

the **Banner** *of Sovereign Grace Truth*



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A Periodical for Young and Old

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Glory follows afflictions, not as the day follows the night
but as the spring follows the winter;
for the winter prepares the earth for the spring,
so do afflictions sanctified, prepare the soul for *glory*.

—RICHARD SIBBES

Call His Name Jesus

MEDITATION

REV. DON OVERBEEK

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou
shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his
people from their sins. — Matthew 1:21

One of the first words children learn to write is their name. When someone is lost, the first question they must answer is, “What is your name?” The key point of identifying yourself is your name, which is matched to your date of birth and perhaps telephone number. Names always have been and always will be important.

In the first sixteen verses of Matthew, names become the primary focus of the passage. Each person listed here in the genealogy of Jesus Christ was blessed with a name that not only identified them, but had a specific meaning and gave them a place in the blessed lineage of the Lord. There is still one name that garners all the attention in the closing verses of Matthew 1. This is the name “Jesus.”

The name “Jesus” simply means “Jehovah saves.” According to an old historian, this was a common name among the Jews. In the Old Testament history, two notable people shared the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus—Joshua, the successor of Moses who led the tribes of Israel into the Promised Land, and Joshua the high priest who, with Zerubbabel, brought the Jews back to their own land after their time in captivity (Zech. 3).

In the blessed name Jesus, which is dear to every believer’s heart, we are taught about the Person and work of the One who received the name. The name Savior would have a rich meaning to the Jewish readers of this Gospel. Their Jewish history was rich in experiences of deliverance, and some Jews even looked forward to a Messiah who would save the nation and restore their ancient glory. In the Person of Jesus, the Great Deliverer, all the attributes of God would work together to save. In calling His name Jesus, the passage is declaring that it is impossible to find salvation anywhere and in anyone else. The Apostle Peter resoundingly echoes this theme in Acts 4:12, and therefore it must be our great goal to make this name known to those around us.

Certain people are on the receiving end of Jesus’ Person and work. This is not a certain select nation, for the verse says, “he shall save his people....” His people are those who would be taught by Him, follow Him, and trust Him as their Savior. This is to say that all those who come to Christ “weary and heavy laden” would receive rest in belonging to Him (Matt. 11:28). All those will be saved who can answer the question posed to the disciples in Matthew 16:15, “But whom say ye that I am?” with Peter’s well-known answer of faith and Jesus’ reply, “thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” To be a disciple of Christ is to live in complete allegiance to His name. It is not enough to merely know that a person named Jesus lived and did much good and try to follow His example. It is not in being able to discourse about the meaning and etymology of the name. It is having His name define you, touch your deepest affections, and drive your obedience.

Then there is the reality that Jesus’ whole Person and work would oppose and remedy “their sin.” He did not have His own sin to oppose and thereby weaken His ability to intervene with theirs. No, their state was one of sin, as law-breakers, rebels, and slaves to sin. All evil is included in sin. It is most wretched and is the cause of all our misery and death. Yet sin, as it opposes God as Creator, Law-giver, and Judge would be overcome and undone in its power by the life and death of this Savior. So while the sinner can do nothing to save himself from the punishment of sin or its defilement, Jesus is able and willing. This is the joy of belonging to Jesus—not just being delivered from the power of sin at the time of salvation, but sharing in the victory over the defilement of sin through life, until all His people are glorified, never to sin anymore!

Rev. Don Overbeek is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Bradford, Ontario.

Immanuel

MEDITATION

DR. GERALD M. BILKES



Immanuel is one of Christ's most precious names. It is a combination of two Hebrew words that together mean "God with us." The Gospel of Matthew explains that Christ received this name in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

For many people, the name *Immanuel* has a nice ring to it that suggests comfort and hope in times of trouble. Yet there is a lot more substance and significance to this name. The encouragement Christians can take from this name is no mere vague impression or passing emotion; it's truth has attached to it a glorious beauty and a wide range of blessings.

THE *beauty* OF IMMANUEL

The Bible uses the name *Immanuel* mostly in connection with the incarnation of Christ. The first time we hear this name is when Isaiah prophesied the virgin birth of Christ: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

Isaiah spoke these words to Ahaz, king of Judah, who was being threatened by surrounding nations. When you read the context you find that, sadly, Ahaz had no interest in God being with him. Despite that, Isaiah told him a person named "God with us" would come. In the fullness of time, Christ would become incarnate in order to bring God's presence to us. He would be born of a virgin, thus escaping the corruption of David's line while remaining David's son.

Christ is an incarnate Savior. That's the beauty of *Immanuel*. He didn't come as an angel or some spirit manifesting itself from time to time. He took to Himself bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. No other religion can give such comfort and hope.

THE *blessings* OF IMMANUEL

Because the Son of God took to Himself our nature, a myriad of blessings are represented in His name *Immanuel*:

1. He is "God with us" to reconcile sinners to God. Man is born alienated from God, and God can have no fellowship with him because of sin. But *Immanuel* came to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). He gave His life as an offering so that sinners can be brought back into fellowship with God (1 John 1:3). On the cross, He could promise the repentant thief that he would be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:43), that is to say, in fellowship with God.
2. He is "God with us" to guide, empower, and expand His church. Having ascended into heaven, Christ is no longer physically with believers here on earth. Yet as the Heidelberg Catechism expresses so beautifully, "with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us" (Q&A 47). At the close of the Gospel of Matthew, *Immanuel* promised His church, "Behold, I am with you alway" (Matt. 28:20).
3. He is "God with us" to comfort His people. Think of Psalm 46, which so beautifully describes the encouraging presence of God in the midst of very chaotic circumstances. He is "a very present help in trouble" (v. 1). Christians need not fear, even when the earth shakes and kingdoms rage. God's presence with His people is constant: "The Lord of hosts is with us" (vv. 7, 11). Believer, God is near you, to help and protect you.
4. He is "God with us" to bring His people to glory. We read in Revelation 21:3 of the new heavens and the new earth, where "God himself shall be with them." In glory, the presence of God with His people will be perfect and uninterrupted. Revelation 22:4 tells us that they shall even see His face.

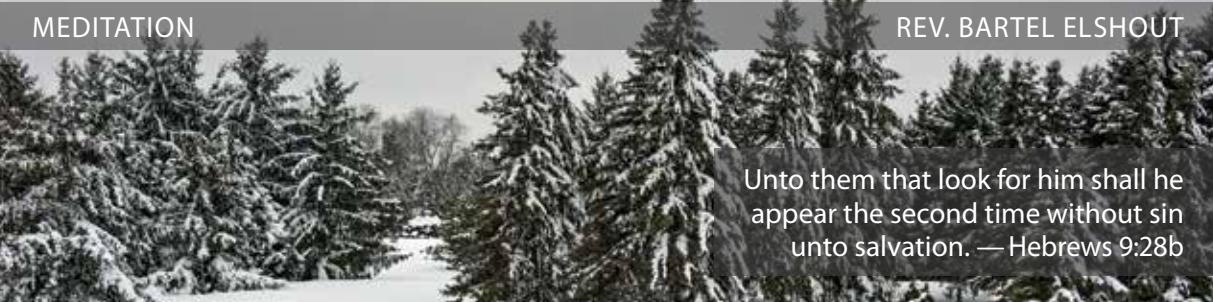
Do you believe the record God has given *Immanuel*? Do you see how low Christ stooped to be "God with sinners"? Do you experience the blessings of "God with us"? These can only be ours through a new birth from above. His birth calls us to ask: Have I been born again? If so, He is your *Immanuel*.

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

New Year's Eve Meditation

MEDITATION

REV. BARTEL ELSHOUT



Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. — Hebrews 9:28b

What did you hope for in 2013? Many who began the year hoping that their pursuit of happiness would be rewarded at last will end this year in bitter disillusionment. Many believed the siren song of the world that material possessions would yield such happiness, only to discover the truth of a Dutch proverb that the possession of a treasure is the end of its pleasure.

Others have encountered trials and great upheaval in their lives, confirming that this life so often proves to be a valley of tears, and that the strength of our years is “labor and sorrow” (Ps. 90:10). Some have faced the inescapable reality of death amid their families or circle of friends. The psalmist sums this up: “My life is like a cloud that comes and disappears; has man, then, lived in vain? Who can, in death’s dark hour, escape the dismal grave with all its ruinous power?” (Psalter 422:8 [Psalm 89]).

And yet in the midst of a world in which the vast majority of men live lives that are no more than “a vain shew” (Ps. 39:6), there are those who by the grace of God live lives profoundly characterized by the words of Paul, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Our text describes them as those who “look for Him.” How beautifully these simple words describe the essence of true spiritual life! The spiritual life of the believer revolves entirely around the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To have Him as their everlasting portion and to enjoy Him forever is the deepest desire of their souls. They yearn with Paul, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10a).

Looking and yearning for Christ is the fruit of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose great work it is to glorify Christ in the hearts of sinners. He has led them to embrace Christ as the perfect Substitute of sinners, appointed once to die and endure God’s inescapable judgment upon sin (v. 27). In this crucified and risen Christ, they have found complete salvation; He is their altogether lovely Lord and Savior whom they love in sincerity (Eph. 6:24). They look for Him—in their prayer closet, when they read their Bible, when they listen to the preaching of God’s Word, while partaking of the sacraments. Their pursuit of happiness consists in the pursuit of Him whom to know “is life eternal” (John 17:3a).

However, our text indicates that all who love this precious Savior are also looking forward to His Second Coming—a longing that will be proportionate to the exercise of their faith. Concluding another year can intensify that longing; we are coming closer to that glorious moment when He shall “appear the second time without sin unto salvation”—and “when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2)!

Dear reader, the crucial question at the end of 2013 is this: is your life characterized by this looking and longing for the Lord Jesus Christ? It is the only life worth living and will culminate in the unbroken enjoyment of eternal life with Christ in heaven. If this is not your life and you were to die this way, Christ will appear for your damnation, and on the great Day of Judgment you will cry out with all who have believed the truth too late: “Hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 6:16–17). Look for Him now while He is yet to be found, for He promises to all who hear the gospel that He will in no wise cast out those who come to Him.

If your confession is “Give me Jesus, else I die,” the One you are looking for is coming. He declares to you, “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

THE PILGRIM MENTALITY OF THE PURITANS

Interview with Tim Challies (www.challies.com)

Tim Challies interviewed our editor over a period of eight weeks on the final eight chapters of A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life, and placed these articles on the Challies blog. We are printing them in this periodical with his permission. All eight articles deal with how the Puritans brought theology into practice. The first article deals with Puritan theology being shaped by a pilgrim mentality.

1. This chapter discusses the pilgrim mentality. Most of us are familiar with Pilgrim's Progress, but should we understand that the pilgrim mentality was prevalent across most or all of the Puritans?

Yes, the Puritans consistently saw the Christian life as a pilgrim's journey to heaven. They suffered much and chose obedience over compromise, keeping their eyes upon Christ and heaven. J. I. Packer says, "The Puritans have taught me to see and feel the transitoriness of this life, to think of it, with all its richness, as essentially the gymnasium and dressing-room where we are prepared for heaven, and to regard readiness to die as the first step in knowing how to live."¹

2. Could you give a short definition of that pilgrim mentality and tell us what difference it made to the Puritans?

The pilgrim mentality is living against this world in hope of glory in another world by faith in Christ.

Like Moses, believers in Christ today choose to trade this world's pleasures for present suffering and future glory with Christ (Heb. 11:24–26). Jeremiah Burroughs said that faith has power "to take off the heart from the world" because its "primary work" is "for the soul to cast itself upon God in Christ for all the good and happiness it ever expects...upon God as an all-sufficient good." This weans our affections from the world, and enables us to wait patiently on the Lord (Ps. 37:7).²

Faith also empowers believers to rejoice in what we do not see, for, as Burroughs said, "Faith makes the future good of spiritual and eternal things to be as present to the soul, and to work upon the soul, as if they were present."³

The Puritans lived in a world of suffering, political oppression, epidemic plagues, and civil war, where many of

their children never survived to adulthood. They also suffered because of their stance against worldliness and false worship. Yet they had a vibrant joy and hope. They were positive people. Why? John Trapp said, "He that rides to be crowned, will not think much of a rainy day."⁴

The Puritans enjoyed God's creation, but did not entangle themselves in the pleasures and pursuits of this world, because they were headed for something better. William Perkins said, "Pilgrims take but little delight in their journeys, because they think themselves not at home." They used this world as if they did not use it, for it was passing away (1 Cor. 7:31).⁵

Christians must long to leave this world and be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Perkins said that a "pilgrim" is "always thinking" of his homeland "and sighing after it." Christians must desire heaven (Heb. 11:16), seek heaven (Col. 3:1), and use this world not as an end in itself but as a means to gain heaven.⁶

3. What do we stand to gain, as contemporary Christians, if we regain something of this pilgrim mentality? What do we stand to lose or to miss if we do not regain it?

First, we would gain a more antithetical stance towards this world. This is not isolationism, where we try to hide from sin and the devil (impossible!), but warfare, where we stand for righteousness against the wickedness and accusations of the world. Peter speaks of this when he calls believers to abstain from sinful desires as "strangers and pilgrims" in the world, precisely because lusts war against our souls and the world accuses us of evil (1 Peter 2:11).

This world is not a friend to help pilgrims to heaven; it is dangerous country we must traverse on our way there. William Ames said, "This may serve to admonish us, not



EDITORIAL · DR. JOEL R. BEEKE

to place our inheritance or our treasure in the things of this world, [and] to exhort us, to lift up our hearts always toward our heavenly country; and to gain all those things that may help us forward.”⁷

Second, we would gain a strong *foundation for suffering and dying*. Perkins said that one of Christianity’s great lessons is that “we must live that we may die in faith.” Few Christians today consider how to suffer well and how to die for God’s glory (Phil. 1:20), but how many of us will avoid pain and death?

To deal with these inevitable realities (if the Lord tarries), we need vision that penetrates beyond the horizons of our mortality. Perkins said that faith is like the tall mast of a ship which a sailor may climb and see land while it is still “afar off” (Heb. 11:13).⁸ As pilgrims of faith we need not fear death. Thomas Watson said that “death will put an end to a weary pilgrimage”—it will take away the pilgrim’s staff and replace it with a crown.⁹

Third, we would gain *unshakable optimism and hope*. I share the same concerns that many American Christians have about the direction of our government and popular culture. But I think that we face a danger as great as persecution and societal decay: I fear that evangelicals are in danger of bitterness and despair. Could it be that we have forgotten that this world is not our home?

The Puritans conquered by the blood of the Lamb. Some scholars might say that the Puritans ultimately lost every political and ecclesiastical battle in which they engaged, but I believe that they triumphed in the spiritual battle for the kingdom, and genuine believers still today are more than overcomers in Christ. John Owen said, “Though our persons fall, our cause shall be as truly, certainly, and infallibly victorious, as that Christ sits at the right hand

of God.” Christ has won the victory, He will bring His kingdom, and all His called and chosen people will share in it (Rev. 17:14).¹⁰

Ultimately, the pilgrim mentality is not about just a place but a person. Christians should see all their earthly lives as a journey to see the face of God. My dad prayed hundreds of times with us in family worship, “Lord, let our lives be primarily a preparation to meet Thee in the righteousness and peace of Christ.” That’s the prayer and God-centered desire of a pilgrim.

1. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 13.

2. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Moses’ Self-Denial*, ed. Don Kistler (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2010), 87.

3. Burroughs, *Moses’ Self-Denial*, 93.

4. John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Hugh Martin (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1867), 1:92 [on Gen. 24:61].

5. William Perkins, *A Commentary on Hebrews 11 (1609 Edition)*, ed. John H. Augustine (1609; repr., New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 73 [on Heb. 11:9].

6. Perkins, *A Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 107 [on Heb. 11:16].

7. William Ames, *A Commentary upon the First Epistle of Peter*, in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithful Minister of Christ William Ames* (London: Iohn Rothwell, 1643), 53.

8. Perkins, *A Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 95, 79 [on Heb. 11:13].

9. Thomas Watson, “The Saint’s Desire to Be with Christ,” in *Select Works* (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, and Co., 1829), 2:14.

10. John Owen, “The Use of Faith, If Popery Should Return upon Us,” in *The Works of John Owen* (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 9:508.

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THE GOD OF THEN IS THE GOD OF NOW

ZECHARIAH 2:1–5

He changes not

THE TRANSITION FROM ONE YEAR to the next is a time for special reflection about where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. There are always reasons for praise and thanksgiving in remembrance of what the Lord has done; there are usually regrets for personal failures. There is always the resolve not to fail again and the expectancy that the Lord will do even greater things in the days ahead. But too often in our assessment, we tend to discouragement when things are not what we think they should be.

Though not at the threshold of a new year, the population of Judah that returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile was at the threshold of a new day. They had returned to the land in obedience; they were where they were supposed to be; but nothing was right. The city was in ruins and the Temple lay in shambles. They were not experiencing the expected blessing they assumed would accompany their return to the Promised Land. Ezra records some of the discouragements and oppositions faced by the people. In His goodness, God raised up Zechariah, the prophet of hope, to address the discouragement factor. Significantly, Zechariah's name means "Jehovah remembers"; that is something God's people should never forget. Zechariah encouraged the people and motivated them to kingdom service by directing their attention to God's unfailing purpose and plan for them. Aspects of the plan involved the distant future, but the timing of the promise was irrelevant to the fact of it. The hope was certain. God transcends time, whether past or future, so what we can learn about the God of "then" is always applicable to "now" because He changes not.

As we approach a new year, I want to learn from Zechariah's word of hope to the post-exilic inhabitants of Jerusalem that God's purpose for His people is greater than their expectations. That was true then; it is true now.

Zechariah 2 is the third in a series of eight night visions that the Lord gave the prophet addressing the whole glorious scope and sequence of His purpose and plan. In this vision, Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line that is about to

measure Jerusalem and teaches three wonderful truths for consideration: 1) God's purpose for His people is greater than expectations (vv. 1–5); 2) God's protection of His people gives confidence for duty (vv. 6–9); and 3) God's presence with His people is reason for joy (vv. 10–13). In this little study, we are going to think especially on the first truth for encouragement as we look ahead to the coming year and learn the principal lesson of the vision that Paul sums up in the amazing words of Ephesians 3:20. God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

FAITH'S EXPECTATIONS ARE GREAT

The mission of the man with the measuring line was to mark the borders of Jerusalem to identify the "city limits." The mission itself was no small demonstration of faith, for in a very real sense there was nothing to measure. As far as the eye could see, the city was in total ruin. The rubble of walls demolished in the Babylonian destruction cluttered the ground, and the once glorious Temple lay in ruins. The evidences of past sins and failures were overwhelmingly obvious. Sight saw nothing but devastation, but faith was able to look beyond the debris to envision a restored city. This was not just wishful thinking but an expression of faith in God's promise. Jeremiah had recorded God's hopeful words prior to the exile: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11). Part of those divinely peaceful thoughts was God's good word that they would return to this place (Jer. 29:10–14). Measuring the city limits was in essence claiming the promise that God would again be jealous for His people and return to them in mercy (1:14–16). It is always good and proper to act according to God's promises.

But yet, to measure is to mark borders, to set limits. Faith expresses the confidence that God will keep His word; but sometimes sight interferes and interjects a bit of caution lest we believe too much. So often the weakness of faith is evident in its exercise. There is always a risk of believing too much lest we become disappointed when what we perceive to

God will keep His word

let us be bold to ask of Him great things

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLE STUDY

DR. MICHAEL P. V. BARRETT

be the way God should work does not look like our notions. This is where the man with the measuring line was, and it is where so many Christians today tend to be as well. We know and believe what God has said, yet sometimes our reason is clouded by perception and experience that somehow prevents us from claiming all the riches we have in Christ or praying for things “too big.” We believe; it should be our prayer that God will help our unbelief.

GOD'S PURPOSE IS GREATER

In his vision, Zechariah sees an angel that approaches the man with the measuring line and essentially instructs him to stop measuring the city. Measuring the city then was premature because “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls” (v. 4). To mark the city limits was impossible because in God’s plan there would be no walls to mark the borders or limits. Here is the remarkable lesson: God’s purpose transcends our limitations to grasp it, and measuring the fullness of God’s blessing is impossible. That was true in Zechariah’s day; it is true in our day as well.

The text gives two reasons for the prohibition to stop trying to measure the city walls. In the ancient world, walls served two purposes: to mark territory and to provide defense. The two explanations address both of these purposes. First, there will be no walls to measure because the population of the city cannot be contained (“the multitude of men and cattle therein” [v. 4]). Years earlier, Isaiah gave the same instruction: “Enlarge the place of thy tent... for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles” (Isa. 54:2–3). In the same passage, the Lord says, “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee” (Isa. 54:7). In

God’s purpose of grace, citizenship in His kingdom extends to and includes people from every race on earth (see Rev. 7:9). With this explanation, the Lord directs attention away from the physical city to that spiritual city and kingdom of far greater importance than brick and mortar. It points to the unrelenting advance of Christ’s church.

Second, there will be no wall to measure because God’s presence provides inviolable security: “I...will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her” (v. 5). Later on, Zechariah describes a scene of peace where those who are most susceptible to danger (the young and old) are in the most dangerous places (the city streets) but are safe and secure because the Lord is “returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem” (8:2–5). It appears to be a peace that is too marvelous for human comprehension, but it is not anything extraordinary to God (8:6). His presence makes the difference, and if God be for His people then none can be against them (Rom. 8:31)—at least, not in a way that really matters.

So as we anticipate what the next while is going to bring our way, we should be encouraged by Zechariah’s vision, which is as relevant to us in the twenty-first century AD

as it was to those in the sixth century BC. The God of then is the God of now. It is good to know that God’s people in every age are part of His unfailing plan of grace. Let us be bold to ask of Him great things regarding our work in His kingdom, knowing and believing that He is able to do far more than we can ask or even think. Let us put away the measuring line.



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PREPARING FOR TRIALS

suffer well

growth of the church

ONE OF THE GREAT HALLMARKS of the apostolic church was the grace God gave them to suffer well. The blood of unflinching martyrs was one of the most powerful factors in the growth of the church. As many of them faced imprisonment and other forms of persecution, outside observers recognized that “these people suffer well.” The steadfastness of the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints is a call to follow the Lord in adversity and persecution—whatever affliction the Lord has in store for us.

For many in our world today, however, the idea that there would be a cost to following the Lord is unacceptable. In some quarters, the “health and wealth gospel” has made many suppose that being a Christian will invariably translate into earthly and material comforts. While we decry this perversion of the gospel, the general prosperity and plenty of our societies has subtly taken hold of many of us. We tend to think of Christian suffering as an exception rather than the rule.

To the extent that we believe this, however, it ironically only *burts* us. We stray from the truth of which Paul reminded the new converts in Asia Minor, namely, that it is “through much tribulation” that we shall “enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). But even worse than that, we are liable to become offended “when tribulation or persecution ariseth” (Matt. 13:21).

ARMED FOR TRIALS

The Scriptures show us how rightly to prepare for what God has in store for us. Peter speaks specifically of arming believers for trials. He writes, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind” (1 Pet. 4:1). Later in this same chapter he explains, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet. 4:12). The Greek literally means: “Let the fiery trial not be a stranger to you.”¹ If you have suffered anything major in your life, you know that trials can feel so strange. You think something has gone horribly wrong. Yet Peter prepares the church so that trials would not feel unexpected, useless, or inappropriate for followers of Christ.

Persecution was heating up tremendously in the days Peter wrote this epistle. These newly converted men and women, young people, and children were at risk of being

imprisoned, slandered, maligned, discriminated against, marginalized, and even killed. This kind of persecution has been present since the beginning and still today puts Christians in the furnace in many parts of the world (John 15:18; Heb. 11:32–38).

Scripture speaks of other trials as well, which can be no less severe. James speaks for example of *temptation* as a fiery trial. He writes, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12). Then there is the *affliction* that comes in everyday life. It can be mild or severe, temporary or permanent, obvious or hidden. It can be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. These can be no less severe trials than suffering in a physical prison for the name of Christ.

How can we best arm ourselves for trials? Allow me to highlight three ways.

SEEING THE FATHER'S HAND

If believers are ever going to “think [trials] not strange,” they must, first of all, *look behind trials and trace them to their source*, namely, God. The Catechism says so beautifully that “all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand” (Lord’s Day 10; A. 27). If the psalmist can say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Ps. 119:71), surely his afflictions must have come from God, or he would not have profited. In fact, the psalmist says exactly that four verses further: “In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me” (Ps. 119:75).

The well-known John Flavel echoes the same truth: “It is the great support and solace of the saints in all the distresses that befall them here, that there is a wise Spirit sitting in all the wheels of motion, and governing the most eccentric creatures and their most pernicious designs to blessed and happy issues.”²

If we see suffering as capricious, random, or coming from some source other than God, we will shrink from it. Thomas Brooks writes:

There is no sickness so little God but hath a finger in it, though it be but the acting of the little finger. And as the scribe is more eyed, and more properly said to write, than the pen; and as every workman is more eyed, and more properly said to effect his work, than the tools which he uses as his instruments: the Lord, who is the chief agent

deeper sense of joy in God than before

and mover in all actions, and who has the greatest hand in all our afflictions, is far more to be eyed and owned than any inferior or subordinate causes whatever.³

If we learn to live eyeing the ultimate source of our trials, they will not be strange to us.

KNOWING THE SAVIOR'S PRESENCE

A second way that trials will not be strange to believers is *that they know that God is with them in trials*. He does not leave us to ourselves in our trials, despite what we often think and feel. God's presence with His people in their suffering was promised by Isaiah: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (43:2).

This is clearly illustrated in the story of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar had to testify, "I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25). This was nothing other than Christ, Emmanuel—God with us—in the furnace with His people.

God's people often have the greatest sense of God's intimate presence during trials. They can say with Paul, "All men forsook me, but the Lord stood with me" (2 Tim. 4:16–17). Elsewhere, he boasted, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:31ff).

If there ever was anyone for whom trials should have felt strange, it should have been the Son of God. He knew no sin, nor had committed any sin. Yet, Christ was "acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). More importantly, Christ not only entered into His people's affliction, but paid the price for their sins. Samuel Rutherford consoled: "Ye know that the weightiest end of the cross of Christ that is laid upon you lieth upon your strong Saviour."⁴ Jesus went through the fires of Gethsemane and Golgotha to pay for the sins of His people so they would not need to. He had to go through the

flame of God's wrath so that the fires of God's wrath would be extinguished for His people.

RESTING SATISFIED IN GOD

Believers will also be helped when, thirdly, *they see how much greater God becomes to them after the trial*. For God is not only the source of the trial, He is also the support in the trial and the satisfaction of the Christian after he or she is tried. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67). More than ever, the psalmist stays more closely attached to God's Word. It is remarkable that it usually takes trials for believers to drink more deeply from the well of God Himself. We know that we have done so when there is a deeper sense of joy in God than before. We learn to approve of the trial and especially of our God who sent it.

Even if we don't understand why God is afflicting us, we should accept our afflictions as quickly as possible and approve of God's way of dealing with us. Edward Payson, a godly Congregational minister in Portland, Maine, was asked if he could see any particular reason for his frequent and heavy afflictions. He replied, "No, but I am as well satisfied as if I could see ten thousand. God's will is the very perfection of all reasons."⁵

It is said that Charles and Susannah Spurgeon had a plaque on their bedroom wall with the words of Isaiah 48:10: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." What a way to remind yourself that trials are not strange! Suffering children of God, consider Him who perfectly ordains your trials. Consider Him who accompanies you in them whether you feel His presence or not. Consider Him who uses them to purify you and to impress more of His own image upon you. Then trials won't be strange, but strangely familiar.

1. The Greek is *xenizoo*, from which we get the word "xenophobia."

2. John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, 6 vols. (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 4:342–43.

3. Thomas Brooks, *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod; With Sovereign Antidotes for Every Case* (London: W. Nicholson, 1806), 26–27.

4. Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, [reprint] 2006), 34.

5. Asa Cummings, *A Memoir of the Rev. Edward Payson* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1830), 353.

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TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT DOING WHAT'S RIGHT

Questions Answered for Children

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

What does "turn the other cheek" mean? Is self-defense against your religion?

That depends what you mean by self-defense. If you mean when physically attacked, the answer is no, self-defense is not against the Christian faith. If you mean being charged with a crime or sued in a court of law, when the truth is at stake, the answer is also no. If you mean being personally challenged or criticized, self-defense can be called for when the glory of God is at stake, and then in other cases it is usually wisest to give our opponent no answer.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:39, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." The picture here is of someone slapping you across the face in a public insult (2 Cor. 11:20). Your face stings, your pride is injured, and your anger flares. Christ called us to renounce personal vengeance, however, and to swallow our pride and love our enemy.

On the one hand, He was not describing a stab with a sword but a slap in the face. Therefore He did not prohibit self-defense when someone threatens us with physical harm. God's prohibition of murder implies that human life, including your life, is precious and should be protected from wrongful harm. It is good and right to care for and protect our bodies so long as it does not distract us from the path of duty (Eph. 5:28–29).

On the other hand, we must willingly part with our honor before men when criticized and insulted. Most of the time, we jump to our own defense too quickly. We must learn the wisdom of Jesus who often did not answer His accusers (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:63; 27:12, 14). We must pray for guidance in such cases. If we feel that the truth needs to be spoken, we must do so in love, not answering our attacker in the same bitter spirit with which he confronts us.

Above all, however, we must be concerned to seek grace to defend the name of God more than our own name. For this, we need the continual influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The next time someone says something bad about you or hurts you, try to think about how many times people said bad things about Jesus and how He kept loving sinners. Pray to the Lord that you may love your brother, sister, or friend when he hurts you. Say to Him, "Lord, give me a new heart and make me like Jesus, so that I will show love instead of hatred and be nice to people when they are mean to me."

What's wrong with playing the lottery?

Lottery fever is running rampant yet again. This year, three lottery winners received lump sums of about \$100 million each. Our mailbox regularly contains promises of prizes, sweepstakes, winning numbers, and bonuses, or questions like "What would you do with \$1,000,000?"

Money is not evil. A lot of good can be done with it, and God encourages us to work hard and earn money so that we can share it with those in need (Eph. 4:28). The rich should enjoy their wealth and be rich in good works (1 Tim. 6:17–18).

But playing the lottery comes from an evil and destructive motive. There is no reason to gamble except out of a desire to get rich. First Timothy 6:9–10 says, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." God commanded us, "Thou shalt not covet" (Ex. 20:17), and playing the lottery caters to coveting.

The lottery promotes proud delusions of being God instead of faithful stewardship of what we have. Whether we win the jackpot or just dream about what we would do with it, the desire to win millions is essentially the same as man's first sin in Paradise: "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). We waste our time and money when the chances of winning the lottery are not one-in-a-million, but closer to one-in-a-hundred-million—or worse. Sadly, many lottery players are poor, and playing the lottery makes more than 99 percent of them even poorer.

Last, winning the lottery distorts your relationships. The Bible warns, "The rich hath many friends" (Prov. 14:20)—false friends who only want their money. Wealth isolates you. It thrusts you into a position of responsibility for which you are not prepared: managing massive resources. Worst of all, it can make it very difficult for you to escape hell and enter God's kingdom (Matt. 19:24). When money abounds, people tend to forget God (Deut. 8:11–18).

It is far better to pray for God to simply provide your needs. Proverbs 30:8–9 says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of the Lord in vain." Godliness with contentment is true riches (1 Tim. 6:6).

What does Jesus mean by saying we must hate our parents, brothers, and sisters?

In Luke 14:26, Christ said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." These are strong words. What did our Lord mean?

Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). So His teachings must fit with God's commandments to honor our father and our mother (Ex. 20:12) and to love our neighbor, including our brothers and sisters, as ourselves (Lev. 19:18).

When Jesus said we must "hate" our families and our own lives to be His disciples, He was saying that we must love Him far more than them. God must have our whole heart (Mark 12:30). He said elsewhere, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37).

Sometimes obeying the Lord will make a parent, brother, or friend mad at you. Christ's teachings will divide families when one person follows Christ but others do not (Matt. 10:34–35). If that happens to you, then you must still confess Christ before men (Matt. 10:32–33). Having a parent or brother or sister against you might hurt you deeply. But Jesus said that we must take up our crosses and follow Him. It's costly to be a Christian (Luke 14:27–28). So we keep on loving our families and praying for them, but Christ is our Lord.

What do I do for people who constantly misuse God's name like, "O God"?

This is indeed a problem. God loves His name and expects us to treat it with reverence. He says in the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7). "In vain" means treating God's name as if it were nothing, unimportant, or without significance.

We should always speak of God with a sense that He is the most important Being in all the world. If we could put God on one side of a scale and all the universe, all people, and all angels on the other, then they would be lighter than a feather compared to the weight of His glory (Isa. 40:15). God is determined to glorify His name in all of the world (Mal. 1:11).

But nothing is more common today than for people to use "God," "Lord," "Jesus," or "Christ" as meaningless filler words or even curses. What can we do?

First, we should examine ourselves. Is our speech clean and reverent? Do we regard God with reverence and awe in our hearts? Do we honor Him with our actions?

Second, pray for our friends who are cursing. Christ taught us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." We are asking that people would treat God's name as sacred and holy. Also ask God for wisdom and boldness to speak for Him.

Third, speak with them privately. Show them respect. Tell them your concern with humility and gentleness. Speak the truth in love. Emphasize the greatness and goodness of God: He is worthy to have His name honored.

Fourth, having spoken, do not nag. Instead, be patient and keep praying.

J. C. Ryle, a great Christian preacher, was converted after a friend rebuked him for taking the Lord's name in vain. Who knows what God might do for your friend?

How can I be a good witness in school without caring in to peer pressure? I'm scared that everyone will laugh at me and call me a religious fanatic.

Allow me to give you three hints. First, remember that the best source of strength for public witnessing before others is your *private praying* with God. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Later, he said we must be praying all the time (v. 18) and asked his friends to pray for his own courage to speak for Christ (v. 19).

If you walk close to God in private, you will not stray too far from His ways in public. The closer you feel to God, the more His smiles and frowns will determine your actions rather than the smiles and frowns of your peers. This is what we call the fear of God: the childlike desire to please our Father above all. Seek grace to cultivate it.

Second, remember that your *heart's attitude* is critical for being a good witness both in your conversation and in your walk. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15–16, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."

Allow your walk to set a positive example, but don't carry yourself with an over-righteous attitude. Avoid superiority like a plague. When your example appears insufficient and you must correct another person verbally, try to do it kindly, as I discussed earlier (Q. 43).

Third, remember that your peers *respect you for doing God's will* much more than you realize. Deep in your heart, don't you respect that person most who dares to live right when he has a humble and reverent attitude? And you don't always tell that person, do you? Well, your peers will feel the same way about you. Their respect for you will come out in little ways. In a group they may even laugh at you, but in private they may very well come to you first for advice.

People, young or old, are too afraid of what their peers think of them. *Be true to God above all, be yourself as much as possible, and don't waste excessive time worrying about what your peers think.* Be kind and friendly, and you will never run short of friends. Above all, be most concerned about what God thinks of you. That has lasting value. Your peers' attitudes can change daily. Besides, to whom must you give an eternal account on the great Judgment Day—to God or to your peers?

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUALITY AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE¹

The issue of homosexuality is an issue that confronts the church today not only as a sin to be spoken out against, but also as an issue that calls for compassion towards those engaged in this sin. Homosexuality is clearly condemned in Scripture (see Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:26–27, and 1 Cor. 6:8–10). Homosexuality has also been regarded as sin throughout the two thousand years of church history after Christ. Furthermore, Christ clearly condemns homosexuality and same-sex marriage by setting forth the God-ordained institution of marriage in Matthew 19:4–6: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female.... For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Consider also:

1. Jesus answers the Pharisee’s questions about divorce by lending His own authority to the account of marriage as given at the beginning of Genesis and confirms that this account is absolutely authoritative and determinative when identifying what marriage is.
2. The Lord affirmed the distinction between male and female when He created “them at the beginning male and female.” This is coupled with the Genesis command to procreate. It follows, then, that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice; it does not arise from some particular gene that dictates sexual orientation.
3. The application to Christ’s statement, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife,” is universal and to be observed throughout all generations. This was not given simply for Adam’s good but for the good of all.
4. Man should leave his paternal home and cleave to his wife. His wife alone was able to be the true help meet for him. She was designed psychologically, emotionally, and physically to help him in his quest to glorify his Creator, and she alone was created by God to assist him in fulfilling God’s command to fill the earth.
5. Marriage is the primary and most sacred institution of all of society. Even parent-child relationships must be secondary to the marriage relationship. In the eyes of the Lord, marriage outweighs every civil relationship. It is therefore not to be taken lightly when marriage is redefined in order to accommodate a minority within society.
6. There must also be faithfulness and morality within marriage. If marriage is the primary social institu-

tion but lacks faithfulness between a husband and his wife, what can we expect elsewhere in society? If marriage lacks morality, what can we expect from the rest of society? Marriages must be examples of faithfulness and morality.

7. While marriage is a civil institution in that it was ordained before the Fall and therefore applies to all mankind, it is also a divine ordinance. This is clearly shown in the words of the Lord: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

What then should our response be to homosexuality and to Christ’s teaching about marriage? The church must contend based on Micah 6:1, “Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.”

We must cry to the LORD. The issue of homosexuality underscores the need for prayer. We must encourage people to pray that the sanctity of marriage would be preserved. Our prayers must be broad and full, praying with thankfulness to God for the gift of marriage and for the stability that marriage brings to society. Divorce between Christian couples is surely a great indictment on the church today and a poor example of Christian marriage. We must pray for parents to train their children so that the children would benefit from the marriage bond. We must pray that the innocence of our children be protected. We must also remember in prayer the many children today who are being raised within civil partnerships with no proper role models, and where their environment will convince them that homosexuality is the norm. We must pray that the leaders of our nation will repent of their godlessness, as the heart of the king is like water in the hand of the Lord—He turns it wherever He wills (Prov. 21:1).

We must cry to the church. In the light of recent developments regarding homosexuality, we must cry to the church to repent of accepting the sin. We also must acknowledge that homosexuality is not only a sin but also a judgment upon sins that precede it. Romans 1 makes that abundantly clear and then declares that God “gave them up to uncleanness,” to “vile affections,” and “to a reprobate mind” (Rom. 1:21–32). “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17). Those who teach and/or practice homosexuality are not true ministers of Christ and ought to have no place as such. Christ defines marriage in terms of a man and a woman. But He also says, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples” (John 8:31). It is incumbent upon minis-

ters and elders to speak God's Word regarding homosexuality. It is not only time to speak out and hold on to biblical norms for marriage and sexuality, but to preach the gospel to those who are trapped in sin and seek to save them from the fire (Jude 22–23). It is time for the church to examine herself and repent of the sins with which she has been stained.

We must cry to the nation. The demand by a minority to change the definition of marriage has little to do with equality, but has everything to do with imposition. Redefining marriage will impose same-sex marriage upon society, and we believe this will have a major impact on virtually every family in the country. We believe that this is only another step towards homosexuality being imposed on our children. Schools will no longer be able to speak about marriage without teaching the equality of same-sex partnerships; children's books from infants upwards will be required to recognize it because the law recognizes it.

Will ministers be forced to perform same-sex unions, and be persecuted for speaking out against same-sex marriage? We already have one example where a minister was barred from praying at a presidential inauguration for his views on homosexuality. What will be the effect on parents who send their children to public schools? What will happen to private schools that do not condone same-sex marriage? The people of our nation are well aware that homosexuality is a sin; the Bible says so, an examination of history confirms it, and our consciences cry out as an echo of God's truth. However, men suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18) in two ways. The first is to normalize homosexuality and have it entrenched in law so that all societal institutions will be forced to recognize it. The second way of suppressing truth is to muzzle or marginalize anyone who expresses any counter-opinion. The germ of this is already being witnessed in our nation. Let us cry to our local, state, and federal governments to consider the serious ramifications of accepting homosexuality.

We must cry to the homosexual. To the homosexual, we say we are not your enemies. We seek nothing but your spiritual good. We recognize that there are those within society who employ gratuitous and abusive language against you. Sadly, there are even some who use physical violence against you. True Christians are not such people. On the contrary, we deplore such behavior.

However, in seeking your spiritual wellbeing, we are duty-bound to speak the truth to you. Were you to see someone heading for a cliff and certain death, would it be a kindness on your part to just walk past and remain silent? For the love of your souls, we must cry out a warning. That warning is not simply our warning, it is the Bible's warning: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

You may feel it is offensive to be challenged by us about homosexuality being a sin. After all, are Christians perfect?

We are not perfect. Indeed, many Christians were just as annoyed and offended when they were challenged about their particular sins before coming to know the Lord.

Paul writes, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:8–10). This is indeed a formidable list. Yet the full potency of this list is really only seen when you read verse 11: "And such were some of you." Obviously there were Christians at Corinth who had been thieves, fornicators, extortioners, and, yes, homosexuals. Yet the gospel of Jesus Christ changed their lives. This is what they had been, but now they were different. Paul continues, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ is available for all sinners. It is this gospel that meets the needs of every kind of sinner. In Christ there is forgiveness of sin; there is a righteousness that is perfect, and power to overcome sin and to live for His glory. All this is in Christ and nowhere else. We see this clearly portrayed in John 8. The Pharisees brought an adulterous woman caught in adultery to Jesus and asked Him if she should be stoned to death. Jesus responded, "If anyone of you is without sin let him cast the first stone." They all left, convicted of their own sins. Then Jesus told her to "go and sin no more." How could she go free? Because Jesus died on the cross in her place so that she could be forgiven and escape God's wrath.

It is for this reason that we as Christians invite you to come humbly to Jesus Christ today. We would exhort you to repent and believe the gospel, even as we are called to do the same. It is a call to faith in Jesus Christ alone for all your righteousness. We know that if you come to Him, He will never cast you away. He will bless you with the blessings of salvation.

True marriage typifies the relationship between Christ and His church. It shows the wondrous love of Christ who gave Himself for His bride, the church. We pray that you will come to personally know this wondrous love of Christ in your own life. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6–7).

1. This report is drafted from Elder Ron VanBeek's earlier submissions as well as a Moderator's Address by Rev. James Gracie of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA) has also published a comprehensive report on the issue, entitled *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation*. This was passed unanimously at their General Assembly.

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Christ

THE MEDIATOR



No one can read the Scriptures without seeing that great prominence is given to Christ Jesus in the plan of salvation.

(1) *He is said to be the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, the Author and Finisher of faith.* He is the Bishop of souls, the Fountain of living waters, the Head of the Church, the bright and morning Star, the Rose of Sharon, the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Paul was so taken with Him that he “determined not to know anything among you [the Corinthians], save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (2 Cor. 2:2).

(2) *To the Old Testament church, He was known by such names and titles as these:* the Angel of the Covenant, the Angel of the Lord, Wonderful, Counselor, the righteous Branch, the Messiah or Anointed. He is also there called the Mighty God and the Lord of Hosts (Isa. 6:3; 9:6). In the New Testament, His personal name is Jesus, or Savior (Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:21). His official name is Christ, or “Anointed.” He is also called Emmanuel, or “God with us.” He is often called God and Lord.

(3) *A mediator is one that comes in between parties who are at variance in order to reconcile them.* Where there is no variance, there can be no mediation. “A mediator is not the mediator of one; but God is one” (Gal. 3:20). If there are no parties, there can be no mediator. A mediator differs from an advocate because the latter, strictly speaking, looks to the interest of one alone, while the former has a regard to both. Christ is called the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Mediator of a better covenant, and the Mediator of the New Testament (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). In the Old Testament, a mediator is called a daysman (Job 9:33).

(4) *It is right and fitting, perhaps, it is necessary that a mediator should be the equal of both parties.* Jesus Christ has this fitness for His work. He can lay His hand upon

both God and sinners. He knows God’s will and God’s rights. He knows man’s sins and man’s wants. He will not betray either party. It is no robbery for Him to claim equality with God (Phil. 2:6).

(5) *Strifes and controversies are of three kinds:* First, such as arise merely from mistakes; second, such as result from wrong on both sides; third, such as come from wrong on one side only. Man’s controversy with God is of the last class. Man *alone* is to blame. Man *alone* has done wrong. The Lord’s ways are equal. Man’s ways are not equal (cf. Ezek. 18:25, 29; 33:17, 20).

(6) *Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator of the New Covenant.* So says Paul, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5–6). If it is wicked to believe in two or more gods, it is no less wicked to believe in two or more mediators. Moses is once called a mediator (Gal. 3:19). The history of the event there referred to shows that the meaning is simply this: he was a messenger to make known God’s will to Israel and to make known the desires of the people to God. The passage refers to the giving of the law, when the display of the divine majesty was so terrible that Israel said to Moses, “Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Ex. 20:19). In mediation between God and sinners to secure salvation, there is no mediator but Christ (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 3:11).

(7) *The great end of Christ’s mediation is the salvation of His people.* So said the angel that announced His birth: “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). “Christ is the head

of the church: and he is the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). As a mediator, He is no respecter of persons. Birth, blood, riches, honors, color, and nationality are nothing with Him. He utterly disregards all distinctions made by art or by man's device. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). "[I]n Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6).

(8) *The necessity for a mediator is found in the holiness and justice of God and in the fears, guilt, and miseries of man.* God is so holy that He cannot look upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13). And how can man, left to himself, be just with God? (Job 9:2). No two things are more contrary to each other than the vileness of man and the purity of God.

(9) *To the office of Mediator, Jesus Christ was chosen by His Father* (Isa. 42:1; 1 Pet. 2:4). Nor was any other ever chosen by God to the same work. He was no intruder into His office. His Father repeatedly declared Himself well pleased in Christ and with His undertaking. His raising Him from the dead and exalting Him at His own right hand was the highest possible proof that in Christ He was well pleased. God greatly honored Moses when He buried him in a secret place; but He never set Moses at His right hand.

(10) *It is a great thing to live under Christ's mediation.* Through Him, we have wonderful discoveries of the character and glory of God. Through Him, heavenly influences are sent down to draw us to God. Never were there so glorious proposals made to creatures as are found in the offers of life and salvation. To those who accept the mediation of Jesus Christ, the very richest blessings are given. Thus says Paul to believers, "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world,

or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21–23). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:17–18). "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17–18). All these countless blessings are made sure to him who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as all his hope and all his salvation. Eternity itself will not exhaust the unsearchable riches of Christ made sure to believers.

(11) *It is a solemn thing to live under the gospel.* No man can despise the mediation of Jesus Christ without incurring the greatest guilt and exposing himself to the greatest peril. "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:2–4). There is nothing more sinful or dangerous than treading underfoot the Son of God, treating His blood as an unholy thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:28–29).

William S. Plumer (1802–1880) was an American Presbyterian minister and theological professor much beloved for his powerful preaching and books on piety.

The Lord was with Him

The Bible says that “the Lord was with” Abraham, Joseph, David, and Hezekiah. We’re also told that Enoch and Noah “walked with God.” These are two sides of the same coin, two perspectives on the same experience of God’s special presence with His people.

This was a *gracious* experience. Humanity had severed itself from God by sin, but God in mercy came down to humanity again to reconcile, to re-establish, to reconnect, and to re-commune. These were all sinners separated from God by sin and distant from Him by nature. Yet God drew near to them, drew them to Himself, and filled them with His own presence. By God’s gift of faith in the coming Messiah, these Old Testament believers experienced forgiveness of their sins and God’s love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit given to them. The Lord who had been against them was now with them.

This was a *spiritual* experience. If you looked at Enoch or David, you would not have seen a second physical figure with them. God was not with them physically; He was with them spiritually. By His indwelling Holy Spirit, God connected and communed with these men. The “withness” was a spiritual “withness.”

This was a *personal* experience. It wasn’t a “force” that was with them, but a person. It was not some impersonal power, but someone with a character, a personality, a will, and an ability to communicate. As such, personal thoughts, feelings, plans, and hopes were shared. There was conversation. We don’t know how much the Old Testament believers understood of God being three Persons, but they certainly knew a personal God.

This was a *transforming* experience. God cannot be with someone without it making a difference in his life. Enoch and Noah stood out from everyone else in their generation. Heathen kings and officials such as Abimelech and Potiphar noticed a difference in those with whom God was present (Gen. 21:22; 26:28; 39:3).

God’s presence produced inner qualities of holiness, peace, contentment, and courage. In the Old Testament, it was also associated with outward prosperity and success (Gen. 39:2–3; 1 Sam. 18:14; 2 Kings 18:7).

This was an *enjoyable* experience. This was not some unwanted and terrifying invasion of these men’s lives; this was the God who was their best friend, coming to walk with them through life’s journey. What a wonderful experience, especially when these men were so often otherwise alone in their spiritual pilgrimage.

This was a *varied* experience. Though God never leaves any believer in whom He has come to live, there are times when He withdraws the sense of His presence, the feeling of His nearness. For example, we’re told that God left Hezekiah to test him (2 Chron. 32:31). That cannot mean God was with him one day and gone the next. Rather, it means that at this time Hezekiah did not have the conscious sense of God’s presence. God was there, but He was silent and still. Yes, the Spirit could be grieved under the old covenant, and such painful times taught these men how much they needed God’s active presence in their lives.

It was an *everywhere* experience. It was not confined to the temple or tabernacle, but God was with His people in building projects, in prison, on the throne, and on the farm. Wherever they went, whatever time of the day, they could enjoy God’s companionship. They could talk to Him, sing to Him, worship Him, and enjoy Him wherever, whenever, whatever.

If Old Testament believers experienced this divine “withness”—this divine presence—how much more should we New Testament believers experience it since we see Christ more clearly, have the fullness of the Spirit’s indwelling, and have so many other helps in our lives, families, and churches!

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

GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE: The Westminster Confession of Faith (3.1)

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH (3.1):

God from all eternity did, by the most wise (Rom. 11:33) and holy counsel of His own will, freely (Rom. 9:15, 18), and unchangeably (Heb. 6:17) ordain whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11): yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin (James 1:13, 17; 1 John 1:5), nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures (Matt. 17:12; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28); nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (John 19:11; Prov. 16:33).

NOWADAYS WE HEAR MUCH OF A GOD who tries His best but can't be blamed if things don't work out very well. All manner of obstacles frustrate God, we are told. Natural laws tie His hands from intervening. Random accidents make a mess of things. The devil runs loose. Worst of all, God's pleadings with humanity often fall upon deaf ears and He can do nothing about it. How frustrated this God must be!

Nevertheless, it is said, as God watches from a distance He hopes that men and women will exercise their free wills to discover His love and their own self-worth. Such is the "kinder and gentler" deity of our day. It is no wonder that some label the religion of the age as moralistic therapeutic deism.

The Bible knows nothing of a frustrated God. Psalm 115:3 sets God apart from all idols by declaring, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." God works out His plan in all things: He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). The word "counsel" means a wise plan including goals and ways of getting them done.

God has a plan. Every intelligent person makes plans; only a fool sets goals but gives no thought to the means by which he will accomplish them. A good and wise God would never have created the world without a plan for what He desired to see take place in it. His counsel is eternal, a purpose formed in His mind before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

God's plan is perfect and unchanging. Many of our plans are frustrated despite all our intelligence and effort. We must shift to plan B, or C, or Z. It is not so with God; His plans never fail. "The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:10–11). Therefore, those whom God has chosen to bless are truly blessed (v.12)! His sovereign will guarantees our ultimate and perfect happiness.

The Holy Scriptures call God's plan "the decree of the most High" (Dan. 4:24) because it is the authoritative command of the supreme King. The Confession is entirely biblical then in speaking of God's "decree" by which He did "ordain" events. For example, the Bible says that God's "decree" established the properties of creation (Ps. 148:6; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:22), the destruction of sinners (Isa. 10:22; Zeph. 2:2), and the triumphant kingdom of His Son (Ps. 2:7). He "ordained" or appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet before he was born (Jer. 1:5).

God's decree is all-comprehensive. God has decreed when the rain will fall and where the lightning will strike (Job 28:26). Regardless of what men may decide, no good thing and no bad thing can take place apart from God's decree (Lam. 3:37–38). God's counsel was formed long ago and includes all that will take place to the very end, including the rise and fall of kings and nations—and His counsel will stand (Isa. 14:24–27; 46:10–11).

It is not just the big things that God has decreed. Whether you will live to see tomorrow depends on His will (James 4:15). The condition of every little bird and every hair on our heads is wrapped up in His plan (Matt. 10:29–30). For this reason, our Lord Jesus said, God's children need not fear men (Matt. 10:31). Westminster theology is a doctrine of hope and confidence.

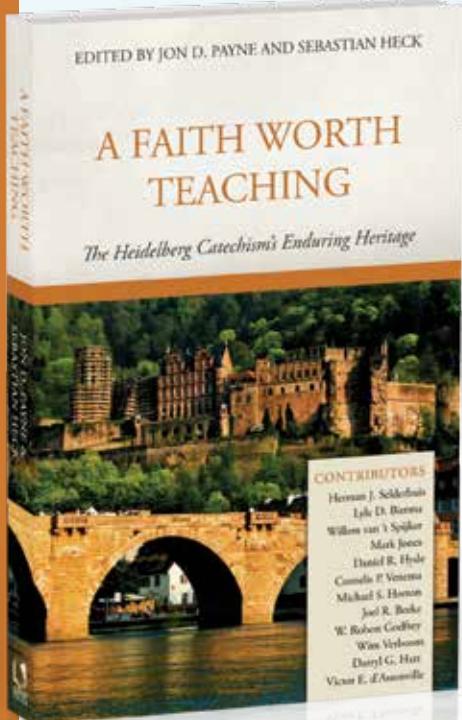
The Westminster divines were careful, however, to fence off the doctrine of God's eternal decree from any kind of fatalism. First, they insisted that God is holy and righteous while decreeing sin. He cannot sin, nor does He entice anyone to sin (James 1:13). God uses sinners as tools in His sovereign hand to accomplish His good and righteous purposes (Isa. 10:5–7, 15). They plan evil but His plan overrules theirs for good (Gen. 50:20). God knows how to draw straight lines with crooked sticks.

Second, they taught that God's decree does not nullify the reality of man's will. God predetermines events but people are still responsible for their choices (Luke 22:22). Men's choices flow from their own hearts (Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:21). But God's will rules over men's hearts so that their choices fulfill His purposes. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). People dream and scheme, but God's plan will stand (Prov. 19:21).

Third, they taught that though God's decree is the primary cause why all things happen, there are still "second causes" which God uses as means to His ends. God decreed that His Son would die, yet He did it by the hands of wicked men (John 19:11; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). Some events, like the rolling of dice, are truly random or contingent on a human level, although God still controls exactly how they land (Prov. 16:33)—perhaps to judge greedy gamblers!

Therefore God's eternal decree does not encourage us to be lazy and careless in our use of proper means to do good. If God intends to prosper you, ordinarily He does so by moving you to work hard at your vocation, for "the hand of the diligent maketh rich" (Prov. 10:4). If God plans to save your soul, often He begins by motivating you to attend the preaching of the Word, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

What God's eternal decree does encourage is humility. Let us never think or speak boastfully about what we intend to accomplish. Apart from His will we can do nothing. Let us never proudly say, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." Let us rather proclaim, "Jesus is Lord!"



BOOK REVIEW

A Faith Worth Teaching

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM'S ENDURING HERITAGE

EDITED BY JON D. PAYNE AND SEBASTIAN HECK
REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS, 272 PAGES. \$23.00

It has been a pleasure reading through this collection of excellent essays discussing our beloved Heidelberg Catechism. What an outstanding resource, particularly for those who are privileged to teach catechumens!

This treasure of his-

tory and study of this means of grace, doctrine, and teaching is highly recommended for each Reformed, Christian home.

When I reflect on my personal catechism experience as a teen, I can't help but wonder how much better church youth today can be instructed with the resources coming off the press 450 years after the Heidelberg Catechism was first commissioned. The Lord be praised for preserving our Catechism instruction and preaching within our churches. Having read this book, I am more than ever before convinced of what a blessing the Catechism is to our churches.

The book is a collection of fourteen essays written by Reformed instructors, pastors, and leaders who hold the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) in high esteem. Herman Selderhuis handles the question, "What is the source of this Catechism's success" in his brief foreword, stressing that the HC touches both heart and mind in a positive way. The proliferation and the geographical extension of the Reformed church are roughly congruent. The ecclesiology of Reformed believers, that the church exists apart from politics and government, along with exploration and emigration of the sixteenth century all contribute to the HC's success.

Lyle D. Bierma introduces the history and people behind the HC. This is a fascinating insight of how the Lord brought this wonderful tool into our heritage. The reader is informed about the Reformation of the Palatinate, the purpose of the Catechism, and its authorship. One note regarding the purpose will suffice to show how rich this history is. In the preface to the original 1563 Catechism, Elector Frederick writes, "It is his God-given duty not only to promote peace and order among his people but also, and above all, constantly to admonish and lead them to devout knowledge and fear of the Almighty, and His word of salvation."

D. G. Hart's essay regarding the HC and the United States is of particular interest to our North American denominations. Hart concludes, "Historians may speculate plausibly that the HC and its use in Dutch Reformed worship may have immunized the Dutch against the virus of liberalism in the United States" (32). Here is incentive for continued use of the HC in our churches!

The Catechism as a means of grace is discussed by Joel Beeke in two essays on the validity and relevance of Catechism preaching today. These are two very practical essays handling the criticism of those who question the Dutch Reformed practice and giving helps to those called to preach. One of the six rules set by the 1618–1619 Synod of Dort outlining expectations for Catechism preaching is worth quoting here: "Catechism sermons should be brief and understandable; doctrine must be presented at the layperson's level so that even children could understand it" (43). Beeke considers several objections to the practice of Catechism preaching and counters them effectively with biblical perspectives.

Sebastian Heck addresses the doctrine of baptism in the HC. The historical and confessional context of the Catechism helps the reader understand our rich biblical tradition of infant baptism. Heck writes, "Baptism, while primarily a promise, entails an obligation—the duty to believe and live as a disciple of Christ. Baptism cannot be repeated, even as it expresses God's enduring willingness to receive us into His favor" (105).

Next, John D. Payne writes pastorally about the HC and the Lord's Supper. One summary quote from the commentary on the HC by Ursinus will show the depth of understanding emanating from the HC: "According to Ursinus, then, the Lord's Supper is to be understood as no less than a sign and seal of God's grace given to the gathered church for the confirmation of God's promise of redemption in Christ, the strengthening of vital union and communion with Christ, the nourishing of souls in Christ unto eternal life, a public confession of faith, a cultivation of a life of sincere gratitude to God for Christ and all His saving benefits, a badge stating our true identification with and allegiance to Christ, and the fostering of genuine unity and love in the body of Christ" (122–23).

Michael Horton's essay, "Gathered, Protected, and Preserved: The Church in the Heidelberg Catechism," out-

lines the clear teaching of the HC on this vital doctrine for our time. Numerous statements in this essay are essential teachings for our churches. One theme is shared in these quotes: “The church is not created by the willing and running of the church or individuals, but by the gospel.” “The Sovereign Head remains sovereign over His ministrations. He never surrenders His own ministry to His ministers.” “The pastor’s authority is ministerial, not magisterial.” A comparison of the HC with the Belgic Confession regarding the true and false church is also an excellent resource.

Cornelis P. Venema discusses the essential doctrines of justification and sanctification in his essay, “Grace and Gratitude.” He illustrates how the HC brings a balanced teaching of these two benefits of Christ’s saving work: “The first benefit of the gospel declares believers righteous in Christ. The second benefit of the gospel involves the work of renewal whereby believers become righteous in Christ” (153). This essay handles critical truths regarding the work of God in sinners. Dr. Venema’s conclusion highlights the wonderful harmony and balance of emphasis of these two doctrines stressing the Reformation theme of *soli Deo gloria*.

The Christology of the HC is the content of the essay by Mark Jones. Jones shows us how grateful we as twenty-first-century believers ought to be to our forefathers for clarifying doctrine for us. In his conclusion, quoting Calvin’s *Institutes*, he notes: “We cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God? Let us be ashamed of such ingratitude” (180). Calvin’s attitude about the ancients should be our attitude towards the authors of the HC and ultimately God, who blessed the church with such a confession of faith.

“Prophet, Doctor Jesus: The Son of God as ‘Our High Priest and Teacher’” is the title of the essay by Victor E. d’Assonville. Arguing that the HC is unsurpassed, particularly in its pedagogical character, he breaks down the Catechism’s doctrines of Christ with two main divisions: Christology at the intersection of pastoral and pedagogical lines and the three offices of our Lord as Prophet, Priest, and King. Just looking at Question 31 will illustrate this: “The Son of God has been ordained by God the Father and has been appointed by the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher, our only high priest, and our eternal king” (193).

Danny Hyde’s essay, “The Spirit-Filled Catechism: The Heidelberg Catechism and the Holy Spirit” is a timely reminder. Though the Catechism holds only one question relating to the Holy Spirit, “from beginning to end [it] describes His person as well as His work both in relation to Christ and to the believer” (197). Hyde concludes “that

far from presenting a bare outline of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and minimizing His person and work the HC catechetically presents the person and work of the Spirit from beginning to end—there is no major doctrine in our HC from which the Holy Spirit is absent” (212).

The fourth and last section of *A Faith Worth Teaching* considers the HC as a catechetical tool. The first essay in this section is a historical comparison of John Calvin’s first and second catechisms and the Westminster catechisms. Robert Godfrey compares and contrasts the five catechisms for us but concludes with the bias I share: “On this 450th anniversary of the HC, its particular strengths may be appropriately highlighted. It is fuller than the Westminster Shorter Catechism and not as long as the Westminster Longer Catechism. It is more focused than either of Calvin’s catechisms. At least for this year, we should declare it the best of the Reformed catechisms” (229).

Willem Verboom’s essay, “The Heidelberg Catechism: A Catechetical Tool,” illustrates the covenantal purpose of the HC to bring the baptized children through a course of preparation for their confession of faith. The ultimate goal of the curriculum is living as a Christian. This quote from Verboom’s essay was my personal experience. “The question-and-answer method of the HC has both a didactic and theological meaning. When he asks questions, the catechist does so as a representative of the congregation. When he answers, the child does so as a child of the congregation. These commandments and promises are expressed in the answers as the church’s doctrine of faith. However, asking and answering are not only didactical events but pneumatological ones. The underlying idea is that the dialog functions as a vessel through which the Holy Spirit can give the child personal knowledge of saving faith. By learning and repeating, the child acquires the treasures of Scripture” (235). This theme of instruction is considered in the “learning congregation,” the use of the HC in the Netherlands at home, in the schools, and in the worship services through the centuries. Verboom concludes with delight that “the HC is new again and again, like a powerful love song that touches the deepest parts of the heart” (246).

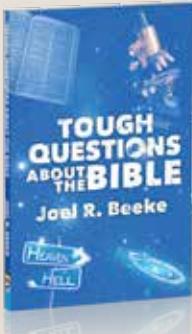
The final essay by Willem van’t Spijker is entitled “Scholasticism in the Heidelberg Catechism?” This essay highlights the giftedness of the Catechism’s author, Ursinus. It is impressive to read of the Lord’s gift of this man to His church. Ursinus is portrayed as a godly man of integrity with profound respect and influence who “wrote his HC for people who were already familiar with the first principles of faith. His purpose is pedagogical, not apologetical” (261).

I highly recommend this book. The Heidelberg Catechism is truly a faith worth teaching!

Henk Kleyn is Director of Operations at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and an elder in the Free Reformed church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

BOOK TALK

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



Tough Questions about the Bible

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Children from a variety of backgrounds have come up with the questions in this book and Joel Beeke has done his best to answer these in the light of God's Word. These are real questions from real children in real life situations—and a real pastor with a genuine concern for their souls takes them to the one true God and the real gospel.

"Kids ask the toughest questions and who hasn't been caught wondering how to answer? This book is thoughtfully written, pastorally sensitive, biblically based, gospel-centered, Christ-exalting material of the best sort. [Truth is, grown-ups will profit from these answers, too!]" —Derek W. H. Thomas

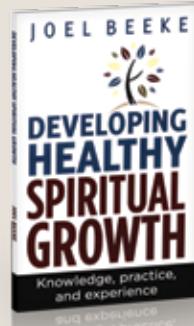
(Christian Focus, PB, 124 pages) \$9.00 | 6.30

Developing Healthy Spiritual Growth: Knowledge, Practice, and Experience

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

"It is easy for Christians to be lopsided. Many stress doctrine at the expense of practice, and others pit experience against doctrine. *Developing Healthy Spiritual Growth* integrates growing in knowledge, practice, and experience into a biblically balanced and practical process of growing in grace. This book stands out by wedding doctrines such as communion with the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit, and the threefold office of Christ with Puritan-like application and heart-piercing and heart-warming expressions. This book will help you develop a well-rounded Christian life." —Ryan McGraw

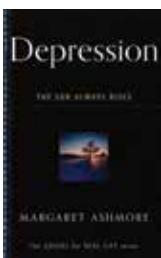
(EP Books, PB, 143 pages) \$10.00 | \$7.50



The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Major Reformed Confessions and Catechisms of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Yuzo Adhinarta

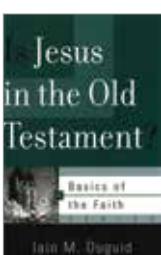
In a masterful piece of research, Yuzo Adhinarta demonstrates from major confessions and catechisms that the doctrine of the Spirit truly fills the Reformed tradition. He investigates the pervasive place of the Spirit not only in the doctrines of the Trinity, Christ, salvation, and the means of grace, but also in the doctrines of creation, providence, church life, missions, and social justice. (Langham Monographs, PB, 235 pgs) \$35.00 | \$25.80



Depression: The Sun always Rises

Margaret Ashmore

A period of depression can range from having a bad day to grieving the loss of a loved one. This booklet provides readers a set of godly choices so that their own "dark night of the soul" does not dominate them, and they are enabled to find God's freedom in the midst of difficult times. (P&R, PB, 38 pgs) \$4.99 | \$3.75



Is Jesus in the Old Testament?

Iain M. Duguid

Many Christians find the Old Testament difficult and are even not sure what to do with it. This booklet shows how Christ is present throughout the Old Testament. In fact, proper interpretation shows that the Old Testament is about Him. Duguid explores what it means to rightly see Christ in the Old Testament and looks at specific ways the Old Testament prepares us to see and understand Christ's ministry in the gospels. (P&R, PB, 39 pgs) \$4.99 | \$3.75

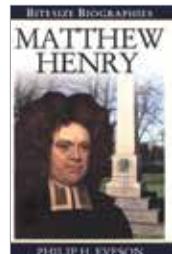


The Organized Heart: A Woman's Guide to Conquering Chaos

Staci Eastin

Most books on organization just add more rules to your life, whether their approach includes another plan, another calendar, or another method. Tackling topics such as perfectionism, busyness, leisure, and more, this book shows a different and better way, one grounded in the grace of God and reaching to the heart.

(Cruciform, PB, 103 pgs) \$10.00 | \$8.00



Matthew Henry—Philip H. Eveson

Matthew Henry lived at the end of the Puritan era and in many ways gathered much of its fruit into his famous commentary on the Bible. Yet despite the continuing use of his commentary few people know anything about Henry himself. Therefore I'm delighted that Philip Eveson has written this brief biography of Henry. Interesting and inspiring, it reminds us that a faithful servant of God is like a stone dropped into a still pond, sending out ripples that continue long after the stone disappears.

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At the Mercy of Kings: Mary of Orange

Linda Finlayson

Born to privilege from the royal line and heir to the throne of England, Scotland, and Ireland, Mary was destined to reign and change her country. Raised to believe the Bible and strengthened by her faith, Mary, with her husband William of Orange, trusted God in a rule whose religious and political effects are still seen in Great Britain and other democracies.

(Christian Focus, PB, 175 pgs) \$9.00 | \$6.75



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Elyse Fitzpatrick, ed.

This counseling resource applies timeless biblical truth from more than twenty contributors to address struggles many women face daily, such as negative habits and addictions, emotions, worry, depression, eating disorders, habitual sin, verbal abuse, pornography, singleness and marriage, and more.

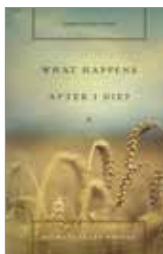
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Philippians—*Dennis E. Johnson*

The truth revealed behind the phrase “for me to live is Christ” transforms our responses to present imperfections and future hope. This Reformed Expository Commentary from a professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California is grounded in pastoral application and ideal for sermon preparation and devotional reading.

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Century Puritanism—*Larry Siekawitch*

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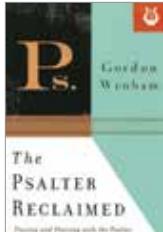


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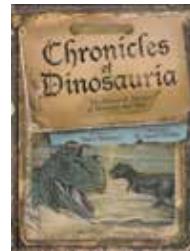
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Gordon Wenham

People often use the book of Psalms in times of crisis or pain, yet they often misread and misunderstand it. In contrast, this welcome volume highlights the foundational place the Psalms have in Christian

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KING of KNGS

FOR OUR CHILDREN
DIANA KLEYN

*"Only in
bowing before
King Jesus
can we be
truly happy."*

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, some people were very glad. The shepherds received the message from the angels and hurried to worship the Baby in the manger. Simeon and Anna saw Jesus in the temple and praised God for their Messiah. Others, however, were not happy. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matthew 2:1–3). Herod lived in a beautiful palace and ruled as king of the Jews. When he heard that some wise men from the East were talking about another king of the Jews, he did not want to share his honor with anyone else. He must be the only king!

If we are tempted to think that we are much better than Herod, we should look into our own hearts and ask ourselves some important questions. How do we react when someone receives a prize or a gift that we think we deserved? Or how do we behave when we lose a game or don't get the grade we want on a test? What do we do when others are praised for something they said or did while we are skipped over? We all want to be first. We all want to have the highest place and like to think more highly of ourselves than of others.

Herod was so jealous that he came up with a terrible plan: he ordered all the little boys in Bethlehem aged two and under to be killed. Herod decided there was no room for another king. He wanted to remain king at all costs, even if it included murder. Again, we would like to think that we are different. Had we lived during the time of Jesus' birth, we surely would have gone to worship Him! None of us would ever think of ignoring the King of kings, let alone hurt Him! But the Holy Spirit asks us to look deep into our hearts once again. Although we might never kill another person, the tendencies in our hearts are no different from King Herod's. It goes against our sinful nature to bow before God. Herod did not want to submit to King Jesus; neither do we. "I'm not evil like king Herod!" you protest.

A Christian Girl's Revenge



"Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Romans 12:17).

Two men living in the southern part of Africa had a quarrel. They became bitter enemies and made each other's lives miserable. One day, one of them found his enemy's daughter in the woods near her father's house. An evil plan formed in his heart. He captured the little girl and brutally cut off both her hands, screaming, "I have had my revenge!"

Years passed, and the little girl grew up to be a young woman. A poor, worn-out, grey-headed old man wandered into her yard one day and asked for something to eat. The young woman recognized him as the cruel man who had cut off her hands. She went into the hut and asked her servant to prepare some food and drink. The man was very happy when he was given a large amount of food and sat down to eat. When he had finished, the young woman approached her visitor. She saw that he did not recognize her. Removing the shawl that covered her arms, she held up her handless wrists. Smiling through her tears, she said softly, "I have had my revenge!"

They were the same words this man had shrieked at her in gruesome triumph years ago, but now the young woman spoke the words gently and lovingly. The old man was overwhelmed with shock. He did not understand her kindness. Why was she not angry?

The secret of this young woman's love was that she had become a Christian. The Holy Spirit had shown her that the Lord Jesus had suffered far more than she did. She learned that through His death, He had purchased salvation for her. Instead of hate, anger, bitterness, and fear, the Holy Spirit had given love, compassion, and forgiveness. She had learned the meaning of the verse, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee" (Proverbs 25:21–22). How beautiful was the treatment the young woman gave her enemy! The love she displayed to her former abuser was a beautiful reflection of the love of her Savior.

"I like to go to church, and I try my best to listen during devotions. I pray every morning and every night. I learn my memory verse and Psalter every week. I try to obey my parents and teachers. When I do something wrong, I ask God to forgive me. I am not like King Herod at all!"

All those things are good; God wants you to do them. But God looks at your motives, desires, thoughts, and impulses. He wants more than outward obedience; he wants your whole heart. That means every part of you must bow before Him. He demands to be King of every aspect of your life. He requires unconditional surrender to His will. He sends His Holy Spirit to shine His light into the deepest corners of our heart in order to bring repentance and cleansing. Acknowledging Jesus as King means learning to give up control and trusting God's leading. It sometimes means doing things we don't like to do, and not doing things we would really like to do. Herod was so full of pride, hatred, and rebellion that he thought he could destroy God. He believed that getting rid of this Baby King would be a good solution. How wrong he was! Not long after this, Herod died a very painful death, and then he had to appear before the very God he had tried to kill.

Dear children, what does Christmas mean to you? What does Jesus mean to you? Is He the King of your heart? Does He rule over every part of your life—your thoughts, words, and actions? Do you want to do His will, not your own? Do you ask Him to teach you to submit to His authority and lay down your rebellion against Him? Are you sad when you notice how often you try to rule your own life and push Him away? There is no joy in trying to be number one. King Herod was not a happy man; he was miserable! He was rich and powerful, but he was afraid and wretched; the shepherds were some of the poorest people in Israel, yet they were full of joy. They rejoiced at the good news of Christ's birth and rushed to the manger to bow before their Savior! They "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:20). God's people have joy that the world will never attain. There is no joy in trying to be greater than God. Only in bowing before King Jesus can we be truly happy. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:16–17). This Christmas and all year long, I wish you and your families the joy of serving and worshipping King Jesus.

Diana Kleyn is the author of several books for children.

Adapted by Diana Kleyn from *Anecdotes Illustrative of New Testament Texts*. Clerical Library, Vol. 8. Hartford, Connecticut: S. S. Scranton Co., 1900, 190.

Puzzle

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A								
B								
C								
D	I							
E			G					
F								
G						K		
H					10	:	10	

1. “K I N G — — — D₆ — H₅ —” (Ps. 24:10).

2. “—E1—H2 ——E7—A7 B8—A6 H4—A3—”(Zec. 14:9)

3. “— D7 E2 — B6 C3 — F6 G5” (Dan. 4:37).

4. “G6 — D8 — — — H1 A8 —” (Ps. 22:28).

5. “—C1B3—F4————F2—B7” (Isa. 9:6)

6. “— B1 — — G3 — G8 — C4 — A1 — F5 — — F8 — E4 — E6 D2” (Ps. 95:3).

7. “— C₈ — C₂ — — — — G₁ — — — — A₄ C₇ — D₃ A₅ — — — G₄ E₈ — — — — B₅ D₄ — — — — H₃ D₅ — — — — G₂ ” (John 19:19).

8. “—E5—B2 — — —C5—F1—” (Deut. 10:17).

9. “B4 — E3 — — — — C6” (John 1:49).

10. “—A2 — — F7” (Mic. 5:2).

Answers to last month's puzzle:

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. God | 8. sheep | 15. prayers | 22. hosts |
| 2. other | 9. because | 16. might | 23. ask |
| 3. washing | 10. plenteous | 17. for | 24. "Oh how |
| 4. whosoever | 11. upright | 18. flock | great is thy |
| 5. knowing | 12. taste | 19. wonders | goodness" |
| 6. anger | 13. blotted | 20. attentive | (Psalm |
| 7. art | 14. faithless | 21. receive | 31:19a). |

Thanks again to all who sent in their puzzle answers!

Audrey Bilkes	Becky Boot	Elijah Meschke
Ezra Bilkes	Shelly Boot	Lukas Meschke
Justus Bilkes	Danny O. Davis	Kyle Nieuwenhuis
Lauren Bilkes	Caleb Fithian	Abigail Scherer
Malachi Bilkes	Ted Hinojosa	Jonathan Scherer
Seth Bilkes	Abigail Kranendonk	Hanna Sweetman
Zach Bilkes	Matthew Kranendonk	Kara Sweetman
Phillip Boerkel	Sam Kranendonk	Kenzie Zomer
Silvia Boerkel	Tyssyna Kranendonk	

First, fill in the descriptions of God in #1–9 by looking up the texts in your KJV Bible. Underneath some of the blanks are letter/number combinations. Put the letters you have printed above these combinations into the corresponding boxes in the grid. When you are finished, they will spell out another text. The first word has been done for you.

Please send your puzzle answers to:

Banner Puzzles and Questions

Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn

540 Crescent St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
e-mail: cdkleyn2@gmail.com

Praying Tom

Stories for Children

When he was just beginning his ministry, Rev. Marsh was asked to preach in a church near Basingstoke. A man named "Swearing Tom" was present in church that day. He had earned his name because of his terrible language. In calling out to sinners, the minister stated, "If the most wicked man in this church would go home and pray that God, for Christ's sake, would give him His Holy Spirit to change his heart, God would hear and answer that man's prayer." These words went straight to the heart of Swearing Tom. "I am the worst man here," he thought to himself. "I will go home and pray."

On his way home, he had to pass by a familiar tavern, but, unmoved by the calls of his friends, Swearing Tom refused to join them. When he reached his home, he threw



himself upon his knees and prayed using the words which he had heard from the pulpit. That prayer was answered, and from that time he became a changed man. "Swearing Tom" became known as "Praying Tom." He loved to visit the sick and afflicted, and was a great blessing in his home town for more than fifty years.

Almost thirty years after Swearing Tom first prayed, Rev. Marsh returned to preach again in the church near Basingstoke. After the service, Tom told the minister the story of his conversion. What a joy and an encouragement it was for the old minister to hear of the fruit of his sermon so long ago!

Again, some years later, Rev. Marsh attended a Bible Society meeting. When the old minister learned there was

a man present who was from Basingstoke, he asked him about Praying Tom. "Ah, dear sir," replied the man, "'Praying Tom' is now 'Praising Tom.' He is in heaven now with the Lord Jesus whom he loved so much. His last hours were blessed indeed, for he died as he had lived, rejoicing in His beloved Savior."

Dear children, how would people describe you? Would you be given a name like Swearing Tom or like Praying Tom? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a heart that loves the Lord Jesus Christ and gives honor and glory to God.

Adapted by Diana Kleyn from *The Notebook: A Collection of Anecdotes and Illustrations, for the Use of Teachers*. London: Sunday School Union, 1871, pp. 2–3.

Not Safe

A lady came to visit her minister. "I'm very concerned for my daughter," she said. "I talk to her constantly about the necessity of being born again, but she does not want to listen. She says she'll think about it when she's older. I'm so afraid that she will never come to Christ!"

The minister encouraged the mother with some of God's promises, and promised to come and visit soon. A short time later, the minister came to speak with the girl.

"I hear that your mother is bothering you about salvation," began the minister.

The girl looked at him in astonishment. She never expected the pastor to speak this way!

"Shall I advise your mother not to bring up the subject anymore? Would that make things better for you?" he continued.

The girl could think of no response, so shocked was she.

The minister spoke again. "What if I suggest to her that for a year she should say nothing at all to you about your soul. How is that?"

The girl finally found her voice. "A year is a long time. I don't think it would be safe to avoid the topic for a whole year."

"Alright, then how about six months? Is that better?" responded the minister.

"I don't know," objected the girl. "My friend died last year. She was not even sick for very long."

"Three months?" proposed the pastor.

After a little hesitation, the girl finally admitted, "I don't think it would be safe to put it off for three months." All at once she burst into tears and cried, "I don't think it would be safe to put it off another day!"

Together they went down on their knees and asked the Lord for His gift of salvation. That very day the Holy Spirit began His saving work in this girl. Have you fled for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Adapted by Diana Kleyn from *From Life to Life; Illustrations and Anecdotes for the Use of Religious Workers and for Private Meditation*, by Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman, D.D. Boston and Chicago: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 52.

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

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We wish all our subscribers and your families God's richest blessings in Immanuel this coming season as we commemorate His birth and, God willing, enter a new year. May we all ever be found looking to Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 9:28; 12:2). Pray for grace to live in Him, by Him, and unto Him by Spirit-worked faith—for this life and a better life to come.

-JRB

OBITUARY

THOMPSON, William (Bill) F., aged 87, passed away on October 31, 2013 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was preceded in death by his sisters, Lucille (Ted) Smigiel and Betty Harvey. Bill is survived by his wife, Bernice; Children—William Paul Thompson, Marilyn (Jerry) Lomaszewich, and Bonnie (Bruce) Spaanstra; Sister—Vivian (Frank) Mattucci; Brother—Edwin Thompson; several step-brothers; Granddaughters, Amanda and Caitlin Spaanstra. (Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven—John 1:29b; 1 Corinthians 15:50–58).

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Warm Boots for Cold Feet



What's on your shopping list? Last year COAH purchased \$2000 of leather for a Christian shoe factory in Ukraine. Employees donated a day's labour and the company gave the rest to make 248 boots for the poor. We don't think twice when we pull on our winter boots, but in some Eastern European families, one pair of boots is shared by several siblings. This year again, COAH is shopping for leather. So what's on your list? Thanks be to God for inclining hearts to warm feet!

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NATIONAL NEWS

WISCONSIN SCHOOL DISTRICT TRIES TO SILENCE CHRISTMAS—AND SUCCEEDS

More than a dozen schools in Wisconsin will not perform Christmas music this year. They are following a district directive to limit religious music in December. Fifteen elementary schools in the Wausau School district cancelled all “holiday” concerts. And Wausau West High School’s choral director, Phil Buch, decided not to hold its traditional Christmas concerts, *The Post Crescent* reported.

Buch, who has directed the school’s music programs since 1981, said the decision not to perform was made after meeting with school officials and an attorney representing the district. He specifically talked about a group called the Master Singers. “This group sings at Christmas programs,” he told the news outlet. “We sing for nursing homes, grade schools, businesses. To do that without Christmas music doesn’t make any sense.”

“At its heart, Christmas is a religious holiday,” said Eric Buehrer, president of Gateways to Better Education. “To censor that or reduce it to being irrelevant is simply bad education. The irony is, school officials who take such extreme measures end up offending most people in their communities. While lots of teens and pre-teens look to [secular music] to impress on them what is musically valuable,” he said, “there are educators who want to teach—and students who actually want to perform—culturally uplifting music that has inspired people for centuries. That should be encouraged, not discouraged.” (By Bethany Monk of *CitizenLink*)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

BAJRANG DAL PRESSURE VILLAGERS TO LEAVE CHRISTIANITY

For much of the year, Christians in the central India village of Taragaon have been enduring pressure to abandon their religion. In April, elements of Bajrang Dal demolished the church in Taragaon, a small town in the farming- and forestry-dominated region of southern Chhattisgarh state. Bajrang Dal is the militant youth wing of the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or VHP. Bajrang Dal goals include preventing “fraudulent or forceful conversion” of Hindus to any other religion.

Their church destroyed, the Christians of Taragaon moved their worship meetings into the homes of believers. The Bajrang Dal followed them.

Early in September, members of Bajrang Dal have been parading Hindu idols by the houses of Christian believers. Using loudspeakers, they ordered the Christians to come out of their homes to worship the idol, according to Open Doors.

“They are threatening us that they will drag each one out of our homes, beat us, and kill us if we did not come out of our homes ourselves,” the ministry quoted a village resident as saying. “In this atmosphere of fear and pressure, we do not know whom to turn to for help,” the resident said. “The police are biased and do nothing to protect the Christians.” (*WorldWatchMonitor*)

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

ONLY 1 IN 3 YOUNG “BORN-AGAIN EVANGELICALS” BELIEVES JESUS IS ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN, APOLOGETIC SAYS

Young Americans who claim to be “born-again believers” are moving away from a biblically centered worldview, with only one in three affirming that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, according to Steve Cable, Senior Vice President of Probe Ministries. We need to admit [that there’s a problem],” Cable said at a session titled “What Do [Young] American Believers Really Believe and How Do We Save Them From Cultural Captivity?” at Southern Evangelical Seminary’s Christian Apologetics conference in Charlotte, N.C. “We need to focus on the upcoming generations, saving the lost, saving the captive believers. Don’t stop when they leave high school,” Cable said.

Cable said that survey data shows only 9 percent of Americans hold a biblical view, and, among emerging adults, that number is even smaller. In general, the statistics showed that in 1990, 11 percent of 18–30-year-olds

said they have no religion. That number increased to 31 percent in 2012. “If it continues at that rate, it’s not going to be too many years until we have over 50 percent of young adults in America who say they have no religion,” he said.

Other notable stats showed that born-agains have decreased in number by 22 percent since 1976, while only one in three of emerging adults who said they have been born again believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to get into heaven. “This means that two thirds of them do not believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven,” Cable said. “It’s pretty hard to have a biblical belief in Jesus Christ and believe there are other ways to heaven.”

Similarly, when asked basic questions relating to their faith, only one in three of born-again young evangelicals were found to hold a biblical worldview, and only one in five were actively engaged in practicing their faith. “The evangelicals who are living out their lives as a witness to Jesus Christ, bringing these non-evangelicals to faith in the Lord—it’s 1 out of 25,” Cable added.

He offered, however, that those Christians who are going to church or identifying as born-agains but siding with what culture tells them instead of the Bible, called “cultural captives,” can still be reached by truth. “Interact with them; share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel does not change,” he advised. “[They] need to be Christ servants. They need to learn to accept objective truth, and be aware of cultural traps.” (By Stoyan Zaimov, *Christian Post* Reporter)

FOCUS ON CHRISTIANITY



A blanket of snow covers the little town of Bethlehem, in Pieter Bruegel’s oil painting from 1566. Although Jesus’ birth is celebrated every year on December 25, Luke and the other gospel writers offer no hint about the specific time of year He was born. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)

THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS IN DECEMBER

Christmas, the festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, is celebrated by a majority of Christians on December 25. But early Christians did not celebrate His birth, and no one knows on which date Jesus was actually born (some scholars believe that the actual date was in the early spring, which would place the occurrence of the holiday closer to Easter).

The origins of the holiday and its December date lie in the ancient Greco-Roman world, as commemorations probably began sometime in the second century. There are several possible origins for the December date. The Roman Christian historian Sextus Julius Africanus dated Jesus’ conception to March 25 (the same date upon which he held that the world was created), which, after nine months in His mother’s womb, would result in a December 25 birth.

As the church in Rome only formally celebrated December 25 in 336 AD during the reign of the emperor Constantine, who made Christianity the effective religion of his empire, some have speculated that choosing this date had the political motive of weakening the established pagan celebrations, such as the Roman festival called Saturnalia (during which people feasted and exchanged gifts). The date was not widely accepted for another half-century in the Eastern Empire, where January 6 had been favored, and Christmas did not become a major Christian festival until the ninth century. (*Britannica Editors*)

IS GOD JEALOUS OF HIS NAME?

REV. MARK KELDERMAN & REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

From Facebook to Twitter, from newsfeeds to blogs, how do we guard God's holy name? How can we properly represent the Lord in a world that blasphemes His name? These are important questions to ask as we engage in the world of technology and digital communication. When we profess to be Christians, we are called to represent God to a dying and fallen world. As we do so, we need to keep in mind the third commandment which says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7). So how can we do that?

Esteem His Name. God has revealed His name on every page of His Word. Think of Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3): "I AM." This name reveals God's eternal being and holiness. He is beyond time and beyond our feeble imaginations. He is the eternal and unchangeable Being who spoke the world into being: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This alone makes us responsible for how we use His name in the digital and online world. He reveals Himself not only as the eternal and unchangeable supreme Being and Creator, but also as the Redeemer of sinful people. In the opening verses of the Ten Commandments, He says, "I AM the LORD thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." He is Yahweh who saves His people. That name reappears at the birth of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:18: "And thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

When we profess to believe, we must do our utmost to esteem this name. When we do so, we must do it with a right estimation of ourselves. We are finite, foolish, and fickle. But the Lord is eternal, all-wise, and unchangeable. That ought to give us pause as we navigate the digital world, a world that often numbs us to the reality of His great name. So often we think we can navigate this world anonymously, but the virtual world is also under His control and all-seeing eye; it demands careful navigation so that we don't err by taking God's name in vain.

Think before you post. A right estimation of this holy name of God will make us careful what we post because we will acknowledge our accountability to Him for every word that we speak—including what we post.

Ask yourself this question, "Is this post glorifying the holy name of God?" When you are engaged in online debate about some political, social, or religious issue, are you careful to guard God's name not just in what you write, but also in your attitude? When you post on a blog, does the content of that post honor the holy name of God? He is jealous for His name—even in the online world. When you post about random activities, does your language reflect the name of God?

The temptation is to appeal to your peers, but remember that God is jealous for His name. He sees what you post. Are you perhaps silent when you see others taking the name of God in vain? The Heidelberg Catechism (A. 99) equates this silence with sinning against God's Name and counsels us not to be partakers of these horrible sins of others "by silence or connivance." That opens up a whole area of online accountability for your friends. At the very least, you should send them a grace-filled private message or warning, or better yet speak to them face-to-face, pointing out the serious nature of this sin, but also pointing them to the remedy in the name of Jesus.

Flee to the name. What if we have transgressed this commandment? What if our blog post or Facebook status has defiled the name of God? It stands there etched in the digital world, shared with friends who have shared it with others. Your name is connected and memorialized with a misuse of His name. Is it hopeless? No, remember He is the God who brought sinful Israel out of Egypt. Remember the blood sprinkled on the doorposts as Israel fled Egypt that dark night so long ago that pointed to the name of Jesus, who saves His people from their sins. Turn again to that name for cleansing. Though your sins might be etched in the digital world, they can be wiped clean in God's eyes through the blood of Jesus, whose name means "the LORD saves!" Take your online misrepresentation of God's name and find cleansing and healing in it (Acts 3:6, 16).

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FROM OUR MAILBOX

CHURCH MINISTRIES

From a friend in prison:

I have been thankful for your faithfulness in sending me tracts, the *Banner* magazine, and sermon notes. They fill my soul. Please keep my fellow Reformed brothers and me in prayer. With a transfer to a new prison, we were set squarely into the heart of Arminianism and Pentecostalism; to say that Reformed theology is frowned upon would be an understatement. It is openly attacked by the chaplain and his “appointed” inmate religious “leaders.” We are content to hold Bible studies out in the hot desert sun rather than take part in what is preached in the chapel. Again, thank you for the prayers and the publications you have provided.

From a friend in prison:

Dear brothers and sisters in the family of God Almighty,

Praise Jesus always first and foremost. I have been blessed with some of your literature and am edified by the message presented. I perceived it to be based on Bible doctrine and was uplifted. I was also set free of some doubts that the devil was trying to worm into my faith. So thank you very much. Glory to Jesus’ name.

CONFERENCE MINISTRY

At a recent conference, I questioned you concerning daily family worship, and had a few excuses as to why my family and I could not do daily family worship. You shot my excuses down and left me feeling very convicted. Ever since then I have led my family in worship every night with only a few exceptions where I had to work well into the night. At first it was very hard and I met with a lot of resistance from my own nature and from my wife. But after three months of daily worship it has become something we all look forward to, so much so that it has become the highlight of our day. It is hard to be consistent, but as long as we treat worship as a daily necessity we find that we can make time 99% of the time. Thank you for your encouragement.

PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

From friends in Louisiana:

We are prayerfully longing to see the Lord grow PRTS, that the certain kingdom of Christ may be extended in the Puritan and Reformed tradition, and we will continue to do all that we can to further that blessed work.

We also wish to thank you for the series of messages on assurance. You may recall, this was the topic at our first hearing of your preaching in Pensacola, FL where the Lord just “blew us away” with the soundness of the doctrine and the grace with which it was delivered. Ever since, we have enjoyed a steady diet of the “best food” by the men of HRC

and been provoked to read and study more to the end that we may glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

A recent devotion from Calvin, selected and edited by a godly man that we know, said this: “The just walk in the Lord’s ways because the Lord leads them by his hand. Faith will be a hundred eyes and wings to them. Hope will sustain them, for they are armed with promises and encouragement. They have stimulants whenever the Lord earnestly exhorts them, and they have warnings that are so terrible that they keep them awake. The faithful find the best ways in the Word of the Lord, and they follow them.” Hosea 14:9 moves the objective to the subjective, and we have experienced this in the preaching at Heritage. Our assurance has never been greater—certain knowledge and assured confidence makes for contentment in this life, no matter what the struggles!

SERMON AUDIO

I was listening to the message, “How shall we live in the world?” recently, and was so very blessed! For, this was needed to strengthen and encourage me while I live here on this wretched earth. So easily can the world draw us to itself, and so easily can Satan seek to use it to pull us away from the narrow way that we are to follow. I thank the Lord for using His message, to remind me of how I am to persevere for His name sake even when it seems impossible. “For He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.... Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Ps. 55:22). What comfort there is in that alone, knowing that He is there by my side through all things and all I have to do is bring it to Him in prayer! I then began to think of the things that I have been hearing lately in regards to the choices being made by God’s people within His church. My heart grieves as I see and hear of the choices many, including myself, tend to make! We seek to please man rather than our Lord and Saviour. I pray this would cease to be and that the Lord would fill me continually with His wisdom, as well as His saints and keep us pressing on for His glory! May He give us the strength and boldness to speak the truth to all as He teaches us His ways! May we continually remember His words.... “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

I pray that He would guard your heart and keep it burning as the two who walked on the road side speaking with Him. May He keep you now and always for His glory. May He help us all to seek more of what He wants us to do and not what the world wants us to do. Oh, how I pray that when that day comes and I cross the river Jordan, He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

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EBENEZER

The Lord, our salvation and light,
The guide of our strength and our days,
Has brought us together tonight,
A new Ebenezer to raise:
The year we have now passed through,
His goodness with blessings has crowned,
Each morning His mercies were new;
Then let our thanksgivings abound.

Encompassed with dangers and snares,
Temptations, and fears, and complaints,
His ear He inclined to our prayers,
His hand opened wide to our wants.
We never besought Him in vain;
When burdened with sorrow or sin,
He helped us again and again,
Or where before now had we been?

His gospel, throughout the long year,
From Sabbath to Sabbath He gave;
How oft has He met with us here,
And shown Himself mighty to save?
His candlestick has been removed
From churches once privileged thus;
But though we unworthy have proved,
It still is continued to us.

For so many mercies received,
Alas! what returns have we made?
His Spirit we often have grieved,
And evil for good have repaid,
How well it becomes us to cry,
“Oh! who is a God like to Thee?
Who passest iniquities by,
And plungest them deep in the sea!”

To Jesus, who sits on the throne,
Our best hallelujahs we bring;
To Thee it is owing alone
That we are permitted to sing:
Assist us, we pray, to lament
The sins of the year that is past
And grant that the next may be spent
Far more to Thy praise than the last.

—JOHN NEWTON

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