to his main point, namely, that we who have died to sin can’t go on living in it. Romans 6:1 b: "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? (2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" Right here he introduces baptism. Verse 3: "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Baptism Was a Universal Practice in the Early Church

1. The first thing we learn about baptism is that it was universally practiced in the early church, and Paul assumed that it should be.

He is writing to Rome, where he had never been, and he simply takes it for granted that all the Christians there are baptized. It was not even in his mind that there could be unbaptized Christians. We see this in Romans 6:3 in two ways.

First, because he simply explains why Christians can't go on living in sin by saying that the meaning of their baptism contradicts it. "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death." Baptism means death with Christ, and those who are dead to sin don't go on living in it. And that means "all of us." That is, all Christians. The second way Paul shows that baptism was universally practiced and understood like this is in the words (Romans 6:3), "Do you not know . . . ?" In other words, surely you know this about baptism! Why? Because this is basic. This is fundamental. This is an elementary teaching in the Christian life. All believers are baptized and it has this meaning everywhere. So the first thing we learn is that all Christians were baptized. This is assumed. And the understanding of what it meant was so basic to the Christian life, that Paul would be stunned if the Roman Christians did not know it. "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Surely you know! And surely we should know. Surely all Christians here are baptized and surely you all know what it signifies.

Baptism Was by Immersion 2. The second thing we learn about baptism is that it is by immersion, not sprinkling or pouring. This is simply what the word "baptizo" means in Greek. None of the instances of baptism in the New Testament describe anything other than immersion, and some of the instances make sense only if we assume immersion. For example, in John 3:23 it says, "John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there." And in Acts 8:38, Philip leads the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. The eunuch asks if he may be baptized. Philip agrees. "And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." And along with 1) the meaning of the word baptizo and 2) the fact that lots of water was needed and people went down into the water, there Isaiah 3:1-26) the compelling argument of the symbolism of Romans 6:4, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." The picture of burial and resurrection is not portrayed by any other method of baptism.<\l > So we learn that the method of baptism in the New Testament was immersion. There is no compelling reason to think otherwise. God, in his mercy, will, I believe, give indulgence to those who, from a good conscience, do not see this and practice another method, like sprinkling or pouring, but it does not follow that he wants us to treat the method as though it is not important at all, especially since the entire meaning of its symbolism in this text hangs on the picture of burial and resurrection.

Baptism Signifies our Death with Christ

3. The third thing we learn about baptism here is that it signifies our death with Christ that was accomplished at Calvary and was first experienced when we were united to Christ by faith.

Notice carefully the three events in that statement - in chronological order this time. First, there is the historical event of Christ's death at Calvary when God saw us in Christ, so that his death was our death. This was the accomplishment of our death with Christ. Second, we trusted in Christ and were thus united to him experientially, so our death with him became personal to us. This was the application to us through faith of what God accomplished for us at Calvary. Third, we were baptized in Christ's name. This was the signification of our death with Christ. So there was the historical accomplishment of our death with Christ at Calvary, then the experiential application of our death with Christ by faith, then the symbolic signification of our death with Christ by baptism. Accomplishment in history, application by faith, signification through baptism.

Now this is very controversial. So let me make clear what I mean and what makes this interpretation so controversial. I don't touch on controversy because it is desirable or enjoyable. I would rather simply exult in the truth of Christ and not draw any attention to the fact that others may disagree. But I touch on it because it is inevitable in the real world of diversity where we live. There are large blocks of the professing Christian church that do not agree with what I just said. The controversy comes from saying that baptism in Romans 6:3-4 "signifies" our death with Christ. The other view that I have in mind would say, "No, what the text plainly says is not that baptism signifies our death with Christ, but that it effects or causes or brings about our death with Christ." They would point to the last words of Romans 6:3, "[we] have been baptized into His death." They would not take this as a picture of what happened by faith, but as the way we actually died with Christ - in the act of baptism. They would point even more forcefully to Romans 6:4 : "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death." They would stress the words "through baptism." Baptism, they would say, is not the symbol of our death with Christ, but the instrument of our death with Christ. "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death." Baptism is when and how we died with Christ, and before baptism, they say, we were not united with Christ and not justified and not saved.

One representative of this view says, "Those who say [like me] that our union with Christ in His death, and thus our own death to sin, occurred before baptism are simply not taking the text at its word."<\l > I feel the force of this. The words, "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death," do seem to make baptism the instrument of our death, rather than faith, or along with faith. Is Baptism a Symbol or an Instrument? So why do I say that this text teaches that baptism signifies our death with Christ that was accomplished at Calvary and was first experienced when we were united to Christ by faith?

Three reasons.

1) The overwhelming teaching of this letter and the rest of the New Testament is that we are justified by faith alone because of the union with Christ that happens through faith.<\l > Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." (It does not say, "Having been justified by faith and baptism.") And Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In other words, justification (that is, freedom from condemnation) comes through being in Christ Jesus. And it comes through faith. Therefore faith is the means of our being in Christ Jesus and the sole instrument of our justification. Where does that leave baptism? Following closely behind faith,<\l > baptism signifies this great union with Christ, especially in his death and resurrection. But the inner, spiritual union with Christ comes

through the inner, spiritual act of faith, not through the outer, physical act of baptism.

2) When Paul explicitly relates faith and baptism he does so in a way that shows faith is the instrument that unites us to Christ, not physical baptism. For example, Galatians 3:26-27 : "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." The "for" at the beginning of Galatians 3:27 shows that "baptism into Christ" is either an outward expression of faith or a proof of faith. But it is "through faith" that we are sons of God. In Colossians 2:12 Paul says, "[We have] been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God." Here again the instrument of our burial and resurrection is faith ("through faith"). The baptismal act appears to be the outward expression of this inward spiritual experience of union with Christ by faith. Faith is the instrument that unites us to Christ and thus justifies.

3) But do the words of Romans 6:3-4 allow this meaning? I do not think it stretches the words beyond ordinary use to say that Romans 6:3-4 describes the symbol of dying with Christ rather than the instrument of dying with Christ. Paul says, "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death." Now here's the analogy I would suggest to show that this language can be the language of symbol, not instrument: "All of us who have put on the ring of marriage have, by putting on this ring, forsaken all others to cleave only to our wives. Therefore by this ring I am united to my wife alone and dead to all others."

Now you could press the language and say, "Aha, it was the actual putting on the ring that caused your forsaking all others and your cleaving to Noel alone. You said it explicitly: 'By this ring, I am united to my wife alone.' What could be plainer? The ring does it all." But that is not what I would mean by these words. I would mean that putting on the ring is a sign of my forsaking all others and cleaving only to her. The decisive leaving and cleaving is in the promise, the covenant, the vows. "I plight thee my troth." "I promise you my faithfulness." Then comes the ring, the symbol. In that analogy, the vows stand for faith in Christ, and the ring stands for baptism. And the point is that we often talk this way. We often speak of the symbol as though it brings about what it only signifies.

Justified by Faith Alone So here's the main point: Romans 6:3-4 does not contradict the teaching of the first five chapters of Romans that we are united to Christ by faith, and thus justified by faith alone. Instead it teaches that baptism signifies (portrays, dramatizes, expresses outwardly, symbolizes) our death with Christ which was accomplished for us historically at Calvary and then was applied to us experientially by faith. Which leaves us with this application to our lives. Have you trusted in Christ and have you been baptized? Paul assumes that he can build all the rest of this chapter - all the rest of the Christian life! - on your knowledge and understanding of what your baptism meant as a symbol of being buried with Christ in death and rising to newness of life. So let us believe and be baptized. And let us reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. And let's gather again next week to ponder what this reckoning means.

1John Murray's argument is not compelling that says there is in baptism no allusion to burial with Christ. He says we have no more warrant to find a reference to the mode of baptism in "buried with" in Romans 6:4 than we do in "grown together with" in Romans 6:5 or "crucified with" in Romans 6:6 or "clothed" in Galatians 3:27 (Romans, Vol. 1, p. 215). But Paul explicitly links burial with the act of baptism in a more direct way, and the symbolism fits so perfectly (unlike any of

these other images of our spiritual union with Christ) that I cannot imagine that there is no symbolic connection, with our immersion in water signifying death and burial.

2Jack Cottrell, Baptism: A Biblical Study (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Colossians, 1989), p. 84. Dr. Cottrell teaches at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, and represents the denominational view of the "Churches of Christ" and "Christian Churches." He says, "Every Christian has come within the scope of this sin-destroying force of the death of Christ; we have tapped into its lethal power. When did we do this? In our baptism. There is absolutely no indication that this union with Christ in His death happened as soon as we believed or repented. We did not believe into His death; we did not repent into His death. Paul explicitly says we 'have been baptized into his death' (v. 3)" (p. 84).

3Notice how the saving function of faith is stressed in many texts where baptism is not mentioned at all, which would be very strange if baptism were the decisive instrument of union with Christ without which there is no union, no salvation. Acts 4:4; Acts 4:32; Acts 10:43; Acts 11:21; Acts 13:39; Acts 13:48; Acts 14:1; Acts 15:5; Acts 15:9; Acts 16:31; Acts 16:34; Acts 20:21; Romans 1:17; Romans 3:22; Romans 3:25-26; Romans 3:28; Romans 3:30; Romans 4:5; Romans 4:9; Romans 4:11; Romans 4:13; Romans 5:2; Romans 9:30; Romans 10:6; Romans 10:9-17; Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 1:17-21; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:2; Galatians 3:5; Galatians 3:7-9; Galatians 3:14; Galatians 3:22; Galatians 3:24-27; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 2:8; Php 3:9; 2 Timothy 3:15; etc.

4In the book of Acts, all baptisms that we know about happened on the same day as the first act of faith: Acts 2:41 (three thousand); Acts 8:36-38 (Ethiopian eunuch); Acts 9:18 (Paul); Acts 16:15 (Lydia); Acts 16:33 (Philippian jailer). We have perhaps created confusion in the close connection between faith's union with Christ and its signification in baptism by separating them so far. For information on how to receive DGM email subscriptions visit www.desiringGOD.org/esubs <http://www.desiringGOD.org/esubs>.

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04.00. Biblical Eldership

Biblical Eldership Shepherd the Flock of God Among You Table of Contents

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04.000. Preface

Preface "We as a church exist to spread a passion for

the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples." In subscribing to a mission that holds a supreme view of God, it is our goal, as the people of Bethlehem Baptist Church, to maintain the centrality of God in all that we do. He is to be heralded in our worship, in our preaching and teaching, in our evangelism, missions and outreach efforts, in our praying, and even in our church governance. Our motivation? To glorify God by seeking - literally, "stoking" - our joy in him. How? Through the earnest belief that the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever. God’s supreme worth is magnified manifoldly when our deep and lasting joy is in him. Our ongoing aim as a people is to exalt Christ, to cherish Christ, to love Christ, to honor Christ, and to desire Christ above all else, thereby ensuring that God’s great glory and the most exquisite pleasure of his people are inextricably intertwined. Thus, the under-shepherds of the church should be those people whose satisfaction in God is so contagious that they naturally draw others into that enjoyment of God through teaching and preaching and ministry and care. The material presented here is based, in large part, on a paper presented to the church in 1987 by Pastor John Piper. The underlying convictions which led to its presentation at that time included a desire to implement a more Biblically-informed system of governance based upon the clear teachings of the New Testament and also a pastoral concern to release many committed committee members to do the actual work of ministry. It was discussed and debated and ultimately adopted in 1991 and has been the sure foundation upon which the current system of governance - a plurality of elders comprising both lay and vocational leaders - is grounded. The vision and mission of the church is shaped and shared by members of the pastoral staff and by aspiring laymen; so too, are the joys of ministry, the fulfillment of calling, and the corresponding responsibilities to "shepherd the flock of God . . . eagerly." The ensuing decade has been both tumultuous and triumphant. The leadership of Bethlehem, and especially the Council of Elders, has carried the responsibility for oversight through seasons of both unspeakable joy and excruciating pain. Having attended Bethlehem with my family for the past six years, I have carefully observed the visible outworkings of this form of spiritual leadership within the local church and asked, not just "Does this work?" but "Is this Scriptural?" What about these elders? Are these leaders godly? Honest? Biblical? What have they said and done to merit our trust? How about their families? Their wives? Their children? Are they content? Happy? Loved? It is to our lasting delight that we have observed a marked Godwardness in congregational proceedings, and it has been my greater delight to serve for the past 18 months as a lay elder. The process through which I was affirmed began with a simple query from a friend, Tim, as to whether church eldership was an office to which I aspired. After several months of prayerful consideration, the study of some relevant written materials and an ongoing discussion with my wife, Liz, I ventured that perhaps the Lord was leading me to consider eldership. As I worked through the implications of such a call, I struggled with such temporal insecurities as my fitness to shepherd a flock of theologically astute, Bible-memorizing, missions-minded, outreach-oriented believers. Wasn’t I a sinner who had merely dabbled in theology? (Just what is

"hermeneutics"?) Hadn’t I struggled through spiritually barren seasons of life? Didn’t I wrangle and wrestle for countless hours to memorize just a couple of verses of Scripture? Hadn’t I wondered why in the world others were so passionate about missions? Had any of the folks with whom I had shared Christ really been born again? And then, I came across the wonderful, liberating words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians:

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." (2 Corinthians 4:1-7, NKJV)

I saw that the ministry of eldership is not at all about this "earthen vessel" but about the greatness of God, about his mercy, his gospel, his glory and his power! The next steps in the process of pursuing an affirming call on my life were a written testimony submitted to the council, a formal interview with three elders, and finally a verbal testimony before our congregation in which, with dry throat and knocking knees, I simply spoke of the trajectory my life had taken, the incredible joys I had savored as I sought to offer myself to God as a living sacrifice, and my goal of expanding and multiplying that joy by drawing others into wholehearted satisfaction in Him. My tenure as elder has been a season of watching and learning and ministering and failing and simply trying again. But my heart has been encouraged again and again to see God at work in our local church through the faithful, available, servant-shepherds ("earthen vessels"?) he has called to oversee his people. There is a collegiality and camaraderie and a heartfelt effort at mutual upbuilding among the Elder Council members that is sweet and satisfying and, I believe, God-honoring. More importantly, there is a strong desire to shepherd the flock of God with joy, knowing that one day we will be called upon to give an account to the Shepherd of our souls (Hebrews 13:17). For "when the Chief Shepherd appears, we all [lay and vocational elders alike] will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

What unfolds in the succeeding pages is an engagement with the relevant New Testament texts and a God-glorifying pursuit of their contextual, Biblical meaning. The outcome is not merely doctrinaire abstraction, not merely culture-confronting complementarianism, not merely a re-thinking of the inherited, historical norms and traditions, but a practical, non-cumbersome outworking of church governance which aligns with Scripture and aims at meeting the myriad needs of the local expression of the body of Christ.

Dan Holst, Elder

Minneapolis, MN May 1999

Chapter 49

04.01. What Does "Church" Refer to in the New Testament

What Does "Church" Refer tox in the New Testament? The Word "Church"

"Church" comes from the Anglo Saxon "circe" (Kirk) which, in turn, comes from the Greek kyriakon which means "belonging to the Lord." So one could think of "church" as the people or the building "belonging to the Lord." But in the English New Testament, the word "church" translates the Greek ekklesia which means "assembly" or "congregation" and never refers to a building. Therefore, the "church" is the people who belong to the Lord Jesus. The Universal Church of All Believers of All Time

Ephesians 1:22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.

All the Believers in an Area

Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

All the Believers in a City

Acts 8:1 And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem. The Believers Gathered in a House-Congregation 1 Corinthians 16:19 Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Chapter 50

04.02. The Importance and Preciousness and Purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ in the World

The Importance and Preciousness and Purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ in the World The Bride of Christ Ephesians 5:25-29

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church. The Body of Christ (Universal) Colossians 1:18-24

He is also head of the body, the church. . . . Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. The Body of Christ (Local) 1 Corinthians 12:21-27 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. . . . But God has so composed the body . . . that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. The Household and Dwelling of God Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. The Pillar and Support of the Truth

1 Timothy 3:15

[I write] so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. To Display His Glory

1 Peter 2:9

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. To Display the Manifold Wisdom of God to the Spiritual Powers of Heaven Ephesians 3:6-10 The Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. . . . To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. To Show the Authority and Power of Christ

Matthew 16:18

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

04.03. All New Testament Churches Had Elders

All New Testament Churches Had Elders Elders in All the Churches that Paul Founded

Acts 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Elders in the Church at Jerusalem

Acts 15:2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

Elders in Ephesus

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Elders in All the Churches of Crete

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

Elders in All the Churches of the Dispersion of the Roman Empire James 1:1; James 5:14

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. . . . Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Elders in All the Churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia 1 Peter 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen. . . . Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God.

04.04. Eleven Biblical Principles Of Local Church Governance

Eleven Biblical Principles Of Local Church Governance

Principle One The Local Church Is governed by Christ (Matthew 16:18). This governance was mediated through the authority of the apostles and their close associates (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 1 Corinthians 14:37-38; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). Today Christ still rules through the words of his apostles as they are preserved for us in the inspired writings of the New Testament. Therefore, every effort will be made to conform the structure and procedures and spirit of church governance as closely as possible to New Testament guidelines, with a constant eye to promoting the glory of God and the advancement of faith (1 Corinthians 10:31; Php 1:25).

Matthew 16:18

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Ephesians 2:19-20 So then you are . . . the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7:17

Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

1 Corinthians 14:37-38

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

2 Thessalonians 3:14

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Php 1:25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

Principle Two The ministry of the church is primarily the work of the members in the activity of worship toward God, nurture toward each other and witness toward the world. Internal structures for church governance are not the main ministry of the church, but are the necessary equipping and mobilizing of the saints for the work of ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Principle Three

Governance structures should be lean and efficient to this end, not aiming to include as many people as possible in office-holding, but to free and fit as many people as possible for ministry (implied in the preceding principle).

Principle Four

Christ is the head of the church and, spiritually, all his disciples are on a level ground before him, each having direct access to him and responsibility to intercede for the good of all as a community of priests.

Ephesians 4:15 Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.

Matthew 23:8-11 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Revelation 1:6

[Christ] has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father -to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Principle Five Not inconsistent with this equality, God has ordained the existence of officers in the church, some of whom are charged under Christ with the leadership of the church.

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Principle Six

Under Christ and his Word, the decisive court of appeal in the local church in deciding matters of disagreement is the gathered church assembly. (This is implied, first, in the fact that the leaders are not to lead by coercion, but by persuasion and free consent [1 Peter 5:3], second, in the fact that elders may be censured [1 Timothy 5:19], and third, in the fact that Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5:4 depict the gathered church assembly as the decisive court of appeal in matters of discipline).

1 Peter 5:1-3

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you. . . shepherd the flock of God among you. . . not as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

1 Timothy 5:19-20 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

Matthew 18:15-17

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [you are to] deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Principle Seven The local congregation therefore should call and dismiss its own leaders (implied in the preceding principle).

Principle Eight The leaders of the church should be people who are spiritually mature and exemplary (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), gifted for the ministry given to them (Romans 12:6-8), have a sense of divine urging (Acts 20:28), and are in harmony with the duly established

leadership of the church (Php 2:2).

1 Timothy 3:1-13

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, etc [15 qualifications are listed].

Titus 1:5-9 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, etc. [18 qualifications follow].

Romans 12:6-8

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Php 2:2 Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Principle Nine

Spiritual qualifications should never be sacrificed to technical expertise. For example, deacons or trustees or financial and property administrators should be men or women with hearts for God even more importantly than they have heads for finance, and best of all, both. (Implied in the preceding principle.)

Principle Ten The selection process should provide for the necessary assessment of possible leaders by a group able to discern the qualifications mentioned in #8; and that the process provide for the final approval by the congregation of all officers. (Implied in principles 6 and 7.) Principle Eleven

Terms of active service should not be dictated by the desire to include as many different people as possible in leadership (see #3 above), but by the careful balance between the need, on the one hand, to have the most qualified leaders and, on the other hand, to guard against burn out and stagnation.

04.05. Other Names for Elders in the NT

Other Names For Elders in the New Testament

Bishop/Overseer The English term "bishop" means overseer and is sometimes used to translate the Greek word "episcopos" which means "one who over (epi) sees (scopos)".

There are at least four reasons to consider this term (bishop/overseer) as equivalent to "elder" in the New Testament church.

Reason One: Titus 1:5 compared to Titus 1:7

Titus 1:5-7 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.

Compare Titus 1:5 with Titus 1:7, where "bishop/overseer" and "elder" are apparently interchangeable terms. Paul begins by saying that Titus should appoint elders (presbuterous) in every town (Titus 1:5). Then he gives some qualifications that they must meet (Titus 1:6), and continues without a break in Titus 1:7 by saying, "For a bishop (episkopon), as God’s steward must be blameless." Virtually all commentators agree that the same office is in view in these two terms: "elder" describing the man with reference to his dignity and standing (older); "bishop" describing the man with reference to his function and duty (oversight).

Reason Two: Acts 20:17 compared to Acts 20:28 Acts 20:17; Acts 20:28 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. . . . Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. In Acts 20:17, Paul calls the "elders" to come down from Ephesus. Then he says to them in Acts 20:28 that God has made them "guardians" (="overseers/bishops"; episkopous) among the flock. So the "elders" are the "bishops/overseers" in Ephesus.

Reason Three: 1 Timothy 3:1 ff compared to 1 Timothy 5:17

1 Timothy 3:1 If anyone aspires to the office of bishop/overseer, he desires a noble task.

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul says, "If anyone aspires to the office of bishop/overseer, he desires a noble task." Then he gives the qualifications for the overseer/bishop in 1 Timothy 3:2-7. Unlike the deacons, the overseer must be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2), and in 1 Timothy 3:5, he is said to be one whose management of his own household fits him to care for God’s church. These two functions are ascribed to elders in the fifth chapter of this same book (1 Timothy 5:17) -teaching and governing. So it is very likely that in Paul’s mind the

bishops/overseers of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 are the same as the elders of 1 Timothy 5:17.

Reason Four: Php 1:1 compared to 1 Timothy 3:1 ff and Acts 14:23 In Php 1:1 Paul writes, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." These, then, seem to be the two offices of the church just as in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 the qualifications are given only for these two. But Paul appointed "elders" in all the churches (Acts 14:23), and so it is very likely that the elders of the church at Philippi were the bishops/overseers referred to in Php 1:1.

We conclude that the office of bishop/overseer is the same as the office of elder in the New Testament. It is listed beside the office of deacon (Php 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13) in such a way as to show that these two were the main offices by which the ongoing life of the church was to be managed.

Pastor The term "pastor" (poimen) occurs in the New Testament only once (Ephesians 4:11 "He gave some . . . as pastors and teachers"). But there is a verb (poimainein "to shepherd, or feed") closely related to the noun "pastor" which helps us discover how the role of pastor was related to the role of elder and bishop.

Reason One

Ephesians 4:11 treats pastors and teachers as one group and thus suggests that the chief role of the pastor is feeding the flock through teaching, a role clearly assigned to bishops/overseers in 1 Timothy 3:2 ("An elder must be . . . apt to teach") and to elders in Titus 1:9 ("He will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict"). This suggests that "pastor" is another name for "elder" and "overseer."

Reason Two In Acts 20:28, the "elders" of Ephesus are encouraged in their "pastoral" duties, thus showing that Paul saw the elders as the shepherds or pastors. (Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.")

Reason Three In 1 Peter 5:1-2, the "elders" are told to "tend the flock of God" that is in their charge. In other words, Peter saw the elders as, essentially, pastors or shepherds. (1 Peter 5:1-2, "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you.")

Conclusion The New Testament only refers to the office of pastor one time (Ephesians 4:11). It is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the care and feeding of the church as God’s flock, just as "bishop/overseer" is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the governing or oversight of the church. We may conclude therefore that "pastor" and "elder" and "bishop/overseer" refer in the New Testament to the same office. This office stands alongside "deacon" in Php 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 in such a way as to show that the two abiding officers instituted by the New Testament are elder and deacon.

04.06. Function of Elders in the NT

The Function Of Elders in the New Testament:

Governing And Teaching The responsibilities of elders are summed up under two heads: governing and teaching.

Governing

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule (= govern, proestotes) well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who labor in preaching (logo) and teaching (didaskalia).

1 Timothy 3:4-5

He must manage (proistamenon) his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage (prostenai) his own household, how can he care for God’s church?

Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

1 Peter 5:2 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you . . .shepherd the flock of God. The duty of elders to "oversee" or "shepherd" the flock implies a governing or leading function.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you (proistamenous) in the Lord and admonish you.

There is no reference to "elders" here, but the function of the leaders is governing, and the natural assumption is that the leaders are elders that Paul had appointed according to Acts 14:23.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account.

Obedience and submission imply a role of leadership and governance and, again, the reference is probably to the elders, though the leaders are not described explicitly as elders.

Teaching Ephesians 4:11-12 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Pastors and teachers are pictured as one office, so that the pastor (whom we have identified as an elder) has the responsibility of teaching.

1 Timothy 3:2 An overseer, then, must be . . . able to teach. The overseer must be "able to teach." And we have seen that the overseer and elder are the same office. This qualification is not included in the list of qualifications for deacons.

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

All have to be able to teach, but some "labor," that is, they devote more time and energy to it, perhaps earning their living by it. Each elder is vested with the right to teach and exercise authority in the church and so must have the qualifications for it.

Titus 1:9

He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. Not all elders need to be able to do public preaching. The requirement is not for a preaching gift, but for a solid grasp of doctrine and ability to spot and correct errors and explain Biblical truth plainly.

Conclusion The function of elders may be summed up under two heads: teaching and governing. They are the doctrinal guardians of the flock and the overseers of the life of the church responsible to God for the feeding and care and ministry of the people.

Chapter 55

04.07. Biblical Qualifications for Elders

Biblical Qualifications for Elders

Note: The issue of whether elders should be men or women or both is covered in the book, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, edited by Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991). We will not take it up in detail here. The position of Bethlehem Baptist Church, expressed in our constitution, is that elders will be spiritual men who aim not to lord it over anyone, but to be servants of the people of God for their upbuilding in the joy of faith. The main text relating to this issue is 1 Timothy 2:11-13.

Qualifications of Elders According to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 1 Timothy 3:1 "The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop [=elder], he desires a noble task."

Aspiration (oregetai/ epithumei) At least one way for a man to attain the role of elder/bishop was to aspire to it. In fact, since it is the duty of elders to do their work with gladness and not under constraint or for love of money (1 Peter 5:1-3), this should be thought of as one of the elders' qualifications. This need not exclude the possibility that a man may be sought out and urged to become an elder. But no pressure should be used that would result in an unwilling, half-hearted service.

1 Timothy 3:2 "Therefore it is necessary for the bishop [=elder] to be irreproachable."

Irreproachability (anepilempton) The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 Timothy 5:7 (where widows are to be without reproach by putting their hope in God and not living luxuriously or sumptuously or self-indulgently) and 1 Timothy 6:14 (where Timothy is to keep the commandment irreproachable until Jesus comes). The word seems to be a general word for living in a way that gives no cause for others to think badly of the church or the faith or the Lord. This tells us nothing about the sort of thing that would bring reproach on the church or the Lord. But, coming at the head of the list it puts a tremendous emphasis on what a person's reputation is. The focus here is not a person's relationship to the Lord, but how others see him. It seems, therefore, that right from the outset, the public nature of the office is in view with its peculiar demands.

1 Timothy 3:2 ". . . one woman's husband. . ."

One Woman's Husband (mias gunaikas andras) The word order emphasizes the word "one". So it is not likely that Paul meant to say that the elders have to be married. There are other words for "married" he could have used. He probably would have put "husband" in the prominent place if that were his intention. Moreover, Paul was not married (1 Corinthians 9:5; 1 Corinthians 7:7) and he thought singleness was an excellent way to be freer for ministry (1 Corinthians 7:32). In 1 Timothy 3:4, Paul gets to the issue of how well a man manages his household. So the point here probably is not the man's competence as a husband. The point, coming right after irreproachable, is probably one of notoriety. What is this man's reputation with regard to whether he has had one wife or not. It appears that the public standard will be high. Does this standard mean that an elder

1) may not be a polygamist?

2) may not remarry after the death of his wife?

3) may not be remarried after a divorce? The main argument against #1 is the use of the parallel phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9 in reference to widows whom the church was enrolling in a welfare and service order. She must be "one man's wife" (henos andros gune). Since polyandry (a woman having several husbands at once) was simply not a practice, this very probably means that the woman had not divorced and remarried.

Moreover the phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9 surely did not mean that the widow was excluded from the order if she had remarried when her first husband died. For in 1 Timothy 5:14 the younger widows were encouraged to remarry, and it is unlikely that, having said this, Paul would then later exclude them from the widows' order because they had followed his advice.

Song of Solomon 2:1-17 is not likely either, in view of what we just saw about the similar phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9 concerning widows whom Paul encouraged to remarry. Moreover, it would be strange if he rejected widowers who had married after the death of their wives in view of Paul's complete endorsement of remarrying after the death of a spouse (Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Therefore, the most likely meaning for the standard of "one woman's husband" is that the eldership should be composed of men who have never been remarried after divorce.

1 Timothy 3:2 ". . .temperate. . ."

Temperate (nephalion) This word is used two other times in the New Testament - in 1 Timothy 3:11 of the women (wives of?) deacons; and in Titus 2:2 about older men in general.

It is odd that it is used here, even though in 1 Timothy 3:3 the elders must not be addicted to wine (me paroinon). Perhaps here the point is more general - namely, that his temperance extends over other things besides wine. Or perhaps the repetition comes because in 1 Timothy 3:3 there begins a list of things which the elder is not supposed to be, and Paul felt obliged to include the problem of wine in the negative list as well as the positive. The standard here is one of self-control and mastery of his appetites. Wine would surely not be the only drink or food that a person can misuse.

1 Timothy 3:2 ". . . sensible . . ."

Sensible, Prudent, Reasonable (sophrona) The word is used only here and in Titus 1:8 of elders, and Titus 2:2 of older men and Titus 2:5 of younger women.

It is related to sophroneo which means to be of a sound mind - like the demoniac after he was healed (Mark 5:15). The basic idea seems to be having good judgment, which implies seeing things as they really are, knowing yourself well, and understanding people and how they respond. We might say "being in touch with your feelings" or being in touch with reality so that there are no great gaps between what you see in yourself and what others see in you.

1 Timothy 3:2 ". . . dignified . . ."

Respectable, Honorable, (kosmios) The idea seems to be one of not offending against propriety - a person who comports himself in situations so as not to step on toes unnecessarily.

1 Timothy 3:2 ". . . hospitable . . ."

Hospitable (philoxenon) An elder should be who loves strangers - that is, who is given to being kind to newcomers and makes them feel at home - a person whose home is open for ministry and who does not shrink back from having guests, not a secretive person.

1 Timothy 3:2 ". . . an apt teacher. . ."

Skilled in Teaching (didaktikon) This need not mean that the person is very good in front of a group, since not all elders devote all their time to formal teaching or preaching (1 Timothy 5:17). Rather, as Titus 1:9 says, "He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it." In other words, he must know Biblical doctrine well and be able to explain it to people. He must be astute enough theologically that he can spot serious error and show a person why it is wrong and harmful.

1 Timothy 3:3 ". . . no drunkard. . ." Not Addicted to Wine (me paroinon) The general qualification here would be like the one above under temperance, namely, self-control - not addicted to anything harmful or debilitating or worldly. Freedom from enslavements should be so highly prized that no bondage is yielded to.

1 Timothy 3:3 ". . . not violent. . ." Not Pugnacious or Belligerent (me plekten) The point here is that the temper should be under control. He must not be given to quarreling or fighting. There should be a conciliatory bent. His feelings should not be worn on the sleeve. He should not carry resentments or be hypercritical.

1 Timothy 3:3 ". . . but gentle. . ."

Gentle (epieke) This is the opposite of pugnacious or belligerent. He should not be harsh or mean-spirited. He should be inclined to tenderness and resort to toughness only when the circumstances commend this form of love. His words should not be acid or divisive but helpful and encouraging.

1 Timothy 3:3 ". . . not quarrelsome. . ."

Peaceable (amachon) This seems almost identical with "not pugnacious or belligerent". In fact, the last three seem to go together as a unit that stresses peacemaking rather than factiousness or troublemaking. This would have great implications about the way he uses his tongue.

1 Timothy 3:3 ". . . not loving money. . ." Not a Lover of Money (aphilarguron)

He should be putting the kingdom first in all he does. His lifestyle should not reflect a love of luxury. He should be a generous giver. He should not be anxious about his financial future. He should not be so money-oriented that ministry decisions revolve around this issue.

1 Timothy 3:4-5 "He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God’s church?"

Leader of a Well-ordered Household (kalos proistamenon) The home is a proving ground for ministry. He should have submissive children. This does not mean perfect, but it does mean well-disciplined, so that they do not blatantly and regularly disregard the instructions of their parents. The children should revere the father (meta pases semnotetos). He should be a loving and responsible spiritual leader in the home. His wife should be respected and tenderly loved. Their relationship should be openly admirable.

1 Timothy 3:6 "He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." A Mature Believer, Not a New Convert (me neophuton) The "condemnation of the devil" seems to be the condemnation that the devil is under because of his being puffed up. So the new believer, given too much responsibility too soon, may easily swell with pride. The implication is that part of Christian seasoning is a humbling process and a growing protection against pride. We should see evidences in his life that humility is a fixed virtue and not easily overturned.

1 Timothy 3:7 "moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

Good Reputation with Outsiders (Marturian kalen) This is similar to "irreproachability" in 1 Timothy 3:2. But here it is made explicit that the outside unbelieving world is in view. This doesn’t mean the world sets the standards, since Jesus himself was rejected by some. What it seems to mean is that a Christian leader should at least meet the standards of the world for decency and respectability, for the standards of the church should be higher. The snare of the devil is referred to in 2 Timothy 2:26. It seems to involve deception and sin, since to be rescued from it is to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. How does not being well thought of by outsiders cause you to fall into reproach and the snare of the devil? Could it be that the reproaches of the world would cause a person to try to hide his faults in the church and thus fall into lying or duplicity?

Qualifications Of Elders (Continued) According to Titus 1:5-9 Titus 1:6 "If any man is blameless. . ."

Blamelessness (anegkletos) This is virtually the same as "irreproachable". The idea is that no ongoing blame attaches to a man. If he does wrong he makes it right.

Titus 1:6 ". . .the husband of one wife. . ."

See above, One Woman’s Husband.

Titus 1:6 ". . .and his children believers, not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate."

Honest and Orderly Children (pista, me in kategoria asotias e anupotakta) The meaning is probably the same as 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and the well-ordered house. There, the children are to be "in subjection with all reverence"(en hupotage meta pases semnotatetos).

Here, the focus is not just on the relationship of the children to the father, but on their behavior in general. They are not to be guilty of the accusation of "wild living" or uncontrolled behavior. And they are not to be "insubordinate". Does pista mean "believing" (with RSV) or "faithful" in the sense of honest and trustworthy? In favor of the latter would be the use of the word in 1 Timothy 3:11,

where women (deaconesses or wives of deacons) are to be pistas en pasin, faithful in all things. Other places in the pastoral epistles where the word seems to have this meaning are 1 Timothy 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Timothy 3:1; 1 Timothy 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:9; Titus 3:8. So the idea seems to be of children who are well bred, orderly, generally obedient, responsible, and reliable.

Titus 1:7 ". . .blameless. . ."

See above on Titus 1:6, Blamelessness.

Titus 1:7 ". . . not arrogant. . ."

Humility (me authade) This is the assumption behind his not being a new believer, lest he be puffed up. He should be lowly in his demeanor, not speaking much of himself or his achievements. He should count others better than himself and be quick to serve. He should sincerely give God the credit and honor for any accomplishments.

Titus 1:7 ". . .not quick-tempered. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Gentle and Peaceable.

Titus 1:7 ". . .not a drunkard. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Not Addicted to Wine.

Titus 1:7 ". . .not violent. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Not Pugnacious Or Belligerent.

Titus 1:7 ". . .not greedy for gain. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Not a Lover of Money.

Titus 1:8 ". . .hospitable. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Hospitable.

Titus 1:8 ". . . a lover of goodness. . ."

Lover 0f Goodness (philagothon)

He should love to see good done and love to be involved in doing good. This is more than doing good. This is a bent and love to see it done. A kind of expansive person.

Titus 1:8 ". . . master of himself. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Sensible, Prudent, Reasonable.

Titus 1:8 ". . . upright. . ."

Just (dikaion) He should care about whether people are treated fairly and should want to see justice in the world at all levels.

Titus 1:8 ". . . holy. . ."

Devout, Holy (hosion)

He should be a person of devotion to Christ with a life of prayer and meditation. He should love worship and have a deep personal relationship with the Lord.

Titus 1:8 ". . . self-controlled. . ."

Self-Control (egkrate) The focus here is especially on sexual self-control. He should not be in the grip of lust. He should not toy with pornography. He should be utterly faithful to his wife.

Titus 1:9 "He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Skilled in Teaching.

Here the stress is laid on the doctrinal proficiency of the elders.

1. First is stressed his firm hold on the truth. This refers to the subjective relation he bears to the truth. Is it loved (2 Thessalonians 2:10)? Is the person solid and unshakable in his grasp of the truth? Has the truth taken hold of him? The opposite would be a person who is never quite sure of where he stands or a person who thinks that doctrinal definition is generally unimportant or a person who has his learning mainly second-hand from books and teachers and not from the Bible itself, so that his hold is weak.

2. Second is stressed the nature of the word he holds - it is sure and accords with the (apostolic) teaching. This would mean a good grasp of Biblical truth, especially the doctrine of the apostles. The Bible, not other books, must be the foundation of doctrinal knowledge, though other books are very helpful and inspirational.

3. Third is stressed the positive role of teaching this healthy doctrine to others. A person who says, "I know what it means but I can’t explain it so others can understand it" would probably not make a suitable elder. The church is in great need of being led by men who not only know, but can explain, Biblical doctrine. They are responsible for the spread of the truth in the church and from the church.

4. Finally is stressed the negative role of confuting doctrinal error. So the elders must be fairly incisive observers of the thought-world of the day. They need to be able to spot the encroachments of secular principles and assumptions. And they need to be able to correct opponents and straying saints (2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:19-20).

These Lists of Qualifications Are Not Exhaustive

These lists in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are not intended to be exhaustive. We can tell that from the fact that they are not the same. Titus mentions piety (hosion) and justice (dikaion) and sexual self-control (egkrate), but 1 Timothy does not mention these in particular. On the other hand, 1 Timothy mentions that the elder must not be a new convert (neophuton), and that he must be respectable (kosmion) which Titus does not mention specifically.

Neither mentions specifically prayer. Neither forbids the elders explicitly from being robbers or liars or gossips, etc. The point is that the lists are not exhaustive. Paul takes numerous virtues for

granted and gives these as examples. There may be other expectations implied in the ones listed. We should follow the ones listed and let them be the guide for what others we assume.

04.08. Appendices

Appendix 1 Baptist Church Government

Illustrated From Historic

Baptist Confessions The purpose of this historical survey is to show that, from their earliest beginnings Baptists, have held to the view that the two ongoing church offices presented in the New Testament are elders and deacons, and that only in more modern developments has the eldership largely disappeared from Baptist churches. A Short confession of Faith in Twenty Articles by John Smyth, 1609

Article 16 The ministers of the church are, not only bishops (episcopos), to whom the power is given of dispensing both the Word and the sacraments, but also deacons, men and widows, who attend to the affairs of the poor and sick brethren. A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam, 1611

Article 20 That the Officers of every Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls, Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2-3, or Deacons, Men and Women, who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies, Acts 6:1-4 Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion, 1612-1614

Proposition 76 That Christ hath set in His outward church two sorts of ministers: viz., some who are called pastors, teachers or elders, who administer the Word and sacraments, and others who are called Deacons, men and women: whose ministry is, to serve tables and wash the saints' feet (Acts 6:2-4; Php 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2-3; 1 Timothy 3:8; 1 Timothy 3:11; and 1 Timothy 5:1-25). The London Confession, 1644

Article 36 That being thus joyned, every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves meet persons into the office of Pastors,* Teachers,* Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of his Church, and that none other have power to impose them, either these or any other.

* "Pastors" and "Teachers" are omitted in later editions.

Second London Confession, 1677 and 1688 Article 26, paragraph 8 A particular Church gathered, and completely Organized, according to the mind of Christ, consists of Officers, and Members; And the Officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the Church (so called and gathered) for the peculiar Administration of Ordinances, and Execution of power, or Duty which he entrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons.

Articles of the Baptist Bible Union of America, 1923

Article 13

We believe that a church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers . . that its officers of ordination are pastors, elders and deacons, whose qualifications, claims and duties are clearly defined in the Scriptures.

Statement of Faith of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1925 and 1963

Article 6 This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. A Comment on Tradition Of course our only infallible rule for faith and practice is not tradition, either old or new, but rather, is the Word of God. Nevertheless, we believe that humility and wisdom commend the careful consideration of what our fathers in the faith have taught and practiced. We are not the sole possessors of truth. And we are very prone to be blind at the very points where perhaps they saw clearly. The least we can say from this historical survey of Baptist Confessions is that it is false to say that the eldership is unbaptistic. On the contrary, the eldership is more baptistic than its absence, and its disappearance is a modern phenomenon that parallels other developments in doctrine that make its disappearance questionable at best.

Note: The story of the presence and then gradual disappearance of multiple elders from the Congregational churches of New England in the 17th and 18th century is told briefly by Iain Murray in Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography, pp. 344-6. But in the end, the issue is whether the Bible itself teaches a form of church governance including elders and deacons as the two abiding officers of the church.

Appendix 2

Deacons

What Did Deacons Do? The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word diakonos. It usually has the general meaning, "servant," in a broad range of contexts. For example: The servants at the wedding who carried the water containers.

John 2:5; John 2:9 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Christ is called servant to the circumcision.

Romans 15:8 Christ became a servant to the circumcision to show God’s truthfulness.

Paul calls himself a servant (=minister) of the new covenant.

2 Corinthians 3:6 God has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant.

. . .and of the Gospel

Colossians 1:23 Do not shift from the hope of the Gospel. . . of which I Paul became a minister.

. .and of the church.

Colossians 1:24

I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister.

See also 1 Corinthians 3:5.

Tychicus is called a faithful servant in the Lord.

Ephesians 6:21 Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister of the Lord will tell you everything.

Timothy is called God's servant.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 We sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in the Gospel of Christ. The disciples are told that if they would be great they must be servants.

Matthew 20:26 Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. The Greek noun that describes what a diakonos does is diakonia and has meanings just as broad.

Martha is concerned with too much serving (Luke 10:40). The widows of the Hellenists were being overlooked in the daily distribution(Acts 6:1). But three verses later (Acts 6:4) Luke refers to the task of the apostles as the ministry of the Word (see Acts 1:17; Acts 1:25). The raising of money for the poor saint was called a ministry (Acts 11:29; Acts 12:25; Romans 15:31; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 2 Corinthians 9:1; 2 Corinthians 9:12-13).

Paul calls his own assignment from the Lord a ministry (Acts 20:24; Acts 21:19; Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 5:18).

It is listed in the gifts between prophecy and teaching in Romans 12:7. And "various ministries" is listed between "various gifts" and "various workings" in 1 Corinthians 12:5. The old covenant is called a ministry of death and condemnation as compared to the new covenant which is called a ministry of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:7-9).

Pastor/teachers are to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12).

Angels are sent for ministry to saints (Hebrews 1:4). The verb form of this Greek word is diakoneo. It can also have the broad general meaning of "serve."

Jesus came to serve not be served (Matthew 20:28).

Therefore he taught that a good leader is one who serves (Luke 22:26).

Jesus said that if anyone serves him, the Father would honor him (John 12:26).

Timothy and Erastus are described as those who serve Paul (Acts 19:22). But there is a strong tendency of this verb (diakoneo) to refer to the kind of serving that involves very practical acts of supplying material needs, and literally table-service.

Angels came to serve Jesus in the wilderness, that is, to tend to his needs (Matthew 4:11).

Peter's mother-in-law rose from her sick bed to serve her guests (Matthew 8:15). The women who followed Jesus served out of their own pockets (Matthew 27:55; Luke 8:3).

Martha served from the kitchen (Luke 10:40 John 12:2).

Paul’s carrying money to Jerusalem is doing service (Romans 15:25; 2 Corinthians 8:19). The serving of Onesiphorus was refreshing to Paul. It was mentioned in connection with his not being ashamed of Paul’s chains. This probably implies that he visited him in prison (2 Timothy 1:16-18). In the same vein, Paul wants to keep Onesimus, the converted slave, with him so he can serve him in prison (Philemon 1:13). The saints of Hebrews are described as serving the saints in love (Hebrews 6:10), and later they are described as visiting saints in prison (Hebrews 10:32-34).

Speaking and serving are treated separately by Peter (1 Peter 4:10-11), as though there may have been a word ministry (perhaps the teaching of elders) and a non-word-serving ministry (perhaps the service of deacons) .

Matthew 25:44 may be the best summary in the New Testament of the kinds of activities done by one who "serves."

Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not serve thee?"

Summary The basic meaning of the diakon-word group is apparently practical, active, helping with respect to the basic necessities of life. From Matthew 25:44, we could include dire needs arising from hunger, thirst, alienation, nakedness, sickness, imprisonment. That would imply that the basic notion of "serving" in the sense of being a deacon is to help meet needs for:

food,

water,

welcome, acceptance and hospitality,

clothing,

health,

and whatever needs arise from emergencies and

unusual pressures and stress (like imprisonment).

Probably the term is applied to ministries of the Word and apostleship and Christ’s own ministry to show that they are to be done humbly and in compassion and for the benefit of others. But when Jesus says in Luke 22:26 that the leader should become as one who serves (as he did!), he does not mean that there are no differences between a leader and a non-leader. He means that the lowliness that is natural for a table waiter should also characterize those in positions of leadership. So even though the highest offices (apostle, for example) are called "ministry" or "service," this does not mean that there is no office in the church with a special focus on practical and more material needs.

It appears that the deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Php 1:1 were that kind of officers. Were Women Deacons?

Probably yes. There are four observations that incline me to think that this office was held by both men and women.

1. The Greek word for deacon can be masculine or feminine in the same form. So the word itself does not settle the issue.

2. In the middle of the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Paul says, "The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things." This could be the wives of the deacons, but could also be the women deacons. The latter is suggested by the fact that no reference to women is made in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Since women were not candidates for the eldership in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:12-13) because of its authoritative function in teaching and oversight, the absence of the reference to women in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 would be expected. But this confirms the probability that the reference to women in 1 Timothy 3:11 is to women deacons, not merely to wives of deacons.

3. The deacons were distinguished from the elders in that they were not the governing body in the church nor were they charged with the duty of authoritative teaching. So the role of deacon seems not to involve anything that Paul taught in 1 Timothy 2:12 (or anywhere else) which is inappropriate for women to perform in the church.

4. In Romans 16:1, Phoebe is very probably called a deacon. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon(ess) of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well."

It appears then that the role of deacon is of such a nature that nothing stands in the way of women’s full participation in it. Within the deaconate itself, the way the men and women relate to each other would be guided by the sense of appropriateness, growing out of the Biblical teaching of male and female complementarity.

Qualifications of Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13) 1 Timothy 3:8 "Deacons likewise must be serious. . ."

Serious, Earnest, Honorable (semnous) The idea of "serious" by itself seems inadequate. This would be an unsatisfactory translation of Php 4:8 : "Think on these things . . . whatever is true, whatever is honorable. . ." "Serious" is morally neutral. But this word isn’t. The person should not be flippant, but earnest about life.

1 Timothy 3:8 ". . . not double-tongued. . ."

Genuine, Authentic (me dilogous)

"Double-tongued" implies saying one thing to be true here and another thing to be true there, according to what people would think. So it implies a lack of love for truth and a fear of human disapproval and a general instability.

1 Timothy 3:8 ". . . not addicted to much wine. . ."

Temperate (me oino pollo prosechontas)

Prosechontas implies "to concern oneself with" or "to give attention to" or "to turn one’s mind toward." So there should be a freedom from drink, and presumably from all substances that would be harmful if taken too freely. The picture is of a person under control, not carried along 1) by the opinions of others (genuine, authentic) or 2) by his appetites (temperate) or 3) by levity (serious,

honorable).

1 Timothy 3:8 ". . . not greedy for gain. . ."

Content with simplicity (me aischrokerdeis) This word is used in Titus 1:7 of elders and in adverb form of elders in 1 Peter 5:2. It corresponds to aphilargon (not a lover of money) in 1 Timothy 3:3.

It seems to be a fourth dimension of freedom (see "temperate" above for the first three), freedom from the pull of money. Other motives should drive him. There should be a contentment in God and a heavenly mindedness.

1 Timothy 3:9 "...having the mystery of the faith in a clean conscience."

Deep Convictions Concerning The Faith The issue of conscience does not appear to be the general issue as in 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Timothy 4:2; 2 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:15. But 1:19 is a very close connection: "holding faith and a good conscience."

It seems that the conscience bears directly on the "faith in good conscience." This inclines me to think that the issue is the sincerity of the faith. Do the deacons really have faith rooted in their hearts or are there sneaking doubts? Are their consciences clear when they make a public profession of their faith?

1 Timothy 3:10 "And let them also be tested first. . ."

Tested (dokimazesthosan) The test is not specified, but it is to precede the work as deacons. The test would be two-fold: the life they have lived and the assessment of it by those who know them and by some appropriate body of the church. This would surely apply to all the leaders including elders and deacons.

I see three usual steps in the testing and selection of leaders.

1. The elders would take responsibility to see that the testing and approval is done in accord with Biblical criteria since they are responsible for the general oversight of the church and for the doctrinal purity of the leadership.

2. They may need to involve representatives of the congregation who have a wider knowledge of some people than they do.

3. The congregation itself would be the final test of approval, as they are the last court of appeal in matters of church discipline (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4). Therefore, all would be approved by the church as the final step of "testing" and "approval."

1 Timothy 3:10 ". . . then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons."

Blameless (anegkletoi)

Blameless in the sense that no blame is discovered that has not been settled in a Biblical way. It does not mean perfect, but free from ongoing guilt for some unsettled wrong.

1 Timothy 3:11 We will come back to this verse.

1 Timothy 3:12 "Let the deacons be the husband of one wife. . ."

One Woman’s Husband See section 1 Timothy 3:2 (p. 34-35).

1 Timothy 3:12 ". . . and let them manage their children and their households well." This would seem to imply some measure of administrative ability, but note well, unlike the case with the elders in 1 Timothy 3:5, it does not say, "for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God’s church?" General oversight does not appear to be in view as with the "overseers" of 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

Rather, the point is probably the general truth that much of a man’s true character and gifts come out in the way he leads his family. Something is significantly wrong if the man appears religious and able at church but has a disorderly home.

Again the home is the proving ground for all fitness for leadership in the church.

1 Timothy 3:13 "For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." This is not a qualification but a promise of what comes with the faithful execution of the diaconate. A good standing for themselves may mean a respectable place in the Christian community or a safe place in the last Day of Judgment as in 1 Timothy 6:19. And great confidence is the subjective boldness that rises with the faithful performance of duty.

(Now back to 1 Timothy 3:11 and the question of the women.) 1 Timothy 3:11 "Likewise the women. . ." Is this a reference to the wives of the deacons or a reference to women who were deaconesses? See pages 56-57 for a slightly fuller treatment of this issue. In Favor of "Deaconesses": The use of "likewise" to introduce the group in the same way the deacons were introduced in 1 Timothy 3:8 suggests a new order, namely, deaconesses.

2. The women are not mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 where overseers are being discussed. If wives are in view, you would expect that they would be. But if women as a distinct order are in view, you would not, because the elders are given responsibilities which Paul says women should not assume. So the absence of women among the overseers and the presence of the women among the deacons suggests an order, not wives.

3. Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2 appears to be a deaconess.

4. The deacons are not charged with any duties that in themselves would contradict what Paul says is appropriate for women to do in the church. In Favor of "Wives":

You would expect that they would be called "deaconesses" instead of women or wives.

Paul returns to the qualifications of deacons in the next verse, which seems strange if he had begun to discuss a new order.

It seems that the decision will not be made with confidence simply from this text alone but will be made on the basis of the wider considerations of what is appropriate for women to do according to all the New Testament teachings.

1 Timothy 3:11 ". . . must be serious. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:8, Serious, Earnest, Honorable.

1 Timothy 3:11 ". . . no slanderers. . ." Not Slanderers, Gossips (me diabolous) A woman who has itchy ears and a loose tongue will not be a good deaconess. Her words must build up. She must keep confidences and not be addicted to scuttlebutt.

1 Timothy 3:11 ". . .temperate. . ."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Temperate.

1 Timothy 3:11 ". . . faithful in all things."

Honest, Trustworthy, Reliable, Loyal (pistas in pasin) See above on Titus 1:6, Honest.

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Chapter 57

05.01. Biographies

Biographies by

John Piper

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Chapter 59

05.03. “The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle” - The Value of a Masculine Ministry

“The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle” - The Value of a Masculine Ministry In dealing with the life and ministry of John Charles Ryle, my hope is to clarify and commend what I mean by the value of a masculine ministry. But before we turn to “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle,”1 let me make some clarifying comments from the Bible.

God has revealed himself to us in the Bible pervasively as King, not Queen, and as Father, not Mother. The second person of the Trinity is revealed as the eternal Son. The Father and the Son created man and woman in his image, and gave them together the name of the man, Adam (Genesis 5:2). God appoints all the priests in Israel to be men. The Son of God comes into the world as a man, not a woman. He chooses twelve men to be his apostles. The apostles tell the churches that all the overseers—the pastor/elders who teach and have authority (1 Timothy 2:12)—should be men; and that in the home, the head who bears special responsibility to lead, protect, and provide should be the husband (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Masculine Christianity From all of this, I conclude that God has given Christianity a masculine feel. And, being a God of love, he has done it for the maximum flourishing of men and women. He did not create women to languish, or be frustrated, or in any way to suffer or fall short of full and lasting joy, in a masculine Christianity. She is a fellow heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). From which I infer that the fullest flourishing of women and men takes place in churches and families where Christianity has this God-ordained, masculine feel. For the sake of the glory of women, and for the sake of the security and joy of children, God has made Christianity to have a masculine feel. He has ordained for the church a masculine ministry.

And, of course, this is liable to serious misunderstanding and serious abuse, because there are views of masculinity that would make such a vision repulsive. So here is more precisely what I mean. And words are always inadequate when describing beauty. Beauty always thrives best when she is perceived by God-given instincts rather than by rational definitions. But we must try. What I mean by “masculine Christianity,” or “masculine ministry,” or “Christianity with a masculine feel,” is this:

Theology and church and mission are marked by overarching godly male leadership in the spirit of Christ, with an ethos of tender-hearted strength, and contrite courage, and risk-taking decisiveness, and readiness to sacrifice for the sake of leading, protecting, and providing for the community—all of which is possible only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It’s the feel of a great, majestic God, who by his redeeming work in Jesus Christ, inclines men to take humble, Christ-exalting initiative, and inclines women to come alongside the men with joyful support, intelligent helpfulness, and fruitful partnership in the work.

There are, I believe, dozens of sweet and precious benefits that come to a church and family that has this kind of masculine feel. Some of those will emerge as we consider “‘The Frank and Manly

Mr. Ryle': The Value of a Masculine Ministry." His Early Life

John Charles Ryle was born May 10, 1816, near Macclesfield, in the County of Cheshire, England. His parents were nominal members of the Church of England with no interest in vital religion and would never embrace Ryle's evangelical faith—which he came to when he was 21 years old. At the age of eight, he was sent to a boarding school for three years, of which he said when he was 58, "I'm quite certain that I learned more moral evil in a private school than I ever did in my whole life afterwards."2 But he did leave "tolerably well grounded in Latin and Greek."3 A month later, at the age of eleven, he was sent to Eton, the elite preparatory school founded in 1440, and stayed there almost seven years, until he eighteen. "Religion," he says, "was at a very low ebb, and most boys knew far more about the heathen gods and goddesses that about Jesus Christ. . . . On Sundays there was nothing whatever to do us any good; the preaching of the fellows was beneath contempt."4

Cricket Captain The last year was his happiest, and the reason seems to be that he was the captain of the Cricket XI—a game he loved and followed all his life. In his last year at Eton, he became very prominent and powerful among the students: "I was ambitious and fond of influence, attained power and was conscious of it."5 He looked back on his Cricket experience with amazing appreciation for what it taught him about leadership:

I believe it gave me a power of commanding, managing, organizing, and directing, seeing through men's capacities, and using every man in the post to which he is best suited, bearing and forbearing, keeping men around me in good temper, which I have found of infinite use.6 He was on his way to becoming a strong and forceful personality.

Three Years at Oxford In October of 1834, he entered Christ Church, Oxford, where he stayed exactly three years till he was 21. He won the Craven University Scholarship, and at the end of his third year, he took a "brilliant first-class in classics."7 But in spite of his achievements he said,

I thoroughly disliked Oxford on many accounts. . . . Nothing disgusted me so much as the miserable idolatry of money and also of aristocratic connection. I never saw such an amount of toadying flattery, and fawning upon wealth and title as I saw among the undergraduates at Oxford.8 And later, from his perspective as a believer, he wrote, "At Oxford things were very little better [than Eton]. No one cared for our souls anymore than if we had been a pack of heathen."9 So up till the age of 21, Ryle says, "I had no true religion at all. . . . I certainly never said my prayers, or read a word of my Bible, from the time I was 7 to the time I was 21. . . . My father's house was respectable and well conducted but there really was not a bit of [true] religion in it." 10 His Conversion But things were about to change dramatically.

About the end of 1837 [just after Oxford], my character underwent a thorough and entire change, in consequence of a complete alteration in my view of religion. . . . This change was . . . extremely great and has had . . . a sweeping influence over the whole of my life ever since.11 At least three things conspired to bring this about. First, a severe illness confined him to bed. "That was the time," he wrote, "when I distinctly remember I began to read my Bible and began to pray."12

Then a new gospel ministry opened in his hometown of Macclesfield. Till that time, he says, "there was no ministry of the gospel at the church we attended. Macclesfield . . . had only two churches, and in neither of them was the gospel preached."13 But then a new church was opened and the

gospel was preached, and Ryle was contrarian enough to be attracted to it when everyone was criticizing it.

There was a kind of stir among dry bones, and great outcry against the attendants of this new church. This also worked for my good. My natural independence, combativeness, and love of minorities, and hearty dislike for swimming with the stream, combined to make me think that these new evangelical preachers who were so sneered at and disliked were probably right.14 The third influence was some good evangelical books that came into his hands. He mentions Wilberforce's Practical View of Christianity, Angel James's Christian Professor, Scott's Reply to Bishop Tomline, Newton's Cardiaphonia, Milner's Church History, and Bickersteth's Christian Student.15 So God used Ryle's sickness, the gospel preacher, and the evangelical books, and by the beginning of 1838, he says, "I was fairly launched as a Christian, and started on the road which I think I have never entirely left, from that time to this."16 He tells us what the truths were that the Holy Spirit pressed on his soul in those days:

Nothing . . . appeared to me so clear and distinct, as my own sinfulness, Christ's preciousness, the value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out of the world, the need of being born again, the enormous folly of the whole doctrine of baptismal regeneration. All these things, I repeat, seemed to flash upon me like a sunbeam in the winter of 1837 and have stuck in my mind from that time down to this.

People may account for such a change as they like, my own belief is that no rational explanation of it can be given but that of the Bible; it was what the Bible calls "conversion" or "regeneration." Before that time I was dead in sins and on the high road to hell, and from that time I have become alive and had a hope of heaven. And nothing to my mind can account for it, but the free sovereign grace of God. And it was the greatest change and event in my life, and has been an influence over the whole of my subsequent history.17 The Bankruptcy He Never Forgot For the next three and a half years, he mainly worked in the bank that his father owned. Then disaster struck in June 1841, when he was 25 years old. His father lost everything in bankruptcy. Ryle describes this event as so traumatic that "if I had not been a Christian at that time, I do not know if I should not have committed suicide."18

"Every single acre and penny my father possessed had to be given up to meet the demand of the creditors. . . . We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined."19 His own testimony about the effect of this disaster on his life is remarkable.

God alone knows how the iron entered into my soul . . . . I am quite certain it inflicted a wound on my body and mind of which I feel the effects most heavily at this day [he is writing this 32 years later in 1873] and shall feel it if I live to be hundred. To suppose that people do not feel things because they do not scream and yell and fill the air with their cries, is simple nonsense. . . . I do not think there has been a single day in my life for 32 years, that I have not remembered the . . . humiliation.

20 Nevertheless, Ryle believed in the sovereignty of God and knew that this event was decisive in making him what he was.

I have not the least doubt it was all for the best. If . . . I had never been ruined, my life of course would have been a very different one. I should have probably gone into Parliament . . . I should never have been a clergyman, never have preached, written a tract or a book. Perhaps I might have made shipwreck in spiritual things. So I do not mean to say at all, that I wish it to have been different to what it was.21 But now what would he do? He had no idea. “The plans of my life were broken up at the age of 25. . . I was going to leave my father’s house without the least idea what was going to happen, where I was going to live, or what I was going to do.”22 Reluctantly Entering the Ministry The Rector of the parish of Fawley, Rev. Gibson, knew of Ryle’s conversion and leadership gifts, and asked him to be the curate of Exbury. It was a strange way to enter the ministry in which he would become the foremost evangelical spokesman of the Church of England in his day.

I never had any particular desire to become a clergyman, and those who fancied that my self will and natural tastes were gratified by it were totally and entirely mistaken. I became a clergyman because I felt shut up to do it, and saw no other course of life open me.23 His parents did not like the idea, but could suggest nothing better, and so he accepted the offer “with a very heavy heart,”24 and was ordained by the Bishop of Winchester in December, 1841. The people liked him. “I think they would have done anything for me,” he says, although “on the whole . . . I think I was regarded as an enthusiastic, fanatical mad dog of whom most people were afraid.”25

He prepared two written sermons each Sunday, spoke extemporaneously on Wednesday and Thursday, visited 60 families each week, and during an outbreak of scarlet fever, he says, “I saved many lives . . . by supplying them with large quantities of beef tea, made from concentrated essence, and insisted on their swallowing it, as long as their throats kept open.”26 The church was soon filled on Sunday. But he resigned in two years (November, 1843) for health reasons. “The district thoroughly disagreed with me. . . . Constant headache, indigestion, and disturbances of the heart then began and have been the plagues, and have disturbed me ever since that time.”27 Seventeen Years in Helmingham

After a five-month curacy at Winchester, he accepted a call to be the Rector at Helmingham, about 85 miles northeast of London, where he began on Easter, 1844. He was now 28 and still unmarried. Not until now had his income been sufficient to support a wife—which was one of the reasons he accepted this call after only five months at Winchester.28 But this time he stayed 17 years. In October, 1844, his first year there, he married Matilda Plumbpre. She was 22, and he was 28. A child, Georgina, was born May 1846, and Matilda died June 1847. Ryle was married again in February, 1849, to Jessie Walker, but their ten years together “were years of singular trials.”29 Jessie was never well. On five occasions, she had to be confined in London for two months each, and one side effect was that Ryle preached in at least sixty different churches in London and became very popular for his power in the pulpit, to which he responded, “I always felt that popularity, as it was called, was a very worthless thing and a very bad thing for man’s soul.”30

Jessie bore four children over the ten years of their marriage, Isabelle, Reginald, Herbert, and Arthur. But then in May, 1860, after along battle with Bright’s disease, she died. The last five years, Jessie was unable to do much at all, and when she died the entire load of the five children, with the oldest only thirteen, fell to their father, especially the three little boys. As to holidays, rest, and relaxation in the year, I never had any at all; while the whole business of entertaining and

amusing the three little boys in evening devolved entirely upon me. In fact the whole state of things was a heavy strain upon me, both in body and mind, and I often wonder how I lived through it.31 His middle son, Herbert, recalls the early days of childhood with their father:

He was everything to us—taught us games, natural history, astronomy, and insisted on our never being idle, and carefully fostered our love of books. To us boys he was extraordinarily indulgent. And he was tolerant to a degree little known or recognized. The High Church writers sought to destroy his position by detraction. Much as he differed from me in many points, he never suffered the shadow of a difference to come between us in the intimacy of our affection. And since the time I went to school at the age of nine and a half, I never received from him a harsh word.32

While Ryle was an attentive father or not, none of his sons remained true to his evangelical faith. Reginald became a doctor with no professed Christian faith. Arthur became an artist with no religious inclinations. And Herbert was ordained in the Church of England and eventually became Bishop of Winchester, and Dean of Westminster. Though he became liberal in his theology, there remained a bond of affection between him and his father.

Herbert outlived his brothers and wrote, “The last of the five, I remain, having had two such loving brothers as few men ever had—never a quarrel, always affection and confidence.”33 When his father died he wrote to a friend, “And I, to whom it was an intense stimulus to think of pleasing my father as a boy and a young man, feel how greatly he has filled the picture of my life.”34 Nineteen Years in Stradbroke The year after Jessie died, Ryle accepted a call to be the Vicar of Stradbroke about 20 miles north of Helmingham. He had served 17 years in the tiny village of Helmingham and would now serve Stradbroke for another 19 years. The year he began at Stradbroke, he was married a third time, October 24, 1861, to Henrietta Legh-Clowes. He was 45, she was 36, and they were married for 28 years, until she died in 1889, eleven years before his own death in 1900.

During the 36 years in rural parishes of Helmingham and Stradbroke, Ryle was becoming a national figure of prominence in the Church of England. He was constantly writing and traveling to speak. “He was Evangelicalism’s best-known and most respected writer and spokesman through the 1870s.”35

During the . . . years he spent in his two Suffolk parishes, he was a prolific writer, producing evangelistic tracts, devotional commentaries, historical and biographical accounts, works on doctrinal and controversial subjects, papers on Christianity and prophecy, all unashamedly written from the standpoint of a convinced Evangelical and Protestant Churchman.36

Virtually all of the books and tracts that Ryle published had been first given as sermons or lectures.37 The main books were all published during his time at Stradbroke: Knots Untied (1874), his most popular work during his lifetime; Old Paths (1877); Holiness (1877, enlarged 1879), the book he is most famous for today; Practical Religion (1878) which he said should be read in conjunction with Holiness.

One of the great ironies of Ryle’s life is that he took a brilliant first class in classics at Oxford, was a constant reader of old and new theology, collected a five-thousand-volume library, and yet, in tiny rural parishes, became “the Prince of tract writers.”38 “Tracts” in those days were little booklets which in Ryle’s case had been sermons and which sold for pennies. The fact that Ryle put such a premium on publishing practical tracts on Christian living and church life shows how

zealous he was for personal holiness and church reform. In writing and preaching, he was first a pastor, and “as he read,” J. I. Packer points out, “alongside the question ‘Is it true?’ the question ‘What effect will this have on ordinary people?’ was always in his mind.”39 Not only was he a pastor in all he wrote, but he was a firmly rooted Anglican churchman with a strong allegiance to the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles. He had a huge heart and huge respect for Dissenters and those on the outside, like Charles Spurgeon,40 but he was unbudging in his passion that the Church of England, rightly administered was the best church on earth.41 “The standpoint I have tried to occupy, from first to last, is that of an Evangelical Churchman.”42 His passion was for the reformation and renewal of his own denomination, in accord with the great biblical principles of the Reformation.

Liverpool At the age of 64, after 36 years in rural parishes, when most people are ready to retire, he was called to be the first Bishop of Liverpool.43 So he moved from parishes of 300 and 1300 to a city of over 700,000 with all the urban problems he had never met face to face. He served in this post for 20 years, till two months before his death on June 9, 1900, at the age of 84.

Here he poured himself out for the spiritual good of the city and took serious initiatives to relieve some of the worst social ills. “During his time 42 new churches were built in the diocese. The number of clergy increased by 146, and confirmations almost doubled.”44 The book with the most detail about his gospel efforts in Liverpool is Ian D. Farley, J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool (Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2000). On his gravestone, there are two verses of Scripture to capture the two aspects of the Christian life that he heralded, the fight, and the gift. First, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). And then, “By grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

Eight Traits of a Masculine Ministry Of all the helpful things that could be said about the life and ministry of J. C. Ryle, the theme of this conference is governing what I will focus on, namely, “The Value of a Masculine Ministry”—which I tried to define at the beginning.

What I hope to do is illustrate the nature of this “masculine ministry,” or “Christianity with a masculine feel,” with eight traits of such a ministry from the life and ministry of J. C. Ryle.

1. A masculine ministry believes that it is more fitting that men take the lash of criticism that must come in a public ministry, than to unnecessarily expose women to this assault.

Therefore, a masculine ministry puts men at the head of the troop with the flag in hand and the trumpets in their mouths, so that they, and not the women, take the first bullets.

J. C. Ryle was a very controversial figure in British evangelicalism. He saw liberalism and ritualism and worldliness eating away at the heart of the Church of England, and he took such clear stands against these things that criticism against him was sometimes brutal. In 1985, the Liverpool Review (November 21, 1885) published this assessment:

Dr. Ryle is simply about the most disastrous episcopal failure ever inflicted upon a long-suffering diocese. . . . He is nothing better than a political fossil, who has been very unwisely unearthed from his rural obscurity for no better purpose apparently than to make the episcopacy ridiculous.45

Two years later, another paper, Figaro (May 14, 1887), said, “His name will stink in history. . . . It is to be regretted that he was ever appointed to fill a position in which he has done more mischief

than the Liberation Society and all the atheists put together."46 The point here is not that a woman couldn't endure such assaults. No doubt a godly woman could. The point is not that women can't endure criticism, but that godly men prefer to take it for them, rather than thrust them into it.

Courage in the midst of combat, especially harsh and painful combat, whether with arms or with words, is not something a woman can't exercise, nor even something she shouldn't exercise under certain circumstances. The reason we call such courage "manly" is not that a woman can't show it, but that we feel a sense of fitness and joy when a man steps up to risk his life, or his career, with courage; but we (should) feel awkward if a woman is thrust into that role on behalf of men. She may be able to do it, and we may admire her for doing it, if necessary. But we wish the men were numerous enough and strong enough and courageous enough that the women could rejoice in the men, rather than take their place.

2. A masculine ministry seizes on full-orbed, biblical doctrine with a view to teaching it to the church and pressing it with courage into the lives of the people.

Behind the increasing liberalism, ritualism, and worldliness that he saw in the church, Ryle saw a failure of doctrinal nerve — an unmanly failure. Dislike of dogma, he wrote, is an epidemic which is just now doing great harm, and especially among young people. . . . It produces what I must venture to call . . . a "jelly-fish" Christianity . . . a Christianity without bone, or muscle, or power. . . . Alas! It is a type of much of the religion of this day, of which the leading principle is, "no dogma, no distinct tenets, no positive doctrine."

We have hundreds of "jellyfish" clergyman, who seem not to have a single bone in their body of divinity. They have no definite opinions . . . they are so afraid of "extreme views" that they have no views of all.

We have thousands of "jellyfish" sermons preached every year, sermons without an edge, or a point, or corner, smooth as billiard balls, awakening no sinner, and edifying no saint. . . . And worst of all, we have myriads of "jellyfish" worshipers—respectable Church-gone people, who have no distinct and definite views about any point in theology. They cannot discern things that differ, any more than colorblind people can distinguish colors. . . . They are "tossed to and fro, like children, by every wind of doctrine"; . . . ever ready for new things, because they have no firm grasp on the old.47 This aversion to doctrine was the root cause of the church's maladies, and the remedy was a manly affirmation of what he called "sharply cut doctrines"48 recovered from the Reformation and the Puritans and the giants of the eighteenth century in England.

Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion. . . . The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling men to look and live—to believe, repent, and be converted. . . .

Show us at this day any English village, or parish, or city, or town, or district, which has been evangelized without "dogma." . . . Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. . . . No dogma, no fruits!49 The point of calling this failure of doctrinal nerve an unmanly failure is not that

women can't grasp and hold fast to the great doctrines of the faith. They can and should. The point is that when the foundations of the church are crumbling, the men should not stand still and wait for women to seize the tools and brick and mortar. And women should expect their men to be at the forefront of rebuilding the ruins. The point of saying that the remedy for doctrinal indifference is a manly affirmation of "sharply cut doctrines" is not that women cannot or should not make such affirmations. The point is that long, hard, focused, mental labor should not be shirked by men. Men should feel a special responsibility for the life and safety and joy of the community that depends on putting these "sharply cut doctrines" in place. This issue is not what women are able to do, but what men ought to do. J. C. Ryle waited for no one. He took the brick and mortar and trowel and spent his whole life rebuilding the sharp edges of gloriously clear truth to make a place where men and women could flourish in the gospel.

3. A masculine ministry brings out the more rugged aspects of the Christian life and presses them on the conscience of the church with a demeanor that accords with their proportion in Scripture.

Ryle is most famous today for his work on holiness and sanctification. And the overwhelming impression you get in reading his book on holiness is how unsentimental and rugged most of it feels.50 That is, it feels very much like the New Testament, especially the Four Gospels.

Over against the perfectionism and Keswick quietism of his day, he was unrelenting in stressing that sanctification, unlike justification, is a process of constant engagement of the will. And that engagement is war. He asks, Is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to 'yield themselves to God' and be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.51

"True Christianity is a fight."52 He cites, 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3; Ephesians 6:11-13; Luke 13:24; John 6:27; Matthew 10:34; Luke 22:36; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Timothy 1:18-19, and says,

Words such as these appear to me clear, plain, and unmistakable. They all teach one and the same great lesson. . . . That true Christianity is a struggle, a fight, and a warfare.53

"A true Christian," he said, "is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within."54 And this is true at every stage of maturity: "The old, the sick, the dying, are never known to repent of fighting Christ's battles against sin."55 The tone he sets for the Christian life is "the soldier's life." "A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier's life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian."56 "He that would understand the nature of true holiness must know that the Christian is "a man of war."57 Of course, this is not the only picture of the Christian life; but it is a true and prominent one. And Ryle sets it forth with clarity and with a tone that fits the soldier-like theme it is. But the point, again, is not that women cannot, or should not, fight sin with as much urgency as any man. Nor is the point that she is unable to see these things in Scripture, bring them out, and press them on the conscience. She is fully able to do that. The point is that the theme of Christian warfare and other rugged aspects of biblical theology and life should draw the men of the church to take them up in the spirit of a protective warrior in his family and "tribe," rather than expecting the women to take on the spirit of a combatant for the sake of the church.

4. A masculine ministry takes up heavy and painful realities in the Bible, and puts them forward to those who may not want to hear them.

One of the heaviest and most painful realities in the Bible is the reality of hell. It is a godly and loving and manly responsibility of the leaders of the church not to distort or minimize the weight and horror of hell. Ryle faced the same thing we do. In 1855, he preached the sermon that 24 years later was published in the expanded edition of Holiness. There he said,

I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell. . . . I believe the time is come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us “that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever—that there is a love of God lower even than hell—and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved.”. . . We are to embrace what is called a “kinder theology.”. . . Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest. Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not blink it, or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position, and to assert the reality and eternity of hell.

58 He pointed out that no one in Scripture “used so many words to express the awfulness of hell” as Jesus did.

Hell, hell fire, the damnation of hell, eternal damnation, the resurrection of damnation, everlasting fire, the place of torment, destruction, outer darkness, the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the place of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, everlasting punishment—these, these are the words which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself employs.59

He confessed that it sounds dreadful. But then said that the question is: “Is it Scriptural?” If it is, we must not shrink back. “Professing Christians ought to be often reminded that they may be lost and go to hell.60

Ryle’s manly courage that takes up a heavy and painful reality and presses it on people who may not want to hear it was not a callous courage.

God knows that I never speak of hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the Gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most profligate of mankind on his deathbed, “Repent, and believe on Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.”61 The point is not that women are unable to lift the weight or bear the pain of the reality of hell. The point is not that they are unable to press it into those who don’t want to hear. The point is that one of the marks of mature manhood is the inclination to spare her that load and its costs. We admire her for embracing the truth, we share her longings to nurture with tenderness, and, if we can, we carry for her the flaming coals of final condemnation.

5. A masculine ministry heralds the truth of Scripture, with urgency and forcefulness and penetrating conviction, to the world and in the regular worship services of the church. Not all preachers have the same personality or the same tone. Some are louder, some are softer. Some speak faster, some slower. Some with long sentences, some with short. Some with many word pictures, some with fewer. Some with manifest emotion, some with less. Some with lots of gestures, some with few. These differences are inevitable. But preaching, as opposed to teaching — kerussein (Greek) as opposed to didaskein — involves a kind of emotional engagement signified by the word “heralding.” There is in preaching a kind of urgency and a kind of forcefulness. A message is being delivered from the King of the universe — with his authority, in

his name — and this message deals with matters of infinite importance, and the eternal destiny of the hearers hangs on how they respond to the message. This is preaching. And no matter what a preacher's personality or preferred tone, this preaching necessarily involves urgency and forcefulness and a penetrating conviction which aims to come with divine thrust into the minds and hearts of the listeners. And therefore, this is a manly task. Coming to a people with an authoritative word from God, aiming to subdue the hearts of men, and summon them into battle, and lead the charge at their head against the principalities and powers—this is where men belong.

J. C. Ryle's preaching is model for preaching in these ways. J. I. Packer refers to his "electric force of utterance."62 Ryle knew that he had to crucify his florid,63 literary style which marked his early preaching. The nature of preaching demanded something different. Something simpler, but more forceful and penetrating. What developed was really astonishing. Packer describes it, referring to his brisk, spare, punchy style . . . its cultivated forcefulness, its use of the simplest words, its fusillades of short, one-clause sentences . . . its a rib-jabbing drumbeat rhetoric, its easy logical flow, its total lack of sentimentality, and its resolve to call a spade a spade.64

Ryle knew the preaching of his day was languishing. It was "dry, heavy, stiff, dull, cold, tame . . . and destitute of warmth, vivacity, direct appeal, or fire."65 So he made every effort to break the mold, even as a dignified Bishop of Liverpool. He would keep it simple, but he would untame his preaching. His simple, forceful, clarity was renown. One older lady came to the church hoping to hear the Bishop, but afterwards said to a friend, "I never heard a Bishop. I thought I'd hear something great. . . He's no Bishop. I could understand every word."66 Ryle took it as a great compliment.

Listen to what Packer means by the "electric force" of "fusillades" and "rib-jabbing, drumbeat rhetoric." This is from a sermon on Lot's lingering as he came out of Sodom and how so many Christians linger as they leave sin.

Would you know what the times demand?—The shaking of nations—the uprooting of ancient things—the overturning of kingdoms—the stir and restlessness of men's minds—what do they say? They all cry aloud—Christian! do not linger!

Would you be found ready for Christ at His second appearing—your loins girded—your lamp burning—yourself bold, and prepared to meet Him? Then do not linger! . . .

Would you enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation, in the day of sickness, and on the bed of death?—Would you see with the eye of faith heaven opening and Jesus rising to receive you? Then do not linger!

Would you leave great broad evidences behind you when you are gone?—Would you like us to lay you in the grave with comfortable hope, and talk of your state after death without a doubt? Then do not linger!

Would you be useful to the world in your day and generation?—Would you draw men from sin to Christ, adorn your doctrine, and make your Master's cause beautiful and attractive in their eyes? Then do not linger!

Would you help your children and relatives towards heaven, and make them say, "We will go with you"?—and not make them infidels and despisers of all religion? Then do not linger!

Would you have a great crown in the day of Christ's appearing, and not be the least and smallest star in glory, and not find yourself the last and lowest in the kingdom of God? Then do not linger!

Oh, let not one of us linger! Time does not—death does not—judgment does not—the devil does not—the world does not. Neither let the children of God linger.67

There is urgency, forcefulness, penetrating power. Preaching does not always rise to this level of urgency and force and authority, but regularly does, and should. Again the point is not that a woman is not able to speak this way. The point is that godly men know intuitively, by the masculine nature implanted by God, that turning the hearts of men and women to God with that kind of authoritative speaking is the responsibility of men. And where men handle it with humility and grace, godly women are glad.

6. A masculine ministry welcomes the challenges and costs of strong, courageous leadership without complaint or self-pity with a view to putting in place principles and structures and plans and people to carry a whole church into joyful fruitfulness.

Leadership in the church — tending and feeding and protecting and leading the sheep — is not only the work of preaching, but also a firm, clear, reasonable, wise guiding voice when it comes to hundreds of decisions that have to be made. This calls for great discernment and no little strength. There are a hundred ways that a church can drift into ineffectiveness; and wise leaders spot these early, resist them, and win the church joyfully into a better direction. And what is required again and again is a decisive strength that does not weaken in the face of resistance.

Packer describes Ryle's leadership like this: His brains, energy, vision, drive, independence, clear head, kind heart, fair-mind, salty speech, good sense, impatience with stupidity, firmness of principle, and freedom from inhibitions would have made him a leader in any field.68

Ryle was called by his successor to the bishopric of Liverpool, "that man of granite with the heart of a child."69 He was described as "the most rugged and conservative of all Anglican Evangelical personalities."70 He said of his own leadership: "The story of my life has been such that I really cared nothing for anyone's opinion, and I resolved not to consider one jot who was offended and who was not offended by anything I did."71 These are the words of man surrounded by a rising tide of liberalism, ritualism, and worldliness in the Church of England. They are the voice of strength against overwhelming odds.

I am fully aware [he wrote in 1878] that Evangelical churchmanship is not popular and acceptable in this day. It is despised by many. . . . But none of these things move me. I am not ashamed of my opinions. After 40 years of Bible reading and praying, meditation, and theological study, I find myself clinging more tightly than ever to "Evangelical" religion, and more than ever satisfied with it.72

"None of these things move me." "More than ever I am satisfied with [the evangelical faith]." Immovable joy in truth is a precious trait in the leaders of the church. A masculine ministry looks on the forces to be resisted, and the magnitude of the truth to be enjoyed, and feels a glad responsibility to carry a whole people forward into joyful fruitfulness.

7. A masculine ministry publicly and privately advocates for the vital and manifold ministries of women in the life and mission of the church. The aim of godly leadership is a community of

maximum joy and flourishing for everyone within—the women, the children, the men—and maximum impact on the world for the glory of Christ. It's not about the privilege of power, but about the burden of responsibility to enhance the lives of others.

Ryle was outspoken in his zeal for women in the various ministries of the church. He drew attention to Romans 16:1-27, where 11 of the 28 names mentioned are women, and said, The chapter I have mentioned appears to me to contain a special lesson for women. The important position that women occupy in the Church of Christ—the wide field of real, though unobtrusive, usefulness that lies before them . . . I cannot go away with the common notion that great usefulness is for men only, and not for women. . . . It should never be forgotten that it is not preaching alone that moves and influences men. . . . Humanly speaking, the salvation of a household often depends upon the women . . . [and] men's character is exceedingly influenced by their homes.

73 There are countless needs in the community, and needs on the mission field, Ryle says, that cry out for the ministry of women.

There are hundreds of cases continually rising in which a woman is far more suitable visitor than a man. She need not put on a peculiar dress, or call herself by a Roman Catholic name. She has only to go about, in the spirit of her Savior, with kindness on her lips, gentleness in her ways, and the Bible in her hands, and the good that she may do is quite incalculable. Happy indeed is the parish where there are Christian women who "go about doing good." Happy is that minister who has such helpers.74 The aim of a masculine ministry is the fullest engagement of every member of the church in joyful, fruitful ministry. The aim of leadership is not to be the ministry, but to free the ministry, according to God's word, by the power of God's Spirit, for the glory of God's name.

8. A masculine ministry models for the church the protection, nourishing, and cherishing of a wife and children as part of the high calling of leadership. The year after he came to Liverpool as bishop, Ryle published a book of eight messages for children. It's called Boys and Girls Playing based on Zechariah 8:5 75 It reveals the rare mixture of concern for children along with a very masculine feel. One of the messages is called "The Happy Little Girl" about a girl he met in public carriage who spoke of Jesus. He asks, "Dear children, are you as happy and as cheerful as she was?"76 And another message is called "The Two Bears" about the two bears that killed forty-two children for mocking God's prophet. And he says, "Dear children, remember these things to the end of your lives. The wages of sin is death."77 He was a masculine lover of children.

Before his ministry was complete, he had loved and buried three wives, Matilde, Jessie, and Henrietta. He had thee sons and two daughters. All the testimonies we have of his children praise their father for his care for them. Whether he did this well, the evidence is too sketchy to know. But what we do know is that he tried. He gives us a hint of the burden he carried in his small biography of Henry Venn, who also was made a widower in the pastoral ministry with children to care for:

Those who have had this cross to carry, can testify that there is no position in this world so trying to body and soul as that of the minister who is left a widower, with a young family and a large congregation. There are anxieties in such cases which no one knows but he who has gone through them; anxieties which can crush the strongest spirit, and wear out the strongest constitution.78 But no matter how difficult the homelife of a pastor, it is part of the calling, part of

the masculine ministry. From these eight glimpses into the value of a masculine ministry, I commend it to you. And I think “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle” would commend it also.

I commend it because it fits the way God is in the triune fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It fits the way he created man as male and female, calling the man to bear a unique responsibility of headship. It fits the way God has ordered the church with godly men as her elders. And it fits the way our hearts sing—male and female—when men and women exult in each other’s enjoyment of God as our final and all-satisfying destiny.

Footnotes

1 Archbishop McGee called him in 1868 “the frank and manly Mr. Ryle.” Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 9.

2 Peter Toon, editor, J. C. Ryle: A Self-Portrait, A Partial Autobiography (Swengel, Pennsylvania: Reiner Publications, 1975, 14.

3 Self-Portrait, 15

4 Ibid., 19

5 Ibid., 20

6 Ibid., 21

7 Ibid., 30

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 38

10 Ibid., 35 11 Ibid., 35–36

12 Ibid., 40

13 Ibid., 36

14 Ibid., 39

15 Ibid., 40

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 42–43

18 Ibid., 54 19 Ibid., 51–53

20 Ibid., 55

21 Ibid., 56

22 Ibid., 54

23 Ibid., 59

24 Ibid., 60

25 Ibid., 63

26 Ibid., 62

27 Ibid., 64

28 Ibid., 68–69. "I must honestly say that I went very unwillingly, and of all the steps I ever took in my life, to this day I feel doubts whether the move was right or not. I sometimes think that it was a want of faith to go, and I ought to have stayed. . . . But I have never ceased to wonder whether I was right or not. I only know that my chief desire was to set my father free from any charge on my account, and so I tried to hope all was right. But I think the doubt afflicted my spirits for two or three years."

29 Ibid., 79.

30 Ibid., 80.

31 Ibid., 81.

32 J. I. Packer, Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 69–70.

33 Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 85.

34 Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle, 250.

35 Faithfulness and Holiness, 51.

36 Russell, 103.

37 In an appendix to Ian D. Farley, J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool, (Waynesboro, Georgia, Paternoster, 2000), 240–243, there a table which shows what sermons and their dates lay behind each of the chapters in Knots Untied, Old Paths, Holiness, Practical Religion, and A New Birth.

38 Russell, 70. To give some idea of the extent of the effectiveness of these tracts here is one story. "One little booklet called True Liberty was translated into Spanish. It came into the hands of a Dominican Friar who had been sent to stamp out the reform movement in the church in that part of Mexico. As he read the tract the scales fell from his eyes and he entered by faith into the true liberty of the sons of God. He began to build up the church he meant to destroy. The church grew in half a century from a tiny remnant of a few believers into a flourishing church of some fifty thousand members." (72) 39 Faithfulness and Holiness, 71.

40 "'When you read Mr. Spurgeon sermons, note how clearly and perspicuously he divides a sermon, and fills each division with beautiful and simple ideas. How easily you grasp his meaning! . . . great truths, that hang to you like hooks of steel, and which you never forget!' Spurgeon once called Ryle the best man in the Church of England; here Ryle in effect hails Spurgeon as the best preacher anywhere in the country." Faithfulness and Holiness, 62.

41 "I am satisfied that well administered, the Church of England is more calculated to help souls to heaven than any church on earth. . . . I am deeply convinced of the excellency of my own Church—I would even say, if it were not a proud boast, its superiority over any other church upon earth." Faithfulness and Holiness, 45, 48. "He believed that the Episcopal government rightly administered is the best form of church government." Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle, 128.

42 J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998, orig, 1878), vi.

43 There seemed to be some political intrigue behind this appointment. Some said that Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister at the time, made this appointment of an outspoken conservative to spite William Gladstone who had just defeated him in an election and had come from an Anglo-Catholic family in Liverpool. Self-Portrait, 90.

44 Self-Portrait, 101.

45 Farley, J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool, 236.

46 Ibid., 224.

47 J. C. Ryle, Principles for Churchmen (London: William Hunt, 8 1084), 97–98. Quoted in J. I. Packer, Faithfulness and Holiness, 72–73.

48 J. C. Ryle, The Christian Leaders of The Last Century, or England A Hundred Years Ago (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 392.

49 J. C. Ryle, Holiness: It’s Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001), 355–356.

50 "Ryle was habitually factual and unsentimental in his account of things." Faithfulness and Holiness, 71.

51 J. C. Ryle, Holiness, xix.

52 Ibid., 63.

53 Ibid., 66.

54 Ibid., 26.

55 Ibid., 76.

56 Ibid., xxviii.

57 Ibid., 63.

58 Ibid., 208.

59 Ibid., 210.

60 Ibid., 211.

61 Ibid.

62 Faithfulness and Holiness, 11.

63 "I felt that I was doing the country people in my congregation [of Exbury] no good whatever. I was shooting over their heads; they could not understand my imitation of Melville's style, which I thought much of, therefore I thought it my plain duty to crucify my style and bring it down to what it is now." Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle, 60.

64 Faithfulness and Holiness, 19. Examples of his punchy, aphoristic style are almost everywhere. For example, from his book, Thoughts for Young Men: "The poorest saint that ever died in a ghetto is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace." (Kindle, location 414) "Never make an intimate friend of anyone who is not a friend of God." (Kindle, location 485) "Bad company in this life, is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come." (Kindle, location 518)"The gospel keeps many a person from going to jail and from being hanged, if it does not keep him from hell." (Kindle, location 632) And some quoted by Eric Russell: "What we weave in time, we wear in eternity." "Sin forsaken is one of the best evidences of sin forgiven." "It matters little how we die, but it matters much how we live." "One thief on the cross was saved, that none should despair, and only one, that none should presume."

65 Ian Farley, J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool, 103.

66 Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle, 253.

67 J. C. Ryle, Holiness, 193.

68 Faithfulness and Holiness, 9.

69 Eric Russell, J. C. Ryle, 9 70 Ian Farley, J. C. Ryle: First Bishop of Liverpool, 123.

71 Self-Portrait, 67.

72 J. C. Ryle, Practical Religion, vi–vii.

73 J. C. Ryle, Shall We Know One Another, and Other Papers (Moscow, Idaho: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001), 29, 31, 32.

74 J. C. Ryle, Shall We Know One Another? 36. And Ryle made a case for the Zenana Mission who specialized in sending women missionaries to India, China , and Japan. His argument was that half the population of India were women who were almost entirely secluded from men, especially foreigners.

75 J. C. Ryle, Boys and Girls Playing (and Other Addresses to Children), edited by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996, orig. 1881).

76 Ryle, Boys and Girls Playing, 110.

77 Ibid., 65.

78 J. C. Ryle, The Christian Leaders of the Last Century(London: 1869), 279–280. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 60

05.04. Always Singing One Note - A Vernacular Bible

Always Singing One Note - A Vernacular Bible Why William Tyndale Lived and Died What Was the “One Note” He Always Sang?

Stephen Vaughn was an English merchant commissioned by Thomas Cromwell, the king’s adviser, to find William Tyndale and inform him that King Henry VIII desired him to come back to England out of hiding on the continent. In a letter to Cromwell from Vaughan dated June 19, 1531, Vaughan wrote about Tyndale (1494-1536) these simple words: “I find him always singing one note.”1 That one note was this: Will the King of England give his official endorsement to a vernacular Bible for all his English subjects? If not, Tyndale will not come. If so, Tyndale will give himself up to the king and never write another book. This was the driving passion of his life—to see the Bible translated from the Greek and Hebrew into ordinary English available for every person in England to read.

Henry VIII was angry with Tyndale for believing and promoting Martin Luther’s Reformation teachings. In particular he was angry because of Tyndale’s book, Answer to Sir Thomas More. Thomas More (famous for his book Utopia and the movie A Man for All Seasons) was the Lord Chancellor who helped Henry VIII write his repudiation of Luther called Defense of the Seven Sacraments. Thomas More was thoroughly Roman Catholic and radically anti-Reformation, anti-Luther, and anti-Tyndale. So Tyndale had come under the same excoriating criticism by Thomas More.2 In fact More had a “near-rabid hatred”3 for Tyndale and published three long responses to him totaling near three-quarters of a million words.4 But in spite of this high court anger against Tyndale, the king’s message to Tyndale, carried by Vaughan, was mercy: “The kings’ royal majesty is . . . inclined to mercy, pity, and compassion.”5 The thirty-seven-year-old Tyndale was moved to tears by this offer of mercy. He had been an exile from his homeland for seven years. But then he sounds his “one note” again: Will the king authorize a vernacular English Bible from the original languages? Vaughan gives us Tyndale’s words from May, 1531:

I assure you, if it would stand with the King’s most gracious pleasure to grant only a bare text of the Scripture [that is, without explanatory notes] to be put forth among his people, like as is put forth among the subjects of the emperor in these parts, and of other Christian princes, be it of the translation of what person soever shall please his Majesty, I shall immediately make faithful promise never to write more, not abide two days in these parts after the same: but immediately to repair unto his realm, and there most humbly submit myself at the feet of his royal majesty, offering my body to suffer what pain or torture, yea, what death his grace will, so this [translation] be obtained. Until that time, I will abide the asperity of all chances, whatsoever shall come, and endure my life in as many pains as it is able to bear and suffer.6 In other words, Tyndale will give himself up to the king on one condition—that the king authorize an English Bible translated from the Greek and Hebrew in the common language of the people. The king refused. And Tyndale never went to his homeland again. Instead, if the king and the Roman Catholic Church would not provide a printed Bible in English for the common man to read, Tyndale would, even if it cost him

his life—which it did five years later. The Great Achievement: New Testament and Reformation When he was twenty-eight years old in 1522, he was serving as a tutor in the home of John Walsh in Gloucestershire spending most of his time studying Erasmus' Greek New Testament which had just been printed six years before in 1516. And we should pause here and make clear what an incendiary thing this Greek New Testament was in history. David Daniell describes the magnitude of this event: This was the first time that the Greek New Testament had been printed. It is no exaggeration to say that it set fire to Europe. Luther [1483-1546] translated it into his famous German version of 1522. In a few years there appeared translations from the Greek into most European vernaculars. They were the true basis of the popular reformation.7

Every day William Tyndale was seeing these Reformation truths more clearly in the Greek New Testament as an ordained Catholic priest. Increasingly he was making himself suspect in this Catholic house of John Walsh. Learned men would come for dinner, and Tyndale would discuss the things he was seeing in the New Testament. John Foxe tells us that one day an exasperated Catholic scholar at dinner with Tyndale said, "We were better be without God's law than the pope's." In response Tyndale spoke his famous words, "I defy the Pope and all his laws. . . . If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."8

Four years later Tyndale finished the English translation of the Greek New Testament in Worms, Germany, and began to smuggle it into England in bails of cloth. He had grown up in Gloucestershire, the cloth-working county, and now we see what that turn of providence was about.9 By October of 1526 the book had been banned by Bishop Tunstall in London, but the print run was at least three thousand. And the books were getting to the people. Over the next eight years, five pirated editions were printed as well.10 In 1534 Tyndale published a revised New Testament, having learned Hebrew in the meantime, probably in Germany, which helped him better understand the connections between the Old and New Testaments. Daniell calls this 1534 New Testament "the glory of his life's work."11 If Tyndale was "always singing one note," this was the crescendo of the song of his life—the finished and refined New Testament in English. For the first time ever in history, the Greek New Testament was translated into English. And for the first time ever the New Testament in English was available in a printed form. Before Tyndale there were only hand-written manuscripts of the Bible in English. These manuscripts we owe to the work and inspiration of John Wyclif and the Lollards12 from a hundred-thirty years earlier.13 For a thousand years the only translation of the Greek and Hebrew Bible was the Latin Vulgate, and few people could understand it, even if they had access to it.

Before he was martyred in 1536 Tyndale had translated into clear, common English14 not only the New Testament15 but also the Pentateuch, Joshua to 2 Chronicles, and Jonah.16 All this material became the basis of the Great Bible issued by Miles Coverdale in England in 153917 and the basis for the Geneva Bible published in 1557—"the Bible of the nation,"18 which sold over a million copies between 1560 and 1640.

We do not get a clear sense of Tyndale's achievement without some comparisons. We think of the dominant King James Version as giving us the pervasive language of the English Bible. But Daniell clarifies the situation:

William Tyndale gave us our English Bible. The sages assembled by King James to prepare the Authorized Version of 1611, so often praised for unlikely corporate inspiration, took over Tyndale's work. Nine-tenths of the Authorized Version's New Testament is Tyndale's. The same is true of the first half of the Old Testament, which was as far as he was able to get before he was executed outside Brussels in 1536.19 Here is a sampling of the English phrases we owe to Tyndale:

"Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3).

"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9)

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be merciful unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

"There were shepherds abiding in the field" (Luke 2:8).

"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

"Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9).

"The signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3) "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

"He went out . . . and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75). Those two words are still used by almost all modern translations (NIV, NASB, ESV, NKJV). It has not been improved on for five hundred years in spite of weak efforts like one recent translation: "cried hard." Unlike that phrase, "the rhythm of his two words carries the experience."20 "A law unto themselves" (Romans 2:14) "In him we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels" (1 Corinthians 13:1) "Fight the good fight" (1 Timothy 6:12).

According to Daniell, "The list of such near-proverbial phrases is endless."21 Five hundred years after his great work "newspaper headlines still quote Tyndale, though unknowingly, and he has reached more people than even Shakespeare."22

Luther's translation of 1522 is often praised for "having given a language to the emerging German nation." Daniell claims the same for Tyndale in English: In his Bible translations, Tyndale's conscious use of everyday words, without inversions, in a neutral word-order, and his wonderful ear for rhythmic patterns, gave to English not only a Bible language, but a new prose. England was blessed as a nation in that the language of its principal book, as the Bible in English rapidly became, was the fountain from which flowed the lucidity, suppleness and expressive range of the greatest prose thereafter.23 His craftsmanship with the English language amounted to genius.24 He translated two-thirds of the Bible so well that his translations endured until today.25 This was not merely a literary phenomenon; it was a spiritual explosion. Tyndale's Bible and writings were the kindling that set the Reformation on fire in England.

How Did Tyndale Accomplish This? The question arises: How did William Tyndale accomplish this historic achievement? We can answer this in Tyndale's case by remembering two ways that a pastor must die in the ministry. We must die to the notion that we do not have to think hard or work

hard to achieve spiritual goals. And we must die to the notion that our thinking and our working is decisive in achieving spiritual goals.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:7, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” First, think. Work. Don’t bypass the hard work of thinking about apostolic truth. But second, remember this: “the Lord will give you understanding.” You work. He gives. If he withholds, all our working is in vain. But he ordains that we use our minds and that we work in achieving spiritual ends. So Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” The key to spiritual achievement is to work hard, and to know and believe and feel and be happy that God’s sovereign grace is the decisive cause of all the good that comes. The way these two truths come together in Tyndale’s life explains how he could accomplish what he did. And one of the best ways to see it is to compare him with Erasmus, the Roman Catholic humanist scholar who was famous for his books Enchiridion and The Praise of Folly and for his printed Greek New Testament.

Erasmus was twenty-eight years older than Tyndale, but they both died in 1536—Tyndale martyred by the Roman Catholic Church, Erasmus a respected member of that church. Erasmus had spent time in Oxford and Cambridge, but we don’t know if he and Tyndale ever met. On the surface, one sees remarkable similarities between Tyndale and Erasmus. Both were great linguists. Erasmus was a Latin scholar and produced the first printed Greek New Testament. Tyndale knew eight languages: Latin, Greek, German, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, and English. Both men loved the natural power of language and were part of a rebirth of interest in the way language works. For example, Erasmus wrote a book called De copia that Tyndale no doubt used as a student at Oxford.26 It helped students increase their abilities to exploit the “copious” potential of language. This was hugely influential in the early 1500s in England and was used to train students in the infinite possibilities of varied verbal expression. The aim was to keep that language from sinking down to mere jargon and worn-out slang and uncreative, unimaginative, prosaic, colorless, boring speech.

One practice lesson for students from De copia was to give “no fewer than one hundred fifty ways of saying ‘Your letter has delighted me very much.’” The point was to force students “to use of all the verbal muscles in order to avoid any hint of flabbiness.”27 It is not surprising that this is the kind of educational world that gave rise to William Shakespeare (who was born in 1564). Shakespeare is renown for his unparalleled use of copiousness in language. One critic wrote, “Without Erasmus, no Shakespeare.”28 So both Erasmus and Tyndale were educated in an atmosphere of conscious craftsmanship.29 That is, they both believed in hard work to say things clearly and creatively and compellingly when they spoke for Christ. Not only that, but they both believed the Bible should be translated into the vernacular of every language. Erasmus wrote in the preface to his Greek New Testament,

Christ wishes his mysteries to be published as widely as possible. I would wish even all women to read the gospel and the epistles of St. Paul, and I wish that they were translated into all languages of all Christian people, that they might be read and known, not merely by the Scotch and the Irish, but even by the Turks and the Saracens. I wish that the husbandman may sing parts of them at his plow, that the weaver may warble them at his shuttle, that the traveler may with their narratives beguile the weariness of the way.30 Tyndale could not have said it better.

Both were concerned with the corruption and abuses in the Catholic Church, and both wrote about Christ and the Christian life. Tyndale even translated Erasmus' Enchiridion, a kind of spiritual handbook for the Christian life—what Erasmus called philosophia Christi. But there was a massive difference between these men, and it had directly to do with the other half of the paradox, namely, that we must die not just to intellectual and linguistic laziness, but also to human presumption—human self-exaltation and self-sufficiency. Erasmus and Luther had clashed in the 1520s over the freedom of the will—Erasmus defending human self-determination and Luther arguing for the depravity and bondage of the will.31 Tyndale was firmly with Luther here. Our will is locked and knit faster under the will of the devil than could an hundred thousand chains bind a man unto a post.32

Because . . . [by] nature we are evil, therefore we both think and do evil, and are under vengeance under the law, convict to eternal damnation by the law, and are contrary to the will of God in all our will and in all things consent to the will of the fiend.33

It is not possible for a natural man to consent to the law, that it should be good, or that God should be righteous which maketh the law.34 This view of human sinfulness set the stage for Tyndale's grasp of the glory of God's sovereign grace in the gospel. Erasmus—and Thomas More with him—did not see the depth of the human condition, their own condition, and so did not see the glory and explosive power of what the reformers saw in the New Testament. What the reformers like Tyndale and Luther saw was not a philosophia Christi but the massive work of God in the death and resurrection of Christ to save hopelessly enslaved and hell-bound sinners.

Erasmus does not live or write in this realm of horrible condition and gracious blood-bought salvation. He has the appearance of reform in the Enchiridion, but something is missing. To walk from Erasmus into Tyndale is to move (to paraphrase Mark Twain) from a lightning bug to a lightning bolt.

Daniell puts it like this:

Something in the Enchiridion is missing. . . . It is a masterpiece of humanist piety. . . . [But] the activity of Christ in the Gospels, his special work of salvation so strongly detailed there and in the epistles of Paul, is largely missing. Christologically, where Luther thunders, Erasmus makes a sweet sound: what to Tyndale was an impregnable stronghold feels in the Enchiridion like a summer pavilion.35 Where Luther and Tyndale were blood-earnest about our dreadful human condition and the glory of salvation in Christ, Erasmus and Thomas More joked and bantered. When Luther published his 95 theses in 1517, Erasmus sent a copy of them to More—along with a "jocular letter including the anti-papal games, and witty satirical diatribes against abuses within the church, which both of them loved to make."36

I linger here with this difference between Tyndale and Erasmus because I am trying to penetrate to how Tyndale accomplished what he did through translating the New Testament. Explosive reformation is what he accomplished in England. This was not the effect of Erasmus' highbrow, elitist, layered nuancing of Christ and church tradition. Erasmus and Thomas More may have satirized the monasteries and clerical abuses, but they were always playing games compared to Tyndale. And in this they were very much like notable Christian writers in our own day. Listen to this remarkable assessment from Daniell, and see if you do not hear a description of certain

emergent church writers and New Perspective champions: Not only is there no fully realized Christ or Devil in Erasmus's book . . . : there is a touch of irony about it all, with a feeling of the writer cultivating a faintly superior ambiguity: as if to be dogmatic, for example about the full theology of the work of Christ, was to be rather distasteful, below the best, elite, humanist heights. . . . By contrast Tyndale . . . is ferociously single-minded ["always singing one note"]; the matter in hand, the immediate access of the soul to God without intermediary, is far too important for hints of faintly ironic superiority. . . . Tyndale is as four-square as a carpenter's tool. But in Erasmus's account of the origins of his book there is a touch of the sort of layering of ironies found in the games with personae.37

It is ironic and sad that today supposedly avant-garde Christian writers can strike this cool, evasive, imprecise, artistic, superficially reformist pose of Erasmus and call it "post-modern" and capture a generation of unwitting, historically naïve, emergent people who don't know they are being duped by the same old verbal tactics used by the elitist humanist writers in past generations. We saw them last year in Athanasius' day (the slippery Arians at Nicaea), and we see them now in Tyndale's day. It's not post-modern. It's pre-modern—because it is perpetual.

What drove Tyndale to sing "one note" all his life was the rock-solid conviction that all humans were in bondage to sin, blind, dead, damned, and helpless, and that God had acted in Christ to provide salvation by grace through faith. This is what lay hidden in the Latin Scriptures and the church system of penance and merit. The Bible must be translated for the sake of the liberating, life-giving gospel.38

There is only one hope for our liberation from the bonds of sin and eternal condemnation, Tyndale said: "Neither can any creature loose the bonds, save the blood of Christ only."39 By grace . . . we are plucked out of Adam the ground of all evil and graffed [sic] in Christ, the root of all goodness. In Christ God loved us, his elect and chosen, before the world began and reserved us unto the knowledge of his Son and of his holy gospel: and when the gospel40 is preached to us openeth our hearts and giveth us grace to believe, and putteth the spirit of Christ in us: and we know him as our Father most merciful, and consent to the law and love it inwardly in our heart and desire to fulfill it and sorrow because we do not.41 This massive dose of bondage to sin and deliverance by blood-bought sovereign grace42 is missing in Erasmus. This is why there is an elitist lightness to his religion—just like there is to so much of evangelicalism today. Hell and sin and atonement and sovereign grace were not weighty realities for him. But for Tyndale they were everything. And in the middle of these great realities was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is why the Bible had to be translated, and ultimately this is why Tyndale was martyred. By faith are we saved only in believing the promises. And though faith be never without love and good works, yet is our saving imputed neither to love nor unto good works but unto faith only.43

Faith the mother of all good works justifieth us, before we can bring forth any good work: as the husband marryeth his wife before he can have any lawful children by her.44 This is the answer to how William Tyndale accomplished what he did in translating the New Testament and writing books that set England on fire with the reformed faith. He worked assiduously like the most skilled artist in the craft of compelling translation, and he was deeply passionate about the great doctrinal truths of the gospel of sovereign grace. Man is lost, spiritually dead, condemned. God is sovereign; Christ is sufficient. Faith is all. Bible translation and Bible truth were inseparable for

Tyndale, and in the end it was the truth—especially the truth of justification by faith—that ignited Britain with reformed fire and then brought the death sentence to this Bible translator. The Implacable Opposition to the Bible

It is almost incomprehensible to us how viciously opposed the Roman Catholic Church was to the translation of the Scriptures into English. John Wyclif and his followers called “Lollards”45 had spread written manuscripts of English translations from the Latin in the late 1300s. In 1401 Parliament passed the law de Haeretico Comburendo—“on the burning of heretics”—to make heresy punishable by burning people alive at the stake. The Bible translators were in view.

Then in 1408 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundell, created the Constitutions of Oxford which said,

It is a dangerous thing, as witnesseth blessed St. Jerome to translate the text of the Holy Scripture out of one tongue into another, for in the translation the same sense is not always easily kept. . . . We therefore decree and ordain, that no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue . . . and that no man can read any such book . . . in part or in whole.46

Together these statutes meant that you could be burned alive by the Catholic Church for simply reading the Bible in English. The dramatist John Bale (1495-1563) “as a boy of 11 watched the burning of a young man in Norwich for possessing the Lord’s prayer in English. . . . John Foxe records . . . seven Lollards burned at Coventry in 1519 for teaching their children the Lord’s Prayer in English.”47

Tyndale hoped to escape this condemnation by getting official authorization for his translation in 1524. But he found just the opposite and had to escape from London to the continent where he did all his translating and writing for the next twelve years. He lived as a fugitive the entire time until his death near Brussels in 1536.

He watched a rising tide of persecution and felt the pain of seeing young men burned alive who were converted by reading his translation and his books. His closest friend, John Frith, was arrested in London and tried by Thomas More and burned alive July 4, 1531, at the age of twenty-eight. Richard Bayfield ran the ships that took Tyndale’s books to England. He was betrayed and arrested, and Thomas More wrote on December 4, 1531, that Bayfield “the monk and apostate [was] well and worthily burned in Smythfelde.”48

Three weeks later the same end came to John Tewkesbury. He was converted by reading Tyndale’s Parable of the Wicked Mammon which defended justification by faith alone. He was whipped in Thomas More’s garden and had his brow squeezed with small ropes till blood came out of his eyes. Then he was sent to the Tower where he was racked till he was lame. Then at last they burned him alive. Thomas More “rejoiced that his victim was now in hell, where Tyndale ‘is like to find him when they come together.’”49

Four months later James Bainham followed in the flames in April of 1532. He had stood up during the mass at St. Augustine’s Church in London and lifted a copy of Tyndale’s New Testament and pleaded with the people to die rather than deny the word of God. That virtually was to sign his own death warrant. Add to these Thomas Bilney, Thomas Dusgate, John Bent, Thomas Harding,

Andrew Hewet, Elizabeth Barton and others, all burned alive for sharing the views of William Tyndale about the Scriptures and the reformed faith.50

Why this extraordinary hostility against the English New Testament, especially from Thomas More who vilified Tyndale repeatedly in his denunciation of the reformers he burned? Some would say that the New Testament in English was rejected because it was accompanied with Reformation notes that the church regarded as heretical. That was true of later versions, but not the first 1526 edition. It did not have notes, and this is the edition that Bishop Tunstall had burned in London.51 The church burned the word of God. It shocked Tyndale.

There were surface reasons and deeper reasons why the church opposed an English Bible. The surface reasons were that the English language is rude and unworthy of the exalted language of God's word; and when one translates, errors can creep in, so it is safer not to translate; moreover, if the Bible is in English, then each man will become his own interpreter, and many will go astray into heresy and be condemned; and it was church tradition that only priests are given the divine grace to understand the Scriptures; and what's more, there is a special sacramental value to the Latin service in which people cannot understand, but grace is given. Such were the kinds of things being said on the surface. But there were deeper reasons why the church opposed the English Bible: one doctrinal and one ecclesiastical. The church realized that they would not be able to sustain certain doctrines biblically because the people would see that they are not in the Bible. And the church realized that their power and control over the people, and even over the state, would be lost if certain doctrines were exposed as unbiblical—especially the priesthood and purgatory and penance.

Thomas More's criticism of Tyndale boils down mainly to the way Tyndale translated five words. He translated presbuteros as elder instead of priest. He translated ekklesia as congregation instead of church. He translated metanoeo as repent instead of do penance. He translated exomologeo as acknowledge or admit instead of confess. And he translated agape as love rather than charity.

Daniell comments, "He cannot possibly have been unaware that those words in particular undercut the entire sacramental structure of the thousand year church throughout Europe, Asia and North Africa. It was the Greek New Testament that was doing the undercutting."52 And with the doctrinal undermining of these ecclesiastical pillars of priesthood and penance and confession, the pervasive power and control of the church collapsed. England would not be a Catholic nation. The reformed faith would flourish there in due time.

What It Cost Tyndale to Translate the Bible

What did it cost William Tyndale under these hostile circumstances to stay faithful to his calling as a translator of the Bible and a writer of the reformed faith?

He fled his homeland in 1524 and was killed in 1536. He gives us some glimpse of those twelve years as a fugitive in Germany and the Netherlands in one of the very few personal descriptions we have from Stephen Vaughan's letter in 1531. He refers to . . . my pains . . . my poverty . . . my exile out of mine natural country, and bitter absence from my friends . . . my hunger, my thirst, my cold, the great danger wherewith I am everywhere encompassed, and finally . . . innumerable other hard and sharp fightings which I endure.53

All these sufferings came to a climax on May 21, 1535, in the midst of Tyndale's great Old Testament translation labors. We can feel some of the ugliness of what happened in the words of David Daniell: "Malice, self-pity, villainy and deceit were about to destroy everything. These evils came to the English House [in Antwerp], wholly uninvited, in the form of an egregious Englishman, Henry Philips."54 Philips had won Tyndale's trust over some months and then betrayed him. John Foxe tells how it happened: So when it was dinner-time, Master Tyndale went forth with Philips, and at the going forth of Poyntz's house, was a long narrow entry, so that two could not go in a front. Mr. Tyndale would have put Philips before him, but Philips would in no wise, but put Master Tyndale before, for that he pretended to show great humanity. So Master Tyndale, being a man of no great stature, went before, and Philips, a tall comely person, followed behind him: who had set officers on either side of the door upon two seats, who, being there, might see who came in the entry: and coming through the same entry, Philips pointed with his finger over Master Tyndale's head down to him, that the officers who sat at the door might see that it was he whom they should take. . . . Then they took him, and brought him to the emperor's attorney, or procurer-general, where he dined. Then came the procurer General to the house of Poyntz, and sent away all that was there of Master Tyndale's, as well his books as other things: and from thence Tyndale was had to the castle of Filford, eighteen English miles from Antwerp, and there he remained until he was put to death.55

Vilvorde Castle is six miles north of Brussels and about the same distance from Louvain. Here Tyndale stayed for 18 months. "The charge was heresy, with not agreeing with the holy Roman Emperor—in a nutshell, being Lutheran."56 A four-man commission from the Catholic center of Louvain was authorized to prove that Tyndale was a heretic. One of them named Latomus filled three books with his interactions with Tyndale and said that Tyndale himself wrote a "book" in prison to defend his chief doctrinal standard: Sola fides justificat apud Deum—Faith Alone Justifies Before God. This was the key issue in the end. The evil of translating the Bible came down to this: are we justified by faith alone?

These months in prison were not easy. They were a long dying leading to death. We get one glimpse into the prison to see Tyndale's condition and his passion. He wrote a letter to in September, 1535, when there seems to have been a lull in the examinations. It was addressed to an unnamed officer of the castle. Here is a condensed version of Mozley's translation of the Latin:

I beg your lordship, and that of the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here through the winter, you will request the commissary to have the kindness to send me, from the goods of mine which he has, a warmer cap; for I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased in this cell; a warmer coat also, for this which I have is very thin; a piece of cloth too to patch my leggings. My overcoat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out. He has a woolen shirt, if he will be good enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth to put on above; he has also warmer night-caps. And I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study. In return may you obtain what you most desire, so only that it be for the salvation of your soul. But if any other decision has been taken concerning me, to be carried out before winter, I will be patient, abiding the will of God, to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ: whose spirit (I pray) may

ever direct your heart. Amen W. Tindalus57

We don't know if his requests were granted. He did stay in that prison through the winter. His verdict was sealed in August, 1536. He was formally condemned as a heretic and degraded from the priesthood. Then in early October (traditionally October 6), he was tied to the stake and then strangled by the executioner, then afterward consumed in the fire. Foxe reports that his last words were, "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes!"58 He was forty-two years old, never married and never buried.

Tyndale's Closing Words to Pastors His closing words to us in this conference on the theme "How Must a Pastor Die" are clear from his life and from his writings. I will let him speak them in his own words from his book The Obedience of a Christian Man:

If God promise riches, the way thereto is poverty. Whom he loveth he chasteneth, whom he exalteth, he casteth down, whom he saveth he damneth first, he bringeth no man to heaven except he send him to hell first. If he promise life he slayeth it first, when he buildeth, he casteth all down first. He is no patcher, he cannot build on another man's foundation. He will not work until all be past remedy and brought unto such a case, that men may see how that his hand, his power, his mercy, his goodness and truth hath wrought all together. He will let no man be partaker with him of his praise and glory.59

Let us therefore look diligently whereunto we are called, that we deceive not ourselves. We are called, not to dispute as the pope's disciples do, but to die with Christ that we may live with him, and to suffer with him that we may reign with him.60 For if God be on our side: what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes or whatsoever names they will.61 So let Tyndale's very last word to us be the last word he sent to his best friend, John Frith, in a letter just before he was burned alive for believing and speaking the truth of Scripture: Your cause is Christ's gospel, a light that must be fed with the blood of faith. . . . If when we be buffeted for well-doing, we suffer patiently and endure, that is thankful with God; for to that end we are called. For Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, who did no sin. Hereby have we perceived love that he laid down his life for us: therefore we ought to be able to lay down our lives for the brethren. . . . Let not your body faint. If the pain be above your strength, remember: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will give it you." And pray to our Father in that name, and he will ease your pain, or shorten it. . . . Amen.

1 David Daniell, William Tyndale: A Biography (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 217.

2 For example, in More's 1529 book, Dialogue Concerning Heresies.

3 Daniell, Tyndale, p. 4.

4 Thomas More wrote vastly more to condemn Tyndale than Tyndale wrote in his defense. After one book called An Answer Unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue (1531), Tyndale was done. For Thomas More, however, there were "close on three quarters of a million words against Tyndale . . . [compared to] Tyndale's eighty thousand in his Answer." Ibid., p. 277.

5 Ibid., p. 216.

6 Ibid.

7 William Tyndale, Selected Writings, edited with an introduction by David Daniell (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. ix. “Modern champions of the Catholic position like to support a view of the Reformation, that it was entirely a political imposition by a ruthless minority in power against both the traditions and the wishes of the pious people of England. . . . The energy which affected every human life in northern Europe, however, came from a different place. It was not the result of political imposition. It came from the discovery of the Word of God as originally written . . . in the language of the people. Moreover, it could be read and understood, without censorship by the Church or mediation through the Church. . . . Such reading produced a totally different view of everyday Christianity: the weekly, daily, even hourly ceremonies so lovingly catalogued by some Catholic revisionists are not there; purgatory is not there; there is no aural confession and penance. Two supports of the Church’s wealth and power collapsed. Instead there was simply individual faith in Christ the Saviour, found in Scripture. That and only that ‘justified’ the sinner, whose root failings were now in the face of God, not the bishops or the pope.” Daniell, Tyndale, p. 58.

8 Daniell, Tyndale, p. 79.

9 “Not for nothing did William Tyndale, exiled in Cologne, Worms and Antwerp use the international trade routes of the cloth merchants to get his books into England, smuggled in bales of cloth.” Ibid., p. 15.

10 Ibid., p. 188.

11 Ibid., p. 316.

12 “In the summer of 1382, Wyclif was attacked in a sermon preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford, and his followers were for the first time denounced as ‘Lollards’—a loose and suitably meaningless term of abuse (‘mutterers’) current in the Low Countries for Bible students, and thus heretics.” David Daniell, The Bible in English: Its History and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 73.

13Gutenberg’s printing press came in 1450.

14“Tyndale transmitted an English strength which is the opposite of Latin, seen in the difference between ‘high’ and ‘elevated’, ‘gift’ and ‘donation’, ‘many’ and ‘multitudinous.’” Daniell, Tyndale, p. 3.

15Tyndale did not follow Luther in putting Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation in a special section of the New Testament set apart as inferior. “Tyndale, as shown later by his preface to James in his 1534 New Testament, is not only wiser and more generous—he is more true to the New Testament.” Ibid., p. 120.

16This is available now in print with all its original notes and introductions: Tyndale’s Old Testament, translated by William Tyndale (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); as is Tyndale’s New Testament, translated by William Tyndale (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

17How could it be that Tyndale was martyred in 1536 for translating the Bible into English, and that his New Testament could be burned in London by Bishop Tunstall, and yet an entire printed

Bible, essentially Tyndale's, The Great Bible, could be published in England three years later officially endorsed by this Bible-burning bishop? Daniell explains: "Tunstall, whose name would shortly appear on the title pages approving two editions of the Great Bible, was playing politics, being a puppet of the Pope through Wolsey and the king, betraying his Christian humanist learning at the direction of the church, needing to be receiving [Thomas] Wolsey's favor. . . . To burn God's word for politics was to Tyndale barbarous." Tyndale, p. 93.

18 Tyndale, Selected Writings, p. xi.

19Tyndale, p. 1. Daniell speaks with more precision elsewhere and says that the Authorized Version is 83 percent Tyndale's (Tyndale, Selected Writings, p. vii). Brian Moynahan, in God's Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002, p. 1), confirms this with his estimates: Tyndale's words "account for 84 percent of the [King James Version] New Testament and 75.8 percent of the Old Testament books that he translated." Daniell also points out how remarkable the Old Testament translations were: "These opening chapters of Genesis are the first translations—not just the first printed, but the first translations—from Hebrew into English. This needs to be emphasized. Not only was the Hebrew language only known in England in 1529 and 1530 by, at the most, a tiny handful of scholars in Oxford and Cambridge, and quite possibly by none; that there was a language called Hebrew at all, or that it had any connection whatsoever with the Bible, would have been news to most of the ordinary population." Tyndale, p. 287.

20 Tyndale, Selected Writings, p. xv.

21 Tyndale, p. 142.

22Ibid., p. 2.

23Ibid., p. 116.

24Tyndale, Selected Writings, p. xv.

25 Daniell, Tyndale, p. 121. "Tyndale gave the nation a Bible language that was English in words, word-order and lilt. He invented some words (for example, 'scapegoat') and the great Oxford English Dictionary has mis-attributed, and thus also mis-dated a number of his first uses." (Ibid., p. 3) 26 "Tyndale could hardly have missed De copia." Daniell, Tyndale, p. 43. This book went through 150 additions by 1572.

27 Ibid., p. 42.

28 Emrys Jones, The Origins of Shakespeare (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 13.

29 "Tyndale as conscious craftsman has been not just neglected, but denied: yet the evidence of the book that follows makes it beyond challenge that he used, as a master, the skill in the selection and arrangement of words which he partly learned at school and university, and partly developed from pioneering work by Erasmus." Daniell, Tyndale, p. 2.

30 Ibid., p. 67.

31 Erasmus' book was titled On the Freedom of the Will, and Luther's was The Bondage of the Will.

32 Tyndale, Selected Writings, p. 39.

33 Ibid., p. 37.

34 Ibid., p. 40.

35 Daniell, Tyndale, pp. 68-69.

36 Ibid., p. 254.

37 Ibid., pp. 69-70.

38 "Central to Tyndale's insistence on the need for the Scriptures in English was his grasp that Paul had to be understood in relation to each reader's salvation, and he needed there, above all, to be clear." Ibid., p. 139.

39Tyndale, Selected Writings, p. 40.

40 Here is Tyndale's definition of the "gospel" that rings with exuberant joy: "Evangelion (that we call the gospel) is a Greek word and signifieth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a man's heart glad and maketh him sing, dance, and leap for joy. . . . [This gospel is] all of Christ the right David, how that he hath fought with sin, with death, and the devil, and overcome them: whereby all men that were in bondage to sin, wounded with death, overcome of the devil are without their own merits or deservings loosed, justified, restored to life and saved, brought to liberty and reconciled unto the favor of God and set at one with him again: which tidings as many as believe laud, praise and thank God, are glad, sing and dance for joy." Ibid., p. 33.

41 Ibid., p. 37.

42 "Tyndale was more than a mildly theological thinker. He is at last being understood as, theologically as well as linguistically, well ahead of his time. For him, as several decades later for Calvin princes and in the 20th century Karl Barth) is the overriding message of the New Testament is the sovereignty of God. Everything is contained in that. It must never, as he wrote, be lost from sight. . . . Tyndale, we are now being shown, was original and new—except that he was also old, demonstrating the understanding of God as revealed in the whole New Testament. For Tyndale, God is, above all, sovereign, active in the individual and in history. He is the one as he put it, in whom alone is found salvation and flourishing." Ibid., p. ix.

43 Ibid., p. 38.

44 Daniell, Tyndale, pp. 156-157.

45 See note 12.

46 Moynahan, God's Bestseller, p. xxii.

47 William Tyndale, The Obedience of A Christian Man, edited with an introduction by David Daniell (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 202.

48 Moynahan, God's Bestseller, p. 260.

49 Ibid., p. 261.

50 The list and details are given in Daniell, Tyndale, pp. 183-184.

51 Daniell, Tyndale, pp. 192-193.

52 Ibid., p. 149.

53 Ibid., p. 213.

54 Ibid., p. 361.

55 Ibid., p. 364.

56 Ibid., p. 365.

57 Ibid., p. 379.

58 Ibid., pp. 382-383. "Contemporaries noted no such words, however, only that the strangling was bungled and that he suffered terribly." Moynahan, God's Bestseller, p. 377.

59 Tyndale, The Obedience of a Christian Man, p. 6.

60 Ibid., p. 8.

61 Ibid., p. 6. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.05. Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering

Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering Meditations on the Life of Charles Simeon

Introduction In April, 1831, Charles Simeon was 71 years old. He had been the pastor of Trinity Church, Cambridge, England, for 49 years. He was asked one afternoon by his friend, Joseph Gurney, how he had surmounted persecution and outlasted all the great prejudice against him in his 49-year ministry. He said to Gurney, "My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake. When I am getting through a hedge, if my head and shoulders are safely through, I can bear the pricking of my legs. Let us rejoice in the remembrance that our holy Head has surmounted all His suffering and triumphed over death. Let us follow Him patiently; we shall soon be partakers of His victory" (H.C.G. Moule, Charles Simeon, London: InterVarsity, 1948, 155f.). So I have entitled this message, "Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering." I have a very definite Biblical aim in choosing this theme and this man for our meditation. I want to encourage you all to obey Romans 12:12 : "Be patient in tribulation." I want you to see persecution and opposition and slander and misunderstanding and disappointment and self-recrimination and weakness and danger as the normal portion of faithful pastoral ministry. But I want you to see this in the life of a man who was a sinner like you and me, who was a pastor, and who, year after year, in his trials, "grew downward" in humility and upward in his adoration of Christ, and who did not yield to bitterness or to the temptation to leave his charge – for 54 years.

What I have found – and this is what I want to be true for you as well – is that in my pastoral disappointments and discouragements there is a great power for perseverance in keeping before me the life of a man who surmounted great obstacles in obedience to God's call by the power of God's grace. I need very much this inspiration from another age, because I know that I am, in great measure, a child of my times. And one of the pervasive marks of our times is emotional fragility. I feel it as though it hung in the air we breathe. We are easily hurt. We pout and mope easily. We break easily. Our marriages break easily. Our faith breaks easily. Our happiness breaks easily. And our commitment to the church breaks easily. We are easily disheartened, and it seems we have little capacity for surviving and thriving in the face of criticism and opposition. A typical emotional response to trouble in the church is to think, "If that's the way they feel about me, then they can find themselves another pastor." We see very few models today whose lives spell out in flesh and blood the rugged words, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials" (James 1:3). When historians list the character traits of the last third of twentieth century America, commitment, constancy, tenacity, endurance, patience, resolve and perseverance will not be on the list. The list will begin with an all-consuming interest in self-esteem. It will be followed by the subheadings of self-assertiveness, and self-enhancement, and self-realization. And if you think that you are not at all a child of your times just test yourself to see how you respond in the ministry when people reject your ideas.

We need help here. When you are surrounded by a society of emotionally fragile quitters, and when you see a good bit of this ethos in yourself, you need to spend time with people – whether

dead of alive – whose lives prove there is another way to live. Scripture says, "Be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). So I want to hold up for you the faith and the patience of Charles Simeon for your inspiration and imitation. His Life and Times and Theological Commitment

Let me orient you with some facts about his life and times. When Simeon was born in 1759, Jonathan Edwards had just died the year before. The Wesleys and Whitefield were still alive, and so the Methodist awakening was in full swing. Simeon would live for 77 years, from 1758 to 1836. So he lived through the American Revolution, the French Revolution and not quite into the decade of the telegraph and the railroad. His father was a wealthy attorney, but no believer. We know nothing of his mother. She probably died early, so that he never knew her. At seven, he went to England's premier boarding school, The Royal College of Eton. He was there for 12 years, and was known as a homely, fancy-dressing, athletic show off. The atmosphere was irreligious and degenerate in many ways. Looking back late in life, he said that he would be tempted to take the life of his son than to let him see the vice he had seen at Eton.

He said later he only knew one religious book besides the Bible in those 12 years, namely The Whole Duty of Man, a devotional book of the 17th century. Whitefield thought that book was so bad that once, when he caught an orphan with a copy of it in Georgia, he made him throw it in the fire. William Cowper said it was a "repository of self-righteous and pharisaical lumber." That, in fact, would be a good description of Simeon's life to that point. At 19 he went to Cambridge. And in the first four months God brought him from darkness to light. The amazing thing about this is that God did it against the remarkable odds of having no other Christian around. Cambridge was so destitute of evangelical faith that, even after he was converted, Simeon did not meet one other believer on campus for almost three years. His conversion happened like this. Three days after he arrived at Cambridge on January 29, 1779, the Provost, William Cooke, announced that Simeon had to attend the Lord's Supper. And Simeon was terrified. We can see, in retrospect, that this was the work of God in his life. He knew enough to know that it was very dangerous to eat the Lord's Supper unworthily. So he began desperately to read and to try to repent and make himself better. He began with The Whole Duty of Man but got no help. He passed through that first communion unchanged. But knew it wasn't the last. He turned to a book by a Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper. As Easter Sunday approached a wonderful thing happened.

Keep in mind that this young man had almost no preparation of the kind we count so important. He had no mother to nurture him. His father was an unbeliever. His boarding school was a godless and corrupt place. And his university was destitute of other evangelical believers, as far as he knew. He is nineteen years old, sitting in his dormitory room as Passion Week begins at the end of March, 1779.

Here is his own account of what happened. In Passion Week, as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect – "That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it

became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter-day, April 4, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, 'Jesus Christ is risen to-day! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul; and at the Lord's Table in our Chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Saviour. (Moule, 25f) The effect was immediate and dramatic. His well-known extravagance gave way to a life of simplicity. All the rest of his life he lived in simple rooms on the university campus, moving only once to larger quarters so that he could have more students for his conversation gatherings. When his brother left him a fortune, he turned it down and channeled all his extra income to religious and charitable goals. He began at once to teach his college servant girl his new Biblical faith. When he went home for holidays he called the family together for devotions. His father never came, but his two brothers were both eventually converted. And in his private life he began to practice what in those days was known as "methodism" – strict discipline in prayer and meditation.

You can catch a glimpse of his zeal from this anecdote about his early rising for Bible study and prayer.

Early rising did not appeal to his natural tendency to self-indulgence, however, especially on dark winter mornings. . . . On several occasions he overslept, to his considerable chagrin. So he determined that if ever he did it again, he would pay a fine of half a crown to his "bedmaker" (college servant). A few days later, as he lay comfortably in his warm bed, he found himself reflecting that the good woman was poor and could probably do with half a crown. So, to overcome such rationalizations, he vowed that next time he would throw a guinea into the river. This (the story goes) he duly did, but only once, for guineas were scarce; he could not afford to use them to pave the river bed with gold. (Moule, 66) In spite of this disciplined approach to spiritual growth, Simeon's native pride and impetuousness did not disappear overnight. We will see shortly that this was one of the thorns he would be plucking at for some time.

After three years, in January, 1782, Simeon received a fellowship at the university. This gave him a stipend and certain rights in the university. For example, over the next fifty years he was three times dean for a total of nine years, and once vice provost. But that was not his main calling. In May that year he was ordained a deacon in the Anglican Church, and after a summer preaching interim in St. Edwards' Church in Cambridge he was called to Trinity Church as vicar, or pastor. He preached his first sermon there November 10, 1782. And there he stayed for fifty-four years until his death November 13, 1836.

Simeon never married. I have found only one sentence about this fact. H.C.G. Moule said he "had deliberately and resolutely chosen the then necessary celibacy of a Fellowship that he might the better work for God at Cambridge" (Moule, 111). I find it interesting that John Stott, who is also an evangelical Anglican and Cambridge grad, and long-time pastor and celibate, has a great admiration for Simeon and wrote the introduction for Multnomah Press's collection of Simeon's Sermons. Stott is a latter-day Simeon in other ways as well - for example, his social concern and his involvement in world evangelization through the Lausanne movement. In his fifty-four years at Trinity Church, Simeon became a powerful force for evangelicalism in the Anglican church. His position at the university, with his constant influence on students preparing for the ministry, made him a great recruiter of young evangelicals for pulpits around the land. But not only around the land. He became the trusted advisor of the East India Company, and recommended most of the

men who went out as chaplains, which is the way Anglicans could be missionaries to the East in those days. Simeon had a great heart for missions. He was the spiritual father of the great Henry Martyn. He was the key spiritual influence in the founding of the Church Missionary Society, and was zealous in his labors for the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. In fact, on his death bed he was dictating a message to be given to the Society about his deep humiliation that the church has not done more to gather in the Jewish people.

Probably most of all, Simeon exerted his influence through sustained Biblical preaching year after year. This was the central labor of his life. He lived to place into the hands of King William the Fourth in 1833 the completed 21 volumes of his collected sermons. This is the best place to go for researching Simeon's theology. You can find his views on almost every key text in the Bible.

He did not want to be labeled a Calvinist or an Arminian. He wanted to be Biblical through and through and give every text its due proportion, whether it sounded Arminian as it stands or Calvinistic. But he was known as an evangelical Calvinist, and rightly so. As I have read portions of his sermons on texts concerning election and effectual calling and perseverance he is uninhibited in his affirmation of what we would call the doctrines of grace. In fact he uses that phrase approvingly in his sermon on Romans 9:19-24 (Horae Homileticae, Vol. 15, p. 358). But he had little sympathy for uncharitable Calvinists. In a sermon on Romans 9:16, he said,

Many there are who cannot see these truths [the doctrines of God's sovereignty], who yet are in a state truly pleasing to God; yea many, at whose feet the best of us may be glad to be found in heaven. It is a great evil, when these doctrines are made a ground of separation one from another, and when the advocates of different systems anathematize each other. . . . In reference to truths which are involved in so much obscurity as those which relate to the sovereignty of God mutual kindness and concession are far better than vehement argumentation and uncharitable discussion (Horae Homileticae, Vol. 15, p. 357). An example of how he lived out this counsel is seen in the way he conversed with the elderly John Wesley. He tells the story himself:

Sir, I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions. Pray, Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not first put it into your heart?

Yes, I do indeed. And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?

Yes, solely through Christ.

But, Sir, supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works?

No, I must be saved by Christ from first to last.

Allowing, then, that you were first turned by the grace of God, are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power?

No.

What then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother’s arms?

Yes, altogether. And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto His heavenly kingdom?

Yes, I have no hope but in Him.

Then, Sir, with your leave I will put up my dagger again; for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance: it is in substance all that I hold, and as I hold it; and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree. (Moule, 79f) But don’t take this to mean that Simeon pulled any punches when expounding Biblical texts. He is very forthright in teaching what the Bible teaches and calling error by its real name. But he is jealous of not getting things out of balance.

He said that his invariable rule was "to endeavor to give to every portion of the Word of God its full and proper force, without considering what scheme it favours, or whose system it is likely to advance" (Moule, 79). "My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head; never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding" (Moule, 77).

He makes an observation that is true enough to sting every person who has ever been tempted to adjust Scripture to fit a system. Of this he [speaking of himself in the third person] is sure, that there is not a decided Calvinist or Arminian in the world who equally approves of the whole of Scripture . . . who, if he had been in the company of St. Paul whilst he was writing his Epistles, would not have recommended him to alter one or other of his expressions. But the author would not wish one of them altered; he finds as much satisfaction in one class of passages as another; and employs the one, he believes, as freely as the other. Where the inspired Writers speak in unqualified terms, he thinks himself at liberty to do the same; judging that they needed no instruction from him how to propagate the truth. He is content to sit as a learner at the feet of the holy Apostles and has no ambition to teach them how they ought to have spoken. (Moule, 79) With that remarkable devotion to Scripture, Simeon preached in the same pulpit for fifty-four years. What drew me to him was his endurance – not just because of the length of time, and not just because it was in the same place for all that time, but also because it was through extraordinary opposition and trials. That is what I want to turn to now. First his trials, and then finally, the resources that enabled him to press on to the end and not give up. How was he able to be "patient in tribulation"? His Trials

Himself The most fundamental trial that Simeon had –and that we all have – was himself. He had a somewhat harsh and self-assertive air about him. One day, early in Simeon’s ministry, he was visiting Henry Venn, who was pastor 12 miles from Cambridge at Yelling. When he left to go home Venn’s daughters complained to their father about his manner. Venn took the girls to the back yard and said, "Pick me one of those peaches." But it was early summer, and "the time of peaches was not yet." They asked why he would want the green, unripe fruit. Venn replied, "Well, my dears, it is green now, and we must wait; but a little more sun, and a few more showers, and the peach will be

ripe and sweet. So it is with Mr. Simeon."

Simeon came to know himself and his sin very deeply. He described his maturing in the ministry as a growing downward. We will come back to this as the key to his great perseverance and success. His Congregation The vicar of Trinity Church died in October, 1782, just as Charles Simeon was about to leave the university to live in his father's home. Simeon had often walked by the church, he tells us, and said to himself, "How should I rejoice if God were to give me that church, that I might preach the Gospel there and be a herald for Him in the University" (Moule, 37). His dream came true when Bishop Yorke appointed him "curate-in-charge" (being only ordained a deacon at the time). His wealthy father had nudged the Bishop and the pastor at St. Edwards, where Simeon preached that summer, gave him an endorsement. He preached his first sermon there November 10, 1782. But the parishioners did not want Simeon. They wanted the assistant curate Mr. Hammond. Simeon was willing to step out, but then the Bishop told him that even if he did decline the appointment he would not appoint Hammond. So Simeon stayed – for fifty-four years! And gradually – very gradually – overcame the opposition. The first thing the congregation did in rebellion against Simeon was to refuse to let him be the Sunday afternoon lecturer. This was in their charge. It was like a second Sunday service. For five years they assigned the lecture to Mr. Hammond. Then when he left, instead of turning it over to their pastor of five years they gave it to another independent man for seven more years! Finally, in 1794, Simeon was chosen lecturer. Imagine serving for 12 years a church who were so resistant to your leadership they would not let you preach Sunday evenings, but hired as assistant to keep you out.

Simeon tried to start a later Sunday evening service and many townspeople came. But the churchwardens locked the doors while the people stood waiting in the street. Once Simeon had the doors opened by a locksmith, but when it happened again he pulled back and dropped the service. The second thing the church did was to lock the pew doors on Sunday mornings. The pewholders refused to come and refused to let others sit in their personal pews. Simeon set up seats in the aisles and nooks and corners at his own expense. But the churchwardens took them out and threw them in the churchyard. When he tried to visit from house to house, hardly a door would open to him. This situation lasted at least ten years. The records show that in 1792 Simeon got a legal decision that the pewholders could not lock their pews and stay away indefinitely. But he didn't use it. He let his steady, relentless ministry of the word and prayer and community witness gradually overcome the resistance. But I mustn't give the impression that all the troubles were over after the first 12 years. After years of peace, in 1812 (after he had been there 30 years!) there were again opponents in the congregation making the waters rough. He wrote to a friend, "I used to sail in the Pacific; I am now learning to navigate the Red Sea that is full of shoals and rocks." Who of us would not have immediately concluded at age 53, after thirty years in one church that an upsurge of opposition is a sure sign to move on? But again he endured patiently and in 1816 he writes that peace had come and the church is better attended than ever. The University As the students made their way to Trinity Church, they were prejudiced against the pastor by the hostile congregation, and for years he was slandered with all kinds of rumors. Basically his enemies said that he was a bad man with a front of piety. The students at Cambridge held Simeon in derision for his Biblical preaching and his uncompromising stand as an evangelical. They repeatedly disrupted his services and caused a tumult in the streets. One observer wrote from personal experience, "For many years Trinity Church and the streets leading

to it were the scenes of the most disgraceful tumults" (Moule, 58). On one occasion a band of undergraduates determined to assault Simeon personally as he left the church after service. They waited by the usual exit for him, but providentially he took another way home that day.

Students who were converted and wakened by Simeon's preaching were soon ostracized and ridiculed. They were called "Sims" – a term that lasted all the way to the 1860's and their way of thinking was called derisively "Simeonism." But harder to bear than the insults of the students was the ostracism and coldness of his peers in the university. One of the Fellows scheduled Greek classes on Sunday night to prevent students from going to Simeon's service. In another instance one of the students who looked up to Simeon was denied an academic prize because of his "Simeonism."

Sometimes Simeon felt utterly alone at the university where he lived. He looked back on those early years and wrote, "I remember the time that I was quite surprised that a Fellow of my own College ventured to walk with me for a quarter of an hour on the grass-plot before Clare Hall; and for many years after I began my ministry I was 'as a man wondered at,' by reason of the paucity of those who showed any regard for true religion" (Moule, 59).

Even after he had won the respect of many, there could be grave mistreatment. For example, even as late as 1816 (34 years into his ministry) he wrote to a missionary friend, "Such conduct is observed towards me at this very hour by one of the Fellows of the College as, if practised by me, would set not the College only but the whole town and University in a flame" (Moule, 127).

Physical weakness In 1807, after twenty-five years of ministry, his health failed suddenly. His voice gave way so that preaching was very difficult and at times he could only speak in a whisper. After a sermon he would feel "more like one dead than alive." This broken condition lasted for 13 years, till he was sixty years old. In all this time Simeon pressed on in his work. The way this weakness came to an end is remarkable and shows the amazing hand of God on this man's life. He tells the story that in 1819 he was on his last visit to Scotland. As he crossed the border he says he was "almost as perceptibly revived in strength as the woman was after she had touched the hem of our Lord's garment." His interpretation of God's providence in this begins back before his weakness. Up till then he had promised himself a very active life up to age sixty, and then a Sabbath evening. Now he seemed to hear his Master saying:

I laid you aside, because you entertained with satisfaction the thought of resting from your labour; but that now you have arrived at the very period when you had promised yourself that satisfaction, and have determined instead to spend your strength for me to the latest hour of your life, I have doubled, trebled, quadrupled your strength, that you may execute your desire on a more extended plan. (Moule, 127) So at sixty years of age, Simeon renewed his commitment to his pulpit and the mission of the church and preached vigorously for 17 more years, until two months before his death.

How Simeon Endured and Flourished Through Opposition

How did Simeon endure these trials without giving up or being driven out of his church? I will mention some of the many fruits of Simeon's life that I think gave him such endurance and staying power. Then we will conclude by looking at Simeon's inner life and its deepest root in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.

Simeon had a strong sense of his accountability before God for the souls of his flock, whether they liked him or not. In his first year in the pulpit he preached a sermon on this and said to the people standing in the aisles,

Remember the nature of my office, and the care incumbent on me for the welfare of your immortal souls. . . . Consider whatever may appear in my discourses harsh, earnest or alarming, not as the effects of enthusiasm, but as the rational dictates of a heart impressed with a sense both of the value of the soul and the importance of eternity. . . . By recollecting the awful consequences of my neglect, you will be more inclined to receive favorably any well-meant admonitions. (Moule, 46)

Fifteen years later he preached on the subject again. Years after this sermon, one of his friends told of how its power was still being felt. He said the pastor is like the keeper of a lighthouse. And he painted a vivid picture of a rocky coast strewn with dead and mangled bodies with the wailing of widows and orphans. He pictured the delinquent keeper being brought out and at last the answer given: Asleep. "Asleep!" The way he made this word burst on the ears of the hearers never let at least one of them ever forget what is at stake in the pastoral ministry.

It did not matter that his people were often against him. He was not commissioned by them, but by the Lord. And they were his responsibility. He believed Hebrews 13:17 - that he would one day have to give an account for the souls of his church. His preaching in the midst of conflict was free from the scolding tone.

How many times have we heard a pastor’s wounded pride or his personal anger at parishioners coming though his preaching! This is deadly for the ministry. Moule said of Simeon that his style of address in those early years of intense opposition was "totally free from that easy but fatal mistake of troubled pastors, the scolding accent" (Moule, 46).

Years after his conversion he said that his security in God gave him the capacity to be hopeful in the presence of other people even when burdened within: "With this sweet hope of ultimate acceptance with God, I have always enjoyed much cheerfulness before men; but I have at the same time laboured incessantly to cultivate the deepest humiliation before God" (William Carus, Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon, 1846, p. 519).

Joseph Gurney saw the same thing in Simeon for years and wrote, that in spite of Simeon’s private weeping, "it was one of his grand principles of action, to endeavor at all times to honor his Master by maintaining a cheerful happy demeanor in the presence of his friends" (Moule, 157).

He had learned the lesson of Matthew 6:17-18, "But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret."

Simeon was no rumor-tracker.

He was like Charles Spurgeon who gave a lecture to his students entitles "The Blind Eye and the Deaf Ear." The pastor must have one blind eye and one deaf ear, and turn that eye and that ear to the rumors that would incense him.

Simeon was deeply wronged in 1821. We are not given the details. But when he was asked about his response (which had, evidently been non-retaliatory) he said, "My rule is – never to hear, or see, or know, what if heard, or seen, or known, would call for animadversion from me. Hence it is

that I dwell in peace in the midst of lions" (Moule, 191).

We would do well not to be curious about what others are saying. Nothing makes me want to tune someone out more quickly than when they begin a sentence, "A lot of people are saying . . ."

Simeon dealt with his opponents in a forthright face-to-face way. In 1810, a man named Edward Pearson accused Simeon of setting too high a standard of holiness in his preaching. This criticism was made public in pamphlets. Simeon wrote to Pearson and said,

Persons who have the same general design, but differ in some particular modes of carrying it into execution, often stand more aloof from each other than they do from persons whose principles and conduct they entirely disapprove. Hence prejudice arises and a tendency to mutual crimination; whereas, if they occasionally conversed for half an hour with each other, they would soon rectify their mutual misapprehensions, and concur in aiding, rather than undermining, the efforts of each other for the public good. (Moule, 126f)

It is remarkable, as Simeon said, how much evil can be averted by doing things face to face. We attempt far too much fence-mending by letter and even by phone. There is something mysteriously powerful about the peacemaking potentials of personal face-to-face conversation. It did not spare Simeon years of criticism, but it was surely one of the means God used to overcome the opposition in the long run.

Simeon could take a rebuke and grow from it. This is utterly essential to survive and thrive in the ministry – the ability to absorb and profit from criticism. From the Lord and from man. You recall how he interpreted his 13-year weakness from age 47 to 60 as a rebuke from the Lord for his intention to retire at sixty. He took it well, and gave himself with all his might to the work till he died. At seventy-six he wrote, "Through mercy I am, for ministerial service, stronger than I have been at any time this thirty years . . . preaching at seventy-six with all the exuberance of youth . . . but looking for my dismission [i.e. death] daily" (Moule, 162). He was not embittered by a thirteen-year rebuke. He was impelled by it.

It was the same with rebukes from men. If these rebukes came from his enemies, his sentiment was the sentiment of James 1:2. He said, "If I suffer with a becoming spirit, my enemies, though unwittingly, must of necessity do me good" (Moule, 39). But his friends rebuked him as well. For example, he had the bad habit of speaking as if he were very angry about mere trifles. One day at a Mr. Hankinson’s house he became so irritated at how the servant was stoking the fire that he gave him a swat on the back to get him to stop. Then when he was leaving, the servant got a bridle mixed up, and Simeon’s temper broke out violently against the man.

Well, Mr. Hankinson wrote a letter as if from his servant and put it in Simeon’s bag to be found later. In it he said that he did not see how a man who preached and prayed so well could be in such a passion about nothing and wear no bridle on his tongue. He signed it "John Softly."

Simeon responded (on April 12, 1804) directly to the servant with the words, "To John Softly, from Charles, Proud and Irritable: I most cordially thank your, my dear friend for your kind and seasonable reproof." Then he wrote to his friend, Mr. Hankinson, "I hope, my dearest brother, that when you find your soul nigh to God, you will remember one who so greatly needs all the help he can get" (Moule, 147).

We will see the root of this willingness to be humbled in just a moment.

Simeon was unimpeachable in his finances and had no love for money. In other words, he gave his enemies no foothold when it came to lifestyle and wealth. He lived as a single man simply in his rooms at the university and gave all his excess income to the poor of the community. He turned down the inheritance of his rich brother. Moule said he had "a noble indifference to money." And his active involvement with the relief for the poor in the area went a long way to overcoming the prejudices against him. It is hard to be the enemy of a person who is full of practical good deeds. "It is God's will that by doing good you put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).

Simeon found ways to look at discouraging things hopefully. When the members of his congregation locked their pews and kept them locked for over ten years, Simeon said, In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience. The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was this, 'The servant of the Lord must not strive.' It was painful indeed to see the church, with the exception of the aisles, almost forsaken; but I thought that if God would only give a double blessing to the congregation that did attend, there would on the whole be as much good done as if the congregation were doubled and the blessing limited to only half the amount. This comforted me many, many times, when, without such a reflection, I should have sunk under my burden. (Moule, 39)

One illustration of the truth of Simeon's confidence is the story of one of his preaching trips to Scotland. He happened to visit the home of a minister named Stewart who was not truly converted and was quite miserable. Through the personal life and witness of Simeon Mr. Stewart was transformed and for 15 years afterward was powerful for the gospel.

One of the couples who said later that they "owed their own selves" to the new preaching of Mr. Stewart were the parents of Alexander Duff. They brought up their son in the full faith of the gospel and with a special sense of dedication to the service of Christ. Duff, in turn, became one of the great Scottish missionaries to India for over fifty years. So it is true that you never know when the Lord may give a double blessing on your ministry to a small number and multiply it thirty- sixty- or a hundredfold even after you are dead and gone. This confidence kept Simeon going more than once.

Simeon saw his suffering as a wonderful privilege of bearing the cross with Christ.

One striking witness to this was during a time when the university was especially cold and hostile to him. He reflected on his own name "Simeon" which is the same as Simon who was compelled to bear the cross for Jesus. And he exclaimed about that text: "What a word of instruction was here – what a blessed hint for my encouragement! To have the cross laid upon me, that I might bear it after Jesus – what a privilege! It was enough. Now I could leap and sing for joy as one whom Jesus was honoring with a participation of His sufferings." (Moule, 59f)

We recall his words when he was 71 and Joseph Gurney asked him how he had surmounted his persecution for 49 years. He said, "My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake." The Root of all this Fruit But where now did this remarkable power and fruit come from? This is not an ordinary way of seeing things. This is not an ordinary way of life. What was the root of all this fruit. We get a step closer to it when we notice that . . .

Simeon strengthened himself with massive doses of meditation and prayer. A friend of Simeon's named Housman lived with him for a few months and tells us about this discipline. "Simeon invariably arose every morning, though it was the winter season, at four o'clock; and, after lighting his fire, he devoted the first four hours of the day to private prayer and the devotional study of the Scriptures . . . . Here was the secret of his great grace and spiritual strength. Deriving instruction from such a source, and seeking it with such diligence, he was comforted in all his trials and prepared for every duty" (Moule, p. 66).

Yes it was the secret of his strength. But it was not the deepest secret. What Simeon experienced in the word was remarkable. And it is so utterly different from the counsel that we receive today that it is worth looking at, in conclusion.

He grew downward in humiliation before God, and he grew upward in his adoration of Christ.

Handley Moule captures the essence of Simeon's secret of longevity in this sentence: "'Before honor is humility,' and he had been 'growing downwards' year by year under the stern discipline of difficulty met in the right way, the way of close and adoring communion with God" (Moule, 64). Those two things were the heartbeat of Simeon's inner life: growing downward in humility and growing upward in adoring communion with God. But the remarkable thing about humiliation and adoration in the heart of Charles Simeon is that they were inseparable. Simeon was utterly unlike most of us today who think that we should get rid once and for all of feelings of vileness and unworthiness as soon as we can. For him, adoration only grew in the freshly plowed soil of humiliation for sin. So he actually labored to know his true sinfulness and his remaining corruption as a Christian.

I have continually had such a sense of my sinfulness as would sink me into utter despair, if I had not an assured view of the sufficiency and willingness of Christ to save me to the uttermost. And at the same time I had such a sense of my acceptance through Christ as would overset my little bark, if I had not ballast at the bottom sufficient to sink a vessel of no ordinary size. (Moule 134f.)

He never lost sight of the need for the heavy ballast of his own humiliation. After he had been a Christian forty years he wrote, With this sweet hope of ultimate acceptance with God, I have always enjoyed much cheerfulness before men; but I have at the same time laboured incessantly to cultivate the deepest humiliation before God. I have never thought that the circumstance of God's having forgiven me was any reason why I should forgive myself; on the contrary, I have always judged it better to loathe myself the more, in proportion as I was assured that God was pacified towards me (Ezekiel 16:63). . . . There are but two objects that I have ever desired for these forty years to behold; the one is my own vileness; and the other is, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: and I have always thought that they should be viewed together; just as Aaron confessed all the sins of all Israel whilst he put them on the head of the scapegoat. The disease did not keep him from applying to the remedy, nor did the remedy keep him from feeling the disease. By this I seek to be, not only humbled and thankful, but humbled in thankfulness, before my God and Saviour continually. (Carus, 518f.)

If Simeon is right, vast portions of contemporary Christianity are wrong. And I can't help wondering whether one of the reasons we are emotionally capsized so easily today – so vulnerable to winds of criticism or opposition – is that in the name of forgiveness and grace, we have thrown the ballast

overboard.

Simeon’s boat drew a lot of water. But it was steady and on course and the mastheads were higher and the sails bigger and more full of the Spirit than most people’s today who talk continuously about self-esteem.

Simeon’s missionary friend Thomason writes about a time in 1794 when a friend of Simeon’s named Marsden entered his room and found Simeon "so absorbed in the contemplation of the Son of God, and so overpowered with a display of His mercy to his soul, that he was incapable of pronouncing a single word," till at length, he exclaimed, "Glory, glory." But a few days later Thomason himself found Simeon at the hour of the private lecture on Sunday scarcely able to speak, "from a deep humiliation and contrition."

Moule comments that these two experiences are not the alternating excesses of an ill-balanced mind. Rather they are "the two poles of a sphere of profound experience" (Moule, 135). For Simeon, adoration of God grew best in the plowed soil of his own contrition.

Simeon had no fear of turning up every sin in his life and looking upon with great grief and hatred, because he had such a vision of Christ’s sufficiency that this would always result in deeper cleansing and adoration.

Humiliation and adoration were inseparable. He wrote to Mary Elliott, the sister of the writer of the hymn "Just as I Am,"

I would have the whole of my experience one continued sense - first, of my nothingness, and dependence on God; second, of my guiltiness and desert before Him; third, of my obligations to redeeming love, as utterly overwhelming me with its incomprehensible extent and grandeur. Now I do not see why any one of these should swallow up another. (Moule, 160f.) As an old man he said, "I have had deep and abundant cause for humiliation, [but] I have never ceased to wash in that fountain that was opened for sin and uncleanness, or to cast myself upon the tender mercy of my reconciled God" (Carus, 518f).

He was convinced that Biblical doctrines "at once most abase and most gladden the soul" (Moule, 67). He spoke once to the Duchess de Broglie when he made a visit to the continent. He comments later "[I] opened to her my views of the Scripture system . . . and showed her that brokenness of heart is the key to the whole" (Moule, 96).

He actually fled for refuge to the place which we today try so hard to escape.

Repentance is in every view so desirable, so necessary, so suited to honor God, that I seek that above all. The tender heart, the broken and contrite spirit, are to me far above all the joys that I could ever hope for in this vale of tears. I long to be in my proper place, my hand on my mouth, and my mouth in the dust. . . . I feel this to be safe ground. Here I cannot err. . . . I am sure that whatever God may despise . . . He will not despise the broken and contrite heart. (Moule, 133f) When he was old and could look on much success, he wrote to a friend on the fiftieth anniversary of his work, "But I love the valley of humiliation. I there feel that I am in my proper place" (Moule, 159f). In the last months of his life he wrote, "In truth, I love to see the creature annihilated in the apprehension, and swallowed up in God; I am then safe, happy, triumphant" (Moule, 162).

Why? Why is this evangelical humiliation a place of happiness for Simeon? Listen to the benefits he sees in this kind of experience: By constantly meditating on the goodness of God and on our great deliverance from that punishment which our sins have deserved, we are brought to feel our vileness and utter unworthiness; and while we continue in this spirit of self-degradation, everything else will go on easily. We shall find ourselves advancing in our course; we shall feel the presence of God; we shall experience His love; we shall live in the enjoyment of His favour and in the hope of His glory. . . . You often feel that your prayers scarcely reach the ceiling; but, oh, get into this humble spirit by considering how good the Lord is, and how evil you all are, and then prayer will mount on wings of faith to heaven. The sigh, the groan of a broken heart, will soon go through the ceiling up to heaven, aye, into the very bosom of God. (Moule, 137f) So my conclusion is that the secret of Charles Simeon’s perseverance was that he never threw overboard the heavy ballast of his own humiliation for sin and that this helped keep his masts erect and his sails full of the spirit of adoration.

I love simplicity; I love contrition. . . . I love the religion of heaven; to fall on our faces while we adore the Lamb is the kind of religion which my soul affects. (Moule, 83) As he lay dying in October of 1836, a friend sat by his bed and asked what he was thinking of just then. He answered, "I don’t think now; I am enjoying."

He grew downward in the pain of contrition and he grew upward in the joy of adoration. And the weaving together of these two experiences into one is the achievement of the cross of Christ and the deepest secret of Simeon’s great perseverance. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 62

05.06. Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity

Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity A Personal Introduction My topic this year is "Preaching through Adversity," and the man I focus on is Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who died on this day 103 years ago at the age of 57 after preaching for 38 years at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. There are very personal reasons why I chose this topic and this man for this year's biographical study. Everyone faces adversity and must find ways to persevere through the oppressing moments of life. Everyone must get up and make breakfast, and wash clothes, and go to work, and pay bills, and discipline children and generally keep life going when the heart is breaking. But it's different with pastors—not totally different, but different. The heart is the instrument of our vocation. Spurgeon said, "Ours is more than mental work—it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul" (see note 1). So when our heart is breaking we must labor with a broken instrument. Preaching is our main work. And preaching is heart work, not just mental work. So the question for us is not just How you keep on living when the marriage is blank, and a child has run away, and the finances don't reach, and pews are bare and friends have forsaken you; the question for us is more than, How do you keep on living? It's, How do you keep on preaching. It's one thing to survive adversity; it is something very different to keep on preaching, Sunday after Sunday, month after month when the heart is overwhelmed.

Spurgeon said to the students of his pastors' college, "One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low. The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor ... Ten years of toil do not take so much life out of us as we lose in a few hours by Ahithophel the traitor, or Demas the apostate" (see note 2). The question for us is not, How do you live through unremitting criticism and distrust and accusation and abandonment; for us the question is also, How do you preach through it? How do you do heart work when the heart is under siege and ready to fall? For just over a year now that has been perhaps the uppermost question of my life. And, if I am not mistaken, I believe it is now, or will be, uppermost for many of you as well. Just last Sunday night I spent a half-hour on the phone with the wife of a pastor who would love to be here. He is under so much criticism and accusation that she found it hard to go to church and marveled that he could preach last Sunday morning—and I know this is a pure and faithful servant whose church I would gladly attend for the sake of my soul.

Preaching great and glorious truth in an atmosphere that is not great and glorious is an immense difficulty. To be reminded week in and week out that many people regard your preaching of the glory of the grace of God as hypocrisy pushes a preacher not just into the hills of introspection, but sometimes to the precipice of self-extinction.

I don't mean suicide. I mean something more complex. I mean the deranging inability to know any longer who you are. What begins as a searching introspection for the sake of holiness, and humility gradually becomes, for various reasons, a carnival of mirrors in your soul: you look in one and you're short and fat; you look in another and you're tall and skinny; you look in another and you're upside down. And the horrible feeling begins to break over you that you don't know who you

are any more. The center is not holding. And if the center doesn't hold—if there is no fixed and solid "I" able to relate to the fixed and solid "Thou," namely, God, then who will preach next Sunday? When the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "By the grace of God, I am what I am," he was saying something utterly essential for the survival of preachers in adversity. If, by grace, the identity of the "I"—the "I" created by Christ and united to Christ, but still a human "I"—if that center doesn't hold, there will be no more authentic preaching, for there will be no more authentic preacher, but a collection of echoes.

O how fortunate we are, brothers of the pulpit, that we are not the first to face these things! I thank God for the healing history of the power of God in the lives of saints. I urge you for the sake of your own survival: live in other centuries and other saints.

I have turned to Charles Spurgeon in these days, and I have been helped. And that's what I want to share with you this afternoon. My aim is to give you strength to keep on preaching through adversity.

First let me answer the question,

Why Spurgeon?

1. Charles Spurgeon was a preacher.

He preached over 600 times before he was 20 years old. His sermons sold about 20,000 copies a week and were translated into 20 languages. The collected sermons fill 63 volumes equivalent to the 27 volume ninth edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, and "stands" as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity" (see note 3).

Even if his son Charles was biased his assessment is close enough to the truth, "There was no one who could preach like my father. In inexhaustible variety, witty wisdom, vigorous proclamation, loving entreaty, and lucid teaching, with a multitude of other qualities, he must, at least in my opinion, ever be regarded as the prince of preachers" (see note 4). Spurgeon was a preacher.

2. He was a truth-driven preacher.

I am not interested in how preachers deal with adversity if they are not first and foremost guardians and givers of unchanging Biblical truth. If they find their way through adversity by other means than faithfulness to truth, I turn away.

Spurgeon defined the work of the preacher like this: "To know truth as it should be known, to love it as it should be loved, and then to proclaim it in the right spirit, and in its proper proportions" (see note 5). He said to his students, "To be effective preachers you must be sound theologians" (see note 6). He warned that "those who do away with Christian doctrine are, whether they are aware of it or not, the worst enemies of Christian living ... [because] the coals of orthodoxy are necessary to the fire of piety" (see note 7).

Two years before he died he said,

"Some excellent brethren seem to think more of the life than of the truth; for when I warn them that the enemy has poisoned the children's bread, they answer 'Dear brother, we are sorry to hear it; and, to counteract the evil, we will open the window, and give the children fresh air.' Yes, open the

window, and give them fresh air, by all means ... But, at the same time, this ought you to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Arrest the poisoners, and open the windows, too. While men go on preaching false doctrine, you may talk as much as you will about deepening their spiritual life, but you will fail in it" (see note 8).

Doctrinal truth was at the foundation and superstructure of all Spurgeon's labors.

3. He was a Bible-believing preacher. The truth that drove his preaching ministry was Biblical truth, which he believed to be God's truth. He held up his Bible and said,

"These words are God's ... Thou book of vast authority, thou art a proclamation from the Emperor of Heaven; far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee ... This is the book untainted by any error; but it is pure unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? Because God wrote it" (see note 9).

What a difference where this allegiance holds sway in the hearts of preachers and people. I had lunch with a man recently who bemoaned the atmosphere of his Sunday school class. He characterized it like this: if a person raises a question to discuss, and another reads a relevant Bible verse, the class communicates, "Now we have heard what Jesus thinks, what do you think?" Where that atmosphere begins to take over the pulpit and the church, defection from truth and weakness in holiness are not far behind.

4. He was a soul-winning preacher.

There was not a week that went by in his mature ministry that souls were not saved through his written sermons (see note 10). He and his elders were always on the "watch for souls" in the great congregation. "One brother," he said, "has earned for himself the title of my hunting dog, for he is always ready to pick up the wounded birds" (see note 11).

Spurgeon was not exaggerating when he said,

"I remember, when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that my whole soul has agonized over men, every nerve of my body has been strained and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears, if I could but win souls" (see note 12).

He was consumed with the glory of God and the salvation of men.

5. He was a Calvinistic preacher.

He was my kind of Calvinist. Let me give you a flavor of why his Calvinism drew 5,000 people a week to his church rather than driving them away. He said,

"To me, Calvinism means the placing of the eternal God at the head of all things. I look at everything through its relation to God's glory. I see God first, and man far down in the list ... Brethren, if we live in sympathy with God, we delight to hear Him say, 'I am God, and there is none else'" (see note 13). For Spurgeon "Puritanism, Protestantism, Calvinism [were simply] ... poor names which the world has given to our great and glorious faith,—the doctrine of Paul the apostle, the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (see note 14). But he did make distinctions between the full system, which he did embrace, and some central, evangelical doctrines shared by

others that bound him together with them—like his favorite, the doctrine of the substitution of Christ for sinners. He said, "Far be it for me to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views" (see note 15).

He said, "I am not an outrageous Protestant generally, and I rejoice to confess that I feel sure there are some of God's people even in the Romish Church" (see note 16). He chose a paedobaptist to be the first head of his pastor's college, and did not make that issue a barrier to who preached in his pulpit. His communion was open to all Christians, but he said he "would rather give up his pastorate than admit any man to the church who was not obedient to his Lord's command [of baptism]" (see note 17). His first words in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the place he built to preach in for thirty years:

"I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, "It is Jesus Christ" (see note 18). But he believed that Calvinism honored that Christ most fully because it was most true. And he preached it explicitly, and tried to work it into the minds of his people, because he said, "Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to vital truth" (see note 19).

Therefore he was open and unashamed: "People come to me for one thing ... I preach to them a Calvinist creed and a Puritan morality. That is what they want and that is what they get. If they want anything else they must go elsewhere" (see note 20).

6. He was a hard-working preacher.

I do not look to soft and leisurely men to instruct me how to endure adversity. If the main answer is, "Take it easy," I look for another teacher. Take a glimpse of this man's capacity for work:

"No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear ... I have to look after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with four thousand members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revised, The Sword and the Trowel to be edited, and besides all that, a weekly average of five hundred letters to be answered. This, however, is only half my duty, for there are innumerable churches established by friends, with the affairs of which I am closely connected, to say nothing of the cases of difficulty which are constantly being referred to me" (see note 21). At his 50th birthday a list of 66 organizations was read that he founded and conducted. Lord Shaftesbury was there and said, "This list of associations, instituted by his genius, and superintended by his care, were more than enough to occupy the minds and hearts of fifty ordinary men" (see note 22).

He typically read six substantial books a week and could remember what he read and where to find it (see note 23). He produced more than 140 books of his own—books like The Treasury of David, which was twenty years in the making, and Morning and Evening, and Commenting on Commentaries, and John Ploughman's Talk, and Our Own Hymnbook (see note 24).

He often worked 18 hours in a day. The missionary David Livingstone, asked him once, "How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day? Spurgeon replied, "You have forgotten there are two of us" (see note 25). I think he meant the presence of Christ's energizing power that we

read about in Colossians 1:29. Paul says, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." "There are two of us."

Spurgeon's attitude toward sacrificial labor would not be acceptable today where the primacy of "wellness" seems to hold sway. He said,

"If by excessive labour, we die before reaching the average age of man, worn out in the Master's service, then glory be to God, we shall have so much less of earth and so much more of Heaven!" (see note 26). "It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living sacrifices, whose lot is to be consumed" (see note 27).

Behind this radical viewpoint were some deep Biblical convictions that come through the apostle Paul's teaching. One of these convictions Spurgeon expressed like this:

"We can only produce life in others by the wear and tear of our own being. This is a natural and spiritual law,—that fruit can only come to the seed by its spending and be spent even to self-exhaustion" (see note 28). The apostle Paul said, "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation" (2 Corinthians 1:6). "Death works in us, but life in you" (2 Corinthians 4:12). And he said that his own sufferings were the completion of Christ's sufferings for the sake of the church (Colossians 1:24).

Another Biblical conviction behind Spurgeon's radical view of pastoral zeal is expressed like this:

"Satisfaction with results will be the [death] knell of progress. No man is good who thinks that he cannot be better. He has no holiness who things that he is holy enough" (see note 29). In other words he was driven with a passion never to be satisfied with the measure of his holiness or the extent of his service (cf. Php 3:12). The year he turned 40 he delivered a message to his pastors' conference with the one-word title, "Forward!" (see note 30). In it he said,

"In every minister's life there should be traces of stern labour. Brethren, do something; do something; DO SOMETHING. While Committees waste their time over resolutions, do something. While Societies and Unions are making constitutions, let us win souls. Too often we discuss, and discuss, and discuss, while Satan only laughs in his sleeve ... Get to work and quit yourselves like men" (see note 31).

I think the word "indefatigable" was created for people like Charles Spurgeon.

7. He was a maligned and suffering preacher.

He knew the whole range of adversity that most preachers suffer—and a lot more.

A. He knew the everyday, homegrown variety of frustration and disappointment from lukewarm members.

You know what one coldhearted man can do, if he gets at you on Sunday morning with a lump of ice, and freezes you with the information that Mrs. Smith and all her family are offended, and their pew is vacant. You did not want to know of that Lady's protest just before entering the pulpit, and it does not help you (see note 32). Or perhaps even worse, after the service it can happen.

What terrible blankets some professors are! Their remarks after a sermon are enough to stagger you ... You have been pleading as for life or death and they have been calculating how many seconds the sermon occupied, and grudging you the odd five minutes beyond the usual hour (see note 33).

It's even worse he says if the calculating observer is one of your deacons.

Thou shalt not yoke the ox and the ass together was a merciful precept: but when a laborious, ox-like minister comes to be yoked to a deacon who is not another ox, it becomes hard work to plough (see note 34).

B. He also knew the extraordinary calamities that befall us once in a lifetime. On October 19, 1856 he preached for the first time in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens because his own church would not hold the people. The 10,000 seating capacity was far exceeded as the crowds pressed in. Someone shouted, "Fire!" and there was great panic in parts of the building. Seven people were killed in the stampede and scores were injured.

Spurgeon was 22 years old and was overcome by this calamity. He said later, "Perhaps never soul went so near the burning furnace of insanity, and yet came away unharmed." But not all agreed he was unharmed. The specter so brooked over him for years, and one close friend and biographer said, "I cannot but think, from what I saw, that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night" (see note 35).

C. Spurgeon also knew the adversity of family pain.

He had married Susannah Thomson January 8 in the same year of the calamity at Surrey Gardens. His only two children, twin sons were born the day after the calamity on October 20. Susannah was never able to have more children. In 1865 (nine years later), when she was 33 years old she became a virtual invalid and seldom heard her husband preach for the next 27 years till his death. Some kind of rare cervical operations was attempted in 1869 by James Simpson, the father of modern gynecology, but to no avail (see note 36). So to Spurgeon's other burdens was added a sickly wife and the inability to have more children, though his own mother had given birth to seventeen children.

D. Spurgeon knew unbelievable physical suffering.

He suffered from gout, rheumatism and Bright's disease (inflammation of the kidneys). His first attack of gout came in 1869 at the age of 35. It became progressively worse so that "approximately one third of the last twenty-two years of his ministry was spent out of the Tabernacle pulpit, either suffering, or convalescing, or taking precautions against the return of illness" (see note 37). In a letter to a friend he wrote, "Lucian says, 'I thought a cobra had bitten me, and filled my veins with poison; but it was worse,—it was gout.' That was written from experience, I know" (see note 38). So for over half his ministry Spurgeon dealt with ever increasingly recurrent pain [such as in] his joints that cut him down from the pulpit and from his labors again and again, until the diseases took his life at age 57 where he was convalescing in Mentone, France.

E. On top of the physical suffering, Spurgeon had to endure a lifetime of public ridicule and slander, sometimes of the most vicious kind. In April, 1855 the Essex Standard carried an article with these words: His style is that of the vulgar colloquial, varied by rant ... All the most solemn mysteries of our holy religion are by him rudely, roughly and impiously handled. Common sense is outraged and decency disgusted. His rantings are interspersed with coarse anecdotes" (see note 39). The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent said,

He is a nine days' wonder—a comet that has suddenly shot across the religious atmosphere. He has gone up like a rocket and ere long will come down like a stick" (see note 40). His wife kept a bulging scrapbook of such criticisms from the years 1855-1856. Some of it was easy to brush off. Most of it wasn't. In 1857 he wrote:

"Down on my knees have I often fallen, with the hot sweat rising from my brow under some fresh slander poured upon me; in an agony of grief my heart has been well-nigh broken" (see note 41). His fellow ministers criticized from the right and from the left. Across town from the left Joseph Parker wrote,

"Mr. Spurgeon was absolutely destitute of intellectual benevolence. If men saw as he did they were orthodox; if they saw things in some other way they were heterodox, pestilent and unfit to lead the minds of students or inquirers. Mr. Spurgeon's was a superlative egotism; not the shilly-shallying, timid, half-disguised egotism that cuts off its own head, but the full-grown, over-powering, sublime egotism that takes the chief seat as if by right. The only colors which Mr. Spurgeon recognized were black and white" (see note 42). And from the right James Wells, the hyper-Calvinist, wrote, "I have—most solemnly have—my doubts as the Divine reality of his conversion" (see note 43).

All the embattlements of his life came to climax in the Downgrade Controversy as Spurgeon fought unsuccessfully for the doctrinal integrity of the Baptist Union. In October 1887 he withdrew from the Union. And the following January he was officially and publicly censured by a vote of the Union for his manner of protest (see note 44).

Eight years earlier he had said,

"Men cannot say anything worse of me than they have said. I have been belied from head to foot, and misrepresented to the last degree. My good looks are gone, and none can damage me much now" (see note 45).

He gives an example of the kinds of distortions and misrepresentations that were typical in the Downgrade controversy:

"The doctrine of eternal punishment has been scarcely raised by me in this controversy; but the 'modern thought' advocates continue to hold it up on all occasions, all the while turning the wrong side of it outwards" (see note 46). But even though he usually sounded rough and ready, the pain was overwhelming and deadly. In May of 1891 eight months before he died he said to a friend, "Good-bye; you will never see me again. This fight is killing me" (see note 47).

F. The final adversity I mention is the result of the others – Spurgeon's recurrent battles with depression.

It is not easy to imagine the omni-competent, eloquent, brilliant, full-of-energy Spurgeon weeping like a baby for no reason that he could think of. In 1858, at age 24 it happened for the first time. He said, "My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for (see note 48).

Causeless depression cannot be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discoursings. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness ... The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison, needs a heavenly hand to push it back (see note 49).

He saw his depression as his "worst feature." "Despondency," he said, "is not a virtue; I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God" (see note 50). In spite of all these sufferings and persecutions Spurgeon endured to the end, and was able to preach mightily until his last sermon at the Tabernacle on June 7, 1891. So the question I have asked in reading this man's life and work is, How Did He Persevere and Preach Through This Adversity?

O, how many strategies of grace abound in the life of Spurgeon. My choices are very limited and personal. The scope of this man's warfare, and the wisdom of his strategies were immense. Our time is short and we must be very selective. I begin with the issue of despondency and depression. If this one can be conquered, all the other forms of adversity that feet into it, will be nullified in their killing effect.

1. Spurgeon saw his depression as the design of God for the good of his ministry and the glory of Christ.

What comes through again and again is Spurgeon's unwavering belief in the sovereignty of God in all his afflictions. More than anything else it seems, this kept him from caving in to the adversities of his life. He said,

"It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity" (see note 51). This is exactly the opposite strategy of modern thought, even much evangelical thought, that recoils from the implications of infinity. If God is God he not only knows what is coming, but he knows it because he designs it. For Spurgeon this view of God was not first argument for debate, it was a means of survival. Our afflictions are the health regimen of an infinitely wise Physician. He told his students,

"I dare say the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness ... If some men, that I know of could only be favoured with a month of rheumatism, it would, by God's grace mellow them marvelously" (see note 52).

He meant this mainly for himself. Though he dreaded suffering and would willingly avoid it, he said,

I am afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable ... Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best

book in a minister’s library (see note 53).

He saw three specific purposes of God in his struggle with depression. The first is that it functioned like the apostle Paul’s thorn to keep him humble lest he be lifted up in himself. He said the Lord’s work is summed up in these words:

"'Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.’ Instruments shall be used, but their intrinsic weakness shall be clearly manifested; there shall be no division of the glory, no diminishing of the honor due to the Great Worker ... Those who are honoured of their Lord in public have usually to endure a secret chastening, or to carry a peculiar cross, lest by any means they exalt themselves, and fall into the snare of the devil" (see note 54). The second purpose of God in his despondency was the unexpected power it gave to his ministry:

"One Sabbath morning, I preached from the text, ’My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?’ and though I did not say so, yet I preached my own experience. I heard my own chains clank while I tried to preach to my fellow-prisoners in the dark; but I could not tell why I was brought into such an awful horror of darkness, for which I condemned myself. On the following Monday evening, a man came to see me who bore all the marks of despair upon his countenance. His hair seemed to stand up right, and his eyes were ready to start from their sockets. He said to me, after a little parleying, ’I never before, in my life, heard any man speak who seemed to know my heart. Mine is a terrible case; but on Sunday morning you painted me to the life, and preached as if you had been inside my soul.’ By God’s grace I saved that man from suicide, and led him into gospel light and liberty; but I know I could not have done it if I had not myself been confined in the dungeon in which he lay. I tell you the story, brethren, because you sometimes may not understand your own experience, and the perfect people may condemn you for having it; but what know they of God’s servants? You and I have to suffer much for the sake of the people of our charge ... You may be in Egyptian darkness, and you may wonder why such a horror chills your marrow; but you may be altogether in the pursuit of your calling, and be led of the Spirit to a position of sympathy with desponding minds" (see note 55). The third design of his depression was what he called a prophetic signal for the future. This has given me much encouragement in my own situation.

"This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord’s richer benison" (see note 56).

I would say with Spurgeon that in the darkest hours it is the sovereign goodness of God that has given me the strength to go on—the granite promise that he rules over my circumstances and means it for good no matter what anyone else means.

2. Very practically Spurgeon supplements his theological survival strategy with God’s natural means of survival – his use of rest and nature. For all his talk about spending and being spent, he counsels us to rest and take a day off and open ourselves to the healing powers God has put in the world of nature.

"Our Sabbath is our day of toil," he said, "and if we do not rest upon some other day we shall break down" (see note 57). Eric Hayden reminds us that Spurgeon "kept, when possible, Wednesday as his day of rest" (see note 58). More than that Spurgeon said to his students,

"It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. On, on, on for ever, without recreation may suit spirits emancipated from this 'heavy clay', but while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt, and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of harness for a while" (see note 59).

I can testify that the four extra weeks that the church gave me last summer were crucial weeks in breathing a different spiritual air. And when we take time away from the press of duty, Spurgeon recommends that we breathe country air and let the beauty of nature do its appointed work. He confesses that "sedentary habits have tendency to create despondency ... especially in the months of fog." And then counsels, "A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best" (see note 60). A personal word to you younger men. I am finishing my 15th year at Bethlehem and I just celebrated my 49th birthday. I have watched my body and my soul with some care over these years and noticed some changes. They are partly owing to changing circumstances, but much is owning to a changing constitution. One, I cannot eat as much without gaining unhelpful weight. My body does not metabolize the same way it used to.

Another is that I am emotionally less resilient when I lose sleep. There were early days when I would work without regard to sleep and feel energized and motivated. In the last seven or eight years my threshold for despondency is much lower. For me, adequate sleep is not a matter of staying healthy. It is a matter of staying in the ministry. It is irrational that my future should look bleaker when I get four or five hours sleep several nights in a row. But that is irrelevant. Those are the facts. And I must live within the limits of facts. I commend sufficient sleep to you, for the sake of your proper assessment of God and his promises.

Spurgeon was right when he said,

"The condition of your body must be attended to ... a little more ... common sense would be a great gain to some who are ultra spiritual, and attribute all their moods of feeling to some supernatural cause when the real reason lies far nearer to hand. Has it not often happened that dyspepsia has been mistaken for backsliding, and bad digestion has been set down as a hard heart?" (see note 61) 3. Spurgeon consistently nourished his soul by communion with Christ through prayer and meditation.

It was a great mercy to me as I entered this past year that I had just prepared the lecture on John Owen for this conference and had discovered his book Communion with God. Perhaps more than any other, that book nourished me again and again the soul asked, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?"

Spurgeon warned his students,

"Never neglect your spiritual meals, or you will lack stamina and your spirits will sink. Live on the substantial doctrines of grace, and you will outlive and out-work those who delight in the pastry and syllabubs of 'modern thought'." (see note 62)

I think one of the reasons Spurgeon was so rich in language and full in doctrinal substance and strong in the spirit, in spite of his despondency and his physical oppression and his

embattlements, is that he was always immersed in a great book—six a week. We cannot match that number. But we can always be walking with some great "see-er" of God. I walked with Owen most of the year on and off little by little and felt myself strengthened by a great grasp of God's reality. And Spurgeon came in along side this reading, saying and showing the same thing, namely, that the key in all good reading of theology is utterly real fellowship with Christ.

"Above all, feed the flame with intimate fellowship with Christ. No man was every cold in heart who lived with Jesus on such terms as John and Mary did of old ... I never met with a half-hearted preacher who was much in communion with the Lord Jesus" (see note 63). In many ways Spurgeon was a child in his communion with God. He did not speak in complex terms about anything too strange or mystical. In fact his prayer life seems more business-like than contemplative.

"When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a bank clerk when I have cheque to be cashed. I walk in, put the cheque down on the counter, and the clerk gives me my money, I take it up, and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks; when I have received my change I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray; but there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the mercy seat as though one had no particular reason for being found there" (see note 64). This may not be entirely exemplary. It may dishonor the Lord to treat him like a bank clerk rather than like a mountain spring. But we would make a mistake if we thought that Spurgeon's business-like praying was anything other than childlike communion with his Father. The most touching description I have read of his communion with God comes from 1871 when he was in terrible pain with gout.

"When I was racked some months ago with pain, to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this, 'Thou are my Father, and I am thy child; and thou, as a Father art tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as thou makest me suffer, and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt thou hide thy face from me, my Father? Wilt thou still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from thy countenance?' ... So I pleaded, and I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me: 'I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.' I bless God that ease came and the racking pain never returned" (see note 65).

If we are going to preach through adversity, we will have to live in communion with God on such intimate terms—speaking to him our needs and our pain, and feeding on the grace of his promises and the revelations of God's glory.

4. Spurgeon rekindled the zeal and passion to preach by fixing his eyes on eternity rather than the immediate price of faithfulness. The apostle Paul saw that the outer nature was wasting away. And what kept him going was the abiding assurance that this momentary affliction is working for him an eternal weight of glory. And so he looked to the things that are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). So did Spurgeon.

"O brethren, (he said to his pastors' conference) we shall soon have to die! We look each other in the face to-day in health, but there will come a day when others will look down upon our pallid

countenances as we lie in our coffins ... It will matter little to us who shall gaze upon us then, but it will matter eternally how we have discharged our work during our lifetime"(see note 66). When our hearts grow faint and our zeal wavers for the task of preaching he calls us to,

"Meditate with deep solemnity upon the fate of the lost sinner ... Shun all views of future punishment which would make it appear less terrible, and so take off the edge of your anxiety to save immortals from the quenchless flame ... Think much also of the bliss of the sinner saved, and like holy Baxter derive rich arguments from 'the saints' everlasting rest.' ... There will be no fear of your being lethargic if you are continually familiar with eternal realities" (see note 67).

Short of eternity he took the long view when it came to his own persecution. In the Downgrade controversy he said,

"Posterity must be considered. I do not look so much at what is to happen to-day, for these things relate to eternity. For my part, I am quite willing to be eaten of dogs for the next fifty years; but the more distant future shall vindicate me. I have dealt honestly before the living God. My brother, do the same" (see note 68). To keep on preaching in storm of adversity, you must look well beyond the crisis and feelings of the hour. You must look to what history will make of your faithfulness and most of all what God will make of it at the last day.

5. For Spurgeon a key to his perseverance in preaching through adversity was that he had settled who he was and would not be paralyzed with external criticism or internal second-guessing.

One of the great perils of living under continual criticism is that this is a constant call for you to be other than what you are. And, in fact, a humble saint always wants to be a better person than he is. But there is a great danger here of losing your bearings in sea of self-doubt. Not knowing who you are. Not being able to say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Spurgeon felt this danger keenly. In comparing one ministerial identity with another he reminded other pastors that at the last supper there was a chalice for drinking the wine and there was a basin for washing feet. Then he said,

"I protest that I have no choice whether to be the chalice or the basin. Fain would I be whichever the Lord wills so long as He will but use me ... So you, my brother, you may be the cup, and I will be the basin; but let the cup be a cup, and the basin a basin, and each one of us just what he is fitted to be. Be yourself, dear brother, for, if you are not yourself, you cannot be anybody else; and so, you see, you must be nobody ... Do not be a mere copyist, a borrower, a spoiler of other men's notes. Say what God has said to you, and say it in your own way; and when it is so said, plead personally for the Lord's blessing upon it" (see note 69). And I would add, plead personally the Lord's purifying blood upon it too, because none of our best labors is untainted. But the danger is to let the truth paralyze you with fear of man and doubt of self.

Eleven years later in 1886 he struck the same anvil again:

Friend, be true to your own destiny! One man would make a splendid preacher of downright hard-hitting Saxon; why must he ruin himself by cultivating an ornate style? ... Apollos has the gift of eloquence; why must he copy blunt Cephas? Every man in his own order" (see note 70).

Spurgeon illustrates with his own struggle to be responsive to criticism during the Downgrade controversy. For a season he tried to adapt his language to the critics. But there came a time when

he had to be what he was.

"I have found it utterly impossible to please, let me say or do what I will. One becomes somewhat indifferent when dealing with those whom every word offends. I notice that, when I have measured my words, and weight my sentences most carefully, I have then offended most; while some of my stronger utterances have passed unnoticed. Therefore, I am comparatively careless as to how my expressions may be received, and only anxious that they may be in themselves just and true" (see note 71).

If we are to survive and go on preaching in an atmosphere of controversy, there comes a point where you have done your best to weight the claims of your critics and take them to heart and must now say, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." And bring an end to the deranging second-guessing that threatens to destroy the very soul.

6. But in the end, the strength to go on preaching in the midst of adversity and setbacks came for Spurgeon from the assured sovereign triumph of Christ.

Near the end of his life (1890) in (I believe) his last address to his pastors' conference he compares adversity and the ebb of truth to the ebbing tide.

"You never met an old salt, down by the sea, who was in trouble because the tide had been ebbing out for hours. No! He waits confidently for the turn of the tide, and it comes in due time. Yonder rock has been uncovered during the last half-hour, and if the sea continues to ebb out for weeks, there will be no water in the English Channel, and the French will walk over from Cherbourg. Nobody talks in that childish way, for such an ebb will never come. Nor will we speak as though the gospel would be routed, and eternal truth driven out of the land. We serve an almighty Master ... If our Lord does but stamp His foot, He can win for Himself all the nations of the earth against heathenism, and Mohammedanism, and Agnosticism, and Modern-though, and every other foul error. Who is he that can harm us if we follow Jesus? How can His cause be defeated? At His will, converts will flock to His truth as numerous as the sands of the sea ... Wherefore be of good courage, and go on your way singing [and preaching!]: The winds of hell have blown The world its hate hath shown, Yet it is not o'erthrown.

Hallelujah for the Cross!

It shall never suffer loss! The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge (see note 72)."

Notes:

1. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 156.

2. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 161.

3. Eric W. Hayden, "Did You Know?" in Christian History, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, p. 2.

4. C. H. Spurgeon: Autobiography, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), p. 278.

5. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, An All Round Ministry, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), p. 8.

6. An All Round Ministry, p. 8.

7. Erroll Hulse and David Kingdon, eds., A Marvelous Ministry: How the All-round Ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon Speaks to us Today, (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), p. 128.

8. An All Round Ministry, p. 374.

9. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 47.

10. Arnold Dallimore, Spurgeon, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 198.

11. Autobiography, vol. 2, p. 76.

12. A Marvelous Ministry, pp. 49-50.

13. An All Round Ministry, p. 337.

14. An All Round Ministry, p. 160.

15. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 65.

16. Autobiography, vol. 2, p. 21.

17. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 43.

18. Bob L. Ross, A Pictorial Biography of C. H. Spurgeon, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1974), p. 66.

19. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 121.

20. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 38.

21. Autobiography, vol. 2, p. 192.

22. Dallimore, Spurgeon, p. 173.

23. "Did You Know?", p. 2.

24. Dallimore, Spurgeon, p. 195.

25. "Did You Know?", p. 3.

26. An All Round Ministry, pp. 126-127.

27. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 157.

28. An All Round Ministry, p. 177.

29. An All Round Ministry, p. 352.

30. An All Round Ministry, pp. 32-58.

31. An All Round Ministry, p. 55.

32. An All Round Ministry, p. 358.

33. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 310.

34. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 311.

35. Darrel W. Amundsen, "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," in: Christian History, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, p. 23.

36. A Marvelous Ministry, pp. 38-39.

37. Iain H. Murray, ed., Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 166, note 1.

38. Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, p. 165.

39. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 35.

40. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 35.

41. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 23.

42. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 69.

43. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 35.

44. A Marvelous Ministry, p. 126.

45. An All Round Ministry, p. 159.

46. An All Round Ministry, p. 288.

47. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 25.

48. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 24.

49. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 163.

50. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 24.

51. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 25.

52. An All Round Ministry, p. 384.

53. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 25.

54. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," pp. 163-164.

55. An All Round Ministry, pp. 221-222.

56. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 160.

57. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 160.

58. Eric W. Hayden, Highlights in the life of C. H. Spurgeon, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), p. 103.

59. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 161.

60. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 158.

61. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 312.

62. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 310.

63. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 315.

64. A Marvelous Ministry, pp. 46-47.

65. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 24.

66. An All Round Ministry, p. 76.

67. Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 315.

68. An All Round Ministry, pp. 360-361.

69. An All Round Ministry, pp. 73-74.

70. An All Round Ministry, pp. 232-233.

71. An All Round Ministry, pp. 282-283.

72. An All Round Ministry, pp. 395-396. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 63

05.07. The Chief Design of My Life: Mortification and Universal Holiness

The Chief Design of My Life: Mortification and Universal Holiness Reflections on the Life and Thought of John Owen

Introduction

There have been six keynote speakers at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors before this year. Half of them have said that John Owen is the most influential Christian writer in their lives. That is amazing for a man who has been dead for 311 years, and who wrote in a way so difficult to read that even he saw his work as immensely demanding in his own generation. For example, his book, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ, is probably his most famous and most influential book. It was published in 1647 when Owen was 31 years old. It is the fullest and probably the most persuasive book ever written on the "L" in TULIP: limited atonement. The point of the book is that when Paul says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," (Ephesians 5:25), he means that Christ really did something decisive and unique for the church when he died for her—something that is particular and sovereign, and different from what he does for people who experience his final judgment and wrath. The book argues that the particular love Christ has for his bride is something more wonderful than the general love he has for his enemies. It is a covenant love. It pursues and overtakes and subdues and forgives and transforms and overcomes every resistance in the beloved. The Death of Death is a great and powerful book—it kept me up for many evenings about twelve years ago as I was trying to decide what I really believed about the third point of Calvinism.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. The point I was making is that it is amazing that Owen can have such a remarkable impact today when he has been dead 311 years and his way of writing is extremely difficult. And even he knows his work is difficult. In the Preface ("To the Reader") of The Death of Death Owen does what no good marketing agent would allow today. He begins like this: "READER ... If thou art, as many in this pretending age, a sign or title gazer, and comest into books as Cato into the theatre, to go out again,—thou hast had thy entertainment; farewell!" (X, 149) (see note 1).

Owen's influence on prominent contemporary theologians

Nevertheless, J.I. Packer and Roger Nicole and Sinclair Ferguson did not bid Owen farewell. They lingered. And they learned. And today all three of them say that no Christian writer has had a greater impact on them than John Owen.

J.I. Packer

Packer says that Owen is the hero of his book, Quest for Godliness, a book about The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life. That is saying a lot, because for Packer the Puritans are the redwoods in the forest of theology (see note 2). And John Owen is "the greatest among the Puritan

theologians." In other words he is the tallest of the redwoods. "For solidity, profundity, massiveness and majesty in exhibiting from Scripture God's ways with sinful mankind there is no one to touch him" (see note 3). But Packer has a very personal reason for loving John Owen. I've heard him tell the story of the crisis he came into soon after his conversion. He was in danger in his student days of despairing under a perfectionistic teaching that did not take indwelling sin seriously. The discovery of John Owen brought him back to reality. "Suffice it so say," Packer recalls, "that without Owen I might well have gone off my head or got bogged down in mystical fanaticism" (see note 4). So Packer virtually says he owes his life, and not just his theology to John Owen. It's not surprising then that Packer would say with regard to Owen's style that, while laborious and difficult, "the reward to be reaped from studying Owen is worth all the labour involved" (see note 5).

Roger Nicole

Roger Nicole, who taught at Gordon-Conwell Seminary for over 40 years said when he was here in 1989 that John Owen is the greatest theologian who has ever written in the English language. He even paused and said, even greater than the great Jonathan Edwards. That really caught my attention, because I am sure Nicole has read more of those two greats than most theologians and pastors have.

Sinclair Ferguson

Sinclair Ferguson, who was here in 1990, wrote an entire book on Owen, John Owen on the Christian Life, and tells us about his debt that began, if you can believe it, when he was still a teenager: My personal interest in [Owen] as a teacher and theologian began in my late teenage years when I first read some of his writing. Like others, before and since, I found that they dealt with issues which contemporary evangelical literature rarely, if ever, touched. Owen's penetrating exposition opened up areas of need in my own heart, but also correspondingly profound assurances of grace in Jesus Christ ... Ever since those first encounters with his Works, I have remained in his debt ... To have known the pastoral ministry of John Owen during these years (albeit in written form) has been a rich privilege; to have known Owen's God an even greater one (see note 6).

Others Of course the magnitude of John Owen's influence goes well beyond these three. To Ambrose Barnes he was "the Calvin of England." To Anthony Wood, he was "the Atlas and Patriarch of Independency" (see note 7). Charles Bridges, in The Christian Ministry (1830) said,

Indeed upon the whole—for luminous exposition, and powerful defence of Scriptural doctrine—for determined enforcement of practical obligation —for skillful anatomy of the self-deceitfulness of the heart—and for a detailed and wise treatment of the diversified exercises of the Christian's heart, he stands probably unrivaled" (see note 8).

If Nicole and Bridges are right—that John Owen is unrivaled in the English speaking world—then Jonathan Edwards was not too far behind, and Edwards pays his respect to Owen not only by quoting him substantially in the Religious Affections, but also by recording in his "Catalogue" of readings the recommendation of Hallyburton to his students at St. Andrews University that the writings of John Owen are to be valued above all human writings for a true view of the mystery of the gospel (see note 9).

One of the reasons I linger over these tributes so long is that I want you to feel drawn not just to Owen, but to the value of having some great heroes in the ministry. There are not many around today. And God wills that we have heroes. Hebrews 13:7—"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." It seems to me that the Christian leaders today that come closest to being heroes are the ones who had great heroes. I hope you have one or two, living or dead. Maybe Owen will become one. An Overview of Owen's Life

Most people—even pastors and theologians—don't know much about John Owen. One of the reasons is that his writings are not popular today (see note 10). But another reason is that not much is known about him —at least not much about his personal life. Peter Toon, in his 1971 biography says, "Not one of Owen's diaries has been preserved; and ... the extant letters in which he lays bare his soul are very few, and recorded, personal reactions of others to him are brief and scarce (see note 11) ... We have to rely on a few letters and a few remarks of others to seek to understand him as a man. And these are insufficient to probe the depths of his character. So Owen must remain hidden as it were behind a veil ... his secret thoughts remain his own" (see note 12).

I think this may be a little misleading because when you read the more practical works of Owen the man shines through in a way that I think reveals the deep places of his heart. But still the details of his personal life are frustratingly few. You will see this—and share my frustration— in what follows.

Owen was born in England in 1616, the same year that William Shakespeare died and four years before the Pilgrims set sail for New England. This is virtually in the middle of the great Puritan century (roughly 1560 to 1660).

Puritanism was at heart a spiritual movement, passionately concerned with God and godliness. It began in England with William Tyndale the Bible translator, Luther's contemporary, a generation before the word "Puritan" was coined, and it continued till the latter years of the seventeenth century, some decades after "Puritan" had fallen out of use ... Puritanism was essentially a movement for church reform, pastoral renewal and evangelism, and spiritual revival ... The Puritan goal was to complete what England's Reformation began: to finish reshaping Anglican worship, to introduce effective church discipline into Anglican parishes, to establish righteousness in the political, domestic, and socioeconomic fields, and to convert all Englishmen to a vigorous evangelical faith (see note 13).

Owen was born in the middle of this movement and became its greatest pastor-theologian as the movement ended almost simultaneously with his death in 1683 (see note 14). His father was a pastor in Stadham, five miles north of Oxford. He had three brothers and a sister. In all his writings he does not mention his mother or his siblings. There is one brief reference to this father which says, "I was bred up from my infancy under the care of my father, who was a Nonconformist all his days, and a painful laborer in the vineyard of the Lord" (see note 15). At the age of 10 he was sent to the grammar school run by Edward Sylvester in Oxford where he prepared for the university. He entered Queens College, Oxford at 12, took his Bachelor of Arts at 16 and his M.A. three years later at 19. We can get a flavor of what the boy was like from the observation by Peter Toon that Owen's zeal for knowledge was so great at this time that "he often allowed himself only four hours

of sleep each night. His health was affected, and in later life, when he was often on a sick-bed, he regretted these hours of rest that he had missed as a youth" (see note 16).

Owen began his work for the B.D. but could not stand the high church Arminianism and formalism of Oxford any longer and dropped out to become a personal tutor and chaplain to some wealthy families near London. In 1642 the Civil war began between Parliament and King Charles (between the high-church religion of William Laud and the Puritan religion of the Presbyterians and Independents in the House of Commons). Owen was sympathetic with Parliament against the king and Laud, and so he was pushed out of his chaplaincy and moved to London where five major events of his life happened in the next four years that stamped the rest of his life.

Five Events that Stamped the Rest of his Life

A. Conversion The first is his conversion—or his assurance of salvation and deepening of his personal communion with God. It is remarkable that it happened in a way almost identical to Charles Spurgeon's conversion two centuries later. On January 6, 1850 Spurgeon was driven by a snow storm into a Primitive Methodist Chapel where a layman stood in for the pastor and took the text from Isaiah 45:22, "Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth." Spurgeon looked and was saved (see note 17).

Owen was a convinced Calvinist with large doctrinal knowledge, but he lacked the sense of the reality of his own salvation. That sense of personal reality in all that he wrote was going to make all the difference in the world for Owen in the years to come. So what happened one Sunday in 1642 is very important. When Owen was 26 years old he went with his cousin to hear the famous Presbyterian, Edmund Calamy at St. Mary's Church Aldermanbury. But it turned out Calamy could not preach and a country preacher took his place. Owen's cousin wanted to leave. But something held Owen to his seat. The simple preacher took as his text Matthew 8:26, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" It was God's appointed word and appointed time for Owen's awakening. His doubts and fears and worries as to whether he was truly born anew by the Holy Spirit were gone. He felt himself liberated and adopted as a Son of God. When you read the penetrating practical works of Owen on the work of the Spirit and the nature of true communion with God it is hard to doubt the reality of what God did on this Sunday in 1642 (see note 18).

B. Marriage The second crucial event in those early years in London was Owen's marriage to a young woman named Mary Rooke. He was married to her for 31 years, from 1644 to 1675. We know virtually nothing about her. But we do know one absolutely stunning fact that must have colored all of Owen's ministry for the rest of his life (He died eight years after she did.). We know that she bore him 11 children, and all but one died as a child, and that one daughter died as a young adult. In other words Owen experienced the death of eleven children and his wife! That's one child born and lost on the average every three years of Owen's adult life (see note 19).

We don't have one reference to Mary or to the children or to his pain in all his books. But just knowing that the man walked in the valley of the shadow of death most of his life gives me a clue to the depth of dealing with God that we find in his works. God has his strange and painful ways of making us the kind of pastors and theologians he wants us to be.

C. First book The third event in these early London years is the publishing of his first book. He had read thoroughly about the recent controversy in Holland between the Remonstrants (whom he

called Arminians) and the Calvinists. The Remonstrance was written in 1610 and the Calvinistic response was the Synod of Dordt in 1618. In spite of all its differences Owen say the English High Church of William Laud and the Dutch Remonstrants as essentially one in their rejection of predestination which for Owen had become utterly crucial, especially since in conversion which he so thoroughly attributed to God. So he published his first book in April 1643 with the polemical, preface-like title, A Display of Arminianism: being a discovery of the old Pelagian idol, free-will, with the new goddess, contingency, advancing themselves into the throne of God in heaven to the prejudice of His grace, providence and supreme dominion over the children of men. This is important not only because it set his direction as a Calvinist, but as a public, controversial writer whose whole life would be swallowed up by writing ot the final month of his life in 1683.

D. Becoming a pastor The fourth crucial event in these years was Owen's becoming a pastor of a small parish in Fordham, Essex, on July 16, 1643. He didn't stay long in this church. But I mention it because it set the course of his life as a pastor. He was always essentially a pastor, even when involved with administration at the University of Oxford and even when involved with the political events of his day. He was anything but a cloistered academic. All of his writing was done in the press of pastoral duties. There are points in his life where this seems utterly amazing—that he could keep on studying and writing with the kind of involvements that he had.

E. Addressing Parliament The fifth event of these early years in London was the invitation in 1646 to speak to the Parliament. In those days there were fast days during the year when the government asked certain pastors to preach to the House of Commons. It was a great honor. This message catapulted Owen into political affairs for the next 14 years.

Owen came to the attention of Oliver Cromwell, the governmental leader ("Protector") in the absence of a king, and Cromwell is reputed to have said to Owen, "Sir, you are a person I must be acquainted with;" to which Owen replied, "that will be much more to my advantage than yours" (see note 20).

Well, maybe and maybe not. With that acquaintance Owen was thrown into the turmoil of civil war. Cromwell made him his chaplain and carried him off to Ireland and Scotland to preach to his troops and to assess the religious situation in these countries and to give the theological justification for Cromwell's politics. Not only that Cromwell in 1651 appointed Owen to the Deanship at Christ Church College in Oxford and then the next year made him also the Vice-Chancellor. He is involved with Oxford for nine years until 1660 when Charles II returns and things begin to go very bad for the Puritans.

Fruitfulness Amid Pressure

What began to amaze me as I learned how public and how administratively laden Owen's life was, was how he was able to keep on studying and writing in spite of it all, and in part because of it all. At Oxford Owen was responsible for the services of worship because Christ Church was a cathedral as well as a college and he was the preacher. He was responsible for the choice of students, the appointment of chaplains, the provision of tutorial facilities, the administration of discipline, the oversight of property, the collection of rents and tithes, the gift of livings and the care of almsmen the church hospital. but his whole aim in all his duties Peter Toon says was "to establish the whole life of the College on the Word of God (see note 21). His life was simply

overwhelmed with pressure. I can’t imagine what kind of family life he had, and during his time his children were dying (We know that at least two sons died in the plague of 1655.). When he finished his duties as Vice chancellor he said in his closing address,

Labours have been numberless; besides submitting to enormous expense, often when brought to the brink of death on your account, I have hated these limbs and this feeble body which was ready to desert my mind; the reproaches of the vulgar have been disregarded; the envy of others has been overcome: in these circumstances I wish you all prosperity and bid you farewell (see note 22). In spite of all that administrative pressure and even hostility because of his commitment to godliness and to the Puritan cause, he was constantly studying and writing, probably late at night instead of sleeping. That’s how concerned he was with doctrinal faithfulness to Scripture. Peter Toon lists 22 published works during those years. For example, he published his defense of the Saints’ Perseverance in 1654. He saw a man named John Goodwin spreading error on this doctrine and he felt constrained, in all his other duties, to answer him—with 666 pages! It fills all of volume 11 in his Works. And he wasn’t writing fluff that would vanish overnight. One biographer said that this book is "the most masterly vindication of the perseverance of the saints in the English tongue" (see note 23).

During these administrative years he also wrote Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers (1656), Of Communion with God (1657), Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It (1658). What is so remarkable about these books is that they are what I would call intensely personal and in many places very sweet. So he wasn’t just fighting doctrinal battles he was fighting sin and temptation. And he wasn’t just fighting, he was trying to foster heartfelt communion with God in the students.

He was relieved of his duties of the Deanship in 1660 (having laid down the Vice-Chancelorship in 1657). Cromwell had died in 1658. The monarchy with Charles II was back. The Act of Uniformity that put 2000 Puritans out of their pulpits was just around the corner (1662). The days ahead for Owen now were not the great political, academic days of the last 14 years. He was now from 1660 until his death in 1693 a kind of fugitive pastor in London.

During these years he became what some have called the "Atlas and Patriarch of Independency." He had begun his ministry as a Puritan of Presbyterian persuasion. But he became persuaded that the Congregational form of government is more Biblical. He was the main spokesman for this wing of Non-conformity, and wrote extensively to defend the view (see note 24). But even more significant he was the main spokesman for tolerance of both Presbyterian and Episcopal forms. Even while at Oxford he had the authority to squash Anglican worship, but he allowed a group of Episcopalians to worship in rooms across from his own quarters (see note 25). He wrote numerous tracts and books to call for tolerance within Orthodoxy. For example in 1667 he wrote (in Indulgence and Toleration Considered):

It seems that we are some of the first who ever anywhere in the world, from the foundation of it, thought of ruining and destroying persons of the same religion with ourselves, merely upon the choice of some peculiar ways of worship in that religion (see note 26). His ideas of tolerance were so significant that they had a large influence on William Penn, the Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania, who was a student of Owen. And it is significant to me as a Baptist that in 1669 he wrote, with several other pastors, a letter of concern to the governor and congregationalists of Massachusetts pleading with them not to persecute the Baptists (see note 27).

Pastoral Ministry

During these 23 years after 1660 Owen was a pastor. Because of the political situation he was not always able to stay in one place and be with his people but he seemed to carry them on his heart even when he was moving around. Near the end of his life he wrote to his flock, "Although I am absent from you in body, I am in mind and affection and spirit present with you, and in your assemblies; for I hope you will be found my crown and rejoicing in the day of the Lord" (see note 28). Not only that, he actively counseled and made plans for their care in his absence. He counseled them in one letter with words that are amazingly relevant to pastoral care struggles in our churches today:

I beseech you to hear a word of advice in case the persecution increases, which it is like to do for a season. I could wish that because you have no ruling elders, and your teachers cannot walk about publicly with safety, that you would appoint some among yourselves, who may continually as their occasions will admit, go up and down from house to house and apply themselves peculiarly to the weak, the tempted, the fearful, those who are ready to despond, or to halt, and to encourage them in the Lord. Choose out those unto this end who are endued with a spirit of courage and fortitude; and let them know that they are happy whom Christ will honor with His blessed work. And I desire the persons may be of this number who are faithful men, and know the state of the church; by this means you will know what is the frame of the members of the church, which will be a great direction to you, even in your prayers (see note 29).

Under normal circumstances Owen believed and taught that, "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word" (see note 30). He pointed to Jeremiah 3:15 and the purpose of God to "give to his church pastors according to his own heart, who should feed them with knowledge and understanding." He showed that the care of preaching the gospel was committed to Peter, and through him to all true pastors of the church under the name of "feeding" (John 21:15-16). He cited Acts 6:1-15 and the apostles decision to free themselves from all encumbrances that they may give themselves wholly to the word and prayer. He referred to 1 Timothy 5:17 that it is the pastor’s duty to "labor in the word and doctrine," and to Acts 20:28 where the overseers of the flock are to feed them with the word.

Then he says, "Nor is it required only that he preach now and then at his leisure; but that he lay aside all other employments, though lawful, all other duties in the church, as unto such a constant attendance on them as would divert him from this work, that he give himself unto it ... Without this, no man will be able to give a comfortable account of his pastoral office at the last day" (see note 31). I think it would be fair to say that this is the way Owen fulfilled his charge during these years whenever the political situation allowed him.

Owen and Bunyan

It’s not clear to me why some Puritans at this time were in prison and others, like Owen were not. Part of the explanation was how openly they preached. Part of it was that Owen was a national figure with connections in high places. Part of it was that the persecution was not nationally uniform, but some local officials were more rigorous than others. But whatever the explanation it is remarkable the relationship that John Owen had in these years with John Bunyan who spent too many of them in prison. One story says that King Charles II asked Owen one time why he

bothered going to hear an uneducated Tinker like Bunyan preach. Owen replied, "Could I posses the tinker's abilities for preaching, please your majesty, I would gladly relinquish all my learning" (see note 32).

One of the best illustrations of God's hiding a smiling face behind a frowning providence is the story of how Owen failed to help Bunyan get out of prison. Repeatedly when Bunyan was in prison Owen worked for his release with all the strings he could pull. But to no avail. But when John Bunyan came out in 1676 he brought with him a manuscript "the worth and importance of which can scarcely be comprehended" (see note 33). In fact Owen met with Bunyan and recommended his own publisher, Nathaniel Ponder. The partnership succeeded, and the book that has probably done more good, after the Bible, was released to the world—all because Owen failed in his good attempts to get Bunyan released, and because he succeeded in finding him a publisher. The lesson: "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,/but trust him for his grace;/behind a frowning providence/he hides a smiling face."

Death

Owen died August 24, 1683. He was buried on September 4, in Bunhill Fields, London, where five years later the Tinker and "Immortal Dreamer of Bedford Jail" would be buried with him. It was fitting for the two to lie down together, after the Congregational Giant had labored so long in the cause of toleration for lowly Baptists in England and New England. His All-encompassing Aim in Life—Holiness

What I would like to try to do now is get close to the heart of what made this man tick and what made him great. I think the Lord wants us to be inspired by this man in some deep personal and spiritual ways. That seems to be the way he has touched people most—like J. I. Packer and Sinclair Ferguson.

I think the words of his which come closest to giving us the heart and aim of his life are found in the preface to the little book: Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers which was based on sermons that he preached to the students and academic community at Oxford:

I hope I may own in sincerity that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life ... are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God, that so the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things (see note 34). That was 1656. Owen was 40 years old. Twenty-five years later he was still sounding the same note in his preaching and writing. In 1681 he published The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded. Sinclair Ferguson is probably right when he says, "Everything he wrote for his contemporaries had a practical and pastoral aim in view—the promotion of true Christian living" (see note 35)—in other words the mortification of sin and the advancement of holiness. This was his burden not only for the churches but also for the University when he was there. Peter Toon says, "Owen's special emphasis was to insist that the whole academic curriculum be submerged in preaching and catechizing and prayer. He wanted the graduates of Oxford not only to be proficient in the Arts and Sciences but also to aspire after godliness" (see note 36).

Even in his political messages—the sermons to Parliament—the theme was repeatedly holiness. He based this on the Old Testament patter— that "the people of Israel were at the height of their

fortunes when their leaders were godly" (see note 37). So the key issue for him was that the legislature be made up of holy people. His concern that the gospel spread and be adorned with holiness was not just a burden for his English homeland. When he came back from Ireland in 1650 where he had seen the English forces, under Cromwell, decimate the Irish, he preached to Parliament and pleaded for another kind of warfare:

"How is it that Jesus Christ is in Ireland only as a lion staining all his garments with the blood of his enemies; and none to hold him out as a Lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends? ... Is this to deal fairly with the Lord Jesus?—call him out to do battle and then keep away his crown? God hath been faithful in doing great things for you; be faithful in this one—do your utmost for the preaching of the Gospel in Ireland" (see note 38). From his writings and from the testimony of others it seems fair to say that the aim of personal holiness in all of life, and the mortifying of all known sin really was the labor not only of his teaching but of his own personal life.

David Clarkson, his pastoral associate in the later years of Owen's ministry, gave his funeral address. In it he said, A great light is fallen; one of eminency for holiness, learning, parts and abilities; a pastor, a scholar, a divine of the first magnitude; holiness gave a divine lustre to his other accomplishments, it shined in his whole course, and was diffused through his whole conversation (see note 39).

John Stoughton said, "His piety equaled his erudition" (see note 40). Thomas Chalmers of Scotland commented on On the Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalence of Indwelling Sin in Believers, "It is most important to be instructed on this subject by one who had reached such lofty attainments in holiness, and whose profound and experimental acquaintance with the spiritual life so well fitted him for expounding its nature and operations" (see note 41).

Why We Should Listen to John Owen The reason this question is so urgent for us today is not only that there is a holiness without which we will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14), but that there seems to be a shortage of political and ecclesiastical leaders today who make the quest for holiness as central as the quest for church growth or political success. The President of the United States communicated very clearly that he did not think his personal holiness was a significant factor in his leadership of this nation. The cavalier way many church leaders treat sexual propriety is an echo of the same disease. John Owen would have been appalled at both the national and the ecclesiastical scene.

John Owen is a good counselor and model for us on this matter of holiness because he was not a hermit. We often think some people have the monkish luxury of just staying out of the mess of public life and becoming holy people. Not so the Puritans of Owen's day. J. I. Packer said that Puritanism was "a reformed monasticism outside the cloister and away from monkish vows" (see note 42). This is especially true of Owen. His contemporary, Richard Baxter, called Owen "the great doer" (see note 43). He lived in the public eye. He was involved in academic administration; he was in politics up to his ears; he was entangled with the leading military officers of the country; he was embroiled in controversies over all kinds of matters from the authenticity of the Hebrew vowel points and the Epistle of Ignatius to the national laws of toleration and the nature of justification; he was looked to by thousands of congregational independent ministers as their spokesman at the national level; he was all the while pastoring people—and don't forget, losing a child in death every three years. And we all know that a life like that is shot through with criticism

that can break the spirit and make the quest for personal holiness doubly difficult. When his adversaries could not better him in argument they resorted to character assassination. He was called, "the great bell-weather of disturbance and sedition ... a person who would have vied with Mahomet himself both for boldness and imposture ... a viper, so swollen with venom that it must either burst or spit its poison" (see note 44). And even more painful and disheartening is the criticism of friends. He once got a letter from John Eliot, the missionary to the Indians in America, that wounded him more deeply, he said, than any of his adversaries.

What I have received from you ... hath printed deeper, and left a greater impression upon my mind, than all the virulent revilings and false accusations I have met withal from my professed adversaries ... That I should now be apprehended to have given a wound unto holiness in the churches, it is one of the saddest frowns in the cloudy brows of Divine Providence (see note 45).

Add to this the daily burdens of living in a pre-technological world with no modern conveniences, and passing through two major plagues one of which in 1665 killed 70,000 of the half-million people in London (see note 46), plus the 20 years of living outside the protection of the law—then we know that John Owen's holiness was not worked out in the comforts of peace and leisure and safety. When a man like this, under these circumstances, is remembered and extolled for centuries for his personal holiness we should listen.

How Did He Pursue Holiness?

Owen humbled himself under the mighty hand of God.

Though he was one of the most influential and well-known men of his day his view of his own place in God's economy was sober and humble. Two days before he died he wrote in a letter to Charles Fleetwood, "I am leaving the ship of the Church in a storm, but while the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable" (see note 47).

Packer says that "Owen, [though] a proud man by nature, had been brought low in and by his conversion, and thereafter he kept himself low by recurring contemplation of his inbred sinfulness" (see note 48). What Owen wrote illustrates this: To keep our souls in a constant state of mourning and self-abasement is the most necessary part of our wisdom ... and it is so far from having any inconsistency with those consolations and joys, which the gospel tenders unto us in believer, as that it is the only way to let them into the soul in a due manner (see note 49). With regard to his immense learning and the tremendous insight he had into the things of God he seems to have a humbler attitude toward his achievements because he had climbed high enough to see over the first ridge of revelation into the endless mysteries of God.

I make no pretence of searching into the bottom or depths of any part of this "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." They are altogether unsearchable, unto the [limit] of the most enlightened minds, in this life. What we shall farther comprehend of them in the other world, God only knows (see note 50). This humility opened Owen's soul to the greatest visions of Christ in the Scriptures. And he believed with all his heart the truth of 2 Corinthians 3:18 that by contemplating the glory of Christ "we may be gradually transformed into the same glory" (see note 51). And that is nothing other than holiness.

Owen grew in knowledge of God by obeying what he knew already. In other words Owen recognized that holiness was not merely the goal of all true learning; it is also the means of more true learning. This elevated holiness even higher in his life: it was the aim of his life and, in large measure, the means of getting there. The true notion of holy evangelical truths will not live, at least not flourish, where they are divided from a holy conversation (=life). As we learn all to practice [!!!], so we learn much by practice ... and herein alone can we come unto the assurance, that what we know and learn is indeed the truth [cf. John 7:17] ... And hereby will they be led continually into farther degrees of knowledge. For the mind of man is capable of receiving continual supplies in the increase of light and knowledge ... if ... they are improved unto their proper end in obedience unto God. but without this the mind will be quickly stuffed with notions so that no streams can descend into it from the fountain of truth (see note 52).

Thus Owen kept the streams of the fountain of truth open by making personal obedience the effect of all that he learned, and the means of more.

Owen passionately pursued a personal communion with God.

It is incredible that Owen was able to keep writing edifying and weighty books and pamphlets under the pressures of his life. The key was his personal communion with God. Andrew Thomson, one of his biographers wrote,

It is interesting to find the ample evidence which [his work on Mortification] affords, that amid the din of theological controversy, the engrossing and perplexing activities of a high public station, and the chilling damps of a university, he was yet living near God, and like Jacob amid the stones of the wilderness, maintaining secret intercourse with the eternal and invisible (see note 53).

Packer says that the Puritans differ from evangelicals today because with them,

" ... communion with God was a great thing, to evangelicals today it is a comparatively small thing. The Puritans were concerned about communion with God in a way that we are not. The measure of our unconcern is the little that we say about it. When Christians meet, they talk to each other about their Christian work and Christian interests, their Christian acquaintances, the state of the churches, and the problems of theology—but rarely of their daily experience of God" (see note 54). But God was seeing to it that Owen and the suffering Puritans of his day lived closer to God and sought after communion with God more earnestly than we. Writing a letter during an illness in 1674 he said to a friend, "Christ is our best friend, and ere long will be our only friend. I pray God will all my heart that I may be weary of everything else but converse and communion with Him" (see note 55). God was using illness and all the other pressures of Owen’s life to drive him into communion with God and not away form it. But Owen was also very intentional about his communion with God. He said, "Friendship is most maintained and kept up by visits; and these, the more free and less occasioned by urgent business (see note 56) ..." In other words, in the midst of all his academic and political and ecclesiastical labors he made many visits to his Friend, Jesus Christ. And when he went he did not just go with petitions for things or even for deliverance in his many hardships. He went to see his glorious friend and to contemplate his greatness. The last book he wrote—he was finishing it as he died—is called Meditations on the Glory of Christ. That says a great deal about the focus and outcome of Owen’s life. In it he said, The revelation ... of Christ ... deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations and our utmost

diligence in them ... What better preparation can there be for [our future enjoyment of the glory of Christ] than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory in the revelation that is made in the Gospel (see note 57). The contemplation Owen has in mind is made up of at least two things: on the one hand there is what he called his "severest thoughts" and "best meditations" or in another place "assiduous meditations," and on the other had relentless prayer. The two are illustrated in his work on Hebrews.

One of his greatest achievements was his seven volume commentary on Hebrews. When he finished it near the end of his life he said, "Now my work is done: it is time for me to die" (see note 58). How did he doe it? We get a glimpse from the preface:

I must now say, that, after all my searching and reading, prayer and assiduous meditation have been my only resort, and by far the most useful means of light and assistance. By these have my thoughts been freed from many an entanglement (see note 59). His aim in all he did was to grasp the mind of Christ and reflect it in his behavior. This means that the quest for holiness was always bound up with a quest for true knowledge of God. That’s why prayer and study and meditation always went together.

I suppose ... this may be fixed on as a common principle of Christianity; namely, that constant and fervent prayer for the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit, is such an indispensable means for ... attaining the knowledge of the mind of God in the Scripture, as that without it all others will not [avail] (see note 60).

Owen gives us a glimpse into the struggle that we all have in this regard lest anyone think he was above the battle. He wrote to John Eliot in New England,

I do acknowledge unto you that I have a dry and barren spirit, and I do heartily beg your prayers that the Holy One would, notwithstanding all my sinful provocations, water me from above. (see note 61). In other words the prayers of others were essential not just his own. The chief source of all that Owen preached and wrote was this "assiduous meditation" on Scripture and prayer. Which leads us to the fourth way that Owen achieved such holiness in his immensely busy and productive life. Which leads us to the fourth way that Owen achieved such holiness in his immensely busy and productive life.

Owen was authentic in commending in public only what he had experienced in private.

One great hindrance to holiness in the ministry of the word is that we are prone to preach and write without pressing into the things we say and making them real to our own souls. Over the years words begin to come easy, and we find we can speak of mysteries without standing in awe; we can speak of purity without feeling pure; we can speak of zeal without spiritual passion; we can speak of God’s holiness without trembling; we can speak of sin without sorrow; we can speak of heaven without eagerness. And the result is a terrible hardening of the spiritual life.

Words came easy for Owen, but he set himself against this terrible disease of unauthenticity and secured his growth in holiness. He began with the premise: "Our happiness consisteth not in the knowing the things of the gospel, but in the doing of them" (see note 61). Doing, not just knowing, was the goal of all his studies. As a means to this authentic doing he labored to experience every truth he preached. He said,

I hold myself bound in conscience and in honor, not even to imagine that I have attained a proper knowledge of any one article of truth, much less to publish it, unless through the Holy Spirit I have had such a taste of it, in its spiritual sense, that I may be able, from the heart, to say with the psalmist, 'I have believed, and therefore I have spoken' (see note 62). So for example his Exposition of Psalms 130:1-8 (320 pages on eight verses) is the laying open not only of the Psalm but of his own heart. Andrew Thomson says, When Owen ... laid open the book of God, he laid open at the same time the book of his own heart and of his own history, and produced a book which ... is rich in golden thoughts, and instinct with the living experience of 'one who spake what he knew, and testified what he had seen' (see note 63). The same biographer said of Owen's On The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded (1681) that he "first preached [it] to his own heart, and then to a private congregation; and which reveals to us the almost untouched and untrodden eminences on which Owen walked in the last years of his pilgrimage" (see note 64). This was the conviction that controlled Owen: A man preacheth that sermon only well unto others which preacheth itself in his own soul. And he that doth not feed on and thrive in the digestion of the food which he provides for others will scarce make it savoury unto them; yea, he knows not but the food he hath provided may bd poison, unless he have really tasted of it himself. If the word do not dwell with power in us, it will not pass with power from us (see note 65).

It was this conviction that sustained Owen in his immensely busy public life of controversy and conflict. Whenever he undertook to defend a truth, he sought first of all to take that truth deeply into his heart and gain a real spiritual experience of it so that there would be no artificiality in the debate and no mere posturing or gamesmanship. He was made steady in the battle because he had come to experience the truth at the personal level of the fruits of holiness and knew that God was in it. Here is the way he put it in the Preface to The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated (1655): When the heart is cast indeed into the mould of the doctrine that the mind embraceth,—when the evidence and necessity of the truth abides in us,—when not the sense of the words only is in our heads, but the sense of the thing abides in our hearts—when we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for—then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men (see note 66).

That, I think, was the key to Owen's life and ministry, so renown for holiness —"when we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for—then shall we be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men." The last thing Owen was doing at the end of his life came was communing with Christ in a work that was later published as Meditations on the Glory of Christ. His friend William Payne was helping him edit the work. Near the end Owen said, "O, brother Payne, the long-wished for day is come at last, in which I shall see the glory in another manner than I have ever done or was capable of doing in this world" (see note 67). But Owen saw more glory than most of us see, and that is why he was known for his holiness, because Paul taught us plainly and Owen believed, "We all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next."

Lesson from Owen's life The primary lesson I take away from this study of Owen's life and thought is that in all our enterprises and projects the primary goal for his glory should be holiness to the Lord. The indispensable means of that holiness is the cultivation of personal, deep, authentic communion with God— the full meaning of which I leave for him to teach you as you read his works (see note 68).

Notes:

1. In this paper all references to the works of John Owen will be taken from The Works of John Owen, ed. William Goold, 23 volumes (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965, this edition originally published 1850-53). The last 7 volumes are the Exposition to the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Roman numeral will refer to the volume in this set, and the Arabic numeral to the page.

2. J. I. Packer, A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 11.

3. A Quest for Godliness, p. 81.

4. A Quest for Godliness, p. 12. The story is told more fully in John Owen, Sin and Temptation, abridged and edited by James M. Houston (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1983), introduction, pp. xxv-xxix.

5. A Quest for Godliness, p. 147.

6. Sinclair B. Ferguson, John Owen on the Christian Life, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), pp. x-xi.

7. Peter Toon, God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen, (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster Press, 1971), p. 173.

8. Charles Bridge, The Christian Ministry, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1967, originally published, 1830), p. 41.

9. Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, ed. by John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 69. The quotes of Owen in Edwards are on pp. 250f, 372f.

10. The Banner of Truth has caused a little renaissance of interest by publishing his collected works in 23 volumes (7 of them the massive Hebrews Commentary) plus one or two paper backs.

11. God's Statesman, p. vii.

12. God's Statesman, p. 177.

13. A Quest for Godliness, p. 28.

14. J. I. Packer says that Puritanism developed under Elizabeth, James and Charles, and blossomed in the Interregnum [1640's and 1650's], before it withered in the dark tunnel of persecution between 1660 (Restoration) and 1689 (Toleration). A Quest For Godliness, pp. 28f.

15. Works, XII, p. 224.

16. God's Statesman, p. 6.

17. Charles Spurgeon, C. H. Spurgeon: Autobiography, Vol. I, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust: 1962), p. 87.

18. God's Statesman, p. 12f.

19. Andrew Thomson wrote, "Nearly all the information that has descended to us regarding this union [with Mary], from the earlier biographies amounts to this,—that the lady bore to him eleven children, all of whom, except one daughter, died in early youth. This only daughter became the wife of a Welsh gentleman; but the union proving unhappy, she 'returned to her kindred and to her father's house,' and soon after died of consumption." Works I, xxxiii. "When she died in 1676 [Owen] remained a widower for about 18 months and married Dorothy D'Oyley. His exercises by affliction were very great in respect of his children, none of whom he much enjoyed while living, and saw them all go off the stage before him." Works I, p. xcv.

20. A Religious Encyclopedia, ed. by Philip Schaff, (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888) 3 vols. vol. 3, p. 1711.

21. God's Statesman, p. 54.

22. God's Statesman, p. 77f.

23. Works, I, p. lvii.

24. A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace and Unity (1672); An Inquiry into the Original Nature .. and Communion of Evangelical Churches (1681); and the classic text, True Nature of a Gospel Church (1689 posthumously).

25. Works, I, p. li.

26. God's Statesman, p. 132.

27. God's Statesman, p. 162. See the letter in Peter Toon, ed. The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683), (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1970), pp. 145-146.

28. God's Statesman, p. 157.

29. The Correspondence of John Owen, p. 171.

30. Works, XVI, 74.

31. Works, XVI, 74-75.

32. God's Statesman, p. 162.

33. God's Statesman, p. 161.

34. God's Statesman, p. 55.

35. John Owen on the Christian Life, p. xi. Italics added. See below, note 52.

36. God's Statesman, p. 78.

37. God's Statesman, p. 120.

38. God's Statesman, p. 41.

39. God's Statesman, p. 173.

40. A Religious Encyclopedia, vol. 2, p. 1712.

41. Works, I, p. lxxxiv.

42. A Quest for Godliness, p. 28.

43. God’s Statesman, p. 95.

44. Works, I, p. lxxxix.

45. The Correspondence of John Owen, p. 154.

46. God’s Statesman, p. 131.

47. The Correspondence of John Owen, p. 174.

48. A Quest for Godliness, p. 193.

49. Works, VII, p. 532.

50. Works, I, p. 44; cf. VI, pp. 64, 68.

51. God’s Statesman, p. 175; Works, I, p. 275.

52. Works, I, p. lxiv-lxv.

53. Works, I, p. lxiv-lxv.

54. A Quest for Godliness, p. 215.

55. God’s Statesman, p. 153.

56. Works, VII, 197f.

57.

Works, I, p. 275.

58. God’s Statesman, p. 168.

59. Works, I, p. lxxxv. Italics added.

60. Works, IV, p. 203.

61. Works, XIV, p. 311.

62. Works, X, p. 488.

63. Works, I, p. lxxxiv.

64. Works, I, p. xcix-c.

65. Works, XVI, p. 76. See also on justification p. 76.

66. Works, I, p. lxiii-lxiv.

67. God’s Statesman, p. 171.

68. By way of recommendation for one beginning to read Owen I would suggest the following list on the basis of their being especially influential doctrinally or especially inspiring practically.

Doctrinally I would suggest: The Death of Death in the Death of Christ (1647) The Doctrine of the Saint's Perseverance (1654) A Discourse on the Holy Spirit (1674) True Nature of the Gospel Church (1689) Practically I would suggest: Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers (1656) Of Temptation: the Nature and Power of It (1658) The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin (1667) The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually-minded (1681) Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ (1684) By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 64

05.08. Contending for Our All

Contending for Our All The Life and Ministry of Athanasius

Athanasius was born in AD 298 in Egypt and became the bishop of Alexandria on June 8, 328 at the age of 30. The people of Egypt viewed him as their bishop until he died on May 2, 373 at the age of 75.1 I say he was “viewed” by the people as their bishop during these years because Athanasius was driven out of his church and office five times by the powers of the Roman empire. Seventeen of his 45 years as bishop were spent in exile. But the people never acknowledged the validity of the other bishops sent to take his place. He was always bishop in exile as far as his flock was concerned.

Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389) gave a memorial sermon in Constantinople seven years after the death of Athanasius and described the affections of the Egyptian people for their bishop. At the end of the third exile from his homeland, when Athanasius returned in 364 after six years away, Gregory tells us: amid such delight of the people of the city and of almost all Egypt, that they ran together from every side, from the furthest limits of the country, simply to hear the voice of Athanasius, or feast their eyes upon the sight of him.2 From their standpoint none of the foreign appointments to the office of bishop in Alexandria for 45 years was valid but one, Athanasius. This devotion was owing to the kind of man Athanasius was. Gregory remembered him like this:

Let one praise him in his fastings and prayers . . . , another his unweariedness and zeal for vigils and psalmody, another his patronage of the needy, another his dauntlessness towards the powerful, or his condescension to the lowly. . . . [He was to] the unfortunate their consolation, the hoary-headed their staff, youths their instructor, the poor their resource, the wealthy their steward. Even the widows will . . . praise their protector, even the orphans their father, even the poor their benefactor, strangers their entertainer, brethren the man of brotherly love, the sick their physician.3

One of the things that makes that kind of praise from a contemporary the more credible is that, unlike many ancient saints, Athanasius is not recorded as having done any miracles. Archibald Robertson, who edited Athanasius’ works for the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, said, “He is . . . surrounded by an atmosphere of truth. Not a single miracle of any kind is related of him. . . . The saintly reputation of Athanasius rested on his life and character alone, without the aid of any reputation for miraculous power.”4 Then he goes on with his own praise of Athanasius: In the whole of our minute knowledge of his life there is a total lack of self-interest. The glory of God and the welfare of the Church absorbed him fully at all times. . . . The Emperors recognized him as a political force of the first order . . . but on no occasion does he yield to the temptation of using the arm of flesh. Almost unconscious of his own power . . . his humility is the more real for never being conspicuously paraded. . . . Courage, self-sacrifice, steadiness of purpose, versatility and resourcefulness, width of ready sympathy, were all harmonized by deep reverence and the discipline of a single-minded lover of Christ.5 Athanasius—The Father of Orthodoxy—Contra Mundum This single-minded love for Jesus Christ expressed itself in a lifelong battle to explain

and defend Christ's deity and to worship Christ as Lord and God. This is what Athanasius is best known for. There were times when it seemed the whole world had abandoned orthodoxy. That is why the phrase "Athanasius contra Mundum" (against the world) arose. He stood steadfast against overwhelming defection from orthodoxy, and only at the end of his life could he see the dawn of triumph. But in a sense it is anachronistic to use the word "orthodoxy" this way—to say that the world abandoned orthodoxy. Was it really there to abandon? Well, biblical truth is always there to abandon. But "orthodoxy" generally refers to a historic, or official, or universally held view of what is true to Scripture. Was that there to abandon? The answer is suggested in the other great name given to Athanasius, namely, "Father of Orthodoxy."6 That phrase seems to say that orthodoxy came to be because of Athanasius. And in one sense that is true in regard to the Trinity. The relationships between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had not received formal statement in any representative council before the time of Athanasius.

R.P.C. Hanson wrote, "There was not as yet any orthodox doctrine [of the Trinity], for if there had been, the controversy could hardly have lasted sixty years before resolution."7 The sixty years he has in mind is the time between the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople8 in 381. The Council of Nicaea established the battle lines and staked out the deity of Christ, and the Council of Constantinople confirmed and refined the Nicene Creed. The sixty years between was war over whether the Nicene formulation would stand and become "orthodoxy." This was the war Athanasius fought for 45 years. It lasted all his life, but the orthodox outcome was just over the horizon when he died in 373. And under God this outcome was owing to the courage and consistency and work and writing of Athanasius. No one comes close to his influence in the cause of biblical truth during his lifetime.9 The war was sparked in 319. A deacon in Alexandria named Arius, who had been born in 256 in Libya, presented a letter to bishop Alexander arguing that if the Son of God were truly a Son, he must have had a beginning. There must have been a time, therefore, when he did not exist. Most of what we know of Arius is from others. All we have from Arius' own pen is three letters, a fragment of a fourth and scrap of a song, the Thalia.10 In fact he proved to be a very minor character in the controversy he unleashed. He died in 336.11

Athanasius was a little over 20 when the controversy broke out—over 40 years younger than Arius (a lesson in how the younger generation may be more biblically faithful than the older). Athanasius was in the service of Alexander the bishop of Alexandria. Almost nothing is known of his youth. Gregory of Nazianzus celebrates the fact that Athanasius was brought up mainly in biblical training, not philosophical.

He was brought up, from the first, in religious habits and practices, after a brief study of literature and philosophy, so that he might not be utterly unskilled in such subjects, or ignorant of matters which he had determined to despise. For his generous and eager soul could not brook being occupied in vanities, like unskilled athletes, who beat the air instead of their antagonists and lose the prize. From meditating on every book of the Old and New Testament, with a depth such as none else has applied even to one of them, he grew rich in contemplation, rich in splendor of life.12 This was the service he was to render for 45 years: biblical blow after blow against the fortresses of the Arian heresy. Robert Letham confirms the outcome of Gregory's observation: "Athanasius' contribution to the theology of the Trinity can scarcely be overestimated. . . . He turned discussion away from philosophical speculation and back to a biblical and theological basis."13 In 321 a synod was convened in Alexandria, and Arius was deposed from his office and

his views declared heresy. Athanasius at age 23 wrote the deposition for Alexander. This was to be his role now for the next 52 years—writing to declare the glories of the incarnate Son of God. The deposition of Arius unleashed 60 years of ecclesiastical and empire-wide political conflict.

Eusebius of Nicomedia (the modern Izmit in Turkey) took up Arius' theology and became "the head and center of the Arian cause."14 For the next 40 years the Eastern part of the Empire was mainly Arian. That is true in spite of the fact that the great Council of Nicaea came down for the full deity of Christ. Hundreds of bishops signed it and then twisted the language to say that Arianism really fit in the wording of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea (325)

Emperor Constantine had seen the sign of the cross during a decisive battle 13 years earlier and was converted to Christianity. He was concerned with the deeply divisive effect of the Arian controversy in the kingdom. Bishops had tremendous influence, and when they were at odds (as they were over this issue), it made the unity and harmony of the empire more fragile. Constantine's Christian advisor, Hosius, had tried to mediate the Arian conflict in Alexandria, but failed. So in 325 Constantine called the Council at Nicaea across the Bosporus from Constantinople (today's Istanbul). He pulled together, according to tradition,15 318 bishops plus other attenders like Arius and Athanasius, neither of whom was a bishop. He fixed the order of the council and enforced its decisions with civil penalties. The Council lasted from May through August and ended with a statement of orthodoxy that has defined Christianity to this day. The wording today which we call the Nicene Creed is really the slightly altered language of the Council of Constantinople in 381. But the decisive work was done in 325. The anathema at the end of the Creed of Nicaea shows most clearly what the issue was. The original Creed of Nicaea was written in Greek, but here it is in English:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible, and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father (ek tës ousias tou patros), God of God (theon ek theou), and Light of Light (kai phõs ek phõtos), very God of very God (theon alëthinon ek thou alëthinou), begotten, not made (gennëthenta ou poinëthenta), being of one substance with the Father (homoousion tõ patri); by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he cometh to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. And those who say: there was a time when he was not; and: he was not before he was made; and: he was made out of nothing, or out of another substance or thing (ë ex heteras hupostaseõs ë ousias), or the Son of God is created, or changeable, or alterable; they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church. The key phrase, homoousion tõ patri (one being with the Father),was added late on the insistence of the emperor. It made the issue crystal clear. The Son of God could not have been created, because he did not have merely a similar being to the Father (homoiusion tõ patri), but was of the very being of the Father (homoousion tõ patri). He was not brought into existence with similar being, but was eternally one with divine being.

Astonishingly all but two bishops signed the creed, some, as Robertson says, "with total duplicity."16 Secundus and Theonas, along with Arius, were sent into exile. Eusebius squeaked by with what he called a "mental reservation," and within four years would persuade the emperor that

Arius held substantially to the Creed of Nicaea—which was pure politics.17 When Athanasius' mentor, Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria died, April 17, 328, three years after the Council of Nicaea, the mantel of Egypt and of the cause of orthodoxy fell to Athanasius. He was ordained as Bishop June 8 that year. This see was the second in Christendom after Rome. It had jurisdiction over all the bishops of Egypt and Libya. Under Athanasius Arianism died out entirely in Egypt. And from Egypt Athanasius wielded his Empire-wide influence in the battle for the deity of Christ.

Athanasius, the Desert Monks, and Antony

We've passed over one crucial and decisive event in his role as Alexander's assistant. He made a visit with Alexander to the Thebaid, the desert district in upper Egypt where he came in contact with the early desert monks, the ascetics who lived lives of celibacy, solitude, discipline, prayer, simplicity, and service of the poor. Athanasius was deeply affected by this visit and "set on fire by the holiness of their lives."18 For the rest of his life there was an unusual bond between the city bishop and the desert monks. They held him in awe, and he admired them and blessed them. Robinson says, "He treats . . . the monks as equals or superiors, begging them to correct and alter anything amiss in his writings."19 The relationship became a matter of life and death because when Athanasius was driven out of his office by the forces of the empire, there was one group he knew he could trust with his protection. "The solitaries of the desert, to a man, would be faithful to Athanasius during the years of trial."20

One in particular captured Athanasius' attention, affection, and admiration: Antony. He was born in 251. At 20 he sold all his possessions and moved to the desert but served the poor nearby. At 35 he withdrew for 20 years into total solitude and no one knew if he were alive or dead. Then at 55 he returned and ministered to the monks and the people who came to him for prayer and counsel in the desert until he died at 105. Athanasius wrote the biography of Antony. This was Athanasius' ideal, the combination of solitude and compassion on the poor based on rock-solid orthodoxy.

Antony made one rare appearance in Alexandria that we hear about, namely, to dispel the rumor that the desert monks were on the Arian side. He denounced Arianism "as the worst of heresies, and was solemnly escorted out of town by the bishop [Athanasius] in person."21 Orthodoxy, rigorous asceticism for the sake of purity, and compassion on the poor—these were the virtues Athanasius loved in Antony and the monks. And he believed their lives were just as strong an argument for orthodox Christology as his books were.

Now these arguments of ours do not amount merely to words, but have in actual experience a witness to their truth. 2. For let him that will, go up and behold the proof of virtue in the virgins of Christ and in the young men that practice holy chastity, and the assurance of immortality in so great a band of His martyrs.22

Athanasius' biography of Antony is significant for another reason. It was translated from Greek to Latin, and found its way into the hands of Ponticianus, a friend of St. Augustine, some time after 380. Ponticianus told St. Augustine the story of Antony. As he spoke, Augustine says, he was "violently overcome by a fearful sense of shame." This led to Augustine's final struggles in the garden in Milan and his eventual conversion. "Athanasius' purpose in writing Antony's Life had gained its greatest success: Augustine would become the greatest theologian in the church for the next 1,000 years."23 Athanasius Embroiled in Controversy

Within two years after taking office as Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius was embroiled in controversy. Most of the Bishops who had signed the Creed of Nicaea did not like calling people heretics who disagreed. They wanted to get rid of Athanasius and his passion for this cause. Athanasius was accused of levying illegal taxes, that he was too young when ordained, that he used magic, that he subsidized treasonable persons, and more. Constantine did not like his hardline either and called him to Rome in 331. The facts acquitted him, but his defense of the Nicene formulation of Christ's deity was increasingly in the minority. The First Exile of Athanasius (336–338)

Finally his enemies resorted to intrigue. They bribed Arsenius, a Bishop in Hypsele (on the Nile in southern Egypt), to disappear so that the rumor could be started that Athanasius had arranged his murder and cut off one of his hands for magic. Constantine was told and asked for a trial to be held in Tyre. Meanwhile one of Athanasius' trusted deacons had tracked Arsenius to a monastery in hiding and taken him captive and brought him secretly to Tyre. At the trial the accusers produced a human hand to confirm the indictment. But Athanasius was ready. "Did you know Arsenius personally?" he asked. "Yes" is the eager reply from many sides. So Arsenius is ushered in alive, wrapped up in a cloak. They were surprised but demanded an explanation of how he had lost his hand. Athanasius turned up his cloak and showed that one hand at least was there. There was a moment of suspense, artfully managed by Athanasius. Then the other hand was exposed, and the accusers were requested to point out whence the third had been cut off.24 As clear as this seemed, Athanasius was condemned at this Council and fled in a boat with four bishops and came to Constantinople. The accusers threw aside the Arsenius indictment and created another with false witnesses: Athanasius had tried to starve Constantine's capitol by preventing wheat shipments from Alexandria. Constantine ordered Athanasius banished to Treveri (Trier, near today's Luxemborg). Athanasius left for exile on February 8, 336.

Constantine died the next year, and the empire was divided among his three sons, Constantius (taking the East), Constans (taking Italy and Illyricum), and Constantine II (taking the Gauls and Africa). One of Constantine II's first acts was to restore Athanasius to his office in Alexandria (November 23, 327). The Second Exile of Athanasius (339–346)

Two years later Eusebius the leader of the Arians had persuaded Constantius to get rid of Athanasius. He took the ecclesiastical power into his hands, declared Gregory the bishop of Alexandria, and put his own secular governor in charge, and used force to take the bishop's quarters and the churches. Athanasius was forced to leave the city to spare more bloodshed. This was the beginning his second exile—the longest time away from his flock. He left on April 16, 339 and didn't return until October 21, 346, over seven years in exile. Constantine's other two sons supported Athanasius and called the Council of Sardica (now Sophia in Bulgaria) which vindicated him in August of 343. But it took three years till the political factors fell into place for his return. Constans threatened Constantius with war if he did not reinstate Athanasius. In the meantime the Arians had fallen out of favor with Constantius and the substitute bishop Gregory had died. So Athanasius was restored to his people with rejoicing after seven years away (346).

During this season of peace Alexandria and the surrounding districts seemed to have experienced something of a revival, with a strong ascetic flavor. Athanasius wrote (in History of the Arians):

How many unmarried women, who were before ready to enter upon marriage, now remained virgins to Christ! How many young men, seeing the examples of others, embraced the monastic life! . . . How many widows and how many orphans, who were before hungry and naked, now through the great zeal of the people, were no longer hungry, and went forth clothed! In a word, so great was their emulation in virtue, that you would have thought every family and every house a Church, by reason of the goodness of its inmates, and the prayers which were offered to God. And in the Churches there was a profound and wonderful peace, while the Bishops wrote from all quarters, and received from Athanasius the customary letters of peace.25 The Third Exile of Athanasius (356–362) On January 18, 350 Constans was murdered. This freed Constantius to solidify his power and to oppose Athanasius and the Nicene theology unopposed. The people of Alexandria held off one armed assault on the city by the Emperor's Secretary Diogenes in 355, but the next year Constantius sent Syrianus his military commander On Thursday night, Feb. 8 [356], Athanasius was presiding at a crowded service of preparation for a Communion on the following morning . . . in the Church of Theonas . . . the largest in the city. Suddenly the church was surrounded and the doors broken in, and just after midnight Syrianus . . . "entered with an infinite force of soldiers." Athanasius . . . calmly took his seat upon the throne (in the recess of the apse), and ordered the deacon to begin the 136th psalm, the people responding at each verse "for His mercy endureth for ever." Meanwhile the soldiers crowded up to the chancel, and in spite of entreaties the bishop refused to escape until the congregation were in safety. He ordered the prayers to proceed, and only at the last moment a crowd of monks and clergy seized the Archbishop and managed to convey him in the confusion out of the church in a half-fainting state . . . but thankful that he had been able to secure the escape of his people before his own (p. 264). From that moment Athanasius was lost to public view for "six years and fourteen days."

26 He had spared his people briefly. But in June the hostility against the supporters of Athanasius were attacked with a viciousness unlike anything before. In the early hours of Thursday, June 13, [356] after a service (which had begun overnight . . .), just as all the congregation except a few women had left, the church of Theonas was stormed and violences perpetrated which left far behind anything that Syrianus had done. Women were murdered, the church wrecked and polluted with the very worst orgies of heathenism, houses and even tombs were ransacked throughout the city and suburbs on pretence of "seeking for Athanasius."27 The secular authorities forced a new bishop on the people. It proved to be a disaster. Bishop George instigated violent persecution of any who sided with Athanasius and did not support the Arian cause. Many were killed and others banished. At last in December 361, the people's patience was exhausted and George was lynched.

Such was the mingling of secular and ecclesiastical forces in those days. But at the darkest hour for Athanasius and for the cause of orthodoxy, the dawn was about to break. This third exile proved to be the most fruitful. Protected by an absolutely faithful army of desert monks, no one could find him, and he produced most of his most significant written works. The Arian History, the four Tracts Against Arians, the four dogmatic letters To Serapion, and On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia. This last work was a response to the two councils called by Constantius in 359 to settle the conflict between the Arians and the supporters of Nicea. 400 bishops assembled in Arimium in Italy, and 160 assembled in Seleucia in Asian Minor. The aim was a unifying creed for Christianity. The upshot of these councils was a compromise, sometimes called semi-Arian,

that says the Son is “like the Father” but does not say how. It basically avoids the issue. For Athanasius this was totally unacceptable. The nature of Christ was too important to obscure with vague language.

It is one of the typical ironies of God’s providence that the triumph over Arianism would happen largely through the ministry of a fugitive living and writing within inches of his death. Here is the way Archibald Robertson described the triumph of the third exile: The third exile of Athanasius marks the summit of his achievement. Its commencement is the triumph, its conclusion the collapse of Arianism. It is true that after the death of Constantius [November 3, 361] the battle went on with variations of fortune for twenty years, mostly under the reign of an ardently Arian Emperor [Valens] (364–378). But by 362 the utter lack of inner coherence in the Arian ranks was manifest to all; the issue of the fight might be postponed by circumstances but could not be in doubt. The break-up of the Arian power was due to its own lack of reality: as soon as it had a free hand, it began to go to pieces. But the watchful eye of Athanasius followed each step in the process from his hiding-place, and the event was greatly due to his powerful personality and ready pen, knowing whom to overwhelm and whom to conciliate, where to strike and where to spare. This period then of forced abstention from affairs was the most stirring in spiritual and literary activity in the whole life of Athanasius. It produced more than half of . . . of his entire extant works. . . . Let it be noted once for all how completely the amazing power wielded by the wandering fugitive was based upon the devoted fidelity of Egypt to its pastor. Towns and villages, deserts and monasteries, the very tombs were scoured by the Imperial inquisitors in the search for Athanasius; but all in vain; not once do we hear of any suspicion of betrayal. The work of the golden decade [the period of revival before the third exile] was bearing its fruit.28

Athanasius returned to Alexandria on February 21, 362 by another irony. The new and openly pagan emperor, Julian, reversed all the banishments of Constantius. The favor only lasted eight months. But during these months Athanasius called a Synod at Alexandria and gave a more formal consolidation and reconciliation to the gains he had accomplished in the last six years of his writing. It had a tremendous impact on the growing consensus of the church in favor of Nicene orthodoxy. Jerome says that this synod “snatched the whole world from the jaws of Satan.”29 And Robertson calls it “the crown of the career of Athanasius.”30 The rallying point that it gave for orthodoxy in 362 enabled the reuniting forces of Eastern Christendom to withstand the political Arianism under emperor Valens who reigned from 364 to 378. The Fourth Exile of Athanasius (362–364) But in October of 362 Athanasius was again driven from his office by the emperor’s wrath when he realized that Athanasius took his Christianity seriously enough to reject the pagan gods. Again he spent the next 15 months among the desert monks. The story goes that he was freed to return by a prophecy by one of the monks that Julian had that very day fallen in battle in Persia. It proved true, and Athanasius was restored to his ministry on February 14, 364. The Fifth Exile of Athanasius (365–366) A year an a half later the emperor Valens gave order that all the bishops expelled under Julian should be removed by the civil authorities. On October 5, 365 the Roman Prefect broke into the church and searched the apartments of the clergy, but the 67-year-old Athanasius had been warned and escaped one last time—his fifth exile. It was short because a dangerous revolt led by Procopius had to be put down by Valens and it was not time to allow popular discontent to smolder in Alexandria. Athanasius was brought back February 1, 366. The Last Years of Athanasius’ Life

He spent the last years of his life fulfilling his calling as a pastor and overseer of pastors. He carried on extensive correspondence and gave great encouragement and support to the cause of orthodoxy around the empire. He died on May 2, 373.

Lessons from Athanasius's Life and Ministry I turn now to the lessons that we may learn from this remarkable life and ministry.

1. Defending and explaining doctrine is for the sake of the gospel of Christ's glory and our everlasting joy. When Athanasius was driven into his third exile, he wrote a open letter called "To the Bishops of Egypt." In it he referred to the martyrs for who had died defending the deity of Christ. Then he said, "Wherefore . . . considering that this struggle is for our all . . . let us also make it our earnest care and aim to guard what we have received."31 "The Arian controversy was to him no battle for ecclesiastical power, nor for theological triumph. It was a religious crisis involving the reality of revelation and redemption."32 He said in essence, "We are contending for our all."

What was at stake was everything. Oh, how thankful we should be that Athanasius saw things so clearly. The incarnation has to do with the gospel. It has to do with salvation. It has to do with whether there is any hope or life. The creed that Athanasius helped craft, and that he embraced and spent his life defending and explaining, says this plainly:

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father . . . very God of very God, . . . being of one substance with the Father . . . who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again . . . In other words, the deity of the incarnate Son of God is essential because the gospel of our salvation is essential. There is no salvation if Jesus Christ was not God. It's true that Athanasius deals with salvation mainly in terms of restoring the image of God in man by Christ's taking human nature into union with the divine nature. But Athanasius does not emphasize this to the exclusion of the death of Christ and the atonement. You hear both in this passage from On The Incarnation of the Word: For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent. For being over all, the Word of God naturally by offering His own temple and corporeal instrument for the life of all satisfied the debt by His death. And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection."33

Athanasius saw the great proportion of things. There are doctrines in the Bible that are worth dying for and living for. They are the ground of our life. They are the heart of our worship. The divine and human nature of Christ in one person is one of those doctrines.

2. Joyful courage is the calling of a faithful shepherd.

Athanasius stared down murderous intruders into his church. He stood before emperors who could have killed him as easily as exiled him. He risked the wrath of parents and other clergy by consciously training young people to give their all for Christ, including martyrdom. He celebrated the fruit of his ministry with these words: “in youth they are self-restrained, in temptations endure, in labors persevere, when insulted are patient, when robbed make light of it: and, wonderful as it is, they despise even death and become martyrs of Christ”34—martyrs not who kill as they die, but who love has they die.

Athanasius contra mundum should inspire every pastor to stand your ground meekly and humbly and courageously whenever a biblical truth is at stake. But be sure that you always out-rejoice your adversaries. If something is worth fighting for, it worth rejoicing over. And the joy is essential in the battle, for nothing is worth fighting for that will not increase our joy in God. Our people must see that.

Courage in conflict must mingle with joy in Christ. This is what Athanasius loved about Antony and what he sought to be himself. This was part of his battle strategy with his adversaries:

Let us be courageous and rejoice always. . . . Let us consider and lay to heart that while the Lord is with us, our foes can do us no hurt. . . . But if they see us rejoicingin the Lord, contemplating the bliss of the future, mindful of the Lord, deeming all things in His hand . . . —they are discomfited and turned backwards.35

So, brothers, even if at times it may feel as though we are alone contra mundum, let us stand courageous and out-rejoice our adversaries.

3. Loving Christ includes loving true propositions about Christ

What was clear to Athanasius was that propositions about Christ carried convictions that could send you to heaven or to hell. There were propositions like: “There was a time when the Son of God was not,” and, “He was not before he was made,” and, “the Son of God is created.” These propositions were strictly damnable. If they were spread and believed they would damn the souls which embraced them. And therefore Athanasius labored with all his might to formulate propositions that would conform to reality and lead the soul to faith and worship and heaven.

I believe Athanasius would have abominated, with tears, the contemporary call for “depropositionalizing” that you hear among many of the so-called “reformists” and “the emerging church,”younger evangelicals,”postfundamentalists,” “postfoundationalists,”postpropositionalists,” and “postevangelicals.”36 I think he would have said, “Our young people in Alexandria die for the truth of propositions about Christ. What do your young people die for?” And if the answer came back, “We die for Christ, not propositions about Christ,” I think he would have said, “That’s what Arius says. So which Christ will you die for?”

Athanasius would have grieved over sentences like “It is Christ who unites us; it is doctrines that divides.” And sentences like: “We should ask, Whom do you trust? rather than what do you believe?”37 He would have grieved because he knew this is the very tactic used by the Arian bishops to cover the councils with fog so that the word “Christ” could mean anything. Those who talk like this—“Christ unites, doctrine divides”—have simply replaced propositions with a word. They think they have done something profound and fresh, when in fact they have done something

very old and stale and very deadly. This leads to a related lesson . . .

4. The truth of biblical language must be vigorously protected with non-biblical language.

Athanasius' experience was critically illuminating to something I have come to see over the years, especially in liberally minded baptistic and pietistic traditions, namely, that the slogan, "the Bible is our only creed" is often used as a cloak to conceal the fact that Bible language is used to affirm falsehood. This is what Athanasius encountered so insidiously at the Council of Nicaea. The Arians affirmed biblical sentences. Listen to this description of the proceedings: The Alexandrians . . . confronted the Arians with the traditional Scriptural phrases which appeared to leave no doubt as to the eternal Godhead of the Son. But to their surprise they were met with perfect acquiescence. Only as each test was propounded, it was observed that the suspected party whispered and gesticulated to one another, evidently hinting that each could be safely accepted, since it admitted of evasion. If their assent was asked to the formula "like to the Father in all things," it was given with the reservation that man as such is "the image and glory of God." The "power of God" elicited the whispered explanation that the host of Israel was spoken of as dunamis kuriou, and that even the locust and caterpillar are called the "power of God." The "eternity" of the Son was countered by the text, "We that live are alway (2 Corinthians 4:11)!" The fathers were baffled, and the test of homoosion, with which the minority had been ready from the first, was being forced (p. 172) upon the majority by the evasions of the Arians.38

R. P. C. Hanson explained the process like this: "Theologians of the Christian Church were slowly driven to a realization that the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language, because the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself."39 The Arians railed against the unbiblical language being forced on them. They tried to seize the biblical high ground and claim to be the truly biblical people—the pietists, the simple Bible-believers—because they wanted to stay with biblical language only—and by it smuggle in their non-biblical meanings. But Athanasius saw through this "post-modern,"post-conservative," "post-propositional" strategy and saved for us not just Bible words, but Bible truth. May God grant us the discernment of Athanasius for our day. Very precious things are at stake.40

5. A widespread and long-held doctrinal difference among Christians does not mean that the difference is insignificant or that we should not seek to persuade toward the truth and seek agreement.

What if someone had said to Athanasius, "Athanasius, people have disagreed on this issue for 300 years and there has never been an official position taken in the church to establish one side as orthodox and the other as heresy? So who do you think you are? Half the bishops in the world disagree with you and they read the same Bible you do. So stop fighting this battle and let different views exist side by side.

We may thank God that Athanasius did not think that way. He did not regard the amount of time that has elapsed or the number of Christians who disagreed to determine what doctrines are important and which we should strive to teach and spread and make normative in the church. And so today we should not conclude that the absence of consensus in the church means doctrinal stalemate. God may yet be pleased to give the blessing of unity on some crucial areas of doctrine that are not yet resolved in the Christian church. I think for example of the issue of Manhood and

Womanhood, the issue of Justification by faith, and the issue of how the death of Christ saves sinners, and the issue of the sovereignty of God's grace in converting the soul. I don't think we should assume that because much time has gone by and many people disagree it must always be this way. Who knows but that, by God's amazing grace, wrong views on these things could become as marginal as the Arianism of the Jehovah's Witnesses is today?

6. Don't aim to preach only in categories of thought that can be readily understood by this generation. Aim at creating biblical categories of thought that are not present.

Another way to put it is to use the terminology of Andrew Walls: Don't embrace the indigenous principle of Christianity at the expense of the pilgrim principle.41 The indigenous principle says, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). The pilgrim principle says, "Do not be conformed to this world,but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Some of the most crucial and precious truths of the Scripture are counter-intuitive to the fallen human mind. They don't fit easily into our heads. The orthodox understanding of the Trinity is one of those. If the indigenous principle had triumphed in the fourth century, we would all be Arians. It is far easier for the human mind to say that the Son of God, like all other sons, once was not, and then came into being, than it is to say that he has always been God with the Father, but there is only one God. But the Bible will not let its message be fit into the categories we bring with our fallen, finite minds. It presses us relentlessly to create new categories of thought to contain the mysteries of the gospel.

Archibald Roberts points out that with the conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313) which gave legal status to Christianity, "the inevitable influx of heathen into the Church, now that the empire had become Christian, brought with it multitudes to whom Arianism was a more intelligible creed than that of Nicaea."42 And if you want to grow a church the temptation is to give the people what they already have categories to understand and enjoy. But once that church is grown, it thinks so much like the world that the difference is not decisive. The radical, biblical gospel is blunted and the glory of Christ is obscured.

Rather, alongside the indigenous principle of accommodation and contextualization, Athanasius would plead with us to have a deep commitment to the pilgrim principle of confrontation and transformation and brain-boggling, mind-altering, recategorization of the way people think about reality. And we must not treat these two principles as sequential. They start and continue together. We must not assume that the first and basic truths of Christianity fit into the fallen mind of unbelievers. We must not assume that these first truths can be contextualized in categories of thought that are present in the minds of 21st century human beings, and that only later, after they have become Christians, we can begin to alter the way they think with more advanced truth.

That's not the case. From the very beginning, we are speaking to them God-centered, Christ-exalting truths that shatter fallen human categories of thought. We must not shy away from this. We must do all we can to advance it and to help people, by the grace of God, to see what is happening to them (the shattering of their categories) as the best news in all the world. From the very beginning, in the most winsome way possible, we must labor to create categories like this: God rules the world of bliss and suffering and sin, right down to the roll of the dice and the fall of a

bird and the driving of the nail into the hand of his Son, yet, though he will that such sin and suffering be, he does not sin, but is perfectly holy. Or a category like this: God governs all the steps of all people, both good and bad, at all times and in all places, yet such that all are accountable before him and will bear the just consequences of his wrath if they do not believe in Christ. Or this category: All are dead in their trespasses and sin and are not morally able to come to Christ because of their rebellion, yet, they are responsible to come and will be justly punished if they don't. Or: Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human, such that he upheld the world by the word of his power while living in his mother's womb. Or: sin, though committed by a finite person and in the confines of finite time is nevertheless deserving of an infinitely long punishment because it is a sin against an infinitely worthy God. Or: the death of the one God-Man, Jesus Christ, so displayed and glorified the righteousness of God that God is not unrighteous to declare righteous ungodly people who simply believe in Christ.

These kinds of mind-boggling, category-shattering truths demand our best thought and our most creative labors. We must aim to speak them in a way that, by the power of God's word and Spirit, a place for them would be created in the minds of those who hear. We must not preach only in the categories that are already present in our listeners' fallen minds, or we will betray the gospel and conceal the glory of God.

7. Finally, we must not assume that old books, which say some startling things, are necessarily wrong, but may in fact have something glorious to teach us that we never dreamed.43 For example, Athanasius says some startling things about human deification that we would probably never say. Is that because one of us is wrong? Or is it because the language and the categories of thought that he uses are so different from ours that we have to get inside his head before we make judgments about the truth of what he says? And might we discover something great by this effort to see what he saw? For example, he says, "[The Son] was made man that we might be made God (theopoiëthõmen)."44 Or: "He was not man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us."45 The issue here is whether the word "make God" or "deify" (theopoieõ) means something unbiblical or whether it means what 2 Peter 1:4 means when it says, "that you may become partakers of the divine nature" (hina genësthe theias koinõnoi phuseõs)? Athanasius explains like this:

John then thus writes; 'Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. . . . And the Son is in the Father, as His own Word and Radiance; but we, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us and abides in us, . . . What then is our likeness and equality to the Son? . . . The Son is in the Father in one way, and we become in Him in another, and that neither we shall ever be as He, nor is the Word as we.46

What becomes clear when all is taken into account is that Athanasius is pressing on a reality in the Scriptures that we today usually call "glorification" but is using the terminology of 2 Peter 1:4 and Romans 8:29, "Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." He is pressing the destiny and the glory of being a brother of the second person of the Trinity, and "sharing in his nature."47 And thus Athanasius raises for me one of the most crucial questions of all: What is the ultimate end of

creation—the ultimate goal of God in creation and redemption? Is it being or seeing? Is it our being like Christ or our seeing the glory of Christ? How does Romans 8:29 (“predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”) relate to John 17:24 (“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory”)? Is the beatific vision of the glory of the Son of God the aim of human creation? Or is likeness to that glory the aim of creation?

Athanasius has helped me go deeper here by unsettling me. I am inclined to stress seeing as the goal rather than being. The reason is that it seems to me that putting the stress on seeing the glory of Christ makes him the focus, but putting the stress on being like Christ makes me the focus. But Athanasius will not let me run away from the biblical texts. His language of deification forces me to think more deeply and worship more profoundly. My present understanding would go like this: the ultimate end of creation is neither being nor seeing, but delighting and displaying. Delighting in and displaying “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). And the displaying happens both in the delighting, since we glorify most what we enjoy most, and in the deeds of the resurrection body that flow from this enjoyment on the new earth in the age to come. The display of God’s glory will be both internal and external. It will be spiritual and physical. We will display the glory of God by the Christ-exalting joy of our heart, and by the Christ-exalting deeds of our resurrection bodies.

How then should we speak of our future being and seeing if they are not the ultimate end? How shall we speak of “sharing God’s nature” and being “conformed to his Son”? The way I would speak of our future being and seeing is this: By the Spirit of God who dwells in us, our final destiny is not self-admiration or self-exaltation, but being able to see the glory of God without disintegrating, and being able to delight in the glory of Christ with the very delight of God the Father for his own Son (John 17:26),48 and being able to do visible Christ-exalting deeds that flow from this delight. And in this way a wave of revelation of divine glory in the saints is set in motion that goes on and grows for all eternity. As each of us sees Christ and delights in Christ with the delight of the Father, mediated by the Spirit, we will overflow with visible actions of love and creativity on the new earth. In this way we will see the revelation of God’s glory in each other’s lives in ever new ways. New dimensions of the riches of the glory of God in Christ will shine forth every day from new delights and new deeds. And these in turn will become new seeings of Christ which will elicit new delights and new doings. And so the ever-growing wave of the revelation of the riches of the glory of God will role on for ever and ever. And we will discover that this was possible only because the infinite Son of God took on himself the human nature so that we in our human nature might be united to him and display more and more of his glory. We will find in our eternal experience that his infinite beauty took on human form so that our human form might increasingly display his infinite beauty.

I am thankful to God that I did not run away from the word “deification” in Athanasius. There is here “a grace the magnitude of which our minds can never fully grasp.”49 Thank you, Athanasius. And thank you, Father. And thank you, Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Endnotes

1 Timothy D. Barnes, Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantiain Empire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19.

2 Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 21: On Athanasius of Alexandria, in Gregory Nazianzus, Select Orations, Sermons, Letters; Dogmatic Treatises, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [hereafter NPNF], vol. 7, 2nd Series, ed. P. Shaff and H. Wace (repr.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1955), 277 ¶27.

3 Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 21, 272 ¶10.

4 Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, in NPNF, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999; orig. 1892), lxvii.

5 Ibid.

6 NPNF 4:lviii.

7 R.P.C. Hanson, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), xviii-xix.

8 See the chapter on “The Council of Constantinople” in Robert Letham, The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2004), 167-183.

9 “The Nicene formula found in Athanasius a mind predisposed to enter into its spirit, to employ in its defense the richest resources of theological and biblical training, of spiritual depth and vigor, of self-sacrificing but sober and tactful enthusiasm; its victory in the East is due under God to him alone.” NPNF 4:lxix.

10 Letham, The Holy Trinity, 109.

11 Archibald Robertson recounts the death of Arius like this: “From Jerusalem Arius had gone to Alexandria, but had not succeeded in obtaining admission to the Communion of the Church there. Accordingly he repaired to the capital about the time of the Council [of Tyre]. The Eusebians resolved that here at any rate he should not be repelled. Arius appeared before the Emperor and satisfied him by a sworn profession of orthodoxy, and a day was fixed for his reception to communion. The story of the distress caused to the aged bishop Alexander [Bishop of Constantinople] is well known. He was heard to pray in the church that either Arius or himself might be taken away before such an outrage to the faith should be permitted. As a matter of fact Arius died suddenly [A.D. 336] the day before his intended reception. His friends ascribed his death to magic, those of Alexander to the judgment of God, the public generally to the effect of excitement on a diseased heart. Athanasius, while taking the second view, describes the occurrence with becoming sobriety and reserve (pp. 233, 565).

NPNF 4:xli.

12 Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 21, 270-271 ¶6.

13 Letham, The Holy Trinity, 145.

14 NPNF 4:xvi.

15 Archibald Robertson estimates the bishops at something over 250, and attributes the number 318 to the symbolic significance it had. “According to Athanasius, who again, toward the end of his life (ad Afr. 2) acquiesces in the precise figure 318 (Gen xiv. 14; the Greek numeral τιë combines

the Cross [t] with the initial letters of the Sacred Name [ië]) which a later generation adopted (it first occurs in the alleged Coptic acts of the Council of Alexandria, 362, then in the Letter of Liberius to the bishops of Asia in 365), on grounds perhaps symbolical rather than historical. NPNF 4:xvii n. 1.

16 NPNF 4:xx.

17 Ibid., xx. “In 329 we find Eusebius once more in high favor with Constantine, discharging his episcopal functions, persuading Constantine that he and Arius held substantially the Creed of Nicaea.”

18 F. A. Forbes, Saint Athanasius (repr., Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989; orig., 1919), 8.

19 NPNF 4:lxvii.

20 Forbes, Saint Athanasius, 36.

21 NPNF 4:xlii. (July 27, 338).

22 Ibid., 62.

23 David Wright, “The Life Changing ‘Life of Antony,’” in Christian History vol. XVIII, no. 4 (1999): 17.

24 NPNF 4:xl.

25 Ibid., 278.

26 Ibid., l.

27 Ibid., lii.

28 Ibid., li.

29 Ibid., lviii.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 234.

32 Ibid., lxvii.

33 NPNF 4:40-41. Archibald Robertson observes, “Athanasius felt, as we have already mentioned, the supremacy of the Cross as the purpose of the Saviour’s coming, but he does not in fact give to it the central place in his system of thought which it occupies in his instincts” (lxix). That is a fair statement. But the following one from Robert Letham goes against the evidence as I have seen it in what Athanasius wrote: “For Athanasius the decisive fulcrum is the Incarnation. As a result, the Cross has diminished significance. [R.P.C.] Hanson likens his theory of salvation to a sacred blood transfusion that almost does away with a doctrine of the Atonement. Athanasius lacks reasons why Christ should have died. For him, corruption consists in fallenness, rather than in sin.” Letham, The Holy Trinity, 133. Consider, for example, the following passages:

“For man, being in Him, was quickened for this was why the Word was united to man, namely, that against man the curse might no longer prevail. This is the reason why they record the request made on behalf of mankind in the seventy-first Psalm: ‘Give the King Thy judgment, O God’ (Ps. lxxii. I): asking that both the judgment of death which hung over us may be delivered to the Son, and that He may then, by dying for us, abolish it for us in Himself. This was what He signified, saying Himself, in the eighty-seventh Psalm: ‘Thine indignation lieth hard upon me’ (Ps. lxxxviii. 7). For He bore the indignation which lay upon us, as also He says in the hundred and thirty-seventh: ‘Lord, Thou shalt do vengeance for me’ (Ps. cxxxviii. 8, LXX.)”. NPNF 4:88.

“But since it was necessary also that the debt owing from all should be paid again: for, as I have already said, it was owing that all should die, for which especial cause, indeed, He came among us: to this intent, after the proofs of His Godhead from His works, He next offered up His sacrifice also on behalf of all, yielding His Temple to death in the stead of all, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old trespass, and further to shew Himself more powerful even than death, displaying His own body incorruptible, as first-fruits of the resurrection of all.” (Italics added.) NPNF 4:47. Note: Athanasius is willing to make the death for our debt the “special cause” of the incarnation. But he returns quickly to his usual way of seeing things, namely, restoration of the image of God.

34 NPNF 4:65.

35 Ibid., 207.

36 See the critical interaction with these movements in Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, Justin Taylor, eds., Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004).

37 These sentences are from E. Stanley Jones, The Christ of the Indian Road (New York: Abingdon, 1925), 155-157. I cite this older book because it is being used with enthusiasm by some today to buttress a vision that beclouds the importance of doctrine.

38 NPNF 4:xix.

39 Hanson, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God, xxi.

40 Another way that Athanasius and the orthodox bishops at Nicaea protected the truth was to include denials as well as affirmations. In their case they were called anathemas. The point here is this: When mistaken teachers are looking for a way to have their views accepted in the mainstream, they are often willing to agree with affirmations and give them a different meaning. Or sometimes the affirmations are broad and general and so do not make clear what is being excluded as false. But if a denial is included, which explicitly names what is being rejected as false, then the mistaken person cannot as easily weasel around the denial. For example, an open theist may affirm the statement “We believe in the full omniscience of God.” But he would have a difficult time making the denial, “We deny that God is ignorant of anything that shall come to pass.”

41 Andrew Walls, Missionary Movement in Christian History (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001), 7-9.

42 NPNF 4:xxxv.

43 C. S. Lewis wrote an Introduction for Athanasius' book, The Incarnation of the Word. In it he teaches us that the value of old books is not that they have no blind spots, but that they have different blind spots than we do, and therefore are valuable for exposing ours.

It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones.

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. . . . We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century—the blindness about which posterity will ask, "But how could they have thought that?"—lies where we have never suspected it, and concerns something about which there is untroubled agreement between Hitler and President Roosevelt or between Mr. H. G. Wells and Karl Barth. None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. . . . Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction.

C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in C. S. Lewis, Essay Collection And Other Short Pieces (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 439. This essay is available at numerous places on the internet.

44 NPNF 4:65.

45 Ibid., 329.

46 Ibid., 406-407.

47 "Glorification (in Western terminology), or deification (according to the East), is brought to fruition at the eschaton and lasts for eternity, and so is the final goal of salvation. . . . According to the Eastern church, the goal of salvation is to be made like God. This the Holy Spirit effects in us. It involves no blurring of the Creator-creature distinction, but rather focuses on the union and communion that we are given by God, in which we are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3)." Letham, The Holy Trinity, 474, 498.

48 John 17:26 "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

49 John Calvin, quoted in Letham, The Holy Trinity, 472. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 65

05.09. The Divine Majesty of the Word

The Divine Majesty of the Word John Calvin: The Man and His Preaching The Precious Weight of the Glory of God

I would like to begin by focusing our attention on God's self-identification in Exodus 3:14-15. You remember that God called Moses and commissioned him to go to Egypt and bring his people out of bondage. Moses is frightened at this prospect and raises the objection that he is not the person to do this. God responds by saying, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). Then Moses says, "[When I] say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" And God's response is one of the most important revelations that has ever been given to man: And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD [JHWH], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations." In other words, the great, central, Biblical name of Yahweh is explicitly rooted by God himself in the phrase "I am who I am". Tell them, the one who simply and absolutely is has sent you. Tell them that the essential thing about me is that I am.

I begin with this Biblical self-identification of God because my unhidden and unashamed aim in this message on John Calvin – and indeed in all the ten years of this conference for pastors – is to fan the flame in you of a passion for the centrality and supremacy of God in your ministry. My heart burns when I hear God say, "My name is, 'I am who I am.'" Doesn't yours? It burns when I think of the absoluteness of God's existence – never beginning, never ending, never becoming, never improving, simply and absolutely there to be dealt with on his terms or not at all.

Let it hit you, brothers: God – the God in whose name this conference gathers – never had a beginning. God never had a beginning! "I AM has sent me to you. " And the one who never had a beginning, but always was and is and will be, defines all things. Whether we want him to be there or not, he is there. We do not negotiate what we want for reality. God defines reality. When we come into existence, we stand before a God who made us and owns us. We have absolutely no choice in this matter. We do not choose to be. And when we are, we do not choose that God be. No ranting and raving, no sophisticated doubt or skepticism, has any effect on the existence of God. He simply and absolutely is. "Tell them I AM has sent you."

If we don't like it, we can change, for our joy, or we can resist, to our destruction. But one thing remains absolutely unassailed. God is. He was there before we came. He will be there when we are gone. And therefore, what matters in ministry. above all things, is this God. I cannot escape the simple and obvious truth that God must be the main thing in ministry. Ministry has to do with God because life has to do with God, and life has to do with God because all the universe has to do with God, and the universe has to do with God because every atom and every emotion and every soul of every angelic, demonic and human being belongs to God, who absolutely is. He

created all that is, he sustains everything in being, he directs the course of all events, because "from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be glory [in our ministries!] forever" (Romans 11:36). On this tenth anniversary of the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, my desire is as strong as ever that God might inflame in you a passion for his centrality and supremacy in your ministry, so that your people will say, when you are dead and gone, "This man knew God. This man loved God. This man lived for the glory of God. This man showed us God week after week. This man, as the apostle said, was 'filled with all the fullness of God.'" This is my aim and my burden for the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors. Not only because it is implicit in the sheer, awesome existence of God, and not only because it is explicit in the Word of God, but also because David Wells is staggeringly right when he says, "It is this God, majestic and holy in his being . . . who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world" (see note 1). Leslie Newbigen, from the British angle, says much the same thing: "I suddenly saw," he writes, "that someone could use all the language of evangelical Christianity, and yet the center was fundamentally the self, my need of salvation. And God is auxiliary to that. . . . I also saw that quite a lot of evangelical Christianity can easily slip, can become centered in me and my need of salvation, and not in the glory of God" (see note 2). And, O, have we slipped. How many are the churches today where the dominant experience is the precious weight of the glory of God?

John Calvin saw in his own day the same thing Leslie Newbigen did. In 1538, the Italian Cardinal Sadolet wrote to the leaders of Geneva trying to win them back to the Catholic Church after they had turned to the Reformed teachings. He began his letter with a long conciliatory section on the preciousness of eternal life, before coming to his accusations of the reformation. Calvin wrote the response to Sadolet in six days in the fall of 1539. It was one of his earliest writings and spread his name as a reformer across Europe. Luther read it and said, "Here is a writing which has hands and feet. I rejoice that God raises up such men" (see note 3).

Calvin's response to Sadolet is important because it uncovers the root of Calvin's quarrel with Rome that will determine his whole life – as well as the shape of this lecture. The issue is not, first, justification or priestly abuses or transubstantiation or prayers to saints or papal authority. All those will come in for discussion. But beneath all of them, the fundamental issue for John Calvin, from the beginning to the end of his life, was the issue of the centrality and supremacy and majesty of the glory of God. He sees in Sadolet's letter the same thing Newbigen sees in self-centered Evangelicalism.

Here's what he said to the Cardinal: "[Your] zeal for heavenly life [is] a zeal which keeps a man entirely devoted to himself, and does not, even by one expression, arouse him to sanctify the name of God." In other words, even precious truth about eternal life can be so skewed as to displace God as the center and goal. And this was Calvin's chief contention with Rome. It comes out in his writings over and over again. He goes on and says to Sadolet that what he should do – and what Calvin aims to do with all his life – is "set before [man], as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God" (see note 4).

I think this would be a fitting banner over all of John Calvin's life and work – zeal to illustrate the glory of God. The essential meaning of John Calvin's life and preaching is that he recovered and embodied a passion for the absolute reality and majesty of God. That is what I want you to see. Benjamin Warfield said of Calvin, "No man ever had a profounder sense of God than he" (see note

5). There’s the key to Calvin’s life and theology.

Geerhardus Vos, the Princeton New Testament scholar, asked the question in 1891, What is it about Reformed theology that enables that tradition to grasp the fullness of Scripture unlike any other branch of Christendom? He answers, "Because Reformed theology took hold of the Scriptures in their deepest root idea. . . . This root idea which served as the key to unlock the rich treasuries of the Scriptures was the preeminence of God’s glory in the consideration of all that has been created" (see note 6). It’s this relentless orientation on the glory of God that gives coherence to John Calvin’s life and to the Reformed tradition that followed. Vos said that the "all-embracing slogan of the Reformed faith is this: the work of grace in the sinner as a mirror for the glory of God" (see note 7). Mirroring the glory of God is the meaning of John Calvin’s life and ministry. When Calvin did eventually get to the issue of justification in his response to Sadolet, he said, "You . . . touch upon justification by faith, the first and keenest subject of controversy between us. . . . Wherever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished" (see note 8). So here again you can see what is fundamental. Justification by faith is crucial. But there is a deeper root reason why it is crucial. The glory of Christ is at stake. Wherever the knowledge of justification is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished. This is always the root issue for Calvin. What truth and what behavior will "illustrate the glory of God"? For Calvin, the need for the Reformation was fundamentally this: Rome had "destroyed the glory of Christ in many ways — by calling upon the saints to intercede, when Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man; by adoring the Blessed Virgin, when Christ alone shall be adored; by offering a continual sacrifice in the Mass, when the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross is complete and sufficient" (see note 9), by elevating tradition to the level of Scripture and even making the word of Christ dependent for its authority on the word of man (see note 10). Calvin asks, in his Commentary on Colossians, "How comes it that we are ’carried about with so many strange doctrines’ (Hebrews 13:9)?" And he answers, "Because the excellence of Christ is not perceived by us" (see note 11). In other words, the great guardian of Biblical orthodoxy throughout the centuries is a passion for the glory and the excellency of God in Christ. Where the center shifts from God, everything begins to shift everywhere. Which does not bode well for doctrinal faithfulness in our own non-God-centered day.

Therefore the unifying root of all of Calvin’s labors is his passion to display the glory of God in Christ. When he was 30 years old, he described an imaginary scene of himself at the end of his life, giving an account to God, and said, "The thing [O God] at which I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently labored, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice . . . might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ . . . might be fully displayed" (see note 12).

Twenty-four years later, unchanged in his passions and goals, and one month before he actually did give an account to Christ in heaven (he died at age 54), he said in his last will and testament, "I have written nothing out of hatred to anyone, but I have always faithfully propounded what I esteemed to be for the glory of God" (see note 13). So I ask the question now, What happened to John Calvin to make him a man so mastered by the majesty of God? And what kind of ministry did this produce in his life?

Calvin’s Early Life and Conversion

Let’s bring the story up to the key event of his conversion soon after he was 21 years old. He was born July 10, 1509, in Noyon, France, when Martin Luther was 25 years old and had just begun to

teach the Bible in Wittenberg. We know almost nothing of his early home life. When he was 14, his father sent him to study theology at the University of Paris, which at that time was untouched by the Reformation in Germany and steeped in Medieval theology. But five years later (when Calvin was 19) his father ran afoul of the church and told his son to leave theology and study law, which he did for the next three years at Orleans and Bourges.

During these years Calvin mastered Greek, and was immersed in the thought of Duns Scotus and William Occam and Gabriel Biel, and he completed his law course. His father died in May of 1531, when Calvin was 21. Calvin felt free then to turn from law to his first love, which had become the classics. He published his first book, a Commentary on Seneca, in 1532, at the age of 23. But sometime during these years he was coming into contact with the message and the spirit of the Reformation, and by 1533 something dramatic had happened in his life. In November, 1533, Nicholas Cop, a friend of Calvin, preached at the opening of the winter term at the University of Paris, and was called to account by the Parliament for his Lutheran-like doctrines. He fled the city, and a general persecution broke out against what King Francis I called "the cursed Lutheran sect." Calvin was among those who escaped. The connection with Cop was so close that some suspect Calvin actually wrote the message that Cop delivered. So, by 1533, Calvin had crossed the line. He was wholly devoted to Christ and to the cause of the Reformation.

What had happened? Calvin recounts, seven years later, how his conversion came about. He describes how he had been struggling to live out the Catholic faith with zeal:

. . .when, lo, a very different form of doctrine started up, not one which led us away from the Christian profession, but one which brought it back to its fountain . . . to its original purity. Offended by the novelty, I lent an unwilling ear, and at first, I confess, strenuously and passionately resisted . . . to confess that I had all my life long been in ignorance and error. . . .

I at length perceived, as if light had broken in upon me, [a very key phrase, in view of what we will see] in what a sty of error I had wallowed, and how much pollution and impurity I had thereby contracted. Being exceedingly alarmed at the misery into which I had fallen . . . as in duty bound, [I] made it my first business to betake myself to thy way [O God], condemning my past life, not without groans and tears (see note 14).

God, by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame. . . . Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with [an] intense desire to make progress" (see note 15).

What was the foundation of Calvin’s faith that yielded a life devoted utterly to displaying the glory and majesty of God? I believe the answer is that Calvin suddenly, as he says, saw and tasted in Scripture the majesty of God. And in that moment, both God and the Word of God were so powerfully and unquestionably authenticated to his soul, that he became the loving servant of God and his word the rest of his life.

"The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit"

How this happened is extremely important, and we need to see Calvin himself describe it in the Institutes, especially Book I, Chapters VII and VIII. Here he wrestles with how we can come to a saving knowledge of God through the Scriptures. His answer is the famous phrase, "the internal

testimony of the Holy Spirit." For example, he says, "Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit" (I, viii, 13). So two things came together for Calvin to give him a "saving knowledge of God" – Scripture and the "inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit." Neither alone suffices to save. But how does this actually work? What does the Spirit do? The answer is not that the Spirit gives us added revelation to what is in Scripture (see note 16) but that he awakens us, as from the dead, to see and taste the divine reality of God in Scripture, which authenticates it as God's own word. He says, " Our Heavenly Father, revealing his majesty [in Scripture], lifts reverence for Scripture beyond the realm of controversy" (I, viii, 13). There is the key for Calvin: the witness of God to Scripture is the immediate, unassailable, life-giving revelation to the mind of the majesty of God manifest in the Scriptures themselves.

Over and over again in his description of what happens in coming to faith you see his references to the majesty of God revealed in Scripture, and vindicating Scripture. So already in the dynamics of his conversion the central passion of his life is being ignited.

We are almost at the bottom of this experience now. If we go just a bit deeper we will see more clearly why this conversion resulted in such an "invincible constancy" in Calvin's lifelong allegiance to the majesty of God and the truth of God's Word. Here are the words that will take us deeper.

Therefore illumined by [the Spirit's] power, we believe neither by our own [note this!] nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. (I, vii, 5) This is almost baffling. He says that his conviction concerning the majesty of God in Scripture rests not in any human judgment, not even his own. What does he mean? As I have wrestled with this, the words of the apostle John have shed the most helpful light on what Calvin is trying to explain. Here are the key words from 1 John 5:7-11 : And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. . . . If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God [= the Spirit] is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. . . . The witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. In other words the "witness of God," that is, the inward witness of the Spirit, is greater than any human witness – including, I think John would say in this context, the witness of our own judgment. And what is that witness of God? It is not merely a word delivered to our judgment for reflection, for then our conviction would rely on that reflection. What is it then? Verse 11 is the key: "The witness is this: that God has given us eternal life." I take that to mean that God witnesses to us of his reality and the reality of his Son and his Word by giving us life from the dead so that we come alive to his majesty and see him for who he is in his Word. In that instant we do not reason from premises to conclusions, we see that we are awake, and there is not even a prior human judgment about it to lean on. When Lazarus wakened in the tomb by the call or the "witness" of Christ, he knew without reasoning that he was alive and that this call waked him.

Here's the way J. I. Packer puts it: The internal witness of the Spirit in John Calvin is a work of enlightenment whereby, through the medium of verbal testimony, the blind eyes of the spirit are opened, and divine realities come to be recognized and embraced for what they are. This recognition Calvin says, is as immediate and unanalysable as the perceiving of a color, or a taste, by physical sense – an event about which no more can be said than that when appropriate stimuli

were present it happened, and when it happened we know it had happened (see note 17). So in his early twenties John Calvin experienced the miracle of having the blind eyes of his spirit opened by the Spirit of God. And what he saw immediately, and without any intervening chain of human reasoning, were two things, so interwoven that they would determine the rest of his life: the majesty of God and the Word of God. The Word mediated the majesty and the majesty vindicated the Word. Henceforth he would be a man utterly devoted to displaying the majesty of God by the exposition of the Word of God. The Institutes, then Geneva

What form would that ministry take? Calvin knew what he wanted. He wanted the enjoyment of literary ease to promote the Reformed faith as a literary scholar (see note 18). That is what he thought he was cut out for by nature. But God had radically different plans – as he has had for many of us.

After escaping from Paris and finally leaving France entirely, he spent his exile in Basel, Switzerland, between 1534 and 1536. To redeem the time "he devoted himself to the study of Hebrew" (see note 19). In March of 1536, he published there the first edition of the Institutes, which would go through five enlargements until its present form in 1559. And we should not think that this was a merely academic exercise. Years later he tells us what was driving him: But lo! while I lay hidden at Basel, and known only to few people, many faithful and holy persons were burnt alive in France. . . . It appeared to me, that unless I opposed [the perpetrators] to the utmost of my ability, my silence could not be vindicated from the charge of cowardice and treachery. This was the consideration which induced me to publish my

Institutes of the Christian Religion. . . . It was published with no other design than that men might know what was the faith held by those whom I saw basely and wickedly defamed. So when you hold the Institutes of John Calvin in your hand, remember that theology, for John Calvin, was forged in the furnace of burning flesh, and that Calvin could not sit idly by without some effort to vindicate the faithful and the God for whom they suffered. I think we would, perhaps, do our theology better today if more were at stake in what we said. In 1536, France gave a temporary amnesty to those who had fled. Calvin returned, put his things in order and left, never to return, taking his brother Antoine and sister Marie with him. He intended to go to Strasbourg and continue his life of peaceful literary production. But he wrote later to a friend, "I have learned from experience that we cannot see very far before us. When I promised myself an easy, tranquil life, what I least expected was at hand" (see note 20). A war between Charles V and Francis I resulted in troop movements that blocked the road to Strasbourg, and Calvin had to detour through Geneva. In retrospect one has to marvel at the providence of God that he should so arrange armies to position his pastors where he would. The night that he stayed in Geneva, William Farel, the fiery leader of the Reformation in that city, found out he was there and sought him out. It was a meeting that changed the course of history, not just for Geneva, but for the world. Calvin tells us what happened in his preface to his commentary on Psalms:

Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquillity of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this

imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken (see note 21). The course of his life was irrevocably changed. Not just geographically, but vocationally. Never again would Calvin work in what he called the "tranquility of studies." From now on, every page of the forty-eight volumes of books and tracts and sermons and commentaries and letters that he wrote would be hammered out on the anvil of pastoral responsibility.

He took up his responsibilities in Geneva first as Professor of Sacred Scripture, and within four months was appointed Pastor of St. Peter's church – one of the three parishes in the 10,000-person town of Geneva. The City Council was not altogether happy with Farel or Calvin because they did not bow to all their wishes. So the two of them were banished in April of 1538.

Calvin breathed a sigh of relief and thought God was relieving him from the crush of pastoral duties so he could be about his studies. But when Martin Bucer found out about Calvin's availability, he did the same thing to get him to Strasbourg that Farel had done to get him to Geneva. Calvin wrote, "that most excellent servant of Christ, Martin Bucer, employing a similar kind of remonstrance and protestation as that to which Farel had recourse, before, drew me back to a new station. Alarmed by the example of Jonah which he set before me, I still continued in the work of teaching" (see note 22). That is, he agreed to go to Strasbourg and teach. In fact, for three years Calvin served as the pastor to about 500 French refugees in Strasbourg, as well as teaching New Testament. He also wrote his first commentary, on Romans, and put out the second enlarged edition of the Institutes.

Perhaps the most important providence during this three-year stay in Strasbourg was finding a wife. Several had tried to get Calvin a wife. He was 31 years old and numerous women had shown interest. Calvin had told his friend and matchmaker William Farel what he wanted in a wife: "The only beauty which allures me is this – that she be chaste, not too nice or fastidious, economical, patient, likely to take care of my health" (see note 23). Parker comments, "Romantic love . . . seems to have had no place in his character. Yet prosaic wooing led to a happy marriage" (see note 24). I think Parker was wrong about romantic love (see below on Idelette's death). But the prosaic wooing he referred to was toward an Anabaptist widow named Idelette Stordeur who had joined Calvin's congregation with her husband Jean. In the spring of 1540, Jean died of plague and that August 6, 1540, Calvin and Idelette were married. She brought a son and daughter with her into Calvin's home.

Meanwhile back in Geneva, chaos was making the city fathers think that maybe Calvin and Farel were not so bad after all. May 1, 1541, the City Council rescinded the ban on Calvin and even held him up as a man of God. This was an agonizing decision for Calvin, because he knew that life in Geneva would be full of controversy and danger. Earlier in October he said to Farel that though he preferred not to go, "yet because I know that I am not my own master, I offer my heart as a true sacrifice to the Lord" (see note 25). This became Calvin's motto and the picture on his emblem included a hand holding out a heart to God with the inscription, prompte et sincere ("promptly and sincerely").

Tuesday, September 13, 1541, he entered Geneva for the second time to serve the church there until his death on May 27, 1564. His first son, Jacques, was born July 28, 1542, and two weeks later died. He wrote to his friend Viret, "The Lord has certainly inflicted a severe and bitter wound in the death of our baby son. But He is Himself a Father and knows best what is good for his

children" (see note 26). This is the kind of submission to the sovereign hand of God Calvin rendered in all of his countless trials.

Idelette was never well again. They had two more children who also died at or soon after birth. Then on March 29, 1549, Idelette died of what was probably tuberculosis. Calvin wrote to Viret,

You know well how tender, or rather soft, my mind is. Had not a powerful self-control been given to me, I could not have borne up so long. And truly, mine is no common source of grief. I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, had it been so ordained, would have willingly shared not only my poverty but even my death. During her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry. From her I never experienced the slightest hindrance. She was never troublesome to me throughout the whole course of her illness, but was more anxious about her children than about herself. As I feared these private worries might upset her to no purpose, I took occasion three days before she died, to mention that I would not fail in discharging my duty towards her children" (see note 27).

Calvin never remarried. And it is just as well. The pace he kept would not have left much time for wife or children. His acquaintance, Colladon, who lived in Geneva during these years describes his life:

Calvin for his part did not spare himself at all, working far beyond what his power and regard for his health could stand. He preached commonly every day for one week in two [and twice on every Sunday, or a total of about 10 times every fortnight]. Every week he lectured three times in theology. . . . He was at the Consistoire on the appointed day and made all the remonstrances. . . . Every Friday at the Bible Study . . . what he added after the leader had made his declaration was almost a lecture. He never failed in visiting the sick, in private warning and counsel, and the rest of the numberless matters arising out of the ordinary exercise of his ministry. But besides these ordinary tasks, he had great care for believers in France, both in teaching them and exhorting and counseling them and consoling them by letters when they were being persecuted, and also in interceding for them. . . . Yet all that did not prevent him from going on working at his special study and composing many splendid and very useful books" (see note 28). His Invincible Constancy in the Ministry

He was, as Wolfgang Musculus called him, "a bow always strung." In one way he seemed to take heed to his health. Colladon says that "he was for many years with a single meal a day and never [took] anything between two meals . . ." His reasons were that the weakness of his stomach and his migraines could only be controlled, he had found by experiment, by continual abstinence (see note 29). But on the other hand, he was apparently careless of his health and worked night and day with scarcely a break. You can hear the drivenness in this letter to Falais in 1546: "Apart from the sermons and the lectures, there is a month gone by in which I have scarce done anything, in such wise I am almost ashamed to live thus useless" (see note 30). A mere 20 sermons and 12 lectures in that month! To get a clearer picture of his iron constancy, add to this work schedule the "continuous ill health" (see note 31) he endured. He wrote to his physicians in 1564 when he was 53 years old, and described his colic and spitting of blood and ague and gout and the "excruciating sufferings" of his hemorrhoids (see note 32). But worst of all seemed to be the kidney stones that had to pass unrelieved by any sedative.

[They] gave me exquisite pain. ... At length not without the most painful strainings I ejected a calculus which in some degree mitigated my sufferings, but such was its size that it lacerated the urinary canal and a copious discharge of blood followed. This hemorrhage could only be arrested by an injection of milk through a syringe (see note 33). On top of all this pressure and physical suffering were the threats to his own life. "He was not unfamiliar with the sound of mobs outside his house [in Geneva] threatening to throw him in the river and firing their muskets" (see note 34). On his deathbed Calvin said to the pastors gathered, "I have lived here amid continual bickerings. I have been from derision saluted of an evening before my door with forty or fifty shots of an arquebus [a large gun]" (see note 35). In a letter to Melanchthon in 1558, he wrote that war was imminent in the region and that enemy troops could reach Geneva within half an hour. "Whence you may conclude," he said, "that we have not only exile to fear, but that all the most cruel varieties of death are impending over us, for in the cause of religion they will set no bounds to their barbarity" (see note 36).

One of the most persistent thorns in Calvin's side were the Libertines in Geneva. But, here too, his perseverance was triumphant in a remarkable way. In every city in Europe men kept mistresses. When Calvin began his ministry in Geneva in 1536 at the age of 27, there was a law that said a man could keep only one mistress (see note 37). Even after Calvin had been preaching as pastor in St. Peter's church for over fifteen years, the immorality was a plague, even in the church. The Libertines boasted in their license. For them the "communion of saints" meant the common possession of goods, houses, bodies and wives. So they practiced adultery and indulged in sexual promiscuity in the name of Christian freedom. And at the same time they claimed the right to sit at the Lord's table (see note 38). The crisis of the communion came to a head in 1553. A well-to-do Libertine named Berthelier was forbidden by the Consistory of the church to eat the Lord's Supper, but appealed the decision to the Council of the City, which overturned the ruling. This created a crisis for Calvin who would not think of yielding to the state the rights of excommunication, nor of admitting a Libertine to the Lord's table. The issue, as always, was the glory of Christ. He wrote to Viret, "I . . . took an oath that I had resolved rather to meet death than profane so shamefully the Holy Supper of the Lord. . . . My ministry is abandoned if I suffer the authority of the Consistory to be trampled upon, and extend the Supper of Christ to open scoffers. . . . I should rather die a hundred times than subject Christ to such foul mockery" (see note 39). The Lord's day of testing arrived. The Libertines were present to eat the Lord's supper. It was a critical moment for the Reformed faith in Geneva. The sermon had been preached, the prayers had been offered, and Calvin descended from the pulpit to take his place beside the elements at the communion table. The bread and wine were duly consecrated by him, and he was now ready to distribute them to the communicants. Then on a sudden a rush was begun by the troublers in Israel in the direction of the communion table. . . . Calvin flung his arms around the sacramental vessels as if to protect them from sacrilege, while his voice rang through the building:

"These hands you may crush, these arms you may lop off, my life you may take, my blood is yours, you may shed it; but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profaned, and dishonor the table of my God." "After this," says, Beza, Calvin's first biographer, "the sacred ordinance was celebrated with a profound silence, and under solemn awe in all present, as if the Deity Himself had been visible among them" (see note 40). The point of mentioning all these woes in Geneva is to set in bold relief the invincible constancy of John Calvin in the ministry that God

had called him to. We asked earlier, What happened to John Calvin to make him a man so mastered by the majesty of God? And what kind of ministry did this produce in his life? We answered the first part of that question by saying, Calvin experienced the supernatural inward witness of the Spirit to the Majesty of God in Scripture. Henceforth, everything in his thinking and writing and ministry was aimed at illustrating the majesty and glory of God.

Now what is the answer to the second part of that question: what kind of ministry did it produce? Part of the answer has been given: it produced a ministry of incredible steadfastness – what I have called, using Calvin's own words, "invincible constancy" (see note 41). But that is only half the answer. It was a ministry of unrelenting exposition of the Word of God. The constancy had a focus, the exposition of the word of God.

Calvin had seen the majesty of God in the Scriptures. This persuaded him that the Scriptures were the very word of God. He said, "We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it" (see note 42). His own experience had taught him that "the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it" (see note 43). These truths led to an inevitable conclusion for Calvin. Since the Scriptures are the very voice of God and since they are therefore self-authenticating in revealing the majesty of God, and since the majesty and glory of God are the reason for all existence, it follows that Calvin's life would be marked by invincible constancy in the exposition of Scripture.

All was Exposition of the Scriptures

He wrote tracts, he wrote the great Institutes, he wrote commentaries (on all the New Testament books except Revelation, plus the Pentateuch, Psalms, Isaiah and Joshua), he gave Biblical lectures (many of which were published as virtual commentaries) and he preached ten sermons every two weeks. But all of it was exposition of Scripture. Dillenberger said, "[Calvin] assumed that his whole theological labor was the exposition of Scripture" (see note 44). In his last will and testament he said, "I have endeavored, both in my sermons and also in my writings and commentaries, to preach the word purely and chastely, and faithfully to interpret His sacred Scriptures" (see note 45).

Everything was exposition of Scripture. This was the ministry unleashed by seeing the majesty of God in Scripture. The Scripture were absolutely central because they were absolutely the Word of God and had as their self-authenticating theme the majesty and glory of God. But out of all these labors of exposition, preaching was supreme. Emile Doumergue, the foremost biographer of John Calvin with his six-volume life of Calvin, said, as he stood in the pulpit of John Calvin on the 400th anniversary of Calvin's birth, "That is the Calvin who seems to me to be the real and authentic Calvin, the one who explains all the others: Calvin the preacher of Geneva, molding by his words the spirit of the Reformed of the sixteenth century" (see note 46).

Calvin's preaching was of one kind from beginning to end: he preached steadily through book after book of the Bible. He never wavered from this approach to preaching for almost twenty-five years of ministry in St. Peter's church of Geneva – with the exception of a few high festivals and special occasions. "On Sunday he took always the New Testament, except for a few Psalms on Sunday afternoons. During the week . . . it was always the Old Testament" (see note 47). The records

show fewer than half a dozen exceptions for the sake of the Christian year. He almost entirely ignored Christmas and Easter in the selection of his text (see note 48). To give you some idea of the scope of the Calvin's pulpit, he began his series on the book of Acts on August 25, 1549, and ended it in March of 1554. After Acts he went on to the epistles to the Thessalonians (46 sermons), Corinthians (186 sermons), pastorals (86 sermons), Galatians (43 sermons), Ephesians (48 sermons) – till May 1558. Then there is a gap when he is ill. In the spring of 1559 he began the Harmony of the Gospels and was not finished when he died in May, 1564. During the week of that season he preached 159 sermons on Job, 200 on Deuteronomy, 353 on Isaiah, 123 on Genesis and so on (see note 49).

One of the clearest illustrations that this was a self-conscious choice on Calvin's part was the fact that on Easter Day, 1538, after preaching, he left the pulpit of St. Peter's, banished by the City Council. He returned in September, 1541 – over three years later – and picked up the exposition in the next verse (see note 50).

Why this remarkable commitment to the centrality of sequential expository preaching? I will mention three reasons. They are just as valid today as they were in the sixteenth century.

First, Calvin believed that the Word of God was a lamp that had been taken away from the churches. He said in his own personal testimony, "Thy word, which ought to have shone on all thy people like a lamp, was taken away, or at least suppressed as to us. . . . And now, O Lord, what remains to a wretch like me, but . . . earnestly to supplicate thee not to judge according to [my] deserts that fearful abandonment of thy word from which, in thy wondrous goodness thou hast at last delivered me" (see note 51). Calvin reckoned that the continuous exposition of books of the Bible was the best way to overcome the "fearful abandonment of [God's] Word."

Second, Parker says that Calvin had a horror of those who preached their own ideas in the pulpit. He said, "When we enter the pulpit, it is not so that we may bring our own dreams and fancies with us" (see note 52). He believed that by expounding Scripture as a whole, he would be forced to deal with all that God wanted to say, not just what he might want to say.

Third – and this brings us full circle to the beginning, where Calvin saw the majesty of God in his word – he believed with all his heart that the Word of God was indeed the Word of God, and that all of it was inspired and profitable and radiant with the light of the glory of God. In Sermon number 61 on Deuteronomy he challenged us:

Let the pastors boldly dare all things by the word of God. . . . Let them constrain all the power, glory, and excellence of the world to give place to and to obey the divine majesty of this word. Let them enjoin everyone by it, from the highest to the lowest. Let them edify the body of Christ. Let them devastate Satan's reign. Let them pasture the sheep, kill the wolves, instruct and exhort the rebellious. Let them bind and loose thunder and lightning, if necessary, but let them do all according to the word of God (see note 53). The key phrase here is "the divine majesty of this word." This was always the root issue for Calvin. How might he best show forth for all of Geneva and all of Europe and all of history the divine majesty? He answered with a life of continuous expository preaching. There would be no better way to manifest the full range of the glories of God and the majesty of his being than to spread out the full range of God's Word in the context of the pastoral ministry of shepherding care. My own conviction is that this is why preaching remains a

central event in the life of the church even 500 years after the printing press and the arrival of radio and TV and cassettes and CD's and computers. God's word is mainly about the majesty of God and the glory of God. That is the main issue in ministry. And, even though the glory and majesty of God in his word can be known in the still small voice of whispered counsel by the bedside of a dying saint, there is something in it that cries out for expository exultation. This is why preaching will never die. And radical, pervasive God-centeredness will always create a hunger for preaching in God's people. If God is "I am who I am" – the great, absolute, sovereign, mysterious, all-glorious God of majesty whom Calvin saw in Scripture, there will always be preaching, because the more this God is known and the more this God is central, the more we will feel that he must not just be analyzed and explained, he must be acclaimed and heralded and magnified with expository exultation.

Appendix Calvin's Barbaric World – The Case of Michael Servetus The Europe that John Calvin was born into on July 10, 1509, was a harsh and immoral and even barbaric place to live. There was no sewer system or piped water supply or central heating or refrigeration or antibiotics or penicillin or aspirin or surgery for appendicitis or novocaine for tooth extraction or electric lights (for studying at night) or water heaters or washers or dryers or stoves or ballpoint pens or typewriters or computers or motors of any kind. Life was harsh.

Calvin, like many others in his day, suffered from "almost continuous ill-health" (see note 54). He wrote to his physicians in 1564 when he was 53 years old, and described his colic and spitting of blood and ague and hemorrhoids. He said, "An ulcer in the hemorrhoid veins long caused me excruciating sufferings" (see note 55). But even worse were the kidney stones that he had to pass, unrelieved by any sedative.

[They] gave me exquisite pain. . . . At length not without the most painful strainings I ejected a calculus which in some degree mitigated my sufferings, but such was its size that it lacerated the urinary canal and a copious discharge of blood followed. This hemorrhage could only be arrested by an injection of milk through a syringe. My sedentary way of life to which I am condemned by the gout in my feet precludes all hopes of a cure. I am also prevented from taking exercise on horseback by my hemorrhoids (see note 56).

If life could be miserable physically, it could get even worse socially. "He was not unfamiliar with the sound of mobs outside his house [in Geneva] threatening to throw him in the river and firing their muskets" (see note 57). On his deathbed Calvin said to the pastors gathered on April 28, 1564, "I have lived here amid continual bickerings. I have been from derision saluted of an evening before my door with forty or fifty shots of an arquebus [a large gun]" (see note 58). Not only was life harsh, it was immoral. In every city in Europe, men kept mistresses. When Calvin began his ministry in Geneva in 1536 at the age of 27 there was a law that said a man could keep only one mistress (see note 59). Even after Calvin had been preaching as pastor in St. Peter's church for over fifteen years the immorality was a plague, even in the church, especially in the form of the so-called Libertines. They were a sixteenth century version of the same group at Corinth who boasted in their license. By the "communion of saints," they understood the common possession of goods, houses, bodies and wives. So they practiced adultery and indulged in sexual promiscuity in the name of Christian freedom. And at the same time they claimed the right to sit at the Lord's table (see note 60). Not only were the times harsh and immoral, they were often barbaric. This is

important to see, because Calvin did not escape the influence of his times. He described in a letter the cruelty common in Geneva. "A conspiracy of men and women has lately been discovered who, for the space of three years, had [intentionally] spread the plague through the city, by what mischievous device I know not." The upshot of this was that fifteen women were burned at the stake. "Some men," he said, "have even been punished more severely; some have committed suicide in prison, and while twenty-five are still kept prisoners, the conspirators do not cease . . . to smear the door-locks of the dwelling-houses with their poisonous ointment" (see note 61). This sort of punishment loomed on the horizon not just for criminals, but for all the reformers. Calvin was driven out of his homeland, France, under threat of death. For the next 20 years he agonized over the martyrs there and corresponded with many of them. In 1552, five young pastors, who had been trained in Switzerland, returned as missionaries to France and were arrested. Calvin writes to them through their trial. They were condemned to death by burning. "We pray," he wrote, "that [God] would glorify Himself more and more by your constancy, and that He may, by the comfort of His Spirit, sweeten and endear all that is bitter to the flesh, and so absorb your spirits in Himself, that in contemplating that heavenly crown, you may be ready without regret to leave all that belongs to this world" (see note 62). In a letter to Melanchthon on November 19, 1558, he wrote that war was imminent in the region and that enemy troops could reach Geneva within half-an-hour. "Whence you may conclude," he said, "that we have not only exile to fear, but that all the most cruel varieties of death are impending over us, for in the cause of religion they will set no bounds to their barbarity" (see note 63). So Calvin lived in a time of incredible cruelty and almost daily vulnerability to death by agonizing disease or agonizing torture – and that without any hope of pain-relievers. It was a harsh and immoral and barbaric time. This atmosphere gave rise to the greatest and the worst achievement of Calvin. The greatest was the writing of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, and the worst was his joining in the condemnation of the heretic, Michael Servetus, to burning at the stake in Geneva. The Institutes was first published in March, 1536, when Calvin was 26 years old. It went through five editions and enlargements until it reached its present form in the 1559 edition. If this is all Calvin had written – and not 48 volumes of other works – it would have established him as the foremost theologian of the Reformation. But it did not arise for merely academic reasons. Here's why he wrote it, soon after he had been driven from France and was safely hiding in Basel: But lo! whilst I lay hidden at Basel, and known only to few people, many faithful and holy persons were burnt alive in France . . . . It appeared to me, that unless I opposed them [the perpetrators] to the utmost of my ability, my silence could not be vindicated from the charge of cowardice and treachery. This was the consideration which induced me to publish my Institutes of the Christian Religion. . . . It was published with no other design than that men might know what was the faith held by those whom I saw basely and wickedly defamed (see note 64). So it was the very barbarity of the times against the faithful in France that stirred up Calvin to write the first edition of the Institutes. But it was this same barbarity from which he could not disentangle himself. Michael Servetus was a Spaniard, a medical doctor, a lawyer and a theologian. His doctrine of the Trinity was unorthodox – so much so as to shock both Catholic and Protestant in his day. In 1553 he published his views and was arrested by the Catholics in France. But, alas, he escaped to Geneva. He was arrested there and Calvin argued the case against him. He was sentenced to death. Calvin called for a swift execution, but he was burned at the stake on October 27, 1553 (see note 65). This has tarnished Calvin's name so severely that many cannot give his teaching a hearing. But it is not clear that most of us, given that milieu, would not have

gone along under the circumstances (see note 66). Melanchthon was the gentle, soft-spoken associate of Martin Luther whom Calvin had met and loved. He wrote to Calvin on the Servetus affair, "I am wholly of your opinion and declare also that your magistrates acted quite justly in condemning the blasphemer to death" (see note 67). Calvin never held civil office in Geneva (see note 68) but exerted all his influence as a pastor. Yet, in this execution, his hands are as stained with Servetus' blood as David's were with Uriah's. Which makes the confessions of Calvin near the end of his life all the more important. On April 25, 1564, a month before his death, he called the magistrates of the city to his room and spoke these words, With my whole soul I embrace the mercy which [God] has exercised towards me through Jesus Christ, atoning for my sins with the merits of his death and passion, that in this way he might satisfy for all my crimes and faults, and blot them from his remembrance. . . . I confess I have failed innumerable times to execute my office properly, and had not He, of His boundless goodness, assisted me, all that zeal had been fleeting and vain. . . . For all these reasons, I testify and declare that I trust to no other security for my salvation than this, and this only, viz., that as God is the Father of mercy, he will show himself such a Father to me, who acknowledge myself to be a miserable sinner (see note 69).

T. H. L. Parker said, "he should never have fought the battle of faith with the world's weapons" (see note 70). Whether Calvin came to that conclusion before he died, we don't know. But what we know is that Calvin knew himself a "miserable sinner" whose only hope in view of "all [his] crimes" was the mercy of God and the blood of Jesus. So the times were harsh and immoral and barbaric, and had a contaminating effect on everyone, just as we are all contaminated today by the evils of our time. Their blind spots and evils may be different from ours. And it may be that the very things they saw clearly are the things we are blind to. It would be foolhardy to say that we would have never done what they did under their circumstances, and thus draw the conclusion that they have nothing to teach us. In fact, what we probably need to say is that some of our evils are such that we are blind to them, just as they were blind to many of theirs, and the virtues they manifested in those times are the very ones that we probably need in ours. There was in the life and ministry of John Calvin a grand God-centeredness, Bible-allegiance and iron constancy. Under the banner of God's mercy to miserable sinners we would do well to listen and learn.

Notes:

1. David Wells. No Place for Truth, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Pub. Co., 1993), p. 300.

2. Quoted in Tim Stafford, "God's Missionary to Us," Christianity Today, Dec. 9, 1996. Vol. 40, No. 4, p. 29.

3. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letters, (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1909), p. 68.

4. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His Writings, (Scholars Press, 1975), p. 89 (emphasis added).

5. Benjamin Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), p. 24.

6. Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 241-242 (emphasis added).

7. Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," p. 248.

8. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His Writings, p. 95.

9. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 109.

10. Institutes of the Christian Religion, I, vii, 1. "A most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church. As if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended upon the decision of men!"

11. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 55.

12. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His Writings, p. 110.

13. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, p. 42.

14. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, pp. 114-115.

15. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, p. 26.

16. J. I. Packer, "Calvin the Theologian," in John Calvin: A Collection of Essays, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 166. "Rejecting both the Roman contention that the Scripture is to be received as authoritative on the church's authority, and with it the idea that Scripture could be proved divinely authoritative by rational argument alone, Calvin affirms Scripture to be self-authenticating through the inner witness of the Holy spirit. What is this 'inner witness'? Not a special quality of experience, nor a new, private revelation, nor an existential 'decision', but a work of enlightenment."

17. J. I. Packer, "Calvin the Theologian," p. 166.

18. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, p. 86.

19. Theodore Beza, The Life of John Calvin, (Milwaukee, Oregon: Back Home Industries, 1996, from 1844 Edinburgh edition of the Calvin Translation Society), p. 21.

20. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 24.

21. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, p. 28.

22. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, p. 29.

23. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 70.

24. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 69.

25. W. de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide, translated by Lyle D. Bierma, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 38.

26. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 71.

27. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 71.

28. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin's Preaching, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 62-63.

29. T. H. L. Parker, John Calvin, A Biography, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 104.

30. T. H. L. Parker, John Calvin, A Biography, pp. 103-104.

31. John Calvin, Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973, orig. English 1577, orig. French, 1562), with introduction by the publishers, viii.

32. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, (Scholars Press, 1975), p. 78.

33. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 78.

34. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 29.

35. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 42.

36. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 71.

37. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 29.

38. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letters, (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1909), p. 75.

39. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letters, p. 77.

40. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letters, pp. 78-79.

41. In a sermon on Job 33:1-7, Calvin calls preachers to constancy: "When men so forget themselves that they cannot subject themselves to Him Who has created and fashioned them, it behooves us to have an invincible constancy, and to reckon that we shall have enmity and displeasure when we do our duty; yet nevertheless let us go through it without bending." John Calvin, Sermons from Job by John Calvin, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 245.

42. Quoted in J. I. Packer, "Calvin the Theologian," in John Calvin: A Collection of Essays, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 162.

43. Institutes, I. vii, 4.

44. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 14.

45. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 35f.

46. Quoted by Harold Dekker, "Introduction," Sermons from Job by John Calvin, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. xii.

47. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 82.

48. John Calvin, The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons, trans. By Leroy Nixon, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), p. 8.

49. For these statistics see T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 83, and W. de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide, pp. 111-112.

50. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, p. 60.

51. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 115.

52. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 83.

53. John Calvin, Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. xii (emphasis added).

54. John Calvin, Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973, orig. English 1577, orig. French, 1562), with introduction by the publishers, viii.

55. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, Selections from His writings, (Scholars Press, 1975), p. 78.

56. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 78.

57. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 29.

58. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 42.

59. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 29.

60. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letters, (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1909), p. 75.

61. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letters, p. 63.

62. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 120.

63. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 71.

64. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 27.

65. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 102.

66. T. H. L. Parker describes some of those circumstances in Portrait of Calvin, p. 102.

67. Henry F. Henderson, Calvin in His Letter, p. 196.

68. Benjamin Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), p. 16.

69. John Dillenberger, John Calvin, p. 35 (emphasis added).

70. T. H. L. Parker, Portrait of Calvin, p. 103. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 66

05.10. Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy

Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy The title I have given this message about my father is “Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy.” That title is meant to carry several apparent incongruities or paradoxes or ironies. I expect you to feel tension between the word fundamentalist and the phrase “full of grace,” and between the word fundamentalist and the phrase “full of joy.” But the lead word is evangelist. Underneath being a child of God, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and justified by faith, and possessing all the riches of the glory of God in Christ—underneath that most basic identity, my father’s chief identity was “evangelist.” Independent, fundamentalist, Baptist evangelist—full of grace and joy. The Paradoxical Christian Identity

It seems to me that any serious analysis or exploration of a human being’s life will always deal in paradoxes. It will see tensions. Again and again, the serious effort to understand another person will meet with ironic realities. Here is what I mean by irony: It’s the “incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs." The dictionary gives this example: “Hyde noted the irony of Ireland’s copying the nation she most hated.” In other words, it’s a great irony to imitate the people you like the least.

It seems to me that there are very deep and basic reasons why every serious effort to understand another person—especially a Christian—forces us to deal in irony or paradox. One of the most basic reasons is that Christians are both fallen and redeemed. We are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9), and we not yet saved (Romans 13:11). We are adopted (Romans 8:15), yet we wait for adoption (Romans 8:23). We are pure in Christ, but not yet pure: “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened” (1 Corinthians 5:7). What an irony that unleavened bread should be told to become unleavened. Our citizenship is in heaven (Php 3:20); we are sojourners and exiles here (1 Peter 2:11). But the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it (1 Corinthians 10:26); and “all things are yours, whether . . . the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours” (1 Corinthians 3:20-21). We were bought with a price and are slaves of no man (1 Corinthians 7:23). Yet, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (1 Peter 2:13). Our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Yet Jesus prays that we not be taken out of the world (John 17:15). Indeed, “some of you they will put to death . . . but not a hair of your head will perish” (Luke 21:16; Luke 21:18). In fact, you have already died (Romans 6:8). So consider yourselves dead (Romans 8:11). How ironic that dead should be told to consider themselves dead. In other words, irony and paradox and incongruities are found in every Christian life because our very identity as Christians is paradoxical. That’s what it means to be a Christian. If you’re not a paradox, you’re not saved. In fact, I would go even farther and say, if you’re not a paradox, you’re not a human. What could be more basic to fallen humanity—and what could be more ironic—than that those who are created by God in his own image should use that God-like personhood to deny their Maker? Like a digging ant denying the earth; or a flying bird denying the wind; or swimming fish denying the sea.

Bill Piper: Human, Christian So there are these two great reasons why, as I have pondered my father's life, I have found him to be a paradoxical person: He is a Christian, and he is a human. Does it not seem like a strange incongruity—perhaps not a real one—that a blood-earnest, soul-winner, who hammered away at the temptations of the world and the dangers of the flesh should in his sixties celebrate the body of his wife with words like these: Her hair is like an auburn sea, Wind-whipped, waved, mysterious. Her forehead, like a wall of pearl Stands majestic, proud, serene. Her wide-set eyes are like clear, sparkling, hazel-green pools, calm, compassionate, penetrating. Her finely chiseled nose stands firmly between cheeks that are fair, like pillows of down. Her mouth is soft, pleasant and ruby rich. Her skin is like the feathers of a dove. Her breasts are like rose-tipped apples of ivory, And her belly is like a ocean wave, smooth and restful. Her legs are like pillars of granite, strong and firm. And her feet like those of a deer, swift and beautiful. Her breath is like sweet nectar, Her kisses like perfumed flowers, And her love like paradise.

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised that Bob Jones University should produce soul-winners that write like Song of Songs. Maybe the incongruity is just biblical faithfulness. But almost everywhere I turned in my father's life, there were these seeming paradoxes. He was human, and he was Christian.

Corporate Paradoxes And he lived with other humans and other Christians, who together created corporate paradoxes. Does it not seem like a strange incongruity—perhaps not a real one—that the most fundamentalistic, separatistic, worldliness-renouncing school in America, Bob Jones University, where my father graduated in 1942, should have as part of the commencement celebration in those days a performance of "As You Like It" (1939) and "Romeo and Juliet" (1940) both written by William Shakespeare, who in his own day ridiculed the Puritans, and whose Globe Theater was demolished by the Puritans in 1644? Isn't it a strange irony how three centuries can turn worldliness into "a delightful comedy"—as the BJU program said in 1939? So whether personal or corporate, my father's life appears to be permeated with paradoxes. And under the title "Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy," I hope to capture some of them in a way that gives you hope in the grace of God through the gospel of Christ. An Old-Fashioned, No-Nonsense Rearing

William Solomon Hottle Piper—named after a Bible expositor that his father admired—was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, January 8, 1919. He was the third and youngest son of Elmer and Emma Piper. His father had been a machinist (I couldn't forget that he was missing half of one finger), but after his conversion, he became a self-taught Bible student and then the pastor of West Wyomissing Nonsectarian Church. My father told me that he wouldn't have been surprised if his father could quote virtually the entire New Testament from memory. My guess is that this was an overstatement, but it signals the massive priority of the Bible and Bible Study that passed from my grandfather to my father to me. The upbringing of the three boys, Harold, Elmer, and Bill, was old-fashioned, no-nonsense, and strict. He gives us a glimpse into the discipline of his father in one of his sermons.

Behavioristic psychologists teach that temper tantrums and defiant attitudes are normal and healthy. To curb them is dangerous. If you discipline the child you will develop within him inhibitions and warp his personality.

I'm glad I had a father who believed otherwise. I got "warped" a good many times, but it wasn't my personality! . . . O, yes, we had plenty of counseling sessions but generally he did the talking and when he finished I said, "Yes, sir."

Old fashioned? Indeed it was! Scriptural? Absolutely! Right to the letter.

I was reared in a family of three boys. To this day I can hear some of the neighbors and church members say, "Brother Piper, you are just too hard on those boys." Nevertheless, all three are following Christ and two of them are Baptist preachers. There was no "doing as you please" in our home. My father believed he was responsible for the behavior of his children and as long as we were under his roof we were expected to obey.1 The strictness of his father had some surprising side effects that were profound. He told me about one of them. It turns out that both Bill and Elmer had disobeyed their father. Elmer was the older, so his father said that he was the more responsible and that he would get the whipping for both boys. My father told me with tears in his eyes a few years ago that he could hear the belt on the backside. Though he was just a boy, he said it was one of the most vivid pictures in his life of the substitionary atonement of Christ in our place. In a sermon about the salvation of children, he tells us about his own conversion to make the point that young children can be saved. That children can be saved I know from my own experience. I have a brother who was saved at the age of seven and another who gave his heart to Christ when he was eight. I received Christ as my Savior when I was a boy of six. Certainly there were many things I did not know, nor need to know. I knew enough to be saved. I knew I was sinful and needed a Savior. I knew that Christ was that Savior I needed. I knew that if I would believe on Him and confess Him as my Savior He would save me. That is all I needed to know and that all any child needs to know to be saved. I trusted Christ and he saved me.2 The Call at Age Fifteen

Besides his conversion at the age of six, probably the most decisive event in his teenage life (and I mean even more decisive than his marriage to my mother at age nineteen) was what happened when he was fifteen.

He told me this story face to face several times over the years, and he always came to tears as he said it. He saw it as a moment of supernatural confirmation on his divine calling that never left him and that stamped his entire life. I will let him tell the story from his book The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth.

I can vividly recall the thrills that accompanied the delivery of my first Gospel sermon. I was fifteen years of age and had just surrendered my life fully to the will and service of Christ. The young people of our community had joined together to promote a city-wide revival and had invited a well known evangelist. For the Saturday night service, the evangelist decided to turn the entire service over to the young people. For some reason I was asked to bring the message and to give the invitation.

I had been reared in a Baptist parsonage. All my life I had heard great preaching but I had never tried to do it myself. This was to be my first attempt. I didn't know how but I tried. My heart was filled with zeal and I wanted to do my best for the Lord. The big night came. For my message I had selected some thoughts on about a half dozen Gospel tracts. At the time of the sermon I spread these tracts all over the pulpit and I simply preached from one tract to the next.

I don’t recall a thing I said. It probably was a poor sermon. But the thing that mattered was that when I gave the invitation to receive Christ [this is where the tears would inevitably come], ten precious souls left their seats, came weeping to an improvised altar and surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ. The thrill that came to me then is still with me many years later. I knew that Jesus had walked on the water but I felt as I left the building that night that I was walking on air! Believe me, I was on cloud nine! And, better still, I’ve never come down. What thrilled me most was the sudden realization that I had immeasurable power at my disposal. That the God of heaven, the God of the Bible, was willing to speak through me in such a way as to touch other lives and transform them and change their destinies.

I never dreamed such a thrill was possible for me. I had not known such power was at my disposal. I said then, “God, let me know this power the rest of my life. Let me be so yielded to Thee that I’ll never cease to know the thrill and joy of winning others to Christ.” And I can say with honesty, I am just as excited right now [this book was published in 1980, forty-six years later] about the soul-winning power of God as I was at the age of fifteen.

Young people, believe me, the greatest thrill you’ll ever have this side of heaven is the thrill of leading another precious soul to Christ.3 From that day on, my father’s face was set like flint to be a full-time evangelist.

Beside his name in his senior yearbook are the words: “He wants to be an evangelistic preacher.” He never turned back.

Bill and El: The Gospel Songsters In the last two years that he and his brother Elmer were in high school together they had their own radio program on WRW in Reading, Pennsylvania, called “Bill and El, the Gospel Songsters.” They sang and preached. Their theme song was a song called “Precious Hiding Place.” Until you hear it, you can hardly imagine how different the teenage world was seventy-five years ago. Listen to these brothers sing the final verse of their theme song, only this time in their seventies, not their teens, and try to imagine two seventeen- and eighteen-year olds singing this song on a secular radio station.

Perhaps my wife is right in her analysis: When she saw this, she pointed out that in 1936 adolescence as a distinct cultural phenomenon hadn’t yet been created. There was no such thing as a vast teen culture. There was no teenage music. Frank Sinatra was born four years before my father. He is usually considered the first teen idol. The beginnings of a distinct youth culture was just about to begin. So when my father was in high school the overlap between the music that mom and dad liked and what teens liked was much greater then than now. In other words, my father grew up much more quickly than I did. He skipped a good bit of the usually-wasted years called adolescence, or what later was called the “teenage” years—the term teenager did not occur in the English language until 1941. He graduated from high school with his sweetheart Ruth Eulalia Mohn in 1936.

You can see from the note in her senior yearbook that her heart was bound together already in the calling of his life. Hers reads: “She intends to take up evangelistic work.”

Marriage to Ruth, College at Bob Jones

After graduation, my father traveled with the Students' League of Nations and studied at John A. Davis Memorial Bible School in Binghamton, New York. Then on May 26, 1938, he and his brother Elmer in the same wedding ceremony married Ruth and Naomi. Elmer married Naomi Werner. And Bill married Ruth Mohn. Bill and Ruth were both nineteen.

They moved to Cleveland, Tennessee, to attend Bob Jones College. The school had moved to Cleveland in 1933 from near Panama City, Florida, where it was founded in 1927. Ruth and Bill both enrolled. My father was an average student and a very gifted speaker and actor. He had leading roles in several Shakespearean plays. He developed a deep admiration for Dr. Bob Senior, the founder of the school, and quoted him often the rest of his life. My father loved the education he got at Bob Jones. He never belittled the school as an educational institution. When the time would come for cutting off ties with the school, it was a deeply painful thing.

He graduated in 1942 and entered full-time evangelism. My sister Beverly was born in 1943, and I was born in 1946. That same year Bob Jones moved to Greenville, South Carolina, and our family moved with them. Greenville became the base of Daddy's evangelistic ministry for the rest of his life. This is where I grew up. The Rhythm of Leaving and Coming Home

Life, in my memory, was a rhythm of Daddy's leaving for one week or two weeks or as long as four weeks, almost always on Saturday, and then coming home on Monday. When I dedicated the book Desiring God to him, I wrote

I can recall Mother laughing so hard at the dinner table that the tears ran down her face. She was a very happy woman. But especially when you came home on Monday. You had been gone two weeks. Or sometimes three or four. She would glow on Monday mornings when you were coming home. At the dinner table that night (these were the happiest of times in my memory) we would hear about the victories of the gospel. Surely it is more exciting to be the son of an evangelist than to sit with knights and warriors. As I grew older I saw more of the wounds. But you spared me most of that until I was mature enough to "count it all joy." Holy and happy were those Monday meals. O, how good it was to have you home!4

He had been elected to the board of trustees of Bob Jones before coming to Greenville in 1946, the youngest board member ever elected at that time. In 1952, the University award him the Doctor of Divinity degree in recognition of the impact of his ministry in the churches of the United States.

Over the next decades, he preached in all fifty states, half a dozen other countries, held over 1,250 evangelistic crusades, recorded over 30,000 professions of faith, and published seven books of sermons. The Challenges of Full-Time Evangelism The personal toll this took on him, and what it cost my mother, was extraordinary. What keeps you going to hard new challenges week after week when it means you must leave the ones you love again and again? Here's what he wrote in his book Stones Out of the Rubbish. As an evangelist, my work necessarily keeps me away from my sweet wife and children much of the time. Some have asked me, "How can you endure being away from them? Why don't you get a church and settle down?" There is but one answer. When I was a boy of fifteen, I sold out to the will of God. His will since that day has been the supreme passion of my life. There have been failures, mistakes and sins since then, but His blessed will has remained more important to me than family, home or friends. God called me to be an evangelist. I

said, “Lord, this will mean homesickness, separation from loved ones, loneliness and sacrifice, but NEVERTHELESS, if that is your will, ‘I will let down the net.’” The blessings He has given have often been more than I could contain. The fruit I have seen has repaid me a million times over for whatever sacrifices I may have made.”5

Part of the burden he carried was the sordid stereotype of itinerant southern evangelists. It grieved him, but it didn’t stop him.

There is a reason why the words “evangelism” and “evangelism” meet with a feeling of nausea and disgust in the minds of thousands of thinking people today. . . . All emotionalism worked up in the energy of the flesh, deliberately aroused for outward results, or toyfully played upon by the impression-seeking preacher can leave nothing but bitterness in the bottom of the cup.

Still others of my colleagues have been guilty of employing cheap vaudeville showmanship tactics which have done permanent injury to the cause of true revivals. Spectacular, misleading, crowd-pulling sermon titles, sensational predictions, erroneous prophetic interpretations, high pressure money raising methods, ostentatious dress and dramatic presentations are but a few of the current evils in evangelism. . . . We serve a spectacular God. The universe He made is full of the spectacular. Christ is a spectacular Saviour. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a spectacular Gospel. The trouble is that some poor sinners saved by grace endeavor to make themselves spectacular, thus injuring the Gospel they preach and the cause they represent. The glorious, beautiful, powerful Gospel of Christ does not need to be garnished with vain predictions or colored with sordid emotionalism.6 Not Your Typical Evangelist My father was not your typical evangelist. He was a doctrinally driven, Bible-saturated evangelist. When he preached to save sinners, he explained doctrine. One outline from his sermon notes goes like this—and it is typical of the sort of preaching he did:

Christ is our redemption

Christ is our propitiation

Christ is our righteousness

Christ is sanctification

Christ is our Example

Christ is our Expectation

Christ is our Completeness

He believed that the best way to call for repentance and faith was to unpack the glories of Christ in the gospel, which meant unpacking doctrine. He had about 200 sermons in his arsenal. He told me that about twenty of them were blessed above all others, and he would return to these again and again. What marked out his evangelistic preaching as unusual was not the stories, but basic doctrines of man’s helpless condition in sin, God’s holiness and wrath and the immanent danger of damnation, the glorious fullness of Christ’s saving work on the cross, and the free offer of forgiveness and righteousness to any who believed.

He was the most Bible-saturated preacher I have ever heard. When he took up the reality of the new birth, for example, the message was full of the Bible. Here is what I remember most of all from my father's preaching—the relentless onrush of the Bible spilling over from his mind and heart. My father loved the Bible. He believed the Bible. He built his life on the Bible, and he preached the gospel at the center of the Bible with unashamed authority and almost no frills. And God used him mightily in the salvation of sinners.

Separation and Exile In 1957, something happened that broke his heart and changed the scope of his relationships. I don't know all the details. I just know that in June of 1957, Daddy called Bob Jones from a meeting in Wisconsin and resigned from the board of the school. The ways parted. I was eleven years old. Before that I had watched soccer games at BJU and seen films that they made. The campus was just across the highway from our home. But after 1957, there was no more connection. We were not welcome. The larger issue above the particular details was the issue of separation. Christian fundamentalism today is defined largely by the doctrine of separation. The issue of whether to separate from Billy Graham and renounce his work became pivotal in 1957. His New York crusade began on May 15 and ran nightly for four months. The supporters of the crusade were not all evangelical. And the lines of separation became blurred. My father would not renounce Billy. And in the end, there was a division between my father and Bob Jones. This was one of the great ironies of his life. The movement that nurtured him and shaped him, the school that he loved and served, would no longer support him. Only near the end of his life was there a reconciliation as Bob Jones III reached out to my father. It was a sweet ending to a long exile.

Death of Ruth, Marriage to LaVonne In 1974, my mother was killed in a bus accident in Israel. My father was seriously injured but survived. They had been married thirty-six years. A year later, God gave my lonely father a second wife, LaVonne Nalley. I performed the wedding ceremony in December of 1975. The effect of my mother's death and my father's second marriage was profound on our relationship. It took my father one more step away from closeness to me. LaVonne was a southern lady with deep roots in family and place. In the twenty-eight years of their marriage, LaVonne never came to Minneapolis. My father came twice. Since we only saw each other once a year or so, the relationship with the new relatives was cordial but not deep. It never felt very much like family. So it felt like my father had been drawn into an intimacy that was no longer focused on the family he fathered but the new relationship he had with LaVonne. My relationship with my father had always been one of admiration and respect and tremendous enjoyment when we played games together or fished. But we never talked much about personal things. And with the death of my mother, and the movement of my father's heart into a new world of relationships, the distance that I felt grew even greater. In the Shadow of Evangelistic Effectiveness

It never changed my basic feelings for him. I felt a tremendous affection and admiration for him. In fact, in my adult years, I felt a huge compassion or pity for my father, first because of the sacrifices he made to do the work of evangelism, and then because of the death of my mother, and then because of his increasing dementia. My emotional default reaction to my father was never resentment that he wasn't home enough. My reaction was: How can I show him that I love him and help him to know how much I esteem his work and the faithfulness he has shown?

I always felt supported, loved, and admired by my father. He spoke well of me. He thought I was crazy for leaving my professorship at Bethel to be a pastor, since he thought I was exactly where I belonged. But when the decision was made in 1980, he supported me and loved hearing news from the church. Most of all he loved hearing stories of conversions.

I have always lived in the shadow of my father's evangelistic effectiveness. I think it's been good for me, because my father's life is like a living parable of the priority that God puts on the salvation of one sinner who repents. "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). My father's life is a constant reminder of that truth. I am thankful for it.

Homecoming

During the years after my mother's death and my father's increasing inability to travel in evangelism, the Lord opened an amazing door with the creation of international correspondence courses that my father wrote. Rod of God Ministries grew up with tens of thousands of people in Africa and Asia taking these courses. That ministry continues today under the leadership that my father put in place. It was a thrilling gift to him as he aged because he was able be involved in writing and teaching into his mid eighties.

Only in the last couple years was his memory so impaired that he couldn't serve in that way. His second wife LaVonne died August 4, 2003. After a brief stay in independent living in Anderson, South Carolina, near his church, Oakwood Baptist, that cared for him so well, we moved him to Shepherd's Care in Greenville, owned and operated by Bob Jones University. It was, in my mind and his, a kind of homecoming—to the school he loved and to the fundamentalism he never really left—and paradoxically never really belonged to. I look back on God's mercy in my father's final days with tremendous gratitude. The Lord took him on March 6, 2007.

Self-Designated Fundamentalist

After his deepest identity as gospel-glorying child of God, my father's identity was most essentially evangelist. This defined his life from age 15 to 88. In the last days, his unreality that his mind created at Shepherd's Care was not casual times with his family but evangelistic crusades. "Across the lawn there is where the meeting will be tonight." From beginning to end, he was defined by evangelism. But he was also a fundamentalist. By his own self-designation. It was not a term of reproach but of honor. In the first decade of the twentieth century, liberalism was gaining a foothold in most denominations. The common word for the liberals then was modernists—those who believed that modern science had made some essentials of the Christian faith untenable. My father defined modernism like this: By "modernists", we mean ministers who deny the truth concerning Jesus Christ: His miraculous conception, His absolute deity, His vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind, His bodily resurrection, and His personal visible return to this earth. Modernists also deny the need of regeneration by the Holy Spirit and the fact of a literal hell.7 In other words, in the early days of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the battle was not for marginal doctrines or behaviors but essential doctrine—"fundamentals." When J. Gresham Machen wrote his response to liberalism in 1923, he did not title it Fundamentalism and Liberalism but Christianity and Liberalism because he believed liberalism was not Christianity at all.8

Two years before my father was born, the four-volume set of books called The Fundamentals was published (1917). In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick fired his shot across the bow of the ship of the church called “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” My father grew up in this super-charged atmosphere of modernism threatening the very life of the churches in America. In his early sermons in the forties and fifties, he returned to this battle again and again:

Christianity is in the throes of a gigantic conflict with the enemies of the Lord. The followers of Satan have shown their colors and the Faith is being blatantly denied and rejected. Corruption and disintegration have begun in a dozen denominations where the enemy had spread his deadly poison.9 The breach between modernism and fundamentalism keeps getting wider. . . .

“The faith once for all delivered unto the saints” has been shunned in favor of bloodless faith which glorifies man, denies his depravity, rejects the absolute authority of the Bible and the Deity of Jesus Christ.10 In fact, by the time my father was ten-years old, most people recognized that the battle to save the mainline denominations from liberalism was being lost. Then the question became how to deal with this, and the debates about degrees of separation altered the meaning of the term fundamentalism in the 1930s. It ceased to mean “orthodox Christianity” over against those who denied essentials, and came to refer one group of orthodox Christians, namely, the ones who believed that the biblical way forward was strict separation from denominations, groups, and relationships that were not fully orthodox and were not separated from those who were not fully orthodox.

Bob Jones University was and is one of the strongest representations of this development of fundamentalism. And my father embraced it and was defined by it—up to a point. For him, the heart of fundamentalism was the true doctrine. His passion was evangelism—saving people from perishing in hell by leading them to the divine Savior and his substitutionary work on the cross. In other words, if the fundamentals were not true, the gospel is a false hope, and evangelism is misleading. Therefore, the note struck more clearly than all notes was the doctrinal importance of fundamentalism:

Though fundamentalists do not agree upon every point of doctrine, they are definitely agreed upon the essential elements of the Christian faith: the total depravity of man, the absolute deity of Christ, the vicarious, substitutionary atonement for sin through the blood of Christ, His bodily resurrection, the need of the new birth and the blessed return of Christ to the earth.11

Another dimension of fundamentalism that he embraced was authoritative preaching that was willing to name evil and defend truth.

Too many present-day pulpiteers are soft pedaling the Gospel. Even many who are robed in the vestments of fundamentalism are void of a semblance of holy boldness in their preaching. They handle sin with kid gloves, avoid great issues and shrink from declaring cardinal doctrines. Pussyfooters in the pulpit! What a tragedy! They are a blight to the Church and a blockade to the Holy spirit’s blessing.

God wants trumpets in the pulpit, not violins, trumpets that sound the reveille and warn of the judgment to come. . . . The tabooing of negative preaching has taken the fire and brimstone out of the pulpit, dried the tears of repentance and kept the altars empty. I would not for a moment minimize the effectiveness of the positive proclamation of the glorious transforming gospel of

Jesus Christ. . . . It is my contention, however, that the sledgehammer preachers of yesterday were not entirely wrong, and that a balanced, middle-of-the road position must be taken.12

Then there was the fundamentalist vision of separation not just from false doctrine but from all forms of worldliness that weaken the boldness and spiritual power of a Christian.

Every Christian who indulges in the sinful pleasures of this world is a compromiser and a stumbling-block. No dancing, theater-going, card-playing, gambling Christian can hope to be a soul winner or have a testimony for God. If men see this world in you, you will never point them to the next.13

I grew up in a home where it was assumed we would not smoke, or drink, or gamble, or play cards, or dance, or go to movies. We were fundamentalists. So why didn't I kick against this growing up? I have never thought ill of my parents for these standards. I have never resented it or belittled it. When I was in my early twenties, I was indignant in some of my classes at Fuller Seminary when certain young faculty members were cynical and sarcastic about fundamentalism. They sounded to me like adolescents who were angry at their parents and their backgrounds and couldn't seem to grow up. I never felt that way about my parents or about the fundamentalism of my past. Why?

Fundamentalist Freedom

I think I know why. My mother and my father were the happiest people I have ever known. This strikes many as an incongruity, a paradox. But this is the key to my father's influence on me and, I believe, one of the keys to the power of his ministry. The fundamentalist forcefulness in the pulpit, the fundamentalist vision of "the razorsharp edge of truth,"14 the fundamentalist standards that move from the Ten Commandments down to dancing and card-playing—all of this was enveloped in a world of joy and freedom.

Freedom? Fundamentalistic freedom? Yes. I'll illustrate. When I was in the seventh grade, our class, Mrs. Adams' homeroom, won the attendance award for the year. The award? The whole class would go a movie at the Carolina Theater on Main Street during school time. My heart pounded. I went home and asked my mother—Daddy wasn't home—what should I do? She said, "Do what you think is right." I weighed all the factors, and I went. The next year, in the eighth grade, a girl called me one night and asked if I would go with her to a dance. It was one of those Sadie Hawkins events where the girls invite the guys. She was a pretty girl. My heart pounded again: Uh . . . I don't dance, I said. She said, We don't have to dance, we can just sit and watch. Uh . . . just a minute. I went and asked my mother what I should do. (Daddy wasn't home.) She said, "Do what you think is right." Then she checked her calendar, and we were going to be out of town. Saved.

What was my mother, speaking for my father, doing? She was saying: We have standards, son, but they need to come from the inside. If they don't come from the inside, they are worthless. On these issues, you're old enough now to discover who you are deep inside. When my parents said, "Do what you think is right," they were not foolish relativists. They were wise fundamentalists.

"Truthing in Love"

Soon I was old enough to start talking about these issues with my father. Daddy, why is there a split between you and some other fundamentalists? One thing I remember above all about these conversations. He went to Ephesians 4:15 over and over and reminded me that in all our devotion to the truth we must “speak the truth in love.” He used to love to play on the Greek verb and translate it “truthing in love.” He felt as if fundamentalism was losing the battle mainly for spiritual and attitudinal reasons, not doctrinal ones.

Already in the 1940s, there had emerged in my father’s preaching and teaching and writing a warning about the dangers of fundamentalism. For the careless listener, this could sound like he was abandoning the ship of fundamentalism. Some would say he did. He would surely say he didn’t. I don’t think he did. Let me try to capture the spirit of this warning from his own words:

Some professing Christians, often those who boast of their fundamentalism, are given to a grievous censorious and critical attitude toward everything and everybody. As one man I knew has said, “Some people are born in the objective case, the contrary gender and the bilious mood.”. . . For one to profess to know Christ and have real religion and at the same time to manifest a sour, critical, negative attitude is disgusting and abhorrent even to the ungodly. Certainly anyone with such an unsavory nature could never hope to be a “savour of life unto life.”15 Critiquing Fundamentalism

Then there is this amazing passage that folds the critique of fundamentalism in with a much wider concern and shows the scope of my father’s burden. He is not picking on anyone here, he is groaning over the lost power of the church and longing for the day of great revival. When backslidden Christians confess their waywardness and return to God; when worldly Christians stop their smoking, drinking, dancing, card-playing and show-going and heed again the message of separation; when pharisaic negative religionists who boast loudly of what they do not do, forsake their contemptuous pride, covetousness and carnality and return again to their “first love”; when slothful, sleepy, negligent Christians are filled with the Spirit and feel again the thrill of their salvation; when stagnant fundamentalism is replaced by aggressive evangelism; . . . when anemic sermons are red again with the crimson blood of Jesus; when the average church ceases to be merely a center of social interest and becomes again a source of spiritual influence, does more praying and less playing, more fasting and less feasting, showers of revival fire and blessing will again fall on America.16

He said that there is a world of difference between being separated and being consecrated. If we don’t move beyond separation to consecration, our separation is worthless. This is what my parents were saying to me when mother said, Do what you think is right, Johnny. The issue in this family is not whether we keep separation rules, but whether we have consecrated hearts.

I have seen many Christians who are separated but far from consecrated. They boast pharisaically of what they do not do and fail to see that they are doing almost nothing for God. . . . Consecrated Christians are Christians who are so busy serving the Lord that they have neither time or taste for the things of the world. They have found their joy and complete satisfaction in Christ.17

Fundamentalism ceased to be a term my father could use for himself without profound qualification. And this didn’t change for forty years. Here are some of the strongest words I ever heard from his mouth about the dangers of fundamentalism, and these were delivered in

Greenville, South Carolina, at Washington Avenue Baptist Church, when he was in his seventies.

If Christianity, as he said, is not rules and dogmas and creeds and rituals and passionless purity and degrees of goodness, and if the devil himself is a fundamentalist (because he knows all the fundamentals to be true), then what is the heart of the matter? What is Christianity? What was it that undergirded and overshadowed everything else in our home and in my father's ministry?

Stunned by the Gospel The answer was gospel-rooted, Christ-savoring, God-glorifying joy. My father was stunned by the gospel. He exulted in the gospel. Everything in fundamentalism was secondary to the glory of Christ enjoyed in the gospel. The gospel meant salvation, and salvation meant, in the end, total satisfaction in Christ:

Other religions are spelled, "Do," but Christianity is spelled, "Done." If you would be saved, you must place your trust in the finished and perfect work of Christ on the cross. In Him all sin was punished and God's holiness was vindicated. God is satisfied with Christ as to the perfection of His life and righteousness, and as to the completeness of His work in the sinner's behalf. God's only requirement for salvation is that you, too, be satisfied with Christ and His work.18 Satisfied with Christ Where did I learn that delight in God is our highest duty? Before Jonathan Edwards and before C. S. Lewis and before Daniel Fuller, there was Bill Piper, unsystematically, unapologetically, and almost unwittingly saying: God's only requirement is that you be satisfied with Christ.

Long before John Piper read C. S. Lewis' The Weight of Glory and learned about the folly of making mud pies in the slums because one can't imagine a holiday at the sea—long before that—he was hearing his father talkabout the cow and the barbed-wire fence by the road.

I have often seen a cow stick her head through a barbed wire fence to chew the stubby grass bordering a highway, when behind her lay a whole pasture of grass. I have always been reminded of Christians who have not learned to completely trust Christ, reaching out to the world for sensual pleasure when rivers of pleasure were at their disposal in Christ.19

No, no one is denying that there are pleasures to be had in this world. . . . That is not the point. The point is that there are other pleasures to be had in this life. Pleasures so great in depth, significance, satisfaction and duration, that they far exceed the pleasures of sin. They are the pleasures to be found in the knowledge and service of Christ.

20 "Everyone Wants to Be Happy"

Long before John Piper ever read, "All men seek happiness"21 in Pascal's Penses, he was absorbing from his father these very truths. This from a sermon in the 1940s: "Everyone wants to be happy. Sinners seek it in pleasure, fame, wealth and unbelief, but they seek in vain. Christians have found the answer to happiness in Christ."22 And what are these pleasures that this fundamentalist is so ravished by? Like Lewis, my father answered: They are everywhere. The devil never made a rain drop or a snow flake. He never made a baby smile or a nightingale sing. He never placed a golden sun in a western sky or filled the night with stars. Why? Because these things were not his to give. God is the creator and the possessor of them all and he lovingly shares these things with us.23 Christ Himself, The Supreme Delight Is it any wonder my father was a poet? Poets are people who see the indescribable glory everywhere and will not be daunted in

their passion to make language serve its revelation. My father found reason to rejoice everywhere he looked. He had an invincible faith that all things serve God's wise purpose to reveal his glory. Even in his final years of dementia, he rejoiced. In the last month that he was able to keep a journal (April of 2004), he wrote, "I'll soon be 86 but I feel strong and my health is good. God has been exceedingly gracious and I am most unworthy of His matchless grace and patience. The Lord is more precious to me the older I get." In other words, not the pleasures that lie strewn everywhere in life, but the pleasures of Christ himself are the supreme delight. "Every believer has in Christ all the fullness the world longs for. Christianity, therefore, far from being dull and dreary or a harsh system of rules and regulations, is a gloriously free, real, victorious and happy life."24 And, he adds, it never ends: His grace is infinite. It is fathomless as the sea. In glory, throughout the ages to come, we who are saved will behold an endless display of these riches which we now have in Christ Jesus. [Then, always the evangelist, he says, and I say] I trust that you all are sharing this wealth. If not, you may. Simply place your faith in Christ and start reveling in the riches of God's grace.25 "Fully Satisfied with Him Alone"

One last thing, lest he fail to get all the credit that he should: He preached a very provocative message once called "Sanctifying God" from Isaiah 8:13 ("Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."). What was his answer to the question, How do we "sanctify" God—how do we esteem him and honor him and set him apart is the supremely valuable Treasure of our lives?

He gives his answer in the form of a very personal discovery: "I knew . . . that God was sufficient, abundantly able to supply my every need and the need of all who would trust Him. But to sanctify Him as such, I realized that day that I must live a contented life, a life fully satisfied with Him alone."26 Or to quote the echo of the father in the son: God is most sanctified in us, when we are most satisfied in him.

What an evangelist! What a fundamentalist! What a soul full of grace and joy!

Thank you, Daddy. Thank you. Under God, I owe you everything.

Endnotes

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3 The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth, pp. 22-23.

4 John Piper, Desiring God (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), pp. 13-14.

5 Bill Piper, Stones Out of the Rubbish, (Greenville, SC: Piper's Publications, 1947), pp. 63-64.

6 Stones Out of the Rubbish, pp. 27-28.

7 Bill Piper, The Tyranny of Tolerance (Greenville, SC: Piper's Publications, 1964), p. 28.

8 J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1923), pp. 49-50.

9 The Tyranny of Tolerance, p. 38.

10 Ibid., p. 19.

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Ibid., pp. 10, 11, 17.

13 Stones Out of the Rubbish, p. 62.

14 The Tyranny of Tolerance, p. 10.

15 Bill Piper, Dead Men Made Alive (Greenville, SC: Piper's Publications, 1949), pp. 28-29.

16 Stones Out of the Rubbish, p. 33.

17 Ibid., p. 62.

18 Dead Men Made Alive, p. 24.

19 A Good Time and How to Have It, p. 48.

20 The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth, p. 22.

21 Blaise Pascal, Penses (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 113, Thought # 425.

22 Dead Men Made Alive, p. 30.

23 The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth, p. 39.

24 A Good Time and How to Have It, p. 70.

25 Dead Men Made Alive, p. 62.

26 A Good Time and How to Have It, p. 17. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.11. George Mueller's Strategy for Showing God

George Mueller’s Strategy for Showing God

George Mueller was a native German (a Prussian). He was born in Kroppenstaedt on September 27, 1805 and lived almost the entire nineteenth century. He died March 10, 1898 at the age of 92. He saw the great awakening of 1859 which he said “led to the conversion of hundreds of thousands.”1 He did follow up work for D. L. Moody,2 preached for Charles Spurgeon,3 and inspired the missionary faith of Hudson Taylor.4

He spent most of his life in Bristol, England and pastored the same church there for over sixty-six years—a kind of independent, premillennial,5 Calvinistic6 Baptist7 church that celebrated the Lord’s supper weekly8 and admitted non-baptized people into membership.9 If this sounds unconventional, that would be accurate. He was a maverick not only in his church life but in almost all the areas of his life. But his eccentricities were almost all large-hearted and directed outward for the good of others. A. T. Pierson, who wrote the biography that Mueller’s son-in-law endorsed as authoritative,10 captured the focus of this big-hearted eccentricity when he said, George Mueller “devised large and liberal things for the Lord’s cause.”11 In 1834 (when he was 28) he founded The Scripture Knowledge Institute for Home and Abroad,12 because he was disillusioned with the post-millennialism, the liberalism, and the worldly strategies (like going into debt13) of existing mission organizations.14 Five branches of this Institute developed: 1) Schools for children and adults to teach Bible knowledge, 2) Bible distribution, 3) missionary support, 4) tract and book distribution, and 5) “to board, clothe and Scripturally educate destitute children who have lost both parents by death.”15 The accomplishments of all five branches were significant,16 but the one he was known for around the world in his own lifetime, and still today, was the orphan ministry. He built five large orphan houses and cared for 10,024 orphans in his life. When he started in 1834 there were accommodations for 3,600 orphans in all of England and twice that many children under eight were in prison.17 One of the great effects of Mueller’s ministry was to inspire others so that “fifty years after Mr. Mueller began his work, at least one hundred thousand orphans were cared for in England alone.”18

He did all this while he was preaching three times a week from 1830 to 1898, at least 10,000 times.19 And when he turned 70 he fulfilled a life-long dream of missionary work for the next 17 years until he was 87. He traveled to 42 countries,20 preaching on average of once a day,21 and addressing some three million people.22 He preached nine times here in Minneapolis in 1880 (nine years after the founding of Bethlehem Baptist Church). From the end of his travels in 1892 (when he was 87) until his death in March of 1898 he preached in his church and worked for the Scripture Knowledge Institute. At age 92, not long before he died, he wrote, “I have been able, every day and all the day to work, and that with ease, as seventy years since.”23 He led a prayer meeting at his church on the evening of Wednesday, March 9, 1898. The next day a cup of tea was taken to him at seven in the morning but no answer came to the knock on the door. He was found dead on the floor beside his bed. 24 The funeral was held the following Monday in Bristol,

where he had served for sixty-six years. “Tens of thousands of people reverently stood along the route of the simple procession; men left their workshops and offices, women left their elegant homes or humble kitchens, all seeking to pay a last token of respect.”25 A thousand children gathered for a service at the Orphan House No. 3. They had now “for a second time lost a ‘father’.”26

He had read his Bible from end to end almost 200 times.27 He had prayed in millions of dollars (in today’s currency28) for the Orphans and never asked anyone directly for money. He never took a salary in the last 68 years of his ministry, but trusted God to put in people’s hearts to send him what he needed. He never took out a loan or went into debt.29 And neither he nor the orphans were ever hungry. The eccentric pastor and orphan-lover was gone.

He had been married twice: to Mary Groves when he was 25, and to Susannah Sangar when he was 66. Mary bore him four children. Two were stillborn. One son Elijah died when he was a year old. His daughter Lydia married James Wright who succeeded Mueller as the head of the Institute. But she died in 1890 at 57 years old. Five years later Mueller lost his second wife, just three years before he died. And so he outlived his family and was left alone with his Savior, his church, and two thousand children. He had been married to Mary for 39 years and to Susannah for 23 years. He preached Mary’s funeral sermon when he was 64,30 and he preached Susannah’s funeral sermon when he was 90.31 It’s what he said in the face of this loss and pain that gives us the key to his life.

Mary’s Death and the Key to His Life

We have the full text of the message at Mary’s funeral and we have his own recollections of this loss. To feel the force of what he says, we have to know that they loved each other deeply and enjoyed each other in the work they shared. Were we happy? Verily we were. With every year our happiness increased more and more. I never saw my beloved wife at any time, when I met her unexpectedly anywhere in Bristol, without being delighted so to do. I never met her even in the Orphan Houses, without my heart being delighted so to do. Day by day, as we met in our dressing room, at the Orphan Houses, to wash our hands before dinner and tea, I was delighted to meet her, and she was equally pleased to seeme. Thousands of times I told her—“My darling, I never saw you at any time, since you became my wife, without my being delighted to see you.”32

Then came the diagnosis: “When I heard what Mr. Pritchard’s judgment was, viz., that the malady was rheumatic fever, I naturally expected the worst. . . . My heart was nigh to be broken on account of the depth of my affection.”33 The one who had seen God answer 10,000 prayers for the support of the orphan, this time did not get what he asked. Or did he?

Twenty minutes after four, Lord’s Day, February 6, 1870, Mary died. “I fell on my knees and thanked God for her release, and for having taken her to Himself, and asked the Lord to help and support us.”34 He recalled later how he strengthened himself during these hours. And here we see the key to his life. The last portion of scripture which I read to my precious wife was this: “The Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Now, if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have received grace, we are partakers of grace, and to all such he will give glory also. I said to myself, with regard to the latter part, “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”—I am in

myself a poor worthless sinner, but I have been saved by the blood of Christ; and I do not live in sin, I walk uprightly before God. Therefore, if it is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me. And so my heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says.35

Here is the cluster of unshakable convictions and experiences that are the key to this remarkable life. “I am in myself a poor worthless sinner.”I have been saved by the blood of Christ.” “I do not live in sin.”God is sovereign over life and death. If it is good for her and for me, she will be restored again. If not she won’t.”My heart is at rest.”I am satisfied with God.” All this comes from taking God at his word. There you see the innermost being of George Mueller and the key to his life. The word of God, revealing his sin, revealing his Savior, revealing God’s sovereignty, revealing God’s goodness, revealing God’s promise, awakening his faith, satisfying his soul. “I was satisfied with God.” The Gift of Faith vs. the Grace of Faith So were his prayers for Mary answered? To understand how Mueller himself would answer this question, we have to see the way he distinguished between the extraordinary gift of faith and the more ordinary grace of faith. He constantly insisted that he did not have the gift of faith when people put him on a pedestal just because he would pray for his own needs and the needs of the orphans, and the money would arrive in remarkable ways.

Think not, dear reader, that Ihave the gift of faith, that is, that gift of which we read in 1 Corinthians 12:9, and which is mentioned along with “the gifts of healing,” “the working of miracles,”prophecy,” and that on that account I am able to trust in the Lord. It is true that the faith, which I am enabled to exercise, is altogether God’s own gift; it is true that He alone supports it, and that He alone can increase it; it is true that, moment by moment, I depend upon Him for it, and that, if I were only one moment left to myself, my faith would utterly fail; but it is not true that my faith is that gift of faith which is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:9 36 The reason he is so adamant about this is that his whole life—especially in the way he supported the orphans by faith and prayer without asking anyone but God for money—was consciously planned to encourage Christians that God could really be trusted to meet their needs. We will never understand George Mueller’s passion for the orphan ministry if we don’t see that the good of the orphans was second to this. The three chief reasons for establishing an Orphan-House are: 1. That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the means, in its being seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him; and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened. 2. The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children. 3. Their temporal welfare.

37 And make no mistake about it: the order of those three goals is intentional. He makes that explicit over and over in his Narrative. The orphan houses exist to display that God can be trusted and to encourage believers to take him at his word. This was a deep sense of calling with Mueller. He said that God had given him the mercy in “being able to take God by His word and to rely upon it.”38 He was grieved that “so many believers . . . were harassed and distressed in mind, or brought guilt on their consciences, on account of not trusting in the Lord.” This grace that he had to trust God’s promises, and this grief that so many believers didn’t trust his promises, shaped Mueller’s entire life. This was his supreme passion: to display with open proofs that God could be trusted with the practical affairs of life. This was the higher aim of building the orphan houses and supporting them by asking God, not people, for money.

It seemed to me best done, by the establishing of an Orphan-House. It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was the primary reason, for establishing the Orphan-House. . . The first and primary object of the work was, (and still is) that God might be magnified by the fact, that the orphans under my care are provided, with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-laborers, whereby it may be seen, that God is FAITHFUL STILL, and HEARS PRAYER STILL.39 That was the chief passion and unifying aim of Mueller's ministry: live a life and lead a ministry in a way that proves God is real, God is trustworthy, God answers prayer. He built orphanages the way he did to help Christians trust God. He says it over and over again.40

Now we see why he is so adamant that his faith is not the gift of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9 that only some people have, but was the grace of faith that all Christians should have.41 Now we are ready to see this crucial distinction he made between the gift of faith and the grace of faith. His entire aim in life hung on this. If Christians simply said: "Mueller is in a class by himself. He has the gift of faith," then we are all off the hook and he is no longer a prod and proof and inspiration for how we ought to live. Here is what he says The difference between the gift and the grace of faith seems to me this. According to the gift of faith I am able to do a thing, or believe that a thing will come to pass, the not doing of which, or the not believing of which would not be sin; according to the grace of faith I am able to do a thing, or believe that a thing will come to pass, respecting which I have the word of God as the ground to rest upon, and, therefore, the not doing it, or the not believing it would be sin. For instance, the gift of faith would be needed, to believe that a sick person should be restored again though there is no human probability: for there is no promise to that effect; the grace of faith is needed to believe that the Lord will give me the necessaries of life, if I first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness: for there is a promise to that effect. Matthew 6:33 .42

Mueller did not think he had any biblical ground for being certain that God would spare his wife Mary. He admits that a few times in his life he was given "something like the gift (not grace) of faith so that unconditionally I could ask and look for an answer,"43 but he did not have that rare gift in Mary's case. And so he prayed for her healing conditionally—namely, if it would be good for them and for God's glory. But most deeply he prayed that they would be satisfied in God whatever he did. And God did answer that prayer by helping Mueller believe Psalms 84:11. No good thing will God withhold. God withheld no good thing from him, and he was satisfied with God's sovereign will. All this, he says, "springs from taking God at his word, believing what he says."

How Did Mueller Get to this Position?

Let's go back and let him tell the story—essential parts of which are omitted from all the biographies I have looked at. His father was an unbeliever and George grew up a liar and a thief, by his own testimony.44 His mother died when he was 14, and he records no impact that this loss had on him except that while she was dying he was roving the streets with his friends "half intoxicated."45 He went on living a bawdy life, and then found himself in prison for stealing when

he was 16 years old. His father paid to get him out, beat him, and took him to live in another town (Schoenbeck). Mueller used his academic skills to make money by tutoring in Latin, French, and mathematics. Finally his father sent him to the University of Halle to study divinity and prepare for the ministry because that would be a good living. Neither he nor George had any spiritual aspirations. Of the 900 divinity students in Halle, Mueller later estimated that maybe nine feared the Lord. 46

Then on a Saturday afternoon in the middle of November, 1825, when Mueller was 20 years old, he was invited to a Bible study and, by the grace of God, felt the desire to go. “It was to me as if I had found something after which I had been seeking all my life long. I immediately wished to go.”47 “They read the Bible, sang, prayed, and read a printed sermon.”48 To his amazement Mueller said, “The whole made a deep impression on me. I was happy; though, if I had been asked, why I was happy I could not have clearly explained it. “I have not the least doubt, that on that evening, [God] began a work of grace in me. . . . That evening was the turning point in my life.”49

That’s true. But there was another turning point four years later that the biographies do not open for the reader, but which for Mueller was absolutely decisive in shaping the way he viewed God and the way he did ministry. A Decisive Turning Point: Confidence in the Sovereign Goodness of God

He came to England in the hope of being a missionary with the London Missionary Society. Soon he found his theology and ministry convictions turning away from the LMS, until there was a break. In the meantime, a momentous encounter happened.

Mueller became sick (thank God for providential sickness!) and in the summer of 1829 he went for recovery to a town called Teignmouth. There in a little chapel called Ebenezer at least two crucial discoveries were made: the preciousness of reading and meditating on the word of God,50 and the truth of the doctrines of grace.51 For ten days Mueller lived with a nameless man who change his life forever: “Through the instrumentality of this brother the Lord bestowed a great blessing upon me, for which I shall have cause to thank Him throughout eternity.”52

Before this period I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption, and final persevering grace; so much so that, a few days after my arrival at Teignmouth, I called election a devilish doctrine. . . I knew nothing about the choice of God’s people, and did not believe that the child of God, when once made so, was safe for ever. . . . But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the word of God.53

He was led to embrace the doctrines of grace—the robust, mission-minded, soul-winning, orphan-loving Calvinism that marked William Carey, who died in 1834, and that would mark Charles Spurgeon, who was born in 1834.54 About forty years later, in 1870, Mueller spoke to some young believers about the importance of what had happened to him at Teignmouth. He said that his preaching had been fruitless for four years from 1825 to 1829 in Germany, but then he came to England and was taught the doctrines of grace. In the course of time I came to this country, and it pleased God then to show to me the doctrines of grace in a way in which I had not seen them before. At first I hated them, “If this were true I could do nothing at all in the conversion of sinners, as all would depend upon God and the working of His Spirit.” But when it pleased God

to reveal these truths to me, and my heart was brought to such a state that I could say, “I am not only content simply to be a hammer, an axe, or a saw, in God’s hands; but I shall count it an honor to be taken up and used by Him in any way; and if sinners are converted through my instrumentality, from my inmost soul I will give Him all the glory; the Lord gave me to see fruit; the Lord gave me to see fruit in abundance; sinners were converted by scores; and ever since God has used me in one way or other in His service.”55 This discovery of the all-encompassing sovereignty of God became the foundation of Mueller’s confidence in God to answer his prayers for money. He gave up his regular salary.56 He refused to ask people directly for money.57 He prayed and published his reports about the goodness of God and the answers to his prayer.58 These yearly reports were circulated around the world, and they clearly had a huge effect in motivating people to give to the orphan work.59 Mueller knew that God used means. In fact, he loved to say, “Work with all your might; but trust not in the least in your work.”60 But he also insisted that his hope was in God alone, not his exertions and not the published reports. These means could not account for the remarkable answers that he received.

Mueller’s faith that his prayers for money would be answered was rooted in the sovereignty of God. When faced with a crisis in having the means to pay a bill he would say, “How the means are to come, I know not; but I know that God is almighty, that the hearts of all are in His hands, and that, if He pleaseth to influence persons, they will send help.”

61 That is the root of his confidence: God is almighty, the hearts of all men are in his hands,62 and when God chooses to influence their hearts they will give.

He had come to know and love this absolute sovereignty of God in the context of the doctrines of grace, and therefore he cherished it mainly as sovereign goodness.63 This gave him a way to maintain a personal peace beyond human understanding in the midst of tremendous stress and occasional tragedy. “The Lord never lays more on us,” he said, “in the way of chastisement, than our state of heart makes needful; so that whilst He smites with the one hand, He supports with the other.”64 In the face of painful circumstances he says, “I bow, I am satisfied with the will of my Heavenly Father, I seek by perfect submission to His holy will to glorify Him, I kiss continually the hand that has thus afflicted me.”65 And when he is about to lose a piece of property that he wants for the next orphan house, he says, “If the Lord were to take this piece of land from me, it would be only for the purpose of giving me a still better one; for our Heavenly Father never takes any earthly thing from His children except He means to give them something better instead.”66 This is what I mean by confidence in God’s sovereign goodness. This is the root of Mueller’s faith and ministry. The Aroma of Mueller’s Calvinism: Satisfaction and Glad Self-Denial But there was an aroma about Mueller’s Calvinism that was different from many stereotypes. For him the sovereign goodness of God served, first and foremost, the satisfaction of the soul. And then the satisfied soul was freed to sacrifice and live a life of simplicity and risk and self-denial and love. But everything flowed from the soul that is first satisfied in the gracious, sovereign God. Mueller is clearer on this than anyone I have ever read. He is unashamed to sound almost childishly simple:

According to my judgement the most important point to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord. Other things may press upon you, the Lord’s work may even have urgent claims upon your attention, but I deliberately repeat, it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God

Himself! Day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. This has been my firm and settled condition for the last five and thirty years. For the first four years after my conversion I knew not its vast importance, but now after much experience I specially commend this point to the notice of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ: the secret of all true effectual service is joy in God, having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself.67

Why is this “the most important thing”? Why is daily happiness in God “of supreme and paramount importance”? One answer he gives is that it glorifies God. After telling about one of his wife’s illnesses when he almost lost her, he says, “I have . . . stated this case so fully, to show the deep importance to be satisfied with the will of God, not only for the sake of glorifying Him, but as the best way, in the end, of having given to us the desire of our hearts.”68 Being satisfied in God is “of supreme and paramount importance” because it glorifies God. It shows that God is gloriously satisfying. But there is another answer: namely, that happiness in God is the only source of durable and God-honoring self-denial and sacrifice and love. In reference to life-style changes and simplicity he says:

We should begin the thing in a right way, i.e. aim after the right state of heart; begin inwardly instead of outwardly. If otherwise, it will not last. We shall look back, or even get into a worse state than we were before. But oh! how different if joy in God leads us to any little act of self denial. How gladly do we do it then!69

“Glad self-denial” is the aroma of Mueller’s Calvinism. How can there be such a thing? He answers: “Self-denial is not so much an impoverishment as a postponement: we make a sacrifice of a present good for the sake of a future and greater good.”70 Therefore, happiness in God is of “supreme importance” because it is the key to love that sacrifices and takes risks. “Whatever be done . . . in the way of giving up, or self-denial, or deadness to the world, should result from the joy we have in God.”71 A well-to-do woman visited him once to discuss a possible gift to the Institute. He did not ask her for the money. But when she was gone he asked God for it. And the way he did reveals his understanding of how the heart human works.

After she was gone, I asked the Lord, that He would be pleased to make this dear sister so happy in Himself and enable her so to realize her true riches and inheritance in the Lord Jesus, and the reality of her heavenly calling, that she might be constrained by the love of Christ, cheerfully to lay down this 500 [pounds] at His feet.72 How Do We Get and Keep Our Happiness in God?

If happiness in God is “of supreme and paramount importance” because it is the spring of sacrificial love that honors God, then the crucial question becomes how do we get it and keep it? But in what way shall we attain to this settled happiness of soul? How shall we learn to enjoy God? How obtain such an all-sufficient soul-satisfying portion in him as shall enable us to let go the things of this world as vain and worthless in comparison? I answer, This happiness is to be obtained through the study of the Holy Scriptures. God has therein revealed Himself unto us in the face of Jesus Christ.73

Happiness in God comes from seeing God revealed to us in the face of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures. “In them . . . we become acquainted with the character of God. Our eyes are divinely opened to see what a lovely Being God is! And this good, gracious, loving, heavenly Father is ours, our portion for time and for eternity.”74 Knowing God is the key to being happy in God. The

more we know of God, the happier we are. . . . When we became a little acquainted with God . . . our true happiness . . . commenced; and the more we become acquainted with him, the more truly happy we become. What will make us so exceedingly happy in heaven? It will be the fuller knowledge of God.75

Therefore the most crucial means of fighting for joy in God is to immerse oneself in the Scriptures where we see God in Christ most clearly. When he was 71 years old, Mueller spoke to younger believers:

Now in brotherly love and affection I would give a few hints to my younger fellow-believers as to the way in which to keep up spiritual enjoyment. It is absolutely needful in order that happiness in the Lord may continue, that the Scriptures be regularly read. These are God's appointed means for the nourishment of the inner man. . . .Consider it, and ponder over it. . . . Especially we should read regularly through the Scriptures, consecutively, and not pick out here and there a chapter. If we do, we remain spiritual dwarfs. I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. But when I regularly read on through the whole with reference to my own heart and soul, I directly made progress. Then my peace and joy continued more and more. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more.76

He was seventy-one and he would live and read on for another twenty-one years. But he never changed his strategy for satisfaction in God. When he was seventy-six he wrote the same thing he did when he was sixty, "I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord."77 And the means stayed the same:

I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it. . . . What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and . . . not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.78 Which brings us back now the satisfaction of Mueller's soul at the death of his wife, Mary. Remember, he said, "My heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says." 79 The aim of George Mueller's life was to glorify God by helping people take God at his word.80 To that end he saturated his soul with the word of God. At one point he said that he reads the Bible five or ten times more than he reads any other books.81 His aim was to see God in Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead in order that he might maintain the happiness of his soul in God. By this deep satisfaction in God George Mueller was set free from the fears and lusts of the world. And in this freedom of love he chose a strategy of ministry and style of life that put the reality and trustworthiness and beauty of God on display. To use his own words, his life became a "visible proof to the unchangeable faithfulness of the Lord."82

He was sustained in this extraordinary life by his deep convictions that God is sovereign over the human heart and can turn it where he wills in answer to prayer; and that God is sovereign over life and death; and that God is good in his sovereignty and withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly. He strengthened himself continually in his wife's final illness with the hymn:

Best of blessings he'll provide us Nought but good shall e'er betide us, Safe to glory He will guide us, Oh how He loves!83 An Exhortation and Plea from Mueller I will let him have the closing word of exhortation and plea for us to join him in the path of radical, joyful faith: My dear Christian reader, will you not try this way? Will you not know for yourself . . . the preciousness and the happiness of this way of casting all your cares and burdens and necessities upon God? This way is as open to you as to me. . . . Every one is invited and commanded to trust in the Lord, to trust in Him with all his heart, and to cast his burden upon Him, and to call upon Him in the day of trouble. Will you not do this, my dear brethren in Christ? I long that you may do so. I desire that you may taste the sweetness of that state of heart, in which, while surrounded by difficulties and necessities, you can yet be at peace, because you know that the living God, your Father in heaven, cares for you.84 Timeline of George Mueller's Life

1805–1825

Birth to conversion

1825–1835

Conversion to entrance on his life work

1835–1875

His chief life's work

1875–1892

Time of his "missionary tours"

1892–1898

Close of his life

September 27, 1805

Born in Kroppenstaedt near Halberstadt, Prussia.

1819

Death of mother when he was 14

1821

Short imprisonment for theft at age 16

1827

Student at the University of Halle in divinity

November 1825

The Bible study that turned his life to Christ

August 27, 1826

First sermon

August-September 1826

Two months in A. H. Franke’s Orphan House

June 13, 1828

Accepted provisionally by London Missionary Society

March 19, 1829

Arrived in London to study with LMS

August 1829

Stay in Teignmouth where he learned of the doctrines of grace

January, 1830

His connection with the LMS was dissolved

1830-1832

The stated preacher at Ebenezer Chapel, Teignmouth

1830

Baptized by immersion

October 7, 1830

Married to Mary Groves

October, 1830

Gave up salary at his church and for the rest of his life.

August 9, 1831

A stillborn child.

May, 1832

Left Teignmouth to take up ministry in Bristol

July 6, 1832

Began preaching at Bethesda Chapel with Henry Craik in Bristol

September 17, 1832

Daughter Lydia is born

February 20, 1834

Founded Scripture Knowledge Institute

March 19, 1834

Son Elijah born

June 26, 1835

Son Elijah died

November 28, 1836

First infant orphan house opened

June 13, 1838

Second stillborn child

October 7, 1838

His only brother died

March 30, 1840

Father died

January 22, 1866

Henry Craik died

February 6, 1870

Wife Mary died

November 16, 1871

James Wright (Mueller’s eventual successor) married Mueller’s daughter

November 30, 1871

Mueller himself married Susannah Grace Sangar

1890

death of daughter Lydia in her 58th year

January 13, 1895

His second wife died. At 90 he conducts her service

March 10, 1898 (Thursday)

George Mueller died, having led prayer meeting night before

March 14, 1898 (Monday)

Mueller buried with his wives

A Note on Sources

I am not aware of any scholarly biography that puts Mueller in the context of his religious and social context with careful, documented attention to his own writings. A. T. Pierson's George Mueller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith (1889; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1999), was written by one who knew and admired Mueller and was endorsed by Mueller's son-in-law, James Wright. I think Pierson's assessment of Mueller's personality is perceptive, but neither here nor in the other popular biographies that I am aware of will the reader meet a deep and accurate portrayal of Mueller's doctrine which powerfully governed his life. Therefore, any serious study of Mueller will want to put most effort into the newly republished George Mueller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealing with George Muller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Muller Complete and Unabridged, 2 vols. (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes Publications, 2003). Remarkably, this two volume work can be read or downloaded for free online. A shorter access to Mueller's life and writings is also newly republished: George Mueller, Autobiography of George Mueller, or A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer, compiled by G. Fred Bergin (Denton, Tex.: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003).

1 George Mueller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealing with George Muller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Muller Complete and Unabridged, 2 vols. (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes, 2003), 1:646.

2 Ibid., 2:675.

3 Arthur T. Pierson, George Mueller of Bristol and His Witness to A Prayer-Hearing God (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1999), 248. Originally published as "Authorized Memoir" (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1899).

4 Pierson, George Mueller, 354.

5 Mueller, Narrative, 1:41.

6 Ibid., 1:39-40.

7 Ibid., 1:53.

8 Ibid., 1:191

9 Ibid., 1:140.

10 Pierson, George Mueller, 13.

11 Ibid., 264.

12 Mueller, Narrative, 1:80.

13 "Are you in debt? Then make confession of sin respecting it. Sincerely confess to the Lord that you have sinned against Rom. xiii. 8. And if you are resolved no more to contract debt, whatever may be the result, and you are waiting on the Lord, and truly trust in Him, your present debts will soon be paid. Are you out of debt? then whatever your future want may be, be resolved, in the strength of Jesus, rather to suffer the greatest privation, whilst waiting upon God for help, than to use unscriptural means, such as borrowing, taking goods on credit, etc., to deliver yourselves. This way needs but to be tried, in order that its excellency may be enjoyed." Mueller, Narrative,

1:251.

14 Ibid., 1:80-81.

15 Ibid., 2:365-375.

16 In his own words here is a summary of accomplishments up to May, 1868: “Above Sixteen Thousand Five Hundred children or grown up persons were taught in the various Schools, entirely supported by the Institution; more than Forty-Four Thousand and Five Hundred Copies of the Bible, and above Forty Thousand and Six Hundred New Testaments, and above Twenty Thousand other smaller portions of the Holy Scriptures, in various languages, were circulated from the formation of the Institution up to May 26, 1868; and about Thirty-one Millions of Tracts and Books, likewise in several languages, were circulated. There were, likewise, from the commencement, Missionaries assisted by the funds of the Institution, and of late years more than One Hundred and Twenty in number. On this Object alone Seventy six Thousand One Hundred and Thirty-seven Pounds were expended from the beginning, up to May 26, 1868. Also 2,412 Orphans were under our care, and five large houses, at an expense of above One Hundred and Ten Thousand Pounds were erected, for the accommodation of 2,050 Orphans. With regard to the spiritual results, eternity alone can unfold them; yet even in so far as we have already seen fruit, we have abundant cause for praise and thanksgiving.” Mueller, Narrative, 2:314.

17 Pierson, George Mueller, 274.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 305.

20 George Mueller, Autobiography of George Mueller, or A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer, compiled by G. Fred Bergin (Denton, Tex.: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003), ix.

21 Pierson, George Mueller, 305.

22 Ibid., 257.

23 Ibid., 283.

24 Ibid., 285.

25 Ibid., 285-286.

26 Ibid., 286.

27 Ibid., 287. By his own testimony he had read the Bible 100 times by the time he was 71. Mueller, Narrative, 2:834.

28 One estimate is that Mueller collected about $150 million in today’s currency. Thanks to Coty Pinckney for the reference and calculations, using John J. McCusker, “Comparing the Purchasing Power of Money in Great Britain from 1264 to Any Other Year Including the Present,” Economic History Services, 2001 (http://www.eh.net/hmit/ppowerbp/).

29 “In looking back upon the Thirty One years, during which this Institution had been in operation, I had, as will be seen, by the Grace of God, kept to the original principles, on which, for His honour,

it was established on March 5, 1834. For 1, during the whole of this time I had avoided going in debt; and never had a period been brought to a close, but I had some money in hand. Great as my trials of faith might have been, I never contracted debt; for I judged, that, if God's time was come for any enlargement, He would also give the means, and that, until He supplied them, I had quietly to wait His time, and not to act before His time was fully come. Mueller, Narrative, 2:291. On his view of debt, see also 1:25, 62, 83, 169, 172, 213, 251, 259, 316-317, 403.

30 Mueller, Narrative, 2:389-401.

31 Pierson, George Mueller, 279.

32 Mueller, Narrative, 2:392-393.

33 Ibid., 2:398.

34 Ibid., 2:400.

35 Ibid., 2:745. In the actual funeral sermon itself Mueller took as a text Psalms 119:68, "Thou art good and doest good." He opened it like this: "'The Lord is good, and doeth good,' all will be according to His own blessed character. Nothing but that, which is good, like Himself, can proceed from Him. If he pleases to take my dearest wife, it will be good, like Himself. What I have to do, as His child, is to be satisfied with what my Father does, that I may glorify Him. After this my soul not only aimed, but this, my soul, by God's grace, attained to. I was satisfied with God." Ibid., 2:398-399.

36 Ibid., 1:302.

37 Ibid., 1:103.

38 Ibid., 1:105.

39 Ibid. Italics added. The capital letters are his.

40 Ibid., 1:131, 250, 285, 317, 443, 486, 548, 558, etc.

41 "All believers are called upon, in the simple confidence of faith, to cast all their burdens upon Him, to trust in him for every thing, and not only to make every thing a subject of prayer, but to expect answers to their petitions which they have asked according to His will, and in the name of the Lord Jesus." Ibid., 1:302.

42 Ibid., 1:65.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 1:10.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 1:16.

47 Ibid., 1:17.

48 Ibid., 1:16.

49 Ibid., 1:17.

50 “For when it pleased the Lord in August, 1829, to bring me really to the Scriptures, my life and walk became very different.” Ibid., 1:28-29.

51 “Between July, 1829, and January, 1830, I had seen the leading truths connected with the second coming of our Lord Jesus; I had apprehended the all-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as our rule, and the Holy Spirit as or teacher; I had seen clearly the precious doctrines of the grace of God, about which I had been uninstructed for nearly four years after my conversion.” Ibid., 2:720.

52 Ibid., 1:39.

53 Ibid., 1:46. “Thus, I say, the electing love of God in Christ (when I have been able to realize it) has often been the means of producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin.” Ibid., 1:40.

54 “Being made willing to have no glory of my own in the conversion of sinners, but to consider myself merely as an instrument; and being made willing to receive what the Scriptures said; I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths. To my great astonishment I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines. As to the effect which my belief in these doctrines had on me, I am constrained to state, for God’s glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means so dead to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might and as I ought to be, yet, by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period. My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before.” Ibid., 1:46. “Thus, I say, the electing love of God in Christ (when I have been able to realize it) has often been the means of producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin.” Ibid., 1:40.

55 Ibid., 1:752.

56 “Upon our first coming to Bristol we declined accepting anything in the shape of regular salary. . . . We did not act thus because we thought it wrong that those who were ministered unto in spiritual things should minister unto us in temporal things; but 1. because we would not have the liberality of the brethren to be a matter of constraint, but willingly.” Ibid., 1:275.

57 The gifts have been given to me “without one single individual having been asked by me for any thing. The reason why I have refrained altogether from soliciting any one for help is, that the hand of God evidently might be seen in the matter, that thus my fellow-believers might be encouraged more and more to trust in Him, and that also those who know not the Lord, may have a fresh proof that, indeed, it is not a vain thing to pray to God.” Ibid., 1:132.

58 Mueller walked a narrow line: On the one hand, he wanted to give God all the credit for answering prayer for meeting all this needs, and so he did not ask people directly for help. But on the other hand he wanted this work of God to be known so that Christians would be encouraged to trust God for answered prayer. But in the very publication of the work of God he was making known how much he depended on the generosity of God’s people, and thus motivating them by human means to give.

59 “I do not mean to say that God does not use the Reports as instruments in procuring us means. They are written in order that I may thus give an account of my stewardship, but particularly, in order that, by these printed accounts of the work, the chief end of this Institution may be answered, which is to raise another public testimony to an unbelieving world, that in these last days the Living God is still the Living God, listening to the prayers of His children, and helping those who put their trust in Him; and in order that believers generally may be benefited and especially be encouraged to trust in God for everything they may need, and be stirred up to deal in greater simplicity with God respecting everything connected with their own particular position and circumstances; in short, that the children of God maybe brought to the practical use of the Holy Scriptures, as the word of the Living God. — But while these are the primary reasons for publishing these Reports, we doubt not that the Lord has again and again used them as instruments in leading persons to help us with their means.” Ibid., 1:662.

60 Ibid., 1:611. “This is one of the great secrets in connexion with successful service for the Lord; to work as if everything depended upon our diligence, and yet not to rest in the least upon our exertions, but upon the blessing of the Lord.” Ibid., 2:290. “Speak also for the Lord, as if everything depended on your exertions; yet trust not in the least in your exertions, but in the Lord, who alone can cause your efforts to be made effectual.” Ibid., 2:279.

61 Ibid., 1:594.

62 “There is scarcely a country, from whence I have not received donations; yet all come unsolicited, often anonymously, and in by far the greater number of cases from entire strangers, who are led by God, in answer to our prayers, to help on this work which was commenced, and is carried on, only in dependence on the Living God, in whose hands are the hearts of all men.” Ibid., 2:387. “Our Heavenly Father has the hearts of all men at His disposal, and we give ourselves to prayer to Him, and He, in answer to our prayers, lays the necessities of this work on the hearts of his stewards.” Ibid., 2:498. “We should not trust in the Reports, and expect that they would bring in something, but trust in the Living God, who has the hearts of all in His hands, and to whom all the gold and silver belongs.” Ibid., 2:80.

63 “Remember also, that God delights to bestow blessing, but, generally, as the result of earnest, believing prayer.” Ibid., 2:279.

64 Ibid., 1:61.

65 Ibid., 2:401.

66 Ibid., 1:505.

67 Ibid., 2:730-731. “I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.” Ibid., 1:271.

68 Ibid., 2:406.

69 Ibid., 1:355.

70 Pierson, George Mueller, 374.

71 Mueller, Narrative, 1:355.

72 Ibid., 1:326.

73 Ibid., 2:731.

74Ibid., 2:732.

75 Ibid., 2:740.

76 Ibid., 2:834.

77 Ibid., 1:271.

78 Ibid., 1:272-273.

79 Ibid., 2:745.

80 “I have not served a hard Master, and that is what I delight to show. For, to speak well of His name, that thus my beloved fellow-pilgrims, who may read this, may be encouraged to trust in Him, is the chief purpose of my writing.” Ibid., 1:63.

81 Ibid., 1:101.

82 Ibid., 1:105.

83 Ibid., 2:399.

84 Ibid., 1:521. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 68

05.12. He Kissed the Rose and Felt the Thorn: Living and Dying in the Morning of Life

He Kissed the Rose and Felt the Thorn: Living and Dying in the Morning of Life Meditations on the Life of Robert Murray McCheyne The most important example in all of history of someone who did not publish any books and died young, and yet made an impact on the world all out of proportion to his short life, was Jesus Christ. He was about 33 years old when he was crucified. Today 1.3 billion people call themselves Christian because of his life and death and resurrection. The key to this impact is two things, not just one. It's always two things. First, and most important, is who he was—the sheer truth and power and beauty of the God-man. Being who he was created a movement in the world that is irrepressible. It was not his writing. He did not write. It was his Person, his spoken words, and his actions. His presence in the world was inescapable and unendingly powerful. That's the first key to his impact on history. The second—and there must be a second—is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude portrayed his Person and work in writing. They did write. And by means of those writings, the reality and truth and power and beauty of the Son of God can be known today. If there had been no Person, there would have been no books. And if there had been no books, we would not know the Person. And we would be lost.

God ordained that he himself be known in history through the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and through the written word about the incarnate Word, the Bible. We worship the God we know in the person Jesus Christ. But we know the God we worship only because those who knew him preserved what they knew in a book.

O how precious is that Book. And it seems that God has ordained that this perfect original be a pattern in church history—a powerful life, captured with truth and beauty in a book, and preserved for the enduring good of the church—this has been God's providence for centuries. If there had been no books, there would be virtually no Church History. And all the treasures of thought and life for the past 2,000 years would be reduced to a tiny fragment, namely, what might have been passed along orally. But God has ordained that it be otherwise. And I am deeply thankful. He has ordained that some of his followers make such a powerful, personal impact that someone is provoked to write a book about it. And that personal impact, together with that book, go on instructing, inspiring, and strengthening the church for centuries.

It is amazing to me how God has raised up extraordinary young people with great impact and then cut them off in their youth, and then has preserved their impact with a book for decades to come, and centuries.

Elliot, Brainerd, and Martyn For example, Jim Elliot, who never published a book during his life, was 28 years old when he was killed in 1956. But his wife Elisabeth Elliot captured his life and mission in Through Gages of Splendor and Shadow of the Almighty which were published within two years of his death, and are still in print today shaping the mission and history of the church.

Then there is David Brainerd, the missionary to the American Indians in the 1740s. He never published anything and died when he was 29 in 1747. He would have quickly passed out of human consciousness, since hardly anyone knew him, except that two years later Jonathan Edwards captured his life and diaries in The Life of David Brainerd, which has become one of the three most influential books in the history of modern missions.

Then there is Henry Martyn, the missionary to India and Persia who died in 1812 at the age of 31. No one would know of him today except that four years later, John Sargent wrote a record of his life and rescued his journals in Memoir of the Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D. And so generations of students, especially in Britain, were inspired to take up the challenge of missionary work.

McCheyne's Precious Friend And now we come to Robert Murray McCheyne, not a missionary this time, but a local pastor in Dundee, Scotland, who died in 1843 at the age of 29. Perhaps of all the young saints that I have mentioned, he is the least likely to have been remembered. He wasn't crucified like Jesus. He wasn't speared to death in the jungles of Ecuador like Jim Elliot. He didn't suffer in the wild woods of early America like Brainerd. He didn't die alone in Turkey and cut off from his fiancé like Henry Martyn. He was local pastor who served his church for six years and then died of Typhus fever and was buried in his own church yard. But he had a very precious friend, Andrew Bonar, a nearby pastor; and within two years Andrew had published Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne. It is still in print, and here we are 168 years after McCheyne's death encouraged and inspired by his life.

How does that happen? Two things: A life with great force, and a friend to capture it in a book for the centuries. We probably should ask if that is a good thing. Books about sinful men can deflect our attention from the main book about the sinless man. So is the writing and reading of such books a good thing?

Fix Your Eyes on Those Who Walk

I have often turned to Hebrews 11:1-40 as a biblical warrant for loving and reading biography. But more recently I have been more struck by Php 3:17 where Paul says, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." This is very striking.

Paul himself is one step removed from Jesus, the great example. And yet he calls us to "join in imitating me." Then he says: Keep your eyes on, or fix your gaze on, those who walk according to the example you have in us. These people are now two steps removed from Jesus. Paul follows Jesus, these people walk according to Paul's example, and then we are told to imitate them. So we are three steps from Jesus. But the wording is even more striking. It says, fix your eyes (Greek skopeite) on them. Watch them closely. Don't lose sight of them. It seems to me that this is one of the most powerful warrants in the Bible for fixing our attention on the saints who have lived lives that are so exemplary—flawed, but still exemplary.

What Is It about McCheyne? So for McCheyne, as for Elliot and Brainerd and Martyn, there was a very short, but powerful life and a friend to capture it in a book. What was it about McCheyne's short, and in many ways ordinary, life that gave it the force which created the book (and now books) that preserves his legacy to our day? The title that I have chosen is intended to point to an answer to that question. I've tried to sift through the details and find the aspects of McCheyne's life

and character that explain the power. People don’t go on reading and thinking about a life, no matter how good the biography, if there is no unusual power in the person behind it. So what was it about McCheyne—that he could die at 29, and minister in his church only six years, and be worthy of fixing our ees on him in obedience to Php 3:17?

He Kissed the Rose The title is: "He Kissed the Rose and Felt the Thorn: Living and Dying in the Morning of Life." The main part of the title, "He Kissed the Rose and Felt the Thorn," is taken from McCheyne’s description of his teenage years when he was careless, worldly, and unconverted. He said, "I kissed the Rose nor thought about the thorn." I am turning the meaning of this statement on its head, because that’s what happened to McCheyne’s life.

He meant by it: "I indulged in all the amusing and beautiful pleasures of the world, and didn’t give a thought to sickness and suffering and death." That’s what he meant when he said, "I kissed the Rose nor thought about the thorn." But after his conversion, he spoke often of Jesus as his Rose of Sharon, and he lived in almost constant awareness of the thorn of his sickness and that his time might be short. He said in one of his sermons,

Set not your heart on the flowers of this world; for they have all a canker in them. Prize the Rose of Sharon . . . more than all; for he changeth not. Live nearer to Christ than to the saints, so that when they are taken from you, you may have him to lean on still. So the meaning of the title, "He Kissed the Rose and Felt the Thorn," is that there was a double-sided key to McCheyne’s power: the preciousness of Christ and the painful shortness of life—or the nearness of eternity. In Only the Morning of His Life The point of the subtitle ("Living and Dying in the Morning of Life") is to underline the second part of this title. He lived only the morning of his life. Most of us live a morning, a noon, and an evening of life. But McCheyne died before he was 30. My argument is that his effectiveness was not frustrated by this fact but empowered by it. Because of his tuberculosis, he lived with the strong sense that he would die early. This was a huge factor in his powerful usefulness. So the double key to his life is the preciousness of Jesus, the Rose, intensified by the pain of the thorn, the sickness and the shortness of his life.

McCheyne was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, May 21, 1813. His parents would have been called Moderates in the Church of Scotland, not evangelical. The Moderates were the group that glorified reason and virtue and a kind of moralistic preaching that minimized the central gospel truths of the cross and the new birth and the power of the Spirit.

McCheyne grew up in this atmosphere with high moral standards, but was, by his own testimony, "devoid of God." When he went to the University of Edinburgh at the age of 14, he studied classics. His father said that "he turned his attention to . . . poetry and the pleasures of society rather more perhaps than was altogether consistent with prudence." And the professor of Moral Philosophy, Thomas Chalmers, who would later become McCheyne’s most influential mentor, said that McCheyne was "a fine specimen of the natural man." He was kissing the rose of classical learning, and ignoring the thorn of suffering and death. But all that changed in 1831 when he was 18 years old. Robert was the youngest of four children. His sister Isabella had died before he was born. His two brothers were David and William. His sister Elizabeth would later live with him and keep house for him during his six years in the pastorate.

David was the oldest brother, and Robert loved him. But David was neither spiritually nor physically well. In the summer of 1831, he sank into a deep depression and died on July 8. Suddenly the thorn of the rose stabbed McCheyne through the heart. All the beauty of the rose he was living for wilted. And by God's grace, he saw another Rose in what happened to David. In the days leading up to his death, David found a profound peace through the blood of Jesus. Bonar said that "joy from the face of a fully reconciled Father above lighted up [David's dying] face." McCheyne saw it, and everything began to change. He had seen a rose other than classical learning. And he saw it as beautiful, not in spite of the thorn, but because of it. The thorn pierced him awake.

McCheyne marked the anniversary of his brother's death the rest of his life—twelve more years. One year later he said, "On this morning last year came the first overwhelming blow to my worldliness; how blessed to me, Thou O God, only knowest, who hast made it so." Eleven years later on the anniversary, he wrote, "This day, eleven years ago, I lost my loved and loving brother, and began to seek a Brother who cannot die." The word "began" is important. The decisive change in his heart seemed to come a few months later in March of 1832 when McCheyne was reading the book The Sum of Saving Knowledge. He called it "the work which I think first of all wrought a saving change in me."

Conversion Captured in a Poem

There are some important glimpses here into McCheyne's heart and mind. What was being converted was a poetic lover of the classics. He was being converted through an emotionally heart-wrenching death and through a book on Reformed doctrine. It is not a surprise—and it reveals a lot about McCheyne and his way of seeing and savoring life—that the best account we have of his conversion is a poem—his best known poem. Not an essay. Not a journal entry. Not a sermon. But a poem.

McCheyne was not a great poet. I'm not sure I would even call him a good poet. But what was good, and even great, is that he saw the world with a poet's eyes. He had a poet's heart. That is, he was moved by what he saw, and he sought to find words that would help others be moved.

Poems are scattered through the early part of the Memoir. Later they are fewer. But that's because, as time goes by, he applies his poetic gift less to poetry and more to preaching. When you read his sermons, you are struck over and over at the provocative and awakening and pleasing and powerful way he says things. This is why McCheyne is so endlessly quotable. He didn't bury his poetic gift when he became a preacher. So when this poetic lover of the classics was converted by the death of his brother and by book on Reformed doctrine, the result was a doctrine-laden poem recounting the process. The poem is called "Jehovah Tsidkenu." The words are a transliteration of the last two Hebrew words of Jeremiah 23:6, "And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD our righteousness.'" McCheyne cherished the phrase as a summary of the doctrine of justification—his own justification. So here is the story of his conversion as he told it in the poem. And one of the most moving things about it is that the last verse proves amazingly prophetic because of the way he died of Typhus fever.

Jehovah Tsidkenu "The Lord Our Righteousness" The watchword of the Reformers—

I once was a stranger to grace and to God,

I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;

Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree,

Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.

I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage,

Isaiah’s wild measure and John’s simple page; But e’en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree

Jehovah Tsidkenu seemed nothing to me.

Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll,

I wept when the waters went over His soul;

Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree

Jehovah Tsidkenu—’twas nothing to me. When free grace awoke me, by light from on high,

Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die; No refuge, no safety in self could I see—

Jehovah Tsidkenu my Savior must be. My terrors all vanished before the sweet name; My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free—

Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.

Jehovah Tsidkenu! my treasure and boast,

Jehovah Tsidkenu! I ne’er can be lost; In thee I shall conquer by flood and by field— My cable, my anchor, my breastplate and shield!

Even treading the valley, the shadow of death, This "watchword" shall rally my faltering breath; For while from life’s fever my God sets me free,

Jehovah Tsidkenu my death-song shall be.

There is so much about this poem that makes it a window onto his life. The fact that it is a poem, and McCheyne was a poet to the end; the fact that its refrain is in Hebrew, a language and a people that he loved so deeply; the fact that it bears the subheading "the watchword of the Reformers," a legacy that he cherished; the fact that it celebrates free grace, and he offered it so relentlessly to others in all his preaching; the fact that it embraces death with confidence, and for him this came so soon—all of this reveals profound things about McCheyne’s life and power.

Call to Ministry and Thomas Chalmers

God knew that McCheyne would live only 29 years. Perhaps that’s why he ordained that his call to faith and his call to the ministry were virtually simultaneous. Four months after the death of his brother, McCheyne enrolled in the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh University, November, 1831. And like so many of us, I suppose—at least it was true for me—he met the man who would have the greatest influence on his life and ministry, Thomas Chalmers.

Chalmers had been converted while serving as a pastor in 1811, and was called to teach Moral Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews in 1823 and then to Edinburgh in 1828. He was the main human force in the revitalizing of the Scottish Church and overcoming the deadening effects of Moderatism. A Growing Passion for Holiness

He embodied the warm-hearted, devotional, evangelistic Calvinism that shaped McCheyne's life and ministry. You may have heard of a sermon called, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." That was my first introduction to Thomas Chalmers, and I loved it. You could call it "Christian Hedonism Scottish Style." It typified the practical, heart-felt urgency for holiness that marked the Reformed pastoral ministry that McCheyne embodied.

Chalmers pressed all of his great learning into the service of holiness and evangelism. He warned McCheyne and the other students of "the white devil" and "the black devil"—the black devil leading to "fleshly sins" of the world, and the white devil to "spiritual sins" of self-righteousness. And he made the gospel of Christ-crucified for sinners the central power for this holiness. A Growing Passion for Evangelism And Chalmers was deeply burdened about the poverty in the slums of Edinburgh and how little gospel witness there was there. He established the Visiting Society, and recruited McCheyne and his friends to join. This threw McCheyne into a world he had never seen as an upper-middle-class university student.

It awakened in him a sense of urgency for those cut off from the gospel. On March 3, 1834, two and a half years into his divinity studies, he wrote:

Such scenes I never before dreamed of. Why am I such a stranger to the poor of my native town? I have passed their doors thousands of times; I have admired the huge black piles of buildings, with their lofty chimneys breaking the sun's rays. Why have I never ventured within? How dwelleth the love of God in me?

How cordial is the welcome even of the poorest and most loathsome to the voice of Christian sympathy! What embedded masses of human beings are huddled together, unvisited by friend or minister! 'No man careth for our souls' is written over every forehead. Awake, my soul! Why should I give the hours and days any longer to the vain world, when there is such a world of misery at the very door? Lord, put thine own strength in me; confirm every good resolution; forgive my past long life of uselessness and folly. So McCheyne would take away from his time in divinity school a passion for holiness and a passion for evangelism. These would never leave him and would become defining impulses of his life—all of it motivated by the beauty of the Rose and all of it intensified by the thorn of suffering.

I feel constrained to make a side comment here concerning time spent in theological education and the shortness of time and the urgency of reaching lost people. Many young men feel the urgency of the task of ministry at age 19 or 20 and the thought of four years of college and three or four years of theological training seems almost like a diversion from the task at hand. Immediate fulltime ministry vs. two or four or eight (or in my case ten) years of school.

Well, consider McCheyne. Nobody burned with a greater zeal for the lost than McCheyne. A servant girl once described him as "deein' to hae folk converted." He wrote one time that we need a ministry that will "go to seek the people. We need men with the compassion of Christ who will leave home, friends, comforts all behind and go into the haunts of profligacy, the dens of the

Cowgate, and with the love and life of Jesus persuade them to turn and not die." As Van Valen says, "The unquenchable fire of burning love towards sinners remained with McCheyne until he was consumed by that same love." His Worthwhile Investment in Theological Training But he did not cut his university training short. He took the full course of theological studies and mastered his Greek and Hebrew. And then served only seven years of full-time ministry. And I think he made the right choice. I don't think he would have been more fruitful in soul-winning if he had rushed into ministry. I don't think he would have had greater impact on the church of Scotland. And I don't think he would be inspiring people 168 years later.

I don't mean you have to have formal theological training to be fruitful in ministry. What I mean is: You need not have less fruitfulness if you take the time to get that training, and like McCheyne, you may have more. Fruitfulness in this life is not quantifiable in years. He only had seven years left when he was done with school. But with everything he had learned form Chalmers and with immersion in the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament and with a radical commitment to holiness and evangelism, and with a band of friends, those seven years were worth seven decades.

He took away something else from his university days that made a tremendous difference—deep friendships, especially with Andrew Bonar and Alexander Somerville. They used to study together and pray and sing and evangelize together. The reason this has to be mentioned is that without this friendship with Bonar, the Memoir would never have been written and we would probably never have heard of Robert Murray McCheyne. But it seems that these friendships were something more than usual. They seemed to have intensified everything that was happening in those days. It's as though the spiritual effect of an experience on the three of them was more than the sum of one plus one plus one. It seems that effect of experiencing things together was exponential—as though a bolt of electricity vertically from the Lord was supercharged when it connected horizontally among McCheyne and Bonar and Sommerville.

Supercharged Friendships with Bonar and Sommerville Bonar described it like this:

I sometimes think that we three at that time were like the three disciples you read of—Peter, James, and John before the day of Pentecost. . . . Christ took these three into the chamber of Jairus' daughter, and taught them how to raise dead souls. He taught us from the very first to put no stress upon human appliances, but to keep to the gospel word. He took us to the Transfiguration hill, and showed us His person from time to time. He taught us to delight in His person, and to behold in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image. He took us to Gethsemane at communion times, and showed us the cup that the father gave him to drink, and which he drank, leaving no dregs behind. From 1838—the last five years of McCheyne's life—Bonar ministered in the town of Collace just a few miles from where McCheyne ministered. When McCheyne died in 1843, the church at Dundee turned to Bonar for comfort, and he preached from Romans 8:1-39 in the two Sunday services following McCheyne's death. He said, "There was no friend whom I loved like him."

One of my prayers in these days of theological reformation and church revitalization is that thousands of young pastors will find this kind of camaraderie in the ministry. I am jealous for you to experience this in part because it was so rare when I was just starting 30 years ago. In those days the structures of fellowship were not mainly theological but organizational. And it felt so weak and

shallow.

It was hard to find gatherings of pastors where they cared to talk about a biblical, Reformed vision of Christ and his work and the sovereignty of God in ruling the world and saving sinners. But today, the structures of relationships built around deep, clear, Reformed theological truths are everywhere. And now, at age 65, I have close friends, deep friends close and far, that are built on something so much greater and deeper and more wonderful than the pragmatics of church talk. I linger over this aspect of McCheyne's life because I I want you to experience it. Your impact in the world will be exponentially increased through these kinds of friendships. Van Valen captured this exponential effect of McCheyne's band of brothers like this:

McCheyne's 'school' tended to be more spiritual than theological. Their influence was evident not so much in the college halls or the study rooms of the theological students; they distinguished themselves not in controversy, when it concerned the fight against error, but their contribution was more effective in spreading the classical teaching on grace to the general public. Their task was especially focused on evangelization and revivals and didn't exist to give substance to theological structures. Hence their strength lay in their preaching, which distinguished itself from the preaching of others "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power".

Bands of brothers—comrades in a great cause—are more than the sum of their parts. May God link your arms theologically, spiritually, personally for the sake of this exponential effect. The last day of McCheyne's divinity lectures was March 29, 1835. He was just shy of being 22 years old. And that fall he was called to be the assistant minister in the double parish of Larbert and Dunipace in November, 1835. He served there as an assistant until the call came from St. Peter's Church in Dundee on August, 1836. There McCheyne served as the pastor until his death six and a half years later.

That's the simple sum of his professional life: A student till he was 22, an assistant pastor for a year, and a senior pastor for six years. And as far as any unusual events in that six-year pastorate are concerned, only two would stand out. He made an eight-month trip to Israel in 1838, and his church experienced an extraordinary awakening while he was away, which lasted in some measure until McCheyne died four and a half years later. David Robertson, who is the pastor of McCheyne's church today, writes, "The rest of his life [after his return from Israel in November, 1838] was spent in a time of revival awakening and renewal." So as I have tried to think through what makes such an uneventful life so useful even 168 years after his death, it isn't any extraordinary event in his life. Rather, it is his extraordinary passion for Christ—for the Rose—and for holiness and for lost people, all intensified by his friendships and his daily sense of the shortness of life—the thorn. And all this passion preserved in powerful, picturesque language. He is still influencing us because of the words that came out of his mouth, not the events of his life. His Memorable, Inspiring Words The words, of course, would be empty without the passion for Christ and the pursuit of holiness and the cry for conversion. But all that passion would be formless and ineffectual today without his words. It's the words of McCheyne that give him abiding influence today. I would guess that not one person in ten, who can quote McCheyne, could tell you any event in his life that has inspired them. It is his words. So let's listen to him concerning the pursuit of holiness, and concerning his communion with God through the word and prayer. We won't focus on his preaching, but we should know that the two things we are focusing on, holiness

and communion with God, were the keys to his power in preaching.

Isabella Dickson, who became Andrew Bonar's wife, heard McCheyne preach when she was still and unbeliever and wrote,

There was something singularly attractive about Mr. McCheyne's holiness. . . . It was not his matter nor his manner either that struck me; it was just the living epistle of Christ—a picture so lovely, I felt I would have given all the world to be as he was, but knew all the time I was dead in sins. The Key to His Power in Preaching The man himself, for her, was the sermon. It is what God made of him in private that became his power in public. People sensed that, like Moses, he had just come down the mountain because his face still shone with the glory of Christ. One who heard him preach wrote, "What a joy it is to come under the quickening and refreshing influence of a living creature, a true man of God, whose face, like the face of Moses, shines as if fresh from the holy Mount!" The reason he could commend Christ and the gospel with so much power is that these things were becoming more and more precious to him. He wrote to his mother, "Forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God become every day in my view more unspeakably precious." Christ was his life, and so Christ filled his preaching: "It is strange," he said, "how sweet and precious it is to preach directly about Christ, compared with all other objects of preaching." He was speaking from his own communion with Christ when he said to his people, "Unfathomable oceans of grace are in Christ for you. Dive and dive again, you will never come to the bottom of these depths." So the key to his power in preaching was his personal holiness and his communion with Christ in the word and prayer. That's what we will focus on.

God had given McCheyne the gospel key to pursuing personal holiness. He received it through the teaching of Thomas Chalmers. Chalmers was very concerned about excessive introspection in the pursuit of holiness. He knew that a believer cannot make progress in holiness without basing it on the assurance of salvation. And yet the effort to look into our sinful hearts for some evidences of grace usually backfires.

Chalmers said that glimpses into the dark room of the heart alone give no good prospect. Instead, he said we should take help from the windows. Open the shutters and admit the sun. So if you wish to look well inwardly, look well out. . . . This is the very way to quicken it. Throw widely open the portals of faith and in this, every light will be admitted into the chambers of experience. The true way to facilitate self-examination is to look believingly outwardly.

Ten Looks to Jesus for Every One Look at Self

McCheyne had written that down in a class and underlined the last sentence. So it is not surprising to hear him give his own counsel in similar terms: "Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely . . . . Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love. And repose in his almighty arms." This was the basic strategy in the pursuit of holiness. And he knew that the battle would have to be waged all the way to the end. He said to his people, "When a soul comes to . . . Christ, it is not made perfectly holy all at once. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day [Proverbs 4:18].'" He was often distressed by his own lack of holiness. But he knew that the battle would be won only in the gospel way of looking ten times to Jesus and "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

So when McCheyne spoke what are probably his most famous words, "The greatest need of my people is my own holiness," he meant not only that they need a pastor who is morally upright, but that they need a pastor who is walking in constant communion with Christ, and being changed into Christ's likeness by that constant fellowship. Which brings us now finally to the way he cultivated that constant communion with Christ.

He has much to say about the disciplines of meditating on God's word and praying. But we need to realize from the outset that all of these disciplines were designed to cultivate not occasional, but constant, communion with Christ. He did not think of his morning devotions as "laying up a stock of grace for the rest of the day, for manna will corrupt if laid by—but rather with the view of 'giving the eye the habit of looking upward all the day, and drawing down gleams from the reconciled countenance.'" In other words, all of McCheyne's scheduled disciplines aimed at fixing the habit in his heart of living in constant communion with Christ. He had formed the habit of rising early to read the Scriptures and pray, and he tried to maintain this to the end of his life. He loved to meet Jesus early. He journaled, "Rose early to seek God and found him whom my soul loveth. Who would not rise early to meet such company?" He wrote to a student, "Never see the face of man till you have seen his face who is our life, our all." Or in another place, he said, "I cannot begin my work for I have not seen the face of God." The Key to His Constant Communion with Jesus And when he spoke of seeing the face of God, he had in mind seeing God in the word of God, the Bible. He wrote to Horatius Bonar, Andrew's brother, "I love the word of God, and find it the sweetest nourishment to my soul." Many of us know that McCheyne developed a Bible reading plan, that many still use today, that takes you through the Old Testament in a year and through the New Testament and Psalms twice. But not as many know that he also developed a plan for reading the whole Bible in a month, because he so much believed that constant communion with Christ depended so heavily on these focused and set apart times of disciplined communion. And he had also learned through much experience with the living Christ that you can read the Bible and not commune with him. It is not automatic.

You may read your Bible, and pray over it till you die; you may wait on the preached Word every Sabbath-day, . . . [But] if you are not brought to cleave to him, to look to him, to believe in him, to cry out with inward adoration: "My Lord, and my God"—"How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty!"—then the outward observance of the ordinances is all in vain to you. So the key to his holiness and his preaching was not merely stated times of meditation on God's word. It was pressing into Christ through the word. The written word became the window through which he gazed on the glories of Christ—the beauties of the Rose. This was the key to his constant communion with Jesus, which was the key to his holiness and preaching. But communion goes both ways, and prayer was essential to McCheyne's power. Both the word of God read and the word of God preached depend on prayer for their power.

We are often for preaching to awaken others; but we should be more upon praying for it. Prayer is more powerful than preaching. It is prayer that gives preaching all its power. . . . Why, the very hands of Moses would have fallen down, had they not been held up by his faithful people. Come, then, ye wrestlers with God—ye that climb Jacob's ladder—ye that wrestle Jacob's wrestling—strive you with God, that he may fulfill his word.

He probably had himself in mind when said,

Since the intellectual part of the discourse is not that which is most likely to be an arrow in the conscience, those pastors who are intellectual men must bestow tenfold more prayerfulness on their work, if they would have either their own or their people's souls affected under their word. If we are ever to preach with compassion for the perishing, we must ourselves be moved by those same views of sin and righteousness which moved the human soul of Jesus.

Prayer was so crucial to his power in preaching that he was jealous to discern quickly any hindrance to prayer. One of the measures that McCheyne used to discern if he was too much in love with the world was by noticing the effect it had on his prayer and Bible reading: "Brethren, if you are ever so much taken up with any enjoyment that it takes away your love for prayer or for your Bible. . . . then you are abusing this world. Oh! Sit loose to this world's joy: 'the time is short.'" Of course, he didn't always live up to his own goals. Near the end of his life he was writing notes on "Reformation in Secret Prayer." In them he says,

I ought to pray before seeing any one [in the morning]. Often when I sleep long, or meet with others early, and then have family prayer, and breakfast, and forenoon callers, often it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. . . . Family prayer loses much of its power and sweetness; and I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then, when secret prayer comes, the soul is often out of tune. . . .

It is far better to begin with God—to see his face first—to get my soul near Him before it is near another. "When I awake I am still with Thee." If I have slept too long, or am going on an early journey, or my time is in any way shortened, it is best to dress hurriedly, and have a few minutes alone with God, than to give it up for lost. But in general, it is best to have at least one hour alone with God, before engaging in anything else. . . .

I ought to spend the best hours of the day in communion with God. It is my noblest and most fruitful employment, and is not to be thrust into any corner. The morning hours, from six to eight, are the most uninterrupted, and should be thus employed, if I can prevent drowsiness. A little time after breakfast might be given to intercession. After tea is my best hour, and that should be solemnly dedicated to God, if possible. . . . [And] when I awake in the night, I ought to rise and pray, as David and as John Welsh did. By this means of word and prayer, the Rose of Sharon became more and more beautiful and precious to McCheyne. And all the while, these acts of devotion were being intensified by the thorn of his suffering and the shortness of his life. The week he finished his university studies he wrote, "Life itself is vanishing fast. Make haste for eternity."

It wasn't long before the evidences of tuberculosis were unmistakable. He wrote to his mother in 1838, five years before he died, "My cough is turned into a loose kind of grumble, like the falling down of a shower of stones in a quarry." Early in 1839, he wrote, "My sickly frame makes me feel every day that my time may be very short." And to his own congregation, he said early in 1843, "I do not expect to live long. I expect a sudden call someday, perhaps soon, and therefore I speak very plainly."

All of this suffering and expectation of death produced a focused simplicity and intensity that gave increased power to everything else McCheyne did. He saw it as a merciful way that God lifted the veil from eternity. He said in 1839, "I always feel it a blessed thing when the Savior takes me aside

from the crowd, as he took the blind out of the town; removes the veil and clears away obscuring mists, and by his Word and Spirit leads to deeper peace and a holier walk."

He believed his sufferings and shortness of life were all for his holiness. "I have been too anxious to do great things. The lust of praise has ever been my besetting sin; and what more befitting school could be found for me than that suffering alone, away from the eyes and ears man?"

If we will not pray in the strength God gives us, the life—the very short life—of McCheyne teaches us that God has ways to make us pray and seek his face. McCheyne learned this through suffering. "Paul never prayed more earnestly, "McCheyne said, "than when he had the thorn in his flesh. The thorn in the flesh makes us pant after God." A Rose More Cherished Because of the Thorn So I conclude that in living and dying in the morning of life, McCheyne kissed the Rose and felt the thorn. His supreme joy was to know Christ. He lived in fellowship with Jesus through the word and prayer. And the thorn of his suffering intensified and purified that fellowship so that we are still being inspired by it 168 years later. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 69

05.13. Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision

Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision Andrew Fuller's Broadsides Against Sandemanianism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Global Unbelief

It is totally possible that Andrew Fuller's impact on history, by the time Jesus returns, will be far greater and different than it is now. My assessment at this point, 192 years after his death, is that his primary impact on history has been the impetus that his life and thought gave to the modern missionary movement, specifically through the sending and supporting of William Carey to India in 1793. That historical moment—the sending of William Carey and his team—marked the opening of the modern missionary movement. The Unleashing of Modern Missions

Carey was the morning star of modern missions. Between 1793 and 1865, a missionary movement never before seen in the history of the world reached virtually all the coastlands on earth. Then in 1865, Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, and from 1865 until 1934, another wave of missionary activity was released so that by 1974 virtually all the inlands—all the geographic countries of the world—were reached with the gospel. In 1934, Cameron Townsend founded Wycliffe Bible Translators which focused not on geographic areas or political states but on people groups with distinct languages and dialects and cultures—and gradually the church awakened, especially at the Lausanne Congress in 1974, to the biblical reality of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9; Revelation 7:9)—and the missionary focus of the church shifted from unreached geography and to the unreached peoples of the world.

We are in the midst of this third era of modern missions. Today the great reality, as documented in Philip Jenkins' The Next Christendom,1 is that the center of gravity in missions is moving away from Europe and the United States to the South and East. Places we once considered mission fields are now centers of Christian influence and are major missionary sending forces in the world.2 Andrew Fuller's Impact

You won't read it in the secular history books or hear it on the nightly news, but judged by almost any standard, this modern missionary movement—the spread of the Christian faith to every country and almost all the peoples of the world—is the most important historical development in the last two hundred years. Stephen Neill, in the conclusion to his History of Christian Missions, wrote, "The cool and rational eighteenth century [which ended with William Carey's departure for India] was hardly a promising seed-bed for Christian growth; but out of it came a greater outburst of Christian missionary enterprise than had been seen in all the centuries before."3 So how did it come about that the "cool and rational" eighteenth century gave birth to the greatest missionary movement in world history—a movement that continues to this day, which, if you're willing, you can be a part of? God's ways are higher than our ways and his judgments are unfathomable and inscrutable (Romans 11:33). More factors led to this great movement than any human can know. All I want to do is document one of them—just one of ten thousand things God did to unleash this great Christ-exalting, gospel-advancing, Church-expanding, evil-confronting, Satan-conquering, culture-transforming soul-saving, hell-robbing, Christian-refreshing, truth-intensifying missionary

movement.4 The reason I said at the beginning that it is totally possible that Andrew Fuller's impact on history, by the time Jesus returns, will be far greater and different than it is now, is that there are three volumes of his writings still in print, and he was an unusually brilliant theologian. So quite apart from his influence on the rise of modern missions, his biblical insights may have an impact for good on future generations all out of proportion to his obscure place in the small town of Kettering, England. We will see some of his theological genius as we work our way backward from effect to cause—from his engagement with the new missionary movement to the spiritual life and theology that set it in motion.

Great Gain and Great Loss

Andrew Fuller died on May 7, 1815, at the age of sixty-one. He had been the pastor of the Baptist Church in Kettering (population, about three thousand) for thirty-two years. Before that, he was the pastor at Soham, and before that, he was a boy growing up on his parents' farm and getting a simple education. He had no formal theological training but became the leading theological spokesman for the Particular Baptists5 in his day. He began to do occasional preaching in his home church of Soham at age seventeen, and when he was twenty-one, they called him to be the pastor. The year after he became the pastor at Soham, he married Sarah Gardiner. (The year was 1776—the year America declared independence from Britain). In the sixteen years before she died, the couple had eleven children, of whom eight died in infancy or early childhood. Sarah died two months before the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in Fuller's home in October of 1792.

It is often this way in the ministry: the greatest gain and the greatest loss within two months. "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). He did marry again. In 1794, he married Ann Coles who outlived him by ten years. An Overwhelmed Life

During these forty years of pastoral ministry in Soham and Kettering, Fuller tried to do more than one man can do well. He tried to raise a family, pastor a church, engage the destructive doctrinal errors of his day with endless writing, and function as the leader of the Baptist Missionary Society which he and a band of brothers had founded in 1792. He regularly felt overwhelmed. In 1801, he wrote in a letter,

[Samuel] Pierce's memoirs are now loudly called for [that is, people were calling for him to write the memoirs of his friend, which he did]. I sit down almost in despair. . . . My wife looks at me with a tear ready to drop, and says, "My dear, you have hardly time to speak to me." My friends at home are kind, but they also say, "You have no time to see us or know us and you will soon be worn out." Amidst all this there is "Come again to Scotland—come to Portsmouth—come to Plymouth—come to Bristol."6 A little band of Baptist pastors including William Carey had formed the Baptist Missionary Society on October 2, 1792. Fuller, more than anyone else, felt the burden of what it meant that William Carey and John Thomas (and later others) left everything for India in dependence, under God, on this band of brothers. One of them, John Ryland, recorded the story where the famous "rope holder" image came from. He wrote that Carey said, Our undertaking to India really appeared to me, on its commencement, to be somewhat like a few men, who were deliberating about the importance of penetrating into a deep mine, which had never before been explored, we had no one to guide us; and while we were thus deliberating, Carey, as it were, said "Well, I will go down, if you will hold the rope." But before he went down . . . he, as it seemed to

me, took an oath from each of us, at the mouth of the pit, to this effect—that “while we lived, we should never let go of the rope.”7

Fuller served as the main promoter, thinker, fundraiser, and letter-writer of the Society for over twenty-one years. He held that rope more firmly and with greater conscientiousness than anyone else. When he said above that in all his pastoral labors he hears, “Come again to Scotland—come to Portsmouth—come to Plymouth—come to Bristol,” he meant: Churches were calling him to come and represent the mission. So he traveled continuously speaking to raise support for the mission. He wrote the regular Periodical Accounts. He supplied news to the Baptist Annual Register, the Evangelical Magazine, and the Baptist Magazine. He took the lead role in selecting new missionaries. He wrote regularly to the missionaries on the field and to people at home.8 Tireless Pastoral Labors

All this while knowing his pastoral work was suffering. He did not have an assistant at Kettering until 1811 (John Hall), four years before he died. In October of 1794, he lamented in a letter to John Ryland how the mission work was compromising the church work: “I long to visit my congregation that I may know of their spiritual concerns and preach to their cases.”9 The love he felt for his people is expressed in a letter he wrote to a wayward member that he was pursuing: “When a parent loses . . . a child nothing but the recovery of that child can heal the wound. If he could have many other children, that would not do it. . . . Thus it is with me towards you. Nothing but your return to God and the Church can heal the wound.”10

He pressed on faithfully feeding his flock with faithful expository preaching. “Beginning April 1790, he expounded successively Psalms, Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Genesis, Matthew, Luke, John, Revelation, Acts, Romans, and First Corinthians as far as 4:5.”11 The people did not seem to begrudge their pastor’s wider ministry for the Missionary Society. One young deacon entered in his diary two weeks before Fuller’s death,

What a loss as individuals and as a church we are going to sustain. Him that has so long fed us with the bread of life, that has so affectionately, so faithfully, and so fervently counseled, exhorted, reproved, and animated; by doctrine, by precept, and by example the people of his charge; him who has liv’d so much for others! Shall we know more hear his voice?12 And when he was home from his travels, his life was one form of work for another. His second wife Ann once told him that “he allowed himself no time for recreation.” Fuller answered, “O no: all my recreation is a change of work.”13 His son, Gunton Fuller, recorded that even in 1815, just a few months before his death, he was still working at his desk “upwards of twelve hours a day.”

14 Extraordinary Suffering

Woven into all this work, making his perseverance all the more astonishing, is the extraordinary suffering, especially his losses. He lost eight children and his first wife. On July 10, 1792, he wrote, “My family afflictions have almost overwhelmed me, and what is yet before me I know not! For about a month past the affliction of my dear companion has been extremely heavy.” Then on July 25, “Oh my God, my soul is cast down within me! The afflictions of my family seemed too heavy for me. Oh, Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me!”15 When his wife died one month later (August 23, 1792), having lost eight of her children, Fuller wrote these lines: The tender parent wails no

more her loss, Nor labors more beneath life's heavy load; The anxious soul, released from fears and woes, Has found her home, her children, and her God.16 Andrew Fuller, the Thinker That is the personal, pastoral, missionary context of Fuller's engagement with the spiritual and doctrinal errors of his day. And for all his activism, it is his controversial and doctrinal writing that served the cause of world missions most. Virtually all the students of Andrew Fuller agree that he was the most influential theologian of the Particular Baptists. "Fuller," one writes, "was pre-eminently the thinker, and no movement can go far without a thinker."17

What I will try to do is show how his engagement with Sandemanianism recovered and preserved a kind of vital faith that is essential for missions, and his engagement with Hyper-Calvinism (or what he more often called High Calvinism) recovered and preserved a kind of preaching that is essential for missions. And in both cases, the battle was distinctly exegetical and doctrinal even though the all-important outcomes were deeply experiential and globally practical.

Enlightenment Contemporaries and Particular Baptists Of course, Andrew Fuller, the thinker, the theologian, did not arise in a vacuum. Besides the secular rationalism of David Hume (1711-1776) in Britain and Rousseau (1712-1778) in France and Thomas Paine (1737-1809) in America—all contemporaries of Andrew Fuller—there was the Great Awakening in America and the Evangelical Awakening in Britain. Both George Whitefield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791) were in their prime when Andrew Fuller was born in 1754. The Particular Baptists did not like either of these evangelical leaders. Wesley was not a Calvinist, and Whitefield's Calvinism was suspect, to say the least, because of the kind of evangelistic preaching he did. The Particular Baptists spoke derisively of Whitefield's "Arminian dialect."18 Fuller grew up in what he called a High Calvinistic—or Hyper-Calvinistic—church. He said later that the minister at the church in Soham (John Eve) had "little or nothing to say to the unconverted."19 Fuller's greatest theological achievement was to see and defend and spread the truth that historic biblical Calvinism fully embraced the offer of the gospel to all people without exception.

Fuller immersed himself in the Scriptures and in the historic tradition flowing from Augustine through Calvin through the Puritans down to Jonathan Edwards. The Bible was always paramount: "Lord, thou hast given me a determination to take up no principle at second-hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountain of thy word."20 That is one of the main reasons why it is so profitable to read Fuller to this very day: He is so freshly biblical. His Great Mentors But he is wide open about who his great mentors were. And we should know them. He searched both the Scriptures and the history of doctrine to see if he could find this High Calvinism that had so infected and controlled his denomination—the view that opposed offering the gospel to all men and said it could not be the duty of the unregenerate men to believe on Jesus, and therefore, one should not tell them they should do what they have no duty to do. That was the reasoning of Hyper-Calvinism.21 Fuller came to this conclusion:

Neither Augustine nor Calvin, who each in his today defended predestination, and the other doctrines connected with it, ever appear to have thought of denying it to be the duty of every sinner who has heard the gospel to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Neither did the other Reformers, nor the Puritans of the 16th century, nor the divines at the Synod of Dort, (who opposed Arminius) nor any of the nonconformists of the 17th century, so far as I have any acquaintance with their writings, ever so much as hesitate upon this subject.22

John Calvin played a relatively minor role in shaping Fuller's thinking directly. He was immersed in the Puritans and quoted more from Charnock, Goodwin, Bunyan, and Owen than from Calvin.23 In fact, by his own testimony, John Owen ranks first in his esteem of all the writers that influenced him. "I never met with anything of importance in his writings on which I saw any reason to animadvert; so far from it, that I know of no writer for whom I have so great an esteem."24 The Influence of Jonathan Edwards But even if he esteems Owen above all others, almost everyone who studies Fuller's works agree that Jonathan Edwards was the most decisively influential in helping him break free from his Hyper-Calvinistic roots.25 Fuller admits that, after the Bible itself, it was Edwards who provided the keys that unlocked the door out of Hyper-Calvinist reasoning. We will see that this was true both for the Sandemanian and the Hyper-Calvinist controversies.

David Bebbington says that Jonathan Edwards "stands at the headwaters" of eighteenth-century evangelicalism.26 That is certainly true for Andrew Fuller. To give you a flavor of the way he felt about Edwards—ten days before Fuller died on May 7, 1815, he dictated a letter to John Ryland, one of the band of brothers who founded the mission together with him. The point of the letter was to defend Jonathan Edwards:

We have heard some, who have been giving out of late that "if Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful." If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is.27 Edwards' Freedom of the Will

Fuller was born in 1754, four years before Jonathan Edwards died, and the year that Edwards published his hugely influential book The Freedom of the Will. I mention Edwards' book on the will because in it Fuller found one of the keys that unlocked the unbiblical prison of Hyper-Calvinism. The Hyper-Calvinist reasoning went like this, in the words of Andrew Fuller:

It is absurd and cruel to require of any man what is beyond his power to perform; and as the Scriptures declare that "No man can come to Christ, except the Father draw him," and that "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," it is concluded that these are things to which the sinner, while unregenerate, is under no obligation.28

"It is a kind of maxim with such persons," Fuller said, "that 'none can be obliged to act spiritually, but spiritual men.'"29 The practical conclusion that they drew was that faith in Christ is not a duty for the non-elect. It is not a duty for the unregenerate. Therefore, you never call for faith indiscriminately. You never stand before a group of people—whether in Britain or in India—and say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!" You never exhort, plead, call, command, urge.

Fuller Against the Hyper-Calvinists One of Fuller's critics, John Martin, Pastor at Grafton Street, Westminster wrote,

Sinners in my opinion, are more frequently converted, and believers more commonly edified, by a narrative of facts concerning Jesus Christ, and by a clear, connected statement of the doctrines of grace, and blessings of the gospel, and then by all the expectations and expostulations that were ever invented.30 But in fact, the Hyper-Calvinists were not passionately telling the narrative of the gospel story to the lost and were opposed to the new mission to India. Peter Morden points out that "The prevalence of high Calvinism had led not only to a refusal to 'offer Christ' but also to a

general suspicion of all human ‘means’, such as ministerial training and associating.”31 The effect of this rationalistic distortion of the biblical Calvinism was that the churches were lifeless32 and the denomination of the Particular Baptists was dying.

Fuller, who only knew High Calvinism in his early ministry, said in 1774, “I . . . durst not, for some years, address an invitation to the unconverted to come to Jesus.”33 He went on to say, “I conceive there is scarcely a minister amongst us whose preaching has not been more or less influenced by the lethargic systems of the age.”34 The price had been huge: in the forty years after 1718; the Particular Baptists declined from 220 congregations to 150.35 A “Warrant of Faith”?

If you ask: How then did anyone get saved under this system? The answer was that here and there God would give what they called a “warrant of faith.” That is, there would be some token granted by the Holy Spirit to signify that the persons were regenerate and elect and therefore had a “warrant” to believe. For example, one way God did this, they believed, was by forcibly suggesting a Scripture to one’s mind. This happened to Fuller at age thirteen (with Romans 6:14), and he thought for a while that he had been saved. But the experience proved to be abortive.36

What Fuller came to see was that High Calvinism had shifted the meaning of faith from focusing on the objective person and promises of Christ onto the subjective state of our own hearts. In other words, saving faith became faith that I am experiencing the regenerating work of God—faith that I am elect. Or, as Fuller put it, the High Calvinists said that faith is to “believe the goodness of their state.” To this he responded:

If this be saving faith, it must inevitably follow that it is not the duty of unconverted sinners; for they are not interested in Christ [that is, they are not yet united to him], and it cannot possibly be their duty to believe a lie. But if it can be proved that the proper object of saving faith is not our being interested in Christ [that is, our being already united to him], but the glorious gospel of the ever blessed God, (which is true, whether we believe it or not,) a contrary inference must be drawn; for it is admitted, all in all hands, that it is the duty of every man to believe what God reveals.37 In fact, Fuller goes on to show that

Nothing can be an object of faith, except what God has revealed in his word; but the interest that any individual has in Christ . . . is not revealed. . . . The Scriptures always represent faith as terminating on something [outside of] us; namely, on Christ, and the truths concerning him. . . . The person, blood, and righteousness of Christ revealed in the Scriptures as the way of a sinner’s acceptance with God, are, properly speaking, the objects of our faith; for without such a revelation it were impossible to believe in them. . . . That for which he ought to have trusted in him was the obtaining of mercy, in case he applied for it. For this there was a complete warrant in the gospel declarations.38 In other words, we should not say to unbelievers: Wait until you feel some warrant of faith so that you can trust in that. Rather, we should say, “Christ is the glorious divine Son of God. His death and resurrection are sufficient to cover all your sins.39 He promises to receive everyone who comes to him and he promises to forgive all who trust in him. Therefore, come to him and trust him and you will be saved. If you wonder if you are elect or if you are regenerate, cease wondering and do what Christ has commanded you to do. Receive him, trust in him, cast yourself on him for his promised mercy. And you will prove to be elect and to be regenerate.”

Fuller, the Calvinist

Fuller is a Calvinist. He says, “The Scriptures clearly ascribe both repentance and faith wherever they exist to divine influence [e.g., 2 Timothy 2:25-26; Ephesians 2:8].” He believes in irresistible grace. But what he is arguing against is that one has to know before he believes that he is being irresistibly called or regenerated:

Whatever necessity there may be for a change of heart in order [for one to believe], it is neither necessary nor possible that the party should be conscious of it till he has believed. It is necessary that the eyes of a blind man should be opened before he can see; but it is neither necessary nor possible for him to know that his eyes are open till he does see.40

Fuller steadfastly refuses to let ostensible Calvinistic or Arminian logic override what he sees in Scripture. And ironically, High Calvinism and Arminianism are here standing on the same pretended logic against Scripture. Both argue that it is absurd and cruel to require of any man what is beyond his power to perform. Or to put it the way Fuller does,

They are agreed in making the grace of God necessary to the accountableness of sinners with regard to spiritual obedience. The one [High Calvinism] pleads for graceless sinners being free from obligation, the other [Arminianism] admits of obligation but founds it on the notion of universal grace. Both are agreed that where there is no grace there is no duty. But if grace be the ground of obligation, it is no more grace, but debt.41

“The whole weight of this objection,” he says, “rests upon the supposition that we do not stand in need of the Holy Spirit to enable us to comply with our duty.”42 In other words, both High Calvinists and Arminians rejected the prayer of St. Augustine, “Command what you wish, but give what you command.”43 But Fuller says, “To me it appears that the necessity of Divine influence, and even of a change of heart, prior to believing, is perfectly consistent with its being the immediate duty of the unregenerate.”44 Why? Because the Scripture shows it to be the case, and Jonathan Edwards provides categories that help make sense out of it. Concerning the biblical witness, he writes, The same things are required in one place which are promised in another: ‘Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart.’—‘I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.’ When the sacred writers speak of the divine precepts, they neither disown them nor infer from them a self-sufficiency to conform to them, but turn them into prayer: ‘Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!’ In fine, the Scriptures uniformly teach us that all our sufficiency to do good or to abstain from evil is from above; repentance and faith, therefore may be duties, notwithstanding their being the gifts of God.45 Natural Inability and Moral Inability In his most famous work, The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, Fuller piles text upon text in which unbelievers are addressed with the duty to believe.46 These are his final court of appeal against the High Calvinists who use their professed logic to move from biblical premises to unbiblical conclusions. But he finds Edwards very helpful in answering the High Calvinist objection on another level. Remember, the objection is: “It is absurd and cruel to require of any man what is beyond his power to perform.” In other words, a man’s inability to believe removes his responsibility to believe (and our duty to command them to believe). In response to this objection, Fuller brings forward the distinction between moral inability and natural inability. This was the key insight which he learned from Jonathan Edwards, and he gives him credit for it on the third page of The Gospel Worthy.47 The distinction is this: Natural inability is owing to the lack of “rational faculties, bodily powers, or

external advantages"; but moral inability is owing to the lack of inclination because of an averse will. Natural inability does in fact remove obligation. He cites Romans 2:12 as a pointer to this truth: "For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law." In other words, there is a correlation between what you will be held accountable for and what you had natural access to. But moral inability does not excuse. It does not remove obligation. And this is the kind of inability the Bible is speaking about when it says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14; cf. Romans 8:8).

There is an essential difference [Fuller writes] between an ability which is independent of the inclination, and one that is owing to nothing else. It is just as impossible, no doubt, for any person to do that which he has no mind to do, as to perform that which surpasses his natural powers; and hence it is that the same terms are used in one case as in the other.48 In other words, it is just as impossible for you to choose to do what you have no inclination to do as it is to do what you have no physical ability to do. But the inability owing to physical hindrances excuses, while the inability owing to a rebellious will does not.49 This kind of reasoning was not Fuller's main reason for rejecting High Calvinism and Arminianism. Scripture was. But Edwards' categories helped him make more sense of what he saw there. The Practical Effect for Missions The all important conclusion from all this exegetical, doctrinal, theological labor and controversy was the enormously practical implication for evangelism and world missions:

I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; and, as I believe the inability of men to [do] spiritual things to be wholly of the moral, and therefore of the criminal kind—and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust in him for salvation, though they do not; I therefore believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them, to be not only consistent, but directly adapted as means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to bring them to Christ. I consider it as part of my duty that I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.50

Fuller's engagement at this level of intellectual rigor, as a pastor and a family man, may seem misplaced. The price was high in his church and in his family. But the fruit for the world was incalculably great. No one else was on the horizon to strike a blow against the church-destroying, evangelism-hindering, missions-killing doctrine of High Calvinism. Fuller did it, and the theological platform was laid for the launching of the greatest missionary movement in the world.

Fuller Against Sandemanianism

Before we draw out some lessons for ourselves, I want to deal briefly with Fuller's engagement with Sandemanianism. Fuller's response to this deadening movement of his day was part of the platform for the missionary movement, and it is amazingly relevant for our day because of its bearing on the debates about the nature of justifying faith. I just tuned into the debate between R. Scott Clark and Doug Wilson over at Scott's blog, Heidelblog, and there were elements of it that relate directly to Fuller's response to Sandemanianism (though no one there would be in the category of a Sandemanian). And again Fuller gets one of his decisive insights in this debate from Jonathan Edwards.

What is Sandemanianism?

Robert Sandeman (1718-1771) spread the teaching that justifying faith is the mind's passive persuasion that the gospel statements are true. Here is the way Andrew Fuller expressed this Sandemanianism. The distinguishing marks of the system, he says, relate to the nature of justifying faith. This Mr. S. [Sandeman] constantly represents as the bare belief of the bare truth; by which definition he intends, as it would seem, to exclude from it everything pertaining to the will and the affections, except as effects produced by it. . . . 'Everyone,' says he, 'who obtains a just notion of the person and work of Christ, or whose notion corresponds to what is testified of him, is justified, and finds peace with God simply by that notion.' This notion he considers as the effect of truth being impressed upon the mind, and denies that the mind is active in it. 'He who maintains,' says he, 'that we are justified only by faith, and at the same time affirms . . . that faith is a work exerted by the human mind, undoubtedly maintains, if he had any meaning to his words, that we are justified by a work exerted by the human mind.'51

Sandeman's aim is to protect the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He believes that if faith has any movement of mind or will or affections toward God, it is an act and therefore a work and would therefore compromise the doctrine. To protect the doctrine, he denies that faith has any activity in it at all. Implicit is that faith is not a virtue. It does not partake of any goodness or newness in the soul. He therefore does not see regeneration as preceding and enabling faith, for that would make faith an acting of the renewed heart and therefore we would be justified by the goodness of what we do. So faith must be defined as perfectly consistent with a soul that is in actual enmity with God, before there is any renewal at all.

Sandeman's main support for this view is the meaning of the term ungodly in Romans 4:5, "To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." He argues that this term must mean that there is no godly or virtuous or renewed or active quality about our faith, for if there were, we would not be called ungodly. So he defines faith as a passive persuasion of the truth in which the mind is not active. So faith can coexist with ungodliness understood as the total absence of any renewal or godly act of the soul.52 For the Sake of the Church and the Nations

Fuller found this both unbiblical and deadening to the churches. To sever the roots of faith in regeneration, and to strip faith of its holiness, and to deny its active impulse to produce the fruit of love (Galatians 5:6) was to turn the church into an intellectualistic gathering of passive people who are afraid of their emotions and who lack any passion for worship or missions.53 Therefore, Fuller, the lover of God and missions, waged another battle against Sandemanianism for the sake of the church and the nations.

Fuller compiles a hundred pages of small print argument in twelve letters complied under the title Strictures on Sandemanianism.54 He points out, for example, that faith is a kind of "work" or act of the soul because Jesus says so in John 6:28-29, "Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"55 He also observes that it is the uniform witness of Scripture that "without repentance there is no forgiveness."56 He also shows that the meaning of faith in the New Testament is revealed with many parallel expressions that imply the good action of the heart (for example, to receive Christ, John 1:12; or to come to Christ, John 6:35). So Fuller denies that faith

is a mere passive persuasion of the mind, but asserts that it is the holy fruit of regeneration which has in it the good impulse to “work through love” (Galatians 5:6).57 To see this is vital for the life of the church and the power of world missions. How then does he reconcile this with Romans 4:5 which says that God “justifies the ungodly”? Here is his answer: This term [ungodly in Romans 4:5], I apprehend, is not designed, in the passage under consideration, to express the actual state of mind which the party at the time possesses, but the character under which God considers him in bestowing the blessing of justification upon him. Whatever be the present state of the sinner’s mind—whether he be a haughty Pharisee or a humble publican—if he possess nothing which can in any degree balance the curse which stands against him, or at all operate as a ground of acceptance with God, he must be justified, if at all, as unworthy, ungodly, and wholly out of regard to the righteousness of the mediator.”58

He uses the analogy of a magnet to help us see that faith can have qualities about it and yet it not be these qualities that God has reference to when he counts faith as justifying.

Whatever holiness there is in [faith], it is not this, but the obedience of Christ, that constitutes our justifying righteousness. Whatever other properties the magnet may possess, it is as pointing invariably to the north that it guides the mariner; and whatever other properties faith may possess, it is as receiving Christ, and bringing us into union with him, that it justifies.59 The Uniqueness of Faith

He points out that faith is unique among all the other graces that grow in the renewed heart. It is a “peculiarly receiving grace.”

Thus it is that justification is ascribed to faith, because it is by faith that we receive Christ; and thus it is by faith only, and not by any other grace. Faith is peculiarly a receiving grace which none other is. Were we said to be justified by repentance, by love, or by any other grace, it would convey to us the idea of something good in us being the consideration on which the blessing was bestowed; but justification by faith conveys no such idea. On the contrary, it leads the mind directly to Christ, in the same manner as saying of a person that he lives by begging leads to the idea of his living on what he freely receives.”60

What matters, Fuller says, concerning the meaning of the justification of the ungodly is not that we possess no holy affections in the moment of justification by faith, “but that, whatever we possess we make nothing of it as a ground of acceptance, ‘counting all things but loss and dung that we may win and be found in him.’”61 Faith is a duty. It is an act of the soul. It is a good effect of regeneration. “Yet,” Fuller says, “it is not as such, but as uniting us to Christ and deriving righteousness from him, that it justifies?”62 Faith: A Holy Act That Justifies the Ungodly Fuller concludes his book The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation with reference back to the New Testament preachers. The ground on which they took their stand was “Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them” [Galatians 3:10]. Hence they inferred the impossibility of the sinner being justified in any other way than for the sake of him who was “made a curse for us;” and hence it clearly follows, that whatever holiness any sinner may possess before, in, or after believing, it is of no account whatever as a ground of acceptance with God.63 Which means that God justifies us under the consideration of our unworthiness, our ungodliness, because of Christ, not under the consideration of any holiness in us. In this way, Fuller is able to retain the crucial biblical meaning of faith as a holy acting of the will flowing from

regeneration, and yet say with Paul, “To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Romans 4:5).

One Great Enemy: Global Unbelief The sum of the matter is that Fuller had one great enemy he wanted to defeat—global unbelief in Jesus Christ. He believed that the kingdom of Christ would triumph, and he meant to be an instrument in the conquering of unbelief in India and to the ends of the earth. Standing in the way of that triumph in his generation were false views of justifying faith and false views of gospel preaching. Sandemanianism had ripped the life and power out of faith so that it was powerless in worship and missions. Hyper-Calvinism had muzzled the gospel cry of the Bride (“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price,” Revelation 22:17). For the sake of the life of the church and the salvation of the nations, Fuller took up the battle for truth. The Vital Link Between Doctrine and World Missions

What shall we learn from this? We should learn the vital link between the doctrinal faithfulness of the church and the cause of world missions. The main impulse of our day is in the other direction. Everywhere you turn there is pressure to believe that missions depends on not disputing about doctrine. As soon as you engage another professing Christian in controversy over some biblical issue, the cry will go up: “Stop wasting your time and be about missions.” What we learn from Fuller is that those cries are at best historically naïve and at worst a smoke screen for the uninhibited spread of error.

One crucial lesson from Andrew Fuller’s life is that the exegetical and doctrinal defense of true justifying faith and true gospel preaching in the end did not hinder but advanced the greatest missionary movement in world history. Getting Christian experience biblically right and getting the gospel biblically right are essential for the power and perseverance and fruitfulness of world missions.

Wrong Inferences Produce Deadly Mistakes

Learn from Fuller’s conflicts that deadly mistakes come from drawing wrong inferences from texts based on superficial claims of logic: If God justifies the ungodly, then faith must be ungodly because God justifies by faith. If the natural man cannot receive the message of the cross, then don’t urge him to receive it; it’s pointless and cruel. Real logic is not the enemy of exegesis. But more errors than we know flow from the claim to logic that contradicts the Bible.

If God is love, there cannot be predestination.

If Stephen says Israel has resisted God, then God cannot overcome our rebellion irresistibly.

If men are accountable for their choices, they must be ultimately self-determining.

If God is good, innocent people cannot suffer so much.

If God rules all things including sin, he must be sinner.

If God rules all things, there is not point in praying.

If God threatens a person with not entering the kingdom, he cannot have eternal security.

If Christ died for all, he cannot have purchased anything particular for the elect.

Fuller shows us that the best antidote against the wrong use of logic is not first better logic, but better knowledge of the Bible, which is the best warning system for when logic is being misused.

Global Impact for the Glory of Christ

There is a kind of inner logic to Fuller's life and battles and global fruitfulness. His engagement with Sandemanianism highlights the importance of vital, authentic spiritual experience over against sterile, intellectualistic faith. His engagement with Hyper-Calvinism highlights the importance of objective gospel truth. These two things set the stage for assaulting global unbelief. Authentic subjective experience of God plus authentic objective truth of God leads to authentic practical mission for God. Holy faith plus worthy gospel yields world vision.

Therefore, devote yourself to experiencing Christ in the gospel biblically and authentically. And devote yourself to understanding Christ in the gospel biblically and authentically. And may God ignite that experience and that understanding in such a way that your life will count like Andrew Fuller's for the cause of world evangelization to the glory of Christ.

1 Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

2Andrew Walls would say it a little differently than Jenkins: "While some scholars such as Philip Jenkins emphasize a shift of power from Western churches to those south of the equator, Walls sees instead a new polycentrism: the riches of a hundred places learning from each other." "Historian Ahead of His Time," Christianity Today, Vol. 51, No. 2, February 2007, p. 89.

3 Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 571.

4 I mention the terms Christian-refreshing and truth-intensifying because in Andrew Fuller's life, there is a reciprocal relationship between spiritual life and biblical truth, on the one hand, and missions, on the other hand. In one direction, spiritual life and biblical truth give rise to missions. And in the other direction, engagement in the missionary enterprise awakens and sustains new levels of spiritual life and sharpens and deepens and intensifies our grasp of biblical truth. We will focus on the first in this message, but here are some glimpses into the effect missions had on Fuller's life. On July 18, 1794, he wrote the following in his diary:

Within the last year or two, we have formed a missionary society; and have been enabled to send out two of our brethren to the East Indies. My heart has been greatly interested in this work. Surely I never felt more genuine love to God and to his cause in my life. I bless God that this work has been a means of reviving my soul. If nothing else comes of it, I and many others have obtained a spiritual advantage. (Peter Morden, Offering Christ to the World [Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster, 2003], p. 167)

Six months earlier he had written to John Ryland, "I have found the more I do for Christ, the better it is with me. I never enjoyed so much the pleasures of religion, as I have within the last two years, since we have engaged in the Mission business. Mr. Whitfield used to say, 'the more men does for God, the more he may'." (Ibid.) In one direction, when your love for Christ is enflamed and your

grasp of the gospel is clear, a passion for world missions follows. In the other direction, when you are involved in missions—when you are laying down your life to rescue people from perishing—it tends to authenticate your faith, and deepen your assurance, and sweeten your fellowship with Jesus, and heighten your love for people, and sharpen your doctrines of Christ and heaven and hell. In other words, spiritual life and right doctrine are good for missions, and missions is good for spiritual life and right doctrine.

5 The term Particular Baptist is a technical term taken from the phrase “particular redemption,” one of the tenets of the Calvinistic Baptists. Therefore, Particular Baptists were the Calvinistic Baptists, in distinction from the General (or Arminian) Baptists.

6 Morden, Offering Christ, pp. 153-154.

7 Ibid., p. 136.

8 See Ibid., pp. 136-137, for a fuller account of his engagements.

9 Ibid., p. 111.

10 Accessed online at http://haykin.luxpub.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=26.

11 Tom Nettles in his “Preface to the New Edition: Why Andrew Fuller?” The Complete Works of Reverend Andrew Fuller, Vol. 1, Joseph Belcher, (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988).

12 Morden, Offering Christ, p. 112.

13 Accessed online at http://haykin.luxpub.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=26.

14 Morden, Offering Christ, p. 183.

15 The Complete Works of Reverend Andrew Fuller, Vol. I, pp. 58-59.

16 Works, Vol. I, pp. 59-61.

17 Morden, Offering Christ, p. 137, citing E. F. Clipsham, who was quoting B. Grey Griffith.

18 Ibid., p. 20.

19 Ibid., p. 27.

20Works, Vol. I, p. 20.

21 The two most influential authors representing High Calvinism—at least the ones who influenced Particular Baptists most—were John Brine (1703-1765) and John Gill (1697-1771). Morden comments that Timothy George and others have made attempts to rehabilitate Gill and to rebut the charge that he was a Hyper-Calvinist, “but attempts to defend him from the charge of high Calvinism are ultimately unconvincing” (Offering Christ, p. 15) A quotation illustrating John Gill’s attitude towards a free offer of the gospel: “That there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny; nay I deny that they are made to any; no not to God’s elect; grace

and salvation are provided for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel and applied by the spirit." John Gill, Sermons and Tracts, Three Volumes (London: 1778), III, p. 269-270, quoted in Morden, Offering Christ, p. 14. Fuller himself certainly saw Gill as a High Calvinist responsible for much of the evangelistic deadness among his fellow Particular Baptists: "I perceived . . . that the system of Bunyan was not the same as [John Gill's]; for while he maintained the doctrines of election and predestination, he nevertheless held with the free offer of salvation to sinners without distinction" (Morden, Offering Christ, p. 31).

22Works, Vol. II, p. 367.

23 He only quotes from Calvin once in the first edition of his most influential book, The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation. Morden concludes, "There is no direct link between Calvin's writings and The Gospel Worthy." Morden, Offering Christ, p. 35.

24 Works, Vol. I, p. 39. Emphasis added.

25 Edwards, most agree, was "probably the most powerful and important extra biblical influence" on Fuller. Morden, Offering Christ, p. 49.

26 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 6.

27 Works, Vol. I, p. 101.

28 Ibid., p. 376.

29 Works, Vol. II, p. 360.

30 Quoted in Morden, Offering Christ, p. 57.

31 Morden Offering Christ, p. 45

32 One example of the emotional fallout of High Calvinism is seen, first, in the fact that Whitefield and Wesley were accused of "enthusiasm" which was defined vaguely and abusively as any kind of religious excitement, and, second, in the fact that John Gill, in his A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, said that spiritual joy "is not to be expressed by those who experience it; it is better experienced than expressed." Ibid., p. 20.

33 Quoted from John Ryland's biography in Ibid., p. 103.

34 Works, Vol., II, p. 387.

35 Morden Offering Christ, p. 8.

36 Ibid., p. 28.

37 Works, Vol., II, p. 333.

38 Ibid., pp. 334, 340, 342.

39 On the extent of the atonement, Fuller found himself again defending the Scripture against High Calvinists and Arminians who both thought that "particular redemption" made the free offer of the

gospel to all illogical. His position is that the death of Christ is not to be conceived of "commercially" in the sense that it purchased effectually a limited number such that if more believed they could not be atoned for. On the other hand, if the atonement of Christ proceed not on the principle of commercial, but of moral justice, or justice as it relates to crime—if its grand object were to express the divine displeasure against sin (Romans 8:3) and so to render the exercise of mercy, in all the ways wherein sovereign wisdom should determine to apply it, consistent with righteousness (Romans 3:25)—if it be in itself equal to the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to embrace it—and if the peculiarity which attends it consists not in its insufficiency to save more than are saved, but in the sovereignty of its application—no such inconsistency can justly be ascribed to it. Works, Vol., II, pp. 373-374. Emphasis added.

40 In other words, the limitation of the atonement lies not in the sufficiency of its worth to save all the sinners in the world, but in the design of God to apply that infinite sufficiency to those whom he chooses. As the application of redemption is solely directed by sovereign wisdom, so, like every other event, it is the result of previous design. That which is actually done was intended to be done. Hence the salvation of those that are saved is described as the end which the Savior had in view: "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Herein, it is apprehended, consists the peculiarity of redemption. There is no contradiction between this peculiarity of design in the death of Christ, and the universal obligation of those who hear the gospel to believe in him, or universal invitation being addressed to them. Ibid., p.374. In this position, as in so many, he was in line with his decisive mentor, Jonathan Edwards, who wrote in The Freedom of the Will,

Christ in some sense might be said to die for all, and to redeem all visible Christians, yea, the whole world by his death; yet there must be something particular in the design of his death with respect to such as be saved thereby. God has the actual salvation of redemption of a certain number in his proper and absolute design, and of a certain number only; and, therefore, such a design can only be prosecuted in anything God does in order to the salvation of men. Jonathan Edwards, The Freedom of the Will, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. I, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale university Press, 1985, p. 435.

Works, Vol., II, p. 383.

41 Ibid., p.379.

42 Ibid., p. 379.

43 Confessions, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), p. 40 (X, xxix).

44 Works, Vol., II, p. 381.

45 Ibid., p. 380. "If an upright heart toward God and man be not itself required of us, nothing is or can be required; for all duty is comprehended in the acting-out of the heart." Ibid., p. 382.

46 See Works, Vol., II, pp. 343-366 where most of these texts are explained. See, for example, Psalms 2:11-12; Isaiah 55:1-7; Jeremiah 6:16; John 12:36; John 6:29; John 5:23. He aligns himself with John Owen at this point who wrote, "When the apostle beseecheth us to be 'reconciled' to God, I would know whether it be not a part of our duty to yield obedience? If not, the expectation is frivolous and vain." Works, Vol., II, p. 353.

47 Referring to himself in the third person as the author, he writes, “He had read and considered, as well as he was able, President Edwards’s Inquiry into the Freedom the Will . . . on the difference between natural and moral inability. He found much satisfaction in the distinction as it appeared to him to carry with it its own evidence—to be clearly and fully contained in the Scriptures. . . . The more he examined the Scriptures, the more he was convinced that all inability ascribed to man, with respect to believing, arises from the perversion of his hear.” Works, Vol., II, p. 330.

48 Ibid., p. 377.

49 “He that, from the Constitution of his nature, is absolutely unable to understand, or believe, or love a certain kind of truth, must of necessity, be alike unable to shut his eyes against it, to disbelieve, to reject, or to hate it. But it is manifest that all men are capable of the latter; it must therefore follow that nothing but the depravity of their heart renders them incapable of the former.” Works, Vol., II, p. 378.

50 Morden, Offering Christ, p. 106.

51 Works, Vol., I, pp. 566-567. Sandeman took his view so seriously that he saw the main stream Puritan writers (including men like Flavel, Boston, Guthrie, and the Erskines) as furnishing “a devout path to hell.” Works, Vol. II, p. 566.

52 See how Fuller explains this argument of Sandeman in Works, Vol., I, p. 568.

53 “Their intellectualized view of faith probably accounted for what Fuller and Sutcliff saw as the arid nature of many of their churches. . . . Most centrally, they were not sufficiently committed to the spread of the gospel.” Morden, Offering Christ, p. 150.

54 Works, Vol. II, pp. 561-646. Here are two sample arguments for not taking ungodly in Romans 4:5 to mean that faith in the justified believer has no character of holiness:

Argument #1: “Neither Abraham nor David, whose cases the apostle selects for the illustration is argument, was, at the time referred to, the enemy of God. . . . But the truth is, [Abraham] had been a believer in God and a true worshiper of him for many years, at the time when he is said to have believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:8. Here then is an account of one who had walked with God for a series of years ‘working not, but believing on him that justifieth the ungodly;’ a clear proof that by ‘working not’ the apostle did not mean a wicked inaction, but a renunciation of works as the ground of acceptance with God” (Works, Vol. III, p. 717).

Argument #2. “It and has been said that the term ungodly is never used but to describe the party as being under actual enmity of God at the time. I apprehend this is a mistake. Christ is said to have died for the ‘ungodly.’ Did he then lay down his life only for those who, at the time, were actually his enemies? If so, he did not die for any of the Old Testament saints, nor for any of the godly who were then alive, nor even for his own apostles. All that can in truth be said is, that, what ever were the characters at the time, he died for them as ungodly; and thus it is that he ‘justifieth the ungodly’” (Ibid., p. 404).

55Works, Vol. III, p. 718. But he adds immediately, as we will see below, “But that we are justified by it as a work, or is a part of moral obedience . . . I utterly deny.”

56 Ibid., p. 716.

57“Unbelief [is not] the same thing as unholiness, enmity, or disobedience; but it is not so distinct from either as not to partake of the same general nature. It is not only the root of all other sin, but is itself a sin. In like manner, faith is not only the root of all other obedience, but is itself an exercise of obedience. It is called ‘obeying the truth,’ and ‘obeying the gospel.’” Works, Vol. II, p. 575.

58 Works, Vol. III, p. 715. Emphasis added.

59 Works, Vol. I, p. 281. “By believing in Jesus Christ the sinner becomes vitally united to him, or, as the Scriptures express it, ‘joined to the Lord,’ and is of ‘one spirit with him;’ and this union, according to the divine constitution, as revealed in the gospel, is the ground of an interest in his righteousness. Agreeable to this is the following language: “There is now, therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.’—‘Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us righteousness,’ etc.—‘That I may be found in him not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.’” Works, Vol. II, p. 384.

60 Works, Vol. I, p. 281. “By faith we receive the benefit; but the benefit arises not from faith, but from Christ. Hence the same thing which is described in some places to faith, is in others ascribed to the obedience, death, and resurrection of Christ.” p. 282.

61 Works, Vol. II, p. 406.

62 Ibid., p. 572. At this point, he refers to Jonathan Edwards and gives him credit for this insight.

63 Ibid., pp. 392-393. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.14. How Few There Are Who Die So Hard!

How Few There Are Who Die So Hard!

Suffering and Success in the Life of Adoniram Judson: The Cost of Bringing Christ to Burma Our Lord Jesus said to us in very solemn words, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Then he adds this: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). In other words, a fruitful life and an eternal life come from this: dying like a seed and hating your life in this world. What overwhelms me, as I ponder this and trace the life of Adoniram Judson, America's first foreign missionary, is how strategic it was that he died so many times and in so many ways.

More and more I am persuaded from Scripture and from the history of missions that God's design for the evangelization of the world and the consummation of his purposes includes the suffering of his ministers and missionaries. To put it more plainly and specifically, God designs that the suffering of his ministers and missionaries is one essential means in the joyful triumphant spread of the gospel among all the peoples of the world. So what I would like to do in this message is show four things and close with a plea that all of you earnestly consider your role in completing the Lord's great commission.

God's purpose to spread the gospel to all peoples.

God's plan to make suffering a crucial means to accomplish this purpose.

The position we are now in with regard to world evangelization.

The pain of Adoniram Judson as an illustration of the truth.

A plea to you to be a part of what Judson and Christ died for.

1. The invincible purpose of God is that "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4) spread to all the peoples of the world and take root in God-centered, Christ-exalting churches. This was the promise of the Old Testament:

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. (Psalms 22:27-28) It was the promise of Jesus to his disciples:

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) It was the design of God in the cross:

"They sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'" (Revelation 5:9) It was the final command of the risen, all-authoritative Christ:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) It was the divine aim of Paul's apostleship:

"Through [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations." (Romans 1:5)

It was his holy ambition, rooted not just in a unique apostolic call but in the Old Testament promise that is still valid today:

"I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." (Romans 15:20-21; see Isaiah 52:15)

"So the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 13:47; see Isaiah 42:6) It was the divine purpose of the sending and filling of the Holy Spirit:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The invincible purpose of God is that "the gospel of the glory of Christ" spread to all the peoples of the world and take root in God-centered, Christ-exalting churches. This great global vision of the Christian movement becomes clear and powerful and compelling in pastors' lives whenever there is Biblical awakening in Christ's people - as there was among many in the first decades of the 1800s when Adoniram Judson was converted and called into missions along with hundreds of others as the light and power of truth awakened the churches.

2. God's plan is that this gospel-spreading, church-planting purpose triumph through the suffering of his people, especially his ministers and missionaries.

I don't just mean that suffering is the consequence of obedient missions. I mean that suffering is one of Christ's strategies for the success of his mission.

Jesus said to his disciples as he sent them out:

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16)

There is no doubt what usually happens to a sheep in the midst of wolves. And Paul confirmed the reality in Romans 8:36 :

"As it is written, "'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'"

Jesus knew this would be the portion of his darkness-penetrating, mission-advancing, church-planting missionaries. "Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword" (Romans 8:35). That is what Paul expected, because that is what Jesus promised. Jesus continues:

" Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them (eis marturion autoi) and the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:17-18).

Notice that the witness before governors and kings is not a mere result or consequence, but a design. "You will be dragged before . . . kings to bear witness." Why this design for missions? Jesus answers:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. . . . If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household?" (Matthew 10:24-25)

Suffering was not just a consequence of the Master's obedience and mission. It was the central strategy of his mission. It was the ground of his accomplishment. Jesus calls us to join him on the Calvary road, to take up our cross, and to hate our lives in this world, and fall into the ground like a seed and die, that others might live. We are not above our Master. To be sure, our suffering does not atone for anyone's sins, but it is a deeper way of doing missions than we often realize. When the martyrs cried out to Christ from under the altar in heaven, "How long till you judge and avenge our blood?" they were told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Revelation 6:11)

Martyrdom is not the mere consequence of radical love and obedience; it is the keeping of an appointment set in heaven for a certain number: "Wait till the number of martyrs is complete who are to be killed." Just as Christ died to save the unreached peoples of the world, so some missionaries are to die to save the people of the world. And lest we think this way of saying it aligns the suffering work of missionaries too closely with the suffering-work of Jesus, listen to the decisive word on this from Paul in Colossians 1:24 :

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." In his sufferings Paul is "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for . . . the church." Not that Paul's sufferings atone for sin or propitiate wrath or vindicate divine justice in passing over sins, but they show the unreached peoples of the world the sufferings of Christ. When Paul shares Christ's sufferings with joy and love, he delivers, as it were, those very sufferings to the ones for whom Christ died. Paul's missionary suffering is God's design to complete the sufferings of Christ, by making them more visible and personal and precious to those for whom he died. So I say this very sobering word: God's plan is that his gospel-spreading, church-planting purpose triumph through the suffering of his people, especially his ministers and missionaries. And not many illustrate this better than Adoniram Judson.

3. The position we are in now at the beginning of the 21st century is one that cries out for tremendous missionary effort and great missionary sacrifice.

Patrick Johnstone says in Operation World that only in the 1990s did we get a reasonably complete listing of the world's peoples. For the first time we can see clearly what is left to be done. There are about 12,000ethnolinguistic peoples in the world. About 3,500 of these have, on average, 1.2% Christian populations - about 20 million of the 1.7 billion people, using the broadest,

nominal definition of Christian.1 Most of these least reached 3,500 peoples are in the 10/40 window and are religiously unsympathetic to Christian missions. That means that that we must go to these peoples with the gospel, and it will be dangerous and costly. Some of us and some of our children will be killed. When Adoniram Judson entered Burma in July, 1813 it was a hostile and utterly unreached place. William Carey had told Judson in India a few months earlier not to go there. It probably would have been considered a closed country today - with anarchic despotism, fierce war with Siam, enemy raids, constant rebellion, no religious toleration. All the previous missionaries had died or left.2 But Judson went there with his 23-year-old wife of 17 months. He was 24 years old and he worked there for 38 years until his death at age 61, with one trip home to New England after 33 years. The price he paid was immense. He was a seed that fell into the ground and died. And the fruit God gave is celebrated even in scholarly works like David Barrett's

World Christian Encyclopedia: "The largest Christian force in Burma is the Burma Baptist Convention, which owes its origin to the pioneering activity of the American Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson" 3

Judson was a Baptist when he entered Burma in 1813, even though he left New England as a Congregationalist. His mind had changed during the 114-day voyage to India and Carey's colleague, William Ward, baptized Adoniram and Ann Judson in India on September 6, 1812. Today Patrick Johnstone estimates the Myanmar (Burma's new name) Baptist Convention to be 3,700 congregations with 617,781 members and 1,900,000 affiliates 4- the fruit of this dead seed. Of course there were others besides Adoniram Judson - hundreds of others over time. But they too came and gave away their lives. Most of them died much younger than Judson. They only serve to make the point. The astonishing fruit in Myanmar today has grown in the soil of the suffering and death of many missionaries, especially Adoniram Judson. My question is, if Christ delays his return another two hundred years - a mere fraction of a day in his reckoning - which of you will have suffered and died so that the triumphs of grace will be told about one or two of those 3,500 peoples who are in the same condition today that the Karen and Chin and Kachins and Burmese were in 1813? Who will labor so long and so hard and so perseveringly that in two hundred years there will be two million Christians in many of the 10/40-window peoples who can scarcely recall their Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist roots? May God use his powerful word and the life of Adoniram Judson to stir many of you to give your lives to this great cause!

4. The pain of Adoniram Judson illustrates all we've seen so far.

Adoniram Judson "hated his life in this world" and was a "seed that fell into the ground and died." In his sufferings "he filled up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions" in unreached Burma. Therefore his life bore much fruit and he lives to enjoy it today and forever. He would, no doubt, say: It was worth it.

Judson was a Calvinist, but did not wear his Calvinism on his sleeve. 5 You can see the evidence for his Reformed convictions in Thomas J. Nettles, By His Grace and for His Glory.6 His father, who was a Congregationalist pastor in Massachusetts, had studied with Jonathan Edwards' student Joseph Bellamy, and Adoniram inherited a deep belief in the sovereignty of God. The great importance this has for my purpose here is to stress that this deep confidence in God's overarching providence through all calamity and misery sustained him to the end. He said, "If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have

survived my accumulated sufferings."7 This was the unshakable confidence of all three of his wives, Ann (or Nancy), Sarah, and Emily. For example, Ann, who married Judson on February 5, 1812 and left with him on the boat on February 19 at age 23, bore three children to Adoniram. All of them died. The first baby, nameless, was born dead just as they sailed from India to Burma. The second child, Roger Williams Judson, lived 17 months and died. The third, Maria Elizabeth Butterworth Judson, lived to be two, and outlived her mother by six months and then died. When her second child died, Ann Judson wrote, "Our hearts were bound up with this child; we felt he was our earthly all, our only source of innocent recreation in this heathen land. But God saw it was necessary to remind us of our error, and to strip us of our only little all. O, may it not be vain that he has done it. May we so improve it that he will stay his hand and say 'It is enough.'"8 In other words, what sustained this man and his three wives was a rock-solid confidence that God is sovereign and God is good. And all things come from his hand for the good - the incredibly painful good - of his children.

There are roots of this missionary-sustaining confidence in God's goodness and providence. One, of course, is Judson's father. That's what he believed and that's what he lived. A second source of this confidence was the Bible. Judson was a lover of the Word of God. The main legacy of his 38 years in Burma was a complete translation of the Bible into Burmese and a dictionary that all the later missionaries could use.

Once when a Buddhist teacher said that he could not believe that Christ suffered the death of the cross because no king allows his son such indignity, "Judson responded, 'Therefore you are not a disciple of Christ. A true disciple inquires not whether a fact is agreeable to his own reason, but whether it is in the book. His pride has yielded to the divine testimony. Teacher, your pride is still unbroken. Break down your pride, and yield to the word of God.'"9 A third source of his confidence in the goodness and detailed providence of God was the way God saved him. It is a remarkable story. He was a brilliant boy. His mother taught him to read in one week when he was three to surprise his father when he came home from a trip.10 When he was 16 he entered Brown University as a sophomore and graduated at the top of his class three years later in 1807.

What his godly parents didn't know was that Adoniram was being lured away from the faith by a fellow student name Jacob Eames who was a Deist. By the time Judson was finished he had no Christian faith. He kept this concealed from his parents until his 20th birthday, August 9, 1808, when he broke their hearts with his announcement that he had no faith and that he intended to go to New York and learn to write for the theater - which he did six days later on a horse his father gave him as part of his inheritance.

It didn't prove to be the life of his dreams. He attached himself to some strolling players, and, as he said later, lived "a reckless, vagabond life, finding lodgings where he could, and bilking the landlord where he found opportunity."11 That disgust with what he found there was the beginning of several remarkable providences. He went to visit his uncle Ephraim in Sheffield, but found there, instead "a pious young man" who stunned him by being firm in his Christian convictions without being "austere and dictatorial."12 Strange that he should find this young man there, instead of his uncle. The next night he stayed in a small village inn where he had never been before. The innkeeper apologized that his sleep might be interrupted because there was a man critically ill in the next room. Through the night he heard comings and goings and low voices and groans and

gasps. It bothered him to think that the man next to him may not be prepared to die. He wondered about himself and had terrible thoughts of his own dying. He felt foolish because good deists weren't supposed to have these struggles. When he was leaving in the morning he asked if the man next door was better. "He is dead," said the innkeeper. Judson was struck with the finality of it all. On his way out he asked, "Do you know who he was?" "Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Eames, Jacob Eames."13

Judson could hardly move. He stayed there for hours pondering the death of his deist friend. If his friend Eames were right, then this was a meaningless event. But Judson could not believe it: "That hell should open in that country inn and snatch Jacob Eames, his dearest friend and guide, from the next bed - this could not, simply could not, be pure coincidence."14 His conversion was not immediate. But now it was sure. God was on his trail, like the apostle Paul in the Damascus road, and there was no escape. There were months of struggle. He entered Andover Seminary in October, 1808 and on December 2 made solemn dedication of himself to God. The fire was burning for missions at Andover and at Williams College (the haystack prayer meeting had taken place in August of 1806, near Williams College, and two from there had come to Andover). On June 28, 1810 Judson and others presented themselves to the Congregationalists for missionary service in the East. He met Ann that same day and fell in love. After knowing Ann Hasseltine for one month he declared his intention to become a suitor, and wrote to her father the following letter:

I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left is heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteous, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?15 Her father, amazingly, said she could make up her own mind. She wrote to her friend Lydia Kimball:

I feel willing, and expect, if nothing in Providence prevents, to spend my days in this world in heathen lands. Yes, Lydia, I have about, come to the determination to give up all my comforts and enjoyments here, sacrifice my affection to relatives and friends, and go where God, in his Providence, shall see fit to place me.16

They were married a year and a half later on February 5, 1812,17 and sailed for India 12 days later with two other couples and two single men18 divided among two ships in case one went down. After a time in India they chose to risk Rangoon and arrived there July 13, 1813. There began a life-long battle in the 108-degree heat with cholera, malaria, dysentery, and unknown miseries that would take two of Judson's wives and seven of his 13 children, and colleague after colleague in death. The first news from home arrived two years later on September 5, 1815. They had died to the nearness of family. Adoniram would never see his mother or father or brother again. He does not return for 33 years. "Missionary time" in those days was very slow. It was a world of difference from today. If someone was sick enough the typical remedy to save life was a sea voyage. So a

marriage or the entire work could be put on hold, so to speak, for three to six months. Or it could be longer. Eight years into their mission Ann was so ill that the only hope was a trip home. She sailed on August 21, 1821. She returned on December 5, 1823, two years and four months later. And when she arrived he had not heard from her for 10 months. If you are married and you love your wife, this is the way you die day after day for a greater good and a greater joy.

One of the joys was seeing some of God's goodness in the dark providences. For example, when Ann was recovering in the States, she wrote a book, An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire. It had a huge influence in stirring up recruits and prayer and finances. This would have never happened without her sickness and two-year absence. But most of the time the good purposes for pain were not that clear.

Through all the struggles with sickness and interruptions Judson labored to learn the language, translate the Bible, and do evangelism on the streets. Six years after they arrived, they baptized their first convert, Maung Nau. The sowing was long and hard. The reaping even harder for years. But in 1831 there was a new spirit in the land. Judson wrote: The spirit of inquiry . . . is spreading everywhere, through the whole length and breadth of the land." [We have distributed] nearly 10,000 tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been 6000 applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China - 'Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.' Others, from the frontiers of Kathay, 100 miles north of Ava - 'Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.' Others, from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is a little known - 'Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells us about Jesus Christ." 19 But there had been an enormous price to pay between the first convert in 1819 and this outpouring of God's power in 1831. In 1823 Adoniram and Ann moved from Rangoon to Ava, the capital, about 300 miles inland and further up the Irrawaddy River. It was risky to be that near the despotic emperor. In May of the next year the British fleet arrived in Rangoon and bombarded the harbor. All westerners were immediately viewed as spies, and Adoniram was dragged from his home and on June 8, 1824 and put in prison. His feet were fettered and at night a long horizontal bamboo pole was lowered and passed between the fettered legs and hoisted up till only the shoulder and heads of the prisoners rested on the ground.

Ann was pregnant, but walked the two miles daily to the palace to plead that Judson was not a spy and that they should have mercy. She got some relief for him so that he could come out into a court yard. But still the prisoners got vermin in their hair amid the rotting food, and had to be shaved bald. Almost a year later they were suddenly moved to a more distant village prison, gaunt, with hollow eyes, dressed in rags crippled from the torture. There the mosquitoes from the rice paddies almost drove them mad on their bloody feet. The daughter, Maria, had been born by now and Ann was almost as sick and thin as Adoniram, but still pursued him with her baby to take care of him as she could. Her milk dried up, and the jailer had mercy on them and actually let Judson take the baby each evening into the village and beg for women to nurse his baby. On November 4, 1825 Judson was suddenly released. The government needed him as a translator in negotiations with Britain. The long ordeal was over - 17 months in prison and on the brink of death, with his wife sacrificing herself and her baby to care for him as she could. Ann's health was broken. Eleven months later she died (October 24, 1826). And six months later their daughter died (April 24,

1827).

While he was suffering in prison Adoniram had said to a fellow prisoner, "It is possible my life will be spared; if so, with what ardor shall I pursue my work! If not - his will be done. The door will be opened for others who would do the work better."20 But now that his wife and daughter were gone, darkness began to settle over his soul. In July, three months after the death of his little girl, he got word that his father had died eight months earlier. The psychological effects of theses losses were devastating. Self-doubt overtook his mind, and he wondered if he had become a missionary for ambition and fame, not humility and self-denying love. He began to read the Catholic mystics, Madame Guyon, Fenelon, Thomas a Kempis, etc. who led him into solitary asceticism and various forms of self-mortification. He dropped his Old Testament translation work, the love of his life, and retreated more and more from people and from "anything that might conceivably support pride or promote his pleasure."21

He refused to eat outside the mission. He destroyed all letters of commendation. He formally renounced the honorary Doctor of Divinity that Brown University had given him in 1823 by writing a letter to the American Baptist Magazine. He gave all his private wealth (about $6,000) to the Baptist Board. He asked that his salary be reduced by one quarter and promised to give more to missions himself. In October, 1828 he built a hut in the jungle some distance from the Moulmein mission house and moved in on October 24, 1828, the second anniversary of Ann's death, to live in total isolation.

He wrote in one letter home to Ann's relatives: "My tears flow at the same time over the forsaken grave of my dear love and over the loathsome sepulcher of my own heart."22 He had a grave dug beside the hut and sat beside it contemplating the stages of the body's dissolution. He ordered all his letters in New England destroyed on condition of returning a legal document his sister needed. He retreated for forty days alone further into the Tiger-infested jungle, and wrote in one letter than he felt utter spiritual desolation. "God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not.23 His brother, Elnathan, died May 8, 1829 at the age of 35. Ironically, this proved the turning point of Judson's recovery, because he had reason to believe that the brother that he had left in unbelief 17 years earlier had died in faith. All through the year 1830 Adoniram was climbing out of his darkness. And you recall that it was 1831 - the next year - when he experienced the great outpouring of spiritual interest across the land. Is that a coincidence? Or was that a God-ordained pattern for spiritual breakthrough in a dark and unreached place?

If we had time we would tell of his remaining sufferings and joys. He married Sarah Boardman, a missionary widow, on April 10, 1834, eight years after Ann died. They had eight children. Five survived childhood. She was a gifted partner and knew the language better than any but himself. But 11 years later she was so sick that they both set sail for America with the three oldest children. They left the three youngest behind, one of whom died before Judson returned. Judson had not been to America now for 33 years and was only returning for the sake of his wife. As they rounded the tip of Africa in September, 1845, Sarah died. The ship dropped anchor at St. Helena Island long enough to dig a grave and bury a wife and mother and then sail on. This time Adoniram does not descend into the depths as before. He has his children. But even more, his sufferings have disengaged him from hoping for too much in this world. He was learning how to hate his life in this world without bitterness or depression. He had one passion: to return and give his life for Burma.

So his stay in the states was long enough to get his children settled and find a ship back. All that was left of the life he knew in New England was his sister. She had kept his room exactly as it had been 33 years earlier and would do that same to the day she died. To everyone's amazement, Judson fell in love a third time, this time with Emily Chubbuck and married her on June 2, 1846. She was 29; he was 57. She was a famous writer and left her fame and writing career to go with Judson to Burma. They arrived in November, 1846. And God gave them four of the happiest years that either of them had every known. On her first anniversary, June 2, 1847 she wrote, "It has been far the happiest year of my life; and, what is in my eyes still more important, my husband says it has been among the happiest of his. . . I never met with any man who could talk so well, day after day, on every subject, religious, literary, scientific, political, and - nice baby-talk." 24

They had one child, but then the old sicknesses attacked Adoniram one last time. The only hope was to send the desperately ill Judson on a voyage. On April 3, 1850 they carried Adoniram onto the Aristide Marie bound for the Isle of France with one friend, Thomas Ranney, to care for him. In his misery he would be roused from time to time by terrible pain ending in vomiting. One of his last sentences was: "How few there are who . . . who die so hard!"25 At 15 minutes after 4 on Friday afternoon April 12, 1850 Adoniram Judson died at sea, away from all his family and Burmese Church. That evening the ship hove to.

"The crew assembled quietly. The larboard port was opened. There were no prayers. . . . The captain gave the order. The coffin slid through the port into the night. The location was latitude 13 degrees North, longitude 93 degrees East, almost in the eastward shadow of the Andaman Islands, and only a few hundred miles west of the mountains of Burma. The Aristide Marie sailed on toward the Isle of France." 26

Ten days later Emily gave birth to their second child who died at birth. She learned four months later that her husband was dead. She returned to New England that next January and died of tuberculosis three years later at the age of 37. The Bible was done. The dictionary was done. Hundreds of converts were leading the church. And today there are close to about 3,700 congregations of Baptists in Myanmar who trace their origin to this man's labors of love.

5. And so, in closing, I make my final plea.

Life is fleeting, brothers. In a very short time we will all give an account before Jesus Christ, not only as to how well we have shepherded our flock, but how well we have obeyed the command to make disciples of all nations.

Many of the peoples of the world are without any indigenous Christian movement today. Christ is not enthroned there, his grace is unknown there, and people are perishing with no access to the gospel. Most of these hopeless peoples do not want you to come. At least they think they don't. They are hostile to Christian missions. Today this is the final frontier. And the Lord still says, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. . . . some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish" (Matthew 10:16; Luke 21:16-18). Are you sure that God wants you to be a pastor in this comparatively church-saturated land? Or might he be calling you to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, to fall like a grain of wheat into some distant ground and die, to hate your life in this world and so to keep it forever and bear much fruit?

Judson wrote to missionary candidates in 1832:

"Remember, a large proportion of those who come out on a mission to the East die within five years after leaving their native land. Walk softly, therefore; death is narrowly watching your steps."27 The question, brothers, is not whether we will die, but whether we will die in a way that bears much fruit.

Endnotes 1 Patrick Johnstone, Jason Mandryk, eds., Operation World (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 15-16.

2 Courtney Anderson, To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 134.

3 David Barrett, ed., World Christian Encyclopedia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 202.

4 Patrick Johnstone, Operation World, 462.

5 Erroll Hulse, Adoniram Judson and the Missionary Call (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1996), 48. "When we come to the doctrines of grace we find that he believed them implicitly rather than by explicit exposition."

6 Thomas J. Nettles, By His Grace and for His Glory (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 148-154.

7 Quoted in Giants of the Missionary Trail (Chicago: Scripture Press Foundation, 1954), 73.

8 Anderson, To the Golden Shore, 193.

9 Ibid., 240.

10 Ibid., 14.

11 Ibid., 41.

12 Ibid., 42.

13 Ibid., 44. The source of this story is oral reports from family members recorded in Francis Wayland, A Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D. Vol. 1 (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co. 1854), 24-25.

14 Anderson, To the Golden Shore, 45.

15 Ibid., 83

16 Ibid., 84.

17 In the meantime, Judson had sailed to England to raise support from the London Missionary Society. Because of the war between Britain and France he was captured on the high seas and imprisoned in France. But again the strange providence of God overruled and his American voice was heard crying out during one prisoners' march, and his release was purchased by a man from Philadelphia. He always saw that time as a crucial preparation for what he would suffer as a missionary.

18 Luther Rice, Gordon Hall, Samuel and Harriet Newell, Samuel and Roxana Nott.

19 Anderson, To the Golden Shore, 398-399.

20 Ibid., 334.

21 Ibid., 387.

22 Ibid., 388.

23 Ibid., 391.

24 Ibid., 481.

25 Ibid., 504.

26 Ibid., 505.

27 Adoniram Judson, "Advice to Missionary Candidates," Maulmain, June 25, 1832, http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bjudson4.html By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.15. "I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!”

"I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!” The Life and Ministry of George Whitefield: Living and Preaching as Though God Were Real (Because He Is) The facts about George Whitefield’s preaching as an 18th-century itinerant evangelist are almost unbelievable. Can they really be true? Judging by multiple attestations of his contemporaries—and by the agreement of sympathetic and unsympathetic biographers—they seem to be so. From his first outdoor sermon on February 17, 1739, at the age of 24 to the coalminers of Kingswood near Bristol, England, until his death 30 years later on September 30, 1770, in Newburyport, Massachusetts (where he is buried), his life was one of almost daily preaching. Sober estimates are that he spoke about 1,000 times every year for 30 years. That included at least 18,000 sermons and 12,000 talks and exhortations.1 Speaking More Than Sleeping The daily pace he kept for 30 years meant that many weeks he was speaking more than he was sleeping. Henry Venn, vicar of Huddersfield, who knew Whitefield well, expressed amazement for all us when he wrote, Who would think it possible that a person . . . should speak in the compass of a single week (and that for years) in general forty hours, and in very many, sixty, and that to thousands; and after this labor, instead of taking any rest, should be offering up prayers and intercessions, with hymns and spiritual songs, as his manner was, in every house to which he was invited.2

Make sure you hear that accurately. Many weeks he was actually speaking (not preparing to speak, which he had virtually no time to do) for sixty hours (60, not 16). That’s almost six hours a day, seven days a week, on the slower weeks, and over eight hours a day, seven days a week on the heavier weeks.

Preaching, Preaching, Preaching

I found no references in all of my reading to what we today would call vacations or days off. When he thought he needed recuperation he spoke of an ocean voyage to America. He crossed the Atlantic 13 times in his life—an odd number (not even) because he died and was buried here, not in England. The trips across the Atlantic took 8–10 weeks each. And even though he preached virtually every day on the ship,3 the pace was different, and he was able to read and write and rest.4 But on land, the preaching pace was unremitting. Two years before he died at the age of 55, he wrote in a letter, “I love the open bracing air.” And the following year, he said, “It is good to go into the highways and hedges. Field-preaching, field-preaching forever!”5 Day after day all his life, he went everywhere preaching, preaching, preaching.

Speaking to Thousands And keep in mind that most of these messages were spoken to gatherings of thousands of people—usually in difficulties of wind and competing noise. For example, in the Fall of 1740, for over a month he preached almost every day in New England to crowds up to 8,000 people. That was when the population of Boston, the largest city in the region, was not much larger than that.6

He recounts that in Philadelphia that same year on Wednesday, April 6, he preached on Society Hill twice in the morning to about 6,000, and in the evening to near 8,000. On Thursday, he spoke to “upwards of ten thousand,” and it was reported at one of these events the words, “‘He opened His mouth and taught them saying,’ were distinctly heard at Gloucester point, a distance of two miles by water down the Delaware River.7 [Do you see why I say such things are near unbelievable?] And there were times when the crowds reached 20,000 or more.”8 This meant that the physical exertion to project the voice to that many people for so long, in each sermon, for so many times every week, for thirty years, was Herculean.

One Scarcely Interrupted Sermon

Add to this the fact that he was continually traveling in a day when it was done by horse or carriage or ship. He covered the length and breadth of England repeatedly. He regularly traveled and spoke throughout Wales. He visited Ireland twice, where he was almost killed by a mob from which he carried a scar on his forehead for the rest of his life.9 He traveled 14 times to Scotland and came to America 7 times, stopping once in Bermuda for 11 weeks—all for preaching, not resting. He preached in virtually every major town on the Eastern Seaboard of America. Michael Haykin reminds us, “What is so remarkable about all of this is Whitefield lived at a time when travel to a town but 20 miles away was a significant undertaking.”10 J. C. Ryle summed up Whitefield’s life like this: The facts of Whitefield’s history . . . are almost entirely of one complexion. One year was just like another; and to attempt to follow him would be only going repeatedly over the same ground. From 1739 to the year of his death, 1770, a period of 31 years, his life was one uniform employment. He was eminently a man of one thing, and always about his Master’s business. From Sunday mornings to Saturday nights, from 1 January to 31 December, excepting when laid aside by illness, he was almost incessantly preaching Christ and going about the world entreating men to repent and come to Christ and be saved.11

Another 19th-century biographer said, “His whole life may be said to have been consumed in the delivery of one continuous, or scarcely interrupted sermon.”12 A Phenomenon in Church History

He was a phenomenon not just of his age, but in the entire 2000-year history of Christian preaching. There has been nothing like the combination of his preaching pace and geographic extent and auditory scope and attention-holding effect and converting power. Ryle is right: “No preacher has ever retained his hold on his hearers so entirely as he did for thirty-four years. His popularity never waned.”13 His contemporary Augustus Toplady (1740–1778) remembered him as “the apostle of the English Empire.”14 He was “Anglo America’s most popular eighteenth-century preacher and its first truly mass revivalist.”15 He was “the first colonial-American religious celebrity.”16 Eight years of his life were spent in America. He loved the American ethos. He was more American in his blood than he was English.

America’s First Celebrity

Harry Stout points out, “As tensions between England and America grew [Whitefield] saw he might have to choose. Wesley would remain loyal to England, and Whitefield could not. His institutional attachments and personal identification with the colonies were stronger than his loyalty to the crown.”17

Estimates are that 80% of the entire population of the American colonies (this is before TV or radio) heard Whitefield at least once. Stout shows that Whitefield's impact on America was such that he can justly be styled America's first cultural hero. Before Whitefield, there was no unifying inter-colonial person or event. Indeed, before Whitefield, it is doubtful any name other than royalty was known equally from Boston to Charleston. But by 1750 virtually every American loved and admired Whitefield and saw him as their champion.18 William Cooper who died when Whitefield was 29 already called him "the wonder of the age."19 Preaching Was Everything This was all the effect of the most single-minded, oratorically enthralling, thunder-voiced devotion to daily evangelistic preaching that history has ever known. Preaching was everything. I think most of his biographers would agree (to quote Stout) that Whitefield demonstrated a callous disregard for his private self, both body and spirit. The preaching moment engulfed all, and it would continue to do so, for in fact there was nothing else he lived for. . . . The private man and the family man had long since ceased to exist. In the final scene, there was only Whitefield in his pulpit.20 Natural and Spiritual Power

What shall we make of this phenomenon? What was the key to his power? At one level, his power was the natural power of eloquence, and at another it was the spiritual power of God to convert sinners and transform communities.

There is no reason to doubt that he was the instrument of God in the salvation of thousands. J. C. Ryle said,

I believe that the direct good which he did to immortal souls was enormous. I will go further—I believe it is incalculable. Credible witnesses in England, Scotland, and America have placed on record their conviction that he was the means of converting thousands of people.21

Whitefield was the main international instrument of God in the first Great Awakening. No one else in the 18th century was anointed like this in America and England and Wales and Scotland and Ireland. This preaching was not a flash in the pan. Deep and lasting things happened. His Effect on Edwards and Wilberforce In February of 1740, Jonathan Edwards sent an invitation to Whitefield in Georgia asking him to come preach in his church. On October 19, Whitefield recorded in his journal, "Preached this morning, and good Mr. Edwards wept during the whole time of exercise. The people were equally affected."22 Edwards reported that the effect of Whitefield's ministry was more than momentary—"In about a month there was a great alteration in the town." 23 The impact of Whitefield, the Wesleys, and the Great Awakening in England changed the face of the nation. William Wilberforce, who led the battle against the slave trade in England was 11 years old when Whitefield died. Wilberforce's father had died when he was 9, and he went to live for a time with his aunt and uncle William and Hanna Wilberforce. This couple were good friends with George Whitefield.24 This was the evangelical air Wilberforce breathed even before he was converted. And after his conversion, Whitefield's vision of the gospel was the truth and the spiritual dynamic that animated Wilberforce's lifelong battle against the slave trade. This is only one small glimpse of the lasting impact of Whitefield and the awakening he served. So I do not doubt that Henry Venn was right when he said, "[Whitefield] no sooner opened his mouth as a preacher, than God commanded an extraordinary blessing upon his word."25 So at this level, the explanation of Whitefield's phenomenal impact was God's exceptional anointing on his life. His Natural Oratorical Gifts But at another level, Whitefield held people in thrall who did not believe a single doctrinal

word that he said. In other words, we have to come to terms with the natural oratorical gifts that he had. How are we to think about these in relation to his effectiveness? Benjamin Franklin, who loved and admired Whitefield26—and totally rejected his theology—said,

Every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turned, and well-placed, that without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleased with the discourse: a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music.27 Virtually everyone agrees with Sarah Edwards when she wrote to her brother about Whitefield's preaching.

He is a born orator. You have already heard of his deep-toned, yet clear and melodious voice. O it is perfect music to listen to that alone! . . . You remember that David Hume thought it worth going 20 miles to hear him speak; and Garrick [an actor who envied Whitefield's gifts] said, 'He could move men to tears . . . in pronouncing the word Mesopotamia.' . . . It is truly wonderful to see what a spell this preacher often casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible.28 And then she raised the question that has caused so much controversy around Whitefield in the last 15 years. She says, A prejudiced person, I know, might say that this is all theatrical artifice and display; but not so will anyone think who has seen and known him. He is a very devout and godly man, and his only aim seems to be to reach and influence men the best way. He speaks from the heart all aglow with love, and pours out a torrent of eloquence which is almost irresistible.29

Harry Stout, professor of history at Yale, is not as sure about the purity of Whitefield's motives as Sarah Edwards was. His biography, The Divine Dramatist: George Whitfield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism, is the most sustained piece of historical cynicism I have ever read. In the first 100 pages of this book, I wrote the word cynical in the margin 70 times.

"The Consummate Actor"? But the challenge needs to be faced. And I think if we face it head on, what we find is something deeper than what Stout finds. Stout contends that Whitefield never left behind his love for acting and his skill as an actor which was prominent in his youth before his conversion. Thus he says the key to understanding him is "the amalgam of preaching and acting."30 Whitefield was "the consummate actor."31 "The fame he sought was . . . the actor's command performance on center stage."32 "Whitefield was not content simply to talk about the New Birth; he had to sell it with all the dramatic artifice of a huckster."33 "Tears became Whitefield's . . . psychological gesture."34 "Whitefield became an actor-preacher, as opposed to a scholar-preacher."35

And, of course, this last statement is true, in one sense. He was an actor-preacher as opposed to a scholar-preacher. He was not a Jonathan Edwards. He preached totally without notes,36 and his traveling pulpit was more of a tiny stage than it was a traditional pulpit.37 Unlike most of the preachers in his day he was full of action when he preached. Cornelius Winter, Whitefield's young assistant in later years, said,

I hardly ever knew him go through a sermon without weeping . . . sometimes he exceedingly wept, stamped loudly and passionately, and was frequently so overcome, that, for a few seconds, you would suspect he never could recover; and when he did, nature required some little time to compose himself.38 And another contemporary from Scotland, John Gillies, reported how

Whitefield moved with “such vehemence upon his bodily frame” that his audience actually shared his exhaustion and “felt a momentary apprehension even for his life.”39

Therefore, in one sense, I do not doubt that Whitefield was “acting” as he preached. That is, that he was taking the part of the characters in the drama of his sermon and pouring all his energy into making their part real. As when he takes the part of Adam in the Garden and says to God, “If thou hadst not given me this woman, I had not sinned against thee, so thou mayest thank thyself for my transgression.”40 Why Was He Acting? But the question is: Why was Whitefield “acting”? Why was he so full of action and drama? Was he, as Stout claims, “plying a religious trade”?41 Pursuing “spiritual fame”?42 Craving “respect and power”?43 Driven by “egotism”?44 Putting on “performances”45 and “integrating religious discourse into the emerging language of consumption”?46

I think the most penetrating answer comes from something Whitefield himself said about acting in a sermon in London. In fact, I think it’s a key to understand the power of his preaching—and all preaching. James Lockington was present at this sermon and recorded this verbatim. Whitefield is speaking.

“I’ll tell you a story. The Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 1675 was acquainted with Mr. Butterton the [actor]. One day the Archbishop . . . said to Butterton . . . ‘pray inform me Mr. Butterton, what is the reason you actors on stage can affect your congregations with speaking of things imaginary, as if they were real, while we in church speak of things real, which our congregations only receive as if they were imaginary?’ ‘Why my Lord,’ says Butterton, ‘the reason is very plain. We actors on stage speak of things imaginary, as if they were real and you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary.’”

“Therefore,” added Whitefield, ‘I will bawl [shout loudly], I will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher.”47 This means that there are three ways to speak. First, you can speak of an unreal, imaginary world as if it were real—that is what actors do in a play. Second, you can speak about a real world as if it were unreal—that is what half-hearted pastors do when they preach about glorious things in a way that says they are not as terrifying and wonderful as they are. And third is: You can speak about a real spiritual world as if it were wonderfully, terrifyingly, magnificently real (because it is).

Out-Acting the Actors So if you ask Whitefield, “Why do you preach the way you do?” he would say: “I believe what I read in the Bible is real.” So let me venture this claim: George Whitefield is not a repressed actor, driven by egotistical love of attention. Rather, he is consciously committed to out-acting the actors because he has seen what is ultimately real.

He is acting with all his might not because it takes greater gimmicks and charades to convince people of the unreal, but because he had seen something more real than actors on the London stage had ever known. For him the truths of the gospel were so real—so wonderfully, terrifyingly, magnificently real—that he could not and would not preach them as though they were unreal or merely interesting.

Acting in the Service of Reality This was not a repressed acting. This was a released acting. It was not acting in the service of imagination. It was acting in the service of reality. This was not rendering the imaginary as real. It was rendering the super-realness of the real as sheer

awesome, breathtaking real. This was not affectation. This was a passionate re-presentation—replication—of reality. This was not the mighty microscope using all its powers to make the small look impressively big. This was the desperately inadequate telescope bending every power to give some small sense of the majesty of what too many preachers saw as tiresome and unreal.

There is no disagreement that God uses natural vessels to display his supernatural reality. And there is no disagreement that George Whitefield was a stupendous natural vessel. He was driven, affable, eloquent, intelligent, empathetic, single-minded, steel-willed, venturesome, and had a voice like a trumpet that could be heard by thousands outdoors—and sometimes at a distance of two miles. All of these, I venture to say, would have been part of Whitefield's natural gifting even if he had never been born again.

Whitefield Born Again But something happened to Whitefield that made all these natural gifts subordinate to another reality. It made them all come into the service of another reality—the glory of Christ in the salvation of sinners. It was the spring of 1735. He was 20 years old. He was part of the Holy Club at Oxford with John and Charles Wesley, and the pursuit of God was all discipline.

I always chose the worst sort of food. . . . I fasted twice a week. My apparel was mean. . . . I wore woolen gloves, a patched gown, and dirty shoes. . . . I constantly walked out in the cold mornings till part of one of my hands was quite black. . . . I could scarce creep upstairs, I was obliged to inform my kind tutor . . . who immediately sent for a physician to me.48

He took a break from school, and there came into his hands a copy of Henry Scougal's Life of God in the Soul of Man. Here is what happened, in his own words:

I must bear testimony to my old friend Mr. Charles Wesley, he put a book into my hands, called, The Life of God and the soul of man, whereby God showed me, that I must be born again, or be damned. I know the place: it may be superstitious, perhaps, but whenever I go to Oxford, I cannot help running to that place where Jesus Christ first revealed himself to me, and gave me the new birth. [Scougal] says, a man may go to church, say his prayers, receive the sacrament, and yet, my brethren, not be a Christian. How did my heart rise, how did my heart shutter, like a poor man that is afraid to look into his account-books, lest he should find himself a bankrupt: yet shall I burn that book, shall I throw it down, shall I put it by, or shall I search into it? I did, and, holding the book in my hand, thus addressed the God of heaven and earth: Lord, if I am not a Christian, if I am not a real one, for Jesus Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is, that I may not be damned at last. I read a little further, and the cheat was discovered; oh, says the author, they that know anything of religion know it is a vital union with the son of God, Christ formed in the heart; oh what a way of divine life did break in upon my poor soul. . . . Oh! With what joy—Joy unspeakable—even joy that was full of, and big with glory, was my soul filled.

49 The power and depth and the supernatural reality of that change in Whitefield is something Harry Stout does not sufficiently reckon with. What happened there was that Whitefield was given the supernatural ability to see what was real. His mind was opened to new reality. Here is the way he described it.

Above all my mind being now more opened and enlarged, I began to read the holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This

proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light, and power from above. I got more true knowledge from reading the book of God in one month than I could ever have acquired from all the writings of men.50 This means that Whitefield's acting—his passionate, energetic, whole-souled preaching—was the fruit his new birth, because his new birth gave him eyes to see "life and light and power from above." He saw the glorious facts of the gospel as real. Wonderfully, terrifyingly, magnificently real. This is why he cries out, "I will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher."

None of his natural abilities vanished. They were all taken captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). "Let my name be forgotten, let me be trodden under the feet of all men, if Jesus may thereby be glorified."51 Fighting Pride, Confessing Foolishness Of course he fought pride. Who doesn't fight pride—pride because we are somebody, or pride because we want to be somebody? But what the record shows is that he fought this fight valiantly, putting to death again and again the lure of the vanity of human praise. "It is difficult," he said, "to go through the fiery trial of popularity and applause untainted."52

"Commendations," he wrote to a friend, "or even the hinting at them, are poison to a mind addicted to pride. A nail never sinks deeper than when dipt in oil. . . . Pray for me, dear Sir, and heal the wounds you have made. To God alone give glory. To sinners nothing belongs, but shame and confusion."53

He confessed publicly the foolishness and mistakes of his earlier years.54 He confessed to a friend in 1741, "Our most holy thoughts are tinctured with sin, and want the atonement of the Mediator."55 He cast himself on the free grace that he preached so powerfully:

I am nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing without God. What although I may, like a polished sepulcher appear a little beautiful without, yet within I am full of pride, self-love and all manner of corruption. However, by the grace of God I am what I am, and if it should please God to make me instrumental to do the least good, not unto me, but unto him, be all the glory.56 Making Real Things Real So Whitefield had a new nature. He had been born again. And this new nature enabled him to see what was real. And Whitefield knew in his soul: I will never speak of what is real as though it is imaginary. I will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher. He would not abandon acting. He would out-act the actors in his preaching, because they became actors to make imaginary things look real, and he became the preacher-actor to make real things look like what they are.

He didn't pause in his preaching to have a little drama off to the side—like some preachers do today, a little skit, a little clip from a movie—that would have missed the whole point. Preaching was the play. Preaching was the drama. The reality of the gospel had consumed him. That was the witness. The preaching itself had become the active word of God. God was speaking. Reality was not simply being shown. Reality was happening. Not Acting in the Theatrical Sense

What this means is that in the end, Whitefield's "acting" was not acting in the theatrical sense at all. If a woman has a role in a movie, say, the mother of child in a burning house, and as the cameras are focused on her, she is screaming to the firemen and pointing to the window in the second floor, we all say she is acting. But if a house is on fire in your neighborhood, and you see a mother screaming to the firemen and pointing to the window in the second floor, nobody says

she’s acting. Why not? They look exactly the same.

It’s because there really is a child up there in the fire. This woman really is the child’s mother. There is real danger that the child could die. Everything is real. And that’s the way it was for Whitefield. The new birth had opened his eyes to what was real, and to the magnitude of what was real: God, creation, humanity, sin, Satan, divine justice and wrath, heaven, hell, incarnation, the perfections of Christ, his death, atonement, redemption, propitiation, resurrection, the Holy Spirit, saving grace, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation with God, peace, sanctification, love, the second coming of Christ, the new heavens and the new earth, everlasting joy. These were real. Overwhelmingly real to him. He had been born again. He had eyes to see. When he warned of wrath, and pleaded for people to escape, and lifted up Christ, he wasn’t play-acting. He was calling down the kind of emotions and actions that correspond with such realities. That’s what preaching does. It seeks to exalt Christ, and describe sin, and offer salvation, and persuade sinners with emotions and words and actions that correspond to the weight of these realities.

If you see these realities with the eyes of your heart, and if you feel the weight of them, you will know that such preaching is not play-acting. The house is burning. There are people trapped on the second floor. We love them. And there is a way of escape. The Preciousness of “the Doctrines of Grace”

Let’s be more specific. What did George Whitefield see as real? Unlike so much preaching today, the preaching of the 18th-century awakening—including the evangelistic preaching of Whitefield and Wesley—was doctrinally specific and not vague. When you read the sermons of Whitefield, you are struck with how amazingly doctrinal they are.

What Whitefield saw within months after his conversion was the preciousness and power of the “doctrines of grace.”57 What was real for him was classical evangelical Calvinism. “From first to last,” Stout says, “he was a Calvinist who believed that God chose him for salvation and not the reverse.”58 J. I. Packer observes that “Whitefield was entirely free of doctrinal novelties.”59 Embracing the Calvinistic Scheme His guide as he read the Bible in those formative days was not John Calvin but Matthew Henry.60 “I embrace the Calvinistic scheme,” he said, “not because Calvin, but Jesus Christ has taught it to me.”61 In fact, he wrote to John Wesley in 1740, “I never read anything that Calvin wrote.”62

He believed these biblical truths—which he sometimes called “the doctrines of the Reformation”—did the most to “debase man and exalt the Lord Jesus. . . . All others leave free will in man, and make him, in part at least, a Savior to himself.”63 And not only did that diminish the work of the Savior; it made our position in Christ insecure. The Link Between Election and Perseverance

What Whitefield saw as real with his new eyes was the link between election and perseverance. God had chosen him unconditionally, and God would therefore keep him invincibly. This was his rock-solid confidence and a fire in his bones and the power of his obedience. He wrote in 1739 from Philadelphia,

Oh the excellency of the doctrine of election, and of the saints’ final perseverance, to those who are truly sealed by the Spirit of promise! I am persuaded, till a man comes to believe and feel these important truths, he cannot come out of himself; but when convinced of these, and assured

of the application of them to his own heart, he then walks by faith indeed, not in himself but in the Son of God, who died and gave himself for him. Love, not fear, constrains him to obedience.64 And a year later he wrote to John Wesley, “The doctrine of election, and the final perseverance of those that are truly in Christ, I am ten thousand times more convinced of, if possible, then when I saw you last.”65 He loved the assurance he had in the mighty hands of God. “Surely I am safe, because put into his almighty arms. Though I may fall, yet I shall not utterly be cast away. The Spirit of the Lord Jesus will hold, and uphold me.”66 Telling the Gospel with All His Might And he didn’t just quietly enjoy these realities for himself; he preached them with all his might in his evangelistic efforts. He said to Wesley, “I must preach the Gospel of Christ, and this I cannot now do without speaking of election.”67 In his sermon based on 1 Corinthians 1:30 called “Christ the Believer’s Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption,” he exults in the doctrine (remember he is lifting up his voice to thousands): For my part I cannot see how true humbleness of mind can be attained without a knowledge of [the doctrine of election]; and though I will not say, that every one who denies election is a bad man, yet I will say, with that sweet singer, Mr. Trail, it is a very bad sign: such a one, whoever he be, I think cannot truly know himself; for, if we deny election, we must, partly at least, glory in ourselves; but our redemption is so ordered, that no flesh should glory in the Divine presence; and hence it is, that the pride of man opposes this doctrine, because, according to this doctrine, and no other, “he that glories must glory only in the Lord.” But what shall I say? Election is a mystery that shines with such resplendent brightness, that, to make use of the words of one who has drunk deeply of electing love, it dazzles the weak eyes even of some of God’s children; however, though they know it not, all the blessing they receive, all the privileges they do or will enjoy, through Jesus Christ, flow from the everlasting love of God the Father.68 Offering Jesus Freely to Every Soul And Whitefield reminds Wesley—and us—in letter of 1741, “Though I hold particular election, yet I offer Jesus freely to every individual soul.”69 Indeed Whitefield does not hide his understanding of definite atonement or irresistible grace as he pleads with men to come to Christ. In a sermon on

John 10:27-28 called “The Good Shepherd,” he speaks clearly of the particular sense in which Christ died for his own,

If you belong to Jesus Christ, he is speaking of you; for says he, “I know my sheep”. “I know them”; what does that mean? Why, he knows their number, he knows their names, he knows every one for whom he died; and if there were to be one missing for whom Christ died, God the Father would send him down again from heaven to fetch him.70 And then he mounts his passionate plea on the basis of irresistible sovereign grace:

O come, come, see what it is to have eternal life; do not refuse it; haste, sinner, haste away: may the great, the good Shepherd, draw your souls. Oh! If you never heard his voice before, God grant you may hear it now. . . . O come! Come! Come to the Lord Jesus Christ; to him I leave you . . . . Amen.71 The Prominence of Justification

Among the doctrines of the Reformation that filled his great evangelistic sermons the most prominent was the doctrine of justification. His signature sermon, if there was one, seemed to be “The Lord Our Righteousness” based on Jeremiah 23:6. He never elevated justification to the exclusion of regeneration and sanctification. In fact, he was explicit in his effort to keep them in balance:

We must not put asunder what God has joined together; we must keep the medium between the two extremes; not insist so much on the one hand upon Christ without, as to exclude Christ within, as evidence of our being his, and as a preparation for future happiness; nor on the other hand, so depend on inherent righteousness or holiness wrought in us, as to exclude the righteousness of Jesus Christ without us.72 The Glory of Jesus' Obedience Imputed But O how jealous he is again and again to press home to the masses the particularities of this doctrine, especially the imputation of Christ's obedience. He lamented in one sermon,

I fear they understand justification in that low sense, which I understood it in a few years ago, as implying no more than remission of sins; but it not only signifies remission of sins past, but also a federal right to all good things to come. . . . As the obedience of Christ is imputed to believers so his perseverance in that obedience is to be imputed to them also.73

Never did greater or more absurdities flow from the denying any doctrine, than will flow form denying the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness.74 The world says, because we preach faith we deny good works; this is the usual objection against the doctrine of imputed righteousness. But it is a slander, an impudent slander.75 Relentlessly Devoted to Good Deeds

And, indeed, it was a slander in the life of George Whitefield. Whitefield was relentless in his devotion to good deeds and his care for the poor—constantly raising funds for orphans and other mercy ministries.76 Benjamin Franklin, who enjoyed one of the warmest friendship's Whitefield ever had, in spite of their huge religious differences, said, "[Whitefield's] integrity, disinterestedness and indefatigable zeal in prosecuting every good work, I have never seen equaled, I shall never see excelled."77 In other words, Whitefield's impassioned belief in the imputation of Christ's righteousness did not hinder the practical pursuit of justice and love, it empowered it. This connection between doctrine and practical duties of love was one of the secrets of Whitefield's power. The masses believed, and believed rightly, that he practiced what he preached. The new birth and justification by faith made a person good. A Contradictory Figure But it didn't make a person perfect. It didn't make Whitefield perfect. In fact, one of the effects of reading history, and biography in particular, is the persistent discovery of contradictions and paradoxes of sin and righteousness in the holiest people.

Whitefield is no exception and he will be more rightly honored if we are honest about his blindness as well as his doctrinal faithfulness and goodness. The most glaring blindness of his life—and there were others—was his support for the American enslavement of blacks.

Slaveholder

Before it was legal to own slaves in Georgia, Whitefield advocated for the legalization with a view to making the orphanage he built more affordable.78 In 1748, he wrote to the trustees of Bethesda, the name of his orphanage and settlement, Had a Negro been allowed, I should now have had a sufficiency to support a great many orphans, without expending about half the sum which hath been laid out. . . . Georgia never can or will be a flourishing province without negroes [sic] are allowed. . . . I am as willing as ever to do all I can for Georgia and the orphan house, if either a limited use of negroes is approved of, or some more indentured servants sent over. If not, I cannot promise to keep any large family, or cultivate the plantation in any considerable manner.79 In 1752 Georgia became a royal colony. Slavery was now legalized, and Whitefield

joined the ranks of the slave owners that he had denounced in his earlier years.80 Ardent Slave Evangelist That in itself was not unusual. Most of the slaveholders were professing Christians. But in Whitefield's case things were more complex. He didn't fit the mold of wealthy, Southern plantation owner. Almost all of them resisted evangelizing an educating the slaves. They knew intuitively that education would tend toward equality, which would undermine the whole system. And evangelism would imply that slaves could be come children of God, which would mean that they were brothers and sisters to the owners, which would also undermine the whole system. That's why the apparent New Testament tolerance of slavery is in fact a very powerful subversion of the institution.

Ironically, Whitefield did more to bring Christianity to the slave community in Georgia than anyone else.81 Whitefield wrote letters to newspapers defending the evangelism of slaves and arguing that to deny them this was to deny that they had souls (which many did deny). Harry Stout observes: "In fact, the letters represented the first journalistic statement on the subject of slavery. As such, they marked a precedent of awesome implications, beyond anything Whitefield could have imagined."82

Whitefield said he was willing to face the "whip" of Southern planters if they disapproved of his preaching the new birth to the slaves.83 He recounts one of his customary efforts among the slaves in North Carolina on his second trip to America:

I went, as my usual custom . . . among the negroes belonging to the house. One man was sick in bed, and two of his children said their prayers after me very well. This more and more convinces me that negro children, if early brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, would make as great proficiency as any among white people's children. I do not despair, if God spares my life, of seeing a school of young negroes singing the praises of Him Who made them, in a psalm of thanksgiving. Lord, Thou has put into my heart a good design to educate them; I doubt not but Thou wilt enable me to bring it to good effect.84

Gary B. Nash dates "the advent of black Christianity" in Philadelphia to Whitefield's first preaching tour. He estimates that perhaps 1000 slaves heard Whitefield's sermons in Philadelphia. What they heard was that they had souls just as surely as the white people. Whitefield's work for the slaves in Philadelphia was so effective that Philadelphia's most prominent dancing master, Robert Bolton, renounced his old vocation and turned his school over to blacks. "By summer's end, over 50 'black Scholars' had arrived at the school."85 Sowing the Seeds of Equality From Georgia to North Carolina to Philadelphia, Whitefield sowed the seeds of equality through heartfelt evangelism and education—blind as he was to the contradiction of buying and selling slaves.

Whitefield ended his most famous sermon, "The Lord Our Righteousness" with this appeal to the blacks in the crowd:

Here, then, I conclude; but I must not forget the poor negroes: no, I must not. Jesus Christ has died for them, as well as for others. Nor do I mention you last, because I despise your souls, but because I would have what I shall say make the deeper impression upon your hearts. O that you would seek the Lord to be your righteousness! Who knows but he may be found of you? For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free; even you may be the children of God, if you believe in Jesus. . . . Christ Jesus is the same now as he was yesterday, and will wash you

in his own blood. Go home then, turn the word of the text into a prayer, and entreat the Lord to be your righteousness. Even so. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly in all our souls. Amen. Lord Jesus, amen, and amen! This kind of preaching infuriated many slave owners. One wonders if there was a rumbling in Whitefield's own soul because he really did perceive where such radical evangelism would lead. He went public with his censures of slave owners and published words like these: "God has a quarrel with you" for treating slaves "as though they were Brutes." If these slaves were to rise up in rebellion, "all good Men must acknowledge the judgment would be just."86 This was incendiary. But it was too early in the course of history. Apparently Whitefield did not perceive the implications of what he was saying. What was clear was that the slave population loved Whitefield. For all his imperfections and blindness to the contradiction between advocating slavery and undermining slavery, when he died it was the blacks who expressed the greatest grief in America.87 More than any other eighteenth century figure, Whitefield established Christian faith in the slave community. Whatever else he failed in, for this they were deeply thankful.88 A Sinner Fit to Preach Free Grace So the greatest preacher of the 18th-century, perhaps in the history of the Christian Church, was a contradictory figure. There was, as he himself so freely confessed, sin remaining in him. And that is what we have found in every human soul on this earth—except one. Which is why our lives are meant to point to him. His perfect obedience, not ours, is the foundation of our acceptance with God. If then, our sin, as well as our righteousness, can point people away from ourselves to Christ, we will rejoice even as we repent.

"I know no other reason," Whitefield said, "why Jesus has put me into the ministry, than because I am the chief of sinners, and therefore fittest to preach free grace to a world lying in the wicked one."89

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2 J. I. Packer, "The Spirit with the Word: The Reformational Revivalism of George Whitefield," in: Honouring the People of God, The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I . Packer, Vol. 4 (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1999), p. 40.

3 Harry S. Stout, The Divine Dramatist: George Whitfield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 59.

4 Dallimore, Whitefield, II, p. 284.

5 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 30.

6 Mark Noll, The Old Religion in a New World: the History of North American Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 52.

7 Dallimore, Whitefield, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), p. 480.

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9 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 209.

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11 Select Sermons of George Whitefield With an Account of his Life by J. C. Ryle (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958 with Ryle's Life written in 1873), pp. 21-22.

12 Dallimore, Whitefield, II, p. 522.

13 Select Sermons, p. 32.

14 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 23.

15 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. xiii.

16 Ibid., p. 92.

17 Ibid., p. 261.

18 Harry Stout, "Heavenly Comet," Christian History, 38 (1993), p. 13–14.

19 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 23.

20 Stout, Divine Dramatist, pp. 276–277.

21 Select Sermons, p. 28.

22 Dallimore, Whitefield, I, p. 538.

23 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 126.

24 John Pollock, Wilberforce (London: Constable and Compnay, 1977), pp. 4–5.

25 Select Sermons, p. 29.

26 Franklin's comment in a letter about Whitefield was, "He is a good man and I love him." Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 233.

27 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 204.

28 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, pp.35–37.

29 Ibid.

30 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. xviii.

31 Ibid., p. 42.

32 Ibid., p. xxi.

33 Ibid., p. 40.

34 Ibid., p. 41.

35 Ibid., p. xix.

36 Dallimore, Whitefield, II, p. 225.

37 See a picture in Dallimore, Whitefield, II, between pages 303–304, and see a picture of an example of his preaching in Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 96.

38 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 41. Winter also said, “My intimate knowledge of him admits of my acquitting him of the charge of affectation.” Eric Carlsson, review of Stout, Divine Dramatist in TrinJ, No. 2, Fall, 93, p. 241.

39 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 141.

40 Select Sermons, p. 165. The sermon is “Walking with God.”

41 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. xvii.

42 Ibid., p. 21.

43 Ibid., p. 36.

44 Ibid., p. 55.

45 Ibid., p. 71.

46 Ibid., p. xviii.

47 Ibid., pp. 239–240.

48 Ibid., pp. 25–26.

49 From a sermon in 1769. Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, pp.25–26.

50 Select Sermons, p. 15.

51 Carlsson, review of Stout, Divine Dramatist in TrinJ, No. 2, Fall, 93, p. 244.

52 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p.68.

53 Ibid., p.83.

54 Dallimore, Whitefield, II, pp. 168, 241.

55 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p.50.

56 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 103.

57 He used the term freely for the fullness of the Reformation, Calvinistic teaching about salvation by sovereign grace. Writing on February 20, 1741, to Anne Dutton, he refers to his settlement in Georgia and says, “My family in Georgia was once sadly shaken, but now, blessed be God, it is settled, and, I hope, established in the doctrines of grace.” Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 127. On his second trip to America, he was critical of many pastors saying, “Many ministers are so sadly degenerated from their pious ancestors, that the doctrines of grace, especially the personal, all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus is but too seldom, too slightly mentioned.” Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 97.

58 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. xxiii.

59 Packer, “The Spirit with the Word,” p. 56.

60 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 26.

61 Packer, “The Spirit with the Word,” p. 47.

62 Dallimore, Whitefield, I, p. 574.

63 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, p. 76.

64 Ibid., pp. 71-72.

65 Ibid., p. 113.

66 Ibid., p. 76.

67 Dallimore, Whitefield, II, p. 41.

68 Haykin, ed., Revived Puritan, pp. 97-98.

69 Ibid., p. 145.

70 Select Sermons, p. 193

71 Ibid., p. 199. See p. 112 for another illustration of how he pleads with people even while drawing their attention to the fact that they cannot change themselves.

72 Ibid., p. 106.

73 Ibid., p.107.

74 Ibid., p. 129.

75 Ibid., p. 189.

76 “[Whitefield] was doctrinally pure in his insistence that salvation came only through God’s grace, but he was nevertheless [sic] deeply involved in charitable work, and his year-long tour through America was to raise money for an orphanage in Georgia. He raised more money than any other cleric of his time for philanthropies, which included schools, libraries, and almshouses across Europe and America.” Walter Isaacson, Benjamin Franklin: An American Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 110.

77 Carlsson, review of Stout, Divine Dramatist in TrinJ, No. 2, Fall, 93, p. 245.

78 “Whitefield spent much of his time in the South actively promoting the legalization of slavery in Georgia.” Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 198.

79 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 199.

80 “There was no longer a need for the South Carolina plantation. All resources were transferred to Bethesda, including a force of slaves for whom, Whitefield rejoiced, ‘Nothing seems to be wanted but a good overseer, to instruct the negroes in selling and planting.’” Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 218.

81 Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 101.

82 Ibid., p. 123.

83 Ibid., p. 100.

84 Ibid., p. 101.

85 Ibid., pp. 107–108.

86 Ibid., pp. 101-102.

87 Ibid., p. 284.

88 A 17-year-old black Boston servant girl named Phyllis Wheatley wrote one of his most famous elegies:

Hail happy saint on thy immortal throne! To thee complaints of grievance are unknown:

We hear no more the music of thy tongue, Thy wonted auditories cease to throng.

Thy lessons in unequal'd accents flow'd!

While emulation in each bosom glow'd;

Thou didst, in strains of eloquence refine'd Inflame the soul, and captivate the mind.

Unhappy we, the setting Sun deplore: Which once was splendid, but it shines no more;

He leaves the earth for Heaven's unmeasure'd height: And worlds unknown, receive him from our sight;

There WHITEFIELD wings, with rapid course his way, And sails to Zion, through vast seas of day. (Stout, Divine Dramatist, p. 284) 89 Haykin, editor, Revived Puritan, pp. 157–158. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 72

05.16. Insanity and Spiritual Songs in the Soul of a Saint

Insanity and Spiritual Songs in the Soul of a Saint Reflections on the Life of William Cowper

Why Cowper?

There are at least three reasons why I have chosen to tell the story of the 18th century poet William Cowper at this year's conference.

One is that ever since I was seventeen—maybe before—I have felt the power of poetry. I went to my file recently and found an old copy of Leaves of Grass, my High School Literary Magazine from 1964 and read the poems that I wrote for it almost 30 years ago. Then I looked at the Kodon from my Wheaton days, and remembered the poem, "One of Many Lands" that I wrote in one of my bleaker moments as a college freshman. Then I dug out The Opinion from Fuller Seminary and the Bethel Coeval from when I taught there. It hit me again what a long-time friend poetry-writing has been to me.

I think the reason for this is that I live with an almost constant awareness of the breach between the low intensity of my own passion and the staggering realities of the universe around me, heaven, hell, creation, eternity, life, God. Everybody (whether they know it or not) tries to close this breach—between the weakness of our emotions and the wonder of the World. Some of us do it with poetry.

William Cowper did it with poetry. I think I know what he means, for example, when he writes a poem about his mother's portrait long after her death and says, And, while that face renews my filial grief, Fancy shall weave a charm for my relief.

There is a deep release and a relief that comes when we find a way of seeing and saying some precious or stunning reality that comes a little closer to closing the breach between what we've glimpsed with our mind and what we've grasped with our heart. It shouldn't be surprising that probably over 300 pages of the Bible was written as poetry. Because the aim of the Bible is to build a bridge between the deadness of the human heart and the living reality of God. The second reason I am drawn to William Cowper is that I want to know the man behind the hymn, "God Moves In a Mysterious Way." Over the years it has become very precious to me and to many in our church.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;

He plants his footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines Of never failing skill, He treasures up his bright designs And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head.

Judge not the lord by feeble sense, But trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purpose will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan his work in vain:

God is his own interpreter, And he will make it plain. This hymn hangs over our mantle at home. It expresses the foundation of my theology and my life so well that I long to know the man who wrote it.

Finally, I want to know why this man struggled with depression and despair almost all his life. I want to try to come to terms with insanity and spiritual songs in the same heart of one whom I think was a saint. A Sketch of his Life Let’s begin with a sketch of his life. Who was he and when did he live?

He was born in 1731 and died in 1800. That makes him a contemporary of John Wesley and George Whitefield, the leaders of the Evangelical Revival in England. He embraced Whitefield’s Calvinistic theology rather than Wesley’s Arminianism. It was a warm, evangelical brand of Calvinism, shaped (in Cowper’s case) largely by one of the healthiest men in the 18th century, the "old African blasphemer" John Newton, whom we will see more of in a moment.

Cowper said he could remember how as a child he would see the people at four o’clock in the morning coming to hear Whitefield preach in the open air. "Moorfields (was) as full of the lanterns of the worshippers before daylight as the Haymarket was full of flambeaux on opera nights" (see note 1).

He was 27 years old when Jonathan Edwards died in America. He lived through the American and French revolutions. His poetry was known by Benjamin Franklin who gave Cowper’s first volume a good review (see note 2). But he was not a man of affairs or travel. He was a recluse who spent virtually all his adult life in the rural English country side near Olney and Weston. From the standpoint of adventure or politics or public engagement his life was utterly uneventful. The kind of life no child would ever choose to read about. But for those of us who are older we have come to see that the events of the soul are probably the most important events in life. And the battles in this man’s soul were of epic proportions. So let’s sketch his seemingly uneventful life with a view to seeing the battles of the soul.

He was born November 15, 1731 at Great Berkhampstead near London, a town of about 1500 people. His father was rector of Great Berkhampstead and one of George II’s chaplains. So the family was well to do, but not evangelical, and William grew up without any saving relation to Christ. His mother died when he was six and his father sent him to Pitman’s boarding school in Bedfordshire. It was a tragic mistake, as we will see from his own testimony later in life. From the age of ten till he was seventeen he attended Westminster private school and learned his French and Latin and Greek well enough to spend the last years of his life fifty years later translating Homer and Madame Guyon. From 1749 he was apprenticed to a solicitor with a view to practicing law—at least this was his father’s view. He never really applied himself, and had no heart for the public life of a lawyer or a politician. For ten years he did not take his legal career seriously, but lived a life of leisure with token involvement in his supposed career. In 1752 he sank into his first paralyzing depression—the first of four major battles with mental breakdown so severe as to set

him to string out of windows for weeks at a time. Struggle with despair came to be the theme of his life. He was 21 years old and not yet a believer. He wrote about the attack of 1752 like this:

(I was struck) with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies, to which before I had been closely attached; the classics had no longer any charms for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had not one to direct me where to find it.

He came through this depression with the help of the poems of George Herbert (who lived 150 years earlier). These contained enough beauty and enough hope that Cowper found strength to take several months away from London by the sea in Southampton. What happened there was both merciful and sad. He wrote in his Memoir: The morning was calm and clear; the sun shone bright upon the sea; and the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I had ever seen...Here it was, that on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my weariness taken off; my heart became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone. That was the mercy. The sadness of it was that he confessed later that instead of giving God the credit for this mercy he formed the habit merely of battling his depression, if at all, by seeking changes of scenery. It was the merciful hand of God in nature. But he did not see him, or give him glory. Not yet.

Between 1749 and 1756 Cowper was falling in love with his cousin Theodora whose home he would regularly visit on the weekends. She became the Delia of his love poems. They were engaged, but for some mysterious reason her father, Ashley Cowper, forbade the marriage. His apparent reason was the inappropriateness of consanguinity. She was William's cousin. But it seems strange that the relation was allowed to develop for seven years as well as the engagement only to shatter on a brick wall at the last minute. Probably her father knew things about William that convinced him he would not have been a good husband for his daughter. This is probably true. But it didn't turn out the way he hoped. Though they never saw each other again after 1756, Theodora outlived him but never married. She followed the poetic career of William from a distance and sent him money anonymously when he was in need, even a regular stipend at one point.

We know of 19 poems that he wrote to her under the name Delia. One of them, written some years after their parting, shows the abiding pain: But now, sole partner in my Delia's heart, Yet doomed far off in exile to complain, Eternal absence cannot ease my smart, And hope subsists but to prolong my pain.

What we find is that William Cowper's life seems to be one long accumulation of pain. In 1759 when he was 28 years old he was appointed, through the influence of his father, Commissioner of Bankrupts in London. Four years later he was about to be made Clerk of Journals in Parliament. What would have been a great career advancement to most men struck fear in William Cowper—so much so that he had a total mental breakdown, tried three different ways to commit suicide, and was put into an asylum. His father had arranged for the position. But his enemies in parliament decided to require a public interrogation for his son as a prerequisite. Cowper wrote about the dreadful attack of 1763:

All the horrors of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence (=interrogation) ... Those whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horror of my situation; others can have none (see note 3). For more than half a year his feelings were those "of a man when he arrives at the place of execution." At that point something dreadful returned to his memory that causes us to wonder about what kind of father William Cowper had. The 32 year old Clerk suddenly recalled a "treatise on self-murder" that he read when he was 11 years old.

I well recollect when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me (see note 4). In the week before his examination (October 1763) he bought laudanum to use as a poison. He pondered escaping to France to enter a monastery. He had illusions of seeing himself slandered in the newspaper anonymously. He was losing his hold on reality almost entirely. The day before the Parliamentary examination he set out to drown himself and took a cab to Tower Wharf. But at Custom House Quay he found the water too low and "a porter seated upon some goods" as if "a message to prevent" him (see note 5). When he got home that evening he tried to take the laudanum but found his fingers "closely contracted" and "entirely useless." The next morning he tried three times to hang himself with a garter. The third time he became unconscious, but the garter broke. The laundress found him in bed and called his uncle who canceled the examination immediately. And that was the end of Cowper’s brush with public life—but not the end of his brush with death.

Conviction of sin took place, especially of that just committed; the meanness of it, as well as its atrocity, were exhibited to me in colours so inconceivably strong that I despised myself, with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed ... This sense of it secured me from the repetition of a crime which I could not now reflect on without abhorrence ... A sense of God’s wrath, and a deep despair of escaping it, instantly succeeded (see note 6).

Now everything he read condemned him. Sleep would not come, and, when it did, it brought him terrifying dreams. When he awoke he "reeled and staggered like a drunken man." So in December 1763, he was committed to St. Albans Insane Asylum where the 58 year old Dr. Nathaniel Cotton tended the patients. He was somewhat of a poet, but most of all, by God’s wonderful design, an evangelical believer and lover of God and the gospel.

He loved Cowper and held out hope to him repeatedly in spite of his insistence that he was damned and beyond hope. Six months into his stay Cowper found a Bible lying (not by accident) on a bench in the garden.

Having found a Bible on the bench in the garden, I opened upon the 11th of St. John, where Lazarus is raised from the dead; and saw so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men, in our Saviour’s conduct, that I almost shed tears upon the relation; little thinking that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards myself. I sighed, and said, "Oh, that I had not rejected so good a Redeemer, that I had not forfeited all his favours." Thus was my heart softened, though not yet enlightened (see note 7).

Increasingly he felt he was not utterly doomed. There came another revelation and he turned again to the Bible and the first verse he saw was Romans 3:25 : "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel ... Whatever my friend Madan had said to me, long before, revived in all its clearness, with demonstration of the spirit and power. Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport; I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder (see note 8).

He had come to love the place of Dr. Cotton so much that he stayed on another 12 months after his conversion. One might wish the story were one of emotional triumph after his conversion. But it will not turn out that way. Far from it. In June 1765, Cowper left St. Albans and moved in with the Unwin family in Huntington. Mary Unwin was only 8 years older than Cowper, but she was to become to him like a mother for almost 30 years. In 1767 Mr. Morley Unwin, Mary’s husband, died in a tragic fall from his horse. This set the stage for the most important relationships in Cowper’s life. Not only did he and Mary Unwin live together for the rest of her life, but at the death of her husband, John Newton entered the picture and became the most important influence in Cowper’s life.

John Newton was the curate at the church in Olney not far from the Unwin’s home. He had lost his mother when he was six just like Cowper. But after being sent to school for a few years, he traveled with his father on the high seas, eventually becoming a slave trading seaman himself. He was powerfully converted and God called him to the ministry. He had been at Olney since 1764 and would be there till 1780.

We know him mainly as the author of "Amazing Grace." But we should also know him as one of the healthiest, happiest pastors in the 18th century. People said that other pastors were respected by their people, but Newton was loved. To show you the kind of spirit he had, here is a quote that gets at the heart of how he approached the ministry:

Two heaps of human happiness and misery; now if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point. If, as I go home, a child has dropped a halfpenny, and if, by giving it another, I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad to do greater things, but I will not neglect this. When I hear a knock on my study door, I hear a message from God; it may be a lesson of instruction, perhaps a lesson of penitence; but, since it is his message, it must be interesting (see note 9).

John Newton was told that a family near his parish had lost their father and husband, the Unwins. He made the trip to the Unwins and was such a help to them that they decided to move to Olney and sit under his ministry. So in September 1767 they moved from Huntington to Olney and lived in a place called Orchard Side for almost 20 years. For 13 of those years Newton was Cowper’s pastor and counselor and friend. Cowper said, "A sincerer or more affectionate friend no man ever

had" (see note 10).

Newton saw Cowper's bent to melancholy and reclusiveness and drew him into the ministry of visitation as much as he could. They would take long walks together between homes and talk of God and his purposes for the church. Then in 1769 Newton got the idea of collaborating with Cowper on a book of hymns to be sung by their church. He thought it would be good for Cowper's poetic bent to be engaged. In the end Newton wrote about 208 hymns and Cowper wrote 68. The hymnal was published in 1779. Besides "Amazing Grace," Newton wrote "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" and "Come, My Soul Thy Suit Prepare." Cowper wrote "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" and "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" and "O for a Closer Walk with God." But before Cowper could complete his share he had what he called "the fatal dream." January had come again. His breakdowns had always been their worse in January. And it was now ten years since "the dreadful '63." They came virtually every ten years in their worst form. He does not say precisely what the dream was but only that a "word" was spoken that reduced him to spiritual despair, something to the effect of "It is all over with you, you are lost" (see note 11).

Twelve years later he still shuddered at the dream. He wrote to Newton in 1785, "I had a dream twelve years ago before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes, and, it seems to me, must always vanish." Not long before his death he told Lady Hesketh, "In one day, in one minute I should rather have said, she (Nature) became a universal blank to me; and though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove, as blindness itself" (see note 12).

Again there were repeated attempts at suicide, and each time God providentially prevented him. Newton stood by him all the way through this, even sacrificing at least one vacation so as not to leave Cowper alone. In 1780 Newton leaves Olney for a new pastorate in Lombard Street, London where he served for the next 27 years. It is a great tribute to him that he did not abandon his friendship with Cowper, though this would have been emotionally easy to do no doubt. Instead there is an earnest exchange of letters for twenty years. Cowper poured out his soul to Newton as to no one else.

Perhaps it was good for Newton to go away, because when he left, Cowper poured himself into his major poetic projects between 1780 and 1786. You have probably never heard of any of these. His most famous and lengthy was called The Task, a one hundred page poem in blank verse. Even though he saw himself in his blackest moods as reprobate and hopeless, he never stopped believing in the truth of the Evangelical Revival. All his poems are meant to teach as well as to entertain.

He wrote about himself:

... I, who scribble rhyme To catch the triflers of the time, And tell them truths divine and clear Which, couched in prose, they would not hear. (see note 13) His first volume of poems was published in 1782 when he was 51. Three years later came The Task which established his fame. The great usefulness of these poems is that they "helped to spread (the Revival's) ideas among the educated of all classes ... because of his formal alliance with the (Evangelical) movement and the practical effects of his work, (Cowper) remains its (poet) laureate" (see note 14).

Perhaps his productivity staved off the threatened breakdown of 1783, the next ten-year interval. But the reprieve did not last. In 1786 Cowper entered his fourth deep depression and again tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide. He and Mary move from Olney to Weston that year and the long decline of both of them begins. He cares for her as for a dying Mother from 1790 to 1796, filling what moments he can with work on his translations of Homer and other Greek and French works. He writes his last original poem in 1799, called The Castaway, and then dies apparently in utter despair in 1800.

Reflections on his Depression

William Cowper's melancholy is disturbing. We need to come to terms with it in the framework of God's sovereign power and grace to save and sanctify his people. What are we to make of this man's life long battle with depression, and indeed his apparent surrender to despair and hopelessness in his own life?

One thing to notice is that there is some inconsistency in the way he reports his misery and hopelessness. For example, in a letter to John Newton on January (!) 13, 1784 he wrote,

Loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended ... You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more ... My friends, I now expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? ... I forestall the answer:—God's ways are mysterious, and He giveth no account of His matters:—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained. (see note 15)

Notice that he affirms the truth of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and does not even quarrel with the reality of his own conversion at St. Albans. What he disputes is that the general truth applies to him. He is the lone exception in the universe. He is reprobate though once he was elect. Ask not why. God gives no account. This is his bleakest way of talking. But notice something else. In that same year he was writing The Task. In it he recounts what Christ meant to him in a way that makes it very hard to believe there are not times now when this is still real for him:

I was stricken deer, that left the herd Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt My panting side was charg'd, when I withdrew To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.

There was I found by one who had himself Been hurt by th' archers. In his side he bore, And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars. With gentle force soliciting the darts, He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live.

Since then, with few associates, in remote And silent woods I wonder, far from those My former partners of the peopled scene; With few associates, and not wishing more.

What would he mean in 1784, twelve years after the "fatal dream" that Jesus had drawn the arrows out and healed him and bade him live? Were there not moments when he truly felt this and affirmed it against the constitutional gloom of his own mind?

Even in the 1790’s there were expressions of hope. From time to time he gave evidence, for example, that he was permitted by God "once more to approach Him in prayer." His earliest biographer and friend said that in the days of the last decade God had once more opened a passage for him but that "spiritual hounds" haunted him at night (see note 16). But there was horrible blackness for him much of the time. He wrote to John Newton (friend to the end!) in 1792 that he always seemed to be "scrambling in the dark, among rocks and precipices, without a guide. Thus I have spent 20 years, but thus I shall not spend twenty years more. Long ere that period arrives, the grand question concerning my everlasting weal or woe will be decided" (see note 17). This is bleak but it is not the settled reprobation we read in 1786. The last days of his life brought no relief. No happy ending. In March of 1800 he said to visiting Dr. Lubbock, "I feel unutterable despair." On April 24 Miss Perowne offered some refreshment to him, to which he replied, "What can it signify?" He never spoke again and died the next afternoon (seen note 18).

What were the roots of such overwhelming and intractable gloom? No doubt there are secrets that God only knows. But we can see some reasons why he may have struggled the way he did. Consider the home into which he was born. His father John married his mother Ann in 1728. Between the wedding in 1728 and his birth in 1731 three children had already been born and lost! He lives. But between 1731 and 1736 when his brother John was born, two more children enter the family then die. Then the mother dies a few days after John’s birth. William is six years old. The marriage is one sustained heartache. The pain and emotional trauma of the death of his mother can probably not be calculated. It’s true that John Newton lost his mother at the age of six, the very year Cowper was born. But there is a difference, as we will see in a moment. In 1790 at the age of 59 Cowper received a portrait of his mother in the post that swept him away with the emotion of years. He had not laid eyes on her face for 53 years. He wrote a poem to capture and release the pain and the pleasure of that "meeting." We catch a glimpse of what it was for him at age 6 to lose his mother. And perhaps why he took so to Mrs. Mary Unwin.

Oh that those lips had language! Life has passed With me but roughly since I heard thee last.

... My mother! when I learned that thou wast dead, Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?

Hovered thy spirit o’er thy sorrowing son, Wretch even then, life’s journey just begun?

...

I heard the bell tolled on thy burial day, I saw the hearses that bore thee slow away, And turning from my nursery window, drew A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!

...

Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern, Oft gave me promise of thy quick return.

What ardently I wished, I long believed, And disappointed still, was still deceived; By expectation every day beguiled, Dupe of to-morrow even from a child.

... But the record fair, That memory keeps of all thy kindness there, Still outlives many a storm, that has effaced A thousand other themes less deeply traced. *** Thy nightly visits to my chamber made That thou mightst know me safe and warmly laid;

Thy morning bounties ere I left my home, Thy biscuit, or confectionery plum; The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestowed By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glowed:

All this, and more endearing still than all, Thy constant flow of love, that knew no fall, Ne'er roughened by those cataracts and breaks, That humour interposed too often makes:

All this still legible in memory's page And still to be so to my latest age.

One begins to ponder the strange relations Cowper had all his life with older women, wanting them in his life, and yet confusing them with the love poems he would write when he had no romantic intentions. Lady Austen in particular was bewildered by the way Cowper wrote to her (see note 19). This kind of behavior may have its roots not only in the loss of his mother but in the virtual loss of his father and his horrible experience in boarding school between the ages of 6 and 8.

He hated boarding school and longed for his father: But my chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys, by a lad about fifteen years of age as a proper object upon which he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to forbear a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity, with which he made it his business continually to persecute me: it will be sufficient to say, that he had, by his savage treatment of me, impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift up my eyes upon him, higher than his knees; and that I knew him by his shoe-buckles, better than any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory! (see note 20)

One would never say it in the 18th century. But knowing what we know today about its effects and what we know about boys at that age, it is hard not to raise the specter of sexual abuse. What horrors a little six year old boy may have experienced combined with the loss of his mother and the virtual loss of his father!

Perhaps the most poignant lines Cowper ever wrote are hidden away in a poem called Tirocinium (Latin for the state of a new recruit, inexperience, rawness) in which he pleads for a private education rather than one at boarding school. What comes through here is a loud cry for his father to have been there for him, and a powerful plea to fathers even in the 20th century to be there for our children. Listen to these lines: Would you your son should be a sot or dunce, Lascivious, headstrong, or all these at once, That in good time, the stripling's finished taste For loose expense and fashionable waste Should prove your ruin, and his own at last, Train him in public with a mob of boys, Childish in mischief only and in noise, Else of a mannish growth, and five in ten In infidelity and lewdness, men.

There shall he learn, ere sixteen winters old, That authors are most useful, pawned or sold, That pedantry is all that schools impart, But taverns teach the knowledge of the heart.

... And seems it nothing in a father's eye that unimproved those many moments fly? And is he well content, his son should find No nourishment to feed his growing mind But conjugated verbs, and nouns declined? For such is all the mental food purveyed by public hackneys in the schooling trade. Who feed a pupil's intellect with store Of syntax truly, but with little more, Dismiss their cares when they dismiss their flock, Machines themselves, and governed by a clock.

Perhaps a father blest with any brains Would deem it no abuse or waste of pains, To improve this diet at no great expense, With savoury truth and wholesome common sense, To lead his son for

prospects of delight To some not steep though philosophic height, Thence to exhibit to his wondering eyes Yon circling worlds, their distance, and their size

... To show him in an insect of a flower Such microscopic proofs of skill and power, As hid from ages past, God now displays To combat atheists with in modern days.

...

Canst thou, the tear just trembling on thy lids, And while the dreadful risk foreseen, forbids, Free too, and under no constraining force, Unless the sway of custom warp thy course, Lay such a stake upon the losing side, Merely to gratify so blind a guide?

Thou canst not: Nature pulling at thine heart, Condemns the unfatherly, the imprudent part.

Thou wouldst not, deaf to nature's tenderest plea, Turn him adrift upon a rolling sea, Nor say, go thither, conscious that there lay A brood of asps, or quicksands in his way;

Then only governed by the self-same rule Of natural pity, send him not to school No!—guard him better: Is he not thine own, Thyself in miniature, thy flesh, thy bone? And hopest thou not ('tis every father's hope) That since thy strength must with thy years elope, And thou wilt need some comfort to assuage Health's last farewell, as staff of thine old age, That then, in recompense of all thy cares Thy child shall show respect to thy gray hairs.

He never wrote a tribute to his father that we know of. He says almost nothing about him. But this is a powerful plea for fathers to love their sons and give them special attention in their education. This is what he missed from the age of six onward.

Lessons The first lesson I see is this: that we all fortify ourselves against the dark hours of depression by cultivating a deep distrust of the certainties of despair. Despair is relentless in the certainties of his pessimism. But we have seen that Cowper is not consistent. Some years after his absolute statements of being cut off from God, he is again expressing some hope in being heard. His certainties were not sureties. So it will always be with the deceptions of darkness. Let us now, while we have the light, cultivate distrust of the certainties of despair. The second lesson I see is that we love children and keep them close to us and secure with us. John Newton lost his mother just like Cowper. But he did not lose his father in the same way. In spite of all the sin and misery of those early years of Newton's life, there was a father, and who can say what deep roots of later health were preserved because of that. Let us be there for our sons and daughters. We are the crucial link in their normal sexual development and that is so crucial in their emotional wholeness.

Third, may the Lord raise up many John Newton's for us, for the joy of our churches and for the survival of the William Cowpers among us and in our churches. Newton remained Cowper's pastor and friend the rest of his life, writing and visiting again and again. He did not despair of the despairing. After one of these visits in 1788 Cowper wrote:

I found those comforts in your visit, which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the Chief Shepherd feeds His flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost for ever. (see note 21) That is not utter

hopelessness. And the reason it is not is because the shepherd had drawn near again. Those were the times when Cowper held out hope.

Fourth, in the very research and writing of this lecture I experienced something that may be a crucial lesson for those of us given to too much self-absorption and analysis. I devoted about three days from waking till sleeping to William Cowper, besides leisurely reading of his poetry up till that time.

Those three days I was almost entirely outside myself as it were. Now and then I "came to" and became aware that I had been absorbed wholly in the life of another. But most of the time I was not self-conscious. I was not thinking about me at all. I was the one thinking, not the one thought about. This experience, when I "came to" and thought about it, seemed to me extremely healthy. That is the way I experienced it. In other words, I felt best when I was not aware of being a feeling one at all. I was feeling and thinking the life of William Cowper.

I think this is the way most of our life should be. Periodic self-examination is needed and wise and Biblical. But for the most part mental health is the use of the mind to focus on worthy reality outside ourselves.

Fifth, the first version of this lecture was given in an evening service at Bethlehem Baptist Church. It proved to be one of the most encouraging things I have done in a long time. This bleak life was felt by many as hope-giving. There are no doubt different reasons for this in the cases of different people. But the lesson is surely that those of us who teach and preach and want to encourage our people to press on in hope and faith must not limit ourselves to success stories. The life of William Cowper had a hope-giving effect on my people. That is a very important lesson.

Finally, let us rehearse the mercies of Jesus often for our people, and point them again and again to the blood of Jesus. These were the two things that brought Cowper to faith in 1764. Remember how in John 11:1-57 he "saw so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men, in our Saviour’s conduct, that I almost shed tears." And remember how on the decisive day he said, "I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification."

You cannot persuade a person that he is not reprobate if he is utterly persuaded that he is. All you can do is keep soaking him in the "benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy" of Jesus and "the sufficiency of the atonement" and "the fullness and completeness of Christ’s justification." He will say that they are wonderful in themselves but that they do not belong to him. But in God’s time these truths may yet be given the power to awaken hope and beget a spirit of adoption.

We have good reason to hope that if we nourish the love and patience of John Newton in our church and the sufficiency of Jesus’ atonement, the William Cowpers among us will not be given over to the enemy in the end.

Notes:

1. Gilbert Thomas, William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, London: Ivor Nocholson and Watson, Ltd., 1935, p. 204.

2. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 267.

3. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 114.

4. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 118.

5. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 118.

6. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 119.

7. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 131-132.

8. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 132.

9. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 202.

10. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 192.

11. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 225.

12. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 226.

13. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 265.

14. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 183.

15. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 281-282.

16. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, pp. 368, 374.

17. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 376.

18. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 384.

19. One writer says that his attitudes toward women were "simple as an infant." I would call them insensitive and unhealthy. In the summer of 1781, Cowper was introduced to the widow of Sr. Robert Austen. She soon became "sister Ann" and more. She probably fell in love with him and cannot be blamed for thinking that he reciprocated. After two months he wrote her not to think it romance. Later she came to Olney, and even stayed in Orchard Side because of an illness. She and Cowper had much time together in those days and he wrote at least one very gallant poem for her that would have given any woman the thought of romance. But he had to write her again in the spring of 1784 to "renounce her society." There was no reconciliation this time. Cowper never met her again after 1784. She had inspired John Gilpin and The Task but now she was gone. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, pp. 289-290.

20. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, pp. 69-70.

21. William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, p. 356. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.17. J. Gresham Machen's Response to Modernism

J. Gresham Machen's Response to Modernism The Tragic End and the Institutions On New Year's Eve, 1936, in a Roman Catholic hospital in Bismarck, North Dakota, J. Gresham Machen was one day away from death at the age of 55. It was Christmas break at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, where he taught New Testament. His colleagues said he looked "deadly tired." But instead of resting, he took the train from Philadelphia to the 20-below-zero winds of North Dakota to preach in a few Presbyterian churches at the request of Pastor Samuel Allen.

Ned Stonehouse, his New Testament assistant said, "There was no one of sufficient influence to constrain him to curtail his program to any significant degree."1 He was the acknowledged leader of the conservative movement in Presbyterianism with no one to watch over him. His heroes and mentors, Warfield and Patton, were dead. He had never married, and so had no wife to restrain him with reality. His mother and father, who gave him so much wise counsel over the years, were dead. His two brothers lived 1500 miles to the east. "He had a personality that only his good friends found appealing."2 And so he was remarkably alone and isolated for a man of international stature.

He had pneumonia and could scarcely breath. Pastor Allen came to pray for him that last day of 1936, and Machen told him of a vision that he had had of being in heaven: "Sam, it was glorious, it was glorious," he said. And a little later he added, "Sam, isn't the Reformed faith grand?" The following day – New Year's Day, 1937 – he mustered the strength to send a telegram to John Murray, his friend and colleague at Westminster. It was his last recorded word: "I'm so thankful for [the] active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." He died about 7:30 P.M. So much of the man is here in this tragic scene. The stubbornness of going his own way when friends urged him not to take this extra preaching trip. His isolation far from the mainline centers of church life and thought. His suffering for the cause he believed in. His utter allegiance to and exaltation of the Reformed faith of the Westminster Confession. And his taking comfort not just from a general truth about Christ, but from a doctrinally precise understanding of the active obedience of Christ – which he believed was his own obedience in Christ and would make him a suitable heir of eternal life, for Christ's sake. And so Machen was cut off in the midst of a great work – the establishment of Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He hadn't set out to found a seminary or a new church. But given who he was and what he stood for and what was happening at Princeton, where he taught for 23 years, and in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., it was almost inevitable.

Westminster Seminary was seven years old when Machen died. The Presbyterian Church in America (which was forced under law to change its name, and so became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) was six months old, and Machen had been elected the first Moderator on June 11, 1936. The occasion for starting a new Presbyterian church over against the huge Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was that on March 29, 1935, Machen's Presbytery in Trenton, New Jersey, found him guilty of insubordination to church authorities3 and stripped him of his

ordination. An appeal was taken to the General Assembly at Syracuse in the summer of 1936, but failed. The reason for the charge of insubordination was that Machen had founded an independent board of foreign missions in June of 1933 to protest the fact that the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions endorsed a laymen's report (called Rethinking Missions) which Machen said, was "from beginning to end an attack upon the historic Christian faith."4

He pointed out that the board supported missionaries like Pearl Buck in China, who represented the kind of evasive, noncommittal attitude toward Christian truth that Machen thought was destroying the church and its witness. She said, for example, that if some one existed who could create a person like Christ and portray him for us, "then Christ lived and lives, whether He was once one body and one soul, or whether He is the essence of men's highest dreams."5

How serious was it that Machen could not give or endorse giving to this board? The General Assembly gave answer in Cleveland in 1934 with this astonishing sentence: A church member . . . that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church is in exactly the same position with reference to the Constitution of the Church as a church member . . . that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper or any other prescribed ordinance of the denomination.6

Thus Machen was forced by his own conscience into what the church viewed as the gravest insubordination and disobedience to his ordination vows, and removed him from the ministry. Hence the beginning of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A few years earlier Machen had left Princeton Seminary to found Westminster Seminary. That time, he wasn't forced out, but chose freely to leave when the governing boards of the seminary were reorganized so that the conservative board of Directors could be diluted by liberals7 more in tune with President Stevenson and with the denomination as a whole.8

Machen said,

If the proposed . . . dissolution of the present Board of Directors is finally carried out . . . [and] the control of the Seminary passes into entirely different hands – then Princeton Theological Seminary as it has been so long and so honorably known, will be dead, and we shall have at Princeton a new institution of radically different type.9

Well Princeton Seminary did die, in Machen's eyes, and out of the ashes he meant to preserve the tradition of Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield. So when he gave the inaugural address of Westminster Seminary to the first class of 50 students and guests on September 25, 1929, he said,

No, my friends, though Princeton Seminary is dead, the noble tradition of Princeton Seminary is alive. Westminster Seminary will endeavor by God's grace to continue that tradition unimpaired.10 The title of today's paper is "J. Gresham Machen's Response to Modernism." What we have seen so far is, I believe, the most enduring response he made: namely, the founding of these two institutions: Westminster Seminary (which today is a major influence in American evangelicalism) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (which now, 56 years later, has only 188 churches and about 19,000 members,11 but may have a witness more significant than its size). Where Did this Warrior for the Faith Come From? Who was J. Gresham Machen? Where did he come from? What shaped and drove him? More important than the mere fact of founding institutions is the question

of the worldview that carried him through that achievement. And what was this thing called “Modernism” that engaged his amazingly energetic opposition? And what can we learn from his response today?

John Gresham Machen was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 28, 1881, sixteen years after the Civil War. His mother was from Macon, Georgia, and was educated and cultured enough that she published a book in 1903 entitled, The Bible in Browning. His father was a very successful lawyer from Baltimore. The family hobnobbed with the cultural elite in Baltimore, had a vacation home in Seal Harbor and traveled often. Machen sailed to Europe and back some six times. In a word, Machen was a well-to-do southern aristocrat.

He went to the private University School for Boys where classics were stressed, including Latin from the time he was 11. The family were devoted members of Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, which was a part of the Southern Presbyterian Church. This cultural atmosphere shaped Machen’s views and sentiments in various ways. For example, he shared the southern paternalistic attitudes toward African-Americans. In an essay during his first year at Johns Hopkins University when he was 17, he wrote of his home in an essay: “The servants are the real, old-fashioned kind-hearted Southern darkies.”12 His view of the southern cause in the Civil War, still fresh in everyone’s mind, was the same as his favorite professor’s at Johns Hopkins: That the cause we fought for and our brothers died for was the cause of civil liberty and not the cause of human slavery . . . It was a point of grammatical concord that was at the bottom of the civil War – ’United States are,’ said one, ‘United States is,’ said another.”13 When he was 21, he inherited $50,000 from his maternal grandfather. To put that in perspective, his first annual salary at Princeton was $2,000. So he inherited 25 times an annual salary when he was 21, and when he was 35 he inherited a similar amount when his father died. When he died, his assets totaled $250,000 dollars.14 This explains why we can read time after time of Machen’s funding ministry and publishing efforts with his own money. As with most of us, therefore, the level at which Machen engaged the culture of his day was being powerfully shaped by the level of his upbringing and education. He went to Johns Hopkins University and majored in Classics, and then, with the urging of his pastor, went on to Princeton Seminary, even though he was not at all sure he would enter the ministry. And after seminary, he spent a year in Germany studying New Testament with well-known German scholars.

Here Machen met Modernism face to face and was shaken profoundly in his faith. Almost overpowering was the influence of Wilhelm Herrmann, the systematic theologian at Marburg, who represented the best of what Machen would later oppose with all his might. He was not casting stones over a wall when he criticized Modernism. Machen had been over the wall and was almost lured into the camp. In 1905 he wrote home: The first time that I heard Herrmann may almost be described as an epoch in my life. Such an overpowering personality I think I almost never before encountered – overpowering in the sincerity of religious devotion. . . My chief feeling with reference to him is already one of the deepest reverence. . . . I have been thrown all into confusion by what he says – so much deeper is his devotion to Christ than anything I have known in myself during the past few years. . . . Herrmann affirms very little of that which I have been accustomed to regard as essential to Christianity; yet there is no doubt in my mind but that he is a Christian, and a Christian of a peculiarly earnest type. He is a Christian not because he follows Christ as a moral teacher; but because his trust in Christ is (practically, if anything even more truly than theoretically)

unbounded . . .

Herrmann represents the dominant Ritschlian school. . . . Herrmann has shown me something of the religious power which lies back of this great movement, which is now making a fight even for the control of the Northern Presbyterian Church in America. In New England those who do not believe in the bodily Resurrection of Jesus are, generally speaking, religiously dead; in Germany, Herrmann has taught me that is by no means the case. He believes that Jesus is the one thing in all the world that inspires absolute confidence, and an absolute, joyful subjection; that through Jesus we come into communion with the living God and are made free from the world. It is the faith that is a real experience, a real revelation of God that saves us, not the faith that consists in accepting as true a lot of dogmas on the basis merely of what others have said. . . . Das Verkehr des Christen mit Gott is one of the greatest religious books I ever read. Perhaps Herrmann does not give the whole truth – I certainly hope he does not – at any rate he has gotten hold of something that has been sadly neglected in the church and in the orthodox theology. Perhaps he is something like the devout mystics of the middle ages – they were one-sided enough, but they raised a mighty protest against the coldness and deadness of the church and were forerunners of the Reformation.15

What Machen seemed to find in Herrmann was what he had apparently not found either in his home or at Princeton, namely, passion and joy and exuberant trust in Christ. At Princeton he had found solid learning and civil, formal, careful, aristocratic presentations of a fairly cool Christianity. He eventually came to see that the truth of the Princeton theology was a firmer ground for life and joy. But at this stage, the spirit in which it came, compared to Herrmann's spirit, almost cost evangelicalism one of its greatest defenders. There is a great lesson here for teachers and preachers: that to hold young minds there should be both intellectual credibility and joyful, passionate zeal for Christ. This experience in Germany made a lasting impact on the way Machen carried on controversy. He said again and again that he had respect and sympathy for the modernist who honestly could no longer believe in the bodily resurrection or the virgin birth or the second coming, but it was the rejection of these things without declaring oneself that angered Machen. For example, He said once that his problem with certain teachers at Union Seminary was their duplicity:

There is my real quarrel with them. As for their difficulties with the Christian faith, I have profound sympathy for them, but not with their contemptuous treatment of the conscientious men who believe that a creed solemnly subscribed to is more than a scrap of paper.16

He wanted to deal with people in a straightforward manner, and take his opponents' arguments seriously if they would only be honest and up front. His struggle with doubt gave him patience and empathy with others in the same boat. Twenty years later he wrote,

Some of us have been through such struggle ourselves; some of us have known the blankness of doubt, the deadly discouragement, the perplexity of indecision, the vacillation between "faith diversified by doubt," and "doubt diversified by faith."17

Machen came through this time without losing his evangelical faith and was called to Princeton to teach New Testament, which he did from 1906 until he left to form Westminster in 1929. During that time he became a pillar of conservative Reformed orthodoxy and a strong apologist for Biblical

Christianity and an internationally acclaimed New Testament Scholar with his book, The Origin of Paul's Religion published in 1921 (still a text at Fuller when I went there in 1968), and then in 1930 his most famous book, The Virgin Birth of Christ.

Machen's Response to Modernism and to Fundamentalism

Machen's years at Princeton were the two decades which are known for the ongoing Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. We will see Machen's distinctive response to Modernism if we contrast it with what was known most widely has Fundamentalism. In the process of defining his response, the meaning of Modernism will become clear.

He was seen as an ally by the Fundamentalists; and his ecclesiastical opponents liked to make him "guilty" by association with them. But he did not accept the term for himself. In one sense, Fundamentalists were simply those who "[singled] out certain great facts and doctrines [the "Fundamentals"] that had come under particular attack, [and] were concerned to emphasize their truth and to defend them."18 But there was more attached to the term than that. And Machen didn't like it. He said, Do you suppose that I do regret my being called by a term that I greatly dislike, a "Fundamentalist"? Most certainly I do. But in the presence of a great common foe, I have little time to be attacking my brethren who stand with me in defense of the Word of God.19 What he didn't like was

the absence of historical perspective;

the lack of appreciation of scholarship;

the substitution of brief, skeletal creeds for the historic confessions;

the lack of concern with precise formulation of Christian doctrine;

the pietistic, perfectionist tendencies (for example, hang ups with smoking,20 etc.);

one-sided other-worldliness (that is, a lack of effort to transform culture); and

a penchant for futuristic chiliasm (or: pre-millenialism).

Machen was on the other side on all these things. And so "he never spoke of himself as a Fundamentalist."21 But none of those issues goes to the heart of why he did not see himself as a Fundamentalist. The issue is deeper and broader and gets at the root of how he fought Modernism. The deepest difference goes back to Machen's profound indebtedness to Benjamin Warfield, who died February 16, 1921. Machen wrote to his mother, "With all his glaring faults he was the greatest man I have known."22 In 1909, at the 400th anniversary of John Calvin's birth, Warfield gave an address that stirred Machen to the depths. Warfield made plea that the Reformed faith – Calvinism – is not a species of Christian theism alongside others, but is Christianity come to full flower.

Calvinism is not a specific variety of theistic thought, religious experience, [or] evangelical faith; but just the perfect manifestation of these things. The difference between it and other forms of theism, religion, [and] evangelicalism is difference not of kind but of degree. . . . it does not take its position then by the side of other types of things; it takes its place over all else that claims to be these things, as embodying all that they ought to be.23 So he says Lutheranism is "its sister type

of Protestantism" and Arminianism is "its own rebellious daughter."24 Calvinism's grasp of the supremacy of God in all of life enabled Machen to see that other forms of evangelicalism were all stages of grasping God which are yet in process of coming to a full and pure appreciation of his total God-centeredness.

What this came to mean for Machen was that his mission in defense of supernaturalistic Calvinism was nothing more or less than the defense of the Christian faith in its purest form. So his biggest problem with the term "Fundamentalist" was that, it seems to suggest that we are adherents of some strange new sect, whereas in point of fact we are conscious simply of maintaining the historic Christian faith and of moving in the great central current of Christian life.25

He was invited to the presidency of Bryan Memorial University in 1927 – a move that would have aligned him with Fundamentalism outside the Reformed tradition. He answered like this:

Thoroughly consistent Christianity, to my mind, is found only in the Reformed or Calvinist Faith; and consistent Christianity, I think, is the Christianity easiest to defend. Hence I never call myself a "Fundamentalist." . . . what I prefer to call my self is not a "Fundamentalist" but a "Calvinist" – that is, an adherent of the Reformed Faith. As such I regard myself as standing in the great central current of the Church's life – the current that flows down from the Word of God through Augustine and Calvin, and which has found noteworthy expression in America in the great tradition represented by Charles Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and the other representatives of the "Princeton School."26 So Machen moved in a different world from most Fundamentalists. And when he took on Modernism, he took it on as a challenge to the whole of Reformed Christianity. His most important book in the debate was Christianity and Liberalism, published in 1923. The title almost says it all: Liberalism is not vying with Fundamentalism as a species of Christianity. The book is not entitled "Fundamentalism and Liberalism." Instead, Liberalism is vying with Christianity as a separate religion. He wrote the blurb for the book:

Liberalism on the one hand and the religion of the historic church on the other are not two varieties of the same religion, but two distinct religions proceeding from altogether separate roots.27

Stonehouse tells us that Machen's only regret is that he had not used the term "Modernism" rather than "liberalism" in the book, since the word "liberalism" seemed to give too much credit to the phenomenon.28 The words refer in Machen's vocabulary to the same thing.

Now what was "liberalism" (or "Modernism")?

Here again Machen did not move quickly with the Fundamentalists to show that the modernists were people who denied certain fundamental Christian doctrines. That was true. But his analysis was wider and deeper.

He approached the phenomenon of Modernism first through an analysis of modern culture and the spirit of the age. He tries to think through the relationship between Modernism and modernity.29 He wants to understand it from the inside as it were, on its own terms. The Roots of Modernism in Modernity He admits from the outset that "Modern culture is a tremendous force."30

Modern inventions and the industrialism that has been built upon them have given us in many respects a new world to live in . . . [and these material conditions] have been produced by mighty changes in the human mind. . . . The industrial world of today has been produced not by blind

forces of nature but by the conscious activity of the human spirit; it has been produced by the achievements of science.31 The problem of modernity is that it has bred forces which are hostile to Biblical faith and yet produced a world that believers readily embrace. Machen is exactly right to skewer us in this dilemma when he says,

We cannot without inconsistency employ the printing press, the railroad, the telegraph [we would say computers, jets and fax machines] in the propagation of our gospel, and at the same time denounce as evil those activities of the human mind that produced these things.32 So he calls for a critical assessment of modernity.33 The negative impulses he sees that all lead to Modernism are:

a suspicion of the past that is natural in view of the stunning advances of recent decades; it does seem as if the past is of relatively little value;

skepticism about truth and a replacement of the category of true with the category of useful (pragmatism, utilitarianism); the question “What works?” seems to be more scientifically productive;

the denial that the supernatural, if there is any such thing, can break into the world.

Machen credits Modernism – the theological response to this challenge of modernity – with trying to come to terms with the real problem of the age. “What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age? It is this problem which modern liberalism attempts to solve.”34 In trying to solve the problem, Liberalism, or Modernism, has joined modernity in minimizing the significance of the past in favor of newer impulses; has accepted the utilitarian view of truth; and has surrendered supernaturalism. All three compromises with the spirit of modernity work together to produce the modernist spirit in religion. And it is a spirit more than a set of doctrines or denials. This is why Machen never tired of pointing out the dangers of what he called “indifferentism” and “latitudinarianism”35 as well as the outright denials of the resurrection or the virgin birth or the inspiration of Scripture. The spirit of Modernism is not a set of ideas but an atmosphere that shifts from time to time with what is useful.

One of their own number, John A MacCallum, an outspoken Modernist minister in Philadelphia, said in a newspaper article in 1923,

[The liberals] have accepted the enlarged view of the universe which has been established by modern astronomy, geology and biology. Instead of blindly denying scientific facts as the obscurantists have always done, they have adjusted themselves to them, and in so doing have increased their faith and urbanity and consequently extended their influence, particularly with the educated classes. . . . Liberalism is an atmosphere rather than a series of formulas.36 When the preference for what is new combines with a naturalistic bias and a skepticism about finding abiding truth, the stage is set for the worst abuses of religious language and the worst manipulations of historic confessions. In essence, what the modernists do is not throw out Christianity, but reinterpret the creeds and give old words new meanings. That is, they make them into symbols for every changing meaning.

Thus the Virgin birth is one theory of the incarnation. The bodily resurrection is one theory of the resurrection. And so on. The old “facts” don’t correspond to anything permanent. They symbolize

general principles of religion. And those symbols are arrived at by what is useful or helpful, not by what is true. If they are useful for one generation, good; and if not for another then they may be exchanged. This meant that in the Presbyterian Church of Machen's day there were hundreds who would not deny the Confession of Faith, but by virtue of this modernistic spirit had given it up even though they signed it. One of the most jolting and penetrating statements of Machen on this issues goes like this:

It makes very little difference how much or how little of the creeds of the Church the Modernist preacher affirms, or how much or how little of the Biblical teaching from which the creeds are derived. He might affirm every jot and tittle of the Westminster Confession, for example, and yet be separated by a great gulf from the Reformed Faith. It is not that part is denied and the rest affirmed; but all is denied, because all is affirmed merely as useful or symbolic and not as true.37 This utilitarian view of history and language leads to evasive, vague language that enables the modernist to mislead people into thinking he is still orthodox. This temper of mind is hostile to precise definitions. Indeed nothing makes a man more unpopular in the controversies of the present day than an insistence upon definition of terms. . . . Men discourse very eloquently today upon such subjects as God, religion, Christianity, atonement, redemption, faith; but are greatly incensed when they are asked to tell in simple language what they mean by these terms.38

Machen's critique of the spirit of Modernism that flows from its marriage to modernity comes from two sides. First, internally – does this modern culture really commend itself? Second, externally – does the history of Christ and the apostles really allow for such a modernistic Christianity? Or is it not an alien religion? The Critique of Modernism as Part of Degenerate Modernity

Machen asks: granted we are better off in material things because of modernity, are we better off in the realm of the spirit and of the distinctly human aspects of life? The improvement appears in the physical conditions of life, but in the spiritual realm there is a corresponding loss. The loss is clearest, perhaps, in the realm of art. Despite the mighty revolution which has been produced in the external condition of life, no great poet is now living to celebrate the change; humanity has suddenly become dumb. Gone, too are the great painters and the great musicians and the great sculptors. The art that still subsists is largely imitative, and where it is not imitative it is usually bizarre.39

He argues that a "drab utilitarianism" destroys the higher aspirations of the soul and results in an unparalleled impoverishment of human life.40 When you take away any objective norm of truth, you take away the only means of measuring movement from lesser to greater or worse to better or less to more beautiful. One doctrine is as good as any contradictory doctrine, "provided it suits a particular generation or a particular group of persons." All that's left without truth are the "meaningless changes of a kaleidoscope."41 Without a sense of progress in view of an objective truth, life becomes less and less, not more and more. In view of these, and other observations about the effects of modernity and Modernism, Machen asks modern man if he can be so sure that the past and the truth and the supernatural are really as cheap and expendable as he thought? In view of the lamentable defects of modern life, a type of religion certainly should not be commended simply because it is modern or condemned simply because it is old. On the contrary, the condition of mankind is such that one may well ask what it is that made the men of past generations so great and the men of the present generations so small.42

Thus Machen seeks to understand and critique modernity and Modernism from the inside – and this set him off by and large from the Fundamentalists of his day.

Critique of Modernism from New Testament History

Then, from the outside, Machen wields his powers as a historian and a student of the New Testament. He argues on historical grounds that from the beginning the church was a witnessing church (Acts 1:8) and a church devoted to the apostles' teaching. In other words, her life was built on events without which there would be no Christianity. These events demand faithful witnesses who tell the objective truth about the events, since they are essential. And the life of the church was built on the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42) – the authoritative interpretation of the events.

He argues powerfully in the chapter on "Doctrine" in Christianity and Liberalism that Paul made much of the truth of his message and the need to get it exactly right, even if the messenger was not exactly right. For example, in Philippians he was tolerant of those who with bad motives preached to make his imprisonment worse – because they were saying the objective truth about Christ. In Galatians, however, he was not tolerant, but pronounced a curse on his opponents – because they were getting the message objectively wrong. They were telling gentiles that works of the flesh would complete in their lives God's saving action, which had begun by faith and the Spirit. It may seem like a triviality since both the Judaizers and Paul would have agreed on dozens of precious things, including the necessity of faith for salvation. But it was not trivial. And with this kind of historical observation and argument from the New Testament, Machen shows that truth and objectivity and doctrine are not optional in grasping and spreading Christianity. As over against . . . [the pragmatist, modernist] attitude, we believers in historic Christianity maintain the objectivity of truth. . . . Theology, we hold, is not an attempt to express in merely symbolic terms an inner experience which must be expressed in different terms in subsequent generations; but it is a setting forth of those facts upon which experience is based.43

Therefore his response to Modernism stands: it is not a different kind of Christianity. It is not Christianity at all. "The chief modern rival of Christianity is 'liberalism.' . . . At every point the two movements are in direct opposition."44 The foundational truths have been surrendered; or worse, the concept of truth has been surrendered to pragmatism so that even affirmations are denials, because they are affirmed as useful and not as true.

I don't think the structure of the Modernism of Machen's day is too different from the Postmodernism of our day. In some churches, the triumph of Modernism is complete. It is still a menace at the door of all our churches and schools and agencies. One of our great protections will be the awareness of stories like Machen's – the enemy he faced, the battle he fought, the weapons he used (and failed to use), the losses he sustained, the price he paid, and the triumphs he wrought. If we do not know history we will be weak and poor in our efforts to be faithful in our day. Our hope for the church and for the spread of the true gospel lies not ultimately in our strategies but in God. And there is every hope that he will triumph. That Church is still alive; an unbroken spiritual descent connects us with those whom Jesus commissioned. Times have changed in many respects, new problems must be faced and new difficulties overcome, but the same message must still be proclaimed to a lost world. Today we have need of all our faith; unbelief and error have perplexed us sore; strife and hatred have set the world aflame. There is only one hope, but that hope is sure. God has never deserted his church; his promise never

fails.45 Lessons We Might Learn from Machen

1. Machen's life and thought issue a call for all of us to be honest, open, clear, straightforward and guileless in our use of language.

He challenges us, as does the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-4), to say what we mean and mean what we say, and repudiate duplicity and trickery and shame and verbal manipulating and sidestepping and evasion.

Machen alerts us to the dangers of the utilitarian uses of moral and religious language. For example (in Christianity Today, Nov. 9, 1992, (36/13) p. 21), Roy Beck quotes Gregory King, spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the nation's largest homosexual advocacy group, who told the Washington Times in August, "I personally think that most lesbian and gay Americans support traditional family and American values," which he defined as "tolerance, concern, support, and a sense of community." This is an example of how words with moral connotations have been co-opted by special interest groups to gain the moral high ground without moral content. They sound like values, but they are empty. "Tolerance" toward what? – all things? – which things? The standards are not defined. "Concern" for what? – expressed in what way? – redemptive opposition, or sympathetic endorsement? The standard is not defined. "Support" for what? – for behavior that is destructive and wrong? – for the person who admits the behavior is wrong and is struggling valiantly to overcome it? The object is not defined. "Community" with what standards of unification? – common endorsements of behavior? – common vision of what is right and wrong? – common indifference to what is right and wrong? Again the standards are not defined.

Yet the opposite of each of these four family values (intolerance, unconcerned, oppressive, self-centered) all carry such negative connotations that it is hard in soundbites to show why the four "values" asserted by the homosexual community are inadequate and even may be wrong as they use them. Where honesty and truth are not paramount, all you have is words driven by a utilitarian view of language. Machen shows us that this is not new and that it is destructive to the church and the cause of Christ.

2. Machen alerts us to the utter doctrinelessness of our day and the fact that we almost take it for granted that utilitarian thinking is the only hope for success, and that preaching or teaching doctrine is a prescription for failure. This skepticism about the value of doctrine is owing to bad preaching that is not passionate and clear and interesting and suspenseful and authentic about the glories of God and his way of salvation, and how it all connects with real life. Dorothy L. Sayers said that the dogma is the drama, and the reason we can't show this to people in our preaching and teaching and writing is that we have not seen and felt the greatness of the glory of God and all his teachings. Preaching doctrine should not be confusing or boring, Machen says: That error, unquestionably, should be avoided. But it should be avoided not by the abandonment of doctrinal preaching, but by our making doctrinal preaching real preaching. The preacher should present to his congregation the doctrine that the Holy Scripture contains; but he should fire the presentation of that doctrine with the devotion of the heart, and he should show how it can be made fruitful for Christian life.46

3. Machen's life teaches us the importance of founding and maintaining institutions in the preservation and spreading of the true gospel.

Visions of truth and worldviews like Machen's are preserved not just in the minds of a few disciples, but in charters and covenants and enclaves and durable organizations and with long-term official commitments. Mark Noll observes that "The genius of Old Princeton had been its embodiment of confessional Calvinism in great institutions: the school itself, the Princeton Review, Hodge's Systematic Theology, and the Old School party among the northern Presbyterians."47

Founding and maintaining institutions are, of course, not the only way of spreading the truth of Christ in the world. And in the name of preserving the truth, they often come to stand in the way of spreading the truth. Nevertheless, they are not necessarily bad and are probably a good tension with the more charismatic, spontaneous focus on individualism in ministry.

I personally give God thanks with all my heart for the institutions of the family that I grew up in, and for Wheaton College, and for Fuller Seminary, and for the church that I now serve. By God's grace these institutions preserved and embodied for me the forces of truth and righteousness in such a way that I have been deeply shaped by them. I think, if each person gives serious thought to how he came to have the convictions and values and dreams that he has, he will see that virtually all of us owe much of what we are to institutions – without denying or minimizing that it has been individual teachers, friends, authors in and around those institutions who have been the immediate mediators of truths and goodness and beauty.

4. Machen's experience calls us to have patience with young strugglers who are having doubts about Christianity.

Machen was saved for the kingdom and the church by faculty and parents who gave him the room to work it through. Machen says that he finally found victory and tranquillity of spirit "because of the profound and constant sympathy of others."48 This is illustrated especially from his mother and father, who responded with love and patience to his fears that he could not enter the ministry because of his doubts. His mother wrote on January 21, 1906, while Machen was in Germany, But one thing I can assure you of – that nothing that you could do could keep me from loving you – nothing. It is easily enough to grieve me. Perhaps I worry too much. But my love for my boy is absolutely indestructible. Rely on that whatever comes. And I have faith in you too and believe that the strength will come to you for your work whatever it may be, and that the way will be opened.49 His father wrote on January 26, 1906,

None of the years of study you have had can ever be properly considered as "wasted" no matter what field of work you may ultimately enter upon. . . . The pecuniary question you need not bother about. I can assure you on that point.50 In a letter to his father, dated February 4, 1906, Machen credits the power of his parents in his life:

Without what I got from you and Mother I should long since have given up all thoughts of religion or of a moral life. . . . The only thing that enables me to get any benefit out of my opportunities here is the continual presence with me in spirit of you and Mother and the Christian teaching which you have given me.51 Not only his parents, but also his colleagues at Princeton in the first several years steadied his hand and preserved his orthodox faith. In his installation address as Assistant Professor of New Testament, May 3, 1915, he gives amazing tribute to his closest colleague,

William Armstrong: “The assistance that he has given me in the establishment of my Christian faith has been simply incalculable.52 On July 14, 1906, Armstrong wrote to Machen with an offer to teach that was flexible enough to allow him to begin at Princeton on a trial basis even with some of his doubts unsettled.

You do not have to be licensed, or ordained or even come under the care of a presbytery. You can start upon the work just as you are. And in regard to your theological opinions you do not have to make any pledge. You are not expected to have reached final conclusion on all matters in this field. Only in your teaching will you be expected to stand on the broad principles of Reformed Theology and in particular on the authority of the Scriptures in religious matters – not that your teaching should be different from your personal convictions – but simply that in matters not finally settled you would await decision before departing from the position occupied by the Seminary. The whole matter reduces itself in simple good faith. Should you find after trying it that you could not teach in the Seminary because you had reached conclusions in your study which made it impossible for you to uphold its position you would simply say so.

53 Machen would not have been allowed to stay at Princeton if he had come out on the wrong side or stayed indefinitely on the fence. The compromise of an institution’s fidelity and the misuse of academic freedom happens when doctrinal and ethical doubts are kept secret, or, worse, when lurking denials are put forward as affirmations. Honest, humble struggles can be sustained for some season. But the duplicity that hides secret denials will destroy an institution and a soul.

5. Machen alerts us to the danger of indifferentism – the attitude that says “affirming or denying truth is not a matter of great import . . . just leave the doctrines aside and unite on other bases.” This is the atmosphere in which false teaching flourishes best. It was not the open modernists who led Princeton away from evangelicalism, it was men who did not think the issues were worth fighting about.

6. Machen’s interaction with Modernism shows the value of a God-centered vision of all reality – a worldview, a theology that is driven by the supremacy of God in all of life. This gives balance and stability in dealing with error. It enables us to see how an error relates to the larger issues of life and thought.

Machen was set off from the Fundamentalists by this consistently God-centered view of all things. His critique of Modernism went deeper and farther because his vision of God caused him to see the problem in a deeper and broader context. The sovereignty of God and his supremacy over all of life, causes us to see everything in relation to more things because they all relate to God and God relates to all things.

7. Machen’s careful expressions of disagreement show the necessity and fruitfulness of controversy. In a lecture delivered in London on June 17, 1932, Machen defended engagement in controversy:

Men tell us that our preaching should be positive and not negative, that we can preach the truth without attacking error. But if we follow that advice we shall have to close our Bible and desert its teachings. The New Testament is a polemic book almost from beginning to end.

Some years ago I was in a company of teachers of the Bible in the colleges and other educational institutions of America. One of the most eminent theological professors in the country made an address. In it he admitted that there are unfortunate controversies about doctrine in the Epistles of Paul; but, he said in effect, the real essence of Paul's teaching is found in the hymn to Christian love in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians; and we can avoid controversy today, if we will only devote the chief attention to that inspiring hymn. In reply, I am bound to say that the example was singularly ill-chosen. That hymn to Christian love is in the midst of a great polemic passage; it would never have been written if Paul had been opposed to controversy with error in the Church. It was because his soul was stirred within him by a wrong use of the spiritual gifts that he was able to write that glorious hymn. So it is always in the Church. Every really great Christian utterance, it may almost be said, is born in controversy. It is when men have felt compelled to take a stand against error that they have risen to the really great heights in the celebration of truth.54 8. We learn from Machen the inevitability and pain of criticism, even from our brothers. His colleague, Charles Erdman publicly accused Machen of "unkindness, suspicion, bitterness and intolerance.55 When he voted against a church resolution in favor of the national Prohibition and the 18th Amendment, he was criticized as a secret drunkard and promoter of vice.56 Since he was single, he was criticized as being naive and unaware of the responsibilities of the family.57

There is in all of us the desire to be liked by others. If it is strong enough we may go to unwise lengths to avoid criticism. We may even think that we can be kind enough to everyone so as to avoid criticism. This will not work, especially if we have any public role. It is true that the Bible says that we are to let our light shine that men might see our good deeds and give glory to God (Matthew 5:16). And it is true that we are to silence the ignorance of foolish men by our good deeds (1 Peter 2:15). But there is also the truth that the world called the most loving master of the house "Beelzebul" (Matthew 10:25).

You cannot be kind enough and merciful enough that no one will criticize you. Consider this: feminist Germain Greer recently criticized even Mother Teresa, saying she is a "religious imperialist." At my convent school, the pious nuns who always spoke softly and inclined their heads with a small, patient smile were the ones to fear. They became the mother superiors. Mother Teresa is not content with running a convent; she runs an order of Mother Teresa clones, which operates world-wide. In anyone less holy, this would be seen as an obscene ego trip. . . . Mother Teresa epitomizes for me the blinkered charitableness upon which we pride ourselves and for which we expect reward in this world and the next. There is very little on earth that I hate more than I hate that.58 9. Machen teaches us the necessity of differentiating levels of error.

He did not focus his energies mainly on fighting eschatological issues, or sacramental issues, or church polity issues, or Arminianism per se, or even Roman Catholicism. He focused on the naturalistic threat to supernatural orthodox Christianity.59 10. His tragic death at the age of 55 reminds us to find the pace to finish the race.

God is sovereign and works all our foolishness together for his good. But our duty and Biblical responsibility is to work in such a way as not to allow less important demands of the present to steal our strength, and our life, which might serve some greater demand in the years to come. It is hard to believe that Machen made a wise decision to go to North Dakota in the Christmas break of 1936-37, when he was "deadly tired" and needed rest so badly. It is also to be noted that he had

gained weight.60 The lesson we should learn is to be accountable to a group of friends who will have the courage and the authority to tell us, if necessary, to work and eat less. Machen was not accountable in this way. Ned Stonehouse, his fellow teacher at Westminster, said at the end, “There was no one of sufficient influence to constrain him to curtail his program to any significant degree.”61 Who knows what a great difference it would have made for the whole cause of Evangelicalism if Machen had lived and worked another 20 years?

11. Machen’s struggle to maintain his faith in the face of passionate Modernism and dull orthodoxy calls us to blend passion and vitality and zeal with intellectual labor and serious thought and rigorous study.

People want to be taught the deep and great things about God, but it must be real and living and life-giving.

12. Finally, Machen’s approach to apologetics raises for us the question whether our labors for the sake of the lost should not only involve direct attempts to present the gospel, but also indirect attempts to remove obstacles in the culture that make faith more difficult.

One of the most provocative aspects of Machen’s thought is his contention that apologetics involves preparing a culture to be more congenial to the gospel.

It is true that the decisive thing is the regenerative power of God. That can overcome all lack of preparation, and the absence of that makes even the best preparation useless. but as a matter of fact God usually exerts that power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel. False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root. . . . What is today a matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires. In that second stage, it has gone too far to be combated; the time to stop it was when it was still a matter of impassioned debate. So as Christians we should try to mold the thought of the world in such a way as to make the acceptance of Christianity something more than a logical absurdity. . . . What more pressing duty than for those who have received the mighty experience of regeneration, who, therefore, do not, like the world, neglect that whole series of vitally relevant facts which is embraced in Christian experience – what more pressing duty than for these men to make themselves masters of the thought of the world in order to make it an instrument of truth instead of error?62 Is there Biblical warrant for this goal in 1 Peter 2:15 – we are to silence the ignorance of foolish men by our good deeds, that is, we are to stop the spread of falsehood by a powerful evidence to the contrary? Or is there evidence for Machen’s view in Ephesians 5:11, where we are told to expose the fruitless works of darkness? Or should we consider Matthew 5:14-16, where we are called light and salt, which may perhaps include spreading the preservative idea that there is truth and beauty and valid knowing? Or, perhaps most plainly we should find support for Machen’s view in 2 Corinthians 10:3, where we are told to take every thought captive to Christ? In one sense this teaching of changing culture so that the gospel is more readily believed may sound backward. In world missions the

gospel comes first before the culture is transformed. Only then, after the gospel is received. is there set in motion a culture-shaping power that in a generation or two may result in changing some worldview issues in the culture that, in turn, make Christianity less foreign even to the nonbeliever, so that there are fewer obstacles to overcome. But this process is not a straight line to glory on earth (some saved > culture altered > more saved > culture more altered, etc.). The process seems to ebb and flow as generations come and go. Being born and living in that ebb and flow, one must ask: is it a crucial ministry to engage in debate at foundational levels in order to slow the process of deterioration of gospel-friendly assumptions, and perhaps even hasten the reestablishing of assumptions that would make Christianity objectively conceivable and thus more capable of embracing? The New Testament is a first-generation document. It is not written into a situation where the gospel has been known and believed for centuries and where the culture may have been partially transformed, then degenerated and is now in need of another movement of transformation. But there is an analogy to this kind of cultural situation in the Old Testament with people of God, who did indeed experience the ebb and flow of being changed by the Word of God and then drifted away from it. So we might see in some of the reforming actions of the Old Testament an analogy to what Machen meant by preparing the culture to make it more receptive to the truth of God. For example, one might think of the removal of the high places by the king, or the putting away of foreign wives by the post-exilic Jews.

We need to think long and hard about the relative priority of such a culture-shaping effort as preparatory for the gospel in view of the Biblical missionary pattern of the reverse.

Possible Weaknesses of Machen Personal Prayer and Devotional Life

It is strange that Machen's friend and close associate, Ned Stonehouse, in 500 pages of sympathetic memoir, said nothing about Machen's prayer life. And in the complete 24-page list of Machen's writings in Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, I found no essay or book on the subject of prayer, though there is a section on prayer in The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History, (pp. 319-329). Nor is there any reference to his devotional life – his meditation on the word for his own encouragement and strength. Nor is there any reference to personal worship, and rarely to corporate worship, as a driving force in his life. It seems as though all was swallowed up in the intellectual defense of faith. One wonders whether some ground may have been lost by fighting instead of praying. Of course, he may have had a vital personal prayer life. But that in all his writings he would not take up that topic, and that Stonehouse would not consider it worthy of highlighting as one of the powerful nerve-centers of his life and thought, is disconcerting in view of Machen's being a Biblically-saturated warrior for the word that commands: "watch and pray" as the heart of the warfare.

Humility and Teachableness

He worked himself to death, it seems, and was not open to the counsel of his friends when they cautioned his slowing down and resting. This is not a mark of the humility and teachableness that we long to see, even in the strongest and most rugged defenders of the faith. (See above.)

Personality

He seemed to have a personality that alienated people too easily. The committee that did not recommend him to the chair of apologetics at Princeton referred to his “temperamental idiosyncrasies.”63 He seems to have had “a flaring temper and a propensity to make strong remarks about individuals with whom he disagreed.”64 Renaissance and Revival

He may have put too much hope in the intellectual power of the church to transform the mindset of a nation and make evangelism easier. In his speaking of renaissance and revival coming together,65 he may have put “renaissance” in too prominent a position. I only say this as a caution which others have seen too,66 not as a final judgment. It may be that in our even more anti-intellectual world of the end of the 20th century we would do well to listen to Machen here, rather than criticize him.

Wealth

He may have lived at a level of cultural wealth and comfort (see above) that made it hard for him to see and feel the painful side of being poor and living without the freedom and luxury to travel to Europe repeatedly and go to hotels in order to have quiet for writing. The privations and pressures of the urban poor were so far from Machen’s experience, that the issue of how to minister more immediately did not press him as hard as it might others. and so left him perhaps to develop his apologetic in a world cut off in good measure from the questions of how it relates to the uneducated.

Again I say this with some hesitancy, because almost all of us are limited by the cultural level at which we live. We see only so many hurts and problems. There are a thousand blind spots for every insight. Machen did give significant thought to the whole issue of education for children, whether or not he faced the complexities of how to tackle the problems of the cities. The overwhelming lesson to be learned from his weaknesses and strengths is that God reigns over his church and over the world in such a way that he uses the weaknesses and the strengths of all in creating the mosaic of his purposes. His overarching plan is always more hopeful than we think in the darkest hours of history, and it is always more intermixed with human sin and weakness in its brightest hours.

Thus we do well to take our stand with one foot in James 4:13-15, to protect ourselves from triumphalism and the other in 1 Corinthians 15:58 to protect ourselves from resignation.

James 4:13-15

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain”; whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.”

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Appendix A Chronological Outline of Key Events in Machen’s Life

July 20, 1827 Father, Arthur Webster Machen, born

June 17, 1849 Mother, Mary Jones Gresham, born

1876 Brother, Arthur, born

July 28, 1881 Machen born in Baltimore

1881 Francis Patton comes to Princeton as professor

1886 Brother, Thomas, born

1888 Francis Patton becomes president of Princeton

Jan. 4, 1896 Machen became confessing member of Franklin St. Presbyterian Church

1897 William Park Armstrong graduates from Princeton

Nov. 3, 1898 - Machen enters Johns Hopkins on three-year program

1889, 1900, 1902 Machen attended the Northfield Conference

1901 Machen editor of The Hullabaloo, the school annual, the Banjo Club and the Chess Club

April 15, 1901 Machen elected Phi Beta Kappa

Fall, 1901 Machen began a year of graduate studies in Classics at Johns Hopkins

Summer, 1902 Machen took a course in banking and international law at U. of Chicago

Fall, 1902 Machen entered Princeton Seminary

1903 His cousin, LeRoy Gresham, left law in Baltimore to study at Union Seminary in Richmond

1903 Mary Machen published The Bible in Browning

1904 Machen won the Middler Prize in NT Exegesis with paper on John 1:1-18

Spring, 1904 Patton confers with Machen about preparing for a professorship at theSeminary in NT

Summer, 1904 Machen goes to Germany to learn German better

1905 Machen won the senior essay contest with “A Critical Discussion of the NT Account of the Virgin Birth of Jesus”

Spring, 1905 Machen’s graduation from Princeton

Oct., 1905 and Jan. 1906 Publication of senior essay in the Princeton Seminary Review.

1905-1906 Machen studies in Germany (Marburg and Goettingen)

Mark. 11, 1906 Armstrong asks him to join faculty of Princeton.

June 13, 1906 Machen is invited by Warfield’s brother, the president of Lafayette College to come and teach Greek and German.

August 21, 1906 Machen arrives back in America.

Fall, 1906 Machen accepts a year's appointment to Princeton to assist Armstrong in NT.

Feb., 1909 "Student rebellion" at Princeton

1907-08 Machen announced a course on the birth narratives. His magnum opus, The Virgin Birth of Christ appeared in 1930.

1909 Machen began to supplement Huddlestone's Essentials of New Testament Greek, an effort which became, New Testament Greek for Beginners in 1923.

1909 Warfield's message on Calvinism at the 400th anniversary of John Calvin's birth stirred Machen deeply.

1910-1915 Publication of The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth

Sept. 12, 1912 Machen gave address "Christianity and Culture" at opening of 101st session of Princeton.

Jan. 4, 1913 Machen got his first major recognition as a scholar of international attention when Adolf Harnack reviewed in Theologische Literaturzeitung Machen's articles on the first chapters of Luke.

Nov. 1913 Machen came under the care of his Presbytery at age 32.

April, 1914 Machen was licensed.

June 23, 1914 Machen was ordained at Plainsboro, NJ.

May, 1914 Machen was elected to Assistant Professor of NT

1914 J. Ross Stevenson elected President of Princeton.

January, 1915 Machen hears Billy Sunday

1914 Machen wrote the weekly lessons for the Board of Christian Education Senior Course of Sunday School.

April, 1915 Machen turns down invitation to Union in Richmond.

May 3, 1915 Machen installed at professor at Princeton.

December 19, 1915 Machen's father died at the age of 88.

April 6, 1917 America declared war.

Nov. 11, 1918 War ended.

May 6, 1919 Address to alumni and then published the address in the Presbyterian under the title "The Church in the War"

Summer, 1920 Controversy at General Assembly over the Plan of Union

Feb. 16, 1921 Benjamin Warfield died.

Summer, 1921 General Assembly sees the Plan of Union was defeated in the Presbyteries.

Jan. 1921 Machen delivered Sprunt Lectures at Richmond on the Origin of Paul's religion.

Oct. 9, 1921 The Origin of Paul's Religion published

May 22, 1922 Harry Emerson Fosdick preached "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"

Feb. 1923 Publication of Christianity and Liberalism.

Summer, 1923 General Assembly in Indianapolis elects liberal moderator by 24 votes with delegates about evenly divided (C. F. Wishart over William Jennings Bryant)

Jan. 9, 1924 150 clergymen publish "An Affirmation designed to Safeguard the Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the USA" called the Auburn Declaration with 1300 eventual signatures.

March 1, 1925 Machen ceased to be the stated preacher of First Church of Princeton because of accusations of van Dyke

Summer, 1925 1) Charles Erdman, prof. of practical theology elected as Moderator of General Assembly. 2) Machen writes What Is Faith with a view to Grove City Bible Conference.

Nov. 1925 What Is Faith published by Macmillan

Dec. 2, 1925 Machen gives Committee of Fifteen his reasons for believing that Modernism was infecting the Church

Jan. 12, 1926 Lecture "Shall We Have a Federal Department of Education"

Feb. 24, 1926 Machen testifies on Education bills before congressional committee.

April 13, 1926 Machen votes no at Presbytery of New Brunswick meeting against the 18th (prohibition) amendment.

May, 1926 Machen elected by Directors to the chair of Apologetics.

Summer, 1926 1) General Assembly in Baltimore approves the Committee of Fifteen's report that denies Machen's allegations. 2) Also the GA appointed a committee to investigate the seminary and eventually make recommendations about its organization. 3) Machen's approval for chair of Apologetics delayed.

1926-27 Directors of the Seminary said President Stevenson's "usefulness is at an end."

April, 1927 Investigating committee published its report.

Spring, 1927 Machen gave Smyth Lectures at Columbia Seminary on the Virgin Birth.

Summer, 1927 General Assembly postpones action on reorganizing seminary and set up larger committee to prepare for it.

Dec. 1927 Machen published, The Attack upon Princeton Seminary: A Plea for Fair Play

Summer, 1928 Owing to the Princeton Petition signed by 11,000 people and 3,000 ministers postponed action on reorganizing the seminary for another year.

June 28, 1928 Machen removes his name from consideration for Professor of Apologetics.

Fall, 1928 Cornelius Van Til takes up instruction in apologetics

Summer, 1929 At St. Paul the reorganization of the seminary was approved at a 5 - 3 proportion.

July 8, 1929 Westminster Seminary conceived in a luncheon on Philadelphia

July 18, 1929 A meeting of seventy persons (former directors, faculty, and students) took steps to organize Westminster.

Sept. 25, 1929 Westminster Seminary opened with 50 students, and Machen gave address: “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan.”

1930 Christianity Today incorporated by Machen, Craig and Shrader.

Feb, 1930 The Virgin Birth of Christ is published.

Oct. 31, 1931 Machen’s mother dies.

1932 A committee of the Presbyterian Church publishes Rethinking Missions.

1932 Machen addressed the American Academy of Political and Social Science, on “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age.”

June 27, 1933 The Independent Board of Foreign Missions was organized and Machen was elected President.

Summer 1934 The GA declares the Independent Board unconstitutional.

Dec. 20, 1934 Machen’s Presbytery appoints a judicial commission to try Machen for “violation of his ordination vows.”

1935 Machen gives a weekly radio program: The Christian Faith in the Modern World, and The Christian View of Man

Feb-Mar, 1935 Trial of Machen before the Presbytery.

Mark. 29, 1935 Guilty verdict.

June 27, 1935 Preparations made for a possible new church by the organization of the Constitutional Covenant Union.

Oct. 7, 1935 First issue of The Presbyterian Guardian.

June 11, 1936 The Presbyterian Church of America was formed and Machen was chosen Moderator.

Summer, 1936 The Syracuse GA rejected the appeal and let the verdict stand.

Jan. 1, 1937 At 7:30 PM Machen dies.

Footnotes

1 Ned B. Stonehouse, J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, originally published in 1954, 17 years after Machen's death), p. 506.

2 George Marsden, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," in Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 200.

3 See J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 489 for the list of grievances.

4 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 475 5 Quoted in Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 474.

6 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 485.

7 The doctrinal drift of the action to reorganize the seminary was indicated by two signers of the liberal "Auburn Affirmation" being appointed to the new board. J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 441 8 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 422.

9 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 427.

10 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 458.

11 The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1993 (New York: World Almanac, 1992), p. 718. For a testimony to the life and witness of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church see Charles Dennison and Richard Gamble, eds., Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986).

12 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 46.

13 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 50. The professor was B.L. Gildersleeve, whose specialty was the history of American classical scholarship.

14 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 393.

15 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 106-108. This quote is a composite of excerpts from letters that year to his parents and brother.

16 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 221-222.

17 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 432.

18 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 336.

19 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 337.

20 In 1905, as his seminary days were coming to an end, he wrote, "The fellows are in my room now on the last Sunday night, smoking the cigars and eating the oranges which it has been the greatest delight I ever had to provide whenever possible. My idea of delight is a Princeton room full of fellows smoking. When I think what a wonderful aid tobacco is to friendship and Christian patience, I have sometimes regretted that I never began to smoke. J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 85.

21 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 337.

22 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 310. George Marsden quotes a letter of Machen from October 5, 1913, in which he said that Warfield was “himself, despite some very good qualities, a very heartless, selfish, domineering sort of man.” “Understanding J. Gresham Machen,” p. 187. My interpretation of this is that there were things about Warfield that irritated Machen, but that Warfield’s strengths were such that they made these things pale in comparison.

23 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 177-178.

24 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 177.

25 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 337.

26 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 428.

27 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 342.

28 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 343.

29 Notice the difference in these two terms. “Modernism” is the technical word referring to the theological response to modernity, while “modernity” refers to what Machen calls “modern culture” with its technology, science, communications, transportation, inventions, pace, and dozens of other implications.

30 J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” in What is Christianity? and Other Addresses, ed. Ned Stonehouse, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), p. 166.

31 J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992, orig. 1923), p. 3.

32 “Christianity and Culture,” p. 159.

33 “Modern culture is a mighty force; it is either helpful to the gospel or else it is a deadly enemy of the gospel. For making it helpful, neither wholesale denunciation nor wholesale acceptance is in place; careful discrimination is required, and such discrimination requires intellectual effort. Here lies a supreme duty of the modern Church.” J. Gresham Machen, The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 377-378.

34 Christianity and Liberalism, p. 6.

35 For example he says that in German universities you find “those forces which underlie all the doctrinal indifferentism in Great Britain and in this country which really presents the serious danger of the life of our Church. J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 241.

36 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 347.

37 J. Gresham Machen, What is Faith? (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991, orig. 1925), p. 34.

38 What is Faith?, p. 13-14.

39 Christianity and Liberalism, p. 10.

40 Christianity and Liberalism, p. 11-12.

41 What is Faith?, p. 32.

42 Christianity and Liberalism, p. 15.

43 What is Faith?, p. 32.

44 Christianity and Liberalism, p. 53.

45 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 386.

46 J. Gresham Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Building Up of the Church,” in: What is Christianity?, p. 139.

47 Mark Noll, “The Spirit of Old Princeton and the OPC,” in: Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, p. 245.

48 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 129.

49 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 113.

50 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 114.

51 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 116-117.

52 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 209.

53 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 133.

54 “Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the New Testament,” in: What is Christianity?, pp. 132-133. See, on this same point, What is Faith?, pp. 41-42; Christianity and Liberalism, p. 17.

55 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 375.

56 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 387.

57 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 413.

58 Quoted in First Things, January, 1993, No. 29, p. 65.

59 Christianity and Liberalism, 48-52.

60 He was 5’8” tall and for most of his life weighed about 150 pounds. But in the last ten years he allowed himself to reach 180. J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 506.

61 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 506.

62 “Christianity and Culture,” p. 162-163.

63 J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 389.

64 George Marsden, “Understanding J. Gresham Machen,” p. 186. See above note 22.

65 “Christianity and Culture,” p. 200; What is Christianity?, p. 118; What is Faith?, p. 18.

66 George Marsden, “Understanding J. Gresham Machen,” pp. 198-199. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 74

05.18. John Newton: The Tough Roots of His Habitual Tenderness

John Newton: The Tough Roots of His Habitual Tenderness

Introduction

John Newton was born July 24, 1725 in London to a godly mother and an irreligious, sea-faring father. His mother died when he was six. Left mainly to himself, Newton became a debauched sailor—a miserable outcast on the coast of West Africa for two years; a slave-trading sea-captain until an epileptic seizure ended his career; a well-paid "surveyor of tides" in Liverpool; a loved pastor of two congregations in Olney and London for 43 years; a devoted husband to Mary for 40 years until she died in 1790; a personal friend to William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon, Henry Martyn, William Carey, John Wesley, George Whitefield; and, finally, the author of the most famous hymn in the English language, Amazing Grace.[1] He died on December 21, 1807 at the age of 82. So why am I interested in this man? Because one of my great desires is to see Christian pastors be as strong and durable as redwood trees, and as tender and fragrant as a field of clover—unshakably rugged in the "defense and confirmation" of the truth (Php 1:7), and relentlessly humble and patient and merciful in dealing with people. Ever since I came to Bethlehem in 1980 this vision of ministry has beckoned me because, soon after I came, I read through Matthew and Mark and put in the margin of my Greek New Testament a "to" (for tough) and a "te" (for tender) beside all of Jesus' words and deeds that fit one category or the other. What a mixture he was! No one ever spoke like this man.

It seems to me that we are always falling off the horse on one side or the other in this matter of being tough and tender—wimping out on truth when we ought to be lion-hearted, or wrangling with anger when we ought to be weeping. I know it's a risk to take up this topic and John Newton in a setting like this, where some of you need a good (tender!) kick in the pants to be more courageous, and others of you confuse courage with what William Cowper called "a furious and abusive zeal."[2] Oh how rare are the pastors who speak with a tender heart and have a theological backbone of steel.

I dream of such pastors. I would like to be one someday. A pastor whose might in the truth is matched by his meekness. Whose theological acumen is matched by his manifest contrition. Whose heights of intellect are matched by his depths of humility. Yes, and the other way around! A pastor whose relational warmth is matched by his rigor of study, whose bent toward mercy is matched by the vigilance of his biblical discernment, and whose sense of humor is exceeded by the seriousness of his calling.

I dream of great defenders of true doctrine who are mainly known for the delight they have in God and the joy in God that they bring to the people of God—who enter controversy, when necessary, not because they love ideas and arguments, but because they love Christ and the church.

There's a picture of this in Acts 15:1-41. Have you ever noticed the amazing unity of things here that we tend to tear apart? A false doctrine arises in Antioch: some begin to teach, "Unless you are

circumcised . . . you cannot be saved" (v. 1). Paul and Barnabas weigh in with what Luke calls a "not a little dissension and debate" (sta,sewj kai. zhth,sewj ouvk ovli,ghj, v. 2). So the church decides to send them off to Jerusalem to get the matter settled. And amazingly, verse 3 says that on their way to the great debate they were "describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren" (v. 3). This is my vision: The great debaters on their way to a life-and-death show down of doctrinal controversy, so thrilled by the mercy and power of God in the gospel, that they are spreading joy everywhere they go. Oh how many there are today who tell us that controversy only kills joy and ruins the church; and oh how many others there are who, on their way to the controversy, feel no joy and spread no joy in the preciousness of Christ and his salvation. One of the aims of this conference since 1988 has been to say over and over again: it is possible and necessary to be as strong and rugged for truth as a redwood and as tender and fragrant for Christ as a field of clover. So now, with the help of the life of John Newton, I want to say it again. And make no mistake: our heroes have feet of clay. There are no perfect pastors. Newton himself warns us: In my imagination, I sometimes fancy I could [create] a perfect minister. I take the eloquence of –, the knowledge of –, the zeal of –, and the pastoral meekness, tenderness, and piety of –: Then, putting them all together into one man, I say to myself, "This would be a perfect minister." Now there is One, who, if he chose to, could actually do this; but he never did it. He has seen fit to do otherwise, and to divide these gifts to every man severally as he will.[3] So neither we nor Newton will ever be all that we should be. But oh how much more like the Great Shepherd we should long to be. Newton had his strengths, and I want us to learn from them. At times his strengths were his weakness, but that too will be instructive. Our theme is "the tough roots of John Newton’s habitual tenderness." His great strength was "speaking the truth in love." As you listen, listen for what you need, not for what the pastor across town needs. On which side of the horse are you falling off?

I begin with a brief telling of his life, because for Newton, his life was the clearest testimony to the heart-breaking mercy of God he ever saw. Even at the end of his life he is still marveling that he was saved and called to preach the gospel of grace. From his last will and testament we read:

I commit my soul to my gracious God and Savior, who mercifully spared and preserved me, when I was an apostate, a blasphemer, and an infidel, and delivered me from the state of misery on the coast of Africa into which my obstinate wickedness had plunged me; and who has been pleased to admit me (though most unworthy) to preach his glorious gospel.[4] This one of the deepest roots of his habitual tenderness. He could not get over the wonder of his own rescue by sheer, triumphant grace.

Newton’s Life

Newton’s mother was a devout Congregationalist and taught her only child, John, the Westminster Catechism and the hymns of Isaac Watts. But she died in 1732 when John was six, and his father’s second wife had no spiritual interest. Newton wrote in his Narrative that he was in school only two of all his growing-up years, from ages 8 to 10, at a boarding school in Stratford. So he was mainly self-taught, and that remained true all his life. He never had any formal theological education. At the age of 11 he began to sail with his father and made five voyages to the Mediterranean until he was 18. He wrote about their relationship: "I am persuaded he loved me, but he seemed not willing that I should know it. I was with him in a state of fear and bondage. His

sternness . . . broke and overawed my spirit."[5] When he was 17 he met Mary Catlett and fell in love with her. She was 13. For the next seven years of traveling and misery he dreamed about her. "None of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced ever banished her a single hour together from my waking thoughts for the seven following years."[6] They did eventually marry when he was 24 and were married for 40 years till she died in 1790. His love for her was extraordinary before and after the marriage. Three years after she died he published a collection of letters he had written to her on three voyages to Africa after they were married.

He was pressed into naval service against his will when he was 18 and sailed away bitterly on the Harwich as a midshipman. His friend and biographer, Richard Cecil, says, "The companions he met with here completed the ruin of his principles."[7] Of himself he wrote, "I was capable of anything; I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. . . . My love to [Mary] was now the only restraint I had left."[8] On one of his visits home he deserted the ship and was caught, "confined two days in the guard-house; . . . kept a while in irons . . . publicly stripped and whipt, degraded from his office."[9] When he was 20 years old he was put off his ship on some small islands just southeast of Sierra Leone, West Africa, and for about a year and a half he lived as a virtual slave in almost destitute circumstances. The wife of his master despised him and treated him cruelly. He wrote that even the African slaves would try to smuggle him food from their own slim rations.[10] Later in life he marveled at the seemingly accidental way a ship put anchor on his island after seeing some smoke, and just happened to be the ship with a captain who know Newton’s father and managed to free him from his bondage.[11] That was February, 1747. He was not quite 21, and God was about to close in. The ship had business on the seas for over a year. Then on March 21, 1748, on his way home to England in the North Atlantic, God acted to rescue the "African blasphemer."[12] On this day 57 years later, in 1805, when Newton was 80 years old, he wrote in his diary, "March 21, 1805. Not well able to write. But I endeavor to observe the return of this day with Humiliation, Prayer and Praise."[13] He had marked the day as sacred and precious for over half a century.

He awoke in the night to a violent storm as his room began to fill with water. As he ran for the deck, the captain stopped him and had him fetch a knife. The man who went up in his place was immediately washed overboard.[14] He was assigned to the pumps and heard himself say, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us."[15] It was the first time he had expressed the need for mercy in many years.

He worked the pumps from three in the morning until noon, slept for an hour, and then took the helm and steered the ship till midnight. At the wheel he had time to think back over his life and his spiritual condition. At about six o’clock the next evening it seemed as though there might be hope. "I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour. I began to pray: I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him Father . . . the comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted; . . . . The great question now was, how to obtain faith."[16]

He found a Bible and got help from Luke 11:13, which promises the Holy Spirit to those who ask. He reasoned, "If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise. I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask: I must therefore pray for it; and, if it be of God, he will

make good on his own word."[17]

He spent all the rest of the voyage in deep seriousness as he read and prayed over the Scriptures. On April 8 they anchored in Ireland, and the next day the storm at sea was so violent they would have surely been sunk. Newton described what God had done in those two weeks:

Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the Gospel, as considered in itself, and of its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. . . . I stood in need of an Almighty Savior; and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvelous thing: I was no longer an infidel: I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and had taken up some right notions; was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my past misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation. I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been as deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.[18] It was a remarkable change but, from his later mature standpoint, Newton did not view it as full conversion.

I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of . . . the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ: a continual dependence on him. . . . I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. . . . I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards."[19] For six years after this time, he said he had no "Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me."[20] He became the captain of a slave-trading ship and went to sea again until December, 1749. In his mature years he came to feel intense remorse for his participation in the slave trade and joined William Wilberforce in opposing it. Thirty years after leaving the sea he wrote an essay, Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade, which closed with a reference to "a commerce so iniquitous, so cruel, so oppressive, so destructive, as the African Slave Trade!"[21] On February 1, 1750 he married Mary. That June his father drowned while swimming in the Hudson Bay. He went on three long voyages after the marriage and left Mary alone for 10 to 13 months each time. Then in November, 1754 he had an epileptic seizure and never sailed again. In the years between his seafaring and his pastorate at Olney he was a Surveyor of Tides in Liverpool and a very active ministerial lay person. He interacted with evangelicals from both the Anglican and Independent wings of the Awakening. He was especially taken by George Whitefield and "was even tagged with the epithet 'Little Whitefield' for his constant attendance upon the evangelist."[22] He devoted himself to a rigorous program of self-study and applied himself to Greek and Hebrew and Syriac. He said, "I was in some hopes that perhaps, sooner or later, [Christ] might call me into his service. I believe it was a distant hope of this that determined me to study the original Scriptures."[23]

Along with these he was reading "the best writers in divinity" in Latin and English and French (which he taught himself while at sea), but gave himself mainly to the Scriptures.[24] The upshot theologically of this study, together with his personal experience of grace, is summed up by Bruce Hindmarsh: "By the early 1760's Newton's theological formation was complete, and there would be few significant realignments of his essential beliefs. He was a five-point Calvinist."[25] But the spirit

of his Calvinism was sweet and tender, which is one of the great concerns of this message. In 1764 he accepted the call to the pastorate of the Church of England parish in Olney and served there for almost 16 years. Then he accepted the call at age 54 to St. Mary's Woolnoth in London where he began his 27-year ministry on December 8, 1779. The last time he was in the pulpit of St. Mary's was in October, 1806 when he was 81 years old. His eyes and ears were failing and his good friend Richard Cecil suggested he cease preaching when he turned 80, to which Newton responded, "What! Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"[26]

John and Mary had no children of their own, but adopted two nieces. When Mary died 17 years before John, Newton lived with the family of one of these nieces and was cared for by her as well as by any daughter. He died December 21, 1807 at the age of 82. A month before he died he expressed his settled faith:

It is a great thing to die; and, when flesh and heart fail, to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion forever. I know whom I have believed, and he is able to keep that which I have committed against that great day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me that day.[27] The best way to learn about these pastorates is to shift now from a narrative of his life to the theme of this message, namely, "The Tough Roots of John Newton's Habitual Tenderness." This tenderness and these roots are seen in this remarkable pastoral ministry for over 40 years.

Newton's Habitual Tenderness The phrase "habitual tenderness" is Newton's own phrase to describe the way a believer should live. In writing to a friend he describes the believer's life: "He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit."[28] It is plain already what some of the roots of tenderness are in that sentence, but before we look at them more closely let's get some snapshots of this man's "habitual tenderness."

It will be helpful to speak of persons and patterns. That is, to whom was he tender; and what form did his tenderness take?

3.1 Persons Who Received His Tenderness

Richard Cecil said, "Mr. Newton could live no longer than he could love."[29] His love to people was the signature of his life. This was true of groups of people and individual people. He loved perishing people and he loved his own flock of redeemed people.

Whoever . . . has tasted of the love Christ, and has known, by his own experience, the need and the worth of redemption, is enabled, Yea, he is constrained, to love his fellow creatures. He loves them at first sight; and, if the providence of God commits a dispensation of the gospel, and care of souls to him, he will feel the warmest emotions of friendship and tenderness, while he beseeches them by the tender mercies of God, and even while he warns them by his terrors.[30]

It's the phrase "at first sight" that stands out in this quote. Newton's first reflex was to love lost people. When he speaks to unbelievers he speaks like this: A well-wisher to your soul assures you, that whether you know these things or not, they are important realities. . . . Oh hear the warning voice! Flee from the wrath to come. Pray thee that the eyes of your mind may be opened, then you will see your danger, and gladly follow the shining light of the Word.[31]

One clear mark of Christlike tenderness is love for children. "Suffer the little children to come to me and do not hinder them" (Mark 10:14) is the badge of tenderness that Jesus wore. When Newton came to Olney one of the first things he did was begin a meeting for children on Thursday afternoons. He met with them himself and gave them assignments and spoke to them from the Bible. At one point he said, "I suppose I have 200 that will constantly attend."[32] And what made it more remarkable to his parishioners was that the meetings were open to all the children, not just the members of his church.

Josiah Bull said, "The young especially had a warm place in his affectionate heart. . . . Mr. Jay . . . relates that once a little sailor-boy with his father called on Mr. Newton. He took the boy between his knees, told him that he had been much at sea himself, and then sang him part of a naval song."[33] For forty-three years his two flocks had an especially tender place in his heart. Richard Cecil said that Newton's preaching was often not well prepared, nor careful or "graceful" in delivery. But, he said, "He possessed . . . so much affection for his people, and so much zeal for their best interests, that the defect of his manner was little consideration with his constant hearers."[34] Once he complained in a letter of his busyness: "I have seldom one-hour free from interruption. Letters, that must be answered, visitants that must be received, business that must be attended to. I have a good many sheep and lambs to look after, sick and afflicted souls dear to the Lord; and therefore, whatever stands still, these must not be neglected."[35]

Newton's tenderness touched individuals as well as groups. The most remarkable instance of this was, of course, William Cowper, the mentally-ill poet and hymn writer who came to live in Olney during 12 of Newton's 16 years there. Newton took Cowper into his home for five months during one season and 14 months during another when he was so depressed it was hard for him to function alone. In fact, Richard Cecil said that over Newton's whole lifetime, "His house was an asylum for the perplexed or afflicted."[36] Newton says of Cowper's stay: "For nearly 12 years we were seldom separated for seven hours at a time, when we were awake, and at home: the first six I passed daily admiring and aiming to imitate him: during the second six, I walked pensively with him in the valley of the shadow of death."[37] When Cowper's brother died in 1770, Newton resolved to help him by collaborating with him in writing hymns for the church. These came to be known as "The Olney Hymns." But soon Cowper was emotionally unable to carry through his part of the plan. Newton pressed on writing one hymn a week without Cowper until there were well over 300. Sixty-seven are attributed to William Cowper.[38] The last hymn that Cowper composed for the Olney Hymns was "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," which he entitled "Light Shining out of Darkness." The next day, in January 1773, he sank into the blackest depression and never went to hear Newton preach again. Newton preached his funeral sermon seven years later and explained what happened and how he responded.

He drank tea with me in the afternoon. The next morning a violent storm overtook him. . . . I used to visit him often but no argument could prevail with him to come and see me. He used to point with his finger to the church and say: "You know the comfort I have had there and how I have seen the glory of the Lord in His house, and until I go there I'll not go anywhere else." He was one of those who came out of great tribulations. He suffered much here for twenty-seven years, but eternity is long enough to make amends for all. For what is all he endured in this life, when compared with the rest which remaineth for the children of God.[39]

What would most of us have done with a depressed person who could scarcely move out of his house? William Jay summed up Newton's response: "He had the tenderest disposition; and always judiciously regarded his friend's depression and despondency as a physical effect, for the removal of which he prayed, but never reasoned or argued with him concerning it."[40]

Another example of his tenderness toward an individual is the case of the missionary, Henry Martyn. The young Martyn was very discouraged from some criticism he had received of his "insipid and inanimate manner in the pulpit." He came to Newton, who blocked every one of Martyn's discouragements with hope. Martyn wrote in his journal (April 25, 1805) that when Newton heard of the criticism he had received,

He said he had heard of a clever gardener, who would sow seeds when the meat was put down to roast, and engage to produce a salad by to the time it was ready, but the Lord did not sow oaks in this way. On my saying that perhaps I should never live to see much fruit; he answered I should have the birds-eye view of it, which would be much better. When I spoke of the opposition that I should be likely to meet with, he said, he supposed Satan would not love me for what I was about to do. The old man prayed afterwards with sweet simplicity.[41]

If there were time we could linger over another instance of remarkable patience and tenderness toward Thomas Scott, who was a liberal, "almost Socinian" clergyman in a neighboring parish. Scott made jest of Newton's evangelical convictions. But in the end Newton's mingling of hope-filled truth and kindness broke Scott's oppostion. Scott commented later: "Under discouraging circumstances, I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by this means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him."[42] Scott was personally and theologically transformed and wrote a book called The Force of Truth and became the minister in Olney when Newton left.

Besides focusing on the persons who benefited from Newton's habitual tenderness, it will be helpful to look too at what we might call some of the patterns of his tenderness.

3.2. Patterns of Newton's Tenderness

One way to describe the pattern of Newton's tenderness is to say that it was patient and perceptive. He captures this balance when he says, "Apollos met with two candid people in the church: they neither ran away because he was legal, nor were carried away because he was eloquent."[43] In other words, Newton was not driven away by people's imperfections and he was not overly impressed by their gifts. He was patient and perceptive. He saw beneath the surface that repelled and the surface that attracted. He once wrote to a friend, "Beware, my friend, of mistaking the ready exercise of gifts for the exercise of grace."[44] Being gracious to people did not mean being gullible. The most illuminating way I know to illustrate Newton's deeply rooted habitual tenderness is in the way he handled doctrinal and moral truth that he cherished deeply. Here we see the very roots of the tenderness (truth) at work in the fruit of tenderness (love). Patience and perception guided him between doctrinaire intellectualism on the one side and doctrinal indifference and carelessness on the other side. With respect to patience Newton said:

I have been thirty years forming my own views; and, in the course of this time, some of my hills have sunk, and some of my valleys have risen: but, how unreasonable within me to expect all this should take place in another person; and that, in the course of a year or two.[45]

He had a passion for propagating the truth, even the whole Reformed vision of God as he saw it. But he did not believe controversy served the purpose. "I see the unprofitableness of controversy in the case of Job and his friends: for, if God had not interposed, had they lived to this day they would have continued the dispute."[46] So he labored to avoid controversy and to replace it with positive demonstrations of Biblical truth. "My principal method of defeating heresy, is, by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares: now, if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts."[47] He knew that receiving the greatest truths required supernatural illumination. From this he inferred that his approach should be patient and unobtrusive:

I am a friend of peace; and being deeply convinced that no one can profitably understand the great truths and doctrines of the gospel any farther than he is taught of God, I have not a wish to obtrude my own tenets upon others, in a way of controversy; yet I do not think myself bound to conceal them.[48]

Newton had a strong, clear Calvinistic theology. He loved the vision of God in true Biblical Calvinism: In the preface to the Olney hymns, he wrote, "The views I have received of the doctrines of grace are essential to my peace; I could not live comfortably a day, or an hour, without them. I likewise believe . . . them to be friendly to holiness, and to have a direct influence in producing and maintaining a gospel conversation; and therefore I must not be ashamed of them."[49] But he believed "that the cause of truth itself may be discredited by an improper management." Therefore, he says, "The Scripture, which . . . teaches us what we are to say, is equally explicit as to the temper and Spirit in which we are to speak. Though I had knowledge of all mysteries, and the tongue of an angel to declare them, I could hope for little acceptance or usefulness, unless I was to speak 'in love.'"[50] Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. . . . The Scriptural maximum, that "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," is verified by daily observation. If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn, we may think we are doing service to the cause of truth, when in reality we shall only bring it into discredit.[51]

He had noticed that one of the most "Calvinistic" texts in the New Testament called for tenderness and patience with opponents, because the decisive work was God's: And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:24, rsv)

So, for the sake of repentance and knowledge of truth, Newton's pattern of tenderness in doctrinal matters was to shun controversy. The sovereignty of God in freeing people from error or from unbelief also made prayer central to Newton's pattern of tenderness. In a letter about controversy, he wrote a friend: As to your opponent, I wish, that, before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. . . . [If he is a believer,] in a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts. . . . [If he

is an unconverted person,] he is a more proper object of your compassion than your anger. Alas! "He knows not what he does." But you know who has made you to differ.[52]

Newton cared more about influencing people with truth for their good than winning debates. William Jay recounts how Newton described the place of his Calvinism. He was having tea one day with Newton. Newton said, "'I am more of a Calvinist than anything else; but I use my Calvinism in my writings and my preaching as I use this sugar'—taking a lump, and putting it into his tea-cup, and stirring it, adding, 'I do not give it alone, and whole; but mixed and diluted.'"[53] In other words, his Calvinism permeates all that he writes and teaches and serves to sweeten everything. Few people like to eat sugar cubes, but they like the effect of sugar when it permeates it right proportion. So Newton did not serve up the "five points" by themselves, but blended them in with everything he taught. This government was a key part of how his pattern of tenderness developed in dealing with people's doctrinal differences. Bruce Hindmarsh remarks, "It is not surprising, therefore, that he wrote principally biographies, sermons, letters, and hymnody—not treatises or polemical tracts, much less a 'body of divinity.'"[54] Did Newton strike the right balance of a patient, tender-hearted, non-controversial pattern of ministry and a serious vigilance against harmful error? Perhaps rather than indict Newton in particular, we should speak generally about the possible weakness in his approach. For example, William Plummer has misgivings: The pious and amiable John Newton made it a rule never to attack error, nor warn his people against it. He said: 'The best method of defeating heresy is by establishing the truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares; now if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defeat his attempts.' Surely the truth ought to be abundantly set forth. But this is not sufficient. The human mind is not like a bushel. It may learn much truth and yet go after folly. The effect of Mr. Newton's practice was unhappy. He was hardly dead till many of his people went far astray. Paul says: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). The more subtle, bitter, and numerous the foes of the truth are the more fearless and decided should its friends be. The life of truth is more important than the life of any man or any theories.[55]

Bruce Hindmarsh has misgivings at another level. "While it is no disgrace that Newton was more a pastor than a theologian, it is one of the most serious indictments of the English Evangelical Revival that it produced so few theologians of stature."[56] In other words, if our zeal for peace and conciliation and heart-felt affection for God and for people creates a milieu in which rigorous, critical thinking and theology will not flourish, we may hurt the cause of Christ in generations to come while seeming to make the cause more pleasing now.

I am not sure that Newton is to be faulted on these counts, even if the general concern is legitimate. It is true that John Wesley wrote to him, "You appear to be designed by divine providence for an healer of breaches, a reconciler of honest but prejudiced men, and an uniter (happy work!) of the children of God."[57] But it is also true that the relationship with Wesley was broken off in 1762 because of the controversy, not over election or perseverance, but over perfectionism.[58]

It is true that Richard Cecil criticized his hero "that he did not always administer consolation . . . with sufficient discrimination. His talent," he said, "did not lie in discerning of spirits."[59] But it is also true that Newton was unwavering in his commitment to holiness and doctrinal fidelity and was used by God to bring Thomas Scott from the brink of Socianism to solid Reformed Christianity.

Pastors simply cannot devote much of their time to blowing the trumpet for rigorous intellectual theology. They should see its usefulness and necessity and encourage its proper place. But they cannot be faulted that they mainly have flocks to love and hearts to change. Defending the truth is a crucial part of that, but it is not the main part. Holding the truth, and permeating all his ministry with the greatness and sweetness of truth for the transformation of our people's lives is the main part of his ministry.

One other aspect of the pattern of Newton's tenderness calls for attention. It is the language he used in making the truth winsome and healing. Newton had the eye and heart and tongue of a spiritual poet, and this gave his speech a penetrating power that many Reformed preachers desperately need. He wrote hymns and poems for his people and for special occasions. Instead of excessive abstraction in his preaching, there was the concrete word and illustration. Instead of generalizing, there was the specific bird or flower or apple or shabby old man.

He had an eye that saw everything as full of divine light for ministry to people. For example, in his diary for July 30, 1776 Newton describes his watching the eclipse of the moon.

Tonight I attended an eclipse of the moon. How great, O Lord, are thy works! With what punctuality do the heavenly bodies fulfill their courses. . . . I thought, my Lord, of Thine eclipse. The horrible darkness which overwhelmed Thy mind when Thou saidst, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Ah, sin was the cause—my sins—yet I do not hate sin or loathe myself as I ought."[60]

Oh how we preachers need eyes like this. Seeing God and his ways everywhere in nature and life and making our communications full of concreteness from daily life.

Newton's language was full of this kind of thing. Most of us tend to gravitate to abstractions. We say, "Men tend to choose lesser pleasures and reject greater ones." But Newton says, "The men of this world are children. Offer a child and apple and bank note, he will doubtless choose the apple."[61] We say, "Men are foolish to fret so much over material things when they will inherit eternal riches." But Newton says:

Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!"[62] This is not merely a matter of style. It is a matter of life and vitality. It is a sign to your people that your mind is healthy and a means to awakening their health. Sick minds can only deal in abstractions and cannot get outside themselves to be moved by concrete, external wonders. And you will never be a tender person toward your people if you merely communicate the heaviness of unhealthy concepts and theories rather than the stuff of the world in which they live. This kind of communication was part and parcel of his winsome, humble, compelling tenderness. And yes there is a crucial place for humor in this pattern of tenderness—not the contrived levity of so many "communicators" today that know how to work an audience—but the balanced, earthy experience of the way the world really is in its horror and humor. There would be more real laughter if there were more real tears. "One day by a strong sneeze he shook off a fly which had perched upon his gnomon, and immediately said: 'Now if this fly keeps a diary, he'll write Today a terrible earthquake.'" At another time, when asked how he slept, he instantly replied: "I'm like a beef-steak—once turned, and I am done."[63] What these

quips indicate is a healthy mind awake to the world and free from bondage to morose speculations or introspection. This kind of mental health is essential for a pastor to be tender, winsome minister to the whole range of human experience. The Tough Roots of This Habitual Tenderness I would mention only three of many that could be brought forward.

Newton’s Realism about the Limits of This Life

Few things will tend to make you more tender than to be much in the presence of suffering and death. "My course of study," Newton said, "like that of a surgeon, has principally consisted in walking the hospital."[64] His biblical assessment of the misery that he saw was that some, but not much, of it can be removed in this life. He would give his life to bring as much relief and peace for time and eternity as he could. But he would not be made hard and cynical by the irremediable miseries like Cowper’s mental illness.[65] "I endeavor to walk through the world as a physician goes through Bedlam [the famous insane asylum]: the patients make a noise, pester him with impertinence, and hinder him in his business; but he does the best he can, and so gets through."[66] In other words, his tender patience and persistence in caring for difficult people came, in part, from a very sober and realistic view of what to expect from this world.

Just as we saw at the beginning there are no perfect ministers, so there are no perfect lay people. This must not discourage us, but only make us patient as we wait for the day when all things will be new. Newton gives beautiful, concrete expression to this conviction as he watches the dawn outside his window. The day is now breaking: how beautiful its appearance! how welcome the expectation of the approaching sun! It is this thought makes the dawn agreeable, that it is the presage of a brighter light; otherwise, if we expect no more day than it is this minute, we should rather complain of darkness, than rejoice in the early beauties of the morning. Thus the Life of grace is the dawn of immortality: beautiful beyond expression, if compared with the night and thick darkness which formerly covered us; yet faint, indistinct, and unsatisfying, in comparison of the glory which shall be revealed."[67] This sober realism about what we can expect from this fallen world is a crucial root of habitual tenderness in the life of John Newton.

Newton’s All-Pervasive Humility and Gratitude at Having Been Saved This he comes back to more than anything as the source of tenderness. Till the day he died he never ceased to be amazed that, as he says at age 72, "such a wretch should not only be spared and pardoned, but reserved to the honour of preaching thy Gospel, which he had blasphemed and renounced . . . this is wonderful indeed! The more thou hast exalted me, the more I ought to abase myself."[68] He wrote his own epitaph:

JOHN NEWTON,

Clerk, Once an Infidel and Libertine, A Servant of Slaves in Africa,

Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior

JESUS CHRIST, Preserved, restored, pardoned, And appointed to preach the Faith He had long laboured to destroy, Near 16 years at Olney in Bucks; And [28] years in this church. When he wrote his Narrative in the early 1760s he said, "I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer."[69] The hymn we know as "Amazing Grace" was written to accompany a New Year’s sermon based on 1 Chronicles 17:16, "Then King David went in and sat before the Lord,

and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far?"[70] Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind but now I see. The effect of this amazement is tenderness toward others. "[The 'wretch' who has been saved by grace] believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness Spirit. Humble under a sense of much forgiveness to himself, he finds it easy to forgive others."[71] He puts it in a picture: A company of travellers fall into a pit: one of them gets a passenger to draw him out. Now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in; nor because they are not yet out, as he is. He did not pull himself out: instead, therefore, of reproaching them, he should shew them pity. . . . A man, truly illuminated, will no more despise others, then Bartimeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met.[72]

Glad-hearted, grateful lowliness and brokenness as a saved "wretch" was probably the most prominent root of Newton's habitual tenderness with people.

Newton's Peaceful Confidence in the Pervasive, Loving Providence of God In order to maintain love and tenderness that thinks more about the other person's need than your own comforts, you must have an unshakable hope that the sadness of your life will work for your everlasting good. Otherwise you will give in, turn a deaf ear to need and say, "Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Newton found this peace and confidence in the all-governing providence of God over good and evil. He describes his own experience when he describes the believer: And his faith upholds him under all trials, by assuring him, that every dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of his love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by Infinite Wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his day.[73] This keeps him from being overwhelmed with anger and bitterness and resentment when he is assaulted with pressures and disappointments. It is as practical as pastoral interruptions: "When I hear a knock at my study door, I hear a message from God. It may be a lesson of instruction; perhaps a lesson of patience: but, since it is his message, it must be interesting."[74] He knew that even his temptations were ordered by the sovereign goodness of God and that not to have any was dangerous for the soul. He approved of Samuel Rutherford's comment, that "there is no temptation like being without temptation."[75] And this same faith in God's gracious providence to help him profit from the painful things in life, also spares from the pleasant things in life that would deceive him that they are best and choke off the superior pleasures he has in God. If the world triumphs in this way, we will lose our joy in Christ and his mercy, and that will be the end of all Christ-exalting tenderness. So it is a crucial root of his habitual tenderness when he says, "By faith [the believer] triumphs over [the world's] smiles and enticements: he sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures."[76]

John Newton's habitual tenderness is rooted in the sober realism of the limits of redemption in this fallen world where "we groan awaiting the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23); the all-pervasive humility and gratitude for having been a blasphemer of the gospel and now being a heaven-bound preacher of it; and the unshakable confidence that the all-governing providence of God will make every experience turn for his good so that he doesn't spend his life murmuring, "My

carriage is broken, my carriage is broken," but sings, "Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

[1] Besides appearing in almost all church hymnals, "'Amazing Grace' has been adapted by scores of performers, from country music to gospel to folk singers. . . . Judy Collins sings in St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University, and talks about how this song carried her through the depths of her alcoholism. Jessye Norman sends 'Amazing Grace' soaring across the footlights at Manhattan Center stage. While in Nashville, Johnny Cash visits a prison and talks about the hymn's impact on prisoners. The folk singer, Jean Ritchie, shares a reunion of her extended family in Kentucky where everyone rejoices together. 'Amazing Grace' is also featured in the repertory of the Boys Choir of Harlem, which performs the hymn in both New York and Japan" (http://www.wlu.ca/mtr/MediaCollection/A/v1396.htm [Accessed 1-26-2001]).

[2] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, in The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 123.

[3] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 107.

[4] Ibid., p. 90.

[5] Ibid., p. 2.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

[7] Ibid., p. 9.

[8] Ibid., p. 12.

[9] Ibid., p.10.

[10] Ibid., p. 16.

[11] Ibid., p. 78.

[12] See below, note 26.

[13] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 13.

[14] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 25.

[15] Ibid., p. 26.

[16] Ibid., p. 28.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 32.

[19] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[20] Ibid., p. 33.

[21] John Newton, "Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade," in The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 6 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 123

[22] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'I Am a Sort of Middle-Man'": The Politically Correct Evangelicalism of John Newton," in Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, ed. by George Rawlyk and Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 32.

[23] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 50. Later in his ministry, Newton counseled a younger minister, "The original Scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them" (The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol.1., p. 143). Concerning the early years of studying the languages he says, "You must not think that I have attained, were ever aimed at, a critical skill in any of these: . . . In the Hebrew, I can read the Historical Books and Psalms with tolerable ease; but, in the Prophetical and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to lexicons, etc. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult" (Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, pp. 49-50).

[24] Ibid., p. 50.

[25] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'I Am a Sort of Middle-Man,'" p. 42.

[26] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 88.

[27] Ibid., p. 89.

[28] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 170.

[29] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 95.

[30] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 5, p. 132, emphasis added.

[31] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000). p. 351. He had a special concern for sailors and lamented their neglect in evangelism and Christian publishing. He eventually wrote a preface for a devotional book designed especially for sailors. See Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, pp. 76-77, 347-348.

[32] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 143.

[33] Josiah Bull, "But Now I See": The Life of John Newton, (Edinburgh: The Banner of to Truth Trust, 1998, original 1868), pp. 336-367.

[34] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 92.

[35] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 139, emphasis added.

[36] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 95.

[37] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 125.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, pp. 129-130.

[40] Ibid., p. 282.

[41] Ibid., p. 184.

[42] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 67.

[43] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 101.

[44] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 164.

[45] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 101.

[46] Ibid., p. 106. In a letter to a friend he warned that if, we do not look continually to the Lord, controversy will obstruct communion with God. "Though you set out in defense of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you , it may become your own cause and awaken in you those tempers which are inconsistent with true peace of mind and will surely obstruct communion with God" (The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, pp. 273-274).

[47] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 100.

[48] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 3, p. 303.

[49] Ibid.

[50] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 5, p. 131. Newton took Ephesians 4:15 ("speaking the truth in love") as his inaugural text when he came to St. Mary's (The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 5, pp. 126-136). Richard Cecil describes how this text was fleshed out in Newton's ministry: "His zeal in propagating the truth . . . was not more conspicuous, than the tenderness of the spirit as to the manner of his maintaining and delivering it. He was found constantly speaking the truth in love; and in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. There was a gentleness, a candour, and a forbearance in him, that I do not recollect to have seen in an equal degree among his brethren . . ." (Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 122).

[51] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 271.

[52] Ibid., p. 269.

[53] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'I Am a Sort of Middle-Man,'" p. 52.

[54] Ibid.

[55] William S. Plummer, The Christian, to which is added, False Doctrines and False Teachers: How to Know Them and How to Treat Them (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1997), p. 22.

[56] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'I Am a Sort of Middle-Man,'" p. 53.

[57] Ibid., p. 31.

[58] Ibid., p. 43. In Liverpool, 51 Methodists claimed instantaneous and entire sanctification. "While Newton had been able to suppress his differences with Wesley over predestination, the extent of the atonement, and final perseverance, he was not able to accept the behavior of Wesley's

followers in the wake of the perfectionism revival. The claim to perfection, however hedged about by talk of grace, seemed in many cases no more than an enthusiastic self-righteousness that belied trusting wholly in the merits of Christ for redemption. Newton had earlier worked out a formula that would maintain evangelical solidarity with Arminians by saying, 'Though a man does not accord with my view of election, yet if he gives me good evidence, that he is effectually called of God, he is my brother' [The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 6, p. 199]. He could not, however, make any rapprochement of with Wesley's growing stress upon perfectionism. The behavior of his followers raised the specter of a Pelagianism that lay outside his understanding of evangelical theology, unduly stressing human agency in salvation."

[59] Cecil writes, "I never saw him so much moved, as when any friend endeavored to correct his errors in this respect. His credulity seemed to arise from the consciousness he had of his own integrity; and from the sort of parental fondness which he bore to all his friends, real or pretended. I knew one, since dead, whom he thus described, while living: 'He is certainly an odd man, and has his failings; but he has great integrity, and I hope is going to heaven:' whereas, almost all who knew him thought the man should go first into the pillory!" (Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, pp. 94-95).

[60] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 134.

[61] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 107.

[62] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 108.

[63] Josiah Bull, "But Now I See": The Life of John Newton, p. 370. The meaning of "gnomon" in 1803, according to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, included "nose." That is probably Newton's reference. "Striking illustrations, happy turns of thought, racy and telling expressions, often enriched Mr. Newton's extempore discourses." Another instance of Newton's humor is seen in a letter to Thomas Scott who became the Vicar in Olney when Newton left. Newton wrote to him, "Methinks I see you sitting in my old corner in the study. I will warn you of one thing. That room—(do not start)—used to be haunted. I cannot say I ever saw or heard anything with my bodily organs, but I have been sure there were evil spirits in it and very near me—a spirit of folly, a spirit of indolence, a spirit of unbelief, and many others—indeed their name is legion. But why should I say they are in your study when they followed me to London, and still pester me here?" (Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 145).

[64] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 100.

[65] See above, note 40. Another case of constitutional depression (as he judged it) besides Cowper's was that of Hannah Wilberforce. Newton wrote to her in a letter dated July, 1764, "Things which abate the comfort and alacrity of our Christian profession are rather impediments than properly sinful, and will not be imputed to us by him who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. Thus, to have an infirm memory, to be subject to disordered, irregular, or low spirits, are faults of the constitution, in which the will has no share, though they are all burdensome and oppressive, and sometimes needlessly so by our charging ourselves with guilt on their account. The same may be observed of the unspeakable and fierce suggestions of Satan, with which some people are pestered, but which shall be laid to him from whom they proceed, and not to them who are troubled and terrified, because they are forced to feel them" (Richard Cecil, The

Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 126).

[66] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, p. 103.

[67] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 319. Another example of the limits of this age that make us patient with people's failings is the God-ordained necessity of temptations. He asks, "Why the Lord permits some of his people to suffer such violent assaults from the powers of darkness" (The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, 226). "Though the Lord sets such bounds to [Satan's] rage as he cannot pass, and limits him both as to manner and time, he is often pleased to suffer him to discover his malice to a considerable degree; not to gratify Satan, but to humble and prove them; to show them what is in their hearts, to make them truly sensible of their immediate and absolute dependence upon him [see p. 232], and to quicken them if to watchfulness and prayer" (p. 227). He goes on to suggest that another design of temptation is "for the manifestation of his power, and wisdom, and grace, in supporting the soul under such pressures as are evidently beyond its own strength to sustain" (p. 228). He gives Job as an illustration: "the experiment answered many good purposes: Job was humbled, yet approved; his friends were instructed; Satan was confuted, and disappointed; and the wisdom and mercy of the Lord, in his darkest dispensations toward his people, were gloriously illustrated" (p. 228). If the Lord has any children who are not exercised with spiritual temptations, I am sure they are but poorly qualified to 'speak a word in season to them that are weary'" (p. 231).

[68] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 86.

[69] Ibid., p. 22.

[70] Richard Cecil, The Life of John Newton, edited by Marylynn Rousse, pp. 365-368.

[71] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 170.

[72] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 105.

[73] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 169.

[74] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 76.

[75] The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 259.

[76] Ibid., pp. 171-172. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 75

05.19. Lessons from an Inconsolable Soul

Lessons from an Inconsolable Soul Learning from the Mind and Heart of C. S. Lewis 1) It Seems I Shouldn't Find Lewis So Helpful My approach in this talk is personal. I am going to talk about what has meant the most to me in C. S. Lewis—how he has helped me the most. And as I raise this question, as I have many times over the years, the backdrop of the question becomes increasingly urgent: Why has he been so significant for me, even though he is not Reformed in his doctrine, and could barely be called an evangelical by typical American uses of that word?

He doesn't believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, 1 and defaults to logical arguments more naturally than to biblical exegesis. He doesn't treat the Reformation with respect, but thinks it could have been avoided, and calls aspects of if farcical. 2 He steadfastly refused in public or in letters to explain why he was not a Roman Catholic but remained in the Church of England. 3 He makes room for at least some people to be saved through imperfect representations of Christ in other religions. 4 He made a strong logical, but I think unbiblical, case for free will to explain why there is suffering in the world. 5 He speaks of the atonement with reverence, but puts little significance on any of the explanations for how it actually saves sinners. 6 In other words, Lewis is not a writer to which we should turn for growth in a careful biblical understanding of Christian doctrine. There is almost no passage of Scripture on which I would turn to Lewis for exegetical illumination. A few, but not many. He doesn't deal with many. If we follow him in the kinds of mistakes that he made (the ones listed above), it will hurt the church and dishonor Christ. His value is not in his biblical exegesis. Lewis is not the kind of writer who provides substance for a pastor's sermons. If a pastor treats Lewis as a resource for doctrinal substance, he will find his messages growing thin, interesting perhaps, but not with much rich biblical content. The Ironic Effect of Reading Lewis So you see the kind of backdrop there is for this message. How and why has C. S. Lewis been so helpful to me when I think he is so wrong on some very important matters? Why don't I put Lewis in the same category as the so-called "emergent" writers? At one level, the mistakes seem similar. But when I pose the question that way, it starts to become pretty clear to me why Lewis keeps being useful, while I think the emergent voices will fade away fairly quickly. In fact, I think posing the question this way not only explains why he has been so helpful to me, but also goes right to the heart of what the life and work of C. S. Lewis were about. There was something at the core of his work—of his mind—that had the ironic effect on me of awakening lively affections and firm convictions that he himself would not have held.

Something About Lewis

There was something about the way he read Scripture that made my own embrace of inerrancy tighter, not looser. There was something about the way he spoke of grace and God's power that made me value the particularities of the Reformation more, not less. There was something about the way he portrayed the wonders of the incarnation that made me more suspicious of his own inclusivism, not less. There was something about the way he spoke of doctrine as the necessary roadmap that leads to Reality, 7 and the way he esteemed truth and reason and precision of

thought, that made me cherish more, not less, the historic articulations of the biblical explanations of how the work of Christ saves sinners—the so-called theories of the atonement.

It may be that others have been drawn away by Lewis from these kinds of convictions and experiences. I doubt very seriously that more people on the whole have been weakened in true biblical commitments than have been strengthened by reading Lewis. I am sure it happens. I am sure that for many, for example, who have taken the road to Roman Catholicism away from evangelicalism, Lewis has played a part in that pilgrimage. He devoted his whole Christian life to defending and adorning what he called “mere Christianity”—“the Christian religion as understood ubique et ab omnibus [everywhere by everyone].” 8 “I have believed myself to be restating ancient and orthodox doctrines. . . . I have tried to assume nothing that is not professed by all baptized and communicating Christians.” 9 This means that he rarely tried to distance himself from Roman Catholicism or any other part of Christendom. He rarely spoke about any debates within Christianity itself. 10 A Pastoral Price to Pay

There is a price to pay when you set yourself this kind of agenda. You will almost certainly omit things essential to the gospel. Not that you yourself do not believe those things, but since virtually all important doctrines have been disputed from within the church (not just from outside), the effort to omit what’s disputed runs the risk of omitting what’s essential. We all should be warned about this, because the disputes in the New Testament letters themselves are virtually all disputes within the church, not with those outside. In the marketplace and the synagogue, Paul argued for the gospel with unbelievers. But in his letters, he defends and defines the heart of the gospel not by disputing with those outside the church, but with those inside the church. He did not consider these disputes—for example in Galatians—as peripheral skirmishes but rather as part of what “mere Christianity” actually is. This dispute is what the Reformation was about.

Therefore, Lewis set himself a lifelong task that no pastor should follow—namely, to adorn and defend only those truths that he thought all Christians always and everywhere have believed. 11 Lewis was not a pastor. He was a professor of English Literature from 1924 to 1963, first at Oxford and then at Cambridge. He did not have to open the Scriptures week after week for a group of people over the course of 30 or 40 years. He didn’t have to explain to his flock the fullness of God’s written revelation. He was a scholar, a writer of science fiction, children’s books, poetry, essays, and apologetics. In these spheres, he chose his focus. He called it “mere Christianity.” Within that limited focus (which he would say is infinitely large), he fell short of saying many important things regarding the gospel of Christ. But if I focus not on what he failed to say, but on what he said and did, I find that even for me—for one who considers some doctrines to be crucial that he neglected—even for me, the blessings of his work have been incalculable.

2) Why Lewis Is So Helpful to Me Which brings us back now to why that is. What was it about the work of C. S. Lewis that has helped me so much? The answer lies in the way that the experience of Joy and the defense of Truth come together in Lewis’s life and writings. The way Lewis deals with these two things—Joy and Truth—is so radically different from Liberal theology and emergent postmodern slipperiness that he is simply in another world—a world where I am totally at home, and where I find both my heart and my mind awakened and made more alive and perceptive and responsive and earnest and hopeful and amazed and passionate for the glory of God every time I turn to C. S. Lewis. It’s this combination of experiencing the stab of God-shaped joy and defending

objective, absolute Truth, because of the absolute Reality of God, that sets Lewis apart as unparalleled in the modern world. To my knowledge, there is simply no one else who puts these two things together the way Lewis does. And ever since I stumbled upon him and his Reformed counterpart, Jonathan Edwards, in my early twenties, I have never been the same. I don't see myself as an imitator of Lewis and Edwards in this. The kind of Joy that Lewis is talking about cannot be imitated. It's a gift. You don't make it happen. And both these men are intellectual giants in the land. I don't have their intellectual ability. In their ability to see and think and feel, they are off the charts. Their capacities to see and feel the freshness and wonder of things was childlike, and their capacities to describe it and understand it and defend it was massively manly. His "Child's Sense of Glory and of Nightmare"

Ruth Pitter was a poet and close friend of Lewis, and described it so well. She said, "His whole life was oriented and motivated by an almost uniquely-persisting child's sense of glory and of nightmare. The adult events were received into a medium still as pliable as wax, wide open to the glory, and equally vulnerable, with a man's strength to feel it all, and a great scholar's and writer's skills to express and to interpret." 12 So I can't imitate Lewis, but I can listen. And I have been listening for decades, and what I have heard and seen echoes almost everywhere in my life and work. His influence is simply huge. So let me try to unpack what I mean by Lewis's experience of Joy and his defense of Truth and how they connect with such force for the glory of God.

3) C.S. Lewis's Experience of Joy

Lewis wrote an autobiography about the first thirty years of his life, Surprised by Joy—up through his conversion to Christianity. He wrote it 20 years later. So its assessments are mature and thoughtful. In it he describes three instances as a child when a certain experience was awakened in him that later he came to call Joy. But he makes clear that this is not what we ordinarily mean by joy or happiness or pleasure. We must be patient here and let him describe it for us, before we jump to the conclusion that we know what he is talking about. The experience of this Joy is the most important theme of his life. He says so. It gives unity to everything else. He said of this experience, "In a sense the central story of my life is about nothing else." 13 Very seldom does a writer tell us what he believes is the central theme of his life. Lewis does tell us. Everything in his life gains its deepest meaning from its connection with this.

Defining Joy

Here's the closest thing that Lewis gives to a definition of this Joy: It is the experience "of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction."

14 This is why he chose the word Joy rather than "desire" or "longing" or "Sehnsucht" when writing his autobiography—because those words failed to convey the desirability of the longing itself.

I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that any one who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is the kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is. 15 Or again he says, "Joy is distinct not only from pleasure in general

but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing." 16 So on the one hand, Joy has this dimension of "inconsolable longing," aching, yearning for something you don't have. But on the other hand, the longing and aching and yearning is itself pleasurable. It is in itself not just a wanting to have but a having.

True, it was desire, not possession. But then what I had felt on the walk had also been desire, and only possession in so far as that kind of desire is itself desirable, is the fullest possession we can know on earth; or rather, because the very nature of Joy makes nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting. There, to have is to want to want is to have. Thus, the very moment when I longed to be stabbed again, was itself again such a stabbing. 17

Alan Jacobs is right to say, "Nothing was closer to the core of his being than this experience." 18 And perhaps what sealed its significance for Lewis is that it brought him to Christ. He was an atheist in his twenties, but relentlessly God was pursuing him through the experience of "inconsolable longing." And he was finding that the writers who awakened it most often were Christian writers.

Made for Another World

One decisive influence was J. R. R. Tolkein, author of The Lord of the Rings. He argued like this, as Lewis did for the rest of his life: When this Joy—this stab of inconsolable longing—is awakened by certain powerful "myths" or "stories," it is evidence that behind these myths there is a true Myth, a true Story that really exists, and that the reason the Joy is desirable and inconsolable is that it's not the real thing. The True Myth, the Real Joy is the original shout, so to speak, and the stories and myths of human making are only echoes.

Tolkein pressed the analogous truth for Christianity. And Lewis did the same years later: "A man's physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread: he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating, and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist." 19 In other words, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world." 20 Overcoming Atheism God overcame Lewis' atheism in the spring term of 1929. He was 30 years old.

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him Whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. . . . Who can duly adore that love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? 21 That was not the end of the struggle. It was two years later on October 1, 1931, that he wrote to his friend Arthur, "I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity." 22 The Great Story really is true. God really sent his Son. He really died for our sins. We really can have forgiveness and eternal life in the presence of the One to whom all the Joy was pointing.

Desiring God

Lewis looked back on all his experiences of Joy differently now. Now he knew why the desire was inconsolable, and yet pleasant. It was a desire for God. It was evidence that he was made for God. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshipers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of the tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. 23

All his life, he said, “an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of [my] consciousness.” 24 “The sweetest thing of all my life has been the longing . . . to find the place where all the beauty came from.” 25 But when Lewis was born again to see the glory of God in Christ, he never said again that he didn’t know where the beauty came from. Now he knew where all the joy was pointing. On the last page of his autobiography, he explained the difference in his experience of Joy now and before.

I believe . . . that the old stab, the old bittersweet, has come to me as often and as sharply since my conversion as at any time of my life whatever. But I now know that the experience, considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts. When we are lost in the woods the site of the signpost is a great matter. He who first sees it cries, ‘Look!’ The whole party gathers around and stares. But when we have found the road and are passing signposts every few miles, we shall not stop and stare. They will encourage us and we shall be grateful to the authority that set them up. But we shall not stop and stare, or not much; not on this road, though their pillars are of silver and their lettering of gold. ‘We would be at Jerusalem.’ 26 So Lewis stopped turning Joy into an idol when he found, by grace, that it was “a pointer to something other and outer,” namely to God. Clyde Kilby gave the highest estimation of this theme in Lewis:

[For Lewis Joy is] a desire which no natural happiness can ever satisfy, the lifelong pointer toward heaven . . . which gave us such delight and yet are the meager signs of the true rapture He has in heaven for redeemed souls. . . . The culmination of Sehnsucht [Longing, Joy] in the rhapsodic joy of heaven is, for me at least the strongest single element in Lewis. In one way or other it hovers over nearly every one of his books and suggests to me that Lewis’s apocalyptic vision is perhaps more real than that of anyone since St. John on Patmos. 27 4) C.S. Lewis’s Defense of Absolute Truth

Now we make a turn to see how this experience of Joy relates to Lewis’s defense of objective, absolute Truth. What we see is that when Lewis saw the historical Christ and the eternal, objective, absolutely real God as the object of his inconsolable longing (his Joy), he knew that if Truth goes, if objective Reality goes, if the possibility of knowing goes, then Joy becomes the mirage he feared all his life it might be. Christianity was the end of his quest precisely because it was true. Christ was real. God was real. Truth was real. Here’s the way he described the connection.

There was no doubt that Joy was a desire . . . but a desire is turned not to itself but to its object. . . . The form of the desired is in the desire. It is the object which makes the desire harsh or sweet,

course or choice, ‘high’ or ‘low.’ It is the object that makes the desire itself desirable or hateful. I perceived (and this was a wonder of wonders) that just as I had been wrong in supposing that I really desired the Garden of the Hesperides, so also I have been equally wrong in supposing that I desired Joy itself. Joy itself, considered simply as an event in my own mind, turned out to be of no value at all. All the value lay in that of which Joy was the desiring. And that object, quite clearly, was no state of my own mind or body at all. 28

Here see the crucial link between Truth and Joy. “Joy itself, considered simply as an event in my own mind, turned out to be of no value at all. All the value lay in that of which Joy was the desiring.” So you see what is at stake. The entire modern world—and even more so the postmodern world—was moving away from this conviction. Liberal theology and emergent writers have flowed with the world of subjectivism and relativism. Lewis stood against it with all his might.

Alan Jacobs calls Lewis’s little book The Abolition of Man the “most profound of Lewis’s cultural critiques.” 29 It would not be an exaggeration to say that in this book Lewis is furious at the purveyors of modern subjectivism in textbooks for young people. He gives this example from one such textbook in his own words. The authors refer to story of Coleridge agreeing with a friend that the beauty of a certain waterfall is sublime. The authors comment, When the man said That is sublime, he appeared to be making a remark about the waterfall. . . . Actually . . . he was not making a remark about the waterfall, but a remark about his own feelings. What he was saying was really I have feelings associate in my mind with the word “Sublime,” or shortly, I have sublime feelings . . . . This confusion is continually present in language as we use it. We appear to be saying something very important about something: and actually we are only saying something about our own feelings.

30 Lewis says that the schoolboy who reads this textbook will “believe two propositions: firstly, that all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker, an secondly, that all such statements are unimportant.” 31 This is, Lewis argues is in the end, “the abolition of man” in more ways than one. Not only will everything true and beautiful and great be trivialized into mere personal preference and subjectivity, but in the end, there will be no resistance to tyrants who simply declare themselves to be in the right. Against this suicidal view of truth and reality, Lewis defends absolute Truth and absolute Value. This theme which I have called for convenience the Tao . . . is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. . . . If my duty to my parents is a superstition, then so is my duty to posterity. If justice is a superstition, then so is my duty to my country or my race. If the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a real value, then so is conjugal fidelity. The rebellion of new ideologies against the Tao is a rebellion of the branches against the tree: if the rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves. 32

Hence “the abolition of man.” In the end, it means the destruction of civilization. 33 But long before that, it means the destruction of Joy, because, as Lewis had learned when he became a Christian, an attack on the objective reality of God is an attack on Joy. “Joy itself, considered simply as an event in my own mind, turned out to be of no value at all. All the value lay in that of which Joy was the desiring.” All the value lay in God. Without God, the event in my mind called Joy is utterly trivial.

Therefore, for Lewis, the fight for Truth, the fight to find and use an epistemology that affirms and finds objective Reality outside of us—ultimately God himself—is the fight for Joy. In There a Conflict? Which raises the question: Is there a conflict in Lewis between the fight for Joy and the fight for Truth—for God? What is ultimate for Lewis? God's Glory or our Joy? And if this sounds like a familiar question to some of you, because I have been asking it for forty years, well guess where I found my answer? I know the very place in Jonathan Edwards where I read the answer, and he has been the greatest help to see it in the Bible and how it relates to other doctrines. But Lewis (with the guidance of my seminary professor Dan Fuller) was the first one who gave me the key that unlocked the door to the room where our Joy and God's Glory came together.

"Fully to Enjoy Is to Glorify"

Edwards said, "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in." 34 So the glory of God is displayed when we rejoice in it. Lewis says exactly the same thing even more clearly. In his book on the Psalms, he says, "The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever'. But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy him." 35 So we have these two great themes in Lewis's life: 1) the experience of Joy as an inconsolable longing in this world always pointing to the Reality beyond this world and 2) the defense of the objective nature of that Reality, that is, God, with all the ethical and epistemological implications of that defense. We see Lewis defending the objective Reality behind the experience of Joy because without it this experience is utterly trivialized as a mere animal state of the brain. Man as man is abolished. But now we have seen that in fighting for the dignity and majesty and eternity of the experience of Joy, Lewis is in fact fighting for the glory of God. Because, as he says, fully to enjoy God is to glorify God. And so the means by which God brought Lewis to himself—the inconsolable longing for (the Joy in) what he knew not—turns out to be the ultimate goal of the Christian life as well—to make God the object of that longing—that Joy—and to glorify God by enjoying him forever.

5) Why the Flawed Lewis Is Influential for Me

So, in spite of all Lewis's flaws, the most fundamental reason why he has been so influential in my life, and so awakening to my own soul, is that he remained anchored as a Christian in the unfathomable rock-solid objectivity of God and his Truth and his gospel as infinitely Beautiful and infinitely Desirable and, therefore, as the unshakeable ground of unutterable and exalted Joy.

6) Eight More Ways Lewis Helps Me But when I say that this is the "most fundamental reason" why Lewis has been so influential in my life, I run the risk of minimizing a whole array of other reasons that flow from this central spring. My tribute would not be complete without mentioning some of them.

6.1 Liberation from False Dichotomies

Lewis's pursuit of Joy by means of rational defenses of objective truth has had liberating effect on me. He freed me from false dichotomies. He demonstrated for me and convinced me that rigorous, precise, penetrating logic is not inimical to deep, soul-stirring feeling and vivid, lively imagination. He was a "romantic rationalist." He combined what almost everybody today assumes are mutually exclusive: rationalism and poetry, cool logic and warm feeling, disciplined prose and free

imagination. In shattering these old stereotypes for me, he freed me to think hard and to write poetry, to argue for the resurrection and compose hymns to Christ, to smash an argument and hug a friend, to demand a definition and use a metaphor. It is a wonderful thing when a great man shows a struggler how to be himself.

6.2 Liberation from Chronological Snobbery

Lewis' unwavering commitment to what is True and Real and Valuable, as opposed to what is trendy or fashionable or current, has been another kind of liberation for me, namely, from "chronological snobbery." He loved the wisdom of the ages, not the whimsy of the passing present. He called himself a Neanderthaler and a dinosaur. 36 He didn't read newspapers. He never wore a watch. He never learned to type. He did not own or drive a car. He cared nothing about cutting a good appearance and wore the same old clothes until they were threadbare. 37 He was incredibly free from the addicting powers of the present moment. The effect of this on me has been to make me wary of what he called "chronological snobbery." 38 That is, he has shown me that "newness" is no virtue, and "oldness" is no fault. He considered the present time to be provincial with its own blind spots. He said once: every third book you read should be from outside your own (provincial) century. 39 Truth and beauty and goodness are not determined by when they exist. Nothing is inferior for being old, and nothing is valuable for being modern. This has freed me from the tyranny of novelty and opened for me the wisdom of the centuries.

6.3 The Wakening of Wonder at What Is Really There

Lewis's keen penetrating sense of his own heart's aching for Joy, combined with his utter amazement at the sheer, objective realness of things other than himself, has over and over awakened me from the slumbers of self-absorption to see and savor the world and through the world, the Maker of the world. And this sense of wonder at what is—really is—has carried over into doctrine, and the gospel in particular.

Lewis gave me, and continues to give me, an intense sense of the astonishing "realness? of things. He had the ability to see and feel what most of us see and do not see. He had what Alan Jacobs called "omnivorous attentiveness." 40 I love that phrase. What this has done for me is hard to communicate. To wake up in the morning and to be aware of the firmness of the mattress, the warmth of the sun's rays, the sound of the clock ticking, the coldness of the wooden floor, the wetness of the water in the sink, the sheer being of things (quiddity as he called it). And not just to be aware but to wonder. To be amazed that the water is wet. It did not have to be wet. If there were no such thing as water, and one day some one showed it to you, you would simply be astonished.

He helped me become alive to life. To look at the sunrise and with say with an amazed smile, "God did it again!" He helped me to see what is there in the world—things which if we didn't have them, we would pay a million dollars to have, but having them, ignore. He convicts me of my callous inability to enjoy God's daily gifts. He helps me to awaken my dazed soul so that the realities of life and of God and heaven and hell are seen and felt. I could go on about the good effect of this on preaching, and the power of communication. But it has been precious mainly just for living.

6.4 The Perils of Introspection

Lewis's experience in the pursuit of Joy and the mistakes he made has had a huge effect on the way I think about the assurance of salvation in relationship to introspection and self-examination. What he discovered is that the effort to know the experience of Joy by looking at Joy is self-defeating. He wrote, "I saw that all my waitings and watchings for Joy, all my vain hopes to find some mental content on which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say, 'This is it,' had been a futile attempt contemplate the enjoyed." 41 It can't be done, for the moment we step outside ourselves to contemplate our enjoying, we are no longer enjoying, but contemplating. The implication of this for knowing that we are believing God by trying to look at our believing is enormous. This is our dilemma . . . as thinkers we are cut off from what we think about; as tasting, touching, willing, loving, hating, we do not clearly understand. The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think. You cannot study Pleasure in the moment of the nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyze the nature of humor while roaring with laughter. But when else can you really know these things?

42 You cannot hope and also think about hoping at the same moment; for in hope we look to hope's object and we interrupt this by (so to speak) turning around to look at the hope itself. . . . Introspection is in one respect misleading. In introspection we try to look inside ourselves and see what is going on. But nearly everything that was going on a moment before is stopped by the very act of our turning to look at it. Unfortunately this does not mean that introspection finds nothing. On the contrary, it finds precisely what is left behind by the suspension of all our normal activities; and what is left behind is mainly mental images and physical sensations. The great error is to mistake this mere sediment or track or by product for the activities themselves. 43

What this has meant for me is, first, that I see now that the pursuit of Joy must always be indirect—focusing not on the experience but the object to be enjoyed. And, second, I see that faith in Jesus, in its most authentic experience is suspended when it is being analyzed to see if its real. Which means this analysis always ends in discouragement. When we are trusting Christ most authentically, we are not thinking about trusting, but about Christ. When we step out of the moment to examine it, we cease what we were doing, and therefore cannot see it. My counsel for strugglers therefore is relentlessly: Look to Jesus. Look to Jesus in his word. And pray for eyes to see.

6.5 The Incompleteness of Duty Without Delight

Lewis's analysis of Joy impelled me deeper into the biblical reality of what it means to walk by the Spirit—or to live "worthy of the gospel" (Php 1:27). Until we are gripped with the joyful impulses of gospel grace from the inside, we will always be thinking in terms of doing external duties as pressures from outside. This is called morality. But here is what I discovered with Lewis's help: A perfect man would never act from a sense of duty; he'd always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and of other people) like a crutch which is a substitute for a leg. Most of us need the crutch at times; but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits etc.) can do the journey on their own. 44 The implications of this for my own pursuit of holiness and my teaching on sanctification have been pervasive. Lewis brings this insight to bear on the Puritans and William Tyndale in particular in a way this is profoundly illuminating: In reality Tyndale is trying to express an obstinate fact which meets us long before we venture into the realm of theology; the fact that morality or duty (what he

calls ‘the Law’) never yet made a man happy in himself or dear to others. It is shocking, but it is undeniable. We do not wish either to be, or to live among, people who are clean or honest or kind as a matter of duty: we want to be, and associate with, people who like being clean and honest and kind. The mere suspicion that what seemed an act of spontaneous friendliness or generosity was really done as a duty subtly poisons it. In philosophical language, the ethical category is self-destructive; morality is healthy only when it is trying to abolish itself. In theological language, no man can be saved by works. The whole purpose of the “Gospel,” for Tyndale, is to deliver us from morality. Thus, paradoxically, the “Puritan” of modern imagination—the cold, gloomy heart, doing as duty what happier and richer souls do without thinking of it—is precisely the enemy which historical Protestantism arose and smote. 45 This is what I want to keep smiting with Christian Hedonism: The gospel is designed to make forgiven sinners love righteousness, not do it against all their inclinations.

6.6 The Painful Value of Self-Knowledge In spite of all the dangers of introspection and self-analysis, Lewis pursued this kind of purity of heart and holiness of motive, and it led him to depths of self-understanding that have exposed my heart again and again. I feel myself laid open when I read Lewis. I feel like I am in the presence of someone who has x-ray vision, and that all my subtle selfish desires and evasions and self-justifications are exposed. Here’s just one example of his own self-awareness of sin. My afternoon “meditations”—which I at least attempt quite regularly now—I have found out ludicrous and terrible things about my own character. Sitting by, watching the rising thoughts to break their necks as they pop up, one learns to know the sort of thoughts that do come. And, will you believe it, one out of every three is the thought of self-admiration: when everything else fails, having had its neck broken, up comes the thought “What an admirable fellow I am to have broken their necks!” I catch myself posturing before the mirror, so to speak, all day long. I pretend I am carefully thinking out what to say to the next pupil (for his good, of course) and then suddenly realize I am really thinking how frightfully clever I am going to be and how he will admire me. . . . And then when you force yourself to stop it, you admire yourself for doing that. It is like fighting the hydra. . . . There seems to be no end to it. Depth under depth of self-love and self-admiration. 46 On the other hand, his powers of analyzing human nature would not be duped by psychoanalysts who would try to turn the experience of Joy into a mere psychological phenomenon. For example, in response to a Freudian assessment of Joy, Lewis wrote,

One knows what a psychoanalyst would say—it is sublimated lust, a kind of defeated masturbation which fancy gives one to compensate for external chastity. And after all, why should that be the right way of looking at it? If he can say that It is sublimated sex, why is it not open to me to say that sex is underdeveloped “It”?—as Plato would have said. 47

Lewis’s powers of analysis of his own heart—and mine—flow from his relentless pursuit of authentic and lasting Joy, that will suffer no substitutes, and therefore sees real sin and false accusation where many of us would miss them both.

6.7 Story Is Great—But Not Everything

Lewis has been helpful in celebrating the power of “story” (which is very fashionable today) and yet not overstating the exclusive claims of story over against exposition and argument and doctrine. Alan Jacobs said, “Philosophy had gotten Lewis to Mount Pisgah, from which (like Moses) he

could look out across the Promised Land. But it would be literature—story—that would take him into that land so that he could taste its milk and honey." 48 That's true. But Lewis never ceased to use the rational tools of his first trade. "Logic is a real insight into the way in which real things have to exist. . . . The laws of thought are also the laws of things." 49

Therefore, alongside three science fiction novels, many published poems, and seven world-class imaginary tales for children, there were the razor-sharp logical defenses of Christian faith, The Problem of Pain, Miracles, The Abolition of Man, Christian Reflections, and dozens of essays. 50 At least one of Lewis's friends, Owen Barfield, accused Lewis, in a friendly way, of having an "expository demon." Some of his friends would have preferred that he do less explaining the truth and spend more time pointing to the truth with stories. But I am deeply thankful that Lewis would not be pressed into this lopsided and unbiblical view of "story." Story is precious and powerful. And the Bible has plenty of it. But explanation and exposition and doctrine are as crucial to life as story is. And the life and work of C. S. Lewis is a magnificent testimony of the power of both, especially when both of them deepen and enrich the other. I thank God for his example—both for his extraordinary imagination and his "expository demon."

6.8 The Glory of Simply Being Human

Finally, Lewis's conception of our final and eternal Joy in the presence of God, and what an unspeakable wonder that will be, enables him to stand in God-exalting awe of what it means to be human. He has helped me rise above my petty complaints and see people—at least from time to time—as the staggering wonders that they are in the image of God.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. . . . There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. 51 The effect this has had on me is to make me serious about life. As Lewis said in one of his letters, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." 52 Serious is not the same as morose. As Lewis says,

We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. 53 The Real Business of Life So life is serious, even when we play. And the pursuit of Joy is a serious matter. All of it is serious and happy because God is Real. Neither he nor our Joy in him is a mere event in the mind. There is God. There is objective Truth. There is the gospel. And there is Joy. And that God-glorifying Joy is the great end of life. In it God's glory and human Joy meet without conflict, if—the awesome if—we have seen Christ in the gospel and believed.

Perhaps it won't be surprising then to hear Lewis say, as his last word to us, "The salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world."

54 “The glory of God, and, as our only means to glorifying Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life.” 55 This doesn’t cancel out all the other business. Lewis’s life testifies to that. But it does focus on our longings and prayers and aims in all we do. 56

Footnotes

1 “Lewis, as we have seen in the scope of this study, stands in sharp contrast to evangelical fundamentalism. His example proves that one can be a dedicated evangelical, accept the full authority of Scripture, yet disbelieve in inerrancy.” Michael J. Christensen, C. S. Lewis on Scripture (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979), p. 91. Lewis speaks of the predictions of the Second Coming in one generation as “error” in “The World’s Last Night” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces (London: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 45.

2 “The process whereby ‘Faith and Works’ became a stock gag in the commercial theater is characteristic of that whole tragic farce which we call the history of the Reformation. The theological questions really at issue have no significance except on a certain level, a high-level, of the spiritual life; they could have been fruitfully debated only between mature and saintly disputants in close privacy and at boundless leisure. Under those conditions formulae might possibly have been found which did justice to the Protestant . . . assertions without compromising other elements of the Christian faith. In fact, however, these questions were raised at a moment when they immediately became embittered and entangled with a whole complex of matters theologically irrelevant, and therefore attracted the fatal attention both of government and the mob. When once this has happened, Europe’s chance to come through unscathed was lost.” C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 37.

3 C. S. Lewis, Letters of C. S. Lewis, ed. W. H. Lewis and Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), pp. 223, 230.

4 After visiting Greece with his dying wife, he wrote, “At Daphne it was hard not to pray to Apollo the Healer. But somehow one didn’t feel it would have been very wrong—would only have been addressing Christ sub specie Apollinis.” Letters of C. S. Lewis, ed. W. H. Lewis and Walter Hooper, revised edition (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), p. 468. In this way of talking about possibly praying to Christ through Apollo, he is doing what he told a mother in a letter about her son who feared he loved Aslan more than Jesus: “But Laurence can’t really love Aslan more than Jesus, even if he feels that’s what he’s doing. For the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really did and said. So that when Laurence thinks he is loving Aslan, he is really loving Jesus: and perhaps loving him more than he ever did before.” C. S. Lewis, Letters to Children, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (New York: Macmillian, 1985), p. 57. Most familiar is the conversion of Emeth (Hebrew for “faithful” or “true”), the sincere seeker in another religion. C. S. Lewis The Last Battle (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 155–157.

5 C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 26–88. But Lewis’ view is not simple or completely transparent. He could say, “You will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.” Problem of Pain, p. 111. And one wonders if by “free will” Lewis sometimes only means

“voluntary” rather than “having ultimate self-determination.” For example he writes, “After all, when we are most free, it is only with freedom God has given us; and when our will is most influenced by Grace, it is still our will. And if what our will does is not voluntary, and if ‘voluntary’ does not mean ‘free’, what are we talking about?” Letters of C. S. Lewis, 1966, p. 246. And perhaps most significantly, after saying that a fallen soul “could still turn back to God,” he adds this footnote: “Theologians will note that I am not here intending to make any contribution to the Pelagian-Augustinian controversy. I mean only that such a return to God was not, even now, an impossibility. Where the initiative lies in any instance of such return is a question on which I am saying nothing.” The Problem of Pain, p. 83.

6 To a Roman Catholic he wrote in 1941, “Yes—I think I gave the impression of going further than I intended in saying that all theories of the atonement were ‘to be rejected if we don’t find them helpful’. What I meant was ‘need not be used—‘ a very different thing. Is there, on your view, and real difference here: that the Divinity of Our Lord has to be believed whether you find it helpful or a ‘scandal’ (otherwise you are not a Christian at all) but the Anselmic theory of Atonement is not in that position. Would you admit that a man was a Christian (and could be a member of your church) who said ‘I believe that Christ’s death redeemed man from sin, but I can make nothing of the theories as to how!’ You see, what I wanted to do in these talks was simply to give what is common to us all, and I’ve been trying to get a nihil obstat from friends in various communions. . . . It therefore doesn’t much matter how you think of my own theory, because it is advanced only as my own.” Letters of C. S. Lewis, 1966, pp. 197–198.

7 “For Lewis the doctrines were always absolutely necessary as maps toward one’s true destination—they should never be the goal of the Christian life.” Alan Jacobs, The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis (New York: HarperOne, 2006), p. 293.

8 “To a layman, it seems obvious that what unites the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic against the ‘Liberal’ or ‘Modernist’ is something very clear and momentous, namely, the fact that both are thoroughgoing supernaturalists, who believe in the Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Four Last Things [death, judgment, heaven, hell]. This unites them not only with one another, but with the Christian religion as understood ubique et ab omnibus [everywhere by everyone].

“The point of view from which this agreement seems less important than their divisions, or than the gulf which separates both from any non-miraculous version of Christianity, is to me unintelligible. Perhaps the trouble is that as supernaturalists, whether ‘Low’ or ‘High’ Church, thus taken together, they lack a name. May I suggest ‘Deep Church’; or, if that fails in humility, Baxter’s ‘mere Christians’?” C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 336.

9 C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 10.

10 “I think we must admit that the discussion of these disputed points has no tendency at all to bring outsiders into the Christian fold… Our divisions should never be discussed except in the presence of those who have already come to believe that there is one God and that Jesus Christ is his only son.” Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 215.

11 “I myself was first led into reading the Christian Classics, almost accidentally, as a result of my English studies. Some, such as Hooker, Herbert, Traherne, Taylor and Bunyan, I read because they are themselves great English writers; others such as Boethius, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Dante because they were “influences” ... They are, you will note, a mixed bag, representative of many Churches, climates and ages. And that brings me to yet another reason for reading them. The divisions of Christendom are undeniable and are by some of these writers most fiercely expressed. But if any man is tempted to think – as one might be tempted who read only contemporaries – that “Christianity” is a word of so many meanings that it means nothing at all, he can learn beyond all doubt, by stepping out of his own century, that this is not so. Measured against the ages “mere Christianity” turns out to be no insipid interdenominational transparency, but something positive, self consistent, and inexhaustible…. It was, of course, buried; and yet – after all – so unmistakably the same; recognizable, not to be evaded, the odour which is death to us until we allow it to become life…

“We are all rightly distressed, and ashamed also, at the divisions of Christendom. But those who have always lived within the Christian fold made be too easily dispirited by them. They are bad, but such people do not know what it looks like from without. Seen from there, one is left intact, despite all the divisions, still appears (as it truly is) an immensely formidable unity. I know, for I saw it; and well our enemies know it. That unity any of us can find by going out of his own age. ... You have now got on to the great level viaduct which crosses the ages and which looks so high from the valleys, so low from the mountains, so narrow compared to the swamps, and so broad compared to the sheep tracks.” C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics, 203-204.

12 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. xxii.

13 C. S. Lewis, Surprised By Joy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955), p. 17. Alan Jacobs agrees that this theme is pervasive in Lewis: “There lies in our hearts a longing that is also a delight, a longing that nothing in this world can satisfy and a delight that nothing in this world can match. . . . The thought expressed in those sentences is everywhere woven and into the fabric of Lewis’s work; it is the whole of what Narnia represents.” Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 313.

14 C. S. Lewis, Surprised By Joy,pp. 17-18.

15 C. S. Lewis, Surprised By Joy, p. 18.

16 C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p. 72.

17 C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 166 18 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 42.

19 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 46.

20 Clyde S. Kilby, A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc, 1968), p. 22.

21 C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, pp. 228-229.

22 The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, vol. I Family Letters 1905-1931, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), p. 974.

23 C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949). pp. 4–5.

24 C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, p. 148.

25 Clyde S. Kilby, A Mind Awake, p. 25, quoted from Till We Have Faces.

26vC. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p. 238.

27 Clyde S. Kilby, The Christian World of C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p, 187.

28 C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p. 220.

29 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 174.

30 C. S. Lewis, Abolition of Man (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 14.

31 Ibid. p. 15.

32 Ibid. p. 56. Lewis sees logic as a real reflection of the nature of Ultimate Reality that makes real knowledge of Reality possible: “I conclude then that logic is a real insight into the way in which real things have to exist. In other words, the laws of thought are also the laws of things: of things in the remotest space and the remotest time.” Quoted from C. S. Lewis, “De Futilitate” in Clyde S. Kilby, A Mind Awake, p. 41.

33 Ibid. p. 39.

34 Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies” in the Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 13, ed Thomas Schafer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 495, miscellany #448.

35 C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1958), p. 97. Emphasis added.

36 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 281.

37 “His students were usually struck first by his appearance: he wore old tweed jackets until they fell apart, kept well into his 50s overcoats that he had inherited from [his father], and, with his ruddy complexion and hearty manner, reminded many students of a grocer or butcher. But the voice soon captivated them.” Contrary to a Time article that said he was short and thickset, he was just shy of 5’ 11’’ and weighed 13 stone, about 182 pounds in 1917. Ibid. p. 164.

38 C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p. 207.

39 C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock, pp.201–202.

40 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. xxi.

41 C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p. 219.

42 C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2000), p. 140.

43 Ibid. pp. 218–219.

44 Letters of C. S. Lewis (1966), p. 277.

45 C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, p. 187.

46 C. S. Lewis: Collected Letters, Vol. 1, Family Letters 1905-1931, edl Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2000), p. 878.

47 Ibid. p. 877.

48 Alan Jacobs, The Narnian, p. 120.

49 See note 32. “De Futilitate,” p. 41.

50 The fullest collection of essays is C.S. Lewis, Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces.

51 Weight of Glory, p. 15.

52 C. S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1964), p. 299.

53 Weight of Glory, p. 15.

54 C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Literature,” in: Christian Reflections, p. 10.

55 C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Culture” in: Christian Reflections (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 14.

56 In 1958, Lewis was chastised by the liberal theologian Norman Pittenger for oversimplification in explaining the Trinity. In response Lewis gives us a rare glimpse into his evangelistic heart. “Most of my books are evangelistic, addressed to tous exo [those outside]. . . When I began, Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow-countrymen either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly cultured clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was therefore simply that of a translator—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand. . . . Dr. Pittenger would be a more helpful critic if he advised a cure as well as asserting many diseases. How does he himself do such work? What methods, and with what success, does he employ when he is trying to convert the great mass of storekeepers, lawyers, realtors, morticians, policemen and artisans who surround him in his own city?” C. S. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” in God in the Dock, pp, 181, 183. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.20. Luther biography template

Luther biography template Chapter 1: Luther Discovers the Book

One of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation — especially of Martin Luther — was that the Word of God comes to us in a form of a Book. In other words, Luther grasped this powerful fact: God preserves the experience of salvation and holiness from generation to generation by means of a Book of revelation, not a bishop in Rome, and not the ecstasies of Thomas Muenzer and the Zwickau prophets.1 The Word of God comes to us in a Book. That rediscovery shaped Luther and the Reformation.

One of Luther's arch-opponents in the Roman Church, Sylvester Prierias, wrote in response to Luther's 95 theses: "He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic".2 In other words, the Church and the pope are the authoritative deposit of salvation and the Word of God; and the Book is derivative and secondary. "What is new in Luther," Heiko Oberman says, "is the notion of absolute obedience to the Scriptures against any authorities; be they popes or councils".3 In other words the saving, sanctifying, authoritative Word of God comes to us in a Book. The implications of this simple observation are tremendous. In 1539, commenting on Psalms 119:1-176, Luther wrote, "In this psalm David always says that he will speak, think, talk, hear, read, day and night constantly — but about nothing else than God's Word and Commandments. For God wants to give you his Spirit only through the external Word."4 This phrase is extremely important. The "external Word" is the Book. And the saving, sanctifying, illuminating Spirit of God, he says, comes to us through this "external Word."

Luther calls it the "external Word" to emphasize that it is objective, fixed, outside ourselves, and therefore unchanging. It is a Book. Neither ecclesiastical hierarchy nor fanatical ecstasy can replace it or shape it. It is "external," like God. You can take or leave it. But you can't make it other than what it is. It is a book with fixed letters and words and sentences. And Luther said with resounding forcefulness in 1545, the year before he died, "Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture."5 Earlier he had said in his lectures on Genesis, "The Holy Spirit himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this book."6 The Word of God that saves and sanctifies, from generation to generation, is preserved in a Book. And therefore at the heart of every pastor's work is book-work. Call it reading, meditation, reflection, cogitation, study, exegesis, or whatever you will — a large and central part of our work is to wrestle God's meaning from a Book, and proclaim it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Minimizing the Holy Spirit?

Luther knew, that some would stumble over the sheer conservatism of this simple, unchangeable fact. God's Word is fixed in a book. He knew then, as we know today, that many say this assertion nullifies or minimizes the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in giving life and light. Luther would, I think, say, "Yes, that might happen." One might argue that emphasizing the brightness of the sun

nullifies the surgeon who takes away blindness. But most people would not agree with that. Certainly not Luther.

He said in 1520, "Be assured that no one will make a doctor of the Holy Scripture save only the Holy Ghost from heaven."7 Luther was a great lover of the Holy Spirit. And his exaltation of the Book as the "external Word" did not belittle the Spirit. On the contrary it elevated the Spirit's great gift to Christendom. In 1533 he said, "The Word of God is the greatest, most necessary, and most important thing in Christendom."8 Without the "external Word" we would not know one spirit from the other, and the objective personality of the Holy Spirit himself would be lost in a blur of subjective expressions. Cherishing the Book implied to Luther that the Holy Spirit is a beautiful person to be known and loved, not a buzz to be felt.

Minimizing the Incarnate Word?

Another objection to Luther's emphasis on the Book is that it minimizes the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ himself. Luther says the opposite is true. To the degree that the Word of God is disconnected from the objective, "external Word," to that degree the incarnate Word, the historical Jesus, becomes a wax nose for the preferences of every generation. Luther had one weapon with which to rescue the incarnate Word form being sold in the markets of Wittenberg. He drove out the money changers — the indulgence sellers — with the whip of the "external Word," the Book. When he posted the 95 theses on October 31, 1517, number 45 read, "Christians should be taught that he who sees someone needy but looks past him, and buys an indulgence instead, receives not the pope's remission but God's wrath."9 That blow fell from the Book — from the story of the Good Samaritan and from the second great commandment in the Book, the "external Word." And without the Book there would be no blow. And the incarnate Word would be everybody's clay toy. So precisely for the sake of the incarnate Word Luther exalts the written Word, the "external Word." Where Christ Is Clear

It is true that the church needs to see the Lord in his earthly talking and walking on the earth. Our faith is rooted in that decisive revelation in history. But Luther reasserted that this seeing happens through a written record. The incarnate Word is revealed to us in a Book.10 Is it not remarkable the Spirit in Luther's day, and in our day, is virtually silent about the incarnate Lord — except in amplifying the glory of the Lord through the written record of the incarnate Word?

Neither the Roman church nor charismatic prophets claimed that the Spirit of the Lord narrated to them untold events of the historical Jesus. This is astonishing. Of all the claims to authority over the "external Word," (by the pope), and along-side the "external Word" (by the prophets), none of them brings forth new information about the incarnate life and ministry of Jesus. Rome will dare to add facts to the life of Mary (for example, the immaculate conception11), but not to the life of Jesus. Charismatic prophets will announce new movements of the Lord in the sixteenth century, and in our day, but none seems to report a new parable or a new miracle of the incarnate Word omitted from the Gospels. Neither Roman authority nor prophetic ecstasy adds to or deletes from the external record of the incarnate Word.12

Why is the Spirit so silent about the incarnate Word — even among those who encroach on the authority of the Book? The answer seems to be that it pleased God to reveal the incarnate Word to all succeeding generations through a Book, especially the Gospels. Luther put it like this: The

apostles themselves considered it necessary to put the New Testament into Greek and to bind it fast to that language, doubtless in order to preserve it for us safe and sound as in a sacred ark. For they foresaw all that was to come and now has come to pass, and knew that if it were contained only in one’s heads, wild and fearful disorder and confusion, and many various interpretations, fancies and doctrines would arise in the Church, which could be prevented and from which the plain man could be protected only by committing the New Testament to writing the language.13 The ministry of the internal Spirit does not nullify the ministry of the "external Word." He does not duplicate what is was designed to do. The Spirit glorifies the incarnate Word of the Gospels, but he does not re-narrate his words and deeds for the illiterate people or negligent pastors. The immense implication of this for the pastoral ministry is that we pastors are essentially brokers of the Word of God transmitted in a Book. We are fundamentally readers, and teachers and proclaimers of the message of the Book. And all of this is for the glory of the incarnate Word and by the power of the indwelling Spirit. But neither the indwelling Spirit nor the incarnate Word leads us away from the Book that Luther called "the external Word." Christ stands forth for our worship and our fellowship and our obedience from the "external Word." This is where we see the glory of God "in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). So it’s for the sake of Christ that the Spirit broods over the Book where Christ is clear, not over trances where he is obscure.

Chapter 2: Pathway to the Professorship The specific question that I want to try to answer with you is what difference this discovery of the Book made in the way Luther carried out his ministry of the Word. What can we learn from Luther at study? His entire professional life was lived as a professor in the University of Wittenberg. So it will be helpful to trace his life up to that point and then ask why a professor can be a helpful model for pastors.

Luther was born November 10, 1483 in Eisleben to a copper miner. His father had wanted him to enter the legal profession. And he was on the way to that vocation at the University. According to Heiko Oberman, "There is hardly any authenticated information about those first eighteen years which led Luther to the threshold of the University of Erfurt."14 In 1502 at the age of 19 he received his Bachelors degree, ranking, unimpressively, 30th of 57 in his class. In January, 1505 he received his Master of Arts at Erfurt and ranked second among 17 candidates. That summer the providential Damascus-like experience happened. On July 2, on the way home from law school, he was caught in a thunderstorm and hurled to the ground by lightening. He cried out, "Help me, St. Anne; I will become a monk!"15 He feared for his soul and did not know how to find safety in the gospel. So he took the next best thing, the monastery.

Fifteen days later, to his father’s dismay, he kept his vow. On July 17, 1505 he knocked at the gate of the Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt and asked the prior to accept him into the order. Later he said this choice was a flagrant sin — "not worth a farthing" because it was made against his father and out of fear. Then he added, "But how much good the merciful Lord has allowed to come of it!"

16 We see this kind of merciful providence over and over again in the history of the church, and it should protect us from the paralyzing effects of bad decisions in our past. God is not hindered in his sovereign designs from leading us, as he did Luther, out of blunders into fruitful lives of joy.

He was 21 years old when he became an Augustinian Monk. It would be 20 more years until he married Katharina von Bora on June 13, 1525. So there were 20 more years of wrestling with the temptations of a single man who had very powerful drives. But "in the monastery," he said, "I did

not think about women, money, or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow his grace on me. . . For I had strayed from faith and could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works."17 There was no theological gamesmanship in Luther's early studies. He said, "If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy."18 On Easter, April 3 (probably), 1507 he was ordained to the priesthood, and on May 2 he celebrated his first mass. He was so overwhelmed at the thought of God's majesty, he says, that he almost ran away. The prior persuaded him to continue. Oberman says that this incident is not isolated. A sense of the "mysterium tremendum," of the holiness of God, was to be characteristic of Luther throughout his life. It prevented pious routine from creeping into his relations with God and kept his Bible studies, prayers, or reading of the mass from declining into a mechanical matter of course: his ultimate concern in all these is the encounter with the living God.19 For two years Luther taught aspects of philosophy to the younger monks. He said later that teaching philosophy was like waiting for the real thing.20 In 1509 the real thing came and his beloved superior and counselor and friend, Johannes von Staupitz, admitted Luther to the Bible, that is, he allowed Luther to teach Bible instead of moral philosophy — Paul instead of Aristotle. Three years later on October 19, 1512, at the age of 28 Luther received his Doctor's degree in theology, and Staupitz turned over to him the chair in Biblical Theology at the University of Wittenberg which Luther held the rest of his life. So Luther was a university theology professor all his professional life. This causes us to raise the question whether he can really serve as any kind of model for pastors, or even understand what we pastors face in our kind of ministry. But that would be a mistake. At least three things unite him to our calling, as we will see.

Chapter 3: Why Should Pastors Listen to Luther?

1. He was more a preacher than any of us pastors.

He knew the burden and the pressure of weekly preaching. There were two churches in Wittenberg, the town church and the castle church. Luther was a regular preacher at the town church. He said, "If I could today become king or emperor, I would not give up my office as preacher." 21 He was driven by a passion for the exaltation of God in the Word. In one of his prayers he says, "Dear Lord God, I want to preach so that you are glorified. I want to speak of you, praise you, praise your name. Although I probably cannot make it turn out well, won't you make it turn out well?" 22 To feel the force of this commitment you have to realize that in the church in Wittenberg in those days there were no programs, but only worship and preaching; Sunday 5:00 AM worship with a sermon on the Epistle, 10:00 AM with a sermon on the Gospel, an afternoon message on the Old Testament or catechism. Monday and Tuesday sermons were on the Catechism; Wednesdays on Matthew; Thursdays and Fridays on the Apostolic letters; and Saturday on John.23

Luther was not the pastor of the town church. His friend, Johannes Bugenhagen, occupied that post from 1521 to 1558. But Luther shared the preaching virtually every week he was in town. He preached because the people of the town wanted to hear him and because he and his contemporaries understood his doctorate in theology to be a call to teach the word of God to the whole church. So Luther would often preach twice on Sunday and once during the week. Walther von Loewenich said in his biography, "Luther was one of the greatest preachers in the history of

Christendom. . . Between 1510 and 1546 Luther preached approximately 3,000 sermons. Frequently he preached several times a week, often two or more times a day."24 For example, in 1522 he preached 117 sermons in Wittenberg and 137 sermons the next year. In 1528 he preached almost 200 times, and from 1529 we have 121 sermons. So the average in those four years was one sermon every two-and-a-half days. As Fred Meuser says in his book on Luther's preaching, "Never a weekend off — he knows all about that. Never even a weekday off. Never any respite at all from preaching, teaching, private study, production, writing, counseling."25 That's his first link with us pastors. He knows the burden of preaching.

2. Like most pastors, Luther was a family man — at least from age 41 until his death at 62.

He knew the pressure and the heartache of having and rearing and losing children. Katie bore him six children in quick succession: Johannes (1526), Elisabeth (1527), Magdalena (1529), Martin (1531), Paul (1533), and Margaret (1534). Do a little computing here. The year between Elizabeth and Magdalena was the year he preached 200 times (more than once every other day). Add to this that Elisabeth died that year at eight-months old, and he kept on going under that pain. And lest we think Luther neglected the children, consider that on Sunday afternoons, often after preaching twice, Luther led the household devotions, which were virtually another worship service for an hour including the guests as well as the children.26 So Luther knew the pressures of being a public and pressured family man.

3. Luther was a churchman, not an ivory tower theological scholar.

He was not only part of almost all the controversies and conferences of his day, he was usually the leader. There was the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), the encounter with Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg (1518), the Leipzig Disputation, with John Eck and Andrew Karlstadt (1519), and the Diet of Augsburg (though he was not there in person, 1513).

Besides active personal involvement in church conferences, there was the unbelievable stream of publications that are all related to the guidance of the church. For example, in 1520, he wrote 133 works; in 1522, 130; in 1523, 183 (one every other day!), and just as many in 1524.27 He was the lightening rod for every criticism against the Reformation. "All flock to him, besieging his door hourly, trooped citizens, doctors, princes. Diplomatic enigmas were to be solved, knotty theological points were to be settled, the ethics of social life were to be laid down."28 With the breakdown of the medieval system of church life, a new way of thinking about church and the Christian life had to be developed. And in Germany the task fell in large measure to Martin Luther.

It is astonishing how he threw himself into the mundane matters of parish life. For example, when it was decided that "Visitors" from the state and university would be sent to each parish to assess the condition of the church and make suggestions for church life, Luther took it upon himself to write the guidelines: "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony." He addressed a broad array of practical issues. When he came to the the education of children he went so far as to dictate how the lower grades should be divided into three groups: pre-readers, readers, and advanced readers. Then he made suggestions for how to teach them.

"They shall first learn to read the primer in which are found the alphabet, the Lord's prayer, the Creed, and other prayers. When they have learned this they shall be given Donatus and Cato, to read Donatus and to expound Cato. The schoolmaster is to expound one or two verses at a time,

and the children are to repeat these at a later time, so that they thereby build up a vocabulary."29

I mention this simply to show that this university professor was intensely involved in trying to solve the most practical ministry problems from the cradle to the grave. He did not do his studying in the uninterrupted leisure of sabbaticals and long summers. He was constantly besieged and constantly at work. So I conclude, that though he was a university professor, there is reason we pastors should look at his work and listen to his words, in order to learn and be inspired for the ministry of the Word — the "external Word," the Book.

Chapter 4: Luther in His Study For Luther the importance of study was so interwoven with his discovery of the true gospel that he could never treat study as any other than utterly crucial and life-giving and history-shaping. For him study had been the gateway to the gospel and to the Reformation and to God. We take so much for granted today about the truth and about the Word that we can hardly imagine what it cost Luther to break through to the truth and sustain access to the Word. For Luther, study mattered. His life and the life of the church hung on it. We need to ask whether all the ground gained by Luther and the other reformers may be lost over time if we lose this passion for study, while assuming that truth will remain obvious and available. To see this intertwining of study and gospel let’s go back to the early years in Wittenberg. Luther dates the great discovery of the gospel in 1518 during his series of lectures on Psalms 30:1-12 He tells the story in his Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings. This account of the discovery is taken from that Preface written March 5, 1545, the year before his death. Watch for the references to his study of Scripture (italicized).

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans

. But up till then it was ... a single word in Chapter 1 [:17], "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word ’righteousness of God,’ which according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteous wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and trouble conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." There I began to understand [that] the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Here a totally other

face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory . . . And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word 'righteousness of God.' Thus that place in Paul was for me truth the gate to paradise.31

Notice how God was brining Luther to the light of the gospel of justification. Six sentences — all of them revealing the intensity of study and wrestling with the Biblical text:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans.

According to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically. (An approach to study from which he was breaking free.) I beat importunately upon Paul a that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words.

Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. That place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. The seeds of all Luther's study habits are there or clearly implied. What was it, then, that marked the man Luther at study?

Chapter 5: Six Characteristics of Luther in the Word 1. Luther came to elevate the biblical text itself far above all commentators or church fathers. This was not the conclusion of laziness. Melancthon, Luther's friend and colleague at Wittenberg, said that Luther knew his Dogmatics so well in the early days he could quote whole pages of Gabriel Biel (the standard Dogmatics text, published 1488) by heart.32 It wasn't lack of energy for the fathers and the philosophers; it was an overriding passion for the superiority of the Biblical text itself.

He wrote in 1533, "For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer."33 Oberman says Luther kept to that practice for a least ten years.34 The Bible had come to mean more to Luther than all the fathers and commentators.

"He who is well acquainted with the text of Scripture," Luther said in 1538, "is a distinguished theologian. For a Bible passage or text is of more value than the comments of four authors."35 In his Open Letter to the Christian Nobility Luther explained his concern: The writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that though them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures. As it is, however, we read them only to be absorbed in them and never come to the Scriptures. We are like men who study that sign-posts and never travel the road. The dear fathers wished by their writing, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought all to work and toil.36 The Bible is the pastor's vineyard, where he ought to work and toil. But, Luther complained in 1539, "The Bible is being buried by the wealth of commentaries, and the text is being neglected, although in every branch of learning they are the best who are well acquainted with the text."37 For Luther, this is no mere purist, allegiance to the sources. This is the testimony of a man who found life at the original spring in the mountain, not the secondary stream in the valley. For Luther it was a matter of life and death whether one studied the text of Scripture itself, or spent most of his time reading commentaries and secondary literature. Looking back on the early days of his

study of the Scriptures he said, When I was young, I read the Bible over and over and over again, and was so perfectly acquainted with it, that I could, in an instant, have pointed to any verse that might have been mentioned. I then read the commentators, but soon threw them aside, for I found therein many things my conscience could not approve, as being contrary to the sacred text. 'Tis always better to see with one's own eyes than with those of other people.38

Luther doesn't mean in all this that there is no place at all for reading other books. After all he wrote books. But he counsels us to make them secondary and make them few. As a slow reader myself, I find this advice very encouraging. He says, A student who does not want his labor wasted must so read and reread some good writer that the author is changed, as it were, into his flesh and blood. For a great variety of reading confuses and does not teach. It makes the student like a man who dwells everywhere and, therefore, nowhere in particular. Just as we do not daily enjoy the society of every one of our friends but only that of a chosen few, so it should also be in our studying.39 The number of theological books should . . . be reduced, and a selection should be made of the best of them; for many books do not make men learned, nor does much reading. But reading something good, and reading it frequently, however little it may be, is the practice that makes men learned in the Scripture and makes them pious besides.40 2. Luther had an intense and serious grappling with the very words of Paul and the other Biblical writers.

Instead of running to the commentaries and fathers he says, "I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted." This was not an isolated incident.

He told his students that the exegete should treat a difficult passage no differently than Moses did the rock in the desert, which he smote with his rod until water gushed out for his thirsty people.41 In other words, strike the text. "I beat importunately upon Paul." There is a great incentive in this beating on the text: "The Bible is a remarkable fountain: the more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst."42 In the summer and fall of 1526 Luther took up the challenge to lecture on Ecclesiastes to the small band of students who stayed behind in Wittenberg during the plague. "Solomon the preacher," he wrote to a friend, "is giving me a hard time, as though he begrudged anyone lecturing on him. But he must yield."43 That is what study was to Luther — taking a text the way Jacob took the angel of the Lord, and saying: "It must yield. I will hear and know the Word of God in this text for my soul and for the church!" That's how he broke through to the meaning of the "righteousness of God" in justification.

3. Luther considered reading Greek and Hebrew was one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities of the Reformation preacher.

Again the motive and conviction here are not academic commitments to high-level scholarship, but spiritual commitments to proclaiming and preserving a pure gospel.

Luther spoke against the backdrop of a thousand years of church darkness without the Word, when he said boldly, "It is certain that unless the languages remain, the Gospel must finally perish."44 He asks, "Do you inquire what use there is in learning the languages. . .? do you say, "We can read the Bible very well in German?'" And he answers,

Without languages we could not have received the gospel. Languages are the scabbard that contains the sword of the Spirit; they are the casket which contains the priceless jewels of antique

thought; they are the vessel that holds the wine; and as the gospel says, they are the baskets in which the loaves and fishes are kept to feed the multitude.

If we neglect the literature we shall eventually lose the gospel. . . No sooner did men cease to cultivate the languages than Christendom declined, even until it fell under the undisputed dominion of the pope. But no sooner was this torch relighted, than this papal owl fled with a shriek into congenial gloom. . . In former times the fathers were frequently mistaken, because they were ignorant of the languages and in our days there are some who, like the Waldenses, do not think the languages of any use; but although their doctrine is good, they have often erred in the real meaning of the sacred text; they are without arms against error, and I fear much that their faith will not remain pure.

45 The main issue was the preservation and the purity of the faith. Where the languages are not prized and pursued, care in biblical observation and biblical thinking and concern for truth decreases. It has to, because the tools to think otherwise are not present. This was an intensely real possibility for Luther because he had known it. He said, "If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the Word, I might have still remained a chained monk, engaged in quietly preaching Romish errors in the obscurity of a cloister; the pope, the sophists, and their anti-Christian empire would have remained unshaken."46 In other words, he attributes the breakthrough of the Reformation to the penetrating power of the original languages. The great linguistic event of Luther's time was the appearance of the Greek New Testament edited by Desiderius Erasmus. As soon as it appeared in the middle of the summer session of 1516 Luther got it and began to study it and use it in his lectures on Romans 9:1-33. He did this even though Erasmus was a theological adversary. Having the languages was such a treasure to Luther he would have gone to school with the devil in order to learn them.

He was convinced that many obstacles in study would be found everywhere without the help of the languages. "St. Augustine", he said, "is compelled to confess, when he writes in De Doctrina Christiana, that a Christian teacher who is to expound Scripture has need also of the Greek and Hebrew languages in addition to the Latin; otherwise it is impossible for him not to run into obstacles every where."47 And he was persuaded that knowing the languages would bring freshness and force to preaching. He said,

Though the faith and the Gospel may be proclaimed by simple preachers without the languages, such preaching is flat and tame, men grow at last wearied and disgusted and it falls to the ground. But when the preacher is versed in the languages, his discourse has freshness and force, the whole of Scripture is treated, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and words.48

Now that is a discouraging overstatement for many pastors who have lost their Greek and Hebrew. What I would say is that knowing the languages can make any devoted preacher a better preacher — more fresh, more faithful, more confident, more penetrating. But it is possible to preach faithfully without them — at least for a season. The test of our faithfulness to the Word, if we have lost our languages, is this: do we have a large enough concern for the church of Christ to promote their preservation and widespread teaching and use in the churches? Or do we, out of self-protection, minimize their importance because to do otherwise stings too badly?

I suspect that for many of us today Luther's strong words about our neglect and indifference are accurate when he says,

It is a sin and shame not to know our own book or to understand the speech and words of our God; it is a still greater sin and loss that we do not study languages, especially in these days when God is offering and giving us men and books and every facility and inducement to this study, and desires his Bible to be an open book. O how happy the dear fathers would have been if they had our opportunity to study the languages and come thus prepared to the Holy Scriptures! What great toil and effort it cost them to gather up a few crumbs, while we with half the labor — yes, almost without any labor at all—can acquire the whole loaf! O how their effort puts our indolence to shame.49 4. Luther modeled extraordinary diligence in spite of tremendous obstacles.

What he accomplished borders on the superhuman, and of course makes pygmies of us all. His job as professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg was full-time work of its own. He wrote theological treatises by the score: biblical, homiletical, liturgical, educational, devotional, and political, some of which have shaped Protestant church life for centuries. All the while he was translating the whole of Scriptures into German, a language that he helped to shape by that very translation. He carried on a voluminous correspondence, for he was constantly asked for advice and counsel. Travel, meetings, conferences, and colloquies were the order of the day. All the while he was preaching regularly to a congregation that he must have regarded as a showcase of the Reformation.50

We are not Luther and could never be no matter how hard we tried. But the point here is: do we work at our studies with rigor and diligence or are we slothful and casual about it, as if nothing really great is at stake? When he was just short of sixty years old he pleaded with pastors to be diligent and not lazy.

Some pastors and preachers are lazy and no good. They do not pray; they do not read; they do not search the Scripture. . . The call is: watch, study attend to reading. In truth you cannot read too much in Scripture; and what you read you cannot read too carefully, and what you read carefully you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well. . . The devil. . . the world. . . and our flesh are raging and raving against us. Therefore, dear sirs and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent. . . This evil. shameful time is not the season for being lazy, for sleeping and snoring.51

Commenting on Genesis 3:19, Luther says, "The household sweat is great; the political sweat is greater; the church sweat is the greatest."52 He responded once to those who do hard physical labor and consider the work of study a soft life.

Sure, it would be hard for me to sit "in the saddle." But then again I would like to see the horseman who could sit still for a whole day and gaze at a book without worrying or dreaming or think about anything else. Ask. . . a preacher. . . how much work it is to speak and preach. . .The pen is very light, that is true. . . But in this work the best part of the human body (the head), the noblest member (the tongue), and the highest work (speech) bear the brunt of the load and work the hardest, while in other kinds of work either the hand, the foot, the back or other members do the work alone so such a person can sing happily or make jokes freely which a sermon writer cannot do. Three fingers do it all. . . but the whole body and soul have to work at it.53

There is great danger, Luther says, in thinking we have ever gotten to a point when we fancy we don't need to study any more. "Let ministers daily pursue their studies with diligence and constantly busy themselves with them. . . Let them steadily keep on reading, teaching, studying, pondering, and meditating. Nor let them cease until they have discovered and are sure that they have taught the devil to death and have become more learned than God himself and all his saints"54 — which, of course, means never.

Luther knew that there was such a thing as overwork and damaging, counterproductive strain. But he clearly preferred to err on the side of overwork than under-work. We see this in 1532 when he wrote, "A person should work in such a way that he remains well and does no injury to his body. We should not break our heads at work and injure our bodies. . . I myself used to do such things, and I have racked my brains because I still have not overcome the bad habit of overworking. Nor shall I overcome it as long as I live."55

I don't know if the apostle Paul would have made the same confession at the end of his life. But he did say, "I worked harder than any of [the other apostles]" (1 Corinthians 15:10). And in comparison to the false apostles he said, "Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death" (2 Corinthians 11:23). So it's not surprising that Luther would strive to follow his dear Paul in "far more labors."

5. For Luther, trials make a theologian — temptation and affliction are the hermeneutical touchstones.

Luther notices in Psalms 119:1-176 that the psalmist not only prayed and meditated over the Word of God in order to understand it; he also suffered in order to understand it. Psalms 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep thy word. . . 71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes." An indispensable key to understanding the Scriptures is suffering in the path of righteousness.

Thus Luther said: "I want you to know how to study theology in the right way. I have practiced this method myself ... Here you will find three rules. They are frequently proposed throughout Psalm [119] and run thus: Oration, meditatio, tentatio (Prayer, meditation, trial).56 And trials (Anfechtungen) he called the "touchstone." "[They] teach you not only to know and understand but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is: it is wisdom supreme."57

He proved the value of trials over and over again in his own experience. "For as soon as God's Word becomes known through you," he says, "the devil will afflict you will make a real doctor of you, and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God's Word. For I myself. . . owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing, and frightening me through the devil's raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I should never have reached."58

Suffering was woven into life for Luther. Keep in mind that from 1521 on Luther lived under the ban of the empire. The emperor Charles V said, "I have decided to mobilize everything against Luther: my kingdoms and dominions, my friends, my body, my blood and my soul."59 He could be legally killed, except where he was protected by his prince.

He endured relentless slander of the most cruel kind. He once observed, "If the Devil can do nothing against the teachings, he attacks the person, lying, slandering, cursing, and ranting at him. Just as the papists' Beelzebub did to me when he could not subdue my Gospel, he wrote that I was possessed by the Devil, was a changeling, my beloved mother a whore and bath attendant."

60 Physically he suffered from excruciating kidney stones and headaches with buzzing in his ears and ear infections and incapacitating constipation — "I nearly gave up the ghost — and now, bathed in blood, can find no peace. What took four days to heal immediately tears open again."61

It's not surprising then that emotionally and spiritually he would undergo the most horrible struggles. For example, in a letter to Melancthon on August 2, 1527, he writes, "For more than a week I have been thrown back and forth in death and Hell; my whole body feels beaten, my limbs are still trembling. I almost lost Christ completely, driven about on the waves and storms of despair and blasphemy against God. But because of the intercession of the faithful, God began to take mercy on me and tore my soul from the depths of Hell.62 On the outside, to many, he looked invulnerable. But those close to him knew the tentatio. Again he wrote to Melancthon from the Wartburg castle on July 13, 1521, while he was supposedly working feverishly on the translation of the New Testament:

I sit here at ease, hardened and unfeeling — alas! praying little, grieving little for the Church of God, burning rather in the fierce fires of my untamed flesh. It comes to this: I should be afire in the spirit; in reality I am afire in the flesh, with lust, laziness, idleness, sleepiness. It is perhaps because you have all ceased praying for me that God has turned away from me . . . For the last eight days I have written nothing, nor prayed nor studied, partly from self-indulgence, partly from another vexatious handicap [constipation and piles] . . . I really cannot stand it any longer . . . Pray for me, I beg you, for in my seclusion here I am submerged in sins.63

These were the trials he said made him a theologian. These experiences were as much a part of his exegetical labors as were his Greek lexicon. This has caused me to think twice before I begrudge the trials of my ministry. How often I am tempted to think that the pressures and conflicts and frustrations are simply distractions from the business of study and understanding. Luther (and Psalms 119:71) teach us to see it all another way. That stressful visit that interrupted your study may well be the very lens through which the text will open to you as never before. Tentatio — trial, the thorn in the flesh — is Satan's unwitting contribution to our becoming good theologians. But at one point Luther confessed that in such circumstances faith "exceeds my powers."64 6. Luther emphasized prayer and reverent dependence on the all-sufficiency of God.

Here the theology and methodology of Luther become almost identical. In typical paradoxical form, Luther seems to take back almost everything he has said about study when he writes in 1518, That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it please God to accomplish something for his glory — not for yours or any other person's — he very graciously grant you a true understanding of his words. For no master of the divine words exists except the Author of these words, as he says: "They shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45). You must, therefore, completely despair of your own industry and ability and rely solely on the inspiration of the Spirit.65 But for Luther that does not mean leaving the "external Word" in mystical reverie, but bathing all our work in prayer, and casting ourselves so on God that he enters and sustains and prospers all our study.

Since the Holy Writ wants to be dealt with in fear and humility and penetrated more by studying [!] with pious prayer than with keenness of intellect, therefore it is impossible for those who rely only on their intellect and rush into Scripture with dirty feet, like pigs, as though Scripture were merely a sort of human knowledge not to harm themselves and others whom they instruct.66 Again he sees the psalmist in Psalms 119:1-176 not only suffering and meditating but praying again and again.

Verse 18, Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law. Verse 27, Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes. Verse 23, Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law. Verse 35, Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it. Verse 36, Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, and not to dishonest gain. Verse 37, Revive me in Thy ways. So he concludes that the true biblical way to study the Bible will be saturated with prayer and self-doubt and God-reliance moment by moment:

You should completely despair of your own sense and reason, for by these you will not attain the goal . . . Rather kneel down in your private little room and with sincere humility and earnestness pray God through his dear Son, graciously to grant you his Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you and give you understanding.67

Luther's emphasis on prayer in study is rooted in his theology, and here is where his methodology and his theology become one. He was persuaded from Romans 8:7 and elsewhere that "The natural mind cannot do anything godly. It does not perceive the wrath of God, there cannot rightly fear him. It does not see the goodness of God, therefore cannot trust or believe in him either. Therefore [!] we should constantly pray that God will bring forth his gifts in us."68 All our study is futile without the work of God overcoming our blindness and hardheartedness. At the heart of Luther's theology was a total dependence on the freedom of God's omnipotent grace rescuing powerless man from the bondage of the will. His book by that name, The Bondage of the Will, published in 1525, was an answer to Erasmus's book, The Freedom of the Will. Luther regarded this one book of his — The Bondage of the Will — as his "best theological book, and the only one in that class worthy of publication."69 To understand Luther's theology and his methodology of study it is extremely important to recognize that he conceded that Erasmus, more than any other opponent, had realized that the powerlessness of man before God, not the indulgence controversy or purgatory, was the central question of the Christian faith. Man is powerless to justify himself, powerless to sanctify himself, powerless to study as he ought and powerless to trust God to do anything about this.

Erasmus' exaltation of man's will as free to overcome its own sin and bondage was, in Luther's mind, an assault on the freedom of God's grace and therefore on the very gospel itself. In his summary of faith in 1528 he writes,

I condemn and reject as nothing but error all doctrines which exalt our "free will" as being directly opposed to this mediation and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. For since, apart from Christ, sin and death are our masters and the devil is our god and prince, there can be no strength or power, no wit or wisdom, by which we can fit or fashion ourselves for righteousness and life. On the contrary, blinded and captivated, we are bound to be the subjects of Satan and sin, doing and thinking what pleases him and is opposed to God and his commandments.70 All Freedom, Power, and Grace For Luther the issue of man's bondage to sin and his moral inability to believe or make himself right — including the inability to study rightly — was the root issue of the Reformation. The

freedom of God, and therefore the freedom of the gospel and therefore the glory of God and the salvation of men were at stake in this controversy. Therefore Luther loved the message of The Bondage of the Will, ascribing all freedom and power and grace to God, and all powerlessness and dependency to man. In his explanation of Galatians 1:1-12 he recounted:

I recall that at the beginning of my cause Dr. Staupitz . . . said to me: It pleases me that the doctrine which you preach ascribes the glory and everything to God alone and nothing to man; for to God (that is clearer than the sun) one cannot ascribe too much glory, goodness, etc. This word comforted and strengthened me greatly at the time. And it is true that the doctrine of the Gospel takes all glory, wisdom, righteousness, etc., from men and ascribes them to the Creator alone, who makes everything out of nothing.71 This is why prayer is the root of Luther's approach to studying God's word. Prayer is the echo of the freedom and sufficiency of God in the heart of powerless man. It is the way he conceived of his theology and the way he pursued his studies. And it is the way he died. At 3:00 AM on February 18, 1546, Luther died. His last recorded words were, "Wir sein Bettler. Hoc est verum." "We are beggars. This is true."72 God is free — utterly free — in his grace. And we are beggars — pray-ers. That is how we live, and that is how we study, so that God gets the glory and we get the grace.

Notes Chapter 1: Luther Discovers the Book

1Thomas Muenzer, seven years Luther's junior, became the preacher the Church of St. Mary in Zwickau. "He. . . joined a union of fanatics, mostly weavers, who, with Nikolaus Storch at their head, had organized themselves under the leadership of twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples, and held secret conventicles, in which they pretended to receive divine revelations." Philip Schaff, ed. Religious Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888), 1596. For Luther's response see A. G. Dickens and Alun Davies, eds., Documents of Modern History: Martin Luther, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 75–79.

2Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, (New York: Doubleday, 1992, orig. 1982), 193. Professor Steven Ozment of Harvard calls Heiko Oberman "the world's foremost authority on Luther."

3Ibid., 204.

4Ewald M. Plass, compiler, What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1359 (emphasis added).

5What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 62.

6Ibid.

7Ibid., 1355.

8Ibid., 913.

9Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, 77.

10It is true that "flesh and blood" cannot see the glory of the Lord (Mathew 16:17). Only the Spirit of God can open the eyes of the heart to see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). I am not denying that. I only mean, with Luther, that the Spirit does not reveal the Son apart

from the "external Word."

11Pope Pius IX announced the doctrine on December 8, 1854 with these words, "That the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Christ, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin." Philip Schaff, ed. Religious Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888), 1064.

12Critical historians do this. They use various historical criteria to deny that such and such saying of Jesus was not really said by him, or such and such a miracle was not really done by him. But none of these historians claim that they are retelling the story of the incarnate Word because of the inspiration of the Spirit. In other words my point here is not that there are no attacks on the historical Jesus, but that the role of the Spirit is not to replace the role of the Book, and that the true Incarnate Word is revealed not by the Spirit apart from the Word.

13Hugh T. Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943) 17.

14Oberman, 102.

Chapter 2: The Pathway to the Professorship

15Ibid., 92.

16Ibid., 125.

17Ibid., 128.

18Ibid., 315.

19Ibid., 137.

20Ibid., 145.

Chapter: 3 Why Should Pastors Listen to Luther?

21Fred W. Meuser., Luther the Preacher, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 39.

22Meuser, Luther the Preacher, 51.

23Ibid., 37–38.

24Walther von Loewenich, Luther: the Man and His Work, trans. by Lawrence W. Denef, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986, orig. 1982), 353.

25Meuser, 27.

26Ibid., 38.

27W. Carlos Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, (New York: American Tract Society, 1866), 473.

28Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, 272.

29Conrad Bergendoff, editor, Church and Ministry II, vol. 40, Luther's Works, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 315–316.

Chapter 4: Luther in His Study

30John Dillenberger, ed. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), xvii.

31Dillenberger, ed. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, 11-12.

Chapter 5: Six Characteristics of Luther in the Word

32Oberman, 138.

33What Luther Says, Vol. 1, 83.

34Oberman, 173.

35What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, 1355 36Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, 13.

37What Luther Says, Vol. 1, 97.

38Kerr, 16.

39What Luther Says, Vol. 1, 112

40Ibid., 113.

41Oberman, 224.

42What Luther Saysy, Vol. 1, 67

43Heinrich Bornkamm, trans. by E. Theodore Bachmann, Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, orig. 1979), 564.

44Kerr, 17.

45W. Carlos Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, pp. 474-475.

46Ibid., 474.

47What Luther Says, Vol. 1, 95.

48Kerr, 148.

49Meuser,43.

50Ibid., 27.

51Ibid., 40–41.

52What Luther Says, Vol. 2, 951.

53Meuser, 44–45.

54What Luther Says, Vol. 2, 927.

55Ibid., 1496–1497.

6Ibid., 1359.

57Ibid., 1360.

58Ibid.

59Oberman, 29.

60Ibid., 88.

61Ibid., 328.

62Ibid., 323.

63E. G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, editors, Martin Luther: Documents of Modern History, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1970), 72–73.

64Oberman, 323.

65What Luther Says, Vol. 3, 77.

66Ibid., 78.

67 What Luther Says, Vol. 3, 1359.

68Conrad Bergendoff, editor, Church and Ministry II, vol. 40, Luther's Works, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 301–302.

69Dillenberger, 167.

70What Luther Says, Vol. 3, 1376–1377.

71Ibid., 1374.

72Oberman, 324. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 77

05.21. Martin Luther: Lessons from His Life and Labor

Martin Luther: Lessons from His Life and Labor Luther Discovers the Book

One of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation -especially of Martin Luther- was that the Word of God comes to us in a form of a Book. In other words Luther grasped this powerful fact: God preserves the experience of salvation and holiness from generation to generation by means of a Book of revelation, not a bishop in Rome, and not the ecstasies of Thomas Muenzer and the Zwickau prophets (see note 1). The Word of God comes to us in a Book. That rediscovery shaped Luther and the Reformation.

One of Luther's arch-opponents in the Roman Church, Sylvester Prierias, wrote in response to Luther's 95 theses: "He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic" (see note 2). In other words, the Church and the pope are the authoritative deposit of salvation and the Word of God; and the Book is derivative and secondary. "What is new in Luther," Heiko Oberman says, "is the notion of absolute obedience to the Scriptures against any authorities; be they popes or councils" (see note 3). In other words the saving, sanctifying, authoritative Word of God comes to us in a Book. The implications of this simple observation are tremendous. In 1539, commenting on Psalms 119:1-176, Luther wrote, "In this psalm David always says that he will speak, think, talk, hear, read, day and night constantly—but about nothing else than God's Word and Commandments. For God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external Word" (see note 4). This phrase is extremely important. The "external Word" is the Book. And the saving, sanctifying, illuminating Spirit of God, he says, comes to us through this "external Word."

Luther calls it the "external Word" to emphasize that it is objective, fixed, outside ourselves, and therefore unchanging. It is a Book. Neither ecclesiastical hierarchy nor fanatical ecstasy can replace it or shape it. It is "external," like God. You can take or leave it. But you can't make it other than what it is. It is a book with fixed letters and words and sentences. And Luther said with resounding forcefulness in 1545, the year before he died, "Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture" (see note 5). Earlier he had said in his lectures on Genesis, "The Holy Spirit himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this book" (see note 6). One of the implications of the fact that the Word of God comes to us in a book is that the theme of this conference is "The Pastor and His Study," not "The Pastor and His Seance," or "The Pastor and His Intuition," or "The Pastor and His Religious Multi-perspectivalism." The Word of God that saves and sanctifies, from generation to generation, is preserved in a Book. And therefore at the heart of every pastor's work is book-work. Call it reading, meditation, reflection, cogitation, study, exegesis, or whatever you will—a large and central part of our work is to wrestle God's meaning from a Book, and proclaim it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luther knew, that some would stumble over the sheer conservatism of this simple, unchangeable fact. God's Word is fixed in a book. He knew then, as we know today, that many say this assertion

nullifies or minimizes the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in giving life and light. Luther would, I think, say, "Yes, that might happen." One might argue that emphasizing the brightness of the sun nullifies the surgeon who takes away blindness. But most people would not agree with that. Certainly not Luther.

He said in 1520, "Be assured that no one will make a doctor of the Holy Scripture save only the Holy Ghost from heaven" (see note 7). Luther was a great lover of the Holy Spirit. And his exaltation of the Book as the "external Word" did not belittle the Spirit. On the contrary it elevated the Spirit's great gift to Christendom. In 1533 he said, "The Word of God is the greatest, most necessary, and most important thing in Christendom" (see note 8). Without the "external Word" we would not know one spirit from the other, and the objective personality of the Holy Spirit himself would be lost in a blur of subjective expressions. Cherishing the Book implied to Luther that the Holy Spirit is a beautiful person to be known and loved, not a buzz to be felt.

Another objection to Luther's emphasis on the Book is that it minimizes the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ himself. Luther says the opposite is true. To the degree that the Word of God is disconnected from the objective, "external Word," to that degree the incarnate Word, the historical Jesus, becomes a wax nose for the preferences of every generation. Luther had one weapon with which to rescue the incarnate Word form being sold in the markets of Wittenberg. He drove out the money changers—the indulgence sellers—with the whip of the "external Word," the Book. When he posted the 95 theses on October 31, 1517, number 45 read, "Christians should be taught that he who sees someone needy but looks past him, and buys an indulgence instead, receives not the pope's remission but God's wrath" (see note 9). That blow fell from the Book—from the story of the Good Samaritan and from the second great commandment in the Book, "external Word." And without the Book there would be no blow. And the incarnate Word would be everybody's clay toy. So precisely for the sake of the incarnate Word Luther exalts the written Word, the "external Word."

It is true that the church needs to see the Lord in his earthly talking and walking on the earth. Our faith is rooted in that decisive revelation in history. But Luther reasserted that this seeing happens through a written record. The incarnate Word is revealed to us in a Book (see note 10). Is it not remarkable the Spirit in Luther's day, and in our day, is virtually silent about the incarnate Lord—except in amplifying the glory of the Lord through the written record of the incarnate Word.

Neither the Roman church nor charismatic prophets claimed that the Spirit of the Lord narrated to them untold events of the historical Jesus. This is astonishing. Of all the claims to authority over the "external Word," (by the pope), and along-side the "external Word" (by the prophets), none of them brings forth new information about the incarnate life and ministry of Jesus. Rome will dare to add facts to the life of Mary [for example, the immaculate conception (see note 11)], but not to the life of Jesus. Charismatic prophets will announce new movements of the Lord in the sixteenth century, and in our day, but none seems to report a new parable or a new miracle of the incarnate Word omitted from the Gospels. Neither Roman authority nor prophetic ecstasy adds to or deletes from the external record of the incarnate Word (see note 12).

Why is the Spirit so silent about the incarnate Word—even among those who encroach on the authority of the Book? The answer seems to be that it pleased God to reveal the incarnate Word to all succeeding generations through a Book, especially the Gospels. Luther put it like this: The

apostles themselves considered it necessary to put the New Testament into Greek and to bind it fast to that language, doubtless in order to preserve it for us safe and sound as in a sacred ark. For they foresaw all that was to come and now has come to pass, and knew that if it were contained only in one's heads, wild and fearful disorder and confusion, and many various interpretations, fancies and doctrines would arise in the Church, which could be prevented and from which the plain man could be protected only by committing the New Testament to writing the language (see note 13). The ministry of the internal Spirit does not nullify the ministry of the "external Word." He does not duplicate what is was designed to do. The Spirit glorifies the incarnate Word of the Gospels, but he does not re-narrate his words and deeds for the illiterate people or negligent pastors. The immense implication of this for the pastoral ministry is that we pastors are essentially brokers of the Word of God transmitted in a Book. We are fundamentally readers, and teachers and proclaimers of the message of the Book. And all of this is for the glory of the incarnate Word and by the power of the indwelling Spirit. But neither the indwelling Spirit nor the incarnate Word leads us away from the Book that Luther called "the external Word." Christ stands forth for our worship and our fellowship and our obedience from the "external Word." This is where we see the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). So it's for the sake of Christ that the Spirit broods over the Book where Christ is clear, not over trances where he is obscure. The specific question that I want to try to answer with you is what difference this discovery of the Book made in the way Luther carried out his ministry of the Word. What can we learn from Luther at study? His entire professional life was lived as a professor in the University of Wittenberg. So it will be helpful to trace his life up to that point and then ask why a professor can be a helpful model for pastors. The Pathway to the Professorship

Luther was born November 10, 1483 in Eisleben to a copper miner. His father had wanted him to enter the legal profession. And he was on the way to that vocation at the University. According to Heiko Oberman, "There is hardly any authenticated information about those first eighteen years which led Luther to the threshold of the University of Erfurt" (see note 14). In 1502 at the age of 19 he received his Bachelors degree, ranking, unimpressively, 30th of 57 in his class. In January, 1505 he received his Master of Arts at Erfurt and ranked second among 17 candidates. That summer the providential Damascus-like experience happened. On July 2, on the way home from law school, he was caught in a thunderstorm and hurled to the ground by lightening. He cried out, "Help me, St. Anne; I will become a monk" (see note 15). He feared for his soul and did not know how to find safety in the gospel. So he took the next best thing, the monastery.

Fifteen days later, to his father's dismay, he kept his vow. On July 17, 1505 he knocked at the gate of the Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt and asked the prior to accept him into the order. Later he said this choice was a flagrant sin—"not worth a farthing" because it was made against his father and out of fear. Then he added, "But how much good the merciful Lord has allowed to come of it!" (see note 16). We see this kind of merciful providence over and over again in the history of the church, and it should protect us form the paralyzing effects of bad decisions in our past. God is not hindered in his sovereign designs from leading us, as he did Luther, out of blunders into fruitful lives of joy.

He was 21 years old when he became an Augustinian Monk. It would be 20 more years until he married Katharina von Bora on June 13, 1525. So there were 20 more years of wrestling with the temptations of a single man who had very powerful drives. But "in the monastery," he said, "I did

not think about women, money, or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow His grace on me ... For I had strayed from faith and could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works" (see note 17). There was no theological gamesmanship in Luther's early studies. He said, "If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy" (see note 18). On Easter, April 3 (probably), 1507 he was ordained to the priesthood, and on May 2 he celebrated his first mass. He was so overwhelmed at the thought of God's majesty, he says, that he almost ran away. The prior persuaded him to continue. Oberman says that this incident is not isolated. A sense of the "mysterium tremendum," of the holiness of God, was to be characteristic of Luther throughout his life. It prevented pious routine from creeping into his relations with God and kept his Bible studies, prayers, or reading of the mass from declining into a mechanical matter of course: his ultimate concern in all these is the encounter with the living God (see note 19). For two years Luther taught aspects of philosophy to the younger monks. He said later that teaching philosophy was like waiting for the real thing (see note 20). In 1509 the real thing came and his beloved superior and counselor and friend, Johannes von Staupitz, admitted Luther to the Bible," that is, he allowed Luther to teach Bible instead of moral philosophy— Paul instead of Aristotle. Three years later on October 19, 1512, at the age of 28 Luther received his Doctor's degree in theology, and Staupitz turned over to him the chair in Biblical Theology at the University of Wittenberg which Luther held the rest of his life. So Luther was a university theology professor all his professional life. This causes us to raise the question whether he can really serve as any kind of model for pastors, or even understand what we pastors face in our kind of ministry. But that would be a mistake. At least three things unite him to our calling.

Why Should Pastors Listen to Luther?

1. He was more a preacher than any of us pastors.

He knew the burden and the pressure of weekly preaching. There were two churches in Wittenberg, the town church and the castle church. Luther was a regular preacher at the town church. He said, "If I could today become king or emperor, I would not give up my office as preacher" (see note 21). He was driven by a passion for the exaltation of God in the Word. In one of his prayers he says, "Dear Lord God, I want to preach so that you are glorified. I want to speak of you, praise you, praise your name. Although I probably cannot make it turn out well, won't you make it turn out well?" (see note 22). To feel the force of this commitment you have to realize that in the church in Wittenberg in those days there were no programs, but only worship and preaching; Sunday 5:00 a.m. worship with a sermon on the Epistle, 10:00 a.m. with a sermon on the Gospel, an afternoon message on the Old Testament or catechism. Monday and Tuesday sermons were on the Catechism; Wednesdays on Matthew; Thursdays and Fridays on the Apostolic letters; and Saturday on John (see note 23).

Luther was not the pastor of the town church. His friend, Johannes Bugenhagen was from 1521 to 1558. But Luther shared the preaching virtually every week he was in town. He preached because the people of the town wanted to hear him and because he and his contemporaries understood his doctorate in theology to be a call to teach the word of God to the whole church. So Luther would often preach twice on Sunday and once during the week. Walther von Loewenich said in his biography, "Luther was one of the greatest preachers in the history of Christendom ... Between

1510 and 1546 Luther preached approximately 3,000 sermons. Frequently he preached several times a week, often two or more times a day" (see note 24). For example, in 1522 he preached 117 sermons in Wittenberg and 137 sermons the next year. In 1528 he preached almost 200 times, and from 1529 we have 121 sermons. So the average in those four years was one sermon every two-and-a-half days. As Fred Meuser says in his book on Luther's preaching, "Never a weekend off—he knows all about that. Never even a weekday off. Never any respite at all from preaching, teaching, private study, production, writing, counseling" (see note 25). That's his first link with us pastors. He knows the burden of preaching.

2. Like most pastors, Luther was a family man – at least from age 41 until his death at 62.

He knew the pressure and the heartache of having and rearing and losing children. Katie bore him six children in quick succession: Johannes (1526), Elisabeth (1527), Magdalena (1529), Martin (1531), Paul (1533), and Margaret (1534). Do a little computing here. The year between Elizabeth and Magdalena was the year he preached 200 times (more than once every other day). Add to this that Elizabeth died that year at eight months old, and he kept on going under that pain. And lest we think Luther neglected the children, consider that on Sunday afternoons, often after preaching twice, Luther led the household devotions, which were virtually another worship service for an hour including the guests as well as the children (see note 26). So Luther knew the pressures of being a public and pressured family man.

3. Luther was a churchman, not an ivory tower theological scholar.

He was not only part of almost all the controversies and conferences of his day, he was usually the leader. There was the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), the encounter with Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg (1518), the Leipzig Disputation, with John Eck and Andrew Karlstadt (1519), and the Diet of Augsburg (though he was not there in person, (1513).

Besides active personal involvement in church conferences, there was the unbelievable stream of publications that are all related to the guidance of the church. For example, in 1520, he wrote 133 works; in 1522, 130; in 1523, 183 (one every other day!), and just as many in 1524 (see note 27). He was the lightening rod for every criticism against the Reformation. "All flock to him, besieging his door hourly, trooped citizens, doctors, princes. Diplomatic enigmas were to be solved, knotty theological points were to be settled, the ethics of social life were to be laid down" (see note 28). With the breakdown of the medieval system of church life, a while new way of thinking about church and the Christian life had to be developed. And in Germany the task fell in large measure to Martin Luther. It is astonishing how he threw himself into the mundane matters of parish life. For example, when it was decided that "Visitors" from the state and university would be sent to each parish to assess the condition of the church and make suggestions for church life, Luther took it upon himself to write the guidelines:"Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony." He addressed a broad array of practical issues. When he came to the the education of children he went so far as to dictate how the lower grades should be divided into three groups: pre-readers, readers and advanced readers. then he made suggestions for how to teach them.

"They shall first learn to read the primer in which are found the alphabet, the Lord's prayer, the Creed, and other prayers. When they have learned this they shall be given Donatus and Cato, to read Donatus and to expound Cato. The schoolmaster is to expound one or two verses at a time,

and the children are to repeat these at a later time, so that they thereby build up a vocabulary" (see note 29).

I mention this simply to show that this university professor was intensely involved in trying to solve the most practical ministry problems from the cradle to the grave. He did not do his studying in the uninterrupted leisure of sabbaticals and long summers. He was constantly besieged and constantly at work. So I conclude, that though he was a university professor, there is reason we pastors should look at his work and listen to his words, in order to learn and be inspired for the ministry of the Word—the "external Word," the Book.

Luther at Study: The Difference the Book Made For Luther the importance of study was so interwoven with his discovery of the true gospel that he could never treat study as any other than utterly crucial and life-giving and history-shaping. For him study had been the gateway to the gospel and to the Reformation and to God. We take so much for granted today about the truth and about the Word that we can hardly imagine what it cost Luther to break through to the truth and sustain access to the Word. For Luther study mattered. His life and the life of the church hung on it. We need to ask whether all the ground gained by Luther and the other reformers may be lost over time if we lose this passion for study, while assuming that truth will remain obvious and available. To see this intertwining of study and gospel let’s go back to the early years in Wittenberg. Luther dates the great discovery of the gospel in 1518 during his series of lectures on Psalms (see note 30). He tells the story in his

Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings. This account of the discovery is taken from that Preface written March 5, 1545, the year before his death. Watch for the references to his study of Scripture (italicized).

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was ... a single word in Chapter 1 [:17], ’In it the righteousness of God is revealed,’ that had stood in my way. For I hated that word ’righteousness of God,’ which according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteous wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and trouble conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." There I began to understand [that] the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I

was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Here a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory ... And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word 'righteousness of God.' Thus that place in Paul was for me truth the gate to paradise (see note 31).

Notice how God was brining Luther to the light of the gospel of justification. Six sentences—all of them revealing the intensity of study and wrestling with the Biblical text:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans.

According to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically. (An approach to study from which he was breaking free.) I beat importunately upon Paul a that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words.

Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. That place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. The seeds of all Luther's study habits are there or clearly implied. What was it, then, that marked the man Luther at study?

1. Luther came to elevate the Biblical text itself far above all commentators or church fathers. This was not the conclusion of laziness. Melancthon, Luther's friend and colleague at Wittenberg, said that Luther knew his Dogmatics so well in the early days he could quote whole pages of Gabriel Biel (the standard Dogmatics text, published 1488) by heart (see note 32). It wasn't lack of energy for the fathers and the philosophers; it was an overriding passion for the superiority of the Biblical text itself.

He wrote in 1533, "For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer" (see note 33). Oberman says Luther kept to that practice for a least ten years (see note 34). The Bible had come to mean more to Luther than all the fathers and commentators.

"He who is well acquainted with the text of Scripture," Luther said in 1538, "is a distinguished theologian. For a Bible passage or text is of more value than the comments of four authors" (see note 35). In his Open Letter to the Christian Nobility Luther explained his concern: The writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that though them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures. As it is, however, we read them only to be absorbed in them and never come to the Scriptures. We are like men who study that sign-posts and never travel the road. The dear fathers wished by their writing, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought all to work and toil (see note 36). The Bible is the pastors vineyard, where he ought to work and toil. But, Luther complained in 1539, "The Bible is being buried by the wealth of commentaries, and the text is being neglected, although in every branch of learning they are the best who are well acquainted with the text" (see note 37). For Luther, this is no mere purist, allegiance to the sources. This is the testimony of a man who found life at the original spring in the mountain, not the secondary stream in the valley. For Luther it was a matter of life and death whether one studied the text of Scripture

itself, or spent most of his time reading commentaries and secondary literature. Looking back on the early days of his study of the Scriptures he said, When I was young, I read the Bible over and over and over again, and was so perfectly acquainted with it, that I could, in an instant, have pointed to any verse that might have been mentioned. I then read the commentators, but soon threw them aside, for I found therein many things my conscience could not approve, as being contrary to the sacred text. 'Tis always better to see with one's own eyes than with those of other people (see note 38).

Luther doesn't mean in all this that there is no place at all for reading other books. After all he wrote books. But he counsels us to make them secondary and make them few. As a slow reader myself, I find this advice very encouraging. He says, A student who does not want his labor wasted must so read and reread some good writer that the author is changed, as it were, into his flesh and blood. For a great variety of reading confuses and does not teach. It makes the student like a man who dwells everywhere and, therefore, nowhere in particular. Just as we do not daily enjoy the society of every one of our friends but only that of a chosen few, so it should also be in our studying (see note 39). The number of theological books should ... be reduced, and a selection should be made of the best of them; for many books do not make men learned, nor does much reading. But reading something good, and reading it frequently, however little it may be, is the practice that makes men learned in the Scripture and makes them pious besides (see note 40).

2. This radical focus on the text of Scripture itself with secondary literature in secondary place leads Luther to an intense and serious grappling with the very words of Paul and the other Biblical writers.

Instead of running to the commentaries and fathers he says, "I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted." This was not an isolated incident.

He told his students that the exegete should treat a difficult passage no differently than Moses did the rock in the desert, which he smote with his rod until water gushed out for his thirsty people (see note 41). In other words, strike the text. "I beat importunately upon Paul." There is a great incentive in this beating on the text: "The Bible is a remarkable fountain: the more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst" (see note 42). In the summer and fall of 1526 Luther took up the challenge to lecture on Ecclesiastes to the small band of students who stayed behind in Wittenberg during the plague. "Solomon the preacher," he wrote to a friend, "is giving me a hard time, as though he begrudged anyone lecturing on him. But he must yield" (see note 43). That is what study was to Luther—taking a text the way Jacob took the angel of the Lord, and saying: "It must yield. I WILL hear and know the Word of God in this text for my soul and for the church!" That's how he broke through to the meaning of the "righteousness of God" in justification. And that is how he broke through tradition and philosophy again and again.

3. The power and preciousness of what Luther saw when he beat importunately upon Paul's language convinced him forever that reading Greek and Hebrew was one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities of the Reformation preacher.

Again the motive and conviction here are not academic commitments to high-level scholarship, but spiritual commitments to proclaiming and preserving a pure gospel.

Luther spoke against the backdrop of a thousand years of church darkness without the Word, when he said boldly, "It is certain that unless the languages remain, the Gospel must finally perish" (see note 44). He asks, "Do you inquire what use there is in learning the languages ...? do you say, 'We can read the Bible very well in German?'" And he answers,

Without languages we could not have received the gospel. Languages are the scabbard that contains the sword of the Spirit; they are the casket which contains the priceless jewels of antique thought; they are the vessel that holds the wine; and as the gospel says, they are the baskets in which the loaves and fishes are kept to feed the multitude.

If we neglect the literature we shall eventually lose the gospel ... No sooner did men cease to cultivate the languages than Christendom declined, even until it fell under the undisputed dominion of the pope. But no sooner was this torch relighted, than this papal owl fled with a shriek into congenial gloom ... In former times the fathers were frequently mistaken, because they were ignorant of the languages and in our days there are some who, like the Waldenses, do not think the languages of any use; but although their doctrine is good, they have often erred i the real meaning of the sacred text; they are without arms against error, and I fear much that their faith will not remain pure (see note 45). The main issue was the preservation and the purity of the faith. Where the languages are not prized and pursued, care in Biblical observation and Biblical thinking and concern for truth decreases. It has to, because the tools to think otherwise are not present. This was an intensely real possibility for Luther because he had known it. He said, "If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the word, I might have still remained a chained monk, engaged in quietly preaching Romish errors in the obscurity of a cloister; the pope, the sophists, and their anti-Christian empire would have remained unshaken" (see note 46). In other words, he attributes the breakthrough of the Reformation to the penetrating power of the original languages. The great linguistic event of Luther's time was the appearance of the Greek New Testament edited by Desiderius Erasmus. As soon as it appeared in the middle of the summer session of 1516 Luther got it and began to study it and use it in his lectures on Romans 9:1-33. He did this even though Erasmus was a theological adversary. Having the languages was such a treasure to Luther he would have gone to school with the devil in order to learn them.

He was convinced that many obstacles in study would be found everywhere without the help of the languages. "St. Augustine", he said, "is compelled to confess, when he writes in De Doctrina Christiana, that a Christian teacher who is to expound Scripture has need also of the Greek and Hebrew languages in addition to the Latin; otherwise it is impossible for him not to run into obstacles every where" (see note 47). And he was persuaded that knowing the languages would bring freshness and force to preaching. He said,

Though the faith and the Gospel may be proclaimed by simple preachers without the languages, such preaching is flat and tame, men grow at last wearied and disgusted and it falls to the ground. But when the preacher is versed in the languages, his discourse has freshness and force, the whole of Scripture is treated, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and words (see note 48).

Now that is a discouraging overstatement for many pastors who have lost their Greek and Hebrew. What I would say is that knowing the languages can make any devoted preacher a better

preacher—more fresh, more faithful, more confident, more penetrating. But it is possible to preach faithfully without them—at least for a season. The test of our faithfulness to the Word, is we have lost our languages, is this: do we have a large enough concern for the church of Christ to promote their preservation and widespread teaching and use in the churches? Or do we, out of self-protection, minimize their importance because to do otherwise stings too badly?

I suspect that for many of us today Luther's strong words about our neglect and indifference are accurate when he says,

It is a sin and shame not to know our own book or to understand the speech and words of our God; it is a still greater sin and loss that we do not study languages, especially in these days when God is offering and giving us men and books and every facility and inducement to this study, and desires his Bible to be an open book. O how happy the dear fathers would have been if they had our opportunity to study the languages and come thus prepared to the Holy Scriptures! What great toil and effort it cost them to gather up a few crumbs, while we with half the labor— yes, almost without any labor at all—can acquire the whole loaf! O how their effort puts our indolence to shame (see note 49).

4. This reference to "indolence" leads us to the next characteristic of Luther at study, namely, extraordinary diligence in spite of tremendous obstacles.

What he accomplished borders on the superhuman, and of course makes pygmies of us all. His job as professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg was full-time work of its own. He wrote theological treatises by the score: biblical, homiletical, liturgical, educational, devotional, and political, some of which have shaped Protestant church life for centuries. All the while he was translating the whole of Scriptures into German, a language that he helped to shape by that very translation. He carried on a voluminous correspondence, for he was constantly asked for advice and counsel. Travel, meetings, conferences, and colloquies were the order of the day. All the while he was preaching regularly to a congregation that he must have regarded as a showcase of the Reformation (see note 50).

We are not Luther and could never be not matter how hard we tried. But the point here is: do we work at our studies with rigor and diligence or are we slothful and casual about it, as if nothing really great is at stake? When he was just short of sixty years old he pleaded with pastors to be diligent and not lazy.

Some pastors and preachers are lazy and no good. They do not pray; they do not read; they do not search the Scripture ... The call is: watch, study attend to reading. In truth you cannot read too much in Scripture; and what you read you cannot read too carefully, and what you read carefully you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well ... The devil ... the world ... and our flesh are raging and raving against us. Therefore, dear sirs and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent ... This evil. shameful time is not the season for being lazy, for sleeping and snoring (see note 51).

Commenting on Genesis 3:19, Luther says, "The household sweat is great; the political sweat is greater; the church sweat is the greatest" (see note 52). He responded once to those who do hard physical labor and consider the work of study a soft life.

Sure, it would be hard for me to sit "in the saddle." But then again I would like to see the horseman who could sit still for a whole day and gaze at a book without worrying or dreaming or think about anything else. Ask ... a preacher ... how much work it is to speak and preach ... The pen is very light, that is true ... But in this work the best part of the human body (the head), the noblest member (the tongue), and the highest work (speech) bear the brunt of the load and work the hardest, while in other kinds of work either the hand, the foot, the back or other members do the work alone so such a person can sing happily or make jokes freely which a sermon writer cannot do. Three fingers do it all ... but the whole body and soul have to work at it (see note 53).

There is great danger, Luther says, in thinking we have ever gotten to a point when we fancy we don't need to study any more. "Let ministers daily pursue their studies with diligence and constantly busy themselves with them ... Let them steadily keep on reading, teaching, studying, pondering, and meditating. Nor let them cease until they have discovered and are sure that they have taught the devil to death and have become more learned than God himself and all His saints (see note 54)"—which, of course means never.

Luther knew that there was such a thing as overwork and damaging, counterproductive strain. But he clearly preferred to err on the side of overwork than under-work. We see this in 1532 when he wrote, "A person should work in such a way that he remains well and does no injury to his body. We should not break our heads at work and injure our bodies ... I myself used to do such things, and I have racked my brains because I still have not overcome the bad habit of overworking. Nor shall I overcome it as long as I live" (see note 55).

I don't know if the apostle Paul would have made the same confession at the end of his life. But he did say, "I worked harder than any of [the other apostles]" (1 Corinthians 15:10). And in comparison to the false apostles he said, "Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death" (2 Corinthians 11:23). So it's not surprising that Luther would strive to follow his dear Paul in "far more labors."

5. Which leads us to the next characteristic of Luther at study, namely, suffering. For Luther, trials make a theologian. Temptation and affliction are the hermeneutical touchstones.

Luther notices in Psalms 119:1-176 that the psalmist not only prayed and meditated over the Word of God in order to understand it; he also suffered in order to understand it. Psalms 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep thy word ... 71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes." An indispensable key to understanding the Scriptures is suffering in the path of righteousness.

Thus Luther said: "I want you to know how to study theology in the right way. I have practiced this method myself ... Here you will find three rules. They are frequently proposed throughout Psalm [119] and run thus: Oration, meditatio, tentatio (Prayer, meditation, trial) (see note 56). And trials (Anfechtungen) he called the "touchstone." "[They] teach you not only to know and understand but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is: it is wisdom supreme" (see note 57).

He proved the value of trials over and over again in his own experience. "For as soon as God's Word becomes known through you," he says, "the devil will afflict you will make a real doctor of

you, nd will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God’s Word. For I myself ... owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing, and frightening me through the devil’s raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I should never have reached" (see note 58).

Suffering was woven into life for Luther. Keep in mind that from 1521 on Luther lived under the ban of the empire. The emperor Charles V said, "I have decided to mobilize everything against Luther: my kingdoms and dominions, my friends, my body, my blood and my soul" (see note 59). He could be legally killed, except where he was protected by his prince.

He endured relentless slander of the most cruel kind. He once observed, "If the Devil can do nothing against the teachings, he attacks the person, lying, slandering, cursing, and ranting at him. Just as the papists’ Beelzebub did to me when he could not subdue my Gospel, he wrote that I was possessed by the Devil, was a changeling, my beloved mother a whore and bath attendant" (see note 60).

Physically he suffered from excruciating kidney stones and headaches with buzzing in his ears and ear infections and incapacitating constipation —"I nearly gave up the ghost—an now, bathed in blood, can find no peace. What took four days to heal immediately tears open again" (see note 61).

It’s not surprising then that emotionally and spiritually he would undergo the most horrible struggles. For example, in a letter to Melancthon on August 2, 1527, he writes, "For more than a week I have been thrown back and forth in death and Hell; my whole body feels beaten, my limbs are still trembling. I almost lost Christ completely, driven about on the waves and storms of despair and blasphemy against God. But because of the intercession of the faithful, God began to take mercy on me and tore my soul from the depths of Hell" (see note 62). On the outside, to many, he looked invulnerable. But those close to him knew the tentatio. Again eh wrote to Melancthon from the Wartburg castle on July 13, 1521, while he was supposedly working feverishly on the translation of the New Testament:

I sit here at ease, hardened and unfeeling—alas! praying little, grieving little for the Church of God, burning rather in the fierce fires of my untamed flesh. It comes to this: I should be afire in the spirit; in reality I am afire in the flesh, with lust, laziness, idleness, sleepiness. It is perhaps because you have all ceased praying for me that God has turned away from me ... For the last eight days I have written nothing, nor prayed nor studied, partly from self-indulgence, partly from another vexatious handicap [constipation and piles] ... I really cannot stand it any longer ... Pray for me, I beg you, for in my seclusion here I am submerged in sins (see note 63).

These were the trials he said made him a theologian. These experiences were as much a part of his exegetical labors as were his Greek lexicon. This has caused me to think twice before I begrudge the trials of my ministry. How often I am tempted to think that the pressures and conflicts and frustrations are simply distractions from the business of study and understanding. Luther (and Psalms 119:71) teach us to see it all another way. That stressful visit that interrupted your study may well be the very lens through which the text will open to you as never before. Tentatio—trial, the thorn in the flesh—is Satan’s unwitting contribution to our becoming good theologians. But at one point Luther confessed that in such circumstances faith "exceeds my powers" (see note 64).

6. Which leads to the final characteristic of Luther at study: prayer and reverent dependence on the all-sufficiency of God. And here the theology and methodology of Luther become almost identical. In typical paradoxical form, Luther seems to take back almost everything he has said about study when he writes in 1518, That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it please God to accomplish something for His glory—not for yours or any other person's—He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words. For no master of the divine words exists except the Author of these words, as He says: 'They shall be all taught of God' (John 6:45). You must, therefore, completely despair of your own industry and ability and rely solely on the inspiration of the Spirit (see note 65). But for Luther that does not mean leaving the "external Word" in mystical reverie, but bathing all our work in prayer, and casting ourselves so on God that he enters and sustains and prospers all our study.

Since the Holy Writ wants to be dealt with in fear and humility and penetrated more by studying [!] with pious prayer than with keenness of intellect, therefore it is impossible for those who rely only on their intellect and rush into Scripture with dirty feet, like pigs, as though Scripture were merely a sort of human knowledge not to harm themselves and others whom they instruct" (see note 66).

Again he sees the psalmist in Psalms 119:1-176 not only suffering and meditating but praying again and again:

Psalms 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law. 27 Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes. 23 Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law. 35 Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it. 36 Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, and not to dishonest gain. 37 Revive me in Thy ways. So he concludes that the true biblical way to study the Bible will be saturated with prayer and self-doubt and God-reliance moment by moment:

You should completely despair of your own sense and reason, for by these you will not attain the goal ... Rather kneel down in your private little room and with sincere humility and earnestness pray God through His dear Son, graciously to grant you His Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you and give you understanding (see note 67).

Luther's emphasis on prayer in study is rooted in his theology, and here is where his methodology and his theology become one. He was persuaded from Romans 8:7 and elsewhere that "The natural mind cannot do anything godly. It does not perceive the wrath of God, there cannot rightly fear him. It does not see the goodness of God, therefore cannot trust or believe in him either. Therefore [!] we should constantly pray that God will bring forth his gifts in us" (see note 68). All our study is futile without the work of God overcoming our blindness and hardheartedness. At the hear of Luther's theology was a total dependence on the freedom of God's omnipotent grace rescuing powerless man from the bondage of the will. His book by that name, The Bondage of the Will, published in 1525, was an answer to Erasmus' book, The Freedom of the Will. Luther regarded this one book of his‐The Bondage of the Will —as his "best theological book, and the only one in that class worthy of publication" (see note 69). To understand Luther's theology and his methodology of study it is extremely important to recognize that he conceded that Erasmus, more than any other opponent had realized that the powerlessness of man before God, not the indulgence controversy or purgatory was the central question of the Christian faith. Man is

powerless to justify himself, powerless to sanctify himself, powerless to study as he ought and powerless to trust God to do anything about this.

Erasmus' exaltation of man's will as free to overcome its own sin and bondage was, in Luther's mind, an assault on the freedom of God's grace and therefore on the very gospel itself. In his summary of faith in 1528 he writes,

I condemn and reject as nothing but error all doctrines which exalt our "free will" as being directly opposed to this mediation and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. For since, apart from Christ, sin and death are our masters and the devil is our god and prince, there can be no strength or power, no wit or wisdom, by which we can fit or fashion ourselves for righteousness and life. On the contrary, blinded and captivated, we are bound to be the subjects of Satan and sin, doing and thinking what pleases him and is opposed to God and His commandments (see note 70). For Luther the issue of man's bondage to sin and his moral inability to believe or make himself right—including the inability to study rightly —was the root issue of the Reformation. The freedom of God, and therefore the freedom of the Gospel and therefore the Glory of God and the salvation of men were at stake in this controversy. Therefore Luther loved the message of The Bondage of the Will, ascribing all freedom and power and grace to God, and all powerlessness and dependency to man. In his explanation of Galatians 1:1-12 he recounted:

I recall that at the beginning of my cause Dr. Staupitz ... said to me: It pleases me that the doctrine which you preach ascribes the glory and everything to God alone and nothing to man; for to God (that is clearer than the sun) one cannot ascribe too much glory, goodness, etc. This word comforted and strengthened me greatly at the time. And it is true that the doctrine of the Gospel takes all glory, wisdom, righteousness, etc., from men and ascribes them to the Creator alone, who makes everything out of nothing (see note 71). This is why prayer is the root of Luther's approach to studying God's word. Prayer is the echo of the freedom and sufficiency of God in the heart of powerless man. It is the way he conceived of his theology and the way he pursued his studies. And it is the way he died. At 3:00 a.m. on February 18, 1546, Luther died. His last recorded words were, "Wir sein Bettler. Hoc est verum." "We are beggars. This is true" (see note 72). God is free—utterly free—in his grace. And we are beggars—pray-ers. That is how we live, and that is how we study, so that God gets the glory and we get the grace.

Notes:

1. Thomas Muenzer, seven years Luther's junior, became the preacher the Church of St. Mary in Zwickau. "He ... joined a union of fanatics, mostly weavers, who, with Nikolaus Storch at their head, had organized themselves under the leadership of twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples, and held secret conventicles, in which they pretended to receive divine revelations." Philip Schaff, ed. Religious Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888), p. 1596. For Luther's response see A. G. Dickens and Alun Davies, eds., Documents of Modern History: Martin Luther, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), pp. 75-79.

2. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, (New York: Doubleday, 1992, orig. 1982), p. 193. Professor Steven Ozment of Harvard calls Heiko Oberman "the world's foremost authority on Luther."

3. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 204.

4. Ewald M. Plass, compiler, What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 1359 (emphasis added).

5. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 62.

6. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, p. 62.

7. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, p. 1355.

8. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, p. 913.

9. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 77.

10. It is true that "flesh and blood" cannot see the glory of the Lord (Mathew 16:17). Only the Spirit of God can open the eyes of the heart to see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). I am not denying that. I only mean, with Luther, that the Spirit does not reveal the Son apart from the "external Word."

11. Pope Pius IX announced the doctrine on December 8, 1854 with these words, "That the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Christ, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin." Philip Schaff, ed. Religious Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888), p. 1064.

12. Critical historians do this. They use various historical criteria to deny that such and such saying of Jesus was not really said by him, or such and such a miracle was not really done by him. But none of these historians claim that they are retelling the story of the incarnate Word because of the inspiration of the Spirit. In other words my point here is not that there are no attacks on the historical Jesus, but that the role of the Spirit is not to replace the role of the Book, and that the true Incarnate Word is revealed not by the Spirit apart from the Word.

13. Hugh T. Kerr, A Compend of Luther’s Theology, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943) p. 17.

14. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 102.

15. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 92.

16. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 125.

17. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 128.

18. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 315.

19. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 137.

20. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 145.

21. Meuser, Fred W., Luther the Preacher, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), p. 39.

22. Luther the Preacher, p. 51.

23. Luther the Preacher, pp. 37-38.

24. Walther von Loewenich, Luther: the Man and His Work, trans. by Lawrence W. Denef, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986, orig. 1982), p. 353.

25. Luther the Preacher, p. 27.

26. Luther the Preacher, p. 38.

27. W. Carlos Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, (New York: American Tract Society, 1866), p. 473.

28. W. Carlos Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, p. 272.

29. Conrad Bergendoff, editor, Church and Ministry II, vol. 40, Luther's Works, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 315-316.

30. John Dillenberger, ed. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), p. xvii.

31. John Dillenberger, ed. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, pp. 11-12.

32. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 138.

33. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 83.

34. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 173.

35. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1355.

36. Hugh T. Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, p. 13.

37. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1 p. 97.

38. Hugh T. Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, p. 16.

39. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 112.

40. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 113.

41. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 224.

42. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 67.

43. Heinrich Bornkamm, trans. by E. Theodore Bachmann, Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, orig. 1979), p. 564.

44. Hugh T. Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, p. 17.

45. W. Carlos Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, pp. 474-475.

46. W. Carlos Martyn, The Life and Times of Martin Luther, p.474.

47. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 95.

48. Hugh T. Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, p. 148.

49. Meuser, Fred W., Luther the Preacher, p. 43.

50. Meuser, Fred W., Luther the Preacher, p. 27.

51. Meuser, Fred W., Luther the Preacher, pp. 40-41.

52. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, p. 951.

53. Meuser, Fred W., Luther the Preacher, pp. 44-45.

54. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 2, p. 927.

55. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1496-1497.

56. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1359.

57. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1360.

58. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1360.

59. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 29.

60. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 88.

61. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 328.

62. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 323.

63. E. G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, editors, Martin Luther: Documents of Modern History, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1970), pp. 72-73.

64. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 323.

65. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 77.

66. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 1, p. 78.

67. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1359.

68. Conrad Bergendoff, editor, Church and Ministry II, vol. 40, Luther's Works, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 301-302.

69. John Dillenberger, ed. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, p. 167.

70. What Luther Says: An Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 1376-1377.

71. What Luther Says, Vol. 3, p. 1374.

72. Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, p. 324. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.22. Oh, That I May Never Loiter On My Heavenly Journey!

Oh, That I May Never Loiter On My Heavenly Journey!

Reflections on the Life and Ministry of David Brainerd A Summary of His Life

David Brainerd was born on April 20, 1718 in Haddam, Connecticut. That year John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards turned 14. Benjamin Franklin turned 12 and George Whitefield 3. The Great Awakening was just over the horizon and Brainerd would live through both waves of it in the mid thirties and early forties, then die of tuberculosis in Jonathan Edwards' house at the age of 29 on October 9, 1747.

Brainerd's father Hezekiah was a Connecticut legislator and died when David was nine year's old. Judging by my own son's attachment to me over the years, I think that might be the hardest year of all to lose father. He had been a rigorous Puritan with strong views of authority and strictness at home; and he pursued a very earnest devotion that included days of private fasting to promote spiritual welfare (see note 1).

Brainerd was the sixth child and third son born to Hezekiah and Dorothy. After him came three more children. Dorothy had brought one little boy from a previous marriage, and so there were twelve of them in the home —but not for long. Five years after his father died at the age of 46, his mother died when he was 14.

It seems that there was an unusual strain of weakness and depression in the family. Not only did the parents die early, David's brother Nehemiah died at 32, his brother Israel died at 23, his sister Jerusha died at 34, and he died at 29. In 1865 a descendant, Thomas Brainerd (in a biography of John Brainerd), said, "In the whole Brainerd family for two hundred years there has been a tendency to a morbid depression, akin to hypochondria (p. 64)." So on top of having an austere father, and suffering the loss of both parents as a sensitive child, he probably inherited some kind of tendency of depression. Whatever the cause, he suffered from the blackest dejection off and on throughout his short life. He says at the very beginning of his diary, "I was, I think, from my youth something sober and inclined rather to melancholy than the other extreme (p. 101)." When his mother died he moved across the Connecticut River to East Haddam to live with his married sister, Jerusha. He described his religion during these years as very careful and serious, but having no true grace. When he turned 19 he inherited a farm and moved for a year a few miles west to Durham to try his hand at farming. But his heart was not in it. He longed for "a liberal education." (p. 103) In fact Brainerd was a contemplative and a scholar from head to toe. If he hadn't been expelled from Yale, he may well have pursued a teaching or pastoral ministry instead of becoming a missionary to the Indians.

After a year on the farm he came back to East Haddam and began to prepare himself to enter Yale. This was the summer of 1738. He was twenty years old. During the year on the farm he had made a commitment to God to enter the ministry. But still he was not converted. He read the Bible through twice that year and began to see more clearly that all his religion was legalistic and simply

based on his own efforts. He had great quarreling with God within his soul. He rebelled against original sin and against the strictness of the divine law and against the sovereignty of God. He quarreled with the fact that there was nothing he could do in his own strength to commend himself to God (pp. 113-124).

He came to see that "all my good frames were but self-righteousness, not bottomed on a desire for the glory of God" (p. 103) "There was no more goodness in my praying than there would be in my paddling with my hands in the water ... because (my prayers) were not performed from any love or regard to God ... I never once prayed for the glory of God." (p. 134) "I never once intended his honor and glory ... I had never once acted for God in all my devotions ... I used to charge them with sin ... (because) of wanderings and vain thoughts ...; and not because I never had any regard in them to the glory of God (p. 136)." But then the miracle happened, the day of his new birth. Half an hour before sunset at the age of 21 he was in a lonely place trying to pray. As I was walking in a dark thick grave, "unspeakable glory" seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul ... It was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God; such as I never had before, nor anything that I had the least remembrance of it. So that I stood still and wondered and admired ... I had now no particular apprehension of any one person of the Trinity, either the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, but it appeared to be divine glory and splendor that I then beheld. And my soul "rejoiced wit joy unspeakable" to see such a God, such a glorious divine being, and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that he should be God over all forever and ever. My soul was so captivated and delighted with the excellency, the loveliness and the greatness and other perfections of God that I was even swallowed up in him, at least to that degree that I had no thought, as I remember at first, about my own salvation or scarce that there was such a creature as I.

Thus the Lord, I trust, brought me to a hearty desire to exalt him, to set him on the throne and to "seek first his Kingdom," i.e. principally and ultimately to aim at his honor and glory as the King and sovereign of the universe, which is the foundation of the religion of Jesus ... I felt myself in a new world (pp. 138-140)."

It was the Lord’s Day, July 12, 1739. He was 21 years old. Two months later he entered Yale to prepare for the ministry. It was a hard beginning. There was hazing by the upperclassmen, little spirituality, difficult studies, and he got measles and had to go home for several weeks during that first year. The next year he was sent home because he was so sick he was spitting blood. So even at this early age he already had the tuberculosis he would die of seven years later. The amazing thing may not be that he died so early and accomplished so little, but that, being as sick as he ws, he lived as long as he did and accomplished so much. When he came back to Yale in November, 1740, the spiritual climate was radically changed. George Whitefield had been there, and now many students were very serious about their faith, which suited Brainerd well. In fact tensions were emerging between the awakened students and the less excited faculty and staff. In 1741 pastor-evangelists, Gilbert Tennent, Ebenezer Pemberton, and James Davenport fanned the flames of discontent among the students with their fiery preaching.

Jonathan Edwards was invited to preach the commencement address in 1741 in the hopes that he would pour a little water on the fire and stand up for the faculty against the enthusiasm of the students. Some faculty had even been criticized as being unconverted. Edwards preached a sermon called "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," and totally disappointed

the faculty and staff. He argued that the work going on in the awakening of those days, and specifically among the students, was a real spiritual work in spite of the excesses. That very morning it had been voted by the college trustees that "If any student of this College shall directly or indirectly say, that the Rector, either of the Trustees or tutors are hypocrites, carnal or unconverted men, he shall for the first offence make a public confession in he hall, and for the second offence be expelled (p. 41)." Edwards was clearly more sympathetic with the students than the college was. He even went so far as to say in his commencement address that afternoon, "It is no evidence that a work is not the work of God, if many that are subjects of it ... are guilty of (so) great forwardness to censure others as unconverted (p. 42)."

Brainerd was in the crowd as Edwards spoke. One can't help but wonder whether Edwards later felt some responsibility for what happened to Brainerd the next term. He was at the top of his class academically but was summarily expelled in early 1742 during his third year. He was overheard to say that one of the tutors, Chauncey Whittelsey, "has no more grace than a chair" and that he wondered why the Rector "did not drop down dead" for fining students for their evangelical zeal (pp. 42, 155). This expulsion wounded Brainerd very deeply. He tried again and again in the next several years to make things right. Numerous people came to his aid, but all to no avail. God had another plan for Brainerd. Instead of a quiet six years in the pastorate or lecture hall followed by death and little historical significance at all, God meant to drive him into the wilderness that he might suffer for His sake and make an incalculable impact on the history of missions.

Before the way was cut off for him to the pastorate, Brainerd had no thought of being a missionary to the Indians. But now he had to rethink his whole life. There was a law, recently passed, that no established minister could be installed in Connecticut who had not graduated from Harvard, Yale or a European University (p. 52). So Brainerd felt cut off from his life calling.

There is a tremendous lesson here. God is at work for the glory of his name and the good of his church even when the good intentions of his servants fail—even when that failing is owing to sin or carelessness. One careless word, spoken in haste , and Brainerd's life seemed to fall apart before his eyes. But God knew better, and Brainerd came to accept it. In fact, I am tempted to speculate whether the modern missionary movement, that was so repeatedly inspired by Brainerd's missionary life, would have happened if David Brainerd had not been expelled from Yale and cut off from his hopes to serve God in the pastorate! In the summer of 1742 a group of ministers sympathetic to the Great Awakening (called New Lights) licensed Brainerd to preach. Jonathan Dickinson, the leading Presbyterian in New Jersey, took an interest in Brainerd and tried to get him reinstated in Yale. When that failed the suggestion was made that Brainerd become a missionary to the Indians under the sponsorship of the Commissioners of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. Dickinson was one of those Commissioners. On November 25, 1742 Brainerd was examined for his fitness for the work and appointed as a missionary to the Indians. (p. 188)

He spent the winter serving a church on Long Island so that he could enter the wilderness in the spring. His first assignment was to the Housatonic Indians at Kaunaumeek about 20 miles northwest of Stockbridge, Massachusetts where Edwards would eventually serve as a missionary to the Indians. He arrived April 1, 1743 and preached for one year, using an interpreter and trying to learn the language from John Sergeant, the veteran missionary at Stockbridge (p. 228). He was

able to start a school for Indian children and translate some of the Psalms (p. 61).

Then came a reassignment to go to the Indians along the Delaware River in Pennsylvania. So on May 1, 1744 he left Kaunaumeek and settled in the Forks of the Delaware, northeast of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. At the end of the month he rode to Newark, N.J. to be examined by the Newark Presbytery and was ordained on June 11, 1744 (pp. 251-252).

Brainerd preached to the Indians at the Forks of the Delaware for one year. But on June 19, 1745 he made his first preaching tour to the Indians at Crossweeksung, New Jersey. This was the place where God moved in amazing power and brought awakening and blessing to the Indians. Within a year there were 130 persons in his growing assembly of believers (p. 376). The whole Christian community moved from Crossweeksung to Cranberry in May 1746 to have their own land and village. Brainerd stayed with these Indians until he was too sick to minister, and in November 1746 he left Cranberry to spend four months trying to recuperate in Elizabethtown at the house of Jonathan Dickinson. On March 20, 1747 David Brainerd made one last visit to his Indian friends and then rode to the house of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts, arriving May 28, 1747. He made one trip to Boston during the summer and then returned and died of tuberculosis in Edwards' house October 9, 1747.

It was a short life: twenty-nine years, five months and nineteen days. Only eight of those years as a believer, and only four of those as a missionary. Why has Brainerd's life made the impact that it has? One obvious reason is that Jonathan Edwards took the Diaries and published them as a Life of Brainerd in 1749. But why has this book never been out of print? Why did John Wesley say, "Let every preacher read carefully over the 'Life of Brainerd (p. 3)'"? Why was it written of Henry Martyn that "perusing the life of David Brainerd, his soul was filled with a holy emulation of that extraordinary man; and after deep consideration and fervent prayer, he was at length fixed in a resolution to imitate his example"? (see note 2) Why did William Carey regard Edwards' Life of Brainerd as a sacred text? Why did Robert Morrison and Robert McCheyne of Scotland and John Mills of America and Frederick Schwartz of Germany and David Livingston of England and Andrew Murray of South Africa and Jim Elliot of modern America look upon Brainerd with a kind of awe and draw power from him the way they and countless others did (p. 4)?

Gideon Hawley, another missionary protégé of Jonathan Edwards spoke for hundreds when he wrote about his struggles as a missionary in 1753, "I need, greatly need something more than humane (=human or natural) to support me. I read my Bible and Mr. Brainerd's Life, the only books I brought with me, and from them have a little support (p. 3)."

Why has this life had such an impact? Or perhaps I should just pose a more modest and manageable question: Why does it have such an impact on me? How has it helped me to press on in the ministry and to strive for holiness and divine power and fruitfulness in my life? The answer for me is that Brainerd's life is a vivid, powerful testimony to the truth that God can and does use weak, sick, discouraged, beat-down, lonely, struggling saints, who cry to him day and night, to accomplish amazing things for his glory. To illustrate this we will look first at Brainerd's struggles, then at how he responded to them and finally at how God used him with all his weaknesses. His Struggles Brainerd struggled with almost constant sickness.

He had to drop out of college for some weeks because he had begun to cough up blood in 1740. In May of 1744 he wrote, "Rode several hours in the rain through the howling wilderness, although I was so disordered in body that little or nothing but blood came from me (p. 247)."

Now and again he would write something like, "In the afternoon my pain increased exceedingly; and was obliged to betake myself to bed ... Was sometimes almost bereaved of the exercise of my reason by the extremity of pain." (p. 253) In August of 1746 he wrote, "Having lain in cold sweat all night, I coughed much bloody matter this morning, and was under great disorder of body, and not a little melancholy." (p. 420) In September he wrote, "Exercised with a violent cough and a considerable fever; had no appetite to any kind of food; and frequently brought up what I ate, as soon as it was down; and oftentimes had little rest in my bed, by reason of pains in my breast and back: was able, however, to rode over to my people, about two miles, every day, and take some care of those who were then at work upon a small house for me to reside in amongst the Indians (p. 430)." In May of 1747 at Jonathan Edwards' house the doctors told him that he had incurable consumption and did not have long to live. (p. 447) In the last couple of months of his life the suffering was incredible. September 24: "In the greatest distress that ever I endured having an uncommon kind of hiccough; which either strangled me or threw me into a straining to vomit." (p. 469) Edwards comments that in the week before he died, "He told me it was impossible for any to conceive of the distress he felt in his breast. He manifested much concern lest he should dishonor God by impatience under his extreme agony; which was such that he said the thought of enduring it one minute longer was almost insupportable." And the night before he died he said to those around him that it was another thing to die than people imagined (pp. 475-476).

What strikes the reader of these diaries is not just the severity of Brainerd's suffering in the days before antibiotics and pain killers, but especially how relentless the sickness was. It was almost always there. And yet he pressed on with his work.

Brainerd struggled with relentlessly recurring depression.

Brainerd came to understand more fully from his own experience the difference between spiritual desertion and the disease of melancholy. So his later judgments about his own spiritual condition are probably more careful than the earlier ones. But however one assesses his psychological condition, he was tormented again and again with the blackest discouragements. And the marvel is that he survived and kept going at all.

Brainerd said eh had been this way from his youth (p. 101). But he said that there was a difference between the depression he suffered before and after his conversion. After his conversion there seemed to be a rock of electing love under him that would catch him, so that in his darkest times he could still affirm the truth and goodness of God, even though he couldn't sense it for a season (pp. 93, 141, 165, 278). But it was bad enough nevertheless. Often his distress was owing to the hatred of his own remaining sinfulness. Thursday, November 4, 1742. "Tis distressing to feel in my soul that hell of corruption which still remains in me." (p. 185) Sometimes this sense of unworthiness was so intense that he felt cut off from the presence of God. January 23, 1743. "Scarce ever felt myself so unfit to exist, as now: I saw I was not worthy of a place among the Indians, where I am going ... None knows, but those that feel it, what the soul endures that is sensibly shut out from the presence of God: Alas, 'tis more bitter than death (pp. 195-6)!"

He often called his depression an kind of death. I counted at least 22 places in the Diary where he longed for death as a freedom from his misery. For example, Sunday, February 3, 1745. "My soul remember 'the wormwood and the gall' (I might almost say hell) of Friday last; and I was greatly afraid I should be obliged again to drink of that 'cup of trembling', which was inconceivably more bitter than death, and made me long for the grave more, unspeakably more, than for hid treasures." (p. 285) sunday, December 16, 1744. "Was so overwhelmed with dejection that I knew not how to live: I longed for death exceedingly: My soul was 'sunk in deep waters,' and 'the floods' were ready to 'drown me': I was so much oppressed that my soul was in a kind of horror (p. 278)."

It caused him compounded misery that his mental distress hindered his ministry and his devotion. Wednesday, March 9, 1743. "Rode 16 miles to Montauk, and had some inward sweetness on the road, but something of flatness and deadness after I came there and had seen the Indians: I withdrew and endeavored to pray, but found myself awfully deserted and left, and had an afflicting sense of my vileness and meanness." (p. 199) At times he was simply immobilized by the distresses and couldn't function anymore. Tuesday, September 2, 1746. "Was scarce ever more confounded with a sense of my own unfruitfulness and unfitness of my work, than now. Oh, what a dead, heartless, barren, unprofitable wretch did I now see myself to be! My spirits were so low, and my bodily strength so wasted, that I could do nothing at all. At length, being much overdone, lay down on a buffalo skin; but sweat much of the whole night (pp. 423f.)."

It is simply amazing how often Brainerd pressed on with the practical necessities of his work in the face of these waves of discouragement. This has no doubt endeared him to many a missionary who know first hand the kinds of pain he endured.

Brainerd struggled with loneliness.

He tells of having to endure the profane talk of two strangers one night in April, 1743 and says, "Oh, I longed that some dear Christian knew my distress (p. 204)!" A month later he says, "Most of the talk I hear is either Highland Scotch or Indian. I have no fellow Christian to whom I might unbosom myself and lay open my spiritual sorrows, and with whom I might take sweet counsel in conversation about heavenly things, and join in social prayer." (p. 207) This misery made him sometimes shrink back from going off on another venture. Tuesday, May 8, 1744. "My hear sometimes was ready to sink with the thoughts of my work, and going alone in the wilderness, I knew not where (p. 248)." In December, 1745 he wrote a letter to his friend Eleazar Wheelock and said, "I doubt not by that time you have read my journal through you'll be more sensible of the need I stand in of a companion in travel than ever you was before (p. 584)." But he didn't just want any kind of person of course. He wanted a soul companion. Many of us can empathize with him when he says, "There are many with whom I can talk about religion: but alas, I find few with whom I can talk religion itself: But, blessed be the Lord, there are some that love to feed on the kernel rather than the shell (p. 292)." But Brainerd was alone in his ministry to the end. The last 19 weeks of his life Jerusha Edwards, Jonathan Edwards' 17 year old daughter, was his nurse and many speculate that there was deep love between them. But in the wilderness and in the ministry he was alone, and could only pour out his soul to God. And God bore him and kept him going.

Brainerd struggled with immense external hardships.

He describes his first mission station at Kaunaumeek in May, 1743: "I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life: most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, and my labor is hard and extremely difficult; and I have little experience of success to comfort me." (p. 207) In August he says, "In this weak state of body, (I) was not a little distressed for want of suitable food. Had no bread, nor could I get any. I am forced to go or send ten or fifteen miles for all the bread I eat; and sometimes 'tis moldy and sour before I eat it, if I get any considerable quantity ... But through divine goodness I had some Indian meal, of which I made little cakes and fried them. Yet felt contented with my circumstances, and sweetly resigned to God (pp. 213-214)."

He says that he was frequently lost in the woods and was exposed to cold and hunger (p. 222). he speaks of his horse being stolen or being poisoned or breaking a leg (pp. 294, 339). He tells about how the smoke from a fireplace would often make the room intolerable to his lungs and he would have to go out into the cold to get his breath, and then could not sleep through the night (p. 422). But the struggle with external hardships, as great as they were, was not his worst struggle. He had an amazing resignation and even rest it seems in many of these circumstances. He knew where they fit in his Biblical approach to life:

Such fatigues and hardship as these serve to wean me more from the earth; and, I trust, will make heaven the sweeter. Formerly, when I was thus exposed to cold, rain, etc., I was ready to please myself with the thoughts of enjoying a comfortable house, a warm fire, and other outward comforts; but now these have less place in my heart (through the grace of God) and my eye is more to God for comfort. In this world I expect tribulation; and it does not now, as formerly, appear strange to me; I don't in such seasons of difficulty flatter myself that it will be better hereafter; but rather think how much worse it might be; how much greater trials others of God's children have endured; and how much greater are yet perhaps reserved for me. Blessed be God that he makes (=is) the comfort to me, under my sharpest trials; and scarce ever lets these thoughts be attended with terror or melancholy; but they are attended frequently with great joy (p. 274)." So in spite of the terrible external hardships that Brainerd knew, he pressed on and even flourished under these tribulations that led to the kingdom.

Brainerd struggled with a bleak outlook on nature.

We will forgive him for this quickly because none of us has suffered physically what he suffered or endured the hardships he did in the wilderness. It is hard to relish the beauty of a rose when you are coughing up blood. But we have to see this as pat of Brainerd's struggle because an eye for beauty instead of bleakness might have lightened some of his load. Edwards extolled Brainerd for not being a person of "warm imagination (p. 93)." This was a virtue for Edwards because it meant that Brainerd was free from what he called religious "enthusiasm"—the intensity of religious emotion based on sudden impressions and sights in the imagination rather than on spiritual apprehension of God's moral perfections. So Edwards applauded Brainerd for not having "strong and lively images formed in his imagination (p. 93)." But there is a costly downside to an unimaginative mind. In Brainerd's case it meant that he seemed to see nothing in nature but a "howling wilderness" and a bleak enemy. There was nothing in his diaries like the transports of Jonathan Edwards as he walked in the woods and saw images of divine glory and echoes of God's excellence everywhere. Norman Pettit is basically right it seems to me when he says,

"Where Edwards saw mountains and waste places as the setting for divine disclosure, Brainerd saw only a 'howling desert.' Where Edwards would take spiritual delight 'in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees,' Brainerd never mentioned natural beauty. In contrast to Edwards' joy in summer is Brainerd's fear of winter." (p. 23) Brainerd never mentioned an attractive landscape or sunset. He did at one place say he had discovered the need for diversions in his labor for the sake of maximizing his usefulness. (p. 292) But he never once described such a diversion or any impact on him that it had.

It is a sad thing that Brainerd was blinded (perhaps by his suffering) to one of God's antidotes to depression. Spurgeon described this as well as anyone: To sit long in one posture, pouring over a book, or driving a quill, is in itself a taxing of nature; but add to this a badly ventilated chamber, a body which has long been without muscular exercise, and a heart burdened with many cares, and we have all the elements for preparing a seething cauldron of despair, especially in the dim months of fog ... Nature outside his window is calling him to health and beckoning him to joy. He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood-pigeons in the forest, the song of the birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. (see note 3)

I say we will forgive Brainerd quickly for not drawing strength and refreshment from God's gallery of joy, because his suffering made it so hard for him to see. But we must make every effort not to succumb with him here. Spurgeon and Edwards are the models for us on ministerial uses of nature. And, of course, an even greater authority said, "Consider the lilies."

Brainerd struggled to love the Indians.

If love is known by sacrifice, then Brainerd loved. But if it is also known by heartfelt compassion then Brainerd struggled to love more than he did. Sometimes he was melted with love. September 18, 1742. "Felt some compassion for souls, and mourned I had no more. I feel much more kindness, meekness, gentleness and love towards all mankind, than ever (p. 181)." December 26, 1742. "Felt much sweetness and tenderness in prayer, especially my whole soul seemed to love my worst enemies, and was enabled to pray for those that are strangers and enemies to God with a great degree of softness and pathetic fervor (p. 193)." Tuesday, July 2, 1745. "Felt my heat drawn out after God in prayer, almost all the forenoon; especially while riding. And in the evening, could not help crying to God for those poor Indians; and after I went to bed my heart continued to go out to God for them, till I dropped asleep. Oh, 'Blessed be God that I may pray (p. 302)!'" But other times he seemed empty of affection or compassion for their souls. He expresses guilt that he should preach to immortal souls with no more ardency and so little desire for their salvation. (p. 235) His compassion could simply go flat. November 2, 1744. "About noon, rode up to the Indians; and while going, could feel no desires for them, and even dreaded to say anything to 'em (p. 272)." So Brainerd struggled with the rise and fall of love in his own heart. He loved, but longed to love so much more.

Brainerd struggled to stay true to his calling.

Even though Brainerd's expulsion from Yale initially hindered his entering the pastorate, and turned him to consider the missionary career, the missionary call he felt from the Lord in this was

not abandoned when other opportunities for the pastorate finally did come along. There were several opportunities for him to have a much easier life in the settled life of the parish minister. The church at Millington, near his hometown of Haddam, called him in March of 1744, and he describes the call as a great care and burden. He turned it down and prayed that the Lord would send laborers to his vineyard. (p. 244) The church at East Hampton on Long Island called him too. Jonathan Edwards called this "the fairest, pleasantest town on the whole island, and one of its largest and most wealthy parishes." Brainerd wrote on Thursday, April 5, "Resolved to go on still with the Indian affair, if divine providence permitted; although before felt some inclination to go to East Hampton, where I was solicited to go." (p. 245)

There were other opportunities too. But each time the struggle was resolved with this sense of burden and call: "(I) could have no freedom in the thought of any other circumstances or business in life: All my desire was the conversion of the heathen, and all my hope was in God: God does not suffer me to please or comfort myself with hopes of seeing friends, returning to my dear acquaintance, and enjoying worldly comforts." (p. 263) So the struggle was obviously there, but he was held to his post by a readiness to suffer and a passion to see the kingdom of Christ spread among the Indians.

Brainerd’s Passion to Press on for God’s Kingdom

I think the reason Brainerd’s life has such powerful effects on people is that in spite of all his struggles he never gave up his faith or his ministry. He was consumed with a passion to finish his race and honor his Master and spread the kingdom and advance in personal holiness. It was this unswerving allegiance to the cause of Christ that makes the bleakness of his life glow with glory so that we can understand Henry Martyn when he wrote, as a student in Cambridge in 1802, "I long to be like him (p. 4)!"

Brainerd called his passion for more holiness and more usefulness a kind of "pleasing pain." "When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of him the more insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable; ... Oh, for holiness! Oh, for more of God in my soul! Oh, this pleasing pain! It makes my soul press after God ... Oh, that I might not loiter on my heavenly journey (p. 186)!"

He was gripped with by the apostolic admonition: "Redeem the time for the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:16) He embodied the counsel: "Let us not grow weary in well doing, for in due time we shall reap if we do not faint." (Galatians 6:9) He strove to be, as Paul says, "abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58)."

April 17, 1747. "O I longed to fill the remaining moments all for God! Though my body was so feeble, and wearied with preaching and much private conversation, yet I wanted to sit up all night to do something for God. To God the giver of these refreshments, be glory forever and ever; Amen." (p. 246) February 21, 1746. "My soul was refreshed and comforted, and I could not but bless God, who had enabled me in some good measure to be faithful in the day past. Oh, how sweet it is to be spent and worn out for God!" (p. 366)

Among all the means that Brainerd used for pursuing greater and greater holiness and usefulness prayer and fasting stand out above all. We read of him spending whole days in prayer (p. 172), and sometimes setting aside six times in the day to pray, (p. 280), and sometimes seeking out a

family or friend to pray with. He prayed for his own sanctification. He prayed for the conversion and purity of his Indians. He prayed for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ around the world and especially in America. Sometimes the spirit of prayer would hold him so deeply that he could scarcely stop.

Once, visiting in a home with friends, he got alone to pray: "I continued wrestling with God in prayer for my dear little flock here; and more especially for the Indians elsewhere; as well as for dear friends in one place and another; till it was bed time and I feared I should hinder the family, etc. But oh, with what reluctancy did I find myself obliged to consume time in sleep!" (p. 402) And along with prayer, Brainerd pursued holiness and usefuleness with fasting. Again and again in his Diary he tells of days spent in fasting. He fasted for guidance when he was perplexed about the next steps of his ministry. And he fasted simply with the deep hope of making greater advances in his own spiritual depth and his usefulness in bringing life to the Indians. When he was dying in Edwards' house he urged young ministers who came to see him to engage in frequent days of private prayer and fasting because of how useful it was. (p. 473)

Edwards himself said, "Among all the many days he spent in secret fasting and prayer and that he gives an account of in his diary, there is scarce an instance of one but what was either attended or soon followed with apparent success and a remarkable blessing in special incomes and consolations of God's Spirit; and very often before the day was ended." (p. 531)

Along with prayer and fasting, Brainerd bought up the time with study and mingled all three of these together. December 20, 1745. "I spent much of the day in writing; but was enabled to intermix prayer with my studies." (p. 280) January 7, 1744. "Spent this day in seriousness, with steadfast resolutions for God and a life of mortification. Studied closely, till I felt my bodily strength fail." (p. 234) December 20, 1742. "Spent this day in prayer, reading and writing; and enjoyed some assistance, especially in correcting some thoughts on a certain subject." (p. 192)

He was constantly writing and thinking about theological things. That's why we have the Diaries and Journal! But there was more. We read frequently things like, "Was most of the day employed in writing on a divine subject. Was frequent in prayer." (p. 240) "I spent most of the time in writing on a sweet divine subject." (p. 284) "Was engaged in writing again almost the whole day." (p. 287) "Rose early and wrote by candlelight some considerable time; spent most of the day in writing." (p. 344) "Towards night, enjoyed some of the clearest thoughts on a divine subject ... that ever I remember to have had upon any subject whatsoever; and spent two or three hours in writing them." (p. 359)

Brainerd's life is one long agonizing strain to "redeem the time" and "not grow weary in well doing" and "abound in the work of the Lord." And what makes his life so powerful is that he pressed on in this passion under the immense struggles and hardships that he did. The Effect of Brainerd's Life

First, I would mention the effect on Jonathan Edwards, the great pastor and theologian of Northampton. Edwards' bears his own testimony:

I would conclude my observations on the merciful circumstances of Mr. Brainerd's death without acknowledging with thankfulness the gracious dispensation of Providence to me and my family in so ordering that he ... should be cast hither to my house, in his last sickness, and should die here: So that we had opportunity for much acquaintance and conversation with him, and to show him

kindness in such circumstances, and to see his dying behavior, to hear his dying speeches, to receive his dying counsels, and to have the benefit of his dying prayers." (p. 541)

Edwards said this even though he must have known it probably cost him the life of his daughter to have Brainerd in his house with that terrible disease. Jerusha had tended Brainerd as a nurse for the last 19 weeks of his life, and four months after he died she died of the same affliction. so Edwards really meant what he said, that it was a "gracious dispensation of Providence" that Brainerd came to his house to die. As a result of the immense impact of Brainerd's devotion on Jonathan Edwards, Edwards wrote in the next two years the Life of Brainerd, which has been reprinted more often than any of his other books. And through this Life the impact of Brainerd on the church has been incalculable, because beyond all the famous missionaries who tell us that they have been sustained and inspired by Brainerd's Life how many countless other unknown faithful servants must there be who found strength to press on from Brainerd's testimony! A lesser known effect of Brainerd's life, and one that owes far more to the gracious Providence of God than to any intention on Brainerd's part was the founding of Princeton College and Dartmouth College. Jonathan Dickinson and Aaron Burr, who were Princeton's first leaders and among its founders took direct interest in Brainerd's case at Yale and were extremely upset that the school would not readmit him. This event brought to a head the dissatisfaction that the New York and New Jersey Presbyterian Synods had with Yale and crystallized the resolve to found their own school. The College of New Jersey (later, Princeton) was chartered in October, 1746. Dickinson was made the first president and when the classes began in his house in May of 1747 in Elizabethtown Brainerd was there trying to recover in his last months, and so he is considered to be the first student enrolled. David Field and Archibald Alexander and others testify that in a real sense "Princeton college was founded because of Brainerd's expulsion from Yale." (p. 55)

Another surprising effect of Brainerd's life is the inspiration he provided for the founding of Dartmouth College by Eleazer Wheelock. Brainerd felt a failure among the Iroquois Indians on the Susquehanna. He labored among them for a year or so and then moved on. But his Diary of the time kindled the commitment of Wheelock to go to the Iroquois of Connecticut. And inspired by Brainerd's example in teaching the Indians he founded in 1748 a school for Indians and whites at Lebanon. Later it was moved to Hannover, New Hampshire where Wheelock founded Dartmouth College. In 1740 Yale and Harvard and William and Mary were the only Colonial colleges, and they were not sympathetic to the Evangelical piety of the Great Awakening. But the tide of Awakening brought in a zeal for education as well as piety and the Presbyterians founded Princeton, the Baptists founded Brown, the Dutch Reformed founded Rutgers, and the Congregationalists founded Dartmouth. It is remarkable that David Brainerd must be reckoned as an essential motivational component in the founding of two of those schools. If he was a somewhat frustrated scholar, thinking and writing by candlelight in the wilderness, his vision for evangelical higher education had a greater fulfillment probably than if he had given his life to that cause instead of to the missionary passion that he felt.

I close by stating that the most awesome effect of Brainerd's ministry is the same as the most awesome effect of every pastor's ministry. There are a few Indians—perhaps several hundreds—who owe their everlasting life to the direct love and ministry of David Brainerd. Some of their individual stories would make another lecture—a very inspiring one. Who can describe the value of one soul transferred from the kingdom of darkness, and from the weeping and gnashing

of teeth, to the kingdom of God's dear Son! If we live 29 years or if we live 99 years, would not any hardships be worth the saving of one person from the eternal torments of hell for the everlasting enjoyment of the glory of God? My last word must be the same as Edwards'. I thank God for the ministry of David Brainerd in my own life. From a journal that seems weak and worldly compared to Brainerd's I quote.

June 28, 1986. This after noon Tom and Julie (Steller) and I drove to Northampton. We found the gravestone of David Brainerd, a dark stone slab the size of the grave top and a smaller white marble inset with these words:

Sacred to the memory of the Rev.

David Brainerd. A faithful and laborious missionary to the Stockbridge, Delaware and Susquehanna Tribes of Indians who died in this town. October 10, 1747 AE 32 (see note 4)

Tom and Julie (and Ruth and Hannah) and I took hands and stood around the grave and prayed to thank God for Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards and to dedicate ourselves to their work and their God. It was a memorable, and I hope, powerful and lasting moment.

Notes:

1. The Life of David Brainerd, ed. Norman Pettit, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 7, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 33. All page numbers in the text refer to this volume which contains not only Edwards' edition of Brainerd's Diaries, but also some journal extracts and an extensive introduction by Dr. Pettit and related correspondence.

2. "Brainerd, David," in Religious Encyclopaedia, Vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff, (New York: the Christian literature Company, 1888), p. 320.

3. Lectures to My Students, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 158.

4. Both these facts are inaccurate: he died October 9 at the age of 29. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.23. A Passion for Christ-Exalting Power

A Passion for Christ-Exalting Power Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the Need for Revival and Baptism with the Holy Spirit Martyn Lloyd-Jones The Preacher In July, 1959 Martyn Lloyd-Jones and his wife Bethan were on vacation in Wales. They attended a little chapel for a Sunday morning prayer meeting and Lloyd-Jones asked them, "Would you like me to give a word this morning?" The people hesitated because it was his vacation and they didn't want to presume on his energy. but his wife said, "Let him, preaching is his life" (see note 1). It was a true statement. In the preface to his powerful book, Preaching and Preachers, he said, "Preaching has been my life's work ... to me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called (see note 2).

Many called him the last of the Calvinistic Methodist preachers because he combined Calvin's love for truth and sound reformed doctrine with the fire and passion of the eighteenth-century Methodist revival (see note 3). For thirty years he preached from the pulpit at Westminster Chapel in London. Usually that meant three different sermons each weekend, Friday evening, and Sunday morning and evening. At the end of his career he remarked, "I can say quite honestly that I would not cross the road to listen to myself preaching" (see note 4). But that was not the way others felt. When J. I. Packer was a 22-year-old student he heard Lloyd-Jones preach each Sunday evening during the school year of 1948-1949. He said that he had "never heard such preaching." It came to him "with the force of electric shock, bringing to at least one of his listeners more of a sense of God than any other man" he had known (see note 5).

Many of us have felt this shock even through the written form of Lloyd-Jones' sermons. I recall very distinctly hearing George Verwer say at Urbana '67 that Lloyd-Jones' two volumes on the Sermon on the Mount were the greatest thing he had ever read. I bought the books and read them in the summer of 1968 between college and seminary. The impact was unforgettable. Not since I was a little boy sitting under the preaching of my father, had I been so moved by what J. I. Packer called "the greatness and weight of spiritual issues" (see note 6). This was the effect he has had, and continues to have on thousands. By some he was called simply the "greatest preacher this century" (see note 7). A Sketch of His Life His path to Westminster was unique. He was born in Cardiff, Wales, December 20, 1899. He moved to London with his family when he was 14 and went to Medical School St. Bartholomew's (teaching) Hospital where he received his M.D. in 1921 and became Sir Thomas Horder's chief clinical assistant. The well-known Horder described Lloyd-Jones as "the most acute thinker that I ever knew" (see note 8).

Between 1921 and 1923 he underwent a profound conversion. It was so life-changing that it brought with it a passion to preach that completely outweighed his call as a physician. He felt a deep yearning to return to his native Wales and preach. His first sermon there was in April 1925 and the note he sounded was the recurrent theme of his life: Wales did not need more talk about social action, it needed "a great spiritual awakening." This theme of revival and power and real vitality remained his lifelong passion (see note 9).

He was called as the pastor of Bethlehem Forward Movement Mission Church in Sandfields, Aberavon in 1926, and the next year married one of his former fellow medical students, Bethan Phillips on January 8. In the course of their life together they had two daughters, Elizabeth and Ann. His preaching became known across Britain and in America. It was popular, crystal clear, doctrinally sound, logical and on fire. In 1937 he preached in Philadelphia and G. Campbell Morgan happened to be there. He was so impressed that he felt compelled to see Lloyd-Jones as his associate at Westminster Chapel in London. At the time Lloyd-Jones was being considered as the president of the Calvinistic Methodist College in Bala in North Wales. So he temporarily refused Westminster's call to be a permanent member of the staff. But the college turned him down. His main supporter on the board of the college had missed the train and couldn't support his call to the presidency. And so he accepted Westminster's call and stayed there 29 years until his retirement in 1968.

I can't help but pause and give thanks for the disappointments and reversals and setbacks in our lives that God uses to put us just where he wants us. How different modern Evangelicalism in Britain would have been had Martyn Lloyd-Jones not preached in London for 30 years. How different my own life may have been had I not read his sermons in the summer of 1968! Praise God for missed trains and other so-called accidents!

Lloyd-Jones and G. Campbell Morgan were joint ministers until Morgan's retirement in 1943. Then Lloyd-Jones was the sole preaching pastor for almost 30 years. In 1947 the Sunday morning attendance was about 1,500 and the Sunday evening attendance 2,000 as people were drawn to the clarity and power and doctrinal depth of his preaching. He wore a somber black Geneva gown and used no gimmicks or jokes. Like Jonathan Edwards two hundred years before, he held audiences by the sheer weight and intensity of his vision of truth.

He became ill in 1968 and took it as a sign to retire and devote himself more to writing. He continued this for about twelve years and then died peacefully in his sleep on March 1, 1981.

Revival Is a Baptism of the Holy Spirit From the beginning to the end the life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a cry for depth in two areas—depth in Biblical doctrine and depth in vital spiritual experience. Light and heat. Logic and fire. Word and Spirit. Again and again he would be fighting on two fronts: on the one hand against dead, formal, institutional intellectualism, and on the other hand against superficial, glib, entertainment-oriented, man-centered emotionalism. He saw the world in a desperate condition without Christ and without hope; and a church with no power to change it. One wing of the church was straining out intellectual gnats and the other was swallowing the camels of evangelical compromise or careless charismatic teaching (see note 10). For Lloyd-Jones the only hope was historic, God-centered revival.

What I would like to do with you this morning is meditate on the meaning of revival in Lloyd-Jones' preaching—or more specifically, I want to understand what sort of power he was seeking, and what he expected it to look like when it came, and how he thought we should seek it (see note 11).

Lloyd-Jones has done more than any other man in this century, I think, to restore the historic meaning of the word revival. A revival is a miracle ... something that can only be explained as the direct ... intervention of God ... Men can produce evangelistic campaigns, but they cannot and never have produced a revival (see note 12). But for Lloyd-Jones it was a great tragedy that the

whole deeper understanding of revival, as a sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit, had been lost by the time he took up the subject in 1959 at the 100th anniversary of the Welsh Revival. "During the last seventy, to eighty years," he said, "this whole notion of a visitation, a baptism of God's Spirit upon the Church, has gone" (see note 13).

He gave several reasons why (see note 14). But he says that the most important theological reason for the prevailing indifference to revival was the view that the Holy Spirit was given once for all on the Day of Pentecost, so that He cannot be poured out again, and prayer for revival is therefore wrong and needless (seen note 15). This is where Lloyd-Jones begins to part ways with some standard evangelical interpretations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He emphatically rejected the common view that equates the spiritual baptism of Acts 2:1-47 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. He describes the view he rejects like this:

Yes, [Acts 2:1-47] was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But we all get that now, and it is unconscious, we are not aware of it, it happens to us the moment we believe and we are regenerated. It is just that act of God which incorporates us into the Body of Christ. That is the baptism of the Spirit. So it is no use your praying for for some other baptism of the Spirit, or asking God to pour out His Spirit upon the church ... It is not surprising that, as that kind of preaching has gained currency, people have stopped praying for revival" (see note 16). When a reformed theologian like Klaas Runia opposed Pentecostalism, Lloyd-Jones agreed that the insistence on tongues and the "claiming" of gifts was wrong, but he was just as disturbed by Runia's concept of the baptism of the Spirit. He wrote to him and said,

I still feel that you really do not allow for revival. You show this where you say, "Read all the passages that speak of the Holy Spirit and the Church. It is always: Become what you are, ALL of you." If it is simply a question of "Become what you are" and nothing more, then how can one pray for revival, and indeed how does one account for the revivals in the history of the church (see note 17)?

Revival is when the Spirit comes down, is poured out. Lloyd-Jones is crystal clear on how he thinks baptism with the Holy Spirit relates to regeneration.

Here is the first principle ... I am asserting that you can be a believer, that you can have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... The baptism of the Holy Spirit is something that is done by the Lord Jesus Christ not by the Holy Spirit ... Our being baptized into the body of Christ is the work of the Spirit [that's the point of 1 Corinthians 12:13], as regeneration is his work, but this is something entirely different; this is Christ's baptizing us with the Holy Spirit. And I am suggesting that this is something which is therefore obviously distinct from and separate fro becoming a Christian, being regenerate, having the Holy Spirit dwelling within you (see note 18).

He laments that by identifying the baptism of the Holy Spirit with regeneration the whole thing is made non-experimental and unconscious. This is not the way it was experienced in the books of Acts (see note 19). So he spoke with strong words about such a view:

Those people who say that [baptism with the Holy Spirit] happens to everybody at regeneration seem to me not only to be denying the New Testament but to be definitely quenching the Spirit" (see note 20). The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Gives Exceptional Assurance and Joy

He believes that this view discourages us from seeking what the church so desperately needs today. "The greatest need at the present time," he says, "is for Christian people who are assured of their salvation" —which is given in a special way through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see note 21). He distinguishes between the "customary assurance" of the child of God, and what he calls "unusual assurance" (see note 22) or "full assurance" (see note 23) that comes with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When Christians are baptized by the Holy Spirit, they have a sense of the power and presence of God that they have never known before —and this is the greatest possible form of assurance (see note 24). The baptism of the Spirit is a new fresh manifestation of God to the soul. You have an overwhelming knowledge given to you of God's love to you in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... This is the greatest and most essential characteristic of the baptism with the Spirit (see note 25). It is experiential. It is undeniable. There is an immediacy that goes beyond ordinary experience. It fills with overwhelming joy (see note 26). It turns advocates of Christ into witnesses of what they have seen and heard (see note 27).

He illustrates the difference between steady-state, customary Christian experience and the experience of baptism with the Spirit by telling a story from Thomas Goodwin. A man and his little child [are] walking down the road and they are walking hand in hand, and the child knows that he is the child of his father, and he knows that his father loves him, and he rejoices in that, and he is happy in it. There is no uncertainty about it all, but suddenly the father, moved by some impulse, takes hold of the child and picks him up, fondles him in his arms, kisses him, embraces him, showers his love upon him, and then he puts him down again and they go on walking together. That is it! The child knew before that his father loved him, and he knew that he was his child. But oh! the loving embrace, this extra outpouring of love, this unusual manifestation of it—that is the kind of thing. The Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (see note 28). When Jesus baptizes a person with the Holy Spirit, Lloyd-Jones says, the person is "carried not only from doubt to belief but to certainty, to awareness of the presence and the glory of God (see note 29). This is what Lloyd-Jones means by revival: The difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a revival is simply one of the number of people affected. I would define a revival as a large number, a group of people, being baptized by the Holy Spirit at the same time; or the Holy Spirit falling upon, coming upon a number of people assembled together. It can happen in a district, it can happen in a country (see note 30).

Baptism With the Holy Spirit is an Authentication of the Gospel And when it happens it is visible. It is not just a quiet subjective experience in the church. Things happen that make the world sit up and take notice. This is what was so important to Lloyd-Jones. He felt almost overwhelmed by the corruption of the world and the weakness of the church. And believed that the only hope was something stunning. The Christian church today is failing, and failing lamentably. It is not enough even to be orthodox. You must, of course, be orthodox, otherwise you have not got a message ... We need authority and we need authentication ... Is it not clear that we are living in an age when we need some special authentication—in other words, we need revival (see note 31). So revival, for Lloyd-Jones was a kind of power demonstration that would authenticate the truth of the gospel to desperately hardened world. His description of that world from 25 years ago sounds amazingly current:

We are not only confronted by materialism, worldliness, indifference, hardness, and callousness—but we are also hearing more and more ... about certain manifestations of the

powers of evil and the reality of evil spirits. It is not merely sin that is constituting a problem in this county today. There is also a recrudescence of black magic and devil worship and the powers of darkness as well as drug taking and some of the things it leads to. This is why I believe we are in urgent need of some manifestation, some demonstration, of the power of the Holy Spirit (see note 32).

He cautions that we must not think only of revival. He warns against being too interested in the exceptional and unusual. Don't despise the day of small things, he says. Don't despise the regular work of the church and the regular work of the Spirit (see note 33). But I get the distinct impression that Lloyd-Jones was increasingly disillusioned with the "regular" and the "customary" and the "usual" as his ministry came to a close at Westminster. Doesn't it sound like that when he says,

[We] can produce a number of converts, thank God for that, and that goes on regularly in evangelical churches every Sunday. But the need today is much too great for that. The need today is for an authentication of God, of the supernatural, of the spiritual, of the eternal, and this can only be answered by God graciously hearing our cry and shedding forth again his Spirit upon us and filling us as he kept filling the early church (see note 34).

What is needed is some mighty demonstration of the power of God, some enactment of the Almighty, that will compel people to pay attention, and to look, and to listen. And the history of all the revivals of the past indicates so clearly that that is invariably the effect of revival, without any exception at all. That is why I am calling attention to revival. That is why I am urging you to pray for this. When God acts, he can do more in a minute that man with his organizing can do in fifty years (see note 35).

What lies so heavily on Lloyd-Jones' heart is that the name of God be vindicated and his glory manifested in the world. "We should be anxious," he says, "to see something happening that will arrest the nations, all the peoples, and cause them to stop and think again" (see note 36). That is what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is all about. The purpose, the main function of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, is ... to enable God's people to witness in such a manner that it becomes a phenomenon and people are arrested and are attracted (see note 37).

Now here is where spiritual gifts come in—things like healing and miracles and prophecy and tongues, the whole area of signs and wonders. Lloyd Jones is addressing power evangelism long before John Wimber.

He says that spiritual gifts are a part of the authenticating work of revival and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Extraordinary spiritual gifts, he says, result from the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then he says that this question is very important at the present time for this reason: "We need some supernatural authentication of our message" (see note 38).

Joel, and the other prophets who also spoke of it, indicated that in the age which was to come, and which came with the Lord Jesus Christ and the baptism with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, there should be some unusual authentication of the message (see note 39). At this point reformed people get nervous because they feel that the power of the word of God is being compromised. Is not the gospel the power of God unto salvation? Is not the spoken word, empowered by the Holy Spirit, sufficient? "Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified ... the power of God ..." (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

Things are not that simple. And the issue here is not contemporary claims; the issue is that the Scripture show signs and wonders functioning in the New Testament along side the greatest preaching that will ever be. And evidently Peter and Paul and Stephen and Philip did not think that the attestation of signs and wonders compromised the integrity and power of the word of God (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:4).

Lloyd-Jones is deeply impressed by this fact, and says, "If the apostles were incapable of being true witnesses without unusual power, who are we to claim that we can be witnesses without such power?" (see note 40). And when he said that , he did not just mean the power of the word. He meant the power manifest in extraordinary spiritual gifts. Here's the evidence:

[Before Pentecost the apostles] were not yet fit to be witnesses ... [They] had been with the Lord during the three years of his ministry. They had heard his sermons, they had seen his miracles, they had seen him crucified on the cross, they had seen him dead and buried, and they had seen him after he had risen literally in the body from the grave. These were men who had been with im in the upper room at Jerusalem after his resurrection and to whom he had expounded the Scriptures, and yet it is to these men he says that they must tarry at Jerusalem until they are endued with power from on high. The special purpose, the specific purpose of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is to enable us to witness, to bear testimony, and one of the ways in which that happens is through the giving of spiritual gifts (see note 41). My own answer to the question how the power of the word and the authenticating function of signs and wonders fit together is this. The Bible teaches that the gospel preached is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:23). It also teaches that the demand for signs in the presence of God's word is the mark of an evil and adulterous generation (Matthew 16:4; 1 Corinthians 1:22). But the Bible also says that Paul and Barnabas "remained a long time [in Iconium] speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3; cf. Hebrews 2:4; Mark 16:20). So signs and wonders were God's attesting witness to the spoken word of the gospel. Could we not then say, in putting all this together, that signs and wonders function in relation to the word of God, as striking, wakening, channels for the self-authenticating glory of Christ in the gospel? Signs and wonders do not save. They do not transform the heart. Only the glory of Christ seen in the gospel has the power to do that (2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6). But evidently, God chooses at times to use signs and wonders along side his regenerating word to win a hearing and to shatter the shell of disinterest and cynicism and false religion, and help the fallen heart fix its gaze on the gospel (see note 42).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones Was Not a Warfieldian Cessationist

Clearly, from what we have seen, Lloyd-Jones was not what we call a cessationist. In fact he came out very strongly against the Warfield kind of cessationism. In 1969 he wrote against "A Memorandum on Faith Healing" put out by the Christian Medical Fellowship in England which relied explicitly on Warfield's arguments that the sign gifts (like healing) were "accompaniments of apostleship" and therefore invalid for today since the apostles were once for all.

I think it is quite without scriptural warrant to say that all these gifts ended with the apostles or the Apostolic Era. I believe there have been undoubted miracles since then (seen note 43). When he speaks of the need for revival power and for the baptism of the Spirit and for a mighty attestation for the word of God today, it is clear that he has in mind the same sort of thing that happened in

the life of the apostles.

It is perfectly clear that in New Testament times, the gospel was authenticated in this way by signs, wonders and miracles of various characters and descriptions ... Was it only meant to be true of the early church? ... The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things were only temporary—never! There is no such statement anywhere (see note 44).

He deals with the cessationist arguments and concludes that they are based on conjectures and arguments from silence in order to justify a particular prejudice (see note 45). "To hold such a view," he says, "is simply to quench the Spirit" (see note 46).

Beyond that he says that there is good historical evidence that many of these gifts persisted for several centuries, and that they have been manifested from time to time since the Reformation. For example, he credits the record of John Welsh, the son-in-law of John Knox for having done many amazing things and actually raising someone from the dead. And there is evidence from Protestant Reformers that some had a genuine gift of prophecy. For example he says that Alexander Peden, one of the Scottish Covenanters, gave accurate literal prophecies of things that subsequently took place (see note 47).

Martin Lloyd-Jones' Personal Experiences of Unusual Power

Lloyd-Jones had enough extraordinary experiences of his own to make him know that he had better be open to what the sovereign God might do. For example, Stacy Woods describes the physical effect of one of Lloyd-Jones' sermons. In an extraordinary way, the presence of God was in that Church. I personally felt as if a hand were pushing me through the pew. At the end of the sermon for some reason or the other the organ did not play, the Doctor went off into the vestry and everyone sat completely still without moving. It must have been almost ten minutes before people seemed to find the strength to get up and, without speaking to one another, quietly leave the Church. Never have I witnessed or experienced such preaching with such fantastic reaction on the part of the congregation (see note 48).

Another illustration comes from his earlier days at Sandfields. A woman who had been a well-known spirit-medium attended his church one evening. She later testified after her conversion: The moment I entered your chapel and sat down on a seat amongst the people, I was conscious of a supernatural power. I was conscious of the same sort of supernatural power I was accustomed to in our spiritist meetings, but there was one big difference; I had the feeling that the power in your chapel was a clean power" (see note 49).

Several times in his life he had a kind of prophetic premonition that went beyond the ordinary. On January 19, 1940 he wrote to the wife of a friend, Douglas Johnson, who had suffered a coronary occlusion.

I have a very definite and unmistakable consciousness of the fact of [Douglas'] complete and entire recovery. That kind of thing, as he will know, is not common with me. I report it because it is so very definite (see note 50). This illustrates the point he makes about God's personal communication to his children. He gives Philip's being led to the chariot in Acts 8:1-40 and Paul and Barnabas being sent out in Acts 13:1-52 as Biblical examples of such direct communication from the Lord, then says, there is no question but that God's people can look for and expect

"leadings", "guidance", indications of what they are meant to do ... Men have been told by the Holy Spirit to do something; they knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to them; and it transpired that it obviously was his leading. It seems clear to me that if we deny such a possibility we are again guilty of quenching the Spirit (see note 51).

Lloyd-Jones knew from the Bible and from history and from his own experience that the extraordinary working of the Spirit defied precise categorization. He said, "the ways in which the blessing comes are almost endless. We must be careful lest we restrict them or lest we try to systematize them over much, or, still worse, lest we mechanize them" (see note 52).

Martin Lloyd-Jones' Criticisms of the Pentecostalism He Knew

These are remarkable teachings coming from the main spokesman for the reformed cause in Britain in the last generation. He helped found a publishing house (Banner of Truth Trust) that has consistently put forward cessationist, Warfield-like thinking on spiritual gifts. And lest you think Lloyd-Jones was a full-blown charismatic incognito let me mention some things that gave him balance and made him disenchanted with Pentecostals and charismatics as he knew them.

1. He insisted that revival have a sound doctrinal basis. And from what he saw there was a minimization of doctrine almost everywhere that unity and renewal were being claimed (see note 53). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and revival will be shallow and short-lived without deeper doctrinal roots than the charismatic tree seems to have.

2. Charismatics put too much stress on what they do and not enough emphasis on the freedom and sovereignty of the Spirit, to come and go on his own terms. "Spiritual gifts," he says, "are always controlled by the Holy Spirit. They are given, and one does not know when they are going to be given" (see note 54).

You can pray for the baptism of the Spirit, but that does not guarantee that it happens ... It is in his control. He is the Lord. He is a sovereign Lord and he does it in his own time and in his own way (see note 55).

3. Charismatics sometimes insist on tongues as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which of course he rejects.

It seems to be that the teaching of the Scripture itself, plus the evidence of the history of the church, establishes the fact that the baptism with the Spirit is not always accompanied by particular gifts (see note 56).

4. But even more often most charismatics claim to be able to speak in tongues whenever they want to. This, he argues is clearly against what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:18, "I thank God I speak in tongues more than you all." If he and they could speak in tongues any time they chose, then there would be no point in thanking God that the blessing of tongues is more often given to him than to them (see note 57).

5. Too often, experiences are sought for their own sake rather than for the sake of empowerment for witness and for the glory of Christ (see note 58). The aim is not to have experiences in themselves but to empower for outreach and making Christ known (see note 59) ...

We must test anything that claims to be a movement of the Spirit in terms of its evangelistic power (see note 60) ... The supreme test of anything that claims to be the work of the Holy Spirit is John 16:14—"He shall glorify me" (see note 61).

6. Charismatics can easily fall into the mistake of assuming that if a person has powerful gifts that person is thus a good person and is fit to lead and teach. This is not true. Lloyd-Jones is aware that baptism with the Holy Spirit and the possession of gifts does not certify one's moral fitness to minister or speak for God. The spiritual condition at Corinth, in terms of sanctification, was low and yet there was much evidence of divine power.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is primarily and essentially a baptism with power ... [But] there is no direct connection between the baptism with the Holy Spirit and sanctification (see note 62) ... It is something that can be isolated, whereas sanctification is a continuing and a continuous process (see note 63).

7. Charismatics characteristically tend to be more interested in subjective impressions and unusual giftings than in the exposition of Scripture. Be suspicious, he says, of any claim to a "fresh revelation of truth" (see note 64). (In view of what he said above concerning how the Holy Spirit speaks today in guidance, he cannot mean here that all direct communication from God is ruled out.)

8. Charismatics sometimes encourage people to give up control of their reason and to let themselves go. Lloyd-Jones disagrees. "We must never let ourselves go" (see note 65). A blank mind is not advocated in the Scriptures (see note 66). The glory of Christianity is what we can "at one and the same time ... be gripped and lifted up by the Spirit and still be in control" (see

1 Corinthians 14:32) (see note 67). We must always be in a position to test all things, since Satan and hypnotism can imitate the most remarkable things (see note 68).

Martin Lloyd-Jones' Warnings to Spirit-Quenching Formalists But having said all that, by way of warning and balance, Lloyd-Jones comes back to the strong affirmation of openness to the supernatural demonstration of power that the world needs so badly. Of those who sit back and point their finger at the charismatic excesses of good people he says, "God have mercy upon them! God have mercy upon them! It is better to be too credulous than to be carnal and to be smug and dead" (see note 69).

He even describes how many people quench the Spirit through fear of the unusual or supernatural. This has often happened: in a meeting ... you begins to be afraid as to what is going to happen and to say, "If I do this what will take place?" That is quenching the Spirit. It is resisting his general movement upon your spirit. You feel his gracious influence, and then you hesitate and are uncertain or you are frightened. That is quenching the Spirit (see note 70).

Certain people by nature are afraid of the supernatural, of the unusual, of disorder. You can be so afraid of disorder, so concerned about discipline and decorum and control, that you become guilty of what the Scripture calls "quenching the Spirit" (see note 71).

How Does Lloyd-Jones Counsel Us to Seek the Baptism of the Spirit? This is all very remarkable it seems to me. Lloyd-Jones' vision of Spirit-baptized life is a different Biblical synthesis than exists in the evangelical church or the charismatic movement. One my very legitimately ask if he is

unwittingly articulating an agenda for the so-called Third Wave of the Spirit. So in my mind there is a real sense of urgency in asking, "What is his counsel to us as we navigate between uncritical, and unbiblical gullibility on the one side and Spirit-quenching resistance on the other?" His basic counsel is this: "You cannot do anything about being baptized with the Spirit except to ask for it. You cannot do anything to produce it" (see note 72). Nevertheless you should labor in prayer to attain it (see note 73). We must be patient (see note 74) and not set time limits on the Lord. He cites Dwight L. Moody and R.A. Torrey and A.J. Gordon and A.T. Pierson as ones who sought the baptism of the Spirit pleading for a long time (see note 75). In fact Lloyd-Jones had a special liking for Moody's repeated prayer: "O God, prepare my heart and baptize me with the Holy Ghost power" (see note 76). But is seems that there is more that we can do than only pray. If a prepared heart is important then there are means of grace besides prayer that cleanse the heart and conform it more and more to Christ. One thinks of meditation on the Scriptures and exhortation from fellow Christians and mortification of sin along the lines of Romans six and so on. But not only that, Lloyd-Jones teaches that the Spirit can be quenched by certain forms of barren institutionalization. Concerning the deadness of formal churches he says,

It is not that God withdrew, it is that the church in her "wisdom" and cleverness became institutionalized, quenched the Spirit, and made the manifestations of the power of the Spirit well-nigh impossible (see note 77).

Now that is a powerful statement from one who believes in the sovereignty of the Spirit—that certain forms of institutionalization can make the manifestations of the Spirit's power "well-nigh impossible." If the Spirit in his sovereignty suffers himself to be hindered and quenched, as Lloyd-Jones (and the apostle Paul!) says, then it is not entirely accurate to say that there is nothing we can do to open the way for his coming. It is only that we cannot constrain him to come. Or to put it another way, while it seems we cannot make the Spirit come in power, we can do things that usually keep him from coming. Did He Practice What He Preached? This leads to one final crucial question that gets right to the heart of the issue of application: Did Lloyd-Jones practice what he preached? Or to ask it another way, "Did he make way for the Spirit, or did he possibly and partially quench the Spirit in his own church (see note 78)? In view of what he said about certain forms of institutionalization that make the manifestation of the Spirit's power "well-nigh impossible", we should ask whether there were forms of institutionalization at Westminster Chapel that hindered the manifestation of the Spirit? And if certain kinds of "institutionalization" can quench the Spirit, one wonders if certain uses of music and certain forms of service and kinds of attitude and personality do not hinder Him as well.

There are at least five aspects of life at Westminster chapel that make me wonder if Lloyd-Jones practically followed through on his revival principles.

1. His biographer, Iain Murray says that the "experience meetings" of the 18th century had disappeared in the churches of England and there was need for change (see note 79). But did Lloyd-Jones make significant changes that gave any real open context for the exercise of the spiritual gifts? Iain Murray tells us that the audience in Westminster Chapel was an anonymous group of listeners. "These were days when strangers did not commonly greet one another in church" (see note 80).

One wonders if Lloyd-Jones took significant steps to turn that tide. Did he labor, for example, to create a small group network in his church where people could minister to one another in a context perhaps less institutionally restrictive on the Spirit (see note 81).

2. He said, "I never trained a single convert how to approach others but they did so ... (see note 82)." Is this typical of his distance from practical hands-on interaction with his people at a level where their participation could be encouraged? Did Lloyd-Jones really seek the kind of involvement with his people through which the manifestations like those that came through the apostles could flow? The apostles had significant hands-on ministry it seems. Without involvement from the pastor and some risk-taking on his part one can hardly expect the people to take steps to avoid quenching the Spirit, especially when they regularly hear overwhelming and austere cautions about charismatic excesses. Ordinary people interpret long and complex warnings and cautions as a red light on new experience.

3. His grandson, Christopher Catherwood says, "He had a special dislike for certain kinds of emotive music" (see note 83). And he himself said,

[The Spirit] does not need ... our help with all our singing and all our preliminaries and working up of emotions ... If the Spirit is Lord—and he is—he does not need these helps, and anything that tries to help the Spirit to produce a result is a contradiction of New Testament teaching (see note 84). This dislike for emotive music and the so called "preliminaries" of the worship service seems to show an austere and suspicious attitude toward emotion and the music that may evoke it for the common people. This could have easily acted as an inhibition on the freedom of the congregation to express the joy of the Holy Spirit. Could not music be in the same category as the reading of a good book, which Lloyd-Jones said was a perfectly legitimate aid in stirring up the emotions to desire more of the Spirit (see note 85)? Only music would seem to be even more legitimate, since it not only helps to stir up holy desire, but also gives vent to true expressions of desire and love. Not only that, music would seem to have more Biblical warrant as an aid in seeking the fullness of God in worship (cf. Ephesians 5:19) (see note 86).

4. He seemed not to be willing to be involved in the nitty gritty of cultivating a prayer movement. I am not sure of this but Murray records a really surprising observation from 1959: "A few in 1959 were so absorbed with revival that they organized all-night prayer meetings and looked for ML-J's support. They did not get it" (see note 87). Yet he was known to pray for extended time with some (see note 88). Did he really live out his principle that the one thing you can do with zeal and labor to seek a revival is to pray for it?

5. Did he ever come to terms with 1 Corinthians 14:1? "Make love your aim and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." How can this be squared with the following statement?

It is always right to seek the fullness of the Spirit—we are exhorted to do so. But the gifts of the Spirit are to be left in the hands of the Holy Spirit himself (see note 89).

1 Corinthians 14:1 specifically says to seek not just fullness in general, but the gifts of the Spirit in particular. So Lloyd-Jones' statement seems to say the opposite. Was this attitude to the gifts a kind of quenching of the manifestation of power? Again he says,

We must not seek phenomena and strange experiences. What we must seek is the manifestation of God's glory and his power and his might ... We must leave it to God, in his sovereign wisdom, to decide whether to grant these occasional concomitants or not (see note 90).

Surely he is right that we must not be preoccupied with the outer forms of things—like bodily healing instead of spiritual life. But could the apostles really have prayed without expressing longing for the signs and wonders which proved so helpful in attesting to the word of grace (Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:4; Mark 16:20)? Did they in fact not pray in Acts 4:30 that God would perform signs and wonders and specifically that he would stretch out his hand to heal? And Lloyd-Jones himself says that the phenomena are extremely valuable and needed.

"Does it not seem clear and obvious that in this way God is calling attention to himself and his own work by unusual phenomena? There is nothing that attracts such attention as this kind of thing, and it is used of God in the extension of his kingdom to attract, to call the attention of people (see note 91).

Surely in view of

1 Corinthians 14:1 and Acts 4:30 and Lloyd-Jones' own estimation of the gifts and phenomena of the Spirit, the answer is not to forsake praying for signs and wonders but to make it a matter of right motive (see note 92) and good balance with all the other important things in Scripture. That balance and motive are fairly well expressed in one of his many beautiful closing exhortations, and I use it to close this message:

Let us together decide to beseech him, to plead with him to do this again. Not that we may have the experience or the excitement, but that his mighty hand may be known and his great name may be glorified and magnified among the people (see note 93).

Notes:

1. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 373.

2. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Preaching and Preachers, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 9.

3. Christopher Catherwood, Five Evangelical Leaders, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1985), p. 55.

4. Preaching and Preachers, p. 4.

5. Five Evangelical Leaders, p. 170.

6. J. I. Packer, Introduction: Why Preach?, in: The Preacher and Preaching, ed. by Samuel T. Logan Jr., (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), p. 7. This is Packer's assessment of the impact Lloyd-Jones had.

7. Five Evangelical Leaders, p. 71.

8. Five Evangelical Leaders. p. 56.

9. Five Evangelical Leaders, p. 66; The Sovereign Spirit, p. 11.

10. The Sovereign Spirit, pp. 55-57.

11. My primary sources have been Iain Murray's new two volume biography, his sermons on Revival given in 1959 and published by Crossway in 1987, and the two most controversial books, Joy Unspeakable and The Sovereign Spirit containing twenty-four sermons preached between November 15, 1964 and June 6, 1965, and published by Harold Shaw in this country in 1984 and 1985. A shorter summary of Lloyd-Jones' life, written by his grandson Christopher Catherwood, is found in Five Evangelical Leaders (Harold Shaw, 1985.

12. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), pp. 111-112.

13. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 385.

14. He mentions 1) a resting in orthodoxy and negligence of true spiritual life; 2) an over concern with apologetics in answering Modernism; 3) a dislike for emotion and an excessive reaction against Pentecostalism; 4) a misunderstanding of the Puritan emphasis on the individual soul; and the confusion of revivals (which is a sovereign work of God) with evangelistic crusades (which are organized by men, as Charles Finney worked out so fully). Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 385.

15. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 386.

16. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 386.

17. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 691.

18. Joy Unspeakable, p. 21, 23. He also tells the stories of numerous people who recount a distinct event in their lives after conversion that corresponds to a baptism for power and unusual assurance. For example: John Flavel, Jonathan Edwards, Mood (pp. 79-80), John Wesley (pp. 62-63), John Howe, William Guthrie (pp. 103-105), Pascal (pp. 105-106), Aquinas (pp. 113).

19. "The baptism with the Holy Spirit is always something clear and unmistakable, something which can be recognized by the person to whom it happens and by others who look on at this person ... No man can tell you the moment when he was regenerated. Everybody is agreed about that—that regeneration is non-experimental." Joy Unspeakable, p. 52.

20. Joy Unspeakable, p. 141 21. Joy Unspeakable, p. 39.

22. Joy Unspeakable, p. 38.

23. Joy Unspeakable, p. 41.

24. Joy Unspeakable, p. 97.

25. Joy Unspeakable, p. 89-90.

26. "I am certain that the world outside is not going to pay much attention to all the organized efforts of the Christian church. The one thing she will pay attention to is a body of people filled with the spirit of rejoicing. That is how Christianity conquered the ancient world." Joy Unspeakable, p. 102.

27. Joy Unspeakable, p. 90.

28. Joy Unspeakable, p. 95-96.

29. Joy Unspeakable, p. 87.

30. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Joy Unspeakable, (Wheaton: harold Shaw Publishers, 1984), p. 51.

31. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 25.

32. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 25.

33. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 384.

34. Joy Unspeakable, p. 278.

35. Revival, pp. 121-122.

36. Revival, pp. 120.

37. Joy Unspeakable, p. 84. See The Sovereign Spirit, p. 17, 35, 120.

38. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 24.

39. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 26. He cites John 14:12 on this page as Jesus' own prophecy that what Joel had predicted would happen. The miracles of Jesus "were not only done as acts of kindness. The main reason for them was that they should be 'signs,' authentications of who he was." The point is that when believers do these signs, they will have the same function.

40. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 46.

41. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 120 (italics mine). Gifts are only "one of the ways" the baptism of the Spirit empowers for witness. "It is possible for one to be baptized with the Holy Spirit without having some of these special gifts." (p. 121) 42. But see below on Lloyd-Jones reluctance to encourage anyone to seek phenomena.

43. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 786. See also Joy Unspeakable, p. 246.

44. The Sovereign Spirit, pp. 31-32.

45. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 39.

46. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 46.

47. The Sovereign Spirit, pp. 44-45. See Alexander Smellie, Men of the Covenant, (London: Andrew Melrose, 1905), pp. 334-335, 384. Lloyd-Jones also refers to Robert Baxter and John Welsh as ones with foretelling gifts (p. 88).

48. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 377.

49. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) p. 221.

50. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 45. He tells of another instance of prophetic certainty about the future: on the weekend of sunday, May 11, 1941 Lloyd-Jones was to preach at Westminster Chapel in the evening but not the morning. He had gone to preach that morning at the chapel of Mansfield College in Oxford. Early Sunday morning he was told that all of Westminster had been flattened by a German bombing raid and he may as well stay the night in Oxford. He said with amazing certainty that he would be preaching there that night. As they arrived there it stood with only two windows blown out in the midst of great rubble. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 16-17.

51. The Sovereign Spirit, pp. 89-90.

52. Joy Unspeakable, p. 243. Edward Payson received the blessing on his deathbed after seeking it all his life. Another strange instance is the case of David Morgan. "And so it was a hundred years ago in Northern Ireland and in Wales. I have mentioned a man called David Morgan, a very ordinary minister, just carrying on, as it were. Nobody had heart of him. He did nothing at all that was worthy of note. Suddenly this power came upon him and for two years, as I have said, he preached like a lion. Then the power was withdrawn and he reverted to David Morgan again" (Revival, p. 114).

53. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 687.

54. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 153.

55. Joy Unspeakable, pp. 77-78. He illustrates with Peter and John healing the man at the temple in Acts 3:1-26 (whom they had no doubt passed many times before), and with Paul in Philipi: "If the apostle permanently had the power of exorcism, why did he not deal with her the first day?" (The Sovereign Spirit, p. 155). This applies to all the gifts including tongues: "It is not something, therefore, that a man can do whenever he likes" (The Sovereign Spirit, p. 156)..

56. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 53. Lloyd-Jones says that it is a mistake to "confuse the baptism of the Spirit with the occasional gifts of the Spirit" (p. 117).

57. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 152.

58. He is aware that in 1 Corinthians the gifts are largely meant to edify the body of Christ. But he says, "Watch the order. It must start in the church, which is then empowered to witness and testify boldly of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is not given that we may have wonderful experiences or marvelous sensations within us, or even to solve psychological and other problems for us. That is certainly a part of the work of the Spirit, but it is not the primary object. The primary object is that the Lord may be known" (The Sovereign Spirit, p. 130).

59. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 693.

60. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 129-130.

61. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 106. See pp. 111 and 113 for the "Jesus is Lord" test.

62. Joy Unspeakable, p. 137. Yet he does say that there is an indirect connection between baptism with the Holy Spirit and sanctification. In baptism with the Holy Spirit we see the Lord more clearly and become more immediately sure of his reality and his glorious power. This sight of

his glory usually functions as a kind of booster to the sanctification process. "His sanctification, everything about him, is stimulated in a most amazing and astonishing manner" (p. 144).

63. Joy Unspeakable, p. 140.

64. The Sovereign Spirit, pp. 77-79.

65. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 71. See p. 78..

66. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 72.

67. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 74. See pp. 151-158, "This is the glory of the way of the Holy Spirit—above understanding, and yet the understanding can still be used" (p. 158)..

68. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 66. In exercising our reason to test the spirits we must realize that it is not enough to say that a person loves Christ more because of the experience. One must go on testing their behavior and their doctrine by Scripture (p. 116).

69. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 83.

70. Joy Unspeakable, p. 206.

71. Joy Unspeakable, p. 18. Sometimes these fearful people will try to hinder the work of God's Spirit by accusing others of being divisive and proud, But Lloyd-Jones says that this is the way formalistic people have responded to the movement of God's Spirit often. It should not hinder the true work of God (The Sovereign Spirit, pp. 46-47).

72. Joy Unspeakable, p. 139.

73. Joy Unspeakable, p. 247. That also includes doing things that increase your desire for it. He specifically mentions reading (p. 228). But he does not see laying on of hands as appropriate for praying over someone that they receive the gifts, in spite of the Samaritans and Ananias etc. (pp. 188-189).

74. Joy Unspeakable, p. 231. "If you are in this position of seeking, do not despair, or be discouraged, it is he who has created the desire within you, and he is a loving God who does not mock you. If you have the desire, let him lead you on. Be patient. Be urgent and patient at the same time. Once he leads you along this line he will lead you to the blessing itself and all the glory that is attached to it."

75. Joy Unspeakable, p. 210.

76. Joy Unspeakable, p. 220. He adds, "It is dangerous to have power unless the heart is right; and we have no right to expect that the Spirit will give us the power unless he can trust us with it." Notice he does not say the Spirit won't give this power to immature and even unsanctified people. He already implied that the Spirit did ust that in Corinth when he was discussing sanctification above. One wonders if the same principle might apply to the degree of true doctrinal depth and breadth in a congregation. Could we say that wrong thinking and shallow doctrine give no warrant for expecting the blessing of Spirit baptism since he is the Spirit of truth. But perhaps, since he is free, this does not necessarily rule out the blessing either. It could be that the blessing might be given to stir up a congregation to go deeper in Scripture, and then withdrawn if they become more

fascinated with phenomena than with the glory of God in the gospel. See above on point six in the discussion of his warnings about the charismatic movement.

77. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 50.

78. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, pp. 694-695.

79. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 693.

80. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 253.

81. The Chapel did not seem to experience significant growth. The membership was 828 in 1967. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 543.

82. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 707.

83. Five Evangelical Leaders, p. 72 84. The Sovereign Spirit, p. 137.

85. Joy Unspeakable, p. 228.

86. Preaching and Preachers, p. 183. He says, referring to the life of the preacher, "Music does not help everyone, but it greatly helps some people; and I am fortunately one of them ... Anything that does you good, puts you into a good mood or condition, anything that pleases you or releases tensions and relaxes you is of inestimable value. Music does this to some in a wonderful way."

87. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 384.

88. Iain H. Murray, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981, p. 372.

89. The Sovereign Spirit, p48.

90. Revival, p. 147.

91. Revival, p. 145.

92. Why do we desire these gifts? ... Our motive should always be to know him so that we may minister to his glory and to his praise. The Sovereign Spirit, p132.

93. Revival, p. 117. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.24. The Pastor as Theologian

The Pastor as Theologian Life and Ministry of Jonathan Edwards My topic is "The Pastor as Theologian, Reflections on the Life and Ministry of Jonathan Edwards." One of Edwards' books, written back in 1742, was recently reissued with an Introduction by Charles Colson. Colson wrote, The western church – much of it drifting, enculturated, and infected with cheap grace – desperately needs to hear Edwards' challenge. . . . It is my belief that the prayers and work of those who love and obey Christ in our world may yet prevail as they keep the message of such a man as Jonathan Edwards.

I assume that you are among that number who love and obey Christ and who long for your prayers and your work to prevail over unbelief and evil in your churches and your communities and eventually in the world. And I believe that Colson is right that Edwards has a challenge for us that can help us very much, not only in his message, but also in his life as a pastor-theologian. The Real Jonathan Edwards

Most of us don't know the real Jonathan Edwards. We all remember the high school English classes or American History classes. The text books had a little section on "The Puritans" or on "The Great Awakening." And what did we read? Well, my oldest son is in the 9th grade now and his American History text book has one paragraph on the Great Awakening, which begins with the sentence that goes something like this: "The Great Awakening was a brief period of intense religious feeling in the 1730's and '40's which caused many churches to split." And for many text books, Edwards is no more than a gloomy troubler of the churches in those days of Awakening fervor. So what we get as a sample of latter-day Puritanism is an excerpt from his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Perhaps one like this, The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousands times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. And so the kids are given the impression that Edwards was a gloomy, sullen, morose, perhaps pathological misanthrope who fell into grotesque religious speech the way some people fall into obscenity. But no high school kid is ever asked to wrestle with what Edwards was wrestling with as a pastor. When you read "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," you see quickly that Edwards was not falling into this kind of language by accident. He was laboring as a pastor to communicate a reality that he saw in Scripture and that he believed was infinitely important to his people. And before any of us, especially us pastors, sniffs at Edwards' imagery, we had better think long and hard what our own method is for helping our people feel the weight of the reality of Revelation 19:15. Edwards stands before this text with awe. He virtually gapes at what he sees here. John writes in this verse, "[Christ] will tread the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty."

Listen to Edwards' comment in this sermon, The words are exceeding terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is "the fierceness and wrath of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! O how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?

What high school student is ever asked to come to grips with what really is at issue here? If the Bible is true, and if it says that someday Christ will tread his enemies like a winepress with anger that is fierce and almighty, and if you are a pastor charged with applying Biblical truth to your people so that they will flee the wrath to come, then what would your language be? What would you say to make people feel the reality of texts like these?

Edwards labored over language and over images and metaphors because he was so stunned and awed at the realities he saw in the Bible. Did you hear that one line in the quote I just read: "Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?" Edwards believed that it was impossible to exaggerate the horror of the reality of hell.

High school teachers would do well to ask their students the really probing question, "Why is it that Jonathan Edwards struggled to find images for wrath and hell that shock and frighten, while contemporary preachers try to find abstractions and circumlocutions that move away from concrete, touchable Biblical pictures of unquenchable fire and undying worms and gnashing of teeth?" If our students were posed with this simple, historical question, my guess is that some of the brighter ones would answer: "Because Jonathan Edwards really believed in hell, but most preachers today don't." But no one has asked us to take Edwards seriously, and so most of us don't know him.

Most of us don't know that he knew his heaven even better than his hell, and that his vision of glory was just as appealing as his vision of judgment was repulsive.

Most of us don't know that he is considered now by secular and evangelical historians alike to be the greatest Protestant thinker America has ever produced. Scarcely has anything more insightful been written on the problem of God's sovereignty and man's accountability than his book, The Freedom of the Will.

Most of us don't know that he was not only God's kindling for the Great Awakening, but also its most penetrating analyst and critic. His book called The Religious Affections lays bare the soul with such relentless care and Biblical honesty that, two hundred years later, it still breaks the heart of the sensitive reader.

Most of us don't know that Edwards was driven by a great longing to see the missionary task of the church completed. Who knows whether Edwards has been more influential in his theological efforts on the freedom of the will and the nature of true virtue and original sin and the history of redemption, or whether he has been more influential because of his great missionary zeal and his writing the Life of David Brainerd. Does any of us know what an incredible thing it is that this man, who was a small-town pastor for 23 years in a church of 600 people, a missionary to Indians for 7 years, who reared 11 faithful children, who worked without the help of electric light, or word-processors or quick correspondence, or even sufficient paper to write on, who lived only until he was 54, and who died with a library of 300 books – that this man led one of the greatest awakenings of modern times, wrote theological books that have ministered for 200 years and did

more for the modern missionary movement than anyone of his generation? His biography of the young missionary David Brainerd has been incalculable in its effect on the modern missionary enterprise. Almost immediately it challenged the spirit of God's great adventurers. Gideon Hawley, one of Edwards' missionary protégés carried it in his saddle bags and wrote in 1753 (even before Edwards' death) when the strain was almost beyond endurance, "I need, greatly need, something more than human to support me. I read my Bible and Mr. Brainerd's Life, the only books I brought with me, and from them have a little support."

John Wesley put out a shortened version of Edwards' Life of Brainerd in 1768, ten years after Edwards' death. He disapproved of Edwards' and Brainerd's Calvinism, but he said, "Find preachers of David Brainerd's spirit, and nothing can stand before them." The list of missionaries who testify to the inspiration of Brainerd's Life through the work of Jonathan Edwards is longer than any of us knows: Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke, William Carey, Henry Martyn, Robert Morrison, Samuel Mills, Fredrick Schwartz, Robert M'Cheyne, David Livingstone, Andrew Murray. And a few days before he died, Jim Elliot, who was martyred by the Aucas, entered in his diary, "Confession of pride – suggested by David Brainerd's Diary yesterday – must become an hourly thing with me." So for 250 years Edwards has been fueling the missionary movement with his biography of David Brainerd. And David Bryant today makes no secret out of the fact that Edwards' book on concerts of prayer (The Humble Attempt) is the inspiration for his own effort in the prayer movement for awakening and world evangelization today. So Brainerd has been read and known for two centuries. And Edwards' vision of united prayer is coming to life again in the person of David Bryant. But who knows the man who wrote these books?

Mark Noll, who teaches history at Wheaton and has thought much about the work of Edwards, describes the tragedy like this:

Since Edwards, American evangelicals have not thought about life from the ground up as Christians because their entire culture has ceased to do so. Edwards's piety continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-entranced world-view or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards's perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy. (Quoted in "Jonathan Edwards, Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought," Reformed Journal (February 1983):26. Emphasis mine.) The Compass of my own Theological Studies And frankly I wish I could recreate for everyone of you what it has meant for me to find my way, little by little, into that God-entranced worldview. It began when I was in seminary, as I read Edwards' Essay on the Trinity and then Freedom of the Will and then Dissertation concerning the End for which God created the World, and then Nature of True Virtue, and then Religious Affections.

Alongside the Bible, Edwards became the compass of my theological studies. Not that he has anything like the authority of Scripture, but that he is a master of that Scripture, and a precious friend and teacher.

One of my seminary professors suggested to us back in 1970 that we find one great and godly teacher in the history of the church and make him a lifelong companion. That's what Edwards has become for me. It's hard to overestimate what he has meant to me theologically and personally in my vision of God and my love for Christ. This was true when I was a teacher at Bethel, because Edwards posed and wrestled with so many questions that were utterly essential to me in those

days. But now I have worked as a pastor for almost eight years and I can say that Edwards has made all the difference in the world.

I am so deeply convinced that what our people need is God. I preached on the reign of Christ two weeks ago on Easter Sunday from 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. It says at the end that someday the Son himself will be subjected to the Father, that God might be all in all. I argued that the necessity of the reign of Christ (expressed in the words, "He must reign, until he has put all his enemies under his feet") is rooted in the very demands of God the Father's well-spring of deity – that to be God in all the fullness of his glory, the image and reflection of his glory, the Son, must turn and bow and draw all attention through himself to the Father.

Six verses later, Paul cries out to the Corinthians, who were questioning the resurrection of Christ, "Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame." What they needed, and what our people need is a true vision of the greatness of God. They need to see the whole panorama of his excellencies.

They need to see a God-entranced man on Sunday morning and at the deacon's meeting. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "What my people need most is my personal holiness. That's right. But human holiness is nothing other than a God-besotted life." And our people need to hear God-entranced preaching. God himself needs to be the subject matter of our preaching, in his majesty and holiness and righteousness and faithfulness and sovereignty and grace. And by that I don't mean we shouldn't preach about nitty-gritty practical things like parenthood, and divorce and AIDS and gluttony and television and sex. We should indeed! What I mean is that everyone of those things should be swept right up into the holy presence of God and laid bare to the roots of its Godwardness or godlessness.

What our people need is not nice little moral, or psychological pep talks about how to get along in the world. They need to see that everything, absolutely everything – from garage sales and garbage recycling to death and demons have to do with God in all his infinite greatness. Most of our people have no one, no one in the world to placard the majesty of God for them. Therefore most of them are starved for the infinite God-entranced vision of Jonathan Edwards and they don't even know it.

They are like people who have grown up in a room with an 8-foot flat white plaster ceiling and no windows. They have never seen the broad blue sky, or the sun blazing in midday glory, or the million stars of a clear country night or some trillion-ton mountain. And so they can't explain the sense of littleness and triviality and pettiness and insignificance in their souls. But it's because there is no grandeur. What our people need is the God-entranced vision of reality that Jonathan Edwards saw.

About five years ago during our January prayer week, I decided to preach on the holiness of God from Isaiah 6:1-13. And I resolved on the first Sunday of the year to take the first four verses of that chapter and unfold the vision of God's holiness, In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high an lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called,

and the house was filled with smoke. So I preached on the holiness of God and did my best to display the majesty and glory of such an unapproachably holy God. I gave not one word of application to the lives of our people (not a good practice regularly).

Little did I know that in the week prior to this message one of the young families of our church discovered that their child was being sexually abused for over a year by a close relative. It was incredibly devastating. There was police involvement. Social workers. Psychiatrists. Doctors. They were there that Sunday morning and sat under that message.

I wonder how many advisers to us pastors today would have said, Piper, can't you see your people are hurting? Can't you come down out of your ivory tower of theology and get practical? Don't you realize what kind of people sit in front of you on Sunday?

Several months later the sad details began to come out. And the husband came to me one Sunday after a service and took me aside, and said, "John, these have been the hardest months of our lives. You know what has gotten me through? The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock we could stand on."

Just a week or so ago I spoke with a woman who has been coming to this church for over seven years. She's not a member. She was getting a divorce in those early days and she knew I was against it. She said last week, "For all my turmoil, and mixed feelings and loneliness I have needed your stand and your vision over these years. They have been crucial in my spiritual survival."

And, O, how I wish we had time to talk about what the vision of this God has meant for the missions movement here at Bethlehem. Let me put it in a word. Young people today at Bethlehem don't get fired up about denominations and agencies. They get fired up about the greatness of a global God and about the unstoppable purpose of a sovereign King.

I believed it before I was a pastor. I believe it even more strongly now after eight years of pastoral ministry. The majesty and sovereignty and beauty of God is the linchpin in the life of the church, both in pastoral care and missionary outreach. In other words, the God-entranced worldview that Jonathan Edwards had was not the product and prerogative of an academic theologian. It was the heartbeat of his pastoral labors. And so I want to let Edwards admonish us and encourage us with his example. I hope that you will all purchase the new biography by Iain Murray. And I hope many of you will get his Works or at least the paperback of Religious Affections. But don't misunderstand me. Not a one of us in this room will be a Jonathan Edwards. He is in a class almost by himself. To think any thought like that would result in nothing but discouragement. We must be ourselves.

Write 1 Corinthians 15:10 over every book and conference and seminar – "By the grace of God I am what I am." I could wish to have the strategic genius of a Ralph Winter or the theological precision and insight of a J.I. Packer, but I will not be them nor Jonathan Edwards. But we can learn and we can be inspired to press on, perhaps far beyond our present attainments, in understanding and holiness and faithfulness. We can be good for each other as long as we don't try to mimic. The eye of the body is not the ear and the foot is not the hand.

Sustaining Our Vision of God So let me tell you some of the things about Edwards' work that sustained his vision of God. Some of them will fit your life and some won't. My prayer is that you will see something here that will give you a new sense of zeal and commitment to the greatest

calling in the world. Let me put this in the form of four exhortations from the life of this pastor.

Edwards exhorts us to radical singlemindedness in our occupation with spiritual things.

Listen to two of his resolutions that he made in 1723, when he was almost 20 years old.

44, Resolved, That no other end but religion shall have any influence at all in any of my actions; and that no action shall be, in the least circumstance, any otherwise than the religious end will carry it.

61, Resolved, That I will not give way to that listlessness which I find unbends and relaxes my mind from being fully and fixedly set on religion, whatever excuse I may have for it . . .

I think this is an application of Paul's principle in 2 Timothy 2:4-6, "No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops."

I think that what happens for many pastors is that the ministry does not flourish with as much power and joy as they had hoped and just to survive emotionally they start to give way to amusements and diversions and hobbies. The ministry becomes a 40-hour-a-week job that you do like any other, and then the evenings and days off are filled up with harmless, enjoyable diversions. And the whole feel changes. The radical urgency fades. The wartime mentality shifts to a peacetime mentality. The lifestyle starts to get cushy. The all-consuming singleness of vision evaporates.

Let me say it again. Our people need a God-besotted man. Even if they criticize the fact that you are not available at the dinner on Saturday night because you must be with God, they need at least one man in their life who is radically and totally focused on God and the pursuit of the knowledge of God, and the ministry of the word of God.

How many people in your churches do you know that are laboring to know God, who are striving earnestly in study and prayer to enlarge their vision of God. Precious few. Well then, what will become of our churches if we the pastors, who are charged with knowing and unfolding the whole counsel of God, shift into neutral, quit reading and studying and writing, and take on more hobbies and watch more television?

Edwards exhorts us to a single-minded occupation with God in season and out of season. Edwards calls this effort to know God "divinity" rather than theology. It is a science far above all other sciences. Listen to what he says we should occupy ourselves with:

God himself, the eternal Three in one, is the chief object of this science; and next Jesus Christ, as God-man and Mediator, and the glorious work of redemption, the most glorious work that ever was wrought: then the great things of the heavenly world, the glorious and eternal inheritance purchased by Christ, and promised in the gospel; the work of the Holy Spirit of God on the hearts of men; our duty to God, and the way in which we ourselves may become . . . like God himself in our measure. All these are objects of this science. (Works, II, 159)

If the single-minded occupation with these things is left to a few academic theologians in the colleges and seminaries, while pastors all become technicians and managers and organizers, there may be superficial success for a while, as Americans get excited about one program or the other, but in the long run the gains will prove shallow and weak, especially in the day of trial. So the first exhortation from Edwards is be radically single-minded in your commitment to know God.

Labor earnestly to know the Scriptures.

Don't get your vision of God secondhand. Don't even let Edwards or Packer be your primary source of divinity. This was the example Edwards himself sets for us. His early biographer Sereno Dwight said that when he came to his pastorate in Northampton, "he had studied theology, not chiefly in systems or commentaries, but in the Bible, and in the character and mutual relations of God and his creatures, from which all its principles are derived" (Works, I, xxxvii).

Edwards once preached a sermon entitled "The Importance and Advantage of a thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth." In it he said, "Be assiduous [!] in reading the Holy Scriptures. This is the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived. Therefore let not this treasure lie by you neglected" (Works, II, 162). And he set an amazing example in his own diligence in studying the Bible itself. I was out at Yale's Beinecke library last October where Edwards' unpublished works are stored. They took me down to the lower level and into a little room where two or three men were working on old manuscripts with microscopes and special lighting. I was allowed to see some of Edwards' sermon manuscripts (including "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") and his catalogue of reading, and his interleaved Bible.

He had taken a big Bible apart page by page and inserted a blank sheet of paper between each page and resewn the book together. Then he drew a line down the center of each blank page in order to make two columns for notes. On page after page in the remotest parts of Scripture there were extensive notes and reflections in his tiny almost illegible handwriting.

I think there is reason to believe that Edwards really did follow through on his 28th resolution while he was at Yale.

Resolved: To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

I find this resolution to be a rebuke, and a great incentive to take stock in my pastoral priorities and my reading priorities. 2 Peter 3:18 says, "Grow in the . . . knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." So Edwards resolved to study the Bible so "steadily and constantly and frequently" that he could see growth.

How many of us have a plan for growing in our grasp of the whole terrain of Scripture? Don't most of us use the Bible as a source for getting sermons and devotionals and personal devotional help? But do we labor over the Scripture in such a way that we can plainly see that today we understand something in it that we did not understand yesterday?

I fear that many of us work at reading books on theology and church life with a view to growing, but have no plan and no sustained effort to move steadily and constantly forward in our understanding of the Bible. Edwards' second exhortation is, this ought not to be so. Study the Bible so steadily and constantly and frequently that you can clearly perceive yourself to grow in them.

Edwards exhorts us to redeem the time and to do what our hand finds to do with all our might. His 6th resolution was simple and powerful: "Resolved: to live with all my might while I do live." Resolution #5 was similar: "Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can."

He was a great believer in doing what you could in the time you have, rather than putting things off till a more convenient time. Resolution #11 is one of the reasons he made such amazing progress in his theological understanding. It says, "Resolved: When I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can towards solving it, if circumstances do not hinder."

Edwards was not a passive reader. He read with a view to solving problems. Most of us are cursed with a penchant toward passive reading. We read the way people watch TV. We don't ask questions as we read. We don't ask, Why does this sentence follow that sentence? How does this paragraph relate to that one three pages earlier? We don't ferret out the order of thought or ponder the meaning of terms. And if we see a problem, we are habituated to leave that for the experts and seldom do we tackle a solution then and there the way Edwards said he was committed to do if time allowed. But Edwards calls us to be active in our minds when we read. A pastor will not be able to feed his flock rich and challenging insight into God's word unless he becomes a disciplined thinker. But almost none of us does this by nature. We must train ourselves to do it. And one of the best ways to train ourselves to think about what we read is to read with pen in hand and to write down a train of thought that comes to mind. Without this, we simply cannot sustain a sequence of questions and answers long enough to come to penetrating conclusions. This was the simple method that caused Edwards' native genius to produce immense and lasting results. Listen to Sereno Dwight's description of his discipline in this regard.

Even while a boy he began to study with his pen in his hand; not for the purpose of copying off the thoughts of others, but for the purpose of writing down, and preserving, the thought suggested to his own mind. . . . This most useful practice . . . he steadily pursued in all his studies through life. His pen appears to have been always in his hand. From this practice . . . he derived the very great advantages of thinking continually during each period of study; of thinking accurately; of thinking connectedly; of thinking habitually at all times . . . of pursuing each given subject of thought as far as he was able . . . of preserving his best thoughts, associations, and images, and then arranging them under their proper heads, ready for subsequent use; of regularly strengthening the faculty of thinking and reasoning, by constant and powerful exercise; and above all of gradually molding himself into a thinking being. . . ("Works, I, xviii)

Dwight tells us how he used the days it took on horseback to get from one town to another. He would think a thing through to some conclusion and then pin a piece of paper on his coat and charge his mind to remember the sequence of thought when he took the paper off at home (Works, I, xxxviii).

Edwards could spend up to 13 hours a day in his study, Dwight tells us, because of his decision not to visit his people except when called for. He welcomed people to his study for conversation, and he frequently taught private meetings in various neighborhoods as well as catechizing the young people in his home. In this pattern of pastoral labor we probably should not follow him. He may even have been wrong in this choice. But we who love what he wrote will not fault him too much.

He rose early, even for those nonelectrical days. In fact he probably was entirely serious when he wrote in his diary in 1728, "I think Christ has recommended rising early in the morning, by his rising from the grave very early."

It’s not easy to know what his family life looked like under this kind of rigorous schedule. Dwight says in one place, "In the evening, he usually allowed himself a season of relaxation, in the midst of his family." (Works, I, xxxviii) But in another place Edwards himself says (in 1734 when he was 31 years old), "I judge that it is best, when I am in a good frame for divine contemplation, or engaged in reading the Scriptures, or any study of divine subjects, that, ordinarily, I will not be interrupted by going to dinner, but will forego my dinner, rather than be broke off" (Works, I, xxxvi). I think it would be fair to say that the indispensable key to raising 11 believing children under these circumstances was an uncommon union with Sarah, who was an uncommon woman. With regard to his eating habits, not only was he willing to skip dinner for the sake of his study if things were really flowing, he also, Dwight tells us, "carefully observed the effects of the different sorts of food, and selected those which best suited his constitution, and rendered him most fit for mental labour." (Works, I, xxxviii) Edwards had set this pattern when he was 21 years old when he wrote in his diary, By a sparingness in diet, and eating as much as may be what is light and easy of digestion, I shall doubtless be able to think more clearly, and shall gain time; 1. By lengthening out my life; 2. Shall need less time for digestion, after meals; 3. Shall be able to study more closely, without injury to my health; 4. Shall need less time for sleep; 5. Shall more seldom be troubled with the head-ache. (Works, I, xxxv)

I commend for your consideration whether such care to maximize time and effectiveness in devotion to the ministry of the word is what Paul meant when he said redeem the time and when the Preacher said, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." The theological labor of Edwards exhorts us to study for the sake of heartfelt worship and for practical obedience.

You recall what Mark Noll said: "Edwards’s piety continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-entranced world-view. . ." The sweet marriage of reason and affection, of thought and feeling, of head and heart, study and worship that took place in the life of Jonathan Edwards has been rare since his day and still is rare. So the final exhortation is to recover that "logic on fire" as the Puritans called it – on fire with joy and obedience.

Edwards did not pursue a passion for God because it was icing on the cake of faith. For him faith was grounded in a sense of God which was more than what reason alone could deliver. He said, A true sense of the glory of God is that which can never be obtained by speculative [reasoning]; and if men convince themselves by argument that God is holy, that never will give a sense of his amiable and glorious holiness. If they argue that he is very merciful, that will not give a sense of his glorious grace and mercy. It must be a more immediate, sensible discovery that must give the mind a real sense of the excellency and beauty of God. (Works, II, 906) In other words, it is to no avail merely to believe that God is holy and merciful. For that belief to be of any saving value, we must "sense" God’s holiness and mercy. That is, we must have a true delight in it for what it is in itself. Otherwise the knowledge is no different than what the devils have. Does this mean that all his study and thinking was in vain? No indeed. Why? Because he says, "The more you have of a rational knowledge of divine things, the more opportunity will there be, when the Spirit shall be

breathed into your heart, to see the excellency of these things, and to taste the sweetness of them." (Works, II, 162, see p.16) But the goal of all is this spiritual taste, not just knowing God but delighting in him, savoring him, relishing him. And so for all his intellectual might, Edwards was the farthest thing from a cool, detached, neutral, disinterested academician.

He said in his 64th resolution,

Resolved, When I find those "groanings which cannot be uttered," of which the apostle speaks, and those "breathings of soul for the longing it hath," of which the psalmist speaks . . . I will not be weary of earnestly endeavouring to vent my desires, nor of the repetitions of such earnestness. In other words, he was as intent on cultivating his passion for God as he was of cultivating his knowledge of God. He strained forward in the harness of his flesh not only for truth, but also for more grace. The 30th resolution says,

Resolved, To strive every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before. And that advancement was for Edwards intensely practical. He said to his people what he sought for himself,

Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls, and in order to practice . . . Practice according to what knowledge you have. This will be the way to know more. . . . [According to Psalms 119:100] "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." (Works, II, 162f) The great end of all study – all theology – is a heart for God and a life of holiness. The great goal of all Edwards' work was the glory of God. And the greatest thing I have ever learned from Edwards, I think, is that God is glorified not most by being known, nor by being dutifully obeyed. He is glorified most by being enjoyed. So God glorifies Himself toward the creatures in two ways: 1. By appearing to . . . their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself. . . . God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.

God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory; and that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it. (The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards, Harvey G. Townsend, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1955, Miscellanies, #448, p. 133; see also #87, p. 128, and #332, p. 130 and #679, p. 138) And so the final and most important exhortation to us from the life and work of Jonathan Edwards is this: in all your study and all your pastoral ministry seek to glorify God by enjoying him for ever. The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the ocean (Works, II, 244). By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 81

05.25. Peculiar Doctrines, Public Morals, and the Political Welfare

Peculiar Doctrines, Public Morals, and the Political Welfare Reflections on the Life and Labor of William Wilberforce

If you want to understand and appreciate The Life and Labor of William Wilberforce, one of the wisest things you can do is to read his own book, A Practical View of Christianity first, and then read biographies. The book was published in 1797 when Wilberforce was 37 years old and had been a member of the British Parliament already for 16 years. The book proved incredibly popular for the time. It went through five printings in six months and was translated into five foreign languages. The book makes crystal clear what drives Wilberforce as a person and a politician. And if you don't see it first in his book, chances are you may not find it clearly in the biographies.

What made Wilberforce tick was a profound Biblical allegiance to what he called the "peculiar doctrines" of Christianity. These, he said, give rise, in turn, to true affections – what we might call "passion" or "emotions" – for spiritual things, which, in turn, break the power of pride and greed and fear, and then lead to transformed morals which, in turn, lead to the political welfare of the nation. He said, "If . . . a principle of true Religion [i.e., true Christianity] should . . . gain ground, there is no estimating the effects on public morals, and the consequent influence on our political welfare." [1] But he was no ordinary pragmatist or political utilitarian, even though he was one of the most practical men of his day. He was a doer. One of his biographers said, "He lacked time for half the good works in his mind." [2] James Stephen, who knew him well, remarked, "Factories did not spring up more rapidly in Leeds and Manchester than schemes of benevolence beneath his roof." [3] "No man," Wilberforce wrote, "has a right to be idle." "Where is it," he asked, "that in such a world as this, [that] health, and leisure, and affluence may not find some ignorance to instruct, some wrong to redress, some want to supply, some misery to alleviate?" [4] In other words, he lived to do good – or as Jesus said, to let his light shine before men that they might see his good deeds and give glory to his Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). But he was practical with a difference. He believed with all his heart that new affections for God were the key to new morals (or manners, as they were sometimes called) and lasting political reformation. And these new affections and this reformation did not come from mere ethical systems. They came from what he called the "peculiar doctrines" of Christianity. For Wilberforce, practical deeds were born in "peculiar doctrines." By that term he simply meant the central distinguishing doctrines of human depravity, divine judgment, the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross, justification by faith alone, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the practical necessity of fruit in a life devoted to good deeds. [5]

He wrote his book, A Practical View of Christianity, to show that the "Bulk" [6] of Christians in England were merely nominal because they had abandoned these doctrines in favor of a system of ethics and had thus lost the power of ethical life and the political welfare. He wrote: The fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight, and as might

naturally have been expected, the moral system itself also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment." [7]

He pled with nominally Christian England not to turn "their eyes from the grand peculiarities of Christianity, [but] to keep these ever in view, as the pregnant principles whence all the rest must derive their origin, and receive their best support." [8]

Knowing Wilberforce was a politician all his adult life, never losing an election from the time he was 21 years old, we might be tempted to think that his motives were purely pragmatic – as if he should say, "if Christianity works to produce the political welfare, then use it." But that is not the spirit of his mind or his life. In fact, he believed that such pragmatism would ruin the very thing it sought, the reformation of culture.

Take the example of how people define sin. When considering the nature of sin, Wilberforce said, the vast Bulk of Christians in England estimated the guilt of an action "not by the proportion in which, according to scripture, [actions] are offensive to God, but by that in which they are injurious to society." [9] Now, on the face of it that sounds noble, loving, and practical. Sin hurts people, so don't sin.

Wouldn't that definition of sin be good for society? But Wilberforce says, "Their slight notions of the guilt and evil of sin [reveal] an utter [lack] of all suitable reverence for the Divine Majesty. This principle [reverence for the Divine Majesty] is justly termed in Scripture, 'The beginning of wisdom' [Psalms 111:10]." [10] And without this wisdom, there will be no deep and lasting good done for man, spiritually or politically. Therefore, the supremacy of God's glory in all things is what he calls "the grand governing maxim" in all of life. [11] The good of society may never be put ahead of this. It dishonors God and defeats the good of society. For the good of society, the good of society must not be the primary good. A practical example of how his mind worked would be the practice of dueling. Wilberforce hated the practice of dueling – the practice that demanded a man of honor to accept a challenge to a duel when another felt insulted. Wilberforce's close friend and Prime Minister, William Pitt, actually fought a duel with George Tierney in 1798, and Wilberforce was shocked that the Prime Minister would risk his life and the nation in this way. [12] Many opposed it on its human unreasonableness. But Wilberforce wrote:

It seems hardly to have been noticed in what chiefly consists its essential guilt; that it is a deliberate preference of the favor of man, before the favor and approbation of God, in articulo mortis ["at the point of death"], in an instance, wherein our own life, and that of a fellow creature are at stake, and wherein we run the risk of rushing into the presence of our Maker in the very act of offending him." [13] In other words, offending God is the essential consideration, not killing a man or imperiling a nation. That is what makes Wilberforce tick. He was not a political pragmatist. He was a radically God-centered Christian who was a politician.

We will come back to how the Christian faith worked in his life and politics, but first let's get a brief glimpse of his life. His Early Life

Wilberforce was born August 24, 1759, in Hull, England. His father died just before Wilberforce turned 9 years old. He was sent to live with his uncle and aunt, William and Hannah, where he came under evangelical influences. His mother was more high church and was concerned her son was "turning Methodist." She took him out of the boarding school where they had sent him and

sent him to another. [14] He had admired Whitefield, Wesley, and John Newton as a child. But at this new school he said later, "I did nothing at all there." And that became his lifestyle through St. John's College at Cambridge. He was rich and able to live off his parents' wealth and get by with little work. He lost any interest in Biblical religion and loved circulating among the social elite.

He became friends with his contemporary William Pitt who in just a few years, at the age of 24, became the Prime Minister of England in 1783. Almost on a lark Wilberforce ran for the seat in the House of Commons from his home town of Hull in 1780 at the age of 21. He spent £8,000 on the election. The money and his incredible gift for speaking triumphed over both his opponents. After that Wilberforce never lost an election till the day of his death just before his 74th birthday. In 1784 he ran for the seat of the much larger and more influential Yorkshire and was elected.

Thus began a fifty-year investment in the politics of England. He began it as a late-night, party-loving, upper-class unbeliever. He was single and would stay that way happily until he was 37 years old. Then he met Barbara on April 15, 1797. He fell immediately in love. In the next eight days he proposed to her and on May 30th they were married, about two weeks after they met – and stayed married until William died 36 years later. In the first eight years of their marriage they had four sons and two daughters. We will come back to William as a family man, because it sheds light on his character and how he endured the political battles of the day.

I've just skipped over the most important thing, his conversion to a deep Christian, evangelical faith. It is a great story of the providence of God pursuing a person through seemingly casual choices. On the long holidays when Parliament was not in session Wilberforce would sometimes travel with friends or family. In the winter of 1784, when he was 25, on an impulse, he invited Isaac Milner, a friend he had known in grammar school, and who was now a tutor in Queens College, Cambridge, to go with him and his mother and sister to the French Riviera. To his amazement Milner turned out to be a convinced Christian without any of the stereotypes that Wilberforce had built up against evangelicals. They talked for hours about the Christian faith. In another seemingly accidental turn, Wilberforce saw lying in the house where they were staying a copy of Philip Doddridge's The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul (1745). He asked Milner about it, and he said that it was "one of the best books ever written" and suggested they take it along and read it on the way home. [15] Wilberforce later ascribes a huge influence in his conversion to this book. When he arrived home in February 1785 he "had reached intellectual assent to the Biblical view of man, God and Christ." But would not have claimed what he later described as true Christianity. It was all intellectual. He pushed it to the back of his mind and went on with political and social life. That summer Wilberforce traveled again with Milner and discussed the Greek New Testament for hours. Slowly his "intellectual assent became profound conviction" [16] One of the first manifestations of what he called "the great change" – the conversion – was the contempt he felt for his wealth and the luxury he lived in, especially on these trips between Parliamentary sessions. Seeds were sown almost immediately at the beginning of his Christian life, it seems, of the later passion to help the poor and to turn all his inherited wealth and his naturally high station into a means of blessing the oppressed.

Simplicity and generosity were the mark of his life. He wrote much later after he was married, "By careful management, I should be able to give at least one-quarter of my income to the poor." [17] His sons reported that before he married he was giving away well over a fourth of his income, one

year actually giving away £3000 more than he made. He wrote that riches were, "considering them as in themselves, acceptable, but, from the infirmity of [our] nature, as highly dangerous possessions; and [we are to value] them chiefly not as instruments of luxury or splendor, but as affording the means of honoring his heavenly Benefactor, and lessening the miseries of mankind." [18] This was the way his mind worked: everything in politics was for the alleviation misery and the spread of happiness. By October he was bemoaning the "shapeless idleness" of his past. He was so ashamed of his prior life that he writes with apparent overstatement, "I was filled with sorrow. I am sure that no human creature could suffer more than I did for some months. It seems indeed it quite affected my reason." [19] He was tormented about what his new Christianity meant for his public life. William Pitt tried to talk him out of becoming an Evangelical and argued that this change would "render your talents useless both to yourself and mankind." [20] To resolve the anguish he felt over what to do with his life as a Christian he resolved to risk seeing John Newton on December 7, 1785 – a risk because Newton was an Evangelical and not admired or esteemed by his colleagues in Parliament. He said that he had "ten thousand doubts" about going to see him, and walked twice around the block before he could get up the courage to knock on his door. To his amazement the sixty year old Newton urged him not to cut himself off from public life and wrote him two years later: "It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up for the good of His church and for the good of the nation." [21] Just imagine what hung in the balance in that moment of counsel in view of what Wilberforce would accomplish. The battle and uncertainties lasted on into the new year, but finally a more settled serenity came over him, and on Easter Day, 1786, the politician for Yorkshire took to the fields to pray and give thanks, as he said in a letter to his sister Sally, "amidst the general chorus with which all nature seems on such a morning to be swelling the song of praise and thanksgiving." [22] With this change came a whole new regimen for the use of his months of recess from Parliament. Beginning not long after his conversion and lasting until he was married 11 years later he would now spend his days studying "about nine or ten hours a day," typically "breakfasting alone, taking walks alone, dining with the host family and other guests but not joining them in the evening until he 'came down about three-quarters of an hour before bedtime for what supper I wanted.'" [23] "The Bible became his best-loved book and he learned stretches by heart." [24] He was setting out to recover a lot of ground lost to laziness in college.
The Cause of Abolition

Now we turn to what makes Wilberforce so relevant to this Pastors' Conference, namely, his life-long devotion to the cause of abolishing the African Slave Trade. And then the abolition of slavery itself. In 1787 Wilberforce wrote a letter in which he estimated that the annual export of slaves from the western coast of Africa for all nations exceeded 100,000. [25] Seventeen years later in 1804 he estimated that 12,000-15,000 human being were enslaved for every year the Guiana trade continued. [26] One year after his conversion God's apparent calling on his life had become clear to him. On October 28, 1787, he wrote in his diary, "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners [=morals]." [27]

Soon after Christmas, 1787, a few days before the recess, Wilberforce gave notice in the House of Commons that early in the new session he would move the abolition of the slave trade. It would be 20 years before he could carry the House of Commons and the House of Lords in putting abolition into law. But the more he studied the matter and the more he heard of the atrocities, the more

resolved he became. In May, 1789 he spoke to the House about how he came to his conviction, "I confess to you, so enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for Abolition. . . . Let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition." [28]

He embraced the guilt for himself when he said in that same year, "I mean not to accuse anyone but to take the shame upon myself, in common indeed with the whole Parliament of Great Britain, for having suffered this horrid trade to be carried on under their authority. We are all guilty – we ought to all to plead guilty, and not to exculpate ourselves by throwing the blame on others." [29] In 1793 a supporter thought he was growing soft and cautious in the cause and he wrote, "If I thought the immediate Abolition of the Slave Trade would cause an insurrection in our islands, I should not for an instant remit my most strenuous endeavors. Be persuaded then, I shall still less ever make this grand cause the sport of the caprice, or sacrifice it to motives of political convenience or personal feeling." [30] Three years later, almost ten years after the battle was begun, he wrote: The grand object of my parliamentary existence [is the abolition of the slave trade]. . . Before this great cause all others dwindle in my eyes, and I must say that the certainty that I am right here, adds greatly to the complacency with which I exert myself in asserting it. If it please God to honor me so far, may I be the instrument of stopping such a course of wickedness and cruelty as never before disgraced a Christian country. [31] Of course the opposition that raged for these 20 years and beyond was that the financial benefits to the traders and to the British as a whole seemed huge because of what the plantations in the West Indies produced. They could not conceive of any way to produce without slave labor. This meant that Wilberforce's life was more than once threatened. When he criticized the credibility of a slave ship captain, Robert Norris, the man became threatening and Wilberforce feared for his life. Short of physical harm there was the painful loss of friends. Some would no longer fight with him, and they were estranged. Then there was the huge political pressure to back down because of the international political ramifications. For example, if Britain really outlawed slavery, the West Indian colonial assemblies threatened to declare independence from Britain and to federate with the United States. These kinds of financial and political arguments held Parliament captive for decades. But the night – or I should say morning – of victory came in 1807. The moral cause and the political momentum for abolition had finally become irresistible. At one point "the House rose almost to a man and turned towards Wilberforce in a burst of Parliamentary cheers. Suddenly, above the roar of 'Hear, hear,' and quite out of order, three hurrahs echoed and echoed while he sat, head bowed, tears streaming down his face." [32] At 4:00 am, February 24, 1807, the House divided, Ayes, 283, Noes, 16, Majority for the Abolition 267. And on March 25, 1807 the royal assent was declared. One of Wilberforce's friends wrote, "[Wilberforce] attributes it to the immediate interposition of Providence." [33] In that early morning hour Wilberforce turned to his best friend and colleague, Henry Thornton, and said, "Well, Henry, what shall we abolish next?" Of course the battle wasn't over. And Wilberforce fought on [34] until his death 26 years later in 1833. Not only was the implementation of the abolition law controversial and difficult, but all it did was abolish the slave trade, not slavery itself. That became the next major cause, and the decisive vote of victory for that one came on July 26, 1833, only three days before Wilberforce died. Slavery itself was outlawed in the British colonies.

William Cowper wrote a sonnet to celebrate Wilberforce's labor for the slaves which begins with the lines, [35] Thy country, Wilberforce, with just disdain, Hears thee by cruel men and impious

call’d Fanatic, for thy zeal to loose the enthrall’d From exile, public sale, and slavery’s chain.

Friend of the poor, the wrong’d, the fetter-gall’d, Fear not lest labor such as thine be vain. And Wilberforce’s friend and sometimes pastor, William Jay, wrote a tribute with this accurate prophecy, "His disinterested, self-denying, laborious, undeclining efforts in this cause of justice and humanity . . . will call down the blessings of millions; and ages yet to come will glory in his memory." [36] His Perseverance

Consider then the remarkable perseverance of this man in the cause of justice. This is what engages me and makes me wonder and long to have a heavy dose of what he had.

There was a ray of hope in 1804 that things might be moving to a success (three years before it actually came), but Wilberforce wrote, "I have been so often disappointed, that I rejoice with trembling and shall scarcely dare to be confident till I actually see the Order in the Gazette." [37] But these repeated defeats of his plans did not defeat him. His adversaries complained, that "Wilberforce jumped up whenever they knocked him down." [38] One of them in particular put it like this: "It is necessary to watch him as he is blessed with a very sufficient quantity of that Enthusiastic spirit, which so far from yielding that it grows more vigorous from blows." [39] When John Wesley was 87 years old (in 1790) he wrote to Wilberforce and said, "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of man and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you. . . ." [40] Two years later Wilberforce wrote in a letter, "I daily become more sensible that my work must be affected by constant and regular exertions rather than by sudden and violent ones." [41] In other words, with 15 years to go in the first phase of the battle he knew only a marathon mentality, rather than a sprinter mentality, would prevail in this cause.

Six years later on his 41st birthday as he rededicates himself in 1800, he prays, "Oh Lord, purify my soul from all its stains. Warm my heart with the love of thee, animate my sluggish nature and fix my inconstancy, and volatility, that I may not be weary in well doing," [42] God answered that prayer and the entire Western World may be glad that Wilberforce was granted constancy and perseverance in well doing.

Obstacles

What makes Wilberforce’s perseverance through four decades of political perseverance in the single-minded cause of justice so remarkable is not only the length of it but the obstacles that he had to surmount in the battle for abolition, first to the slave trade and then to slavery itself. I have mentioned the massive financial interests on the other side, both personal and national. It seemed utterly unthinkable to the Parliament that they could go without what the plantations of the West Indies provided. Then there was the international politics and how Britain was positioned in relation to the brand new nation, the United States of America, and France and Portugal and Brazil. If one nation, like Britain, unilaterally abolished the slave trade, but not the others, it would simply mean – so the argument ran – that power and wealth would be transmitted to the other nations and Britain would be weakened internationally.

Then there was the public criticism and vicious slander. It is true that when Wilberforce won the first victory over the slave trade in February, 1807 at the age of 47, as John Pollock says, "His achievement brought him a personal moral authority with public and Parliament above any living

man." [43] But, as every public person knows, and as Jesus promised, [44] the best of men will be maligned for the best of actions. On one occasion in 1820, thirteen years after the first victory, he took a very controversial position with regard to Queen Caroline's marital faithfulness and experienced a dramatic public outrage against him. He wrote in his diary July 20, 1820. "What a lesson it is to a man not to set his heart on low popularity when after 40 years disinterested public service, I am believed by the Bulk to be a Hypocritical Rascal. O what a comfort it is to have to fly for refuge to a God of unchangeable truth and love." [45]

Probably the severest criticism he ever received was from a slavery-defending adversary named William Cobett, in August of 1823, who turned Wilberforce's commitment to abolition into a moral liability by claiming that Wilberforce pretended to care for slaves from Africa but cared nothing about the "wage slaves" – the wretched poor of England.

You seem to have a great affection for the fat and lazy and laughing and singing and dancing Negroes. . . . [But] Never have you done one single act in favor of the laborers of this country [a statement Cobett knew to be false]. . . . You make your appeal in Picadilly, London, amongst those who are wallowing in luxuries, proceeding from the labor of the people. You should have gone to the gravel-pits, and made your appeal to the wretched creatures with bits of sacks around their shoulders, and with hay-bands round their legs; you should have gone to the roadside, and made your appeal to the emaciated, half-dead things who are there cracking stones to make the roads as level as a die for the tax eaters to ride on. What an insult it is, and what an unfeeling, what a cold-blooded hypocrite must he be that can send it forth; what an insult to call upon people under the name of free British laborers; to appeal to them in behalf of Black slaves, when these free British laborers; these poor, mocked, degraded wretches, would be happy to lick the dishes and bowls, out of which the Black slaves have breakfasted, dined, or supped. [46] But far more painful than any of these criticisms were the heartaches of family life. Every leader knows that almost any external burden is bearable if the family is whole and happy. But when the family is torn, all burdens are doubled. Wilberforce and his wife Barbara were very different. "While he was always cheerful, Barbara was often depressed and pessimistic. She finally worried herself into very bad health which lasted the rest of her life." And other women who knew her said she "whined when William was not right beside her." [47] When his oldest William was at Trinity College, Oxford, he fell away from the Christian faith and gave no evidence as Wilberforce wrote in his diary of "the great change." He wrote on January 10, 1819, "O that my poor dear William might be led by thy grace, O God." On March 11 he poured out his grief,

Oh my poor William. How strange he can make so miserable those who love him best and whom really he loves. His soft nature makes him the sport of his companions, and the wicked and idle naturally attach themselves like dust and cleave like burrs. I go to pray for him. Alas, could I love my Savior more and serve him, God would hear my prayer and turn his heart." [48]

He got word from Henry Venn that William was not reading for his classes, but was spending his father's allowance foolishly, buying an extra horse. Wilberforce agonized and decided to cut off his allowance, have him suspended from school and put with another family, and not allow him home. "Alas my poor Willm! How sad to be compelled to banish my eldest son." [49] Even when William finally came back to faith, it grieved Wilberforce that three of his sons became very high-church Anglicans with little respect for the dissenting church that Wilberforce, even as an Anglican, loved

so much for it evangelical truth and life. [50] On top of this family burden came the death of his daughter Barbara. In the autumn of 1821, at 32, she was diagnosed with consumption (tuberculosis). She died five days after Christmas. Wilberforce wrote to a friend, "Oh my dear Friend, it is in such seasons as these that the value of the promises of the Word of God are ascertained both by the dying and the attendant relatives. . . . The assured persuasion of Barbara's happiness has taken away the sting of death." [51] He sounds strong, but the blow shook his remaining strength, and in March of 1822, he wrote to his son, "I am confined by a new malady, the Gout." [52] The word "new" in that letter signals that Wilberforce labored under some other extraordinary physical handicaps that made his long perseverance political life all the more remarkable. He wrote in 1788 that his eyes were so bad "[I can scarcely] see how to direct my pen." The humorous side to this was that "he was often shabbily dressed, according to one friend, and his clothes sometimes were put on crookedly because he never looked into a mirror. Since his eyes were too bad to let him see his image clearly, he doesn't bother to look at all! [53] But in fact, there was little humor in his eye disease. In later years he frequently mentioned the "peculiar complaint of my eyes," that he could not see well enough to read or write during the first hours of the day. "This was a symptom of a slow buildup of morphine poisoning." [54] This ominous assessment was owing to the fact that from 1788 on doctors prescribed daily opium pills to Wilberforce to control the debility of his ulcerative colitis. The medicine was viewed in his day as a "pure drug" and it never occurred to any of his enemies to reproach him for his dependence on opium to control is illness. [55] "Yet effects there must have been," Pollock observes. "Wilberforce certainly grew more untidy, indolent (as he often bemoaned) and absent-minded as his years went on though not yet in old age; it is proof of the strength of his will that he achieved so much under a burden which neither he nor his doctors understood." [56] In 1812 Wilberforce decided to resign his seat in Yorkshire – not to leave politics, but to take a less demanding seat from a smaller county. He gave his reason as the desire to spend more time with his family. The timing was good, because in the next two years, on top of his colon problem and eye problem and emerging lung problem, he developed a curvature of the spine. "One shoulder began to slope; and his head fell forward, a little more each year until it rested on his chest unless lifted by conscious movement: he could have looked grotesque were it not for the charm of his face and the smile which hovered about his mouth." [57] For the rest of his life he wore a brace beneath his clothes that most people knew nothing about. [58] A Key to His Perseverance

What was the key to Wilberforce's perseverance under these kinds of burdens and obstacles? One of the main keys was his child-like, child-loving, self-forgetting joy in Christ. The testimonies and evidence of this are many. A certain Miss Sullivan wrote to a friend about Wilberforce in about 1815: "By the tones of his voice and expression of his countenance he showed that joy was the prevailing feature of his own mind, joy springing from entireness of trust in the Savior's merits and from love to God and man. . . . His joy was quite penetrating." [59] The poet Robert Southey said, "I never saw any other man who seemed to enjoy such a perpetual serenity and sunshine of spirit. In conversing with him, you feel assured that there is no guile in him; that if ever there was a good man and happy man on earth, he was one." [60] In 1881 Dorothy Wordsworth wrote, "Though shattered in constitution and feeble in body he is as lively and animated as in the days of his youth." [61] His sense of humor and delight in all that was good was vigorous and unmistakable. In 1824 John Russell gave a speech in the Commons with such wit that Wilberforce "collapsed in helpless laughter." [62] This playful side made him a favorite of children as they were favorites of

his. His best friend’s daughter, Marianne Thornton, said that often "Wilberforce would interrupt his serious talks with her father and romp with her in the lawn. ’His love for and enjoyment in all children was remarkable.’" [63] Once, when his own children were playing upstairs and he was frustrated at having misplaced a letter, he heard great din of children shouting. His guest thought he would be perturbed. Instead he got a smile on his face and said, "What a blessing to have these dear children! Only think what a relief, amidst other hurries, to hear their voices and know they are well." [64]

He was an unusual father for his day. Most fathers who had the wealth and position he did rarely saw their children. Servants and a governess took care of the children, and they were to be out of sight most of the time. Instead, William insisted on eating as many meals as possible with the children, and he joined in their games. He played marbles and Blindman’s Bluff and ran races with them. In the games, the children treated him like one of them. [65]

Robert Southey visited the house when all the children were there and wrote that he marveled at "the pell-mell, topsy-turvy and chaotic confusion" of the Wilberforce apartments in which the wife sat like Patience on a monument while her husband "frisks about as if every vein in his body were filled with quicksilver." [66] Another visitor in 1816, Joseph John Gurney, a Quaker, stayed a week with Wilberforce and recalled later, "As he walked about the house he was generally humming the tune of a hymn or Psalm as if he could not contain his pleasurable feelings of thankfulness and devotion." [67]

There was in this child-like love of children and joyful freedom from care a deeply healthy self-forgetfulness. Richard Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, wrote after a meeting with Wilberforce, "You have made me so entirely forget you are a great man by seeming to forget it yourself in all our intercourse." [68] The effect of this self-forgetting joy was another mark of mental and spiritual health, namely, a joyful ability to see all the good in the world instead of being consumed by one’s own problems (even when those problems are huge). James Stephen recalled after Wilberforce’s death, "Being himself amused and interested by everything, whatever he said became amusing or interesting. . . . His presence was as fatal to dullness as to immorality. His mirth was as irresistible as the first laughter of childhood." [69]

Here was a great key to his perseverance and effectiveness. His presence was "fatal to dullness and immorality." In other words, his indomitable joy moved others to be good and happy. He sustained himself and swayed others by his joy. If a man can rob you of your joy, he can rob you of your usefulness. Wilberforce’s joy was indomitable and therefore he was a compelling Christian and Politician all his life.

Hannah More, his wealthy friend and patron of many of his schemes for doing good, said to him, "I declare I think you are serving God by being yourself agreeable. . . to worldly but well-disposed people, who would never be attracted to religion by grave and severe divines, even if such fell in their way." [70] In fact, I think one of the reasons Wilberforce did not like to use the word "Calvinist," though his doctrines seem to line up with what the Whitefield- and Newton-like Calvinists preached, was this very thing: Calvinists had the reputation of being joyless. A certain Lord Carrington apparently expressed to Wilberforce his mistrust of joy. Wilberforce responded: My grand objection to the religious system still held by many who declare themselves orthodox Churchmen. . . is, that it tends to render Christianity so much a system of prohibitions rather than

of privilege and hopes, and thus the injunction to rejoice, so strongly enforced in the New Testament, is practically neglected, and Religion is made to wear a forbidding and gloomy air and not one of peace and hope and joy. [71]

Here is a clear statement of Wilberforce's conviction that joy is not optional. It is an "injunction . . . strongly enforced in the New Testament." Or as he says elsewhere, "We can scarcely indeed look into any part of the sacred volume without meeting abundant proofs, that it is the religion of the Affections which God particularly requires. . . . Joy . . . is enjoined on us as our bounden duty and commended to us as our acceptable worship. . . . A cold . . . unfeeling heart is represented as highly criminal." [72] So for Wilberforce joy was both a means of survival and perseverance on the one hand, and a deep act of submission and obedience and worship on the other hand. Joy in Christ was commanded. And joy in Christ was the only way to flourish fruitfully through decades of temporary defeat. "Never were there times," he wrote, "which inculcated more forcibly than those in which we live, the wisdom of seeking happiness beyond the reach of human vicissitudes." [73] The word "seeking" is important. It is not as though Wilberforce succeeded perfectly in "attaining" the fullest measure of joy. There were great battles in the soul as well as in parliament. For example, in March of 1788 after a serious struggle with colitis he seemed to enter into a "dark night of the soul." "Corrupt imaginations are perpetually rising in my mind and innumerable fears close to me in on every side. . . " [74] We get a glimpse of how he fought for joy in these times from what he wrote in his notebook of prayers,

Lord, thou knowest that no strength, wisdom or contrivance of human power can signify, or relieve me. It is in thy power alone to deliver me. I fly to thee for succor and support, O Lord let it come speedily; give me full proof of a thy Almighty power; I am in great troubles, insurmountable by me; but to thee slight and inconsiderable; look upon me O Lord with compassion and mercy, and restore me to rest, quietness, and comfort, in the world, or in another by removing the hence into a state of peace and happiness. Amen. [75]

Less devastating than "the dark night" were the recurrent disappointments with his own failures. But even as we read his self-indictments we hear the hope of victory that sustained him and restored him to joy again and again. For example, in January 13, 1798 he wrote in his diary, "Three or four times have I most grievously broke my resolutions since I last took up my pen alas! alas! how miserable a wretch am I! How infatuated, how dead to every better feeling yet – yet – yet – may I, Oh God, be enabled to repent and turn to thee with my whole heart, I am now flying from thee. Thou hast been above all measure gracious and forgiving. . . ." [76] Therefore when we say his happiness was unshakable and undefeatable because it was beyond the reach of human vicissitudes, we don't mean it was beyond struggle; we mean it reasserted itself in and after every tumult in society of in the soul. The Foundation for Joy So the last question we ask is: What was it based on? Where did it come from? If his child-like, child-loving, self-forgetting, indomitable joy was a crucial key to his perseverance in the life-long cause of abolition, where is such joy to be found? How can we join him in that kind of joy and that kind of relentless, persevering pursuit of justice? The main burden of Wilberforce's book, A Practical View of Christianity, is to show that true Christianity, which consists in these new, indomitable spiritual affections for Christ, is rooted in the great doctrines of the Bible about Sin and Christ and Faith. "Let him then who would abound and grow in this Christian principle, be much conversant with the great doctrines of the Gospel." [77] More specifically, he says:

If we would . . . rejoice in [Christ] as triumphantly as the first Christians did; we must learn, like them to repose our entire trust in him and to adopt the language of the apostle, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ' [Galatians 6:14], "who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" [1 Corinthians 1:30]. [78] In other words, the joy that triumphs over all obstacles and perseveres to the end in the battle for justice is rooted most centrally in the doctrine of justification by faith. Wilberforce says that all the spiritual and practical errors of the nominal Christians of his age – the lack of true religious affections and moral reformation –result from the mistaken conception entertained of the fundamental principles of Christianity. They consider not that Christianity is scheme "for justifying the ungodly" [Romans 4:5], by Christ's dying for them "when yet sinners" [Romans 5:6-8], a scheme "for reconciling us to God – when enemies [Romans 5:10]; and for making the fruits of holiness the effects, not the cause, of our being justified and reconciled. [79] From the beginning of his Christian life in 1785 until he died in 1833 Wilberforce lived off the "great doctrines of the gospel," especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone based on the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is where he fed his joy. And the joy of the Lord became his strength (Nehemiah 8:10). And in this strength he pressed on in the cause of abolishing the slave trade until he had the victory.

Therefore, in all zeal for racial harmony and the rebuilding of white evangelical and black culture let us not forget these lessons: Never minimize the central place of God-centered, Christ-exalting doctrine; labor to be indomitably joyful in all that God is for us in Christ by trusting his great finished work; and never be idle in doing good – that men may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

[1] William Wilberforce, A Practical View of Christianity, ed. by Kevin Charles Belmonte (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), p. 211.

[2] John Pollock, Wilberforce (London: Constable and Company, 1977), p. 223.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Wilberforce, A Practical View of Christianity, p. 90.

[5] "The grand radical defect in the practical system of these nominal Christians, is their forgetfulness of all the peculiar doctrines of the Religion which they profess – the corruption of human nature – the atonement of the Savior – the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit." Ibid. pp. 162-163.

[6] His favorite word for the majority of nominal Christians in Britain in his day.

[7] Wilberforce, A Practical View of Christianity, p. 198.

[8] Ibid. p. 70.

[9] Ibid. p. 147.

[10] Ibid. p. 149.

[11] Ibid. p. 81.

[12] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 162.

[13] Wilberforce, Real Christianity, p. 115- 116.

[14] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 5.

[15] Ibid, p. 34.

[16] Ibid, p. 37.

[17] Betty Steele Everett, Freedom Fighter: The Story of William Wilberforce (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1994), p. 68.

[18] Wilberforce, Real Christianity, p. 113.

[19] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 37.

[20] Ibid, p. 38.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid. p. 39.

[23] Ibid. p. 43.

[24] Ibid. p. 44.

[25] Ibid. p. 72 [26] Ibid. p. 191.

[27] Ibid. p. 69.

[28] Ibid. p. 56.

[29] Ibid. p. 89.

[30] Ibid. p. 123.

[31] Ibid. p. 143.

[32] Ibid. p. 211.

[33] Ibid. p. 212.

[34] In 1823 Wilberforce wrote a 56-page booklet, "Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies." Ibid. p. 285.

[35] Thy country, Wilberforce, with just disdain, Hears thee by cruel men and impious call’d Fanatic, for thy zeal to loose the enthrall’d From exile, public sale, and slavery’s chain.

Friend of the poor, the wrong’d, the fetter-gall’d, Fear not lest labor such as thine be vain.

Thou hast achieved a part: hast gained the ear Of Britain’s senate to thy glorious cause;

Hope smiles, joy springs; and though cold Caution pause, And weave delay, the better hour is near That shall remunerate thy toils severe, By peace for Afric, fenced with British laws.

Enjoy what thou has won, esteem and love From all the Just on earth, and all the Blest above.

[36] William Jay, The Autobiography of William Jay, edited by George Redford and John Angell James (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, original, 1854), p. 315.

[37] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 189.

[38] Ibid. p. 123.

[39] Ibid. p. 105.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid. p. 116.

[42] Ibid. p. 179.

[43] Ibid. p. 215. Wilberforce's own assessment of the resulting moral authority was this (written in a letter March 3, 1807): "The authority which the great principles of justice and humanity have received will be productive of benefit in all shapes and directions."

[44] Matthew 10:25, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household."

[45] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 276.

[46] Ibid. p. 287.

[47] Everett, Freedom Fighter, pp. 64-65.

[48] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 267.

[49] Ibid. p. 268. From the diary, April 11, 1819.

[50] The official biography written by his sons is defective in portraying Wilberforce in a false light as opposed to dissenters, when in fact some of his best friends and spiritual counselors were among their number. After Wilberforce's death three of his sons became Roman Catholic.

[51] Ibid. p. 280.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Everett, Freedom Fighter, p. 69.

[54] Ibid. p. 81.

[55] Ibid. See pp. 79-81 for a full discussion of the place of opium in his life and culture. "Wilberforce resisted the craving and only raised his dosage suddenly when there were severe bowel complaints. In April 1818, 30 years after the first prescription, Wilberforce noted in his diary that his do this 'it's still as it has long been', a pill three times a day (after breakfast, after tea, and bedtime) each of four grains. Twelve grains daily is a good but not outstanding dose and very far from addiction after such a length of time."

[56] Ibid. p. 81.

[57] Ibid. p. 234.

[58] "He was obliged to wear 'a steel girdle cased in leather and an additional part to support the arms. . . . It must be handled carefully, the steel being so elastic as to be easily broken.' He took a spare one ('wrapped up for decency's sake in a towel') wherever he stayed; the fact that he lived in a steel frame for his last 15 or 18 years might have remained unknown had he not left behind at the Lord Calthorpe's Suffolk home, Ampton Hall, the more comfortable of the two. 'How gracious is God,' Wilberforce remarked in the letter asking for its return, 'in giving us such mitigations is and helps for our infirmities.'" Ibid. pp. 233-234.

[59] Ibid. p. 152.

[60] Jay, The Autobiography of William Jay, p. 317.

[61] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 267.

[62] Ibid. p. 289 [63] Ibid. p. 183.

[64] Ibid. p. 232.

[65] Everett, Freedom Fighter, p. 70.

[66] Pollock, Wilberforce, p. 267.

[67] Ibid. p. 261.

[68] Ibid. p. 236.

[69] Ibid. p. 185.

[70] Ibid. p. 119.

[71] Ibid. p. 46.

[72] Ibid. pp. 45-46.

[73] Ibid. p. 239.

[74] Ibid. p. 82.

[75] Ibid. pp. 81-82.

[76] Ibid. p. 150. He confesses again after a sarcastic rejoinder in the Commons, "In what a fermentation of spirits was I on the night of answering Courtenay. How jealous of character and greedy of applause. Alas, alas! Create in me a clean heat O God and renew our right spirit within me" (p. 167).

[77] Wilberforce, A Practical View of Christianity, p. 170.

[78] Ibid. p. 66.

[79] Ibid. p. 64. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

05.26. The Swan Is Not Silent

The Swan Is Not Silent Sovereign Joy in the Life and Thought of St. Augustine On August 26, 410, the unthinkable happened. After 900 years of impenetrable security, Rome was sacked by the Gothic army led by Alaric. St. Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, was in Palestine at the time, and wrote, "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?" Rome did not perish immediately. It would be another 66 years before the Germans deposed the last Emperor. But the shock waves of the invasion reached the city of Hippo about 450 miles southwest of Rome on the coast of North Africa where Augustine was the bishop. He was 55 years old and in the prime of his ministry. He would live another 20 years and die on August 28, 430, just as 80,000 invading Vandals were about to storm the city. In other words, Augustine lived in one of those tumultuous times between the shifting of whole civilizations.

He had heard of two other Catholic bishops tortured to death in the Vandal invasion, but when his friends quoted to him the words of Jesus, "flee to another city," he said, "Let no one dream of holding our ship so cheaply, that the sailors, let alone the Captain should desert her in time of peril." He had been the bishop of Hippo since 396 and, before that, was a preaching elder for five years. So he had served the church for almost 40 years, and was known throughout the Christian world as a God-besotted, Biblical, articulate, persuasive shepherd of his flock and defender of the faith against the great threats of his day, mainly Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism.

Four years before he died, he had handed over the administrative duties of the church in Hippo to his assistant Eraclius. At the ceremony Eraclius stood to preach, as the old man sat on his bishop’s throne behind him. Overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy in Augustine’s presence, Eraclius said, "The cricket chirps, the swan is silent."

If only Eraclius could have looked down over sixteen centuries at the enormous influence of Augustine, he would understand why I have entitled this message, "The Swan is Not Silent." He was not silent then and he is not today. He has not been silent for 1600 years. The influence of Augustine in the Western World is simply staggering. Adolf Harnack said that he was the greatest man the church has possessed between Paul the Apostle and Luther the Reformer. Benjamin Warfield argued that through his writings Augustine "entered both the Church and the world as a revolutionary force, and not merely created an epoch in the history of the Church, but . . . determined the course of its history in the West up to the present day." He had "a literary talent . . . second to none in the annals of the Church." "The whole development of Western life, in all its phases, was powerfully affected by his teaching." The publishers of Christian History magazine simply say, "After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity." The most remarkable thing about Augustine’s influence is the fact that it flows into radically opposing religious movements. He is cherished as one of greatest fathers of the Catholic Church, and yet it was Augustine who "gave us the Reformation" – not only because "Luther was an Augustinian monk, or that Calvin quoted Augustine more than any other theologian . . . [but because] the Reformation witnessed the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over the

legacy of the Pelagian view of man." "Both sides in the controversy [between the reformers and the counter-reformation] appealed on a huge scale to texts of Augustine."

Henry Chadwick tries to get at the scope of Augustine's influence by pointing out that "Anselm, Aquinas, Petrarch (never without a pocket copy of the Confessions), Luther, Bellarmine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard all stand in the shade of his broad oak. His writings were among the favourite books of Wittgenstein. He was the bte noire ["night beast" = pet aversion] of Nietzsche. His psychological analysis anticipated parts of Freud: he first discovered the existence of the 'sub-conscious.'"

There are reasons for this extraordinary influence. Agostino Trapè gives an excellent summary of Augustine's powers that make him incomparable in the history of the church:

Augustine was . . . a philosopher, theologian, mystic, and poet in one. . . . His lofty powers complemented each other and made the man fascinating in a way difficult to resist. He is a philosopher, but not a cold thinker; he is a theologian, but also a master of the spiritual life; he is a mystic, but also a pastor; he is a poet, but also a controversialist. Every reader thus finds something attractive and even overwhelming: depth of metaphysical intuition, rich abundance of theological proofs, synthetic power and energy, psychological depth shown in spiritual ascents, and a wealth of imagination, sensibility, and mystical fervor.

I think that is accurate and unexaggerated. That is what I have found.

Virtually everyone who speaks or writes on Augustine has to disclaim thoroughness. Benedict Groeschel, who has written the most recent introduction to Augustine, visited the Augustinian Heritage Institute adjacent to Villanova University where the books on Augustine comprise a library of their own. Then he was introduced to Augustine's five million words on computer. He speaks for many of us when he says,

I felt like a man beginning to write a guidebook of the Swiss Alps. . . . After forty years I can still meditate on one book of the Confessions . . . during a week-long retreat and come back feeling frustrated that there is still so much more gold to mine in those few pages. I, for one, know that I shall never in this life escape from the Augustinian Alps. But the fact that no one can exhaust the Alps doesn't keep people from going there, even simple people. And so I have ventured to go, and I invite you to go with me. If you wonder where to start in your own reading, I think almost everyone would say start with the Confessions, the story of his life up through his conversion and the death of his mother. The other four "great books" are On Christian Doctrine (397-426); the Enchiridion: on Faith, Hope and Love (421), which, Warfield says, is "his most serious attempt to systematize his thought;" On the Trinity (395-420), which gave the Trinity its definitive formulation; and The City of God, (413-426), which was Augustine's response to the collapsing of the empire, and his attempt to show the meaning of history.

I invite you to take a very short tour with me in these Alps. But the brevity of the tour is way out of proportion to the greatness of the subject and its importance for our day. What I have seen has been for me tremendously significant for my own life and theology and ministry. I believe it is relevant for your ministry and especially for the advance of the Biblical Reformed faith in our day. I have called my message: "Sovereign Joy in the Life and Thought of St. Augustine." Another possible title might have been "The Place of Pleasure in the Exposition and Defense of

Evangelical Calvinism." Or another might have been, "The Augustinian Roots of Christian Hedonism."

Let’s orient ourselves by a brief overview of Augustine’s life. He was born in Thagaste, near Hippo, in what is now Algeria, on November 13, 354. His father, Patricius, a middle-income farmer, was not a believer. He worked hard to get Augustine the best education in rhetoric that he could, first at Madaura, twenty miles away, from age 11 to 15; then, after a year at home, in Carthage from 17 to 20. His father was converted in 370, the year before he died, when Augustine was 16. He mentions his father’s death only in passing one time in his writings, even though he spends many pages on the grief of losing friends.

"As I grew to manhood," he wrote, "I was inflamed with desire for a surfeit of hell’s pleasures. . . . My family made no effort to save me from my fall by marriage. Their only concern was that I should learn how to make a good speech and how to persuade others by my words." In particular, he said his father, "took no trouble at all to see how I was growing in your sight [O God] or whether I was chaste or not. He cared only that I should have a fertile tongue."

Before he left for Carthage to study for three years, his mother warned him earnestly, "not to commit fornication and above all not to seduce any man’s wife." "I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. . . . My real need was for you, my God, who are the food of the soul. I was not aware of this hunger." "I was willing to steal, and steal I did, although I was not compelled by any lack." "I was at the top of the school of rhetoric. I was pleased with my superior status and swollen with conceit. . . . It was my ambition to be a good speaker, for the unhallowed and inane purpose of gratifying human vanity." He took a concubine in Carthage and lived with this same woman for 15 years and had one son by her, Adeodatus. In a snapshot of the rest of his life, he became a traditional schoolmaster teaching rhetoric for the next eleven years of his life – age 19 to 30 – and then spent the last 44 years of his life as monk and a bishop. Another way to say it would be that he was profligate till he was 31 and celibate till he was 75. But his conversion was not as sudden as is often thought. When he was 19 in the "cauldron of Carthage," swollen with conceit and given over utterly to sexual pleasures, he read Cicero’s Hortensius, which for the first time arrested him for its content and not its rhetorical form. Hortensius exalted the quest for wisdom and truth above mere physical pleasure.

It altered my outlook on life. It changed my prayers to you, O Lord, and provided me with new hopes and aspirations. All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm and my heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for the wisdom of eternal truth. I began to climb out of the depths to which I had sunk, in order to return to you. . . . My God, how I burned with longing to have wings to carry me back to you, away from all earthly things, although I had no idea what you would do with me! For yours is the wisdom. In Greek the word ’philosophy’ means ’love of wisdom’, and it was with this love that the Hortensius inflamed me. This was nine years before his conversion to Christ, but it was utterly significant in redirecting his reading and thinking more toward truth rather than style, which is not a bad move in any age. For the next nine years he was enamoured by the dualistic teaching called Manichaeism, until he became disillusioned with one of its leaders when he was 28 years old. In his 29th year he moved to Rome from Carthage to teach, but was so fed up with the behavior of the students that he moved to a teaching post in Milan, Italy, in 384, which was providential in several ways. There he would discover the Platonists and there he would meet

the great bishop Ambrose. He was now 30 years old and still had his son and his concubine whom he never once names in all his writings. In the early summer of 386 he discovered the writings of Plotinus, a neo-Platonist who had died in 270. This was Augustine's second conversion after the reading of Cicero eleven years earlier. He absorbed the Platonic vision of reality with a thrill. This encounter, Peter Brown says, "Did nothing less than shift the center of gravity of Augustine's spiritual life. He was no longer identified with his God [as in Manichaeism]: This God was utterly transcendent." But he was still in the dark. You can hear the influence of his Platonism in his assessment of those days: "I had my back to the light and my face was turned towards the things which it illumined, so that my eyes, by which I saw the things which stood in the light, were themselves in darkness."

Now came the time for the final move, the move from Platonism to the apostle Paul, through the tremendous impact of Ambrose who was 14 years older than Augustine. "In Milan I found your devoted servant the bishop Ambrose. . . . At that time his gifted tongue never tired of dispensing the richness of your corn, the joy of your oil, and the sober intoxication of your wine. Unknown to me, it was you who led me to him, so that I might knowingly be led by him to you."

Augustine's Platonism was scandalized by the Biblical teaching of "the Word was made flesh." But week in and week out he would listen to Ambrose preach. "I was all ears to seize upon his eloquence, I also began to sense the truth of what he said, though only gradually." "I thrilled with love and dread alike. I realized that I was far away from you . . . and, far off, I heard your voice saying I am the God who IS. I heard your voice, as we hear voices that speak to our hearts, and at once I had no cause to doubt." But this experience was not true conversion. "I was astonished that although I now loved you . . . I did not persist in enjoyment of my God. Your beauty drew me to you, but soon I was dragged away from you by my own weight and in dismay I plunged again into the things of this world . . . as though I had sensed the fragrance of the fare but was not yet able to eat it."

What I want you to notice here is the emergence of the phrase, "enjoyment of my God." Augustine now conceived of the quest of his life as a quest for a firm and unshakable enjoyment of the true God. This will be utterly determinative in his thinking about everything, especially in his great final battles with Pelagianism near the end of his life forty years from this time.

He knew that he was held back now not by anything intellectual, but by sexual lust: "I was still held firm in the bonds of woman's love." Therefore the battle would be determined by the kind of pleasure that triumphed in his life. "I began to search for a means of gaining the strength I needed to enjoy you, [notice the battlefront: How shall I find strength to enjoy God more than sex?], but I could not find this means until I embraced the mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ." His mother Monica, who had prayed for him all his life, had come to Milan in the spring of 385 and begun to arrange a proper marriage for him with a well-to-do Christian family there. This put Augustine into a heart-wrenching crisis, and set him up for even deeper sin, even as his conversion was on the horizon. He sent his concubine of 15 years back to Africa, never to live with her again. "The woman with whom I had been living was torn from my side as an obstacle to my marriage and this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly. She went back to Africa, vowing never to give herself to any other man. . . . But I was too unhappy and too weak to imitate this example set me by a woman. . . . I took another mistress, without the

sanction of wedlock."

Then came one of the most important days in church history. "O Lord, my Helper and my Redeemer, I shall now tell and confess to the glory of your name how you released me from the fetters of lust which held me so tightly shackled and from my slavery to the things of this world." This is the heart of his book, the Confessions and one of the great works of grace in history, and what a battle it was. But listen carefully how it was won. (And read it for yourself in Book VIII.)

Even this day was more complex than the story often goes, but to go to the heart of the battle, let's focus on the final crisis. It was late August, 386. Augustine was almost 32 years old. With his best friend Alypius he was talking about the remarkable sacrifice and holiness of Antony, an Egyptian monk. Augustine was stung by his own bestial bondage to lust, when others were free and holy in Christ.

There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged. . . . I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant. . . . I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. . . . I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant. . . . I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees. But he began to see more clearly that the gain was far greater than the loss, and by miracle of grace he began to see the beauty of chastity in the presence of Christ.

I was held back by mere trifles. . . They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, "Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever.". . . And while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me. So now the battle came down to the beauty of Continence and her tenders of love versus the trifles that plucked at his flesh.

I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes . . . In my misery I kept crying, "How long shall I go on saying 'tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?" . . . All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain 'Take it and read, take it and read.' At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall. So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting . . . seized [the book of Paul's epistles] and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: "Not in reveling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites" (Romans 13:13-14). I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.

I hasten to sum up the rest of Augustine's outer life, because the great message for us is in Augustine's own theological working out of this triumph of joy in God over joy in sex. The experience of God's grace in his own conversion set the trajectory for his theology of grace that brought him into conflict with Pelagius and made him the source of the Reformation a thousand years later. And this theology of sovereign grace was a very self-conscious theology of the triumph of joy in God. That is the message I want us to hear. But first an overview of the rest of his life.

He was baptized the next Easter, 387, in Milan by Ambrose. That autumn his mother died, a very happy woman that the son of her tears was safe in Christ. In 388 (at almost 34) he returned to Africa, with a view to establishing a kind of monastery for him and his friends, whom he called "servants of God." He had given up the plan for marriage and committed himself to celibacy and poverty – that is, the common life with others in the community. He hoped for a life of philosophical leisure in the monastic way. But God had other plans. His son died in 389. The dreams of the homestead evaporated in the light of eternity. Augustine got the idea that it might be more strategic to move his monastic community to the larger city of Hippo. He chose Hippo because they already had a bishop, so there was less chance of his being pressed to take on that role. But he miscalculated – like Calvin over a thousand years later. The church came to Augustine and basically forced him to be the priest and then the bishop of Hippo, where he stayed for the rest of his life. In a sermon much later, Augustine said to his people, "A slave may not contradict his Lord. I came to this city to see a friend, whom I thought I might gain for God, that he might live with us in the monastery. I felt secure, for the place already had a bishop. I was grabbed. I was made a priest . . . and from there, I became your bishop." And so, like so many in the history of the church who left an enduring mark, at the age of 36 he was thrust out of a life of contemplation into a life of action. The role of bishop included settling legal disputes of church members and handling many civil affairs. "He would visit jails to protect prisoners from ill-treatment; he would intervene . . . to save criminals from judicial torture and execution; above all, he was expected to keep peace within his 'family' by arbitrating in their lawsuits."

He established a monastery on the grounds of the church, and for almost forty years raised up a band of Biblically saturated priests and bishops who were installed all over Africa, bringing renewal to the churches. He saw himself as part of the monastery, following the strict vegetarian diet and poverty and chastity. There was an absolute prohibition on female visitors. There was too much at stake and he knew his weakness. He never married. When he died there was no will because all his possessions belonged to the common order. His legacy was his writings, his clergy and his monastery.

Now, back to the triumph of grace in Augustine's life and theology. I said above that Augustine experienced this grace and developed it self-consciously as a theology of "sovereign joy." My thesis is this: R. C. Sproul is right that the church today is in a Pelagian captivity, and that the prescription for the cure is for the Reformed community to recover a healthy dose of Augustine's doctrine of "sovereign joy." (I don't know if Sproul would agree with the second part of the thesis.) My assumption is that far too much of Reformed thinking and preaching in our day has not penetrated to the root of how grace actually triumphs, namely, through joy, and therefore is only half-Augustinian and half-biblical and half-beautiful.

Let me try to unpack this for you. Pelagius was a British monk who lived in Rome in Augustine's day and taught that "though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, it is not necessary to that end." He denied the doctrine of original sin, and asserted that human nature at its core is good and able to do all it is commanded to do. Therefore Pelagius was shocked when he read in Augustine's Confessions, "Give me the grace [O Lord] to do as you command, and command me to do what you will! . . . O holy God . . . when your commands are obeyed, it is from you that we receive the power to obey them." Pelagius saw this as an assault on human goodness and freedom and responsibility – if God has to give what he commands, then we are not able to do what he commands and are not responsible to do what he commands and the moral law unravels.

Augustine had not come to his position quickly. In his book On the Freedom of the Will, written between 388 and 391, he defended the freedom of the will in a way that caused Pelagius to quote Augustine's own book against him in later life. But by the time Augustine wrote the Confessions ten years later the issue was settled. Here is what he wrote. I think it is one of the most important paragraphs for understanding the heart of Augustinianism:

During all those years [of rebellion], where was my free will? What was the hidden, secret place from which it was summoned in a moment, so that I might bend my neck to your easy yoke . . .? How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose . . ! You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. [There's the key phrase and the key reality for understanding the heart of Augustinianism.] You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood, you who outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts, you who surpass all honor, though not in the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves. . . . O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation. This is Augustine's understanding of grace. Grace is God's giving us sovereign joy in God that triumphs over joy in sin. In other words, God works deep in the human heart to transform the springs of joy so that we love God more than sex or anything else. Loving God, in Augustine's mind, is never reduced to deeds of obedience or acts of willpower. It is always a delighting in God, and in other things only for God's sake. He defines it clearly in On Christian Doctrine (III, x, 16). "I call 'charity' [i.e., love for God] the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God." Loving God is always conceived of essentially as delighting in God and in anything else for his sake.

Augustine analyzed his own motives down to this root. Everything springs from delight. He saw this as a universal: "Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy. There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone." This is what guides and governs the will, namely, what we consider to be our delight. But here's the catch that made Pelagius so angry. For Augustine, it is not in our power to determine what this delight will be. Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up. Or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace which he bestows. So saving grace, converting grace, for Augustine, is God's giving us a

sovereign joy in God that triumphs over all other joys and therefore sways the will. The will is free to move toward whatever it delights in most fully, but it is not within the power of our will to determine what that sovereign joy will be. Therefore Augustine concludes, A man’s free-will, indeed, avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth; and even after his duty and his proper aim shall begin to become known to him, unless he also take delight in and feel a love for it, he neither does his duty, nor sets about it, nor lives rightly. Now, in order that such a course may engage our affections, God’s "love is shed abroad in our hearts" not through the free-will which arises from ourselves, but "through the Holy Ghost, which is given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Near the end of his life in 427, he looked back over a lifetime of thought on this issue and wrote to Simplician, "In answering this question I have tried hard to maintain the free choice of the human will, but the grace of God prevailed." When he was asked by his friend Paulinus why he kept on investing so much energy in this dispute with Pelagius even as a man in his seventies, he answered, "First and foremost because no subject gives me greater pleasure. For what ought to be more attractive to us sick men, than grace, grace by which we are healed; for us lazy men, than grace, grace by which we are stirred up; for us men longing to act, than grace, by which we are helped?" And this answer has all the more power when you keep in mind that all this healing, stirring, helping, enabling grace that Augustine revels in is the giving of a compelling, triumphant joy. Grace governs life by giving a supreme joy in the supremacy of God.

Augustine is utterly committed to the moral accountability of the human will, even though the will is ultimately governed by the delights of the souls which are ordered finally by God. When pressed for an explanation, he is willing in the end to rest with Scripture in a "profound mystery." This can be seen in the following two quotes:

Now, should any man be for constraining us to examine into this profound mystery, why this person is so persuaded as to yield, and that person is not, there are only two things occurring to me, which I should like to advance as my answer: ’O the depth of the riches!’ (Romans 11:33) and ’Is there unrighteousness with God?’ (Romans 9:14). If the man is displeased with such an answer, he must seek more learned disputants: but let him beware lest he find presumptuousness.

Let this truth, then, be fixed and unmovable in a mind soberly pious and stable in faith, that there is no unrighteousness with God. Let us also believe most firmly and tenaciously that God has mercy on whom he will and that whom he will he hardeneth, that is, he has or has not mercy on whom he will. Let us believe that this belongs to a certain hidden equity that cannot be searched out by any human standard of measurement, though its effects are to be observed in human affairs and earthly arrangements. The fact that grace governs life by giving a supreme joy in the supremacy of God explains why the concept of Christian freedom is so radically different in Augustine than in Pelagius. For Augustine, freedom is to be so in love with God and his ways that the very experience of choice is transcended. The ideal of freedom is not the autonomous will poised with sovereign equilibrium between good and evil. The ideal of freedom is to be so spiritually discerning of God’s beauty, and to be so in love with God that one never stands with equilibrium between God and an alternate choice. Rather, one transcends the experience of choice and walks under the continual sway of sovereign joy in God. For Augustine the self-conscious experience of having to contemplate choices was a sign not of the freedom of the will, but of the disintegration of the

will. Choice is a necessary evil in this fallen world until the day comes when discernment and delight unite in a perfect apprehension of what is infinitely delightful, namely, God.

What follows from Augustine's view of grace as the giving of a sovereign joy that triumphs over "lawless pleasures" is that the entire Christian life is seen as a relentless quest for the fullest joy in God. He said, "The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire." In other words, the key to Christian living is a thirst and a hunger for God. And one of the main reasons people do not understand or experience the sovereignty of grace and the way it works through the awakening of sovereign joy is that their hunger and thirst for God is so small. The desperation to be ravished for the sake of worship and holiness is unintelligible. Here's the goal and the problem as Augustine saw it: The soul of men shall hope under the shadow of Thy wings; they shall be made drunk with the fullness of Thy house; and of the torrents of Thy pleasures Thou wilt give them to drink; for in Thee is the Fountain of Life, and in Thy Light shall we see the light? Give me a man in love: he knows what I mean. Give me one who yearns; give me one who is hungry; give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the Eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean. But if I speak to a cold man, he just does not know what I am talking about. . . . The remedy from God's side for this condition of "coldness," of course, is the gracious awakening of a sovereign joy. But on the human side it is prayer and the display of God himself as infinitely more desirable than all creation. It is not a mere stylistic device that all 350 pages of the Confessions are written as a prayer. Every sentence is addressed to God. The point is that Augustine is utterly dependent on God for the awakening of love to God. And it is no coincidence that the prayers of Augustine's mother Monica pervade the Confessions. She pled for him when he would not plead for himself.

Augustine counsels us, "Say with the psalmist: 'One thing I ask of the Lord, this I seek: To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate his temple' (Psalms 27:4)."

Then he says, "In order that we may attain this happy life, he who is himself the true Blessed Life has taught us to pray." He shows us the way he prayed for the triumph of joy in God: "O Lord, that I may love you [freely], for I can find nothing more precious. Turn not away your face from me, that I may find what I seek. Turn not aside in anger from your servant, lest in seeking you I run toward something else. . . . Be my helper. Leave me not, neither despise me, O God my Saviour." But alongside prayer, the remedy for people without passion and without hunger and thirst for God is to display God himself as infinitely more desirable – more satisfying – than all creation. Augustine's zeal for the souls of men and women was that they come to see the beauty of God and love him. "If your delight is in souls, love them in God . . . and draw as many with you to him as you can." "You yourself [O God] are their joy. Happiness is to rejoice in you and for you and because of you. This is true happiness and there is no other. So Augustine labored with all his spiritual and poetic and intellectual might to help people see and feel the all-satisfying supremacy of God over all things. But what do I love when I love my God? . . . Not the sweet melody of harmony and song; not the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, and spices; not manna or honey; not limbs such as the body delights to embrace. It is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet, when I love him, it is true that I love a light of a certain kind, a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace; but they are of the kind that I love in my inner self, when my soul is bathed in light that is not bound by space; when it listens to sound that never dies away; when it breathes fragrance that

is not borne away on the wind; when it tastes food that is never consumed by the eating; when it clings to an embrace from which it is not severed by fulfillment of desire. This is what I love when I love my God.

Few people in the history of the church have surpassed Augustine in portraying the greatness and beauty and desirability of God. He is utterly persuaded by Scripture and experience "that he is happy who possesses God." "You made us for yourself, and our hearts find no peace till they rest in you." He will labor with all his might to make this God of sovereign grace and sovereign joy known and loved in the world.

You are ever active, yet always at rest. You gather all things to yourself, though you suffer no need. . . . You grieve for wrong, but suffer no pain. You can be angry and yet serene. Your works are varied, but your purpose is one and the same. . . . You welcome those who come to you, though you never lost them. You are never in need yet are glad to gain, never covetous yet you exact a return for your gifts. . . . You release us from our debts, but you lose nothing thereby. You are my God, my Life, my holy Delight, but is this enough to say of you? Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? Yet woe betide those who are silent about you!

If it is true, as R.C. Sproul says that today "we have not broken free from the Pelagian captivity of the church," then we should pray and preach and write and teach and labor with all our might to break the chain that holds us captive. Sproul says, "We need an Augustine or a Luther to speak to us anew lest the light of God's grace be not only overshadowed but be obliterated in our time." Yes, we do. But we also need tens of thousands of ordinary pastors like you and me, who are ravished with the extraordinary sovereignty of joy in God. And we need to rediscover Augustine's peculiar slant – a very Biblical slant – on grace as the free gift of sovereign joy in God that frees us from the bondage of sin. We need to rethink our Reformed soteriology so that every limb and every branch in the tree is coursing with the sap of Augustinian delight. We need to make plain that total depravity is not just badness, but blindness to beauty and deadness to joy; and unconditional election means that the completeness of our joy in Jesus was planned for us before we ever existed; and that limited atonement is the assurance that indestructible joy in God is infallibly secured for us by the blood of the covenant; and irresistible grace is the commitment and power of God's love to make sure we don't hold on to suicidal pleasures, but will set us free by the sovereign power of superior delights; and that the perseverance of the saints is the almighty work of God to keep us, through all affliction and suffering, for an inheritance of pleasures at God's right hand forever. This note of sovereign, triumphant joy is a missing element in too much Reformed theology and Reformed worship. And it may be that the question we should pose ourselves in conclusion is whether this is so because we have not experienced the triumph of sovereign joy in our own lives. Can we say the following with Augustine?

How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose . . ! You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place. . . . O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation. Or are we in bondage to the pleasures of this world so that, for all our talk about the glory of God, we love television and food and sleep and sex and money and human praise just like everybody else? If so, let us repent and fix our faces like flint toward the Word of God in prayer: O Lord, open my eyes to see the sovereign sight that in your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are

pleasures for evermore (Psalms 16:11). By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 83

05.27. To Live Upon God that Is Invisible

To Live Upon God that Is Invisible Suffering and Service in the Life of John Bunyan In 1672, about 50 miles northwest of London in Bedford, John Bunyan was released from twelve years of imprisonment. He was 44 years old. Just before his release (it seems) he updated his spiritual autobiography called Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. He looked back over the hardships of the last 12 years and wrote about how he was enabled by God to survive and even flourish in the Bedford jail. One of his comments gives me the title for this message about Bunyan's life.

He quotes 2 Corinthians 1:9 where Paul says, "We had this sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead." Then he says, By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon every thing that can be properly called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment, and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. The second was, to live upon God that is invisible, as Paul said in another place; the way not to faint, is to "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." The phrase that I have fastened on for the title and focus of this study of Bunyan is the phrase, "to live upon God that is invisible." He discovered that if we are to suffer rightly we must die not only to sin, but to the innocent and precious things of this world including family and freedom. We must "live upon God that is invisible." Everything else in the world we must count as dead to us and we to it. That was Bunyan's passion from the time of his conversion as a young married man to the day of his death when he was 60 years old. In all my reading of Bunyan, what has gripped me most is his suffering and how he responded to it. What it made of him. And what it might make of us. All of us come to our tasks with a history and many predispositions. I come to John Bunyan with a growing sense that suffering is a normal and useful and essential and God-ordained element in Christian life and ministry. Not only for the sake of weaning us off the world and teaching us to live on God, as 2 Corinthians 1:9 says, but also to make pastors more able to love the church (2 Timothy 2:10; Colossians 1:24) and make missionaries more able to reach the nations (Matthew 10:16-28), so that so that they can learn to live on God and not the bread that perishes (John 6:27).

I am influenced in the way I read Bunyan by both what I see in the world today and what I see in the Bible. I see the persecution of the church in Indonesia with its church burnings; in Sudan with its systematic starvation and enslavement; in China with its repression of religious freedom and lengthy imprisonments; in India with its recent Hindu mob violence and murder two weeks ago of Graham Staines, a 30-year missionary veteran with his seven- and nine-year-old sons; and the estimate reported in this month's International Bulletin of Missionary Research of 164,000 Christian martyrs in 1999.

I see 10,000 dead in Honduras and Nicaragua in the path of hurricane Mitch. I see 1,000 killed by an earthquake last week in Armenia, Colombia. I see hundreds slaughtered in Kosovo. I see 16,000 new people infected with the HIV virus every day, with 2.3 million people dying of AIDS in

1997, 460,000 of these under age 15, and 8.4 million children orphaned by AIDS. And, of course, I see the people suffering in my own church with tuberculosis and lupus and heart disease and blindness, not to mention the hundreds of emotional and relational pangs that people would trade any day for a good clean amputation. And as I come to Bunyan's life and suffering, I see in the Bible that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom" (Acts 14:22); and the promise of Jesus, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20); and the warning from Peter "not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12); and the utter realism of Paul that we who "have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23); and the reminder that "our outer nature is wasting away" (2 Corinthians 4:16); and that the whole creation "was subjected to futility" (Romans 8:20). As I look around me in the world and in the Word, my own sense is that what we need from Bunyan right now is a glimpse into how he suffered and how he learned to "live on God that is invisible." I want that for myself, and I want that for my people, and I want that for you pastors and for your people, because nothing glorifies God more than when we maintain our stability and even our joy having lost everything but God (Habakkuk 3:17-18). That day is coming for each of us, and we do well to get ready, and help our people get ready.

John Bunyan was born in Elstow, about a mile south of Bedford, England November 30, 1628, the same year that William Laud became the bishop of London during the reign of king Charles I. That connection with Bishop Laud is important because you can't understand the sufferings of Bunyan apart from the religious and political times he lived in. In those days there were tremendous conflicts between Parliament and monarchy. Bishop Laud, together with Charles I opposed the reforms of the Church of England desired by the Puritans. Oliver Cromwell was elected to Parliament in 1640 and civil war broke out in 1642 between the forces loyal to the king and those loyal to Parliament. In 1645, the Parliament took control of the Monarchy. Bishop Laud was executed that year and the use of the Book of Common Prayer was overthrown. The Westminster Assembly completed the Westminster Confession for the dominant Presbyterian church in 1646, and the king was beheaded in 1649. Cromwell led the new Commonwealth until his death in 1658. His main concern was a stable government with freedom of religion for Puritans, like John Bunyan and others. "Jews, who had been excluded from England since 1290, were allowed to return in 1655."

After Cromwell's death his son Richard was unable to hold the government together. The longing for stability with a new king swelled. (How quickly the favor of man can turn!) The Parliament turned against the Nonconformists like John Bunyan and passed a series of acts that resulted in increasing restrictions on the Puritan preachers. Charles II was brought home in what is known as the Restoration of the Monarchy, and proclaimed king in 1660, the same year that Bunyan was imprisoned for preaching without state approval. In 1662, the Act of Uniformity was passed that required acceptance of the Prayer Book and Episcopal ordination That August, 2,000 Puritan pastors were forced out of their churches. Twelve years later there was a happy turn of affairs with the Declaration of Religious Indulgence that resulted in Bunyan's freedom, his license to preach and his call as the official pastor of the non-conformist church in Bedford. But there was political instability until he died in 1688 at the age of 60. He was imprisoned one other time in the mid 1670's when he probably wrote Pilgrim's Progress.

These were the days of John Bunyan's sufferings, and we must be careful not to overstate or understate the terror of the days. We would overstate it if we thought he was tortured in the Bedford jail. In fact, some jailers let him out to see his family or make brief trips. But we would understate it if we thought he was not in frequent danger of execution. For example, in the Bloody Assizes of 1685, 300 people were put to death in the western counties of England for doing no more than Bunyan did as a non-conformist pastor.

Bunyan learned the trade of metalworking or "tinker" or "brasyer" from his father. He received the ordinary education of the poor to read and write, but nothing more. He had no formal higher education of any kind, which makes his writing and influence all the more astonishing. The more notable suffering of his life begins in his teens. In 1644, when he was 15, his mother and sister died within one month of each other. His sister was 13. To add to the heartache, his father remarried within a month. All this while not many miles away in that same month of loss the king attacked a church in Leighton and "began to cut and wound right and left." And later that fall, when Bunyan had turned 16, he was drafted into the Parliamentary Army. For about two years was taken from his home for military service. There were harrowing moments he tells us, as once when a man took his place as a sentinel and was shot in the head with a musket ball and died.

Bunyan was not a believer during this time. He tells us, "I had few equals, especially considering my years, which were tender, for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God . . . Until I came to the state of marriage, I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company, in all manner of vice and ungodliness."

He "came to the state of matrimony" when he was 20 or 21, but we never learn his first wife's name. What we do learn is that she was poor, but had a godly father who had died and left her two books that she brought to the marriage, The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven and The Practice of Piety. Bunyan said, "In these two books I would sometimes read with her, wherein I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me; but all this while I met with no conviction." But the work of God's drawing him had begun.

They had four children, Mary, Elizabeth, John and Thomas. Mary, the oldest, was born blind. This not only added to the tremendous burden of his heart in caring for Mary and the others, it would make his imprisonment when Mary was 10 years old an agonizing separation.

During the first five years of marriage, Bunyan was profoundly converted to Christ and to the baptistic, non-conformist church life in Bedford. He came under the influence of John Gifford the pastor in Bedford and moved from Elstow to Bedford with his family and joined the church there in 1653, though he was not as sure as they were that he was a Christian. It's hard to put a date on his conversion because in retelling the process in Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners he includes almost no dates or times. But it was a lengthy and agonizing process.

He was pouring over the Scriptures but finding no peace or assurance. There were seasons of great doubt about the Scriptures and about his own soul. "A whole flood of blasphemies, both against God, Christ, and the Scriptures were poured upon my spirit, to my great confusion an astonishment . . . . How can you tell but that the Turks had as good scriptures to prove their Mahomet the Savior as we have to prove our Jesus?" "My heart was at times exceeding hard. If I would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, I could not shed one." When he thought that he

was established in the gospel there came a season of overwhelming darkness following a terrible temptation when he heard the words, "sell and part with this most blessed Christ . . . . Let him go if he will." He tells us that "I felt my heart freely consent thereto. Oh, the diligence of Satan; Oh, the desperateness of man's heart." For two years, he tells us, he was in the doom of damnation. "I feared that this wicked sin of mine might be that sin unpardonable." "Oh, no one knows the terrors of those days but myself." "I found it a hard work now to pray to God because despair was swallowing me up."

Then comes what seemed to be the decisive moment.

One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he wants [=lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgivable sin] left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God."

Under God, one key influence here, besides Pastor Gifford in Bedford, was Martin Luther. "The God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hand one day a book of Martin Luther's; it was his Comment on Galatians . . . . I found my condition in his experience so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart . . . . I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience." So in 1655, when the matter of his soul was settled, he was asked to exhort the church, and suddenly a great preacher was discovered. He would not be licensed as a pastor of the Bedford church until 17 years later. But his popularity as a powerful lay preacher exploded. The extent of his work grew. "When the country understood that . . . the tinker had turned preacher," John Brown tells us, "they came to hear the word by hundreds, and that from all parts." Charles Doe, a comb maker in London, said (later in Bunyan's life), "Mr. Bunyan preached no New Testament-like he made me admire and weep for joy, and give him my affections." In the days of toleration, a day's notice would get a crowd of 1200 to hear him preach at 7:00 o'clock in the morning on a weekday. Once, in prison, a whole congregation of 60 people were arrested and brought in at night. A witness tells us, "I . . . heard Mr. Bunyan both preach and pray with that mighty spirit of Faith and Plerophory of Divine Assistance, that . . . made me stand and wonder." The greatest Puritan theologian and contemporary of Bunyan, John Owen, when asked by King Charles why he, a great scholar, went to hear an uneducated tinker preach said, "I would willingly exchange my learning for the tinker's power of touching men's hearts."

Ten years after he was married, when Bunyan was 30, his wife died in 1658, leaving him with four children under ten, one of them blind. A year later, he married Elizabeth who was a remarkable woman. The year after their marriage, Bunyan was arrested and put in prison. She was pregnant with their firstborn and miscarried in the crisis. Then she cared for the children as step mother for 12 years alone, and bore Bunyan two more children, Sarah and Joseph.

She deserves at least one story here about her valor in the way she went to the authorities in August of 1661, a year after John’s imprisonment. She had already been to London with one petition. Now she met with one stiff question:

"Would he stop preaching? "

"My lord, he dares not leave off preaching as long a he can speak."

"What is the need of talking?"

"There is need for this, my lord, for I have four small children that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and we have nothing to live upon but the charity of good people."

Matthew Hale with pity asks if she really has four children being so young.

"My lord, I am but mother-in-law to them, having not been married to him yet full two years. Indeed, I was with child when my husband was first apprehended; but being young and unaccustomed to such things, I being smayed at the news, fell into labor, and so continued for eight days, and then was delivered; but my child died."

Hale was moved, but other judges were hardened and spoke against him. "He is a mere tinker!"

"Yes, and because he is a tinker and a poor man, therefore he is despised and cannot have justice."

One Mr. Chester is enraged and says that Bunyan will preach and do as he wishes.

"He preacheth nothing but the word of God!" she says.

Mr. Twisden, in a rage: "He runneth up and down and doeth harm."

"No, my lord, it is not so; God hath owned him and done much good by him." The angry man: "His doctrine is the doctrine of the devil."

She: "My lord, when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil!"

Bunyan’s biographer comments, "Elizabeth Bunyan was simply an English peasant woman: could she have spoken with more dignity had she been a crowned queen?" So for 12 years Bunyan chooses prison and a clear conscience over freedom and a conscience soiled by the agreement not to preach. He could have had his freedom when he wanted it. But he and Elzabeth were made of the same stuff. When asked to recant and not to preach he said, "If nothing will do unless I make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter-shop, unless, putting out my own eyes, I commit me to the blind to lead me, as I doubt not is desired by some, I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on mine eye-brows, rather than thus to violate my faith and principles."

Nevertheless he was sometime tormented that he may not be making the right decision in regard to his family. The parting with my Wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships,

miseries and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my Blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.

Yet he stayed. In 1672 he was released because of the Declaration of Religious Indulgence. Immediately he was licensed as the pastor of the church in Bedford, which he had been serving all along, even from within prison by writings and periodic visits. A barn was purchased and renovated as their first building and this is where Bunyan ministered as pastor for the next 16 years until his death. He never was wooed away from this little parish by the larger opportunities in London. The estimate is that perhaps there were 120 non-conformists in Bedford in 1676 with others no doubt coming to hear him from around the surrounding villages.

There was one more imprisonment in the winter and spring of 1675-76. John Brown thinks that this was the time when The Pilgrim's Progress was written. But even though Bunyan wasn't in prison again during his ministry, the tension of the days was extraordinary. Ten years after his last imprisonment in, the mid-1680's, persecution was heavy again. "Richard Baxter, though an old man now, was shut up in gaol, where he remained for two years more, and where he had innumerable companions in distress."

Meetings were broken in upon, worshipers hurried to prison, "separatists changed the place of gathering from time to time, set their sentinels on the watch, left off singing hymns in their services, and for the sake of greater security worshipped again and again at the dead of night. Ministers were introduced to their pulpits through trap-doors in floor or ceiling, or through doorways extemporized in walls." Bunyan expected to be taken away again and deeded over all his possessions to his wife Elizabeth so that she would not be ruined by his fines or imprisonment. But God spared him. Until August, 1688. He traveled the 50 miles to London to preach and to help make peace between a man in his church and his alienated father. He was successful in both missions. But after a trip to an outlying district, he returned to London on horseback, through excessive rains. He fell sick of a violent fever, and on August 31, 1688, at age 60, followed his Pilgrim from the city of Destruction across the river to the New Jerusalem. His last sermon had been on August 19 in London at Whitechapel on John 1:13. His last words from the pulpit were, "Live like the children of God, that you may look your Father in the face with comfort another day." His wife and children were probably unaware of the crisis till after it was too late. So Bunyan probably died without the comfort of family – just as he had spent so much of his life without the comforts of home. "The inventory of Bunyan's property after his death added up to a total of 42 pounds and 19 shillings. This is more than the average tinker would leave, but it suggests that most of the profits from The Pilgrim's Progress had gone to printers of pirated editions." He was born poor and never let himself become wealthy in this life. He is buried in London at Bunhill Fields.

So, in sum, we can include in Bunyan's sufferings the early, almost simultaneous, death of his mother and sister; the immediate remarriage of his father; the military draft in the midst of his teenage grief; the discovery that his first child was blind; the spiritual depression and darkness for the early years of his marriage; the death of his first wife leaving him with four small children; a twelve year imprisonment cutting him off from his family and church; the constant stress and uncertainty of imminent persecution, including one more imprisonment; and the final sickness and

death far from those he loved most. And this summary doesn't include any of the normal pressures and pains of ministry and marriage and parenting and controversy and criticism and sickness along the way. The question, then, that I bring to Bunyan's suffering is: What was its effect? How did he respond to it? What did it bring about? What difference did it make in his life? Knowing that I am leaving out many important things, I would answer that with five observations.

1. Bunyan's suffering confirmed him in his calling as a writer, especially for the afflicted church.

Probably the greatest distortion of Bunyan's life in the portrait I have given you so far is that it passes over one of the major labors of his life, his writing. Books had awakened his own spiritual quest and guided him in it. Books would be his main legacy to the church and the world. Of course, he is famous for The Pilgrim's Progress – "next to the Bible, perhaps the world's best-selling book . . . translated into over 200 languages." It was immediately successful with three editions in the first year it was published in 1678. It was despised at first by the intellectual elite, but as Lord Macaulay points out, "The Pilgrim's Progress is perhaps the only book about which, after the lapse of a hundred years, the educated minority has come over to the opinion of the common people." But most people don't know that Bunyan was a prolific writer before and after The Pilgrim's Progress. Christopher Hill's index of "Bunyan's Writings" lists 58 books. The variety in these books was remarkable: controversy (like the Quakers and justification and baptism), collections of poems, children's literature, allegory (like The Holy War and The Life and Death of Mr. Badman). But the vast majority were practical doctrinal expositions of Scripture built from sermons for the sake of strengthening and warning and helping Christian pilgrims make their way successfully to heaven.

He was a writer from beginning to end. He had written four books before he went to prison at age 32 and the year he died five books were published in that one year of 1688. This is extraordinary for a man with no formal education. He knew neither Greek nor Hebrew and had no theological degrees. This was such and offense even in his own day that his pastor, John Burton, came to his defense, writing a foreword for his first book in 1656 (when he was 28): "This man is not chosen out of an earthly but out of the heavenly university, the Church of Christ . . . . He hath through grace taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experiences of the temptations of Satan, which do more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the Gospel than all university learning and degrees that can be had."

Bunyan's suffering left its mark on all his written work. George Whitefield said of The Pilgrim's Progress, "It smells of the prison. It was written when the author was confined in Bedford jail. And ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross: the Spirit of Christ and of Glory then rests upon them." The fragrance of affliction was on most of what he wrote. In fact, I suspect that one of the reasons the Puritans are still being read today with so much profit is that their entire experience, unlike ours, was one of persecution and suffering. To our chipper age (at least in the prosperous West) this may seem somber at times, but the day you hear that you have cancer or that your child is blind or that a mob is coming, you turn away from the chipper books to the weighty ones that were written on the precipice of eternity where the fragrance of heaven and the stench of hell are both in the air.

Bunyan's writings were an extension of his pastoral ministry mainly to his flock in Bedford who lived in constant danger of harassment and prison. His suffering fit him well for the task. Which leads to the second effect of Bunyan's suffering I want to mention.

2. Bunyan’s suffering deepened his love for his flock and gave his pastoral labor the fragrance of eternity. His writings were filled with love to his people. For example, three years into his imprisonment he wrote a book called Christian Behavior which he ended like this:

Thus have I, in a few words, written to you before I die, a word to provoke you to faith and holiness, because I desire that you may have the life that is laid up for all them that believe in the Lord Jesus, and love one another, when I am deceased. Though then I shall rest from my labors, and be in paradise, as through grace I comfortably believe, yet it is not there, but here, I must do you good. Wherefore, I not knowing the shortness of my life, nor the hindrance that hereafter I may have of serving my God and you, I have taken this opportunity to present these few lines unto you for your edification. In his autobiography, written about half way through his imprisonment, he spoke of his church and the effect he hoped his possible martyrdom would have on them: "I did often say before the Lord, that if to be hanged up presently before their eyes would be means to awake in them and confirm them in the truth, I gladly should consent to it." In fact, many of his flocked joined him in jail and he ministered to them there. He echoed the words of Paul when he described his longings for them: "In my preaching I have really been in pain, I have, as it were, travailed to bring forth Children to God."

He gloried in the privilege of the gospel ministry. This too flowed from his suffering. If all is well and this world is all that matters, a pastor may become jealous of prosperous people who spend their time in leisure. But if suffering abounds, and if prosperity is a cloak for the true condition of frisky, fun-loving perishing Americans, then being a pastor may be the most important and glorious of all work. Bunyan thought it was: "My heart hath been so wrapped up in the glory of this excellent work, that I counted my self more blessed and honored of God by this, than if I had made me the emperor of the Christian world, or the lord of all the glory of the earth without it."

He loved his people, he loved the work and he stayed with it and with them to the end of his life. He served them and he served the world from a village parish with perhaps 120 members.

3. Bunyan’s suffering opened his understanding to the truth that the Christian life is hard and that following Jesus means having the wind in your face. In 1682, six years before his death, he wrote a book called The Greatness of the Soul based on Mark 8:36-37, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" He says that his aim is to "awaken you, rouse you off of your beds of ease, security, and pleasure, and fetch you down upon your knees before him, to beg of him grace to be concerned about the salvation of your souls." And he does not mean the point of conversion but the process of perseverance. "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (Mark 13:13). He hears Jesus warning us that life with him is hard:

Following of me is not like following of some other masters. The wind sits always on my face and the foaming rage of the sea of this world, and the proud and lofty waves thereof do continually beat upon the sides of the bark or ship that myself, my cause, and my followers are in; he therefore that will not run hazards, and that is afraid to venture a drowning, let him not set foot into this vessel.

Two years later, commenting on John 15:2 ("Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes"), he says, "It is the will of God, that they that go to heaven should go thither hardly or with difficulty. The

righteous shall scarcely be saved. That is, they shall, but yet with great difficulty, that it may be the sweeter."

He had tasted this at the beginning of his Christian life and at every point along the way. In the beginning: "My soul was perplexed with unbelief, blasphemy, hardness of heart, questions about the being of God, Christ, the truth of The Word, and certainty of the world to come: I say, then I was greatly assaulted and tormented with atheism." "Of all the temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God and the truth of his gospel is the worst, and the worst to be borne." In The Excellency of a Broken Heart (the last book he took to the publisher) he says, "Conversion is not the smooth, easy-going process some men seem to think . . . . It is wounding work, of course, this breaking of the hearts, but without wounding there is no saving. . . . Where there is grafting there is a cutting, the scion must be let in with a wound; to stick it on to the outside or to tie it on with a string would be of no use. Heart must be set to heart and back to back, or there will be no sap from root to branch, and this I say, must be done by a wound."

Bunyan's suffering made him passionate about these things – and patient. You can hear his empathy with strugglers in these typically earthy words in a book from 1678 called Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ: "He that comes to Christ cannot, it is true, always get on as fast as he would. Poor coming soul, thou art like the man that would ride full gallop whose horse will hardly trot. Now the desire of his mind is not to be judged of by the slow pace of the dull jade he rides on, but by the hitching and kicking and spurring as he sits on his back. Thy flesh is like this dull jade, it will not gallop after Christ, it will be backward though thy soul and heaven lie at stake."

It seems to me that Bunyan knew the balance of Php 2:12-13, "So then, my beloved . . . work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." First, he publishes a book called Saved By Grace based on Ephesians 2:5, "By grace you are saved." And then in the same year he follows it with a book called, The Strait Gate, based on Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Bunyan's sufferings had taught him the words of Jesus first hand, "The way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:14).

4. Bunyan's suffering strengthened his assurance that God is sovereign over all the afflictions of his people and will bring them safely home.

There have always been, as there are today, people who try to solve the problem of suffering by denying the sovereignty of God – that is the all-ruling providence of God over Satan and over nature and over human hearts and deeds. But it is remarkable how many of those who stand by the doctrine of God's sovereignty over suffering have been those who suffered most and who found in the doctrine the most comfort and help.

Bunyan was among that number. In 1684 he wrote an exposition for his suffering people based on 1 Peter 4:19 : "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." The book was called Seasonable Counsels: Advice to Sufferers. He takes the phrase "according to the will of God," and unfolds the sovereignty of God in it for the comfort of his people.

"It is not what enemies will, nor what they are resolved upon, but what God will, and what God appoints; that shall be done. . . . No enemy can bring suffering upon a man when the will of God is otherwise, so no man can save himself out of their hands when God will deliver him up for his glory. . . [just as Jesus showed Peter "by what death he would glorify God"]. We shall or shall not suffer, even as it pleaseth him."

God has appointed who shall suffer [Revelation 6:11 – the full number of martyrs]. . . . God has appointed . . . when they shall suffer [Acts 18:9-10 Paul's time of suffering was not yet come; so with Jesus in John 7:30]. . . . God has appointed where this, that or the other good man shall suffer ["it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" Luke 13:33; Luke 9:30 f]. . . . God has appointed . . . what kind of sufferings this or that saint shall undergo [Acts 9:16 "how great things he must suffer;" John 21:19 "by what death he would glorify God"]. . . . Our sufferings, as to the nature of them, are all writ down in God's book; and though the writing seem as unknown characters to us, yet God understands them very well [Mark 9:13; Acts 13:29]. . . . It is appointed who of them should die of hunger, who with the sword, who should go into captivity, and who should be eaten up of beasts. Jeremiah 15:2-3.

What is Bunyan's aim in this exposition of the sovereignty of God in suffering? "I have, in a few words, handled this . . . to show you that our sufferings are ordered and disposed by him, that you might always, when you come into trouble for this name, not stagger nor be at loss, but be stayed, composed, and settled in your minds, and say, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Acts 21:14."

He warns against feelings of revenge. "Learn to pity and bewail the condition of the enemy . . . Never grudge them their present advantages. 'Fret not thy self because of evil men. Neither be thou envious at the workers of iniquity.' Proverbs 24:19. Fret not, though they spoil thy resting place. It is God that hath bidden them do it, to try thy faith and patience thereby. Wish them no ill with what they get of thine; it is their wages for their work, and it will appear to them ere long that they have earned it dearly. . . . Bless God that thy lot did fall on the other side. . . . How kindly, therefore, doth God deal with us, when he chooses to afflict us but for a little, that with everlasting kindness he may have mercy upon us. Is.54:7-8." The key to suffering rightly is to see in all things the hand of a merciful and good and sovereign God and "to live upon God that is invisible." There is more of God to be had in times of suffering than any other time.

There is that of God to be seen in such a day as cannot be seen in another. His power in holding up some, his wrath in leaving of others; his making of shrubs to stand, and his suffering of cedars to fall; his infatuating of the counsels of men, and his making of the devil to outwit himself; his giving of his presence to his people, and his leaving of his foes in the dark; his discovering [disclosing] the uprightness of the hearts of his sanctified ones, and laying open the hypocrisy of others, is a working of spiritual wonders in the day of his wrath, and of the whirlwind and storm. . . . We are apt to overshoot, in the days that are calm, and to think ourselves far higher, and more strong than we find we be, when the trying day is upon us. . . . We could not live without such turnings of the hand of God upon us. We should be overgrown with flesh, if we had not our seasonable winters. It is said that in some countries trees will grow, but will bear no fruit, because there is no winter there. So Bunyan begs his people to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God and trust that all will be for their good. "Let me beg of thee, that thou wilt not be offended either with God, or men, if the cross is laid heavy upon thee. Not with God, for he doth nothing

without a cause, nor with men, for . . . they are the servants of God to thee for good. (Psalms 17:14 KJV; Jeremiah 24:5). Take therefore what comes to thee from God by them, thankfully."

5. Bunyan's suffering deepened in him a confidence in the Bible as the Word of God and a passion for Bible memory and Biblical exposition as the key to perseverance.

If "living upon God that is invisible" is the key to suffering rightly, what is the key to living upon God? Bunyan's answer is: to lay hold on Christ through the Word of God, the Bible. Prison proved for Bunyan to be a hallowed place of communion with God because his suffering unlocked the Word and the deepest fellowship with Christ he had ever known.

I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now [in prison]. Those scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed. . . I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world. . . I have seen that here that I am persuaded I shall never, while in this world, be able to express.

He especially cherished the promises of God as the key for opening the door of heaven. "I tell thee, friend, there are some promises that the Lord hath helped me to lay hold of Jesus Christ through and by, that I would not have out of the Bible for as much gold and silver as can lie between York and London piled up to the stars."

One of the greatest scenes in The Pilgrim's Progress is when Christian recalls in the dungeon of Doubting-castle that he has a key to the door. Very significant is not only what the key is, but where it is:

What a fool I have been, to lie like this in a stinking dungeon, when I could have just as well walked free. In my chest pocket I have a key called Promise that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in Doubting-Castle." "Then," said Hopeful, "that is good news. My good brother, do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it." Then Christian took the key from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door; and as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease, so that Christian and hopeful immediately came out.

Three times Bunyan says that the key was in Christians "chest pocket" or simply his "chest." I take this to mean that Christian had hidden it in his heart by memorization and that it was now accessible in prison for precisely this reason. This is how the promises sustained and strengthened Bunyan. He was filled with Scripture. Everything he wrote was saturated with Bible. He poured over his English Bible, which he had most of the time. This is why he can say of his writings, "I have not for these things fished in other men's waters; my Bible and Concordance are my only library in my writings." Charles Spurgeon put it like this: "He had studied our Authorized Version . . . till his whole being was saturated with Scripture; and though his writings . . . continually make us feel and say, 'Why, this man is a living Bible!' Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak with out quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God."

Bunyan reverenced the Word of God and trembled at the prospect of dishonoring it. "Let me die . . . with the Philistines (Judges 16:30) rather than deal corruptly with the blessed word of God." This,

in the end, is why Bunyan is still with us today rather than disappearing into the mist of history. He is with us and ministering to us because he reverenced the Word of God and was so permeated by it that his blood is "Bibline" and that "the essence of the Bible flows from him." And this is what he has to show us. That "to live upon God who is invisible" is to live upon God in his Word. And to serve and suffer out of a life in God is to serve and suffer out of a life drenched with the Word of God. This is how we shall live, this is how we shall suffer and this is how we shall help our people get safely to the Celestial City. We will woo them with the Word. We will say to them with Bunyan to his people:

God hath strewed all the way from the gate of hell, where thou wast, to the gate of heaven, whither thou art going, with flowers out of his own garden. Behold how the promises, invitations, calls, and encouragements, like lilies, lie round about thee! Take heed that thou dost not tread them under thy foot. By John Piper. ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org

Chapter 84

05.28. You Will Be Eaten by Cannibals! Lessons from the Life of John G.Paton

You Will Be Eaten by Cannibals! Lessons from the Life of John G.Paton In 1606, a chain of eighty islands in the South Pacific was discovered by Fernandez de Quiros of Spain. In 1773, the Islands were explored by Captain James Cook and named the New Hebrides because of the similarities with the Hebrides Islands off the Northwest coast of Scotland. In 1980, the New Hebrides gained its independence from Britain and France and was named Vanuatu. The chain of Islands is about 450 miles long. If you draw a line straight from Honolulu to Sydney, it will cut through Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, two thirds of the way between Hawaii and Australia. The population today is about 190,000. To the best of our knowledge, the New Hebrides had no Christian influence before John Williams and James Harris from the London Missionary Society landed in 1839. Both of these missionaries were killed and eaten by cannibals on the island of Erromanga on November 20 of that year, only minutes after going ashore. Forty-eight years later John Paton wrote, "Thus were the New Hebrides baptized with the blood of martyrs; and Christ thereby told the whole Christian world that he claimed these islands as His own" (p.75).1 The London Missionary Society sent another team to the Island of Tanna in 1842, and these missionaries were driven off within seven months. But on the Island of Aneityum, John Geddie from the Presbyterian church in Nova Scotia (coming in 1848) and John Inglis from The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland (coming in 1852) saw amazing fruit, so that by 1854 "about 3,500 savages [more than half the population2] threw away their idols, renouncing their heathen customs and avowing themselves to be worshippers of the true Jehovah God" (p. 77). When Geddie died in 1872, all the population of Aneityum was said to be Christians.3 This is part of a great work God was doing in the South Sea Islands in those days. In 1887 Paton recorded the wider triumphs of the gospel. When certain people argued that the Aborigines of Autstralia were subhuman and incapable of conversion or civilization Paton fought back with mission facts as well as Biblical truth.

Recall . . . what the Gospel has done for the near kindred of these same Aborigines. On our own Aneityum, 3,500 Cannibals have been lead to renounce their heathenism . . . In Fiji, 79,000 Cannibals have been brought under the influence of the Gospel; and 13,000 members of the Churches are professing to live and work for Jesus. In Samoa, 34,000 Cannibals have professed Christianity; and in nineteen years, its College has sent forth 206 Native teachers and evangelists. On our New Hebrides, more than 12,000 Cannibals have been brought to sit at the feet of Christ, through I mean not to say that they are all model Christians; and 133 of the Natives have been trained and sent forth as teachers and preachers of the Gospel. (p. 265) This is the remarkable missionary context for the life and ministry of John G. Paton, who was born near Dumfries, Scotland, on the 24th of May, 1824. He sailed for the New Hebrides (via Australia) with his wife Mary on April 16, 1858, at the age of 33. They reached their appointed island of Tanna on November 5, and in March the next year both his wife and his newborn son died of the fever. He served alone on the island for the next four years under incredible circumstances of constant danger until he was driven off the island in February, 1862. For the next four years he did

extraordinarily effective mobilization work for the Presbyterian mission to the New Hebrides, travelling around Australia and Great Britain. He married again in 1864, and took his wife, Margaret, back this time to the smaller island of Aniwa ("It measures scarcely seven miles by two," p. 312). They labored together for 41years until Margaret died in 1905 when John Paton was 81. When they came to Aniwa in November, 1866, they saw the destitution of the islanders. It will help us appreciate the magnitude of their labors and the wonders of their fruitfulness if we see some of what they faced. The natives were cannibals and occasionally ate the flesh of their defeated foes. They practiced infanticide and widow sacrifice, killing the widows of deceased men so that they could serve their husbands in the next world (pp. 69, 334). Their worship was entirely a service of fear, its aim being to propitiate this or that Evil spirit, to prevent calamity or to secure revenge. They deified their Chiefs . . . so that almost every village or tribe had its own Sacred Man. . . . They exercised an extraordinary influence for evil, these village or tribal priests, and were believed to have the disposal of life and death through their sacred ceremonies. . . . They also worshipped the spirits of departed ancestors and heroes, through their material idols of wood and stone. . . . They feared the spirits and sought their aid; especially seeking to propitiate those who presided over war and peace, famine and plenty, health and sickness, destruction and prosperity, life and death. Their whole worship was one of slavish fear; and, so far as ever I could learn, they had no idea of a God of mercy or grace. (p. 72)4

Paton admitted that at times his heart wavered as he wondered whether these people could be brought to the point of weaving Christian ideas into the spiritual consciousness of their lives (p. 74). But he took heart from the power of the gospel and from the fact that thousands on Aneityum had come to Christ. So he learned the language and reduced it to writing (p. 319). He built orphanages ("We trained these young people for Jesus" p. 317). "Mrs. Paton taught a class of about fifty women and girls. They became experts at sewing, singing and plaiting hats, and reading" (p. 377). They "trained the Teachers . . . translated and printed and expounded the Scriptures . . . ministered to the sick and dying . . . dispensed medicines every day . . . taught them the use of tools . . ." etc. (p. 378). They held worship services every Lord’s Day and sent native teachers to all the villages to preach the gospel. In the next fifteen years, John and Margaret Paton saw the entire island of Aniwa turn to Christ. Years later he wrote, "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Savior’s feet" (p. 312). When he was 73 years old and travelling around the world trumpeting the cause of missions in the South Seas, he was still ministering to his beloved Aniwan people and "published the New Testament in the Aniwan Language" in 1897.5 Even to his death he was translating hymns and catechisms6 and creating a dictionary for his people even when he couldn’t be with them any more (p. 451).

During his years of labor on the islands Paton kept a journal and notebooks and letters from which he wrote his Autobiography in three parts from 1887 to 1898. Almost all we know of his work comes from that book, which is available in one volume now from the Banner of Truth Trust.

Paton outlived his second wife by two years and died in Australia on January 28, 1907.

Today, 93 years after the death of John Paton, about 85% of the population of Vanuatu identifies itself as Christian, perhaps 21% of the population being evangelical.7 The sacrifices and the legacy of the missionaries to the New Hebrides are stunning, and John G. Paton stands out as one of the great ones. The title of this message is "’You Will Be Eaten By Cannibals!’ Courage in

the Cause of World Missions: Lessons from the Life of John G. Paton." So that is the focus of what I want to say. I conceive the rest of this message in three parts: 1) What kinds of circumstances called for courage in Paton's life? 2) What did his courage achieve? 3) Where did his courage come from?

What Kinds of Circumstances Called for Courage in Paton's Life?

He had courage to overcome the criticism he received from respected elders for going to the New Hebrides. A Mr. Dickson exploded, "The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!" The memory of Williams and Harris on Erromanga was only 19 years old. But to this Paton responded:

Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer. (p. 56) This is the kind of in-your-face spiritual moxie that would mark Paton's whole life. It's a big part of what makes reading his story so invigorating.

Another kind of criticism for going was that he would be leaving a very fruitful ministry. Paton had served for ten years as a city Missionary in urban Glasgow among the lower income people with tremendous success and hundreds of unchurched people were attending his classes and services during the week. One of his loved professors of divinity and minister of the congregation where he had served as an elder tried to persuade him to stay in that ministry. He reported that he argued that

Green Street Church was doubtless the sphere for which God had given me peculiar qualifications, and in which He had so largely blessed my labors; that if I left those now attending my Classes and Meetings, they might be scattered, and many of them would probably fall away; that I was leaving certainty for uncertainty - work in which God had made me greatly useful, for work in which I might fail to be useful, and only throw away my life amongst Cannibals. (p. 55) In fact Paton says, "The opposition was so strong from nearly all, and many of them warm Christian friends, that I was sorely tempted to question whether I was carrying out the Divine will, or only some headstrong wish of my own. This also caused me much anxiety, and drove me close to God in prayer" (p. 56). We will see shortly how he rose above these temptations to turn back.

He had courage to risk losing his loved ones and to press on when he did in fact lose them.

He and his wife arrived on the island of Tanna November 5, 1858, and Mary was pregnant. The baby was born February 12, 1859. "Our island-exile thrilled with joy! But the greatest of sorrows was treading hard upon the heels of that great joy!" (p. 79). Mary had reaped attacks of ague and fever and pneumonia and diarrhea with delirium for two weeks.

Then in a moment, altogether unexpectedly, she died on March third. To crown my sorrows, and complete my loneliness, the dear baby-boy, whom we had named after her father, Peter Robert Robson, was taken from me after one week's sickness, on the 20th of March. Let those who have ever passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me; as for all others, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows! (p. 79) He dug the two graves with his own hands and buried them by the house he had built.

Stunned by that dreadful loss, in entering upon this field of labor to which the Lord had Himself so evidently led me, my reason seemed for a time almost to give way. The ever-merciful Lord sustained me . . . and that spot became my sacred and much- frequented shrine, during all the following months and years when I labored on for the salvation of the savage Islanders amidst difficulties, dangers, and deaths. . . . But for Jesus, and the fellowship he vouchsafed to me there, I must have gone mad and died beside the lonely grave! (p. 80) The courage to risk the loss was one thing. But the courage to experience the loss and press on alone was supernatural. "I felt her loss beyond all conception or description, in that dark land. It was very difficult to be resigned, left alone, and in sorrowful circumstances; but feeling immovably assured that my God and father was too wise and loving to err in anything that he does or permits, I looked up to the Lord for help, and struggled on in His work" (p. 85). Here we get a glimpse of the theology that we will see underneath this man's massive courage and toil. "I do not pretend to see through the mystery of such visitations – wherein God calls away the young, the promising, and those sorely needed for his service here; but this I do know and feel, that, in the light of such dispensations, it becomes us all to love and serve our blessed Lord Jesus so that we may be ready at his call for death and eternity" (p. 85).

He had courage to risk his own sickness in a foreign land with no doctors and no escape.

"Fever and ague had attacked me fourteen times severely" (p. 105). In view of his wife's death he never knew when any one of these attacks would mean his own death. Imagine struggling with a life-and-death sickness over and over with only one Christian native friend named Abraham who had come with him to the island to help him. For example, as he was building a new house to get to higher, healthier ground, he collapsed with the fever on his way up the steep hill from the coast: "When about two-thirds up the hill I became so faint that I concluded I was dying. Lying down on the ground, sloped against the root of a tree to keep me from rolling to the bottom, I took farewell of old Abraham, of my mission work, and of everything around! In this weak state I lay, watched over by my faithful companion, and fell into a quiet sleep" (p. 106). He revived and was restored. But only great courage could press on month after month, year after year, knowing that the fever that took his wife and son lay at the door. And it's not as if these dangers were only during one season at the beginning of his missionary life. Fifteen years later with another wife and another child on another island, he records, "During the hurricanes, from January to April, 1873, when the Dayspring [the mission ship] was wrecked, we lost a darling child by death, my dear wife had a protracted illness, and I was brought very low with severe rheumatic fever . . . and was reported as dying" (p. 384). The most common demand for courage was the almost constant threat to his life from the hostilities of the natives. This is what makes his Autobiography read like a thriller. In his first four years on Tanna when he was all alone, he moved from one savage crisis to the next. One wonders how his mind kept from snapping, as he never knew when his house would be surrounded with angry natives or his party would be ambushed along the way. How do you survive when there is no kickback time? No unwinding. No sure refuge on earth. "Our continuous danger caused me now oftentimes to sleep with my clothes on, that I might start at a moment's warning. May faithful dog Clutha would give a sharp bark and awake me. . . . God made them fear this precious creature, and often used her in saving our lives" (p. 178). My enemies seldom slackened their hateful designs against my life, however calmed or baffled for the moment. . . . A wild chief followed me around for four hours with his loaded musket, and, though often directed towards me,

God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him, and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in his hands, and felt immortal till my work was done. Trials and hairbreadth escapes strengthened my faith, and seemed only to nerve me for more to follow; and they did tread swiftly upon each other's heels. (p. 117)

One of the most remarkable things about Paton's dealing with danger is the gutsy forthrightness with which he spoke to his assailants. He often rebuked them to their faces and scolded them for their bad behavior even as they held the ax over his head.

One morning at daybreak I found my house surrounded by armed men, and a chief intimated that they had assembled to take my life. Seeing that I was entirely in their hands, I knelt down and gave myself away body and soul to the Lord Jesus, for what seemed the last time on earth. Rising, I went out to them, and began calmly talking about their unkind treatment of me and contrasting it with all my conduct towards them. . . . At last some of the Chiefs, who had attended the Worship, rose and said, "Our conduct has been bad; but now we will fight for you, and kill all those who hate you." (p. 115)

[Once] when natives in large numbers were assembled at my house, a man furiously rushed on me with his axe but a Kaserumini Chief snatched a spade with which I had been working, and dexterously defended me from instant death. Life in such circumstances led me to cling very near to the Lord Jesus; I knew not, for one brief hour, when or how attack might be made; and yet, with my trembling hand clasped in the hand once nailed on Calvary, and now swaying the scepter of the universe, calmness and peace and resignation abode in my soul. (p. 117) As his courage increased and his deliverances were multiplied, he would make it his aim to keep warring factions separated, and would throw himself between them and argue for peace. "Going amongst them every day, I did my utmost to stop hostilities, setting the evils of war before them, and pleading with the leading men to renounce it" (p. 139). He would go to visit his enemies when they were sick and wanted his help, never knowing what was an ambush and what was not.

Once a native named Ian called Paton to his sick bed, and as Paton leaned over him, he pulled a dagger and held it to Paton's heart.

I durst neither move nor speak, except that my heart kept praying to the Lord to spare me, or if my time was come to take me home to Glory with Himself. There passed a few moments of awful suspense. My sight went and came. Not a word had been spoken, except to Jesus; and then Ian wheeled the knife around, thrust it into the sugar cane leaf. And cried to me, "Go, go quickly!" . . . I ran for my life a weary four miles till I reached the Mission House, faint, yet praising God for such a deliverance (p.191).

One last call for courage that I will mention is the need for courage in the face of criticism that he did not have courage to die.

After four years, the entire island population rose against Paton, blaming him for an epidemic, and made siege against him and his little band of Christians. There were spectacular close calls and a miraculous deliverance from fire by wind and rain (p. 215), and finally a wonderful answer to prayer as a ship arrived just in time to take him off the island. In response to this, after four years

of risking his life hundreds of times and losing his wife and child, he recounts this incident:

Conscious that I had, to the last inch of life, tried to do my duty, I left all results in the hands of my only Lord, and all criticisms to His unerring judgment. Hard things also were occasionally spoken to my face. One dear friend, for instance, said, "You should not have left. You should have stood at the post of duty till you fell. It would have been to your honor, and better for the cause of the Mission, had you been killed at the post of duty like the Gordons and others." (p. 223)

O, how easy it would have been for him to respond by walking away from the mission at a moment like that. But courage pressed on for another four decades of fruitful ministry on the island of Aniwa and around the world. And so the next question I ask of Paton's life is . . .

What Did His Courage Achieve?

We have already seen one main answer to this question, namely, The entire island of Aniwa turned to Christ.

Four years of seemingly fruitless and costly labor on Tanna could have meant the end of Paton's missionary life. He could have remembered that in Glasgow for ten years he had had unprecedented success as an urban missionary. Now for four years he seemed to have accomplished nothing and he lost his wife and child in the process. But instead of going home, he turned his missionary heart to Aniwa. And this time the story was different. "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God, Aniwa now worships at the Savior's feet" (p. 312). The courageous endurance on Tanna resulted in a story that awakened thousands to the call of missions and strengthened the home church. The reason Paton wrote the second volume of his Autobiography, he says, was to record God's "marvelous goodness in using my humble voice and pen, and the story of my life, for interesting thousands and tens of thousands in the work of Missions" (p. 220). And the influence goes on today – even in this room right now.

Oftentimes, while passing through the perils and defeats of my first four years in the Mission-field on Tanna, I wondered . . . why God permitted such things. But on looking back now, I already clearly perceive . . . that the Lord was thereby preparing me for doing, and providing me materials wherewith to accomplish, the best work of all my life, namely the kindling of the heart of Australian Presbyterianism with a living affection for these Islanders of their own Southern Seas . . . and in being the instrument under God of sending out Missionary after Missionary to the New Hebrides, to claim another island and still another for Jesus. That work, and all that may spring from it in Time and Eternity, never could have been accomplished by me but for first the sufferings and then the story of my Tanna enterprise! (pp. 222- 223) And the awakening was not just in Australia, but in Scotland and around the world. For example, he tells us what the effect of his home tour was on his own small Reformed Presbyterian Church after his four years of pain and seeming fruitlessness on Tanna. "I was . . . filled with a high passion of gratitude to be able to proclaim, at the close of my tour . . . that of all her ordained Ministers, one in every six was a Missionary of the Cross!" (p. 280). Indeed the effects at home were far more widespread than that – and here is a lesson for all churches. Nor did the dear old Church thus cripple herself; on the contrary, her zeal for Missions accompanied, if not caused, unwonted prosperity at home. New waves of liberality passed over the heart of her people. Debts that had burdened many of the Churches and Manses were swept away. Additional Congregations were organized. And in May, 1876, the Reformed

Presbyterian Church entered into an honorable and independent Union with her larger, wealthier, and more progressive sister, the Free Church of Scotland. (p. 280) In other words, the courageous perseverance of John Paton on Tanna, in spite of apparent fruitlessness, bore fruit in blessing for the mission field and for the church at home in ways he could have never dreamed in the midst of his dangers.

Another one of those good effects was to vindicate the power of the gospel to convert the hardest people.

Paton had an eye to the sophisticated European despisers of the gospel as he wrote the story of his life. He wanted to give evidence to skeptical modern men that the gospel can and does transform the most unlikely people and their societies. So in his Autobiography he tells stories of particular converts like Kowia, a chief on Tanna. When he was dying he came to say farewell to Paton.

"Farewell, Missi, I am very near death now; we will meet again in Jesus and with Jesus!" . . . Abraham sustained him, tottering to the place of graves; there he lay down . . . and slept in Jesus; and there the faithful Abraham buried him beside his wife and children. Thus died a man who had been a cannibal chief, but by the grace of God and the love of Jesus changed, transfigured into a character of light and beauty. What think ye of this, ye skeptics as to the reality of conversion? . . . I knew that day, and I know now, that there is one soul at least from Tanna to sing the glories of Jesus in Heaven - and, oh, the rapture when I meet him there! (p. 160) And then, of course, there was old Abraham himself. He was not one of Paton's converts, but he was a converted cannibal from Aneityum and Paton's absolutely trustworthy helper on Tanna during all his time there. So Paton writes again in witness to European skeptics: When I have read or heard the shallow objections of irreligious scribblers and talkers, hinting that there was no reality in conversions, and that mission effort was but waste, oh, how my heart has yearned to plant them just one week on Tanna, with the "natural" man all around in the person of Cannibal and Heathen, and only the one "spiritual" man in the person of the converted Abraham, nursing them, feeding them, saving them 'for the love Jesus' - that I might just learn how many hours it took to convince them that Christ in man was a reality after all! All the skepticism of Europe would hide its head in foolish shame; and all its doubts would dissolve under one glance of the new light that Jesus, and Jesus alone, pours from the converted Cannibal's eye. (p. 107) The list could go on as to what Paton's courage achieved because in reality our second and third question overlap. What his courage achieved was, in fact, a vindication of the value of all that produced his courage. So let's turn to that, rather than lengthen the list here. Where Did this Courage Come From? What Was Its Origin? The answer he would want us to say is: It came from God. But he would also want us to see what precious means God used and, if possible, apply them to ourselves and our situation. His courage came from his father. The tribute Paton pays to his godly father is worth the price of the Autobiography, even if you don't read anything else. Maybe it's because I have a daughter and four sons, but I wept as I read this section, it filled me with such longing to be a father like this.

There was a small room, the "closet" where his father would go for prayer, as a rule after each meal. The eleven children knew it and they reverenced the spot and learned something profound about God. The impact on John Paton was immense.

Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, were blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet, and, hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, "He walked with God, why may not I?" (p. 8)

How much my father's prayers at this time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Savior, and learned to know and love him as our Divine friend. (p. 21)

One scene best captures the depth of love between John and his father and the power of the impact on John's life of uncompromising courage and purity. The time came for the young Paton to leave home and go to Glasgow to attend divinity school and become a city missionary in his early twenties. From his hometown of Torthorwald to the train station at Kilmarnock was a forty-mile walk. Forty years later Paton wrote, My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence – my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me; and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain! We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil!"

Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him – gazing after me. Waving my hat in adieu, I rounded the corner and out of sight in an instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for a time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dike to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dyke and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while, he got down, set his face toward home, and began to return - his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as he had given me. (pp. 25-26) The impact of his father's faith and prayer and love and discipline was immeasurable. So much more could be said. His courage came from a deep sense of divine calling.

Before he was 12 years old, Paton says, "I had given my soul to God, and was resolved to aim at being a missionary of the cross, or a minister of the gospel" (p. 21). As he came to the end of his studies in divinity in Glasgow at the age of 32, he says, "I continually heard . . . the wail of the perishing Heathen in the South Seas; and I saw that few were caring for them, while I well knew

that many would be ready to take up my work in Calton" (p. 52). "The Lord kept saying within me, 'Since none better qualified can be got, rise and offer yourself!'" When he was criticized for leaving a fruitful ministry, one crucial event sealed his sense of calling, namely, a word from his parents:

Heretofore we feared to bias you, but now we must tell you why we praise God for the decision to which you have been led. Your father's heart was set upon being a Minister, but other claims forced him to give it up. When you were given to them, your father and mother laid you upon the altar, their first-born, to be consecrated, if God saw fit, as a Missionary of the Cross; and it has been their constant prayer that you might be prepared, qualified, and led to this very decision; and we pray with all our heart that the Lord may accept your offering, long spare you, and give you many souls from the Heathen World for your hire. (p. 57) In response to that Paton wrote, "From the moment, every doubt as to my path of duty forever vanished. I saw the hand of God very visibly, not only preparing me before, but now leading me to, the Foreign Mission field" (p. 57). That sense of duty and calling bred in him an undaunted courage that would never look back. His courage came from a sense of holy heritage in his church.

Paton was part of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, one of the oldest but smallest protestant churches. It traced its lineage back to the Scottish Covenanters and had in it a strong sense of valor for the cause of the great truths of the Reformation. Paton once wrote, "I am more proud that the blood of Martyrs is in my veins, and their truths in my heart, than other men can be of noble pedigree or royal names" (p. 280). The truths he has in mind are the robust doctrines of Calvinism. He said in his Autobiography, "I am by conviction a strong Calvinist" (p. 195). For him this meant, as we have seen, a strong confidence that God can and will change the hearts of the most unlikely people. His Reformed doctrine of regeneration was crucial here in maintaining his courage in the face of humanly impossible odds. Commenting on the conversion of one native, he said, "Regeneration is the sole work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart and soul, and is in every case one and the same. Conversion, on the other hand, bringing into play the action also of the human will, is never absolutely the same perhaps in even two souls" (p. 372). "Oh, Jesus! To Thee alone be all the glory. Thou hast the key to unlock every heart that Thou has created" (p. 373). In other words, Calvinism, contrary to all misrepresentation, was not a hindrance to missions but the hope of missions for John Paton and hundreds of other missionaries like him. So it's not surprising that the fourth source of courage for Paton was His confidence in the sovereignty of God controlling all adversities.

We have already seen the words he wrote over his wife and child's grave: "Feeling immovably assured that my God and father was too wise and loving to err in anything that he does or permits, I looked up to the Lord for help, and struggled on in His work" (p. 85).

Over and over this faith sustained him in the most threatening and frightening situations. As he was trying to escape from Tanna at the end of four years of dangers, he and Abraham were surrounded by raging natives who kept urging each other to strike the first blow. My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ,

whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth. He rules all Nature, animate and inanimate, and restrains even the Savage of the South Seas. (p. 207)

After getting away with his life and losing everything that he had on earth ("my little earthly All"), instead of despairing or pouting or being paralyzed with self-pity, he moved forward expecting to see God's good purpose in time – which he saw in the ministry that opened to him, first of missions mobilization and then of work on Aniwa: "Often since have I thought that the Lord stripped me thus bare of all these interests, that I might with undistracted mind devote my entire energy to the special work soon to be carved out for me, and of which at this moment neither I nor anyone had ever dreamed" (p. 220).

Year after year, "disappointments and successes were strangely intermingled" (p. 247) in his life. There was no long period of time, it seems, where life was very easy. And we would distort the man if we said there were no low moments. "I felt so disappointed, so miserable," he wrote about one period of his travels, "that I wished I had been in my grave with my dear departed and my brethren on the Islands who had fallen around me" (p. 232). It was not always easy after the words, "The Lord has taken away," to add the words, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." But the way out was clear, and he used it again and again. When the mission ship, Dayspring, that he had worked so hard to fund, was sunk in a storm, he wrote:

Whatever trials have befallen me in my Earthly Pilgrimage, I have never had the trial of doubting that perhaps, after all, Jesus had made some mistake. No! my blessed Lord Jesus makes no mistakes! When we see all His meaning, we shall then understand, what now we can only trustfully believe that all is well - best for us, best for the cause most dear to us, best for the good of others and the glory of God. (p. 488)

Near the end of his life, at age 79, he was back on his beloved island Aniwa. "I cannot visit the villages, or go among the people and the sick, as formerly, owing to an increased feebleness in my legs and lumbago. Which is painful for the last fortnight. But all is as our Master sends it, and we submit thankfully, as all is nothing to what we deserve; and adored be our God. We have in our dear Lord Jesus [grace] for peace and joy in all circumstances."8 His courage came through a kind of praying that submitted to God's sovereign wisdom.

How do you claim the promises of God for protection when your wife was equally faithful but, rather than being protected, died; and when the Gordons on Erromanga were equally trusting in those promises and were martyred?9 Paton had learned the answer to this question from listening to his mother pray, even before he leaned the theology that supports it. When the potato crop failed in Scotland, Mrs. Paton said to her children, "O my children, love your Heavenly Father, tell him in faith and prayer all your needs, and he will supply your wants so far as it shall be for your good and His glory" (p. 22).10 This is what Paton trusted God for in claiming the promises: that God would do what was for Paton's good and for his own glory. His courage when he was surrounded by armed natives came through a kind of praying that claimed the promises under the overarching submission to God's wisdom as to what would work most for God's glory and his good.

I . . . assured them that I was not afraid to die, for at death my Savior would take me to be with Himself in Heaven, and to be far happier than I had ever been on Earth. I then lifted up my hands

and eyes to the Heavens, and prayed aloud for Jesus . . . either to protect me or to take me home to Glory as He saw to be for the best. (p. 164) That was how he prayed again and again: "Protect me or . . . take me home to Glory as you see to be for the best." He knew that Jesus had promised suffering and martyrdom to some of his servants (Luke 11:49; Luke 21:12-18). So the promises he claimed were both: either protect me or take me home in a way that will glorify you and do good for others.11 After one harrowing journey he wrote, "Had it not been for the assurance that . . . in every path of duty He would carry me through or dispose of me therein for His glory, I could never have undertaken either journey" (p. 148).12 The peace God gave him in these crises was not the peace of sure escape but the peace that God is good and wise and omnipotent and will do all things well. "We felt that God was near, and omnipotent to do what seemed best in his sight" (p. 197). Did ever mother run more quickly to protect her crying child in danger's hour, than the Lord Jesus hastens to answer believing prayer and send help to His servants in His own good time and way, so far as it shall be for His glory and their good? (p. 164, emphasis added)13 His courage came from a joy in God that he knew could not be surpassed anywhere in any other ministry.

Oh that the pleasure-seeking men and women of the world could only taste and feel the real joy of those who know and love the true God – a heritage which the world . . . cannot give to them, but which the poorest and humblest followers of Jesus inherit and enjoy! (p. 78) My heart often says within itself – when, when will men's eyes at home be opened? When will the rich and the learned . . . renounce their shallow frivolities, and go to live amongst the poor, the ignorant, the outcast, and the lost, and write their eternal fame on the souls by them blessed and brought to the Savior? Those who have tasted this highest joy, "The joy of the Lord," will never again ask - Is Life worth living?14

Near the end of his life he wrote about the joy that carried him on and about his hope that his own children would undertake the same mission and find the same joy:

Let me record my immovable conviction that this is the noblest service in which any human being, can spend or be spent; and that, if God gave me back my life to be lived over again, I would without one quiver of hesitation lay it on the altar to Christ, that He might use it as before in similar ministries of love, especially amongst those who have never yet heard the Name of Jesus. Nothing that has been endured, and nothing that can now befall me, makes me tremble - on the contrary, I deeply rejoice – when I breathe the prayer that it may please the blessed Lord to turn the hearts of all my children to the Mission Field and that He may open up their way and make it their pride and joy to live and die in carrying Jesus and His Gospel into the heart of the Heathen World! (p. 444, emphasis added) Where did the joy of John G. Paton most deeply repose? The answer, it seems, is that it rested most deeply in the experience of personal communion with Jesus Christ mediated through the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway." Therefore, the final source of his courage I would mention is that His courage came from personal fellowship with Jesus through faith in his promise, especially on the brink of eternity. The promise had been given precisely in the context of the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations . . . and Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). More than any other promise, this one brought Jesus close and real to John Paton in all his dangers. After the measles epidemic that killed thousands on the islands, and for which the missionaries were blamed, he wrote: "During the crisis, I felt generally calm, and firm of soul, standing erect and with my whole weight on the promise, 'Lo! I am with you alway.' Precious promise! How often I adore Jesus for it, and rejoice in it! Blessed be his

name" (p. 154). The power this promise had to make Christ real to Paton in hours of crisis was unlike any other Scripture or prayer:

Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Savior, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. In his words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power. . . . It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smiles of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life.15 Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing "Him who is invisible"! (p. 117)

One of the most powerful paragraphs in his Autobiography describes his experience of hiding in a tree, at the mercy of an unreliable chief, as hundreds of angry natives hunted him for his life. What he experienced there was the deepest source of Paton's joy and courage. In fact, I would dare to say that to share this experience and call others to enjoy it was the reason that he wrote the story of his life.16 He began his Autobiography with the words, "What I write here is for the glory of God" (p. 2). That is true. But God gets glory when his Son is exalted. And his Son his exalted when we cherish him above all things. That is what this story is about. Being entirely at the mercy of such doubtful and vacillating friends, I, though perplexed, felt it best to obey. I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets, and the yells of the Savages. Yet I sat there among the branches, as safe as in the arms of Jesus. Never, in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among those chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all alone, in the midnight, in the bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a Friend that will not fail you then? (p. 200)

Footnotes

1 All page references in the text refer to John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebredes, An Autobiography Edited by His Brother (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965, orig. 1889, 1891).

2 Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, The Great Century: The Americas, Australasia and Africa, 1800 AD to 1914 AD. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970, orig. 1943), p. 228.

3 George Patterson, Missionary Life among the Cannibals: Being the Life of the Rev. John Geddie, D.D., First Missionary to the New Hebrides; with the History of the Nova Scotia Presbyterian Mission on that Group (Toronto: James Campbell and Son, 1882), p. 508.

4 This description was made of the natives on the island of Tanna, but applies equally well to the conditions on the nearby island of Aniwa.

5 Ralph Bell, John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides (Butler, IN: The Highley Press, 1957), p. 238.

6 Ralph Bell, John G. Paton, p. 238.

7 Patrick Johnstone, Operation World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 572.

8 Ralph Bell, John G. Paton, p. 238.

9 Mr. and Mrs. G. N. Gordon were killed on Erromanga on May 20, 1861. They had labored four years on the island when they walked into an ambush. "A blow was aimed at him with a tomahawk, which he caught; the other man struck, but his weapon was also caught. One of the tomahawks was then wrenched out of his grasp. Next moment, a blow on the spine laid the dear Missionary low, and a second on the neck almost severed the head from the body." Mrs. Gordon came running to see the noise and "Ouben slipped stealthily behind here, sank his tomahawk into her back and with another blow almost severed her head! This was the fate of those two devoted servants of the Lord; loving in their lives and in their deaths not divided, their spirits, wearing the crown of martyrdom, entered Glory together, to be welcomed by Williams and Harris, whose blood was shed near the same now hallowed spot for the name and the cause of Jesus" (p. 166).

10 Compare this way of praying with the way Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced the fiery furnace in Daniel 3:17-18, "God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

11 This meant that, in one sense, life was not simple. If God may rescue us for his glory, or let us be killed for his glory, which way to turn in self-preservation was not an easy question to answer. "To know what was best to be done, in such trying circumstances, was an abiding perplexity. To have left altogether, when so surrounded by perils and enemies, at first seemed the wisest course, and was the repeated advice of many friends. But again, I had acquired the language, and had gained a considerable influence amongst the Natives, and there were a number warmly attached both to myself and to the Worship. To have left would have been to lose all, which to me was heart-rending; therefore, risking all with Jesus, I held on while the hope of being spared longer had not absolutely and entirely vanished" (p. 173).

12 "Often have I seized the pointed barrel and directed it upwards, or, pleading with my assailant, uncapped his musket in the struggle. At other times, nothing could be said, nothing done, but stand still in silent prayer, asking to protect us or to prepare us for going home to His glory. He fulfilled His own promise - 'I will not fail thee nor forsake thee' (pp. 329-330).

13 Paton taught his helpers to pray this way as well, and we hear the same faith and prayer in Abraham, his trustworthy Aneityumese servant. "O Lord, our Heavenly Father, they have murdered Thy servants on Erromanga. They have banished the Aneityumese from dark Tanna. And now they want to kill Missi Paton and me. Our great King, protect us, and make their hearts soft and sweet to Thy Worship. Or, if they are permitted to kill us, do not Thou hate us, but wash us in the blood of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ. . . . Make us two and all Thy servants strong for Thee and for Thy Worship; and if they kill us now, let us die together in Thy good work, like Thy

servants Missi Gordon the man and Missi Gordon the woman" (p. 171).

14 He goes on to expand the ground of this joy: "Life, any life, would be well spent, under any conceivable conditions, in bringing one human soul to know and love and serve God and His Son, and thereby securing for yourself at least one temple where your name and memory would be held for ever and for ever in affectionate praise, - a regenerated Heart in heaven. That fame will prove immortal, when all the poems and monuments and pyramids of Earth have gone into dust" (pp. 411-412).

15 "My constant custom was, in order to prevent war, to run right in between the contending parties. My faith enabled me to grasp and realize the promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway.' In Jesus I felt invulnerable and immortal, so long as I was doing his work. And I can truly say, that these were the moments when I felt my Savior to be most truly and sensibly present, inspiring and empowering me" (p. 342).

16 "I pity from the depth of my heart every human being, who, from whatever cause, is a stranger to the most ennobling, uplifting, and consoling experience that can come to the soul of man - blessed communion with the Father of our Spirits, through gracious union with the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 359).

Chapter 85

06.00.2. Brothers, We Are Not Professionals

Brothers, We Are Not Professionals A P l e a t o P a s t o r s f o r R a d i c a l M i n i s t r y J O H N P I P E R

06.00.3. Reviews

Reviews

It was the kindness of God that led me to stumble across this book in my first year of pastoral ministry. I remember vividly kneeling at my bedside in tears, feeling so rebuked and so encouraged at the same time. I loved this book then and, with several new chapters, I love it even more now. I hope every pastor reads this book and listens to its sane, practical, biblical advice.

—Kevin DeYoung, senior pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan, and author of The Hole in Our Holiness

John Piper makes me uncomfortable. And I thank God for that. He makes me uneasy with the worldliness that so easily creeps into my heart in my thinking about ministry. He highlights temptations to compromise—temptations that I know personally. He warns me of hidden traps. He urges me against allowing the calling of God to be domesticated by the outlook of this passing age or by my desire to be esteemed by it. But he also reminds me of issues where my people need to be challenged and encouraged. I read Brothers, We Are Not Professionals when it first came out a decade ago and have returned to portions of it repeatedly for examination, encouragement, and exhor-tation. I am delighted now to commend this new edition with addi-tional chapters addressing important topics. This book is ultimately not only convicting, but comforting, and not only exhortational, but devotional. This is a faithful prophet's call to the sons of the prophets. May the Lord grant, by the power of His grace, that we would be able to join John is his prayer: "Thank You for protecting me for all these years from the deadening effects of professionalization."

—Ligon Duncan, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi

Once again, Dr. Piper has provided a generation of pastors with a clear and profound statement on our calling, and his legacy of biblical faithfulness and commitment to God's glory is felt in every chapter.

—Matt Carter Pastor, The Austin Stone Community Church

John Piper is a pastor to pastors. His love for them and his desire to see them faithfully fulfill their calling leaps from each chapter of this book. It will challenge you. It will instruct you. And most of all, it will encour-age you as you shepherd God's flock that He has entrusted to your care.

—Daniel L. Akin, president, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary This book has been a staple for our pastors-in-training for many years—one of the few books I consider to be an absolute must read for those wanting to pursue God's work in God's way. God used the first edition of this book to profoundly shape my ministry philosophy, and I am honored to be able to recommend this second edition of Brothers, We Are Not Professionals. I cannot commend it highly enough. Read it. Re-read it. And then teach it to others.

—J. D. Greear, lead pastor, the Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, author of Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary and Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart:

How to Know for Sure You Are Saved This is not a book for those who want a simple and easy life, it's a book for servants whom God has raised up to get down on the ground and selflessly serve by leading God's people, proclaiming God's truth, and earnestly contending for the faith. May the Holy Spirit use this book to help ignite the next generation with a passion to deny them-selves and take up their crosses to serve Christ and his sheep from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

—Burk Parsons, copastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel, editor of Tabletalk magazine.

06.00.4. copyright

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© 1971, 1973. Quotations indicated jp are the author’s own transla-tions. Italics in biblical texts are added by the author for emphasis.

06.00.5. Table of Contents

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06.00.6. Preface to the New Edition

Preface to the New Edition

Nothing has happened in the last ten years to make me think this book is less needed. In fact, instead of going away, the pressure to “professionalize” the pastorate has morphed and strengthened. Among younger pastors the talk is less about therapeutic and manage-rial professionalization and more about communication or contextual-ization. The language of “professionalization” is seldom used in these regards, but the quiet pressure felt by many pastors is: Be as good as the professional media folks, especially the cool anti-heroes and the most subtle comedians. This is not the overstated professionalism of the three-piece suit and the stuffy upper floors but the understated professionalism of torn blue jeans and the savvy inner ring. This professionalism is not learned in pursuing an MBA but in being in the know about the ever-changing entertainment and media world. This is the professionaliza-tion of ambience, and tone, and idiom, and timing, and banter. It is more intuitive and less taught. More style and less technique. More feel and less force.

If this can be called professionalism, what does it have in common with the older version? Everything that matters. The way I tried to get at the problem in the first edition was to ask some questions. Let me expand that list. Only this time think old and new professionalism. Is there professional praying? Professional trusting in God’s promises? Professional weeping over souls? Professional musing on the depths of revelation? Professional rejoicing in the truth? Professional praising God’s name? Professional treasuring the riches of Christ? Professional walking by the Spirit? Professional exercise of spiritual gifts? Professional dealing with demons? Professional pleading with backsliders? Professional perseverance in a hard marriage? Professional playing with children? Professional courage in the face of persecution? Professional patience with everyone?

That’s for starters.

These are not marginal activities in the pastoral life. They are central. They are the essence. Why do we choke on the word profes-sional in those connections? Because professionalization carries the connotation of an education, a set of skills, and a set of guild-defined standards which are possible without faith in Jesus. Professionalism is not supernatural. The heart of ministry is.

Ministry is professional in those areas of competency where the life of faith and the life of unbelief overlap. Which means two things. First, that overlapping area can never be central. Therefore, professionalism should always be marginal, not central; optional, not crucial. And second, the pursuit of professionalism will push the supernatural center more and more into the corner while ministry becomes a set of secular competencies with a religious veneer. As I write this, I have ten months left as pastor for preaching and vision of Bethlehem Baptist Church. If I live to see this transition complete, I will have served the church for almost thirty-three years. I feel the conviction of this book as strongly today as when I wrote it ten years ago and as when my ministry began on

this basis three decades ago. When I look back, my regret is not that I wasn't more professional but that I wasn't more prayerful, more passionate for souls, more consistent in personal witness, more emotionally engaged with my children, more tender with my wife, more spontaneously affirming of the good in others. These are my regrets. In the first year of my ministry at the church thirty-two years ago, I read E. M. Bounds' Power through Prayer. His book struck the match that ignited the fire of this book. I quote it in chapter 1: "God deliver us from the professionalizers! 'Deliver us from the low, managing, con-triving, maneuvering temper of mind among us.'" Now, at the end of my pastoral ministry, I return to this same place and say, Thank You, Lord. Thank You, for showing me this. Thank You for burning this on my soul. Thank You for protecting me for all these years from the deadening effects of professionalization. And I conclude this new preface with the same prayer I began with: "Banish professionalism from our midst, O God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord. In Jesus' great and powerful name. Amen."

Besides this preface there are six new chapters in the book: chapters 4, 6, 13, 18, 22, and 27. I added these because in the last ten years they pressed themselves on me. One for personal reasons like health (chap. 27). One for family reasons relating to my own sanctification (chap. 22). Two for theological reasons where I felt I needed greater clarity or correction (chaps. 4 and 6). And two in pursuit of being a better preacher (chaps. 13 and 18). A very special thank you for David Mathis, for six years my execu-tive pastoral assistant, now executive editor at Desiring God. I could not have done this under the constraints of pastoral ministry without his help. And here at the end of my pastoral ministry, thank you to the church where I did my best to live according to the things written in this book. You have been kind to me. It has been a taste of heaven to worship and serve among you.

Chapter 90

06.01. Brothers, We Are Not Professionals

The preacher . . . is not a professional man; his ministry is not a profession; it is a divine institution, a divine devotion.

E.M. Bounds ✥ ✥ ✥

We are fools for Christ's sake. But professionals are wise.

We are weak. But professionals are strong. Professionals are held in honor. We are in disrepute.

We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle, but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless

1 Brothers, We Are Not Professionals

We pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more profes-sional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matthew 18:3); there is no professional tenderheartedness (Ephesians 4:32); there is no professional panting after God (Psalms 42:1). But our first business is to pant after God in prayer. Our business is to weep over our sins (James 4:9). Is there professional weeping? Our business is to strain forward to the holiness of Christ and the prize of the upward call of God (Php 3:14); to pummel our bodies and subdue them lest we be cast away (1 Corinthians 9:27); to deny ourselves and take up the blood-spattered cross daily (Luke 9:23). How do you carry a cross professionally? We have been crucified with Christ, yet now we live by faith in the one who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). What is professional faith?

We are to be filled not with wine but with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). We are God-besotted lovers of Christ. How can you be drunk with Jesus professionally? Then, wonder of wonders, we were given the gos-pel treasure to carry in clay pots to show that the transcendent power belongs to God (2 Corinthians 4:7). Is there a way to be a professional clay pot?

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus (professionally?) so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested (professionally?) in our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:9-11).

I think God has exhibited us preachers as last of all in the world. We are fools for Christ's sake, but professionals are wise. We are weak, but professionals are strong. Professionals are held in honor, we are in disrepute. We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle, but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to con-ciliate; we have become the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things (1 Corinthians 4:9-13). Or have we?

Brothers, we are not professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Peter 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord (Php 3:20). You cannot professionalize the love for His appearing without killing it. And it is being killed. The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions. It is precisely by the failure to see this that we are dying. The life-giving preacher is a man of God, whose heart is ever athirst for God, whose soul is ever following hard after God, whose eye is single to God, and in whom by the power of God's Spirit the flesh and the world have been crucified and his ministry is like the generous flood of a life-giving river.1

We are most emphatically not part of a social team sharing goals with other professionals. Our goals are an offense; they are foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23). The professionalization of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of profes-sionalism (parity among the world's professionals) kills a man's belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them Christ-exalting, spiritual aliens in the world. The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man. The strong wine of Jesus Christ explodes the wineskins of professionalism. There is an infinite difference between the pastor whose heart is set on being a professional and the pastor whose heart is set on being the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of death to some and eternal life to others (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

God, deliver us from the professionalizers! Deliver us from the "low, managing,contriving,maneuvering temper of mind among us."2 God, give us tears for our sins. Forgive us for being so shallow in prayer, so thin in our grasp of holy verities, so content amid perishing neighbors, so empty of passion and earnestness in all our conversation. Restore to us the childlike joy of our salvation. Frighten us with the awe-some holiness and power of Him who can cast both soul and body into hell (Matthew 10:28). Cause us to hold to the cross with fear and trembling as our hope-filled and offensive tree of life. Grant us nothing, absolutely nothing, the way the world views it. May Christ be all in all (Colossians 3:11).

Banish professionalism from our midst, Oh God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unre-mitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

Humble us, O God, under Your mighty hand, and let us rise, not as professionals, but as witnesses and partakers of the sufferings of Christ. In His awesome name. Amen.

Notes

John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 16.

Richard Cecil quoted in E. M. Bounds, Power through Prayer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 59.

Chapter 91

06.02. Brothers, God Loves His Glory

For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. . . . For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

Isaiah 48:9; Isaiah 48:11 ✥ ✥ ✥

God's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy His glory forever.

✥ ✥ ✥

God loves His glory more than He loves us, and this is the foundation of His love for us.

2 Brothers, God Loves His Glory

I grew up in a home where 1 Corinthians 10:31 was almost as basic to our family as John 3:16. "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (nasb). But not till I was twenty-two years old did I hear anyone say that God's first commitment is to His own glory and that this is the basis for ours. I had never heard anyone say that God does everything for His glory, too, and that is why we should. I had never heard anyone explain that the role of the Holy Spirit is to burn in me what He has been burning with for all eternity: God's love for God. Or more precisely, God the Father's delight in the panorama of His own perfections reflected as a perfect image in His Son. No one had ever asked me, "Who is the most God-centered Person in the universe?" And then answered, "God is." Or, "Is God an idolater?" And then answered, "No, He has no other gods before Him." Or, "What is the chief end of God?" And then answered, "God's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy His glory forever." So I was never confronted forcefully with the God-centeredness of God until I sat under the teaching of Daniel Fuller and was directed by him to the writings of Jonathan Edwards.

Since those explosive days of discovery in the late sixties, I have labored to understand the implications of God's passion for His glory. That is now the title of a book I wrote as a tribute to Jonathan Edwards, half of which is a reproduction of his book, The End for Which God Created the World. Edwards' thesis in that book is this:

[God] had respect to himself, as his last and highest end, in this work; because he is worthy in himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are per-fectly as nothing in comparison of him. . . . All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.1

Why is it important to be stunned by the God-centeredness of God? Because many people are willing to be God-centered as long as they feel that God is man-centered. It is a subtle danger. We may think we are centering our lives on God when we are really making Him a means to self-esteem. Over against this danger I urge you to ponder the implications, brothers, that God

loves His glory more than He loves us and that this is the foundation of His love for us.

“Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?” (Isaiah 2:22). “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation” (Psalms 146:3). “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength” (Jeremiah 17:5). “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales. . . . All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness” (Isaiah 40:15; Isaiah 40:17).

God’s ultimate commitment is to Himself and not to us. And therein lies our security. God loves His glory above all. “For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. . . . For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 48:9; Isaiah 48:11).

God performs salvation for His own sake. He justifies the people called by His name in order that He may be glorified.

“Therefore say to the house of Israel [and to all the churches], Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord. . . . It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel’” (Ezekiel 36:22-23; Ezekiel 36:32). This is no isolated note in the symphony of redemptive history. It is the ever-recurring motif of the all-sufficient Composer. Why did God predestine us in love to be His sons? That the glory of His grace might be praised (Ephesians 1:6; Ephesians 1:12; Ephesians 1:14). Why did God create a people for Himself? “I created [them] for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7). Why did He make from one lump vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor? That He might show His wrath and make known His power and reveal the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy (Romans 9:22-23). Why did God raise up Pharaoh and harden his heart and deliver Israel with a mighty arm? That His wonders might be multiplied over Pharaoh (Exodus 14:4) and that His name might be declared in all the earth (Exodus 9:16).

Why did God spare rebellious Israel in the wilderness and finally bring them to the promised land? “I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations” (Ezekiel 20:14). Why did He not destroy Israel when they rejected Him from being king over them and demanded to be like all the nations (1 Samuel 8:4-6)? “The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake” (1 Samuel 12:22). God’s love for the glory of His own name is the spring of free grace and the rock of our security.

Why did God bring back the Israelites from Babylonian captivity? Because Daniel prayed, “For your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate” (Daniel 9:17). Why did the Father send the incarnate Son to Israel? “To confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (Romans 15:8-9). Why did the Son come to His final hour? “For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27-28). Christ died to glorify the Father and to repair all the defamation we had brought upon His honor. Our only hope is that the death of Christ satisfied God’s righteous claims

to receive proper glory from His creatures (Romans 3:24-26).

Brothers, God loves His glory! He is committed with all His infi-nite and eternal might to display that glory and to preserve the honor of His name. When Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:13, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful,” it does not mean that we are saved in spite of faith-lessness. For the verse before says, “If we deny him, he also will deny us.” Rather, as the verse explains, “He remains faithful” means “He cannot deny Himself.” God’s most fundamental allegiance is to His own glory. He is committed to being God before He is committed to being anything else. Do your people know these things? Do they stake the answer to their prayers on God’s love for His own glory? Do they make their case before His throne on the grounds that God does everything for His own name’s sake? “Act, O Lord, for your name’s sake!” (Jeremiah 14:7). “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name’s sake!” (Psalms 79:9). “For Your name’s sake, O Lord, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great” (Psalms 25:11 nasb). Do our people really know that “hallowed be thy name!” is a petition for God to glorify Himself as God? “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory” (Psalms 115:1).

We have told our people a hundred times, “Do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). But have we given them the foundation of this command? God loves His glory. He loves it with infinite energy and passion and commitment. And the Spirit of God is ablaze with this love. That is why children of God love the glory of God; they are led by this blazing Spirit (Romans 8:14).

Let us declare boldly and powerfully what God loves most— the glory of God. Let us guard ourselves from the ocean of man-centeredness around us. “Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?” (Isaiah 2:22). The foundation, the means, and the goal of God’s agape for sinners is His prior, deeper, and ultimate love for His own glory. Therefore, brothers, tell your people the great ground of the gospel: God loves His glory!

Notes

06.03. Brothers, God Is Love

Jonathan Edwards, The End for Which God Create the World , in John Piper, God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 140, 242.

God is love.

1 John 4:8 ✥ ✥ ✥

Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth."

Exodus 34:6 nasb ✥ ✥ ✥ His holiness is the absolute uniqueness and infinite value of His glory. His righteousness is His unswerving commitment always to honor and display that glory. And His all-sufficient glory is honored and displayed most by His working for us rather than our working for Him. And this is love.

3 Brothers, God Is Love

Some readers of the previous chapter will echo the con-cerns of some of the men at our church. At a men's retreat, I defined spiritual leadership as "knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to get them there by God's means in reliance on God's power." I suggested that the way we find out where God wants people to be is to ask where God Himself is going. The answer, I think, is that God loves His glory (see chap. 2) and that He aims to magnify His glory in all He does. So the goal of spiritual leadership is to muster people to join God in living for God's glory. The objection arose at the retreat that this teaching makes God out to be a self-centered egomaniac who seems never to act out of love. But God does act out of love. He is love. We need to see how God can be for His own glory and be for us too. The best way I know to show this is to explain how God is holy, God is righteous, and God is love, and how these three interrelate. When we describe God as holy, we mean that He is one of a kind. There is none like Him. He is in a class by Himself.

Moses taught Israel to sing, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glori-ous deeds, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). Centuries later Hannah, Samuel's mother, taught Israel to sing, "There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides you" (1 Samuel 2:2). And Isaiah (Isaiah 40:25) quotes God: "'To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?' says the Holy One."

God is holy in His absolute uniqueness. Everything else belongs to a class. We are human; Rover is a dog; the oak is a tree; Earth is a planet; the Milky Way is one of a billion galaxies; Gabriel is an angel; Satan is a demon. But only God is God. And therefore He is holy, utterly different, distinct, unique.

All else is creation. He alone creates. All else begins. He alone always was. All else depends. He alone is self-sufficient. And therefore the holiness of God is synonymous with His infi-nite value.

Diamonds are valuable because they are rare and hard to make. God is infinitely valuable because He is the rarest of all beings and cannot be made at all, nor was He ever made. If I were a collector of rare treasures and could somehow have God, the Holy One, in my treasury, I would be wealthier than all the collectors of all the rarest treasures that exist outside God.

Revelation 4:8-11 recounts the songs that are being sung to God in heaven. The first one says, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” The second says, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.” These two songs mean the same thing. “God is holy” means that He is worthy. His holiness is His immeasurable worth and value. Nothing can be compared with Him, for He made everything. Whatever worth makes a created thing valuable is found a millionfold in the Creator.

One way to highlight the meaning of God’s holiness is to compare it with His glory. Are they the same? Not exactly. I would say that His glory is the shining forth of His holiness. His holiness is His intrinsic worth—an utterly unique excellence. His glory is the manifest display of this worth in beauty. His glory is His holiness on display. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory,” say the seraphim above His throne (Isaiah 6:3). Habakkuk cries, “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor cov-ered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise” (Habakkuk 3:3). And the Lord Himself says in Leviticus 10:3 : “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.” To show Himself holy is the way He is glorified. The holiness of God is the absolutely unique and infinite value of His being and His majesty. To say that our God is holy means that His value is infinitely greater than the sum of the value of all created beings.

Turn now to consider His righteousness. At root, the righteous-ness of God means that He has a right assessment of His own ultimate value. He has a just regard for His own infinite worth, and He brings all His actions into conformity to this right judgment of Himself.

God would be unrighteous and unreliable if He denied His ulti-mate value, disregarded His infinite worth, and acted as though the preservation and display of His glory were worth anything less than His wholehearted commitment. God acts in righteousness when He acts for His own name’s sake. For it would not be right for God to esteem anything above the infinite glory of His own name.

Psalms 143:11 says, “For your name’s sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring me out of trouble!” Notice the parallel between “in your righteousness” and “for your name’s sake.” Similarly, Psalms 31:1 says, “In your righteousness deliver me.” And Psalms 31:3 adds, “For your name’s sake you lead me and guide me.” Similarly in Daniel 9:16-17, the prophet prays: “According to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem.

. . . For your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate.” An appeal to God’s righteousness is at root an appeal to His unswerving allegiance to the value of His own holy name. For God to be righteous, He must devote Himself 100 percent, with all His heart, soul, and strength, to loving and honoring His own holiness in the display of His glory. And that He does, as we saw in chapter 2. The main point of Ephesians 1:1-23 is repeated three times: God “predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ . . . to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:5-6). God’s purpose is that “we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the

praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12). "The promised Holy Spirit . . .is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14). Everything in our salvation is designed by God to magnify the glory of God.

God is supremely and unimpeachably righteous because He never shrinks back from a right assessment of His ultimate value, a just regard for His infinite worth, or an unswerving commitment to honor and display His glory in everything He does.

Now we are ready to consider God's love. God's love does not conflict with His holiness and righteousness. On the contrary, the nature of God's holiness and righteousness demands that He be a God of love. His holiness is the absolute uniqueness and infinite value of His glory. His righteousness is His unswerving commitment always to honor and display that glory. And His all-sufficient glory is honored and displayed most by His working for us rather than our working for Him. And this is love.

Love is at the heart of God's being because God's free and sover-eign dispensing of mercy is more glorious than would be the demand for humans to fill up some lack in Himself. It is more glorious to give than to receive. Therefore, the righteousness of God demands that He be a giver. Therefore, the holy and righteous One is love.

Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God's love. And when He came, He said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Son of Man has not come seeking employees. He has come to employ Himself for our good. We dare not try to work for Him lest we rob Him of His glory and impugn His righteousness. The apostle Paul says, "Now to one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly; his faith is counted as righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5). This is a warning not to pursue justification by working for God. It is a gift. We have it by faith alone (see chap. 4). And even when we "work out" our salvation in fear and trembling, we must see it as a peculiar kind of working: the only reason we can will to lift a finger is that God is the one "who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Php 2:13).

Though Paul "worked harder" than any of the other apostles, he declares, "It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Therefore, in Romans 15:18, he avows, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." Paul is utterly convinced that no blessing in life is finally owing to man's willing or running but to God, who has mercy (Romans 9:16).

God aims to get all the glory in our redemption. Therefore He is adamant that He will work for us and not we for Him. He is the work-man; we stand in need of His services. He is the doctor; we are the sick patient. We are the weak; He is the strong. We have the broken-down jalopy; He is the gifted mechanic.

We must beware lest we try to serve Him in a way that dishon-ors Him, for He aims to get the glory. As Peter says (1 Peter 4:11), "Whoever serves [let him render it] by the strength that God sup-plies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever." So God is love, not in spite of His passion to promote His glory but precisely because of it. What could be more loving than the infi-nite, holy God stooping to work for us? Yet in working for us rather than needing our work, He magnifies His own glorious

self-suffi-ciency. The stream glorifies the fullness of the spring. And the stream that flows from God is love. If He ceased to seek His glory, He would be of no value to us. But, praise God, He is holy. He is righteous, and therefore, He is love.

Now here is a closing test to see if you have penetrated to the essence of God's merciful God-centeredness. Ask yourself and your people, "Do you feel most loved by God because He makes much of you or because He frees you to enjoy making much of Him forever?" This is the test of whether our craving for the love of God is a craving for the blood-bought, Spirit-wrought capacity to see and glorify God by enjoying Him forever or whether it is a craving for Him to make us the center and give us the pleasures of esteeming ourselves. Who, in the end, is the all-satisfying Treasure that we are given by the love of God: self or God?

God is love because He is infinitely valuable (His holiness) and is committed to displaying that value for our everlasting enjoyment (His righteousness). God is the one being in all the world for whom the most loving act is self-exaltation. For He and He alone will satisfy our hearts.

06.04. Brothers, God Does Make Much of Us

To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son— it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

C.S. Lewis ❖❖ ❖ The Lord your God . . . will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

4 Brothers, God Does Make Much of Us

Between the first and second edition of this book, I worked out a fresh way of saying some things I have been saying for a long time, which I hope will give a clearer sense of the biblical emphasis on God's glory in the way He loves us. There's a lesson in this. If you are like me, you see some truths that are neglected and precious and supremely important for your people, and so you emphasize them. That is good. It is also dangerous. You might fall off the horse on the other side. You might be neglecting something.

Here's my midcourse (late-course?) corrective. I have been asking audiences for years: "Do you feel more loved by God because God makes much of you or because God, at great cost to His Son, frees you to enjoy making much of Him forever?" I still like this question.

It is very provocative. The aim of the question has never been to deny that God makes much of us. He does. (Which we will see shortly.) The aim has been to help people relocate the bottom of their joy—the decisive foundation of their joy—from self to God.

Let me try to help you understand what shapes so much of what I say. A people ought to understand their pastor. I am more concerned about nominal hell-bound Christians who feel loved by God, than I am about genuine heaven-bound Christians who don't feel loved by God.

I feel a special burden for the millions of nominal Christians who are not born again who believe God loves them and yet are on their way to hell. And the difference between them and a born-again believer is this: What's the bottom, the decisive foundation, of their happiness? As you penetrate down deeper and deeper to the core, or the bottom, what makes you happy?

Millions of nominal Christians have never experienced a fun-damental alteration of that foundation of happiness. Instead, they have absorbed the notion that becoming Christian means turning to Jesus to get what you always wanted before you were born again. So, if you wanted wealth, you stop depending on yourself for it, and by prayer and faith and obedience you depend on Jesus for wealth. If you wanted to be healthy, you turn from mere human cures to Jesus as the source of your health. If you wanted to escape the pain of hell, you turn to Jesus for the escape. If you wanted to have a happy marriage, you come to Jesus for help. If you wanted peace of conscience and freedom from guilt feelings, you turn to Jesus for these things. In other words, to become a

Christian, in this way of seeing things, is to have all the same desires you had as an unregenerate person—only you get them from a new source, Jesus. And He feels so loving when you do. But there's no change at the bottom of your heart and your cravings. No change at the bottom of what makes you happy. There's no change in the decisive foundation of your joy. You just shop at a new store. The dinner is still the same, you just have a new butler. The bags in the hotel room are still the same; just a new bellhop.

That's not what the new birth is. It's not having all the same desires you had as an unregenerate person and just getting them from a new source. The new birth changes the bottom, the root, the foundation of what makes us happy. Self at the bottom is replaced by Jesus. God Himself.

What makes born-again people glad is not at the bottom that they have God's gifts but that they have God. This is what I am more con-cerned about than genuine Christians who are truly on their way to heaven but don't feel loved by God. And my shorthand way of trying to awaken people to the dangers of feeling loved by God while being unregenerate has been to ask, Do you feel more loved by God because He makes much of you or because, at great cost to His Son, He frees you to enjoy knowing Him and treasuring Him and making much of Him? But I don't want to fall off the horse on the other side. And I don't want you to fall with me. So in this chapter, I want to celebrate the way God loves us by making much of us—indeed, making much more of us than we ever dreamed. So here is my new way of coming at this issue. I ask, Why does God perform all His acts of love toward us in a way that reveals He is loving us this way for His own glory? Why does God relentlessly reveal His love to us by telling us in the Bible that He is loving us for His own name's sake?

It is an urgent question because so many say or feel it isn't really love for us if God's aim is to magnify His own glory. Or they feel: You say He is making much of me, but in fact He isn't making much of me if His design is that He be made much of in making much of me.

I tremble just to say those words. It isn't so. I want to show you—I want to help you see and feel—that we are more loved by God when He loves us this way. He makes much more of us when He makes much of us this way. Brothers, please don't turn this off. Ask God to help you see what we are about to see in the Bible. That's what I am doing.

Just a few examples of what I mean by God doing all His acts of love toward us in a way that reveals He is loving us for His own glory. (We have seen some of this in chap. 2, "Brothers, God Loves His Glory.") 1. God shows His love for us by predestining us for adoption into his family. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

God loved us in eternity, before we were created, and He planned to make us His children by adoption. And the aim of this love was "to the praise of the glory of his grace." He loved us in this way that we might praise His grace. A regenerate person loves to praise God's grace in our adoption. A nominal Christian simply loves the natural benefits of adoption.

2. God shows His love for us by creating us.

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

God loved us in bringing us into being that we might enjoy for-ever all the good He plans for us. And He did it, He says, for His glory.

3. God shows His love for us by sending us a Savior.

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest.” (Luke 2:10-14)

We get the Savior; He gets the glory. We get the “great joy”; God gets the praise. That is God’s design in sending His Son.

4. God shows His love for us when Christ died for us. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have con-cluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Christ loved us, died for us; and the aim was that we might live for Him. He pursues His glory through our salvation. This is the consum-mation of a very old divine pattern:

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name’s sake! (Psalms 79:9)

Born-again people pray like this. They see their salvation primar-ily as a gift of the ability to see and savor and show the glory of God.

5. God shows His love for us in the way Jesus prays for us.

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24) With Him. He prays that we be with Him. And why does that make us happy? Oh He will give us many things. But the bottom of our joy, the decisive foundation of our happiness, will be this: We will see His glory. Our Savior, not ourself, will be the bottom of our joy. The point of those five texts is to show that throughout the Bible God performs all His acts of love toward us in a way that reveals He is loving us for His own glory.

Now the question is, Why does He do it this way?

Before I answer, it’s crucial for the point of this chapter to empha-size that God’s love for us includes making much of us in ways that take our breath away. They are so over-the-top that we are scarcely able to believe how much He makes of us. A few examples of what I mean:

1. God makes much of us by being pleased with us and commending our lives.

Alan Jacobs says that C. S. Lewis’s greatest sermon was “The Weight of Glory.” And in that sermon, what is the weight of glory every true Christian will bear? To the hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a

father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.1 2. God makes much of us by making us fellow heirs with His Son, who owns everything.

•“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5) •“The promise to Abraham and his offspring [is] that he would be heir of the world.” (Romans 4:13)

•“Let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23)

3.God makes much of us by having us sit at the table when He returns and serving us as though He were the slave and we the masters.

“Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.” (Luke 12:37) 4. God makes much of us by appointing us to carry out the judgment of angels. Do you not know that we are to judge angels? (1 Corinthians 6:3) 5.God makes much of us by ascribing value to us and rejoicing over us as His treasured possession.

•“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. . . . Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29; Matthew 10:31)

•“The Lord your God . . . will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” (Zephaniah 3:17) 6.God makes much of us by giving us a glorious body like Jesus’s resurrection body.

•“He will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Php 3:21)

•“The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matthew 13:43; cf. Romans 8:30) 7.Most amazingly, God makes much of us by granting us to sit with Christ on His throne.

•“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (Revelation 3:21)

•Or as Paul says, “The church . . . is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22-23) We are destined to share in the governing of the universe with divine-like authority.

Let it be known loud and clear, God makes much of His Son’s bride, the church. God loves the church with a kind of love that will make more of her than she can ever imagine. All this is ours if we belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). The final decisive question is, Why does God, who loves so much, and who makes much of us so extremely, remind us again and again that He does all this for His own glory? Why does God remind us over and over that He makes much of us in a way that is designed ultimately to make much of Him? The answer is this: Loving us this way is a greater love. Brothers, we must help our people see this and feel this. God’s love for us, that makes much of us for His glory, is a greater love than if He ended by making us our greatest treasure, rather than Himself. Making Himself our end is a greater love than making us His end. The reason this is greater love is that self, no matter how glorified by God (Romans 8:30), will

never satisfy a heart that is made for God. God loves us infinitely. He sent His Son to die that He might have us and that we might have Him (1 Peter 3:18). He will not let us settle for wonderful and happy thoughts of self. Not even a glorified self. He will not let our glory, which He Himself creates and delights in, replace His glory as our supreme treasure.

Brothers, leave your people with this truth. Help them glory in this and take heart from this, and rejoice in this, and be strengthened by this: You are precious to God, and the greatest gift He has for you is not to let your preciousness become your god. God will be your God. God alone forever. And this is infinite love. This is how much He makes of you.

Notes

C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 10.

06.05. Brothers, Live and Preach Justification by Faith

And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted unto righteousness.

Romans 4:5 jp ✥ ✥ ✥ This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone.

It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.

Martin Luther ✥ ✥ ✥

Wherever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown. John Calvin

5 Brothers, Live and Preach Justification by Faith

Preaching and living justification by faith alone glorifies Christ, rescues hopeless sinners, emboldens imperfect saints, and strengthens fragile churches. It is a stunning truth—that God justifies the ungodly by faith. “To the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). History bears witness: the preaching of this truth creates, reforms, and revives the church. This was true in the ministry of the apostle Paul. For example, in Antioch of Pisidia he preached in the synagogue, “Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is justified (dikaioutai) from everything from which you could not be justified (dikai■th■nai) by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39 jp). What was the result of this preaching of justification by faith? As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. Now when the meeting of the synagogue had bro-ken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:42-44 nasb) As we trace this preaching through the history of the church, sometimes we read that Augustine did not see or preach this doctrine. This is probably not true,1 though it may not be as clear as later in Luther and Calvin. The move away from justification by faith alone and the resulting confusion of an alien righteousness with sanctifica-tion as the basis for our right standing before God probably came after Augustine,2 although it is doubtful that it ever disappeared completely. The great Scholastic theologian, Anselm (1033–1109), was prob-ably also an exponent of justification by faith alone. He described his view in a tract for the consolation of the dying, quoted by A. H. Strong:

“Question. Dost thou believe that the Lord Jesus died for thee? Answer. I believe it. Qu. Dost thou thank him for his passion and death? Ans. I do thank him. Qu. Dost thou believe that thou canst not be saved except by his death? Ans. I believe it.” And then Anselm addresses the dying man:

“Come then, while life remaineth in thee; in his death alone place thy whole trust; in naught else place any trust; to his death commit thyself wholly; with this alone cover thyself wholly; and if the Lord thy God will to judge thee, say, ‘Lord, between thy judgment and me I present the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; no otherwise can I contend with thee.’ And if he shall say that thou art a sinner, say thou: ‘Lord, I interpose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my sins and thee.’ If he say that thou hast deserved condemnation, say: ‘Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my evil deserts and thee, and his merits I offer for those which I ought to have and have not.’ If he say that he is wroth with thee, say: ‘Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between thy wrath and me.’ And when thou hast completed this, say again: ‘Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between thee and me.’” See Anselm, Opera (Migne), 1:686, 687. The above quotation gives us reason to believe that the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith was implicitly, if not explicitly, held by many pious souls through all the ages of papal darkness.3 And there was darkness. The Reformation was needed. And the discovery and preaching of justification by faith alone was the center of the lightning bolt of truth that lit the world. Luther dates his great discovery of the gospel of justification by faith alone to 1518 during his series of lectures on Psalms 4 He tells the story in his “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings.” This account of the discovery is taken from that preface, written March 5, 1545, the year before his death.

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was . . . a single word in Romans 1:1-32 [:17], “In it the righteousness of God is revealed,” that had stood in my way. For I hated that word “righteousness of God,” which accord-ing to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmur-ing greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteous wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righ-teousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand [that] the righteousness of God is that by which the righ-teous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Here a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. . . . And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word “righteousness of God.” Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.5

Oh, that pastors in our pragmatic age would “meditate day and night” and “beat importunately upon Paul” until they see the gospel of justification so clearly that they would “enter paradise itself through open gates.” Then we would discover why Luther put such a weight on it: “In it all other articles of our faith are comprehended, and when that is safe the others are safe too.”6 “On this article all that we teach and practice is based.”7 “It alone can support us in the face of these countless offenses and can console us in all temptations and persecu-tions.”8 “This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.”9

John Calvin cherished and preached this truth because “wher-ever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extin-guished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown.”10 Concerning his debate with Roman Catholicism, he said that justification by faith alone was “the first and keenest subject of controversy between us.”11 What was this great and central truth? Calvin defined it this way: As all mankind are, in the sight of God, lost sinners, we hold that Christ is their only righteousness, since, by his obedience, he has wiped off our transgressions; by his sacri-fice, appeased the divine anger; by his blood, washed away our stains; by his cross, borne our curse; and by his death, made satisfaction for us. We maintain that in this way man is reconciled in Christ to God the Father, by no merit of his own, by no value of works, but by gratuitous mercy. When we embrace Christ by faith, and come, as it were, into commu-nion with him, this we term, after the manner of Scripture, the righteousness of faith.12 When he and the other reformers and the Puritans after them were challenged that the justification of the ungodly by faith alonewould lead to loose living (just as Paul was challenged in Romans 6:1; Romans 6:15), he answered:

I wish the reader to understand that as often as we men-tion faith alone in this question, we are not thinking of a dead faith, which worketh not by love, but holding faith to be the only cause of justification. It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light. Wherefore we do not separate the whole grace of regeneration from faith, but claim the power and faculty of justifying entirely for faith, as we ought.13 The Baptist pastor John Bunyan, who wrote The Pilgrim’s Progress, loved and lived the truth of justification by faith alone. Just before his release from twelve years in prison, he wrote a book entitled A Defense of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith. Most of all the mes-sage was precious to him because it saved him at a time when he was in hopelessness and despairing in his early twenties.

It’s hard to put a date on his conversion because in retelling the process in Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners he includes almost no dates or times. But it was a lengthy and agonizing process. “I was all this while ignorant of Jesus Christ, and going about to establish my own righteousness, and [would have] perished therein, had not God in mercy showed me more of my state by nature. . . . The Bible was precious to me in those days.”14

One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God’s right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he wants [lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw,

moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, “The same yesterday, today, and forever.” Hebrews 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; . . . now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.15

During the Great Awakening in the 1730s and 40s, the preaching of justification on both sides of the Atlantic grounded the strength of the movement of God. When Jonathan Edwards finally published the sermons he had preached on justification by faith in 1734, he wrote in the preface: The beginning of the late work of God in this place was so circumstanced, that I could not but look upon it as a remarkable testimony of God’s approbation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, here asserted and vindicated.

. . . The following discourse of justification . . . seemed to be remarkably blessed, not only to establish the judgments of many in this truth, but to engage their hearts in a more earnest pursuit of justification, in that way that had been explained and defended; and at that time, while I was greatly reproached for defending this doctrine in the pulpit, and just upon my suffering a very open abuse for it, God’s work won-derfully brake forth amongst us, and souls began to flock to Christ, as the Savior in whose righteousness alone they hoped to be justified. So that this was the doctrine on which this work in its beginning was founded, as it evidently was in the whole progress of it.16

Oh, brothers, do we not want to see souls begin “to flock to Christ as the Savior”? Then let us live and preach this great central truth of justification by faith alone.

Remember what Luther said, and give yourselves to it: “I beat importunately upon Paul.” Take hold of Romans and Galatians and wrestle with them the way Jacob wrestled with the angel of God—until these inspired writings bless you with this glorious truth. In Romans 4:1-25, Paul builds his case on Genesis 15:6, which he quotes in Romans 4:3 : “For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’” Paul is eager to pick up on the words faith and reckoned in Genesis 15:6 to show why they rule out boasting and support justification by faith alone. Romans 4:4 : “Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned according to grace, but as according to debt” (jp). This is why justification by works would not put an end to boasting. If you work for your justification, what you are doing is trying to put God in your debt. And if you suc-ceed in getting God to owe you something, then you can boast before men and God. If you worked for justification and you succeeded, you would not get grace but a wage. God would owe it to you. And when you got it, you would be able to say, “I deserve this.” And that, Paul says, is not what Abraham did.

Well, what did he do? Romans 4:5 is perhaps the most important verse on justification by faith alone in all the New Testament. Three bright signals in this verse teach that justification is by faith alone and nothing but faith. “And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” Notice these three signals that justification is by “faith alone.”

First, he says, “To the one who does not work.” Here is a por-trait of the moment of justification. This does not mean there will be no “good works” that follow in sanctification. Paul takes that up in Romans 6:1-23. We are dealing here with the moment of justification. This moment could happen

for any of your people any Sunday morn-ing in an instant because it is not a long process (like sanctification). Justification is a verdict delivered by God in a moment: not guilty, acquitted, accepted, forgiven, righteous! And Paul says it happens to the person who “does not work”! That means it comes by faith alone. The second signal that justification is by faith alone is the word ungodly. After Paul says, “To the one who does not work,” he says,“but trusts him who justifies the ungodly.” This is utterly shocking. It jars all of our judicial sentiments (see Exodus 23:7; Proverbs 17:15). It makes us cry out, “How can this be?” And the stupendous answer is that “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). God can justify the ungodly because His Son died for the ungodly. The point of the word ungodly here is to stress that faith is not our righteousness. Faith believes in Him who justifies the ungodly. When faith is born in the soul, we are still ungodly. Faith will begin to overcome our ungodliness. But in the beginning of the Christian life—where justification happens—we are all ungodly. Godly works do not begin to have a role in our lives until we are justified. We are declared righteous17 by faith alone while we are still ungodly. And that is the only way any of us can have hope that God is on our side so that we can now make headway in the fight against ungodliness. He is for us. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died” (Romans 8:33-34).

Finally, the third signal that justification is by faith alone is the last phrase in Romans 4:5, “His faith is counted as righteousness.” Not his works or his love or even his fruit of faith, but his faith—his faith alone—is counted as righteousness.

What does this mean, “Faith is reckoned as righteousness”? The idea is clearly crucial for Paul because we meet it in Romans 4:3 : “Abraham believed God, and it [his believing] was counted to him as righ-teousness.” Romans 4:5 : “His [the one who believes in him who justifies the ungodly] faith is counted as righteousness.” Romans 4:9 : “Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.” Romans 4:22 : Abraham’s “faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’” Does reckoning faith as righteousness mean that faith itself is the kind of righteousness we perform and God counts that as good enough to be our justifying righteousness? Does it mean that justifica-tion, let’s say, costs five million dollars and I can come up with one million dollars (namely, faith), so God mercifully says He will count my one million as five million and cancel the rest? That would make my faith the righteousness imputed to me. So justification would be God’s recognizing in me a righteousness that He put there and that He acknowledges and counts for what it really is—righteous. Is that what Paul means when he says, “Faith is counted as righteousness”? Or is justification something different—not God’s seeing any righteousness in me but His reckoning to me His own righteousness in Christ through faith? My answer is that Paul means faith is what unites us with Christ and all that God is for us in Him. And when God sees us united to Christ—sees us in Christ—He sees the righteousness of Christ as our righteousness. So faith connects us with Christ who is our righteous-ness and, in that sense, faith is counted as righteousness. The function of justifying faith is to see and savor all that God is for us in Christ, especially His righteousness.

Now what is the biblical basis of this interpretation? John Owen gives five arguments,18 and John Murray gives nine arguments19 why “faith counted as righteousness” does not mean that faith is our righteousness. Here are some of the reasons that seem compelling to me.

First, notice at the end of Romans 4:6 and at the end of Romans 4:11 a different way of expressing the “imputation” of righteousness (or the “counting” of righteousness). At the end of Romans 4:6, “God counts righteousness apart from works.” And at the end of Romans 4:11, “that righteousness might be counted to them.” Notice: in both of these, faith is not the thing counted as righteousness, but righteous-ness is the thing counted to us. “God credits righteousness,” not “God credits faith as righteousness.” What this does is alert us to the good possibility that when Paul says, “Faith is counted as righteousness,” he may well mean, “who thus have righteousness counted to them.” What is counted to our account here is not faith but righteousness. This suggests that speaking of faith being reckoned may be a short-hand way of saying that righteousness is counted through faith.

Second, consider Romans 3:21-22, “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Notice that God’s righteousness comes to us through faith. Faith is what unites us to God’s righteous-ness. Faith is not God’s righteousness which is imputed (reckoned) to us in our union with Christ.

Third, consider 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Here we have a double “imputation.” God imputed our sins to Christ who knew no sin. And God imputed His righteousness to us who had no righteousness of our own. The key phrases for us are “the righteousness of God” and “in him.” It’s not our righteousness that we get in Christ. It is God’s righteousness. And we get it not because our faith is righteous but because we are “in Christ.” Faith unites us to Christ. And in Christ we have an alien righteous-ness. It is God’s righteousness in Christ. Or you can say it is Christ’s righteousness, which is the way Romans 5:18 speaks (“so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men”). He takes our sin. We take His righteousness, imputed to us.20

Fourth, consider 1 Corinthians 1:30. John Bunyan said that after the experience in the field where the imputed righteousness of Christ hit him so powerfully, he went home and looked for biblical support. He came upon 1 Corinthians 1:30. “[God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” “By this Scripture,” Bunyan said, “I saw that the man Christ Jesus . . . is our righteousness and sanctifica-tion before God. Here therefore I lived for some time very sweetly at peace with God, through Christ.”21

Bunyan’s text (1 Corinthians 1:30) says that Christ became for us (simple dative, h■min) “righteousness.” And the reason Christ is our “righteousness” in this way is that we are “in Christ Jesus.” “You are in Christ Jesus who became to [or for] us . . . righteousness.” Christ, not faith, is our righteousness. Faith unites us to Christ and all that God is for us in Him. But what He is for us in Him is righteousness.22 My conclusion from these observations is that, when Paul says in Romans 4:3; Romans 4:5; Romans 4:9; Romans 4:22 that “faith is counted as righteousness,” he does not mean that our faith is our righteousness. He means that our faith unites us to Christ so that God’s righteousness in Christ is reckoned to us.

Here’s an imperfect, but I think helpful, analogy. Suppose I say to Barnabas, my teenage son, “Clean up your room before you go to school. You must have a clean room, or you won’t be able to go watch the game tonight.” Well, suppose he plans poorly and leaves for school without cleaning

the room. And suppose I discover the messy room and clean it. His afternoon fills up, and he gets home just before it's time to leave for the game and realizes what he has done and feels ter-rible. He apologizes and humbly accepts the consequences. No game. To which I say, "Barnabas, I am going to credit your apology and submission as a clean room. I said, 'You must have a clean room, or you won't be able to go watch the game tonight.' Your room is clean. So you can go to the game." What I mean when I say, "I credit your apology as a clean room," is not that the apology is the clean room nor that he really cleaned his room. I cleaned it. It was pure grace. All I mean is that, in my way of counting—in my grace—his apology con-nects him with the promise given for a clean room. The clean room is his clean room. I credit it to him. Or, I credit his apology as a clean room. You can say it either way. And Paul said it both ways: "Faith is reckoned as righteousness," and "God credits righteousness to us." So when God says to those who believe in Christ, "I credit your faith as righteousness," He does not mean that your faith is your justi-fying righteousness. He means that your faith connects you to Christ who becomes your righteousness in God's sight—God's righteousness. For Martin Luther and John Bunyan the discovery of the imputed righteousness of Christ was the greatest life-changing experience they ever had. Luther said it was like entering a paradise of peace with God. For Bunyan it was the end of years of spiritual torture and uncer-tainty. Brothers, what would your people give to know for sure that their acceptance and approval before God was as sure as the standing of Jesus Christ, His Son?

Say to your beloved flock: "Christ offers you this today as a gift. If you see Him as true and precious, if you receive the gift as your greatest treasure in life and trust in it, you will have a peace with God that passes all understanding. You will be a secure person. You will not need the approval of others. You will not need the ego-supports of wealth or power or revenge. You will be free. You will overflow with love. You will lay down your life in the cause of Christ for the joy that is set before you. Look to Christ and trust Him for your righteousness."

Tell them with joy and passion and power that they can't give anything for it. It's free. This is what Christ came to do: fulfill a righ-teousness and die a death that would remove all our sins and become for us a perfect righteousness. Live in the mighty joy and freedom of this gospel. And preach it! Oh preach this to your people again and again.

Notes

1.See the evidences brought forth in The Basic Writings of St. Augustine, ed. by Whitney Oates, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1968), 142ff; and John H. Gerstner, The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards, section on the history of justification, found in Jonathan Edwards Collection: A Light for Every Age (CD-ROM), by Michael Bowman and NavPress Software, 1999.

2.See Ian Sellers, "Justification," in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 557.

3.A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Common-place Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students (Rochester, MN: Press of E. R. Andrews, 1886); reprint, three volumes in one (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1972), 849.

4.John Dillenberger, ed., Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), xvii.

5.Ibid., 11–12.

6.Martin Luther, quoted in Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says: An Anthology, vol. 2 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 703.

7.Quoted in Ibid., 718.

8.Ibid.

9.Ibid., 704.

10.John Dillenberger, John Calvin: Selections from His Writings (n.p.: Scholars Press, 1975), 95.

11.Ibid.

12.Ibid., 96.

13.Ibid., 198.

14.John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1978; original, 1666), 20.

15.Ibid., 90–91.

16.Jonathan Edwards, “Five Discourses,” in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Press, 1974), 620.

17.The word justify (dikaio■) means “declare righteous,” not “make mor-ally righteous.” We see this especially in Romans 3:4 where God is “justified” (dikai■th■s) in His words, that is, declared righteous, not made righteous.

18.John Owen, The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, in The Works of John Owen, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 318–19.

19.John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 353–59.

20.The doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is under heavy attack in our day (again). See for example, Robert H. Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,’” in Books and Culture, January/February 2001, vol. 7, no. 1, 6–9; Robert H. Gundry, “On Oden’s Answer,” in Books and Culture, March/April 2001, vol. 7, no. 2, 15–16,

39.But this trend in New Testament scholarship may not be able to overthrow four centuries of textual reflection and broad Protestant consensus on God’s righteousness in relation to justification. Careful contemporary New Testament exegetes like George Ladd have admitted what Gundry belabors, namely, that an explicit doctrinal statement about the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers is absent: “Paul never expressly states that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers.” But from 2 Corinthians Ladd says, “Paul answers the question when he says, ‘In him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ was made sin for our sake. We might say that our sins were reckoned to Christ. He, although sinless, identified himself with our sins, suffered their penalty and doom—death. So we have reckoned to us Christ’s righteousness even though in character and deed we remain sinners. It is an

unavoidable logical conclusion that men of faith are justified because Christ's righteousness is imputed to them." George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 491. In other words, the absence of doctrinal explicitness and systemati-zation may be no more problematic for the doctrine of the imputation of Christ than it is for the doctrine of the Trinity. For a detailed response to Gundry, see John Piper, Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness? (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002).

21.Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, 91.

22.There is a credible objection to using 1 Corinthians 1:30 to show the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Some say that using the verse to prove the imputation of Christ's righteousness would seem to prove that wisdom and sanctification and redemption are also "imputed" rather than imparted. But each of these is something we actually experience, not just a declaration about us. So if the text says, "God made [Christ to be] our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption," can we pick out only "righteousness" and say it was imputed to us while the others are not merely imputed but applied to us so that we experience them?

One answer is that Paul may well have intended each of the four explicit gifts of our union with Christ to be taken in the way that each functions uniquely in meeting our need, rather than all being taken in the exact same way. John Flavel (1630–1691) saw a progression that points in this direction. Thus in this union Christ becomes wisdom for us which overcomes our blind-ing ignorance of Christ (by illumination). Second, in this union Christ becomes righteousness for us which overcomes our guilt and condemnation (by imputa-tion). Third, in this union Christ becomes sanctification for us which overcomes our corruption and pollution (by progressive impartation). Fourth, in this union Christ becomes redemption for us which overcomes, in the end, all the miseries and pain and futility that come from sin and guilt (through resurrection, "We wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies," Romans 8:23). See John Flavel, The Method of Grace (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 14. One could also bring to bear Romans 10:4 at this point, which translated literally says, "The goal [or end] of the law is Christ for righteousness to every-one who believes." In other words, the law was pointing toward Christ as our righteousness ("Christ for righteousness for everyone who believes," τ■λος γ■ρ ν■μου Χριστ■ς ε■ς δικαιοσ■νην παντ■ τ■ πιστε■οντι [telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiosun■n panti t■ pisteuonti]).

06.06. Brothers, God Is the Gospel

Here is both the emanation and remanation. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God, and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.1 Jonathan Edwards ✥ ✥ ✥

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

1 Peter 3:18 ✥ ✥ ✥ The gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:4

6 Brothers, God Is the Gospel

Since this book was first published in 2002, few things have been on my mind as much as the truth that God is the gospel. The point of that simple sentence is that the highest, best, and final good in the good news is God Himself. When you believe the gospel, you taste and see that the Lord Himself is good and that the best gift He has purchased for you in the death of His Son is the enjoyment of God Himself.

Brothers, I think our people need to hear this constantly. In this fallen world, the tide is always going out. That is, the affections of our people have for God Himself (as distinct from His gifts) are continu-ally prone to shrink. Our job is to tilt the world, by the power of the Spirit and the Word, so that the tide rolls in again. In no way do I want to diminish what has traditionally and bibli-cally been called the gospel. I just want to make sure we tell the whole story. So here's my summary of that gospel in six steps. These are all essential. If any one of them was removed, there would be no gospel.

1. The gospel is a plan: "according to the Scriptures." For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Ephesians 1:4-5) The gospel originated in the mind of God. It was His plan before the foundation of the world. It did not just happen. The Father and the Son worked it out before the world. They planned it.

2. The gospel is an event: the death and resurrection of Jesus. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) The gospel is an event in history. It really happened. If there was no historical Jesus, and if He did not die and rise from the dead, there would be no gospel.

3. The gospel is an achievement: sin and wrath are dealt with; righteousness and life are provided. In dying, Jesus absorbed the wrath of God.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becom-ing a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sin-ful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. (Romans 8:3)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. (John 3:36) The wrath of God is our greatest threat. It hangs over all of us because we are all sinners. Without the death of Jesus, and without faith in Jesus, it “remains” on us. But because of Jesus’ death, applied to us by faith in Him, it does not remain. He bore our condemnation, our curse. In dying Jesus also paid the debt for our sins.

He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24) Not only did Jesus pay the debt for our sins; He provided a per-fect righteousness that counts with God on our behalf. When we are united to Him by faith, His perfection counts as ours. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Besides absorbing God’s wrath and paying the debt of sin and providing a perfect righteousness, when He died and rose again, Jesus also conquered death and obtained eternal life. As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:21) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

All this—wrath absorbed, forgiveness bought, righteousness wrought, death conquered, and eternal life won—was achieved in history by Jesus before any of us lived or believed. God unilaterally took this initiative to save us through the death and resurrection of Christ.

4. The gospel is a free offer: in the preaching of the gospel, the achievement of Christ is freely offered to all people through faith. The good news would vanish if all that “achievement” on the cross were available only by the performance of sufficient good deeds.

Therefore, an essential part of the gospel is that this news is pro-claimed to all and offered freely to whoever will have faith in Jesus.

We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Romans 3:28) By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eter-nal life. (John 3:16) So not only has God planned salvation, and performed the event of Christ's death and resurrection, and achieved the purchase of for-giveness and the perfection of righteousness, but He has also made this achievement available to all through the worldwide, indiscrimi-nate free offer of Christ, so that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

5. The gospel is an application of Christ's achievement to the world: through the proclamation, the plan and event and achievement and offer, the Holy Spirit applies Christ's achievement to the believing heart. The fundamental way all the achievements of Christ become ours is by union with Christ. This is why the tiny phrase "in Christ" is so prevalent in the New Testament.

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. (Romans 16:7)

If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:5) In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Galatians 3:26) That last phrase, "through faith," is the way we experience the work of the Spirit in uniting us to Christ. He does it through faith. And when He does it, all that Christ achieved in His life, death, and resurrection becomes ours.

Forgiveness of sin In him we have redemption through his blood, the for-giveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7) To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:43) Counted righteous in Christ

[That we might] be found in him, not having a righteous-ness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Php 3:9) Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1) Receive eternal life Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eter-nal life. (John 3:16) But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

Now this is where the gospel message usually ends. Plan. Event. Achievement. Free offer. Application. And, of course, this is a glori-ous ending. Who would deny that forgiveness of sins, justification by faith alone, and eternal life are breathtaking realities for sinners like us? But the picture is not complete. At least the completeness has not been made explicit. There is still a sixth and final step.

I return to my question: What is the highest and best and final good in the good news? Is it justification by faith? Is it forgiveness of sins? Is it the removal of the wrath of God? Is it redemption from guilt and liberation from slavery to sin? Is it salvation from hell? Is it entrance into heaven? Is it eternal life? Is it deliverance from all pain and sickness and conflict?

All of these are precious promises bought by the blood of Christ for everyone who believes in Him. But they are not the highest and best and final good of the gospel. In fact, unless they lead to some-thing else, these are not good news at all.

It is possible to believe in all these things, and to want them and expect them, and still never have tasted what makes all these good things in the good news good. So what is that? What is the highest and best and final good that makes every part of the gospel good news? The answer is given in 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 4:6. And the parallels between these two verses show the depth and the wonder of what each of them means: In their case [the case of those who are perishing] the god of this world [that's Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. . . . For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, note the italicized words "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." And in 2 Corinthians 4:6, note the italicized parallel words: "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Here is one of the most important statements about the gospel in the Bible. We know from 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 that the foundational events of the gospel are "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Yes. That is gloriously true. Without this there is no gospel at all. But what must we see in those events if they are to be gospel for us? 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 2 Corinthians 4:6 tell us: We must see "the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." That is, we must see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Why? Because that is the ultimate good of the gospel. The gospel is not just historical events—Christ died and was buried and rose. The gos-pel is good news. And we do not see the decisive good in the good news if we do not see in the events the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Notice carefully the use of the word gospel in 2 Corinthians 4:4 : It is the "gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." This is the gospel. The glory of Christ seen and savored in the work of redemp-tion is the good news. This is the highest and best and final good that makes all the other good things promised in the gospel good.

•Justification is good news because it makes us stand accepted by the one whose glory we want to see and savor above all things.

•Forgiveness is good news because it cancels all the sins that keep me from seeing and enjoying the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

•Removal of wrath and salvation from hell are good news because now in my escape from eternal misery I find eternal pleasure beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ.

•Eternal life is good news because this is eternal life, Jesus said, that they know Me and Him who sent Me.

•And freedom from pain and sickness and conflict are good news because, in my freedom from pain, I am no longer hindered or distracted from the fullest enjoyment of the glory of Christ who is

the image of God. In other words, 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 4:6 tell us what the highest, best, ultimate good of the good news is: the glory of God in the face of Christ. Or: the glory of Christ who is the image of God. This is a real glory, a real spiritual light that shines through the gospel from Christ in His saving work and is seen not with the physical eyes but with the eyes of the heart (Ephesians 1:17-18).

Brothers, this is what I think our people need to hear over and over. That forgiveness and justification and eternal life are good for one ultimate reason—they bring us to God Himself, as Peter says so clearly: “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God ” (1 Peter 3:18). There it is. The ultimate end of the gospel is coming home to God. Knowing Him. Seeing Him unsullied with our own sin. Being with Him. Being conformed to Him. Enjoying Him with the capacities for joy that heaven alone will give. “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalms 16:11).

Brothers, God is the gospel. What a difference it makes in a church when the people know this and embrace it with all their hearts.

Notes

Jonathan Edwards, “The Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World,” in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 8 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 526, 531.

06.07. Brothers, Beware of the Debtor's Ethic

Every good deed we do in dependence on God does just the opposite of paying Him back; it puts us ever deeper in debt to His grace. And that is exactly where God wants us to be through all eternity.

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Good deeds do not pay back grace; they borrow more grace.

7 Brothers, Beware of the Debtor's Ethic

Why Christians do what they do is just as important as what they do. Bad motives ruin good acts. "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). At the last judgment the Lord "will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Therefore, we must not be content that our people are doing good things. We must labor to see that they do good things from God-exalting motives—lest they find in the end that their sacrifices were for nothing. The debtor's ethic has a deadly appeal to immature Christians. It comes packaged as a gratitude ethic and says things like: "God has done so much for you; now what will you do for Him?" "He gave you His life; now how much will you give to Him?" The Christian life is pictured as an effort to pay back the debt we owe to God. The admission is made that we will never fully pay it off, but the debtor's ethic demands that we work at it. Good deeds and religious acts are the installment payments we make on the unending debt we owe God. Have you ever tried to find a biblical text where gratitude or thankfulness is the explicit motive for obedience to God? Stories like the sinful woman (in Luke 7:36-50) and the unforgiving servant (in Matthew 18:23-35) come to mind,1 but neither speaks explicitly of grati-tude as a motive.

Why is this explicit motive for obedience—which in contem-porary Christianity is probably the most commonly used motive for obedience to God—(almost?) totally lacking in the Bible? Could it be that a gratitude ethic so easily slips over into a debtor's ethic that God chose to protect His people from this deadly motivation by not including gratitude as an explicit motive for obedience?

Instead He lures us into obedience with irresistibly desirable promises of enablement (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27; Matthew 19:26; Romans 6:14; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; Galatians 5:22; Php 2:13; Php 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Hebrews 13:21) and divine reward (Luke 9:24; Luke 10:28; Luke 12:33; Luke 16:9; Luke 16:25; Luke 10:35-36; Hebrews 11:24-26; Hebrews 12:2; Hebrews 13:5-6).2

God takes pains to motivate us by reminding us that He is now and always will be working for those who follow Him in the obedi-ence of faith. He never stops and waits for us to work for Him "out of gratitude." He guards us from the mind-set of a debtor by remind-ing us that all our Christian labor for Him is a gift from Him (Romans 11:35-36; Romans 15:18) and therefore cannot be conceived as payment of a debt. In fact the astonishing thing is that every good deed we do in

dependence on Him to “pay Him back” does just the opposite; it puts us ever deeper in debt to His grace. “I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10 nasb). Let us teach people that is exactly where God wants us to be through all eternity, going ever deeper in debt to grace. Should we then stop preaching gratitude as a motivation? I leave that for you to answer. But if we go on urging people to obey “out of gratitude,” we should at least show them the lurking dangers and describe how gratitude can motivate obedience without succumbing to a debtor’s mentality.

Ponder with me the meaning of gratitude and how it might work to motivate in a good way, not like a debtor’s ethic.

First we need a definition. Suppose I wake up to the sound of a robber trying to break into my house. When I turn on the light, he flees. As I get dressed, I smell smoke. A fire had just started in the basement where my sons sleep. I quickly put it out. The thief had awakened me and, unbeknownst to him, saved my sons. But I do not feel grateful to him. I feel grateful to God. Why? Because the thief had no good intentions toward me, but God did. We do not respond with gratitude to a person who does us a favor unintentionally. Or suppose I am visiting some Christian friends in a remote jun-gle village and fall deathly sick. One of the villagers perceives a need for penicillin and sets out on foot to get it from a doctor ten miles away. On his way back he is bitten by a deadly snake but manages to make it to the village before he dies. In his pocket is found the bottle of penicillin—broken by his last fall. He gave his life for me, but I did not get the benefit he died to bring. Do I feel thankful? Yes! Because gratitude is not merely a response to a benefit received; it is a response to someone’s goodwill toward us. This is confirmed by another experience. Suppose you give some-one a gift at a party and he opens it and loves it. He fondles it and shows it off and speaks of it the whole evening but never once does he even look at you or speak to you, the giver. He is totally enthralled with the gift. What do we say of such a person? We say he is an ingrate. Why? Because his emotion of joy over the gift has no refer-ence to the goodwill of the giver. So I arrive at this definition of gratitude. Gratitude is a species of joy which arises in your heart in response to the goodwill of someone who does or tries to do you a favor. The reason this spontaneous response of a heart has a good potential to produce other acts of obedience is that it is a species of joy. Whenever we experience joy, it is because our hearts have esteemed something we regard as valuable. The cause of joy is always a perceived value. The greater the value to us, the greater our joy in receiving it. But not only that. All joy is gregarious. It has in it a demonstrative impulse. It likes to gather others around and savor the value together. Is it not a psychological impossibility to feel intense delight in some-thing good yet feel no impulse to demonstrate to others the value which caused that delight? In his Reflections on the Psalms, C. S. Lewis put it like this:

Just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnifi-cent?” It isn’t out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed.

It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unex-pected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people you are with care for it no more than for a tin can in

the ditch.3 So the secret of how gratitude motivates obedience is in the nature of joy. All joy has in it an impulse to demonstrate the beauty and value of its object. So the question becomes: How should (indeed, how must) our joy in the value of God's gift of Jesus Christ demonstrate itself? Answer: In a way that honors the nature and aim of God's goodwill and does not contradict it. (You should not try to show your gratitude to someone who just paid your way through an alcohol treatment center by throwing him a beer party. That would contradict the aim of his goodwill.) The nature of God's goodwill in giving His Son was that it was unconditional and undeserved—a gift of free grace. The aim of that act was to unleash a power of forgiveness and renewal that would transform people into reflectors of God's glory. So the way our gratitude to God for His goodwill must express itself is by saying and doing what honors its nature as free and its aim as God's glory. This immediately excludes the debtor's ethic. Any attempt to express a gratitude by paying God back would contradict the nature of His gift as free and gracious. Any attempt to turn from being a ben-eficiary of God in order to become God's benefactors would remove the stumbling block of the cross where my debt was so fully paid that I am forever humbled to the status of a receiver, not a giver. "Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies" (1 Peter 4:11 nasb).

Instead, the way our joy expresses the value of free grace is by admitting we don't deserve it, and by banking our hope on it and doing everything we do as a recipient of more and more grace. "God is able to make all grace abound to you, [so that] . . . you may have an abundance for every good deed" (2 Corinthians 9:8 nasb). Good deeds do not pay back grace; they borrow more grace.

Gratitude will always degenerate into the debtor's ethic if it only looks back on past grace and not forward as well to future grace. We honor the nature and aim of God's goodwill by trusting Him to work for us from now on, which means that gratitude functions well as a motive only as it gives rise to faith. Gratitude says to faith, "Keep trusting your Father for more grace; I know He will supply. I have experienced it, and it was sweet." Gratitude does help motivate the radical obedience of love, but it does so indirectly through the service of faith in future grace.

Perhaps this is why the central ethical affirmation of the New Testament is that "faith works through love" (Galatians 5:6), not "gratitude works through love." Not that this would be untrue, but that it is fraught with legalistic dangers. So Paul would have us beware of the debtor's ethic and lead our people into the life-changing power of ever-dependent joy.4

Notes

1.Another possible exception is Hebrews 12:28-29, "Since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consum-ing fire." But the phrase "show gratitude" is a questionable translation. The KJV has, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God." Even if the KJV is wrong, I take the func-tion of gratitude to be that it empowers service by feeding faith in future grace. I say this because Hebrews, more than any other book in the New Testament, is explicitly insistent that obedience comes "by faith" (Hebrews 11:1-40).

2.See chapter 7, "Brothers, Consider Christian Hedonism."

3.C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), 93–95.

4.A full treatment of what I call “living by faith in future grace” and which is the opposite of the debtor’s ethic is found in John Piper, The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1995).

06.08. Brothers, Tell Them Not to Serve God

[God is not] served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Acts 17:25 ✥ ✥ ✥ The difference between Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ is that Uncle Sam won't enlist you in his service unless you are healthy and Jesus won't enlist you unless you are sick.

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What is God looking for in the world? Assistants? No. The gospel is not a help-wanted ad. It is a help-available ad.

God is not looking for people to work for Him but people who let Him work mightily in and through them.

8 Brothers, Tell Them Not to Serve God

We have all told our people to serve God. The Bible says, "Serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalms 100:2). But now it may be time to tell them not to serve God. For Scripture also says:

"The Son of Man . . . came not to be served" (Mark 10:45). The Bible is concerned to call us back from idolatry to serve the true and living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). But it is also concerned to keep us from serving the true God in the wrong way. There is a way to serve God that belittles and dishonors Him. Therefore, we must take heed lest we recruit servants whose labor diminishes the glory of the All-powerful Provider. If Jesus said that He came not to be served, service may be rebellion.

God wills not to be served: "The God who made the world and everything in it . . . [is not] served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24-25). Paul warns against any view of God which makes Him the beneficiary of our beneficence. He informs us that God cannot be served in any way that implies we are meeting His needs. It would be as though a stream should try to fill a spring that feeds it. "He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

What is the greatness of our God? What is His uniqueness in the world? Isaiah says, "From of old no one has heard or perceived by ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64:4). All the other so-called gods make man work for them. Our God will not be put in the position of an employer who must depend on others to make his business go. Instead He magnifies His all-sufficiency by doing the work Himself. Man is the dependent partner in this affair. His job is to wait for the Lord.

What is God looking for in the world? Assistants? No. The gospel is not a help-wanted ad. It is a help-available ad. Nor is the call to Christian service a help-wanted ad. God is not looking for people to work for Him but people who let Him work mightily in and through them: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is

blameless toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is not a scout looking for the first draft choices to help His team win. He is an unstoppable fullback ready to take the ball and run touchdowns for anyone who trusts Him to win the game.

Well, then, our people will ask as we teach them these things, "What does God want from us?" Not what they might expect. God rebukes Israel for bringing Him so many sacrifices: "I will not accept a bull from your house. . . . For every beast of the forest is mine. . . .If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine" (Psalms 50:9-10; Psalms 50:12). But isn't there something we can give to God that won't belittle Him to the status of beneficiary? Yes. Our anxieties. It's a command: "Cast all your anxieties on him" (1 Peter 5:7 rsv). God will gladly receive anything from us that shows our dependence and His all-sufficiency. The difference between Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ is that Uncle Sam won't enlist you in his service unless you are healthy and Jesus won't enlist you unless you are sick. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). Christianity is fundamentally convalescence. Patients do not serve their physicians. They trust them for good prescriptions. The Sermon on the Mount is our doctor's medical advice, not our employer's job description. But even that analogy doesn't get it quite right. Even trusting our doctor to tell us wise and healing things to do may leave us trying to do them in our own strength. God is not only the doctor who pre-scribes. He is the nurse who lifts up our powerless head and puts the spoon in our mouth (or who hangs the bag of intravenous medicine). And He is the medicine. Our very lives hang on not working for God. "To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5). Workmen get no gifts. They get their due. If we would have the gift of justification, we dare not work. God is the workman in this affair. And what He gets is the glory of being the benefactor of grace, not the beneficiary of service. Nor should we think that after justification our labor for God begins. Those who make a work out of sanctification demean the glory of God. Jesus Christ is "our righteousness and sanctification" (1 Corinthians 1:30). "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3). God was the workman in our justification, and He will be the workman in our sanctification.

Religious "flesh" always wants to work for God. But "if you live according to the flesh you will die" (Romans 8:13). That is why our very lives hang on not working for God, both in justification and sanctification. But shall we not then serve Christ? It is commanded: "Serve the Lord" (Romans 12:11). Those who do not serve Christ are rebuked (Romans 16:18, "Such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites"). Yes, we will serve Him. But before we do, we will ponder what to avoid in this service. Surely all the warnings against serving God mean that in the idea of service lies something to be avoided. When we compare our relationship with God to the relation-ship between servant and master, the comparison is not perfect. Some things about servanthood should be avoided in relation to God. Some should be affirmed.

How then shall we serve and not serve? Psalms 123:2 gives part of the answer: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us." The good way to serve God is to be like the maid who looks to the hand of her mistress for mercy.

Any servant who tries to get off the divine dole and strike up a manly partnership with his Heavenly Master is in revolt against the Creator. God does not barter. He gives mercy to servants who will have it and the wages of death to those who won't. Good service is always and fundamentally receiving mercy, not rendering assistance. But it is not entirely passive. Matthew 6:24 gives another clue to good service. Compare serving money and serving God. "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

How does a person serve money? He does not assist money. He is not the benefactor of money. How then do we serve money? Money exerts a certain control over us because it seems to hold out so much promise of happiness. It whispers with great force, "Think and act so as to get into a position to enjoy my benefits." This may include steal-ing, borrowing, or working.

Money promises happiness, and we serve it by believing the promise and living by that faith. So we don't serve money by put-ting our power at its disposal for its good. We serve money by doing what is necessary so that money's power will be at our disposal for our good.

I think the same sort of service to God must be in view in Matthew 6:24, since Jesus puts the two side by side: "You cannot serve God and money." So if we are going to serve God and not money, then we are going to have to open our eyes to the vastly superior happiness which God offers. Then God will exert a greater control over us than money does. We will serve by believing His promise of fullest joy and walking by that faith. We will not serve by trying to put our power at His disposal for His good but by doing what is necessary so that His power will be ever at our disposal for our good. Of course, this means obedience. A patient obeys his doctor in hopes of getting well. A convalescent sinner trusts the painful directions of his therapist and follows them. Or, most accurately, a paralyzed patient lets the nurse serve him the medicine that will give him healing and strength. Only in this way do we keep ourselves in a position to benefit from what the divine Physician has to offer. In all this obedience we are the beneficiaries. God is ever the giver. For it is the giver who gets the glory. And that, perhaps, is the most important thing of all. The only right way to serve God is in a way that reserves for Him all the glory. "Whoever serves [must do it] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified " (1 Peter 4:11). How do we serve so God is glorified? We serve by the strength He supplies. When we are at our most active for God, we are still the recipients. God will not surrender the glory of the benefactor, ever! So let us work hard but never forget that it is not us but the grace of God which is with us (1 Corinthians 15:10). Let us obey now, as always, but never forget that it is God who works in us both the will and the deed (Php 2:13). Let us spread the gospel far and wide and spend ourselves for the sake of the elect but never venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought in us (Romans 15:18). In all our serving may God be the giver, and may God get the glory.

Until the people understand this, brothers, tell them not to serve God!

06.09. Brothers, Consider Christian Hedonism

Delight yourself in the Lord.

Psalms 37:4 ✥ ✥ ✥

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, Rejoice!

Php 4:4 ✥ ✥ ✥

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

✥ ✥ ✥ The desire to be happy is a proper motive for every good deed, and if you abandon the pursuit of your own joy, you cannot love man or please God.

9 Brothers, Consider Christian Hedonism

If you must, forgive me for the label. But don't miss the truth because you don't like my tag. My shortest summary of it is: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Or: The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. Does Christian hedonism1 make a god out of plea-sure? No. It says that we all make a god out of what we take most pleasure in. My life is devoted to helping people make God their God,by wakening in them the greatest pleasures in Him. When Jesus warned His disciples that they might get their heads chopped off (Luke 21:16), He comforted them with the promise that, nevertheless, not a hair on their heads would perish (Luke 21:18). When He warned them that discipleship means self-denial and crucifixion (Mark 8:34), He consoled them with the promise that "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35). When He commanded them to leave all and follow Him, He assured them that they would "receive a hundredfold now . . . with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30-31).

If we must sell all, we should do it, Jesus said, "with joy" because the field we aim to buy contains a hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44). By Christian hedonism I do not mean that our happiness is the highest good. I mean that pursuing the highest good will always result in our greatest happiness in the end. But almost all Christians believe this. Christian hedonism says more, namely, that we should pursue happiness, and pursue it with all our might. The desire to be happy is a proper motive for every good deed, and if you abandon the pursuit of your own joy, you cannot love man or please God. That's what makes Christian hedonism controversial.

Christian hedonism aims to replace a Kantian morality with a biblical one. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher who died in 1804, was the most powerful exponent of the notion that the moral value of an act decreases as we aim to derive any benefit from it. Acts are good if the doer is "disinterested." We should do the good because it is good. Any motivation to seek joy or reward corrupts the act. Cynically, perhaps, but not without warrant, the novelist Ayn Rand captured the spirit of Kant's ethic: An action is moral, said Kant, only if one has no desire to perform it, but performs it out of a sense of duty and derives no benefit from it of any sort, neither material nor

spiritual. A benefit destroys the moral value of an action. (Thus if one has no desire to be evil, one cannot be good; if one has, one can.)2

Against this Kantian morality—which has passed as Christian for too long!—we must herald the unabashedly hedonistic biblical morality. Jonathan Edwards, who died when Kant was thirty-four, expressed it like this in one of his early resolutions: “Resolved, To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.”3

C. S. Lewis put it like this in a letter to Sheldon Vanauken: “It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.”4 And southern novelist Flannery O’Connor gives her view of self-denial like this: “Always you renounce a lesser good for a greater; the opposite is sin. Picture me with my ground teeth stalking joy—fully armed too, as it’s a highly dangerous quest.”5 The Kantian notion says that it’s OK to get joy as an unintended result of your action. But all these people (myself included) are aiming at joy. We repudiate both the possibility and desirability of disinterested moral behavior. It is impossible because the will is not autonomous; it always inclines to what it perceives will bring the most happiness (John 8:34; Romans 6:16; 2 Peter 2:19).

Pascal was right when he said: “All men seek happiness without exception. They all aim at this goal however different the means they use to attain it. . . . They will never make the smallest move but with this as its goal. This is the motive of all the actions of all men, even those who contemplate suicide.”6 But not only is disinterested morality (doing good “for its own sake”) impossible; it is undesirable. That is, it is unbiblical because it would mean that the better a man became the harder it would be for him to act morally. The closer he came to true goodness the more naturally and happily he would do what is good. A good man in Scripture is not the man who dislikes doing good but toughs it out for the sake of duty. A good man loves kindness (Micah 6:8) and delights in the law of the Lord (Psalms 1:2) and the will of the Lord (Psalms 40:8). But how shall such a man do an act of kindness disinterestedly? The better the man, the more joy in obedience.

Kant loves a disinterested giver. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Disinterested performance of duty displeases God. He wills that we delight in doing good and that we do it with the confidence that our obedience secures and increases our joy in God.

Oh, that I could drive the notion out of our churches that virtue requires a stoical performance of duty—the notion that good things are promised merely as the result of obedience but not as an incentive for it. The Bible is replete with promises which are not appended carefully as nonmotivational results but which clearly and boldly and hedonistically aim to motivate our behavior.

What sets off biblical morality from worldly hedonism is not that biblical morality is disinterested but that it is interested in vastly greater and purer things. Some examples:

Luke 6:35 says, “Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great.” Note: We should never be motivated by worldly aggrandizement (“expect nothing in return”); but we are given strength to suffer loss in service of love by the promise of a future reward.

Again, in Luke 14:12-14 : “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, . . . and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Note: Don’t do good deeds for worldly advantage; but do them for spiritual, heavenly benefits. The Kantian philosopher will say: “No, no. These texts only describe what reward will result if you act disinterestedly. They do not teach us to seek the reward.”

Two answers:

(1) It is bad pedagogy to say, “Take this pill, and I will give you a nickel,” if you think the desire for the nickel will ruin the taking of the pill. But Jesus was a wise teacher, not a foolish one.

(2) Even more importantly, there are texts which not only commend but command that we do good in the hope of future blessing.

Luke 12:33 says, “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a trea-sure in the heavens that does not fail.” The connection here between alms and having eternal treasure in heaven is not mere result but aim: “Make it your aim to have treasure in heaven, and the way to do this is to sell your possessions and give alms.” And again, Luke 16:9 says, “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” Luke does not say that the result of a proper use of possessions is to receive eternal habitations. He says, “Make it your aim to secure an eternal habitation by the way you use your possessions.”

Therefore, a resounding no to Kantian morality. No in the pew and no in the pulpit. In the pew, the heart is ripped out of worship by the notion that it can be performed as a mere duty. There are two possible attitudes in genuine worship: delight in God or repentance for the lack of it.

Sunday at 11 a.m., Hebrews 11:6 enters combat with Immanuel Kant. “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” You cannot please God if you do not come to Him as rewarder. Therefore, worship which pleases God is the hedonistic pursuit of God in whose presence is fullness of joy and in whose hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalms 16:11). And in the pulpit, brothers, what a difference it will make if we are Christian hedonists and not Kantian commanders of duty! Jonathan Edwards, the greatest preacher-theologian America has ever produced, daringly said, “I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.”7 The ultimate reason Edwards believed this was his duty is his profound and biblical conviction that God glorifies Himself toward the creatures . . . in two ways: 1. By appearing to . . . their understanding. 2. In com-municating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself. . . . God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it.

. . . He that testifies his idea of God’s glory [doesn’t] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it.8 This is the ultimate foundation for Christian hedonism and pro-foundly shapes a pastor’s pulpit ministry. As Christian hedonists we know that every

listener longs for happiness. And we will never tell them to deny or repress that desire. Their problem is not that they want to be satisfied but that they are far too easily satisfied. We will instruct them how to glut their soul-hunger on the grace of God. We will paint God's glory in lavish reds and yellows and blues, and hell we will paint with smoky shadows of gray and charcoal. We will labor to wean them off the milk of the world onto the rich fare of God's grace and glory.

We will bend all our effort, by the Holy Spirit, to persuade our people that •"the reproach of Christ [is] greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" (Hebrews 11:26).

•they can be happier in giving than receiving (Acts 20:35).

•they should count everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus their Lord (Php 3:8).

•the aim of all of Jesus' commandments is that their joy might be full (John 15:11).

•if they delight themselves in the Lord He will give them the desires of their heart (Psalms 37:4).

•there is great gain in godliness with contentment (1 Timothy 6:6).

•the joy of the Lord is their strength (Nehemiah 8:11).

We will not try to motivate their ministry by Kantian appeals to mere duty. We will tell them that delight in God is their highest duty. But we will remind them that Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2), and that Hudson Taylor, at the end of a life full of suffering and trial, said, "I never made a sacrifice."9

Notes 1.For the full story of what I call "Christian hedonism," see John Piper,

Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1996); or the small version: John Piper, The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001).

2.Ayn Rand, For the Intellectual (New York: Signet, 1961), 32.

3.Resolution 22 in Edwards' Memoirs in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), xxi.

4.From a letter to Sheldon Vanauken in Vanauken's book, A Severe Mercy (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 189.

5.The Habit of Being, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), 126.

6.Blaise Pascal, Pascal's Pensées, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 113 (thought 425).

7.Jonathan Edwards, Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 4, ed. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 87.

8.Jonathan Edwards, The "Miscellanies," a-500, ed. by Thomas Schafer, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 495. Miscellany 448; see also 87, 251–52; 332, 410; #679 (not in the New Haven vol.). Emphasis added. These Miscellanies were

the private notebooks of Edwards from which he built his books, like The End for Which God Created the World.

9.Howard and Geraldine Taylor, Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, n.d.), 30.

06.10. Brothers, Let Us Pray

Prayer is the coupling of primary and secondary causes.

It is the splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven.

✥ ✥ ✥ A pastor who feels competent in himself to produce eternal fruit knows neither God nor himself. A pastor who does not know the rhythm of desperation and deliverance must have his sights only on what man can achieve.

✥ ✥ ✥ When we depend upon organizations, we get what organizations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do; when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.

A. C. Dixon

10 Brothers, Let Us Pray

Prayer is the coupling of primary and secondary causes. It is the splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven. How astonishing it is that God wills to do His work through people. It is doubly astonishing that He ordains to fulfill His plans by being asked to do so by us. God loves to bless His people. But even more He loves to do it in answer to prayer. For example, God knew that His purpose was to increase the men of Israel. But He said, “This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock” (Ezekiel 36:37). He wills to convey to us our blessings through the coupling of prayer.

God knew He would preserve Abimelech’s life if the king would return Sarah to Abraham. But He said to him: “Return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live” (Genesis 20:7). God desired to save Abimelech, but He wanted to do it through Abraham’s prayer. And who would say that God does not love the world or that He is hesitant to gather His harvest? Yet Jesus said, “Pray . . . the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Why must the owner of the farm be implored by his farmhands to send out more laborers? Because there is one thing God loves to do more than bless the world. He loves to bless the world in answer to prayer.

I was amazed once to hear a seminary graduate say how adequate he felt for the ministry after his years of schooling. This was supposed to be a compliment to the school. The reason this amazed me is that the greatest theologian and missionary and pastor who ever lived cried out, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16). Not because he was a bungler but because the awful calling of emitting the fragrance of eternal life for some and eternal death for others was a weight he could scarcely bear. A pastor who feels competent in himself to produce eternal fruit—which is the only kind that matters—knows neither God nor himself. A pastor who does not know the rhythm of desperation and deliverance must have his sights only on what man can achieve. But brothers, the proper goals of the life of a pastor are unques-tionably beyond our reach. The changes we long for in the hearts of our people can happen only by a sovereign work

of grace.

Salvation is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Love is a gift of God (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Faith is a gift of God (1 Timothy 1:14). Wisdom is a gift of God (Ephesians 1:17). Joy is a gift of God (Romans 15:13). Yet as pastors we must labor to “save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). We must stir up the people to love (Hebrews 10:24). We must advance their faith (Php 1:25). We must impart wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:7). We must work for their joy (2 Corinthians 1:24).

We are called to labor for that which is God’s alone to give. The essence of the Christian ministry is that its success is not within our reach.

God’s purpose is that we get the joy of service but that He gets the glory. “Whoever serves, [let him do so] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified ” (1 Peter 4:11). “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7). God does all His gracious work in such a way “that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1:29), which means He usually does it in answer to prayer. A cry for help from the heart of a childlike pastor is sweet praise in the ears of God. Nothing exalts Him more than the collapse of self-reliance that issues in passionate prayer for help. “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Psalms 50:15). Prayer is the translation into a thousand different words of a single sentence: “Apart from me [Christ] you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Oh, how we need to wake up to how much “nothing” we spend our time doing. Apart from prayer, all our scurrying about, all our talking, all our study amounts to “nothing.” For most of us the voice of self-reliance is ten times louder than the bell that tolls for the hours of prayer. The voice cries out: “You must open the mail, you must make that call, you must write this sermon, you must prepare for the board meeting, you must go to the hospital.” But the bell tolls softly: “Without Me you can do nothing.”

Both our flesh and our culture scream against spending an hour on our knees beside a desk piled with papers. It is un-American to be so impractical as to devote oneself to prayer and meditation two hours a day. And sometimes I fear that our seminaries conform to this deadly pragmatism that stresses management and maneuvering as ways to get things done with a token mention of prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

A. C. Dixon said, When we depend upon organizations, we get what orga-nizations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do; when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.1

I do not become excited when denominations or churches react to their lack of growth by merely adding a new program. I know that the reason so few conversions are happening through my church is not because we lack a program or staff. It is because we do not love the lost and yearn for their salvation the way we should. And the reason we do not love them as we ought is because such love is a miracle that overcomes our selfish bent. It cannot be managed or maneuvered into existence. It is an astonishing miracle.

Examine yourself: Does it lie within your power right now to weep over the spiritual destruction of the people on your street? Such tears come only through a profound work of God. If we want this

work of God in our lives and in our churches, there will be agonizing prayer: “God, break my heart!” I choose the word agonize carefully. It is the word Paul used in Romans 15:30, “Now I appeal to you, broth-ers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together [sunag■nizasthai] with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.” With such “agonizing together” God may grant tears. And without those tears we may shuffle members from church to church, but few people will pass from darkness to light.

Take one of your days off and go away by yourself and pray about how you should pray. Say to yourself right now, “God help me to do something radical in regard to prayer!” Refuse to believe that the daily hours Luther and Wesley and Brainerd and Judson spent in prayer are idealistic dreams of another era.

William Wilberforce, who fought unrelentingly in Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade in England, took his own spiritual tem-perature by consulting “the experience of all good men” and lamented: This perpetual hurry of business and company ruins me in soul if not in body. More solitude and earlier hours! I suspect I have been allotting habitually too little time to reli-gious exercises, as private devotion and religious meditation, Scripture-reading, etc. Hence I am lean and cold and hard. I had better allot two hours or an hour and a half daily. I have been keeping too late hours, and hence have had but a hurried half-hour in the morning to myself. Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition that without a due measure of private devotions the soul will grow lean. But all may be done through prayer—almighty prayer, I am ready to say—and why not? For that it is almighty is only through the gracious ordination of the God of loving truth. On then, pray, pray, pray!2 Are our packed calendars and handheld computers really fulfill-ing our own hunger for life in Christ, let alone the hunger of our people and the world? Are not our people really yearning to be around a man who has been around God? Is it not the lingering aroma of prayer that gives a sense of eternity to all our work?

Read about men of prayer, and you will get hungry to pray. Dozens of stories about praying saints have stirred me up to renewed prayer. I close with one from Charles Spurgeon, who wrote: That was a grand action by Jerome, one of the Roman fathers. He laid aside all pressing engagements and went to fulfill the call God gave him, viz., to translate the Holy Scriptures. His congregations were larger than many preach-ers of today, but he said to his people, “Now it is necessary that the Scriptures be translated; you must find another min-ister: I am bound for the wilderness and shall not return until my task is finished.” Away he went and labored and prayed until he produced the Latin Vulgate, which will last as long as the world stands. So we must say to our friends, “I must go away and have time for prayer and solitude.” And though we did not write Latin Vulgates, yet our work will be immortal: Glory to God.3

Notes 1.Quoted in G. Michael Cocoris, Evangelism: A Biblical Approach Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984), 108.

2.Quoted in E. M. Bounds, Power through Prayer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 116.

3.Charles Spurgeon, “The Christian Minister’s Private Prayer,” The Sword and Trowel, November 1868, 165.

Chapter 100

06.11. Brothers, Beware of Sacred Substitutes

Ministry is its own worst enemy.

It is not destroyed by the big, bad wolf of the world.

It destroys itself.

✥ ✥ ✥

Those incessant knocks at our door, and perpetual visits from idle persons, are so many buckets of cold water thrown upon our devout zeal. We must by some means secure uninterrupted meditation, or we shall lose power.

Charles Spurgeon ✥ ✥ ✥ The great threat to our prayer and our meditation on the Word of God is good ministry activity.

11 Brothers, Beware of Sacred Substitutes

Ministry is its own worst enemy. It is not destroyed by the big, bad wolf of the world. It destroys itself. One survey of pas-tors asked, “What are the most common obstacles to spiritual growth?” The top three were busyness (83 percent), lack of discipline (73 percent), and interruptions (47 percent). Most of these interruptions and most of our busyness are ministry related, not “worldly.” The great threat to our prayer and our meditation on the Word of God is good ministry activity. Charles Spurgeon put it like this: “Those incessant knocks at our door, and perpetual visits from idle persons, are so many buckets of cold water thrown upon our devout zeal. We must by some means secure uninterrupted medita-tion, or we shall lose power.”1 That is the point of Acts 6:2-4 : And the twelve summoned the full number of the disci-ples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Without extended and consecrated prayer, the ministry of the Word withers up and bears no fruit. The 120 were devoting them-selves to prayer (Acts 1:14) when the Spirit fell and gave them utter-ance with three thousand converts (Acts 2:41). These converts were also devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42) when signs and wonders were done and people were added to the church daily (Acts 2:43; Acts 2:47). Peter and his friends were engaged in prayer when the place was shaken and they were filled with the Spirit and spoke the Word boldly (Acts 4:31). Paul relied on prayer that he might be given utterance to open his mouth and proclaim the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 6:19).

Without extended, concentrated prayer, the ministry of the Word withers. And when the ministry of the Word declines, faith (Romans 10:17; Galatians 3:2; Galatians 3:5) and holiness (John 17:17) decline. Activity may continue, but life and power and fruitfulness fade away. Therefore, whatever opposes prayer opposes the whole work of ministry. And what opposes the pastor’s life of prayer

more than anything? The ministry. It is not shopping or car repairs or sickness or yard work that squeezes our prayers into hurried corners of the day. It is budget development and staff meetings and visitation and counseling and answering mail and writing reports and reading journals and answer-ing the phone and preparing messages. The effort to meet needs is, ironically, often the enemy of prayer. Literally, Acts 6:3 says, “Brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this need.” The care of the widows was a real need. And it was precisely this need which threatened apostolic prayer. But the apostles would not yield to the temptation. This must mean that prayer demanded a large part of their uninterrupted time. If they had thought of prayer as something you do while washing dishes or cooking (or driving a car between hospitals), they would not have seen table-serving as a threat to prayer. Prayer was a time-consuming labor during which other duties had to be set aside.

They had learned from Jacob and from Jesus that whole nights may have to be spent in prayer (Genesis 32:24; Luke 6:12). Under the drain of ministry, we must “withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:16). Before significant pastoral encounters we must pray alone (Luke 9:18). For Jesus and the apostles the work of prayer demanded significant amounts of solitude: “In the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). The apostles said, “We will devote ourselves to prayer” (Acts 6:4). The word translated “devote ourselves” (proskartere■) emphasizes the unbending commitment of the apostles to preserve time for prayer. It means “to persist at” and “remain with.” It is used in Acts 10:7 to refer to the loyalty with which some soldiers served Cornelius. The idea is to be strong and persistent and unwavering in one’s assignment. So the apostles were saying: No matter how urgent the pressures upon us to spend our time doing good deeds, we will not forsake our chief work. We will persist in it. We will not waver or turn aside from the work of prayer. This word (proskartere■) becomes firmly attached to the ministry of prayer in the early church. In Acts 1:14 the disciples were “devoting them-selves to prayer,” and in Acts 2:42 they “devoted themselves” to “prayers.” Then in the epistles of Paul, this practice becomes a command: “Be con-stant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). “Continue steadfastly in prayer” (Colossians 4:2). “Keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). The more heavily engaged one is in battling the powers of darkness, the greater will be one’s sense of need to spend time in prayer. Therefore, the apostles combine “prayer” and “the ministry of the Word” and free themselves from time-consuming good deeds. The importance of prayer rises in proportion to the importance of the things we should give up in order to pray. If the work we are to give up is a work which requires great spiritual depth and power, then how much more crucial and demanding must be the work of prayer? And this is just the case in Acts 6:3. The text does not say, “Apostles should do the spiritual work of prayer and get some practical folks to serve tables.” It says, “Pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” (Deacons and trustees ought not to be worldly financiers. They ought to be full of the Spirit and of wisdom.) It is not just the daily, routine demands of the pastorate that threaten our life of prayer. Prayer is also menaced by opportunities for ministry which demand fullness of the Spirit and wisdom. Even this we must forsake in order to devote ourselves to prayer.

Martin Luther was once asked by his barber, “Dr. Luther, how do you pray?” Astonishingly, one of the busiest men of the Reformation wrote a forty-page response for his barber, Peter Beskendorf. His words are a great inspiration for us to beware of sacred substitutes. A good clever barber must

have his thoughts, mind and eyes concentrated upon the razor and the beard and not for-get where he is in his stroke and shave. If he keeps talking or looking around or thinking of something else, he is likely to cut a man's mouth or nose—or even his throat. So anything that is to be done well ought to occupy the whole man with all his faculties and members. As the saying goes: he who thinks of many things thinks of nothing and accomplishes no good. How much more must prayer possess the heart exclu-sively and completely if it is to be a good prayer![2]

Luther knew well the struggle to get down to praying when a dozen good things press for our time. So he exhorted himself and his barber:

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business in the morning and the last in the evening. Guard yourself against such false and deceitful thoughts that keep whispering: Wait a while. In an hour or so I will pray. I must first finish this or that. Thinking such thoughts we get away from prayer into other things that will hold us and involve us till the prayer of the day comes to naught.[3]

Oh, how we need to hear the earnest exhortations of our brothers. I preach to myself here. I long to know God in prayer better than I do. I hear the plea of A. A. Bonar, and I am prompted to get up from my desk and go to my prayer bench and linger for a while with the Lord in prayer:

O brother, pray; in spite of Satan, pray; spend hours in prayer; rather neglect friends than not pray; rather fast, and lose breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper—and sleep too—than not pray. And we must not talk about prayer, we must pray in right earnest. The Lord is near. He comes softly while the virgins slumber.[4] Brothers, beware of sacred substitutes. Devote yourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

Notes 1.Charles H. Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 309.

2.Quoted from Walter Trobisch, Martin Luther's Quiet Time (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 4.

3.Ibid., 5.

4.Quoted in Free Grace Broadcaster (Pensacola, FL: Mount Zion Bible Church) no. 153, Summer 1995, 25.

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