

# The *Banner* of Sovereign Grace Truth

*A Periodical for Young and Old*

IN THIS *Issue...*

**Internet: Is More Better?**

**Calvin on Advent  
and the Incarnation**

**The Scottish Communion  
Season**

THE BANNER OF  
SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

Publication Number (USPS 010584)

Official Publication of the Heritage Reformed denomination. Typeset at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Gardner Graphics); printed at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Grandville Printing).

Subscription price for ten issues per year: \$20.00 in the United States. \$30.00 in Canada, payable in U.S. funds. To foreign countries \$35.00 surface mail) or \$65.00 (air mail), payable in U.S. funds. Rates listed are for one year subscriptions.

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Copy for the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* is due the 5th of the month prior to publication. All copy (including announcements, obituaries, anniversary notices, and ads) should be sent to the editor. All announcements submitted for publication should be typed, and are subject to editorial policy. Communications relating to subscriptions should be addressed to the subscription manager. Change of address should be forwarded to the subscription manager one month in advance of moving date. Please provide both new and old address.

PERIODICAL Postage is Paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth," 540 Crescent Street, NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

**Additional Sources**

For a list of printed Reformed literature (both new and used books in English, and used books in Dutch), write: Reformation Heritage Books, 2965 Leonard Street, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525, or visit our on-line bookstore at [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

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## THE VIRGIN BIRTH

*"The God who took a motherless woman out of the side of a man took a fatherless man out of the body of a woman."*

—Matthew Henry

*"As bread is made of wheat, and wine is made of the grapes, so Christ is made of a woman. His body was part of the flesh and substance of the virgin."*

—Thomas Watson

*"The virgin birth at the very least points to a world unbounded by sheer naturalism."*

—Ravi Zacharias

## CALVIN ON ADVENT AND THE INCARNATION

Here are six entries drawn from a new daily devotional, *365 Days with Calvin*, edited by Dr. Joel Beeke, published by Day One from England, and available from Reformation Heritage Books (see page 281).

### ADVENT ON OPENING UP TO GOD'S PROMISES

*And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord* (Luke 1:45).

#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

1 Kings 8:14–21

The truth of God does not depend on the will of men. God always remains true to His promises even if the whole world of unbelievers and liars attempts to ruin His veracity. Yet, as unbelievers are unworthy to obtain the fruit of the promises, so Scripture teaches us that by faith alone these promises are powerful for our salvation.

God offers his benefits indiscriminately to all, and faith opens its bosom to receive them, while unbelief allows them to pass out of reach. If there was any unbelief in Mary, that could not have prevented God from accomplishing His work in another way that He chose. But Mary is called “blessed” because she received by faith the blessing offered to her. That opened up the way to God for its accomplishment. Unbelief, on the other hand, shuts the gate and restrains God’s hand from working so those who refuse the praise due to its power may not feel its saving effect.

We must observe also the relationship between the word and faith. For we learn that in the act of believing, we give assent to God, who speaks to us and holds for certain what He has promised that He will do for us. *From the Lord* has the same meaning as the common expression “on the part of God,” for the promise brought by the angel proceeded from God alone. Hence we see that whether God uses the efforts of angels or of men, He wishes equal honor to be paid to His Word as if He were visibly descending from above.

**FOR MEDITATION:** How daunting the promises of God are sometimes, especially when they are so far beyond our expectations. Yet faith does not question how those blessings come but opens itself to the One who promised them, receiving what God gives with an open hand. How are we, by grace, opening ourselves to what God might accomplish in us? How can we forfeit great blessings through unbelief?

## Meditations

### FILLING THE HUNGRY

*He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away* (Luke 1:52–53).

#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

Isaiah 2:11–22

The dazzling luster of kings and princes may so overpower the masses that few consider there is a God above. If princes brought a scepter with them from the womb, and if the stability of their thrones was perpetual, all acknowledgment of God and of His providence might immediately disappear. When the Lord raises simple people to an exalted rank, however, He triumphs over the pride of the world and encourages simplicity and modesty in His own people.

Thus, when Mary says God *hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree*, she teaches us that the world does not move and revolve by a blind impulse of fortune. Rather, all change is brought about by the providence of God. Furthermore, judgments that appear to disturb us and overthrow the entire framework of society are regulated by God with unerring justice.

This is confirmed by the following verse: *He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away*. For in it we realize that it is not because of people themselves but for His own good reasons that God takes pleasure in these changes. It is because the great and the rich and powerful who are lifted up by their abundance ascribe all praise to themselves and leave nothing to God.

We ought therefore to be scrupulously on our guard against being carried away by prosperity and vain satisfaction of the flesh, lest God suddenly deprives us of what we enjoy. To godly persons who experience poverty, and almost famine, and lift up their cries to God, no small consolation is afforded by the teaching that He *hath filled the hungry with good things*.

**FOR MEDITATION:** We can be so dazzled by rich and famous people that we praise them for their efforts at building empires. In so doing, we fail to recognize that everything belongs to God, who can reverse the fortunes of men in a single stroke. When have we seen the mighty put down and those of low degree exalted? How did that bring our focus back to our Almighty God?



## POSSESSING GOD

*Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Matthew 1:23).*

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:  
John 1

The name *Emmanuel* implies a contrast between the presence of God exhibited in Christ and every other kind of presence that appeared to the ancient people before the coming of Christ. If the reason for this name began to be actually true when Christ appeared in the flesh, it follows that it was not completely, but only in part, that God was formerly united with the patriarchs of faith.

Hence arises another proof that Christ is “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). From the very beginning of the world, Christ held the office of mediator, but as His true identity with God wholly depended on the latest revelation, He is justly called Immanuel when He is finally clothed, as it were, with a new character. He appears in public as a priest to atone for the sins of men by the sacrifice of His body and to reconcile them to the Father by the price of His blood. In a word, He fulfills every part in the salvation of men.

The first thing we ought to consider in this name is the divine majesty of Christ. We may thus yield to Him the reverence that is due to the only and eternal God. At the same time we must not forget the fruit that God intended us to collect and receive from this name. For whenever we contemplate the person of Christ as God-man, we ought to be certain that if we are united to Christ by faith, we possess God.

**FOR MEDITATION:** The miracle of the Incarnation contains great mystery. How is Christ Immanuel to you? How are we to reverence Him as God manifest in the flesh in our prayers and worship? How are we to reverence Him in everyday work? In short, how does it transform our everyday lives when we see and possess God?



## FINDING GREAT JOY

*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people (Luke 2:10).*

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:  
Philippians 4:1–9

To relieve the fear of the shepherds, the angel declares that he was sent to them to announce the mercy of God. When people hear that God is reconciled to them, those who have fallen down are raised, and those who have been ruined are restored. They are, as it were, recalled from death to life.

The angel begins his message by saying that he announces *great joy*. Next he explains the reason for that joy: “a Savior is born.” Until we have peace with God and are reconciled to Him through the grace of Christ, all the joy that we experience is deceitful and of short duration.

Ungodly men frequently indulge in frantic and intoxicating mirth, but if there is no one to make peace between them and God, the hidden stings of conscience can only produce fearful torment. Besides, to whatever extent they may flatter themselves in luxurious indulgence, their own lusts will provide more tormentors.

The beginning of solid joy is to perceive the fatherly love of God toward us, for that alone gives tranquility to our minds. As Paul says, “the kingdom of God” does not consist of eating and drinking but of joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

By promising “great joy,” the angel shows us that we ought, above all things, to rejoice in the salvation brought to us by Christ. This blessing is so great and boundless that it fully compensates for all the pains, distresses, and anxieties of the present life.

Let us learn to be so delighted with Christ alone that the perception of His grace may overcome us and at length remove from us all distresses of the flesh.

**FOR MEDITATION:** When have you experienced the mercy of God? How did it raise you up and restore you? By contrast, when have you pursued worldly entertainment and possessions, thinking they will bring you joy, only to find that you are too soon anxious and dissatisfied? Look to Christ for the only joy that lasts.

## SET UP FOR DESTRUCTION

*And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against (Luke 2:34).*

**SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:**  
Matthew 10:16–25

Simeon predicts here that Christ was divinely appointed to cast down and destroy many in Israel. But we must observe that the ruin of unbelievers results from their own strikes against our Savior. Simeon makes that point when he says that Christ is *a sign which shall be spoken against*. When unbelievers rebel against Christ, they dash themselves against Him, thus setting themselves up for ruin.

The world would not display harmony in opposing the gospel if there were no natural enmity between the Son of God and evildoers. The ambition or fury of the enemies of the gospel carries them in various directions. Dissension splits them into various sects, and a wide variety of superstitions separates idolaters from each other. But while they differ among themselves, these worldly people all agree in opposing the Son of God.

Some have said that opposition made to Christ is too plain an evidence of human depravity. That the world should thus rise against its Creator is a monstrous sight. But Scripture predicted this would happen, and the reason is very apparent. Once people have been alienated from God by sin, they always fly from Him. Instances of this kind, therefore, should not take us by surprise. On the contrary, the armor of our faith ought to prepare us to fight all the contradictions of the world.

**FOR MEDITATION:** Why do evil people so vehemently oppose the only one in whom no guilt can be found? Why do they seemingly gain strength each day in tempting believers and bringing down the church? Simeon's words assure us that such enmity against Christ and His followers is to be expected. Rather than being surprised at it, let us take comfort in it as it indicates that we are suffering like our Master (1 John 3:1).

## OBEYING UNEXPECTED ORDERS

*And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him (Matthew 2:13).*

**SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:**  
1 Corinthians 1:18–31

God has more than one way of preserving His people. This wonderful method of preserving the Son of God in the flight to Egypt teaches us it is improper to prescribe to God a fixed plan of action. Let us permit Him to advance our salvation by a diversity of methods and not refuse to be humbled, so that He may more abundantly display His glory. Above all, let us not avoid the cross of suffering, by which the Son of God Himself was trained from His earliest infancy.

The flight to Egypt, like the cross, may be foolishness to the world, yet it surpasses all the wisdom of the world. So that He might appear in His own time as the Savior of Judea, Christ Jesus is compelled to flee from Judea. He is then nourished in Egypt, from which nothing but what was destructive to the church of God has ever come. Who would not have regarded with amazement such an unexpected work of God?

Joseph immediately complies with the order of the angel. This is another proof of the certainty of the dream; for such promptness of obedience plainly shows that Joseph has no doubt whatsoever that it is God who tells him to take flight. Joseph's eager haste in fleeing Bethlehem may seem to have some aspect of distrust, for fleeing by night has some appearance of alarm. But it is not difficult to explain this. Joseph sees that God has appointed a method of safety, and he concludes that he should take flight because of extreme danger.

Likewise, our fear ought always to be regulated by divine instruction. If the instruction agrees with God's Word, it is not opposed to faith.

**FOR MEDITATION:** God's ways are not our ways—both in His plan of redemption and in His daily providences throughout our lives. What seems foolish to us may be the wisest course of all. What does God ask us to suffer today? What assurance do we have that His ways are wiser than we know in this? How can we submit more humbly and cheerfully to His will?

## Preparing for the Lord's Supper

*We must not only examine whether we have a wedding garment, but also whether it be well kept and brushed; whether no moths be got into it, no new spots dashed upon it.... Graces are to be purified, as well as sins purged out; grace, as well as metal, for want of rubbing and exercise, will gather dust.*

— Stephen Charnock<sup>1</sup>

The commemoration of Jesus' death at the Lord's Supper is not to be approached lightly. We too often minimize preparation for this sacrament. Perhaps we prepared ourselves thoroughly before our first communion, but having done that, we often do not see the need for further preparation. To properly prepare for the Lord's Supper, we must understand why preparation is necessary, how we are to examine ourselves, and the purposes of the Lord's Supper.

### WHY PREPARATION IS NECESSARY

Here are four reasons why we must continue to prepare for the Lord's Supper:

#### 1. The Command of God

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup," says 1 Corinthians 11:28. God commands us to prepare because He knows that we are prone to self-deceit. The corruption of our heart makes us prone to spiritual thievery, and the rebelliousness of our heart makes us prone to avoid self-examination.

#### 2. The Recipients of the Supper

Since the Supper is reserved for true believers in Christ, we must examine whether we possess true faith (2 Cor. 13:5) and other marks of grace, such as those presented in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5) and named as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).<sup>2</sup> The Lord's Supper does not plant faith but strengthens faith that is already planted. Thomas Watson writes, "None but the spouse communicates with her husband; a stranger may drink of his cup, but she alone has his heart—so strangers may drink of the cup at the Lord's Table, but true faith alone can drink of Christ's blood and have true communion with Him."<sup>3</sup>

#### 3. The Design and Holiness of the Ordinance

The greatest purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remember Christ (1 Cor. 11:24b). That demands asking ourselves whether we truly know Him personally (John 17:3).

Also, the holiness, royalty, and excellence of the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ. Since Communion is a holy ordinance established by a holy Institutor with a holy purpose, it is intended only for those who are made holy in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. The Dangers Involved

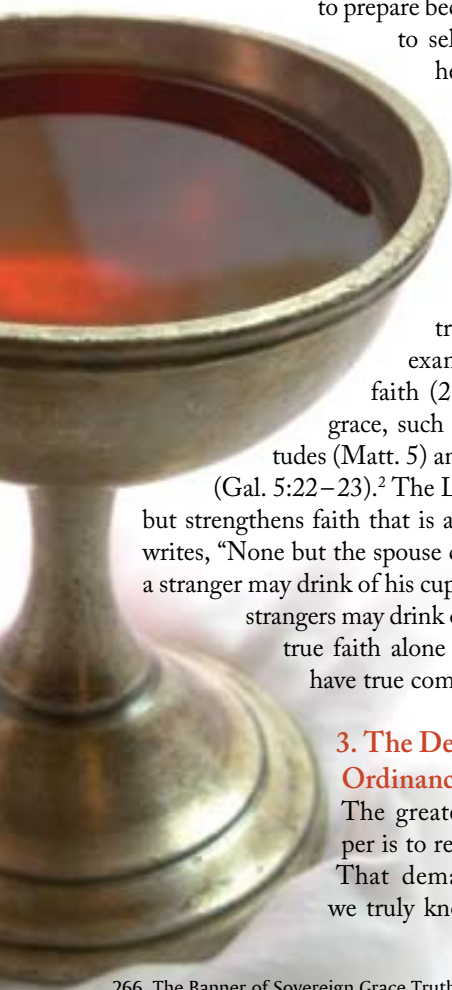
There is great danger in coming unworthily to the Lord's Supper. The tragic consequences of doing so include being "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27) and condemnation (v. 29). God reckons with an unworthy partaker "as with a crucifier of the Lord Jesus," Watson writes. "He does not drink Christ's blood, but sheds it; and brings that curse upon him, as when the Jews said, 'His blood be upon us and our children.'"<sup>5</sup>

Preparation for the Lord's Supper reflects our preparation for the Judgment Day. We can deceive people in the church when we attend the Lord's Supper; we can come without the spiritual wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. But we will never fool Christ on the great Judgment Day. If we neglect self-examination here, God will examine us on the Last Day before His throne where we will have no answer to a thousand questions (Job 9:3).

### HOW WE MUST EXAMINE OURSELVES

Self-examination is much maligned these days. Many Christians view it as an unhealthy and morbid introspection. Admittedly, self-examination has its dangers. If we perform it apart from the Word and the guidance of the Spirit, building our righteousness upon ourselves rather than upon Christ, it will end in ungodly introspection. John Calvin says self-examination can become "sure damnation" to us or we can let "carnal security insinuate itself."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Paul's instruction to conduct biblical self-examination before eating the bread and drinking the wine is ignored at our peril (1 Cor. 11:28–29).<sup>7</sup>

True self-examination for believers, according to the Westminster Larger Catechism, includes examining their "being in Christ, their sins and wants; the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, and repentance; love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; their desires after Christ, and their new obedience" (Q. 171). These marks of grace are summarized in the Dutch Reformed confessional literature, which says that proper self-examination consists of three parts: degree of guilt, experience of grace, and sense of gratitude.<sup>8</sup> An undue focus



on any one to the exclusion of the others will lead to unhealthy and potentially dangerous results.

### *Degree of Guilt*

To examine how we would stand before God apart from Christ, we must first consider our sins and the curse due them. This is not a pleasant exercise. It is painful to recall the many ways in which we have rebelled against our Creator. This is a time to grieve our past and present sins and to ask ourselves whether we experience a real depth of heartfelt sorrow for having transgressed God's law.

The aim of this examination is not depression, however. Nor are we to incite sinful passions in ourselves by dwelling on what tempts us most. Rather, we are to consider how far short of God's standards we fall, how just God would be to condemn us to an eternity apart from Him, and how undeserving we are of His mercy.

### *Experience of Grace*

We must next examine ourselves regarding our experience of God's grace and our faith in Christ. Do we trust God and His graciousness toward us? Having looked into the blackness of our own hearts, do we still trust God's mercy displayed in Jesus Christ? Having reckoned with our sin, do we still believe we are forgiven because of Christ's perfect, substitutionary sacrifice, or are we trying to expiate it ourselves through right living?

Perhaps we looked deeply into our hearts and concluded that sin is still too much a power in our lives. Perhaps we wondered if such sins as we are guilty of can truly be forgiven. Or, on the other hand, perhaps we looked shallowly into our hearts and concluded that we haven't sinned too much and don't realize that we are in dire need of Jesus. These are issues we must address. We are not to look for perfection; rather, we must ask if we have the fundamental faith to take refuge from the just wrath of God in the arms of Jesus Christ the righteous.

### *Sense of gratitude*

Finally, we are to examine our Christian walk and ask ourselves whether we—out of gratitude to God—are striving against sin and pursuing holiness. Are we resolved to continue the Christian fight, or are we sick of it and already contemplating future sins? Do we hate sin and struggle against our spiritual enemies—ourselves, the lusts of the world, and Satan? Do we yearn to have our faith strengthened and our lives made holier? Do we earnestly desire to obey God, to walk in His ways, and to be more conformed to Christ? Or, have we grown weary of God's standards and abandoned them? Do we merely maintain a religious façade to keep peace with our spouses, friends, and church? Are we living in loving harmony with all our Christian brothers and sisters? Have we kept ourselves from sins that Paul says disqualify us from coming to the Lord's Table?

Again, the goal is not to find perfection within ourselves but to cultivate a desire to honor God above all, which is evi-

dence that God is sanctifying us. Consider the following words from the Form for Administering the Lord's Supper used in Dutch Reformed churches. Having recounted a long list of sins that disqualify one from Communion, the form says:

But this is not designed (dearly beloved brethren and sisters in the Lord), to deject the contrite hearts of the faithful, as if none might come to the supper of the Lord but those who are without sin; for we do not come to this supper to testify thereby that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves; but on the contrary, considering that we seek our life outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that we lie in the midst of death; therefore, notwithstanding we feel many infirmities and miseries in ourselves, as namely, that we have not perfect faith, and that we do not give ourselves to serve God with that zeal as we are bound, but have daily to strive with the weakness of our faith and the evil lusts of our flesh; yet, since we are (by the grace of the Holy Spirit) sorry for these weaknesses, and earnestly desirous to fight against our unbelief and to live according to all the commandments of God; therefore we rest assured that no sin or infirmity which still remaineth against our will in us can hinder us from being received of God in mercy, and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly meat and drink.

Self-examination has several purposes. It dissuades unbelievers from taking Communion, to which they have no divine right, and, with the Spirit's blessing, persuades them to turn to Christ so that they too might enjoy the blessings of the gospel, including Communion. It is also designed for believers to stir up love for Christ and a sense of awe at the grace and mercy bestowed on them as unworthy sinners. And it strengthens their resolve to press on through the difficulties of life, to reject sins that have crept back into their lives, and to pursue holiness with renewed vigor.

## **THE PURPOSES OF THE SUPPER**

Preparing for the Lord's Supper also clarifies the purposes of this holy sacrament. Many of us are surprisingly unclear about exactly what we are doing when we partake of the sacrament. We know that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper do not change into the body and blood of Christ (which Roman Catholics believe), nor do we eat Christ in, with, and under the elements (which is what Lutherans believe), but as Reformed Christians, what do we really believe happens in the Lord's Supper?

Calvin says that, in the Supper, we commune with Christ by faith and spiritually, that is, "in heavenly places." Christ does not leave heaven to enter the bread; rather, in the Holy Supper, we are called to lift up our hearts to heaven, where Christ now is. We do not cling to the external bread and wine, but seek for Christ crucified in glory. Calvin writes, "Christ, then, is absent from us in respect of his body, but dwelling in us by his Spirit, he raises us to heaven to himself, transfusing into us the vivifying vigour of his flesh just as the rays of the sun invigorate us by its vital warmth."<sup>9</sup>

When we next prepare for the Lord's Supper, let us focus

on partaking of this sacred meal humbly and reverently before God. The Lord's Supper is a feast testifying that though we are poor, needy sinners, we have become rich in grace through the sufferings of our glorious Savior. Focus on five aspects of this amazing feast, remembering that it is:

### 1. A Commemorative Feast

John Flavel writes, "The Lord's Supper is memorative, and so it has the nature and use of a pledge or token of love, left by a dying friend to a dear surviving friend. It is like a ring plucked off from Christ's finger, or a bracelet from His arm, or rather His picture from His breast, delivered to us with such words as these: 'As oft as you look on this, remember Me, let this help to keep Me alive in your remembrance when I am gone, and out of sight.'"<sup>10</sup>

We profit most when we focus on Christ. We remember what He has done for us from eternity past, in His teaching ministry on earth and in His suffering and death; is now doing for us at the Father's right hand; and will do for us when He comes to take us to Himself to be with Him forever.

### 2. A Covenanting Feast

We remember God's covenant with us in the Supper and respond in gratitude by covenanting ourselves—soul, mind, and strength—to Him in thanksgiving. We surrender our lives in response to the heavenly banquet God spreads for us in the Supper. The Supper enables us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. A Strengthening Feast

It strengthens our faith, our love, and our hope, and fills us with gratitude and assurance as it directs us to the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

### 4. A Witnessing Feast

As we partake of the Supper, we continue to remember the Lord's death, testifying that His death is our only hope of acceptance with God.

### 5. A Love Feast

Ultimately, the Lord's Supper is about love: perfect love, superlative love, divine love, everlasting love. As we prepare for the Supper, we contemplate God's amazing love to us in Christ. That so stirs up our hearts that we may say with John, "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The Lord's Supper is a love feast in which communicants also cherish each other and testify of the bond that they enjoy with each other as the body of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

## PRACTICAL HELPS

Here are six practical ways to prepare for the Lord's Supper.

### 1. Review Christ's Sufferings in the Bible

Read the gospel accounts, especially the narratives of institution of the Supper and Christ's passion. How can we remember Christ in the Holy Supper if we have only vague recollections of what Scripture says about His sufferings and death?

### 2. Read a Great Book

Read about the sufferings of Christ or the Lord's Supper the week prior to Communion. Among the many available, my favorites are Friedrich W. Krummacher's *The Suffering Savior*, Matthew Henry's *The Communicant's Companion*, and Wilhelmus

à Brakel's "The Practice of the Lord's Supper," in *A Christian's Reasonable Service*.

### 3. Meditate on Great Doctrines of Grace

Brakel suggests meditating on eternal election, the covenant of redemption, the coming of the promised Messiah, the sufferings of Christ in bearing the wrath of God, and Christ's resurrection and ascension.<sup>13</sup>

### 4. Cultivate a Humble and Sensitized Conscience

The best way to prepare for Communion is to humble ourselves before God. God brings us low to exalt us. So, search your conscience for any sins of which you have not repented. Confess them to God and to anyone whom you may have sinned against. Ask for strength and grace to mortify the old nature in yourself.

### 5. Fellowship with Believers

Spiritual bonding before the sacrament is a great way to build holy desire for God. Getting together with other Christians the Saturday evening before Communion to pray and speak about who Christ is and what He means to you can be an excellent means of preparation.

### 6. Be Much in Prayer

Do not only pray for a blessing for yourself, but pray also for the minister who officiates at the Lord's Supper, the elders who supervise it, and for the congregation in general. Pray that Christ will be exalted, that the faith of believers will be strengthened, and that new communicants will experience the peace of God that passes understanding. Pray for adults and children who may be present to witness the administration of the sacrament, that they, too, may be drawn to Christ.

Preparing for the Lord's Supper is not like preparing for an exam. The goal is not to pack one's mind full of theological knowledge, though such knowledge can certainly benefit us at the Table. Rather, the goal is to cultivate a tender conscience, a loving and believing heart, and reverential thankfulness toward God. Coming to the Table in such a way, we are certain to benefit from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

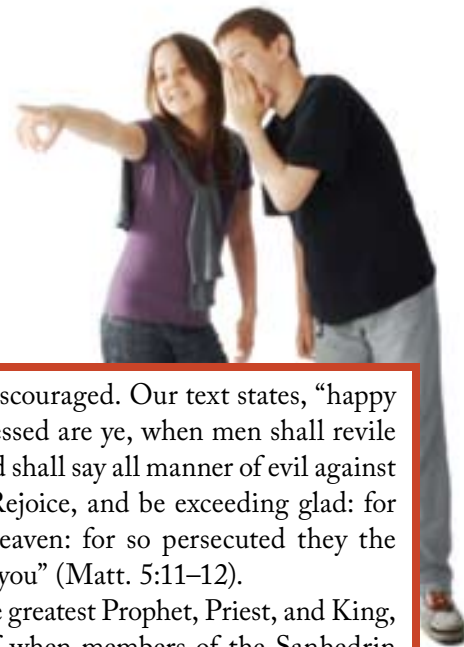
1. Cited in I. D. E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 172.
2. For a very helpful list of the essential marks of grace, see the Belgic Confession of Faith, article 29.
3. Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 244.
4. Cf. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999), 2:570.
5. Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, 233.
6. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.7, 24.
7. For an excellent help in preparing for examination, see Gerard Wisse, "May I Partake of the Lord's Supper?," in his *Christ's Ministry in the Christian* (Sioux Center, Ia.: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing, 1993), 99–123.
8. See especially the Heidelberg Catechism's divisions and Questions 2, 81, and the Lord's Supper Form.
9. Inst. 4.17.12.
10. Cited in Thomas, *The Golden Treasury*, 171.
11. Inst. 4.18.13.
12. Inst. 4.17.44.
13. Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2:582–84.

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## The Insulted Parent and Teacher

JAMES W. BEEKE

*"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified" (1 Peter 4:14).*



*Insults hurt.* Reproach is painful. The wound is deeper when the criticism is hurled by one from our own family; the hurt multiplies according to the closeness of relationship. The closer the friends are, the more painful the reproach. This places parents and teachers at high risk for experiencing pain.

When criticized, it is important to examine the criticism carefully. Is there truth to it? Even if the accusation is exaggerated or slanderous, are there elements of truth in it? What could I learn from the accusation, and consequently change in my way of thinking, speaking, or responding? Serious consideration like that is critical to cultivating a humble and teachable spirit. A proud and unteachable character immediately accuses the criticizer and focuses on any refutable exaggeration or mistaken detail within the accusation. As parents and teachers, we must push self-protection and self-justification aside to honestly face our errors in judgment, to repent and confess our sins, and to right our wrongs with others.

Notice that our text does not say that "if ye are reproached for your mistakes, or for your poor judgment, or for your cruel words, or for your harsh actions, then happy are ye." It speaks of a clearly different cause for being insulted or mocked. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." Being criticized for foolish and wrong responses arising from my self-centered and self-justifying spirit is one thing. But being reproached for the name of Christ is a very different matter. When such is the case, "happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." The spirits underlying both are opposites. As parents and teachers, we need to correctly understand and clearly distinguish both.

Parents, if your older children criticize and fight against you for standing firm on biblical principles, this hurts. If they mock you behind your back and slander you, this is even more painful. Teachers, if your high school students snicker or roll their eyes or laugh at your "old-fashioned ideas" when you stand firm on scriptural positions, this is not pleasant. It can be difficult to accept mockery for holding to biblical principles regarding dress and appearance, moral and immoral behaviors, and a host of other behaviors in which current societal views clash with eternal, biblical absolutes—especially when the insulting, laughing, and persecuting continues. If, however, you suffer insult or reproach for bringing up your children or engaging with your students in a biblical way of diligently teaching (Deut. 6:7), training (Prov. 22:6), nurturing (Eph. 6:4), ruling (1 Tim. 3:4), or example-setting

(1 Kings 9:4), do not be discouraged. Our text states, "happy are ye." Jesus teaches, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you" (Matt. 5:11–12).

Think of how Jesus, the greatest Prophet, Priest, and King, was reproached! Think of when members of the Sanhedrin spit in His face, hit Him, and mocked the Prophet of all prophets, yelling, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?" (Matt. 26:68)? As Priest of the priesthood, did the chief priests and rulers not deride Him and tauntingly proclaim, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Matt. 27:42)? As King of kings, did the soldiers not mock Him by dressing Him in a kingly robe, bowing before Him in mockery, crowning Him with thorns, and hitting him over the head with the stick they gave Him as a mock sceptre (Matt. 27:29–30)? And did Jesus not teach us that His disciples must deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow Him (Matt. 10:38, 16:24)? Why then are we surprised when we are insulted and persecuted for His name's sake?

The question is not whether those who follow Christ will suffer insult or reproach or not. All will, in varying degrees. The question is, how should I handle such insults and reproaches?

Look to Jesus. How did He handle great reproach, humiliation, mockery, and pain, when all His suffering was totally undeserved? As they crucified Him, He prayed, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Look to the saints who have gone before you. Think of David when he fled from Absalom. Shimei reproached him, calling David a bloody man of Belial. In contrast to Abishai who wanted to kill Shimei on the spot, David responded, "Behold, my son, which came forth from my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Sam. 16:11–12). What great lessons we can learn from these examples! How God is honored when we respond to insult and reproach for Christ's sake, not with self-defense and self-justifications, but with self-denying humility and graciousness, with Christ-like meekness and love!

*(continued on page 271)*

## Are You Born Again?

Are you born again? This is one of life's most important questions. Jesus Christ said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It is not enough to reply, "I belong to the church; I suppose I'm a Christian." Thousands of nominal Christians show none of the signs of being born again which the Scriptures have given us—many listed in the First Epistle of John.

### 1. NO HABITUAL SINNING

First of all, John wrote: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 John 3:9). "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not" (1 John 5:18).

A person who has been born again, or regenerated, does not habitually commit sin. He no longer sins with his heart and will and whole inclination. There was probably a time when he did not think about whether his actions were sinful or not, and he did not always feel grieved after doing evil. There was no quarrel between him and sin; they were friends. But the true Christian hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, considers it his greatest plague, resents the burden of its presence, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be completely delivered from it. Sin no longer pleases him, nor is it even a matter of indifference to him; it has become a horrible thing which he hates. However, he cannot eliminate its presence within him.

If he said that he had no sin, he would be lying (1 John 1:8). But he can say that he hates sin and that the great desire of his soul is not to commit sin at all. He cannot prevent bad thoughts from entering his mind, or shortcomings, omissions, and defects from appearing in both his words and his actions. He knows that "in many things we offend all" (James 3:2). But he can truly say, in the sight of God, that these cause him grief and sorrow and that his whole nature does not consent to them.

*What would the apostle say about you?  
Are you born again?*

### 2. BELIEVING IN CHRIST

Second, John wrote: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1).

A man who is born again, or regenerated, believes that Jesus Christ is the only Savior who can pardon his soul, that He is the divine person appointed by God the Father for this

very purpose, and that beside Him there is no Savior at all. In himself he sees nothing but unworthiness. But he has full confidence in Christ and, trusting in Him, he believes that his sins are all forgiven. He believes that, since he has received Christ's finished work and death on the cross, he is considered righteous in God's sight, and he may look forward to death and judgment without alarm. He may have fears and doubts. He may sometimes tell you that he feels as if he had no faith at all. But ask him if he is willing to trust in anything instead of Christ, and see what he will say. Ask him if he will rest his hope of eternal life on his own goodness, his own works, his prayers, his minister, or his church, and listen to his reply.

*What would the apostle say about you?  
Are you born again?*

### 3. PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS

Third, John wrote: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 John 2:29).

The man who is born again, or regenerated, is a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God's will, to do the things that please God and to avoid the things that God hates. He wishes to continually look to Christ as his example as well as his Savior and to prove himself to be Christ's friend by doing whatever He commands. He knows he is not perfect. He is painfully aware of his indwelling corruption. He finds an evil principle within himself that is constantly warring against grace and trying to draw him away from God. But he does not consent to it, though he cannot prevent its presence.

Though he may sometimes feel so low that he questions whether or not he is a Christian at all, he will be able to say with John Newton, "I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am."

*What would the apostle say about you?  
Are you born again?*

### 4. LOVING OTHER CHRISTIANS

Fourth, John wrote: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

A man who is born again has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Father in heaven, he loves all men with a great general love, but he has a special love for those who share his faith in Christ. Like his Lord and Savior, he

loves the worst of sinners and could weep over them; but he has a peculiar love for those who are believers. He is never so much at home as when he is in their company.

He feels that they are all members of the same family. They are his fellow soldiers, fighting against the same enemy. They are his fellow travelers, journeying along the same road. He understands them, and they understand him. They may be very different from him in many ways—in rank, in station, and in wealth. But that does not matter. They are his Father's sons and daughters and he cannot help loving them.

*What would the apostle say about you?  
Are you born again?*

## 5. OVERCOMING THE WORLD

Fifth, John wrote: "Whoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4).

A man who is born again does not use the world's opinion as his standard of right and wrong. He does not mind going against the world's ways, ideas, and customs. What men think or say no longer concerns him. He overcomes the love of the world. He finds no pleasure in things which seem to bring happiness to most people. To him they seem foolish and unworthy of an immortal being.

He loves God's praise more than man's praise. He fears offending God more than offending man. It is unimportant to him whether he is blamed or praised; his first aim is to please God.

*What would the apostle say about you?  
Are you born again?*

## 6. KEEPING ONESELF PURE

Sixth, John wrote: "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself" (1 John 5:18).

A man who is born again is careful of his own soul. He tries not only to avoid sin but also to avoid everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He

knows that evil communications corrupt the heart and that evil is more catching than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He is careful about the use of his time; his chief desire is to spend it profitably.

He desires to live like a soldier in an enemy country—to wear his armor continually and to be prepared for temptation. He is diligent to be a watchful, humble, prayerful man.

*What would the apostle say about you?  
Are you born again?*

## THE TEST

These are the six great marks of a born-again Christian.

There is a vast difference in the depth and distinctness of these marks in different people. In some they are faint and hardly noticeable. In others they are bold, plain, and unmistakable, so anyone may read them. Some of these marks are more visible than others in each individual. Seldom are all equally evident in any one person. But still, after every allowance, here we find boldly painted six marks of being born of God.

How should we react to these things? We can logically come to only one conclusion—only those who are born again have these six characteristics, and those who do not have these marks are not born again. This seems to be the conclusion to which the apostle intended us to come.

*Do you have these characteristics?  
Are you born again?*

*(continued from page 269)*

Is not this what our text teaches? "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." On the part of the ones who reproach, Christ is evil spoken of, but on your part (the one reproached for Christ's sake), He is glorified.

Parents, if you fight back against grown children or family members when reproached for Christ's sake in order to establish your honor, you will gain nothing for your Master or yourself. Teachers, if you argue against students or parents of students for your name, the result will be the same. Jesus taught us a different way. "For whosoever will save his

life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). Go forward then, asking for grace to respond Christ-like. This will glorify Christ. Your humble graciousness will also be observed by others—even the insulter. Who can tell? God may use your Christ-like response to lead the very one who is insulting and mocking to repentance and faith in Christ!

*Are you a parent who responds to insults like Christ and a teacher who glorifies Christ when reproached for His sake?*

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## THE Scottish Communion Season (1)

DR. DAVID MURRAY

When asked to write about a tradition that is unique to our own church or country, there is always a danger that we might give the impression of a kind of moral or spiritual superiority. Having been asked to write about the Scottish Communion season, especially as it is observed in the Scottish Highlands, I am very concerned to avoid this danger. So, let me be clear, I'm not saying the Scottish way is the only way of remembering the Lord's death. Neither am I saying it is necessarily the best way. However, just as I have learned much from the Dutch Reformed tradition since I arrived here last year, I would hope that there might be something you could learn from the Scottish tradition—something you might think worthy of weaving into your own tradition in some way or another.

### THE HISTORY

When I explain the five-day Scottish Communion season to you, you might think it is awfully elaborate, lengthy, and complicated. In some ways it is. Of course, it didn't begin like that. How, then, did it develop? Well, one of the major results of the Scottish Reformation was an intense carefulness in the administration of the Lord's Supper. The Reformers inherited a situation where anyone and everyone took communion and so were extremely anxious to get back to a more biblical position. It was proposed that every member in the congregation be examined by the minister, at least once a year, as to their biblical knowledge and their spirituality.

But, with so many people to visit, this meant that Communion was administered only once or twice a year. Consequently, when Communion did come around, people wanted to make it a special occasion. A preparation service was added

on Saturday. Then a fast was added between the Saturday and the Sabbath morning. Then that fast was moved to the mid-week, and a service held. And so it went on, with other services being added over the years. In addition, there were times in Scottish Church history when there was a real shortage of ministers, which limited the opportunities to have Communion. With this limitation again came the desire to make the Communion season a special occasion with extra services, a festival of spiritual food and spiritual experience.

### THE PRACTICE

Probably the best way to give an understanding of the Scottish Communion season is to be more practical than historical. I will, therefore, take you through the season day by day, from the Thursday to the Monday. And, to simplify matters, I will give you one word by which to remember the significance of each day.

### THURSDAY: HUMILIATION

Thursday is the day of humiliation. In parts of the Scottish Highlands, almost everything, including schools and shops, closes down on Communion Thursday. This is made possible by the various denominations in an area having their Communion seasons at the same time. Farms and crofts lie silent, and fishing boats are tied up, sometimes for the whole five days.

This time of quiet and rest from regular work gives people time to search their lives and souls with a view to confession of sin. There are two church services on Thursday—morning and evening—which focus on Psalms and Scriptures related to conviction of sin, contrition, and repentance. Sermons usu-

ally aim to induce a spiritual sensitivity in the hearers, to bring God's people to see their spiritual need, and to start the Communion season low, in the dust—the necessary place to be before any spiritual blessing comes to us. God brings us low before He raises us up again.

Thursday is also known as the “Fast Day.” Now of course, some people do fast from food in order to give themselves more time to examine their souls and search out their sins. There is certainly a fairly widespread “fasting” from the media. Being from the more “pagan” south of Scotland, I made a real blunder at my first Scottish Communion season in the Scottish Highlands when I asked on the Thursday where the nearest shop was so that I could buy a newspaper. Shock and horror spread all around the room—this “heathen” southerner wanting to read a newspaper on the Communion Thursday! I was soon educated about the need to come apart from the world for one whole day to examine my soul for sin rather than get distracted by the sins of the world. So, the whole of Thursday, in private and in public worship, is focused towards humiliation.

## FRIDAY: EXAMINATION

Friday is the day of examination. In a way, Thursday involves self-examination as well. However, on the Thursday we look for sin to confess, whereas on Friday we look for marks of grace to encourage us. We might say that the Christians are “killed” on a Thursday and then raised again on the Friday. “For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole” (Job 5:18). The painful experience of humiliation is followed, hopefully, by a skilful spiritual physician pouring balm into the soul to encourage the humble soul that, despite all the sins that are present in the heart, “There, look, there's a little mark of grace. And look, you have this mark as well; don't despair.”

As on the Thursday, there are also two services on the Friday. The evening service is a normal worship service at which the minister preaches on one of the marks of grace—love to the brethren, hope, patience in tribulation, prayer, etc. The aim is to encourage God's trembling people to profess faith by sitting at His table, as well as to discourage the unconverted from taking such an unwarranted privilege to themselves.

The Friday morning service is usually one of the high points of the Communion season. It is called “The Ceisd” (pronounced Kaysch), and is Gaelic for “The Question.” Why is it called “The Question?” Well, let me begin by explaining that there are usually three ministers in the pulpit—the local minister and two visiting ministers who have been invited to assist with the numerous services of the season. At the Question meeting, after singing and prayer, the senior visiting minister stands up and asks one of the local elders for a “text.” One of the elders then stands up and reads out a verse of Scripture. The text may be from any part of the Bible but is always related to Christian experience. Some examples might be, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses

and sins” (Eph. 2:1), or “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious” (1 Pet. 2:7). The elder then asks a question along these lines: “Would the brethren explain how they have experienced this verse either in their conversion or in their Christian life?” More specifically, he might say, “Would the brethren give a testimony as to how they were brought alive spiritually?” or, “Would the brethren explain how Christ is precious to them?” The question is really targeted at bringing out the marks of true Christian experience, and of conversion especially.

When the elder sits down, the senior minister, without any prior notice or preparation, “Opens the Question,” that is, he gives an explanation of the text in its context. This is a real test for a minister, and a time of much silent prayer! It was not unknown for “mischievous” elders to pick a text from an obscure minor prophet in order to “test” the minister! Usually the minister speaks about the text for about ten to fifteen minutes and then sits down—often greatly relieved. At that point, the local minister asks one of the older Christian men in the congregation, or one of the men visiting from other congregations, to stand up and, “Speak to the question.” He then speaks for about five minutes, and ideally no more than ten minutes, and tells of how the Lord brought him spiritually alive or how the Lord is precious to him. Then another person would be asked in the same way. Depending on how long each man spoke, you would normally hear maybe six to ten men speak, one after another.

I have been present at many Friday mornings when godly men wept openly as they described, without any preparation, of how the Lord had dealt with them and brought them to the knowledge of themselves and of the Savior. And the aim of it all is to help and encourage those who are present and wondering, “Am I a Christian or not?” The men are usually incredibly honest. It is not a time to show off. It is a time to bare the soul and speak of the struggles and the difficulties of Christian experience as well as the blessings and privileges. And many, many Christians can point back to a Friday morning of a Communion season as a time when they received assurance of faith through listening to these testimonies.

In the 1800s, these meetings went on for three and four hours, with sometimes up to forty men being called. We don't have that stamina today! Our meetings usually last about two hours, but the time usually flies by—as it does when you experience the foretaste of heaven that is present in true Christian fellowship.

At the end, the visiting minister “Closes the Question” by summing up what had been said and, if necessary, gently and diplomatically correcting anything said amiss that might discourage or mislead.

The next article will cover the Saturday to Monday of the Communion season.

# Profiting from the Parables (1)

Read: Matthew 13:10–17, 34–35

The parables of Christ are among the most familiar and best loved parts of Holy Scripture. Parables are word pictures that illustrate parts of Christ's teaching. They come in all sorts and sizes. There are short parables and longer ones. There are parables that stand alone and some that come in a series. There are comforting parables and challenging parables. There are parables that seem easy to understand and parables that few understand.

## Why are the Parables so Attractive?

There are various reasons why the parables are so attractive to so many readers. For one thing, many of them are brief and simple. They use colorful language and examples of daily life. There is the woman who kneads leaven into dough. There is the merchant who sells all his possessions for the pearl of great price. There is the invitation to the wedding. There is the woman sweeping her house looking for the lost coin. There is the man who builds on the sand. There is the unforgiving debtor. All these scenarios engage the mind and imagination, and we can easily relate to these word pictures.

Another reason the parables are attractive is that they include surprises that impact our minds and emotions. There is the rich fool, who is planning for bigger barns one moment and dead the next. There is the publican, who goes to his home justified rather than the self-righteous Pharisee. There is the prodigal son, who is welcomed back while the elder son stands outside of the feast. These surprises help make the stories memorable.

## What are Some Common Threads in the Parables?

### 1. THE PARABLES ARE GOD-CENTERED.

Above all else, the parables are centered on God. Many of them touch on the kingdom of heaven and bring the King of the kingdom, namely God, into view. Many of the parables involve a father, a king, a householder, or some other "master," who draws our attention to God as the Lord of all things.

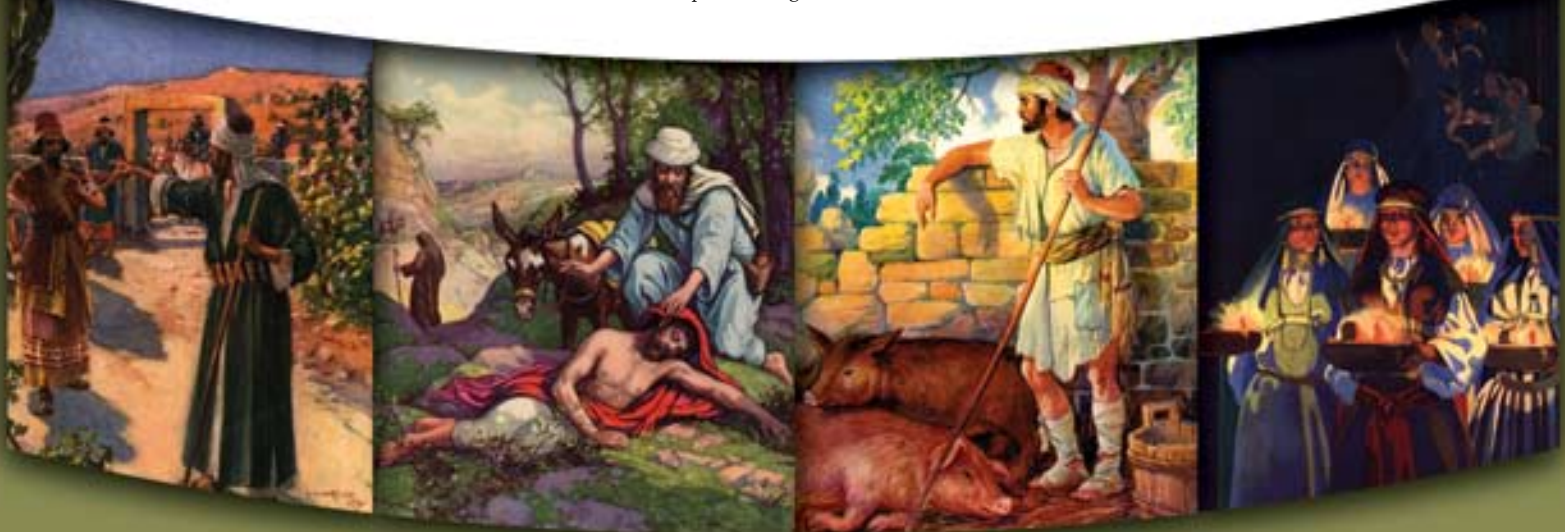
In addition, the purpose of the parables as a whole exalts the doctrine of God's sovereignty. When Jesus explained why He spoke in parables, He made clear that His parables unveil truth to true disciples while hiding truth from unbelievers (Matt. 11:25–26). To some, God gives the ability to understand His teaching, whereas to others He hides His truth. In this way as well, then, the parables center on God.

### 2. THE PARABLES UNDERScore MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

That the parables exalt the sovereignty of God does not mean that they exclude an emphasis on our responsibility. Many of them deal with our responsibility to our Maker and Master. How many don't involve stewards or tenants? Like them, we have a responsibility to our Master for which we must give account. A number of parables press the duty of watching, because we don't know the hour of Christ's return (e.g., Matt. 24:45–51). Others point to the need to be wise like the builder on the rock (Matt. 7:24), or the five wise virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). Think also of the parable that exposes the excuses that people make for not coming to the great supper (Luke 14:18).

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In addition, Christ encourages those who hear the parables to be busy with them. We need to be like a householder who brings out of his treasury, things new and old (Matt. 13:51). We have a responsibility to mine the parables busily.

### 3. PARABLES HIGHLIGHT THE GRACIOUSNESS OF THE GOSPEL

Frequently, parables use the picture of a banquet or supper (e.g., Luke 14:16; Matt. 22:2; Luke 15:24). The festivities highlight the theme of grace that runs through many of the parables. In the parable of the great supper, the host invites people freely to come to the supper (Luke 14:16–24). When the first group of invitees does not come, he instructs his servant to invite the poor and disabled. When his house is still not filled, a third invitation goes out to those in the highways and byways. This same message of grace resounds in the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15).

The theme of grace is illustrated in other parables as well. The publican is justified freely, without the deeds of the law (Luke 18:14). The parable of the barren fig tree is another notable example (Luke 13:6–9). When the fig tree is barren after a prolonged period of labor, one might conclude that further labor is in vain. However, like the husbandman of the parable, God bears long with sinners, showing them patience and longsuffering (Luke 13:6–9).

### What is the Main Purpose of the Parables?

People often think of the parables as simple examples or illustrations that help make Jesus' teaching more understandable. The truth of the matter is, however, that the parables both reveal and conceal. They help understanding but also hide understanding, depending on who you are and how you stand with respect to the kingdom of God. When His disciples asked Him why He taught in parables, Christ quoted Isaiah 6:9–10, which reads: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and under-

stand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (see e.g., Matt. 13:10–17). Christ had not always taught in parables. But when people, especially the leaders, began to reject Him and His teaching, He turned to parables. What Christ is making clear is that the parables are more than just illustrations that make things easier to understand. They hide the truth as much as they reveal it. They reveal it to disciples, but hide it to unbelievers.

How does this work practically? Let's take the parable of the sower as an example. Here we hear about a sower whose seed falls on four types of ground. Only one of them brings forth lasting fruit. How does this parable hide the truth? Well, unbelievers hear this parable and don't understand how it relates to them. Either they fail to get the point at all, or they fail to see themselves in the parable. Perhaps they don't see how their hearts are pictured in the wayside, the stony ground, or the thorny ground. Or even if they would see it, they either don't agree with this portrayal or they fail in knowing what to do with this truth. They certainly don't take away real advantage from this parable.

In the meantime, the true disciples recognize that this parable gives a true picture of the natural heart, as well as tendencies in their own hearts, even after grace. For them, this parable really makes things concrete. The problem becomes real and alive. Especially after examining their own hearts and lives by the teaching of this parable, they realize the importance of "taking heed how ye hear" (Luke 8:18). By the Spirit's illuminating power, they do so more and more. They also receive encouragement that the work which the Lord has begun will not fail. Instead, God's Word will cause an abundant harvest in due time.

This is how the parables both reveal and conceal. No matter what parable we look at, we need to keep this purpose in mind. Whoever we are and wherever we are spiritually, we need to be concerned that the meaning and force of the parable is not lost on us. We should desire that the parable do its positive work in us.

## Questions

1. If you had to choose a favorite parable, which would it be? Why?
2. Jesus often talked about the kingdom of heaven in His parables. Define the kingdom of heaven. Are we used to talking about the kingdom as much as Christ did?
3. Many people think of the parables almost as sermon illustrations, which simplify a spiritual point for hearers. According to Matthew 13:10–13, is this accurate?
4. A simple believer will understand a parable like an unbelieving scholar never will. Do you agree? How would that work with, for example, the parable of the two builders (Matt. 7:24–27)?
5. Nathan told David a parable in order to convict him of sin (2 Sam. 12:1–6). Give an example of how Christ's parables also aimed to convict.

## The Puritan Family (1)

*A holy family is a place of comfort, a church of God.... Oh that God would stir up the hearts of people thus to make their families as little churches, that it might not be in the power of rulers or pastors that are bad to extinguish religion, or banish godliness from any land!*<sup>1</sup>

— Richard Baxter

The Christian's relationship with his family is inseparable from personal sanctification, according to the Puritans. The Scriptures set forth the ways in which we are to live righteously, and since the Bible takes great pains to teach how parents and children should relate to one another, these relationships are an index of sanctification. So it is of primary importance that Christians recognize that holiness begins at home and then extends to all of life. Puritan pastors spent much time teaching fathers how to exercise spiritual leadership in the home. They also advised Christian mothers of their role in the biblical pattern, and they taught children to show proper respect for parents in service to God. In this family emphasis, they aimed to follow only the Bible, for, as they said, the Bible presents the family as the fundamental unit of human society.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible tells us to glorify God by raising children for Him for the well-being of society, the church, and the family itself. As Richard Baxter puts it, "It is no small mercy to be the parents of a Godly seed: and this is the end of the institution of marriage."<sup>3</sup> According to Isaac Ambrose, parents have the task of "erecting and establishing Christ's glorious kingdom in their house."<sup>4</sup> The Puritans, both in writing and by example, provide us with the ideal Reformed Christian home, bequeathing it to us in a direct and substantive way. This article (the first of two) shows how they did that.

### Children Are Gifts of God

While most Puritans believed that the primary purpose of mar-

riage was companionship, they also believed that having children was an expected consequence of marital love. Children were seen as blessings of the Lord. And apparently they were blessings that the Lord bestowed frequently and abundantly. Puritan families were large, with an average of seven or eight children. The infant mortality rate was also very high, however. Typically, of all the children born in a family, less than half reached adulthood.

Though they tended to have large families, Puritan husbands did not procreate without due concern for their wives. According to Allen Carden, it was common practice to space children—in many cases, two years apart—over a period of up to twenty years, with siblings varying widely in age.<sup>5</sup>

The Puritans were also keenly aware that children were a tremendous responsibility. Viewing their families as nurseries for church and society, parents were expected to do everything possible to make sure their children conformed to biblical norms and precepts.

### Authority in the Family

The Puritans regarded the headship of husbands and fathers as a biblical command. They expected a man to exercise spiritual, social, and educational leadership for his wife and children, and to provide adequate support for his family.

Though a wife was expected to submit to her husband's authority, the husband's hierarchical headship did not imply that the wife was his servant.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Puritans



believed in spheres of responsibility in a family. The husband could delegate authority in some of these spheres to his wife, particularly in matters dealing with the children and household servants. According to Samuel Willard, “She is invested with an authority over them by God; and her husband is to allow it to her, for though the husband be the head of the wife, she is an head of the family.”<sup>7</sup>

In areas where the wife was more capable than her husband, such as in managing family finances, it was common for him to delegate such responsibilities to her.<sup>8</sup> Also, the headship principle did not prevent a woman from religious teaching or spiritual admonition of a man. “Women may and must privately and familiarly exhort others,” Samuel Torshell writes in *The Woman’s Glory*. “They may also privately admonish men and reprove them.”<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Byfield says the wife is not subject to the husband “in matters of her soul and religion when his will is contrary to God’s will.” He adds, “She is not so subject but she may admonish and advise her husband with certain cautions, if she be sure the thing she speaks against be sinful and hurtful.”<sup>10</sup>

Even though, in the final analysis, the husband was the head of the family, the husband and wife shared the authority for the day-to-day oversight of the family, Leland Ryken says.<sup>11</sup> For example, the Puritans believed that the father bore the primary responsibility for the education of children, but because this duty was seen as the task of both parents, he often delegated much of that authority to his wife. An excellent summary of the mutual task and authority of Puritan parents toward their children is contained in the 1677 church covenant from the congregation in Dorchester, Mass., which required parents to vow “to reform our families, engaging ourselves in a conscientious care to set up and maintain the worship of God in them and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts in a faithful discharge of all domestic duties: educating, instructing, and charging our children and our households to keep the ways of the Lord.”<sup>12</sup>

The Puritans extended the parent-child relationship to all of society, based on the fifth commandment (see Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 124–133). As a child is to honor his parents who are placed in authority over him by God, so employees are to honor employers, students are to honor teachers, citizens are to honor magistrates, and church members are to honor church office-bearers.

Each person must know his place—either of submission or authority—in every sphere of life. And all those in authority must exercise that authority in accord with the Bible and therefore under God, who gives the Scriptures and His Son, to whom the Father gives all authority in heaven and on earth.

## Principles of Child-Rearing

Although much of the writing about Puritan ideas of child-rearing seems familiar to us, some of their ideas were revolutionary at the time. Here are just a few of their contributions that promoted biblical child-rearing:

• *Child-rearing begins at conception.* Prospective parents had two major tasks before a child was born. First, they were to pray daily for the salvation of their child, since the child was conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5).<sup>13</sup> They also were to pray daily for the protection of both mother and child. Richard Adams writes, “Whilst it is yet but an embryo, there is not only requisite prayer, with thanksgiving for the sanctifying [of ] the fruit of the body, as Jeremiah and John were (1 Tim. 4:5; Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:15), but also a tender care for the preservation of life.”<sup>14</sup> Second, since miscarriages were common, the health of the mother was to be carefully protected. Husbands were expected to tenderly help their wives during pregnancy and childbirth. If they failed to do so and the baby was lost, they were regarded as “guilty of the sin, and liable to the judgment.”<sup>15</sup> Pregnant mothers were not to run or ride horseback. They were to watch their diets closely, not eating what was harmful, and not eating too much or too little. If through carelessness a woman contributed to the miscarriage of a baby, she was reckoned “guilty of the blood” of their child, “at least in the court of conscience before God.”<sup>16</sup> Parents who aborted a child were guilty of “wilful murder” and were to be judged guilty and “revenged” both in the court of God and the court of man.<sup>17</sup>

• *Mothers have the major role in caring for newborns.* The Puritans stressed that a mother’s responsibilities included breastfeeding, which ought not be delegated to a midwife or nanny. William Gouge wrote ten pages on why it was important for the mother to breastfeed, answering twelve objections along the way.<sup>18</sup> Husbands were to encourage their wives to breastfeed and to offer what help they could in caring for the infant.<sup>19</sup>

• *Baptizing infants is part of parents’ covenant obligations to God.* Puritan child-rearing was rooted in the conviction that children belonged to the covenant God makes with believers (Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14), evident in baptism, which, being a sacrament, is a visible sign and seal of God’s invisible grace. Just as the believing Israelite had to circumcise his son in the old covenant, so, in the new covenant, believing Christians are to baptize children to confirm their inauguration into the covenant of grace. Baxter says that God “ordained baptism to be used as a solemn initiation of all that will come into his church, and enter into the covenant of God.”<sup>20</sup> In baptism, Christian parents assume covenant responsibilities on behalf of their children. God, therefore, claims these children as His own; parents are stewards of their children on God’s behalf. Thomas Watson goes so far as to say that Christian parents “will endeavour that their children may be more God’s children than theirs.”<sup>21</sup>

Believing that their children belonged to God did not mean that the Puritans believed their children were saved from birth. Rather, they believed that all children, whether elect or not, entered the world in a depraved state. They were lost in sin until brought to faith in Christ. Thus, children were *in*, but not necessarily *of*, the covenant. They lived under the promises of the covenant, but they still needed

to appropriate these promises through faith, evidenced by repentance, faith in Christ, and a holy walk.

They believed, however, that God uses parents to bring their children to a personal conversion experience. Parents were regularly taught in sermons to bring up their children so that the covenant promises given them at baptism might be fulfilled and realized in their lives. The New England Puritan Thomas Cobbett writes, “The greatest love and faithfulness which parents as covenanters can show to God and to their children, who in and with themselves are joint covenanters with God, is so to educate them that the conditions of the covenant may be attended by their children and so the whole covenant fully effected.”<sup>22</sup>

• *Children must be trained early in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* The salvation and godliness of children is the main purpose of their education. That goal can be realized only through the Spirit’s blessing of the Word of God (Rom. 10). The Puritans made it a law that parents must teach their children to read so that they could read the Bible and other religious material for their spiritual welfare.<sup>23</sup> Gaius Davies sums up the Puritan approach to teaching: “Education should begin as early as possible, and though it should be thorough, godliness is more important than learning, and schoolmasters must be chosen with this in mind.”<sup>24</sup>

Reading opened the world of doctrine to children. Even Puritan reading tools themselves, such as the *New England Primer* (1683), conveyed theology. From this primer, the theological ABCs were taught: from A, “In Adam’s Fall, we sinned all,” to Z, “Zacchaeus, he did climb the Tree, his Lord to see.”<sup>25</sup> These tools worked hand in hand with catechetical instruction. The Puritans taught their children catechism as soon as possible; most fathers catechized each child for one hour per week. To help them, Puritan pastors wrote books that explained fundamental Christian doctrines by means of questions and answers supported by Scripture.<sup>26</sup> Fathers explained the theological content of the questions and answers of these catechism books by illustrating them with Bible stories and dialoguing with their children.<sup>27</sup>

The goals of catechizing were to make sermons and the sacraments more understandable for covenant children, to prepare them for confession of faith, and to teach them how to defend their faith against error.<sup>28</sup> Then, too, children were taught that truth must be loved and lived. As the Puritan ministers’ catechism books and sermons show, children were told the truth about matters such as the fall in Adam, sin, and condemnation, as well as salvation in Christ, His righteousness, and everlasting bliss. They also were invited, via appeals to their wills and hearts, to flee to Christ with their sins.<sup>29</sup> The ultimate goal was not simply a well-stocked head, but also a warm appreciation of the truths of God in mind and soul so that the child would lead a holy life.

Parents were to nurture and train their children in godly ways not only by teaching, but, what was more important, by example. Richard Greenham writes, “Experience teaches us that children learn more by countenance, gesture, and

behaviour than by rule, doctrine, precept, or instruction.”<sup>30</sup> Likewise, it was recognized that a bad example would cause great harm. As Greenham says: “If parents would have their children blessed at church and at school, let them beware they give their children no corrupt examples at home by any carelessness, profaneness, or ungodliness. Otherwise, parents will do them more harm at home than both pastors and schoolmasters can do them good abroad.”<sup>31</sup>

1. Richard Baxter, “The Poor Man’s Family Book,” in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 4:230–231. For much of what follows, including several quotations, I am indebted to Leland Ryken’s excellent chapter on the Puritan family in his *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 73–90, and to Neil Prunk for freedom to use several thoughts from a lecture that he gave on “The Puritans at Home,” most of which was later published in *The Messenger*, 44, no. 8 (Sept. 1997): 3–6.
2. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 74.
3. Quoted in John Halkett, *Milton and the Idea of Matrimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 20.
4. Quoted in R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England: A Regional Study of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 105.
5. Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America: Religion and Life in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1990), 174.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 78.
8. Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 43.
9. Quoted in Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 106.
10. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 78.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 80.
13. William Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties* (Pensacola: Puritan Reprints, 2006), 364.
14. Richard Adams, “What are the Duties of Parents and Children; and how are they to be Managed According to Scripture?” *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 2:324.
15. Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*, 368.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 368–377; cf. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 426–432.
19. *Ibid.*, 368, 376–377.
20. Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 4:179.
21. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 79.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 88.
24. Gaius Davies, “The Puritan Teaching on Marriage and the Family,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 27, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 19.
25. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Ordering Their Private World: What the Puritans did to grow spiritually,” *Christian History*, 13, no. 1 (1994): 18.
26. See Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, ca. 1530–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
27. For contemporary books that will help you recover this lost art of home-catechizing, see Joyce M. Horton, *How to Teach the Catechism to Children* (Jackson, Miss.: Reformed Theological Seminary, 1979); Starr Meade, *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2000); and Donald VanDyken, *Rediscovering Catechism: The Art of Equipping Covenant Children* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2000). VanDyken includes a thorough, annotated bibliography.
28. Joel R. Beeke, *Bringing the Gospel to Covenant Children* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 28–32; Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 98–100.
29. For a largely negative but informative study of Jonathan Edwards’ sermons to children, see Catherine A. Brekus, “Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child Rearing,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 315–317.
30. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 83.
31. Richard Greenham, *The Works of Richard Greenham* (New York: De Capo Press, 1973), 162.

This article is taken from Dr. Beeke’s new book, *Living to the Glory of God: An Introduction to Calvinism*.

## INTERNET – Is More Better?

REV. FOPPE VANDER ZWAAG

The United States recently elected a new president. What motivated the millions of voters to prefer one to the other? What motivated you—not only in this election, but also in so many other decisions in your life? How do we form our opinions? On what are they based? Is it on some vague impressions or on carefully thought out opinions, on feelings or on thoughts?

In *World* (July 26/August 2), I recently read a short, pertinent article by Janie Cheaney commenting on our changing reading habits. Both title and subtitle were striking: “Fleeting thoughts: How the internet is eating my brain.” The underlying question is whether or not the internet and its seemingly unlimited access to information truly are helpful in making us better informed. Or to ask it differently, “Is more better?”

It reminded me of concerns I already had some twenty years ago with the introduction and rise of the computer and related technology. Without a doubt much good came with it, and therefore it can be considered as a gift from God. It improved the quality of life, saved lives, and caused the Word of God, sermons, and good books to be available worldwide as never before. As the printing press in its day, so the internet today can be used by God for good and by Satan for ill.

My initial concerns about computers, TV, and internet, apart from the ungodly content, were about how words increasingly were replaced by images. Those watching news or the presidential debates on TV or on-line indeed get lively impressions but their opinions about people or issues may be formed more by style and flair than by content and substance. Of course, it is true that a picture says more than a thousand words, but it also is true that a picture is open to a thousand interpretations. It aims for the heart and our feelings rather than for our mind and understanding.

With fewer words and more images, the idea is to get a lot more information across in less time. However, perhaps we should ask the question, Is more better? Does it really help us or does it perhaps hurt us that

we now have access to all this information? Could it be that it might prevent us from forming thoughtful and scriptural opinions about what takes place in our world, and that it rather sets us up to be manipulated and indoctrinated?

The article I read acknowledges the vast amount of helpful information on-line, hopping from one link to another, skimming as many articles on any given subject as desired. The sky is the limit. Perhaps we download articles that seem good to us, to be, as Mrs. Cheaney writes, “read ‘later’...” In other words, the internet may well be changing not just what we read but how we read. And that could mean a fundamental change in how we think.”

My original concern that computer technology would make people read less and watch more seems to remain relevant. Many people watch movies of literary classics but never read the books, and yet presume they know what the books are all about. We think we are knowledgeable because we have seen it in a movie, on TV, or on-line—or, if we have not yet, we know we have all the information we need at our fingertips. We access it, interact with it and with each other through email, Facebook, and text messages, reading perhaps not less but differently. As the article informs us, “Five thousand words on a given topic makes the mind go deep; five links makes it go wide.”

Mrs. Cheaney then goes on to quote Sergey Brin, one of the co-founders of Google, who said how great it would be if somehow we had “all the world’s information directly attached to our brain, or an artificial brain.” However, not only would we be in great danger of information overload and of being manipulated rather than informed, we would be in danger of being yet another step further removed from thoughtful and prayerful reading of and meditation on God’s Word.

There is nothing new under the sun, also not in being distracted from our need to search the Scriptures for real knowledge and wisdom found in the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, Satan’s attempts are more fine-tuned and subtle than ever before, not only captivating the world, but the church as well. It is a variation of what we read in Acts 17:21, “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” Let us take to heart Paul’s warning in Colossians 2:8: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

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## Vile!

**W**e are rather afraid that this title will deter some from reading this article: we hope it will not be so. True, it does not treat of a popular theme; it is one which is now very rarely heard in the pulpit. Nevertheless, it is a scriptural one. Fallen man is "vile," so vile that it has been rightly said "he is half brute, half devil." Nor does such a description exceed the truth. Man is "born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12), and he is "taken captive by the devil at his will" (2 Tim. 2:26).

Perhaps the reader is ready to reply, "That is man in his unregenerate state, but it is far otherwise with the regenerate." From one viewpoint that is true; from another, it is not so. Did not the Psalmist acknowledge, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (Ps. 73:22), unteachable, intractable, kicking against God's providential dealings, not behaving like a man, much less like a saint! Again, did not Agur confess, "Surely I am more brutish than any man" (Prov. 30:2)?

To those who are painfully conscious of the plague of their own heart, such words may often describe their case. Only recently we received a letter from a dear brother in Christ, saying, "The vanity and corruption that I find within, which refuses to be kept in subjection, is so strong at times that it makes me cry out: 'my wounds do stink and are corrupt' (Ps. 38:5)."

Does the reader object against our appropriation of the Psalms and Proverbs, and say, "We in this New Testament age occupy much higher ground than those did"? Probably you have often been told so by men, but are you sure of it from the Word of God? Listen, then, to the groan of an eminent Christian: "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). Do you never feel thus, my reader? Then we are sincerely sorry for you. As to the other part of the description of fallen man, "half devil": did not Christ say to regenerate Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me" (Matt. 16:23)? And are there not times when writer and reader fully merit the same reproof? Speaking for myself, I bow my head with shame, and say, "Alas, there is!"

**"Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4).**

This was not said by Cain in a remorseful moment after his murder of Abel, nor by Judas after he had betrayed the Savior into the hands of His enemies; instead, it was the utterance of one of whom God said, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8).

Was Job's language the effect of extreme melancholy, induced by his terrible afflictions? If not, was he justified in using such strong language of self-deprecation? If he was, are Christians today warranted in echoing the same?

In order to arrive at the correct answer to the above questions, let us ask another: when was it that Job said, "Behold, I am vile"? Was it when he first received tidings of his heavy losses?

No, for then he exclaimed, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

Was it when his friends reasoned with and reprov'd him? No, for then he vindicated himself and boasted of his goodness. Then when was it that Job declared "Behold, I am vile"? It was when the Lord appeared to him and gave him a startling revelation of His own wondrous perfections! It was when he stood in the all-penetrating light of God's immaculate holiness and was made to realize His mighty power.

Ah, when a soul is truly brought into the presence of the living God, boasting ceases, our comeliness is turned into corruption (Dan. 10:8), and we cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa. 6:5). When God gives to the soul a personal revelation of His wondrous perfections, that individual is effectually convinced of his own wretchedness. The more we are given to discern the ineffable glory of the Lord, the more will our self-complacency wither. It is in God's light, and in that light only, that "we see light" (Ps. 36:9). When He shines into our understandings and hearts, and brings to light "the hidden things of darkness," we perceive the utter corruption of our nature and are abominable in our own eyes. While we measure ourselves by others, we will, most likely, think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3); but when we measure ourselves by the holy requirements of God's nature, we cry, "I am dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). True repentance changes a man's opinion of himself.

Is, then, a Christian today warranted in saying "Behold, I am vile"? Not as faith views himself united to the One who is "altogether lovely"; but as faith discerns, in the light of the Word, what he is by nature, what he is in and of himself, he may. Not that he is to hypocritically adopt such language in order to gain the reputation of great humility; such an utterance is only to be found upon our lips as it is the feeling expression of our hearts. It is to be particularly owned before God, when we come to Him in contrition and in confession. Yet it is also to be acknowledged before the saints, even as the apostle Paul cried publicly, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24). It is part of our testimony to own (before those who fear the Lord) what God has revealed to us.

"Behold; I am vile": such is the candid and sorrowful confession of the writer.

### 1. I am vile in my imaginations

What scum rises to the surface when lusts boil within me. What filthy pictures are visioned in "the chambers of my imagery" (Ezek. 8:12). What unlawful desires run riot within. Yes, even when engaged in meditating upon the holy things of God, the mind wanders and the fancy becomes engaged with what is foul and fetid. How often does the writer have to acknowledge

before God that “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” in him, “but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores” (Isa. 1:6)? Nightly does he avail himself of that Fountain which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

## 2. I am vile in my self-will

How fretful am I when God blows upon my plans and thwarts my desires. What surgings of rebellion within my wicked heart when God’s providences displease. Instead of lying placidly as clay in the Potter’s hand, how often do I act like the restive colt, which rears and kicks, refusing to be held in with bit and bridle, determined to have my own way. Alas, how very little have I learned of Him who was “meek and lowly in heart.” Instead of “the flesh” in me being purified, it has putrefied; instead of its resistance to the spirit weakening, it appears to be stronger each year. Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, that I could fly away from myself!

## 3. I am vile in my religious pretenses

How often I am anxious to make “a fair show in the flesh” and be thought highly of by others. What hypocrisies have I been guilty of in seeking to gain a reputation for spirituality. How frequently have I conveyed false impressions to others, making them suppose it was far otherwise within me than was actually the case. What pride and self-righteousness have swayed me. And of what insincerity have I, at times, been guilty in the pulpit: praying to the ears of the congregation instead of to God, pretending to have liberty when my own spirit was bound, speaking of those things which I had not first felt and handled for myself. Much, very much cause has the writer to take the leper’s place, cover his lips, and cry, “Unclean, unclean!”

## 4. I am vile in my unbelief

How often am I still filled with doubts and misgivings. How often do I lean unto my own understanding instead of upon the Lord. How often do I fail to expect from God (Mark 11:24) the things for which I ask Him. When the hour of testing comes, past deliverances are forgotten only too frequently. When troubles assail, instead of looking off unto the things unseen, I am occupied with the difficulties before me. Instead of remembering that with God all things are possible, I am ready to say, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Ps. 78:19).

True, it is not always thus, for the Holy Spirit graciously keeps alive the faith which He has placed within; but when He ceases to work, and a trial is faced, how often do I give my Master occasion to say, “How is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).

How closely does your experience correspond with the above? Is it true that, “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Prov. 27:19)? Have we been describing some of the symptoms of your diseased heart? Have you ever owned before God: “Behold, I am vile”? Do you bear witness to the humbling fact before your brethren and sisters in Christ? It is comparatively easy to utter such words, but do you feel them?

Does the realization of this truth make you “blush” (Ezra 9:6) and groan in secret? Have you such a personal and painful sense of your vileness that often, you feel thoroughly unfit to draw nigh unto a holy God? If so:

- You have abundant cause to be thankful to God that His Holy Spirit has shown you something of your wretched self, that He has not kept you in ignorance of your woeful state, and that He has not left you in that gross spiritual darkness that enshrouds millions of professing Christians. My stricken friend, if you are groaning over the ocean of corruption within and feel utterly unworthy to take the sacred name of Christ upon your polluted lips, then you should be unfeignedly thankful that you belong not to that great multitude of self-complacent and self-righteous religionists of whom it is written, “They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down” (Jer. 8:12). Much cause have you to praise the God of all grace that He anointed your sin-blinded eyes, and that now, in His sight, you are able to see a little of your hideous deformities, and cry “I am black” (Song of Sol. 1:5).
- You have abundant cause to walk softly before God. Must not the realization of our vileness truly humble us before Him, make us smite upon our breast, and cry, “God be merciful to me, the sinner”? Yes, such a prayer is as suited to the mature saint as it was when first convicted of his lost estate, for he is to continue as he began: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col. 2:6). “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:5). But alas, how quickly does the apprehension of our vileness leave us! How frequently does pride again dominate us. For this reason we are bidden to “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa. 51:1). Beg God to daily show you your vileness that you may walk humbly before Him.
- You have abundant cause to marvel at the surpassing love of the Triune God towards you. That the Eternal Three should have set Their heart upon such a wretch is indeed the wonder of all wonders. That God the Father should foreknow and foresee every sin of which you would be guilty in thought and word and deed, and yet have loved thee “with an everlasting love,” must indeed fill you with astonishment. That God the Son should have laid aside the robes of His glory and be made in the likeness of sin’s flesh, in order to redeem one so foul and filthy as me, was truly a love “that passeth knowledge.” That God the Holy Spirit should take up His residence and dwell in the heart of one so vile, only proves that where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

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A.W. Pink (1886–1952) served several pastorates in United States and Australia, but became best known as a prolific author.

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

## NEW RHB BOOKS

### John Calvin — *Simonetta Carr*



The year 2009 marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. Providentially used at a crucial time in the history of the church, Calvin's works made formative impressions on the Reformed tradition. In this attractive volume, Simonetta Carr introduces

young readers to the life and ministry of Calvin. Simply written, richly illustrated, and full of interesting facts, this book will make a great gift for children during the upcoming year of remembrance. (64 pages, HB) \$15.00/12.00

### Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ

*R. Scott Clark*



"Dr. Clark's book is a very welcome addition to the growing literature on the development of Reformed Orthodoxy in the Reformation and post-Reformation period. In a series of carefully argued chapters, he places Olevian's thought in historical context and, by so doing, puts to rest a number of misconstructions of doctrinal development during this time while shedding new light upon the relationship of the theology of Olevian to

that of the Heidelberg Catechism, of John Calvin, and of the wider Reformed world. This is a book that should be read by all students and scholars interested in the theology of the period in general and of Olevian in particular."

— Carl R. Trueman  
(280 pages, PB) \$25.00/\$19.00

### Sowing the Seed — *Diana Kleyn*



A garden will never grow unless someone takes the time to plant seeds. Likewise, God has planned things so that people will not be saved from their sins unless someone, accompanied by the Spirit's blessing, shares the good news of Jesus Christ with them. Just like a seed planted in good soil brings forth a beautiful garden, God uses the gospel message to produce Christians fit for bearing spiritual fruit. In *Sowing the Seed*, children will read

stories about people sharing the gospel with others. These stories about missions and evangelism reinforce the importance of sharing the gospel and encourage children to see the joy of telling others about Jesus. (150 pages, PB) \$8.00/6.00

## OTHER NEW BOOKS

### The Life of Archibald Alexander

*James W. Alexander*



Archibald Alexander was converted during a revival of religion in the Valley of Virginia and was licensed to preach at age nineteen. He held pastorates in Virginia and Philadelphia before he was called to be the first professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he remained until the end of his life. He wrote many excellent books including

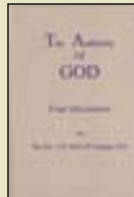
*The Log College*, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, and *Practical Truths*. May this memorial of one who devoted his best powers to the church and to the Lord Jesus, be used to promote true religion in our hearts today. (Sprinkle Publications, 700 pages, HC) \$30.00/23.00

### Friendship: A Classic Guide to Finding, Restoring, and Building Lasting Friendships — *Hugh Black*



In our busy, self-centered culture, Hugh Black directs our attention to the importance of friendship and the blessing that it can be. He addresses the challenges and responsibilities associated with friendship, including the tragic consequences of eclipsed or wrecked friendships. He defines the limitations of friendship and illustrates that in true friendship, accountability and love inspire us to live with more honor, integrity, and grace. (Joshua Press, 144 pages, PB) \$15.00/11.00

### The Authority of God — *J.H. Merle D'Aubigne*



D'Aubigne held that the fundamental principle of Roman Catholic error is to deny the supreme and ultimate authority of the Word of God. In this book, D'Aubigne offers four discourses on the divine authority of Scripture: 1. The Testimony of God, 2. The Testimony of Men, 3. The Testimony of History, and 4. The Testimony of Theology. (Sprinkle Publications, 305 pages, HC) \$22.00/17.00

### Daniel — *Iain M. Duguid*



Duguid reminds Christians that Daniel gives us more than moral lessons or a prophetic timetable. The whole of the book points us to Christ, whether as the one greater than Daniel who has perfectly lived an exilic life of service and separation for us or as the exalted heavenly Son of Man who took flesh among us. This exposition of Daniel is accessible to both pastors and lay readers. (P&R, 236 pages, HC) \$22.99/17.00

### Wasted Faith — *Jim Elliff*



"What is most alarming is the risky willingness of many professing Christians to gamble eternity on an emotional one-time experience, a 'sinner's prayer' properly prayed, or a feeling of substantial relief at a juncture in time, without ever taking a serious look at what is evident now, at this moment. Is eternal life of so little value that it seems unnecessary to examine ourselves for the evidence of it?"

— from *Wasted Faith* (Christian Communicators Worldwide, 60 pages, PB) \$3.00/2.50

### Man Overboard! The Story of Jonah — *Sinclair B. Ferguson*



Jonah is not all about a great fish, but about God, and how one man came to discover God's true character. It traces not only the path of Jonah's journey, but unravels the inner workings of his heart—his fears, motivations, and passing moods. Christians today still experience these "Jonah-syndromes." (Banner of Truth, 112 pages, PB) \$12.00/8.00



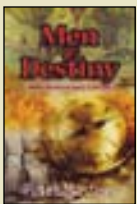
**The Chief End of Man: An Exposition of the First Answer of the Shorter Catechism — John Hall**

Effort is required to teach or learn the Shorter Catechism. The proper use of the catechism in the instruction of children is not only one of memorization. John Hall asserts that each paragraph must be explained, illustrated, and applied so that a child can attach a meaning

and authority to the words, and early learn to discover the mass of practical truth contained within the catechism. It is with this view that John Hall expounds and illustrates the first answer of the Shorter Catechism. (Solid Ground, 101 pages, PB) \$12.00/8.50

**The Application of Redemption — Thomas Hooker**

In *The Application of Redemption*, Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) explains the doctrine of conversion from sin and self to the salvation in Christ. Knowing that the sinner will not turn to God while his heart is self-satisfied, Hooker examines the way that God brings about a “contrite and humble spirit” fit for His dwelling (Isaiah 57:15). While Hooker spends much space discussing conviction of sin, he is equally quick to hold forth the all-sufficiency of God in Christ. (International Outreach, 450 pages, HC) \$42.00/32.00



**Men of Destiny — Peter Masters**

The lives of fourteen remarkable people having in common a personal spiritual experience which changed and molded them, are detailed here. Some of the men included are Joshua Poole, John Newton, Bilney, Tynedale, Latimer, Martin Luther, and Alexander Pavlovich. (Wakeman, 166 pages, PB) \$12.00/9.50



**Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth — R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

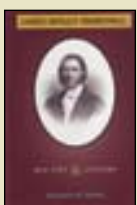
The world in which we live is in the midst of a major cultural transformation—one leading to a widespread lack of faith, an increase in moral relativism, and a rejection of absolute truth. In the face of this, Al Mohler takes a theological stand and provides a biblical perspective for confronting and engaging this society. In twenty short chapters, *Culture Shift* provides sober counsel on topics such as politics, parenting, education, abortion, global tragedies, and more. (Multnomah, 160 pages, HC) \$15.00/11.00



**In My Place Condemned He Stood — J.I. Packer and Mark Dever**

*In My Place Condemned He Stood* combines three classic articles by Packer—“The Heart of the Gospel”; “What Did the Cross Achieve?”; and his introductory essay to John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*—with Dever’s recent article, “Nothing but the

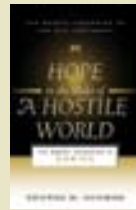
Blood.” It also features a foreword by the four principals of Together for the Gospel: Dever, Ligon Duncan, C. J. Mahaney, and Al Mohler. This important anthology reaffirms the classic doctrine of substitutionary atonement and counters the ongoing attacks against it. (Crossway, 188 pages, PB) \$16.99/12.00



**James Henley Thornwell: His Life and Letters — Benjamin M. Palmer**

The biography by Dr. Palmer is a masterly piece of work. While it abounds in information and often fascinating detail, Thornwell’s main concerns on such matters as the true nature of preaching, the purity and renewal of the church, and the rule of Scripture, receive their true prominence, and they supply numerous lessons of abiding importance to the church universal. B.M. Palmer does not disguise his belief that Thornwell was the greatest preacher and theologian he

ever knew, but it is the impression given us of Thornwell as a Christian, which moves us most. (Solid Ground, 614 pages, HC) \$60.00/40.00



**Hope in the Midst of a Hostile World: The Gospel According to Daniel — George M. Schwab**

God reveals the future to affect the present. Prophecy glorifies the One in control, inspires believers’ confidence, intensifies hope for God’s will to be done, and moves people to repentance and holiness. This study of the book of Daniel highlights these essential aspects of prophecy. Schwab’s focus is clear: God’s absolute control and unrelenting resolve to accomplish His redemptive purpose in Christ should give God’s people in every age “hope in the midst of a hostile world.” (P&R, 196 pages, PB) \$12.99/9.50

**365 Days with Calvin — Joel R. Beeke, ed.**

John Calvin exercised a profound ministry in Europe and is probably one of the most seminal thinkers ever to have lived. A godly pastor, theologian, and preacher, he led his flock by example and labored to foster consistent godliness in his town. Joel R. Beeke has provided carefully compiled select portions of Calvin’s writings, edited in contemporary language to make for easy reading, together with concluding thoughts for meditation, to lead the reader through a year of devotions. Make this volume your 2009 daily devotional.



(384 pages, HB) \$20.00/\$15.00

See pages 263–265 of this issue of BSGT for six samples of daily devotions.

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## Waiting for Jesus




If you had been born into a Jewish family in Old Testament times, you would have been told that one day the Messiah would come — He would come to save His people, Israel. Everyone hoped that the Redeemer would come during their lifetime. What would He look like? What great things would He do? Would He lead them in battle like King David? Would He destroy all their enemies? Would He live in a beautiful palace like King Solomon's? Would He have servants and soldiers? Would He have a family or would He be all alone, separated from everyone else? Would He be so majestic and glorious that no one would dare to speak to Him? Every child certainly wondered about these things.



Over the years, God revealed information to the Old Testament prophets about this coming Messiah and the prophets told God's messages to the Israelites; but not all these prophecies fit what people had imagined. They had their own ideas of what a King and a Savior should be like. Many of the prophecies were not at all what the people were expecting. As a result, many prophets were rejected, abused, and even killed.

What did God's prophets say that the Israelites did not want to hear? First of all, the prophets were faithful and honest in pointing out to the people that they were sinful. After all, it was because of sin that the Savior was coming into this world. When God's people strayed from His commandments, the prophets warned them that God was just and holy and that He would punish them for their sins. Many people became angry with the prophets — they did not want to hear this! Sin? Repentance? Who wanted to think about that? No, they were God's own chosen people! "Of course God would punish the heathen nations around them, but not Israel," they thought proudly.



Another thing they did not want to hear was that this Messiah would have to suffer and die. A *suffering* Messiah? A King who would *die*? This could not be! The Jews expected a strong, majestic, earthly king who would conquer their enemies with a mighty army. The problem was that most of the Jews did not realize that the battle was a *spiritual* one. They did not understand that a suffering Messiah was the only solution for our sin. In His great mercy, God promised a Savior who would save His people from their sins. This Savior would take the place of His people and bear the full wrath of God against sin. This meant blood must be shed, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission [forgiveness]" (Hebrews 9:22b). From the very beginning, when God gave the first promise of the Savior to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they sinned, God spoke about pain and suffering. "And I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). There would be a battle between the seed of the woman (the Lord Jesus Christ) and the serpent (Satan). This was not a battle of swords and guns, but a war between good and evil, light and darkness.

Just as the Paschal lamb had to be killed and its blood wiped on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes, so the Lamb of God had to shed His blood. This was prophesied by several of the Old Testament prophets. David used words and phrases like "reproach," "shame," "dishonor," "adversaries," and "heaviness" (Psalm 69:19–20). The most well-known prophecies are given by Isaiah, especially in chapter 53. Over time, God sent more messages through the prophets with more details of the coming Messiah. When He finally came as a helpless baby in a manger, born to a very poor couple, only a handful of people

were expecting Him and only a handful of people recognized Him. The majority of the Israelites foolishly rejected God's messages.

But maybe you are wondering why the Messiah, the Savior, had to suffer and die. If He is God, can't God do whatever He pleases? Can't He simply send Satan and his demons to hell and save sinners without the death of His Son? No, children. God is indeed almighty, but He is also just. His justice demands payment be made for sin. Someone must pay, or atone, for the sins we commit. God cannot ignore sin because He is holy. We cannot pay for our own sins because we cannot bear the wrath of God against sin. Only God can provide the solution. In His great mercy and love, God offered His only begotten Son as the sacrifice for sin. What a miracle! God would come from heaven and become a man so that He, the Holy One who had never committed any sin, could pay for the sins of wicked sinners! Who can begin to understand the love of God? "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

God's promises to the Israelites of the Messiah are proof of God's compassion. Many Jews did not understand this, but some did. Through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, some understood that one day the Savior, the Lamb of God, would make atonement for their sins. He would take the place of those lambs that were offered in the tabernacle and later in the temple. They knew far less than we do today, yet they believed by faith that the Substitute would bear the payment for their sins. Through the sacrifices and ceremonies, God graciously gave the Israelites examples and illustrations so that even children could understand the work of the Lamb of God. They watched the priests kill young goats, calves, or lambs. Innocent animals died and spilled their blood because of the sins of the people. The priest would dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it on the altar or on the mercy seat.

There was the gospel: one day the perfect Lamb would come and spill His blood to satisfy the justice of God. God told His people, "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD" (Leviticus 16:30). They did not know exactly what Jesus would be like or what He would say and do, but they understood the message of the gospel and thanked God for it. "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

Dear children, what about us? We know so much more: we know the whole story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Do we realize why we need a Savior? Do we realize how great our sins are and the damage they have caused? Have we repented and confessed our sins to Him, asking Him to forgive and save us? Do we love Him? Are we thankful for this Messiah, or is He not the kind of Savior we want? Maybe we don't think we need a Savior at all, at least not now. When we get older we can take this more seriously, we say; we have plenty of time. Do not be so foolish! If we think we can wait, then we don't realize our danger at all! "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11b), and yes, we are wicked. That is why we need a Savior. If we have not been covered by the blood of the Lamb of God, we are in great danger! Ask Him to open your eyes to your terrible danger and obey the warnings God gives us in His Word. Finding forgiveness and peace in the Lord Jesus is the greatest joy you can experience here on earth. When you are God's child, you have the greatest gift: the love of God. "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Diana Kleyn is the author of numerous books for children.

## — BIBLE QUIZ —

1. List the words that describe the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the words that are left. Whom do they describe?

Jealous      Messiah      Unkind      Gracious      Meek      Perfect  
 Proud      Humble      Kind      Prince of Peace      Son of God  
 Son of Man      Sinful      Rejected      Despised      Loving  
 Wicked      Selfish      Redeemer      Foolish      Savior      Lamb of God

2. Can you put these words in the right order to make a text describing the Messiah?

LAMB SIN WORLD OF BEHOLD THE (JOHN THE AWAY OF WHICH GOD 1:29B) THE TAKETH.



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

Marianna Beeke  
Sarah Beeke  
Lauren Bilkes  
Andrew Boesterd  
Justin Boesterd  
Becky Boot (2)  
Shelly Boot (2)  
Ronald Clemons  
Brett? Huston  
Garreth Huston  
Nathanael Huston  
Aaron Kamp

Phillip Kamp  
Amanda Koppert  
Samuel Kranendonk  
Allison Krygsman  
Kristen Krygsman  
Hailey Meerdink  
Nick Meschke  
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Zachary Van Vliet  
David Van Vugt  
Lauren Van Vugt  
Erin Veldhuizen (2)  
Danique Veldhuizen (2)  
Wilena Veldhuizen (2)  
Ken Zabavski  
Audrey Zevenbergen (2)  
Matthew Ziegler  
Will Ziegler

Here is the answer to last month's quiz.

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15).

Please send your puzzle answers to:  
Banner Puzzles and Questions  
Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn  
540 Crescent St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
e-mail: ckleyn@comcast.net

## STORIES FOR CHILDREN

DIANA KLEYN

# A Savior

“...and [the LORD] shall send them a savior, and a great one, and he shall deliver them” (Isaiah 19:20b).

A missionary named Mr. Colemeister worked among the Esquimaux for thirty-four years.<sup>1</sup> While he worked among them, this missionary translated the four Gospels into the Esquimau language. This was a huge task and a difficult one, since not all languages have translations for every word in the Bible. In one case, Mr. Colemeister tried to discover the Esquimau word for “Savior.” He studied their language carefully, but could find no word that gave any idea of such a friend. Finally, the missionary asked the people, “Has it ever happened when you were out fishing that a storm came up, and your boat began to sink?”

“Oh, yes!” they answered. “That has happened more than once. We’ve lost many men that way over the years.”

Adapted from *Instructive Anecdotes Illustrative of the Old and New Testaments*, Eleventh Edition, by John Whitecross. Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison; London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., n.d.

“Has it ever happened that fishermen in another boat saw that you were in danger and came to help?”

“Yes!” they responded. They listed the names of many men who had been rescued from certain death.

“What do you call the man who stretches out his hand to pull you to safety?” the missionary asked.

Now the people understood what Mr. Colemeister was looking for. The word they gave him became the word for “Savior” in the Esquimau gospels. This word would help them understand why the Lord Jesus came into this world. The Savior rescues men in great danger from certain death.

1. The native people of the arctic coastal regions in North America, the Aleutian Islands, Greenland, and the northeastern tip of Siberia were referred to as “Esquimaux,” and later “Eskimos.” The people of northern Canada are now generally referred to as “Inuit.”



## The Blessing of Hope

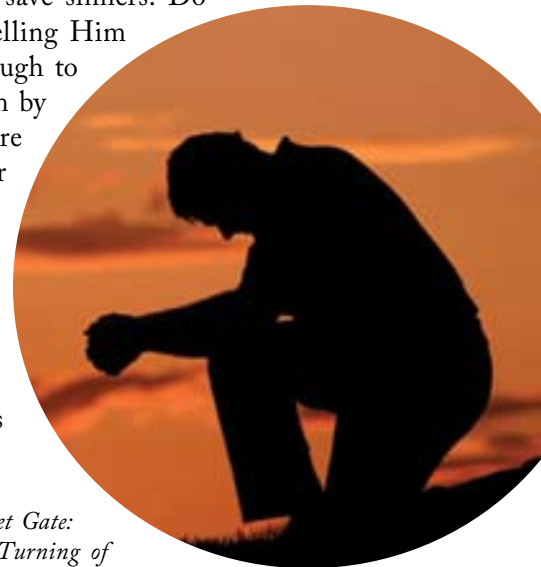
During a time of revival in a small town, many people were anxious about their souls' condition. Among them was a young man who had been awakened to a sense of his sin and guilt before God. He knew he was headed to hell. One evening, he went to visit his friends. They spoke with him, urging him to flee to Jesus, the Savior of sinners. Then they prayed with him. Still, the young man felt so hopeless that he said, "For me it is too late. I am lost. I am past help. I will stop seeking for salvation."

His friends wept when he said this, and tried to encourage him to continue seeking God's mercy. Through his tears, the young man insisted it was too late for him. He thought he had sinned too much and too often. Walking home, however, he thought, "If I am going to hell, I might as well pray my life away." He was so overwhelmed with feelings of grief and hopelessness that he knelt down right there on the side of the road and cried out in his despair to God. He felt he had nowhere else to go and no one else to turn to in his deep distress. All night long he prayed and wept. He was very sad that he had grieved God with his many sins. Would God be willing to listen to such a wicked sinner as he was? He didn't think so, but he didn't know what else to do. He was grieving too deeply to be able to hold it all inside, so he poured out all his sorrow before God.

When morning came, the clouds of sorrow and hopelessness lifted. A quiet peace flooded his soul. Despair and hopelessness were gone. Instead, he was filled with hope, joy, and

gratitude. He returned to his friends. Again, tears were shed, but this time they were tears of gladness and thanksgiving. They rejoiced in God's amazing grace, which is stronger than the powers of Satan and of the hardest heart.

Dear children, never believe the lie that you are beyond God's help. God is *almighty*: no one is stronger than God; no sinner is beyond God's reach. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died to save sinners. Do not insult God by telling Him He is not strong enough to save you. Honor Him by humbly bowing before Him, confessing your sins, trusting He will fulfill His own Word to save you. Glorify Him by living a life of thanksgiving, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He is worthy!



Adapted from *The Wicket Gate: Short Narratives of the Turning of Sinners to God with Words of Counsel and Warning*. Boston: American Tract Society, 1863.

## The Doctrine of the Atonement

*"It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."*

— Leviticus 17:11

The first sermon which Rev. Robert Hall preached at Cambridge after he had become a pastor was about the atonement of the Lamb of God. The Lord Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay for the sins of His people. After the service, a man approached him. "Rev. Hall," he said angrily, "this preaching is not good; it doesn't suit this congregation! It will only suit a congregation of old women!"

"Do you mean my sermon or my doctrine, sir?"

"Your doctrine," replied the man.

"Why do you say my doctrine is only suitable for old women?" asked the minister.

"Because it's for people who are teetering on the edge of the grave!" the man burst out in frustration.

Rev. Hall nodded. "Thank you, sir," he said quietly. "This doctrine is suitable for people of any age, because we all stand

at the edge of eternity. We all must die one day. We do not know when that day will be, and that is why this doctrine is important for every person at any age."

Children, do you love this doctrine, this teaching about the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus? Have your sins been washed away by His blood? Do you love this precious Lamb of God? Is He your Savior, or are you facing eternity without Him? If your sins have not been washed away, you are not safe! Ask the Lord Jesus to wash away your sins, and to come and live in your heart. Ask Him to make you His child. Then you will be safe for eternity and you will have nothing to fear.

Adapted from *Instructive Anecdotes Illustrative of the Old and New Testaments*, Eleventh Edition, by John Whitecross. Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison; London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., n.d.

## CHURCH NEWS

We held our Heritage Reformed Classis meeting on Friday, October 24, and acknowledge the Lord for His faithfulness to us in all things. The spiritual welfare reports from each congregation gave evidence of the Lord's great faithfulness and gracious presence among us. Please pray for continued divine blessings upon the preaching and upon all the ministries of the churches. We especially request prayer for wisdom and discernment in ministering to the young people of our churches.

We also had the privilege of being addressed by four brothers from various Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. This was a valuable time to see the Lord's work also among other denominations of similar convictions.

We are thankful to inform you that the three HRC students were promoted to the next year of study. As the seminary continues to grow, we appreciate continued congregational support of this important ministry.

We are grieved to report that, in accordance with church order, Classis decided that the ministerial credentials of Rev. Richard DeRuiter as a minister of the HRC can no longer be retained.

Many committee reports were reviewed. Apart from some financial constraints, the Lord has greatly blessed many of our denominational ministries.

A policy was adopted to allow us to officially recognize various independent mission endeavors engaged in by members of our congregations.

In the future, Classis will only meet once per year; we are working out the details of these plans, including the possibility of an annual ministerial conference.

Though we as Christians are troubled on every side, yet the Lord remains faithful. So we have again collectively cast ourselves upon sovereign grace and mercy, praying together that God's kingdom will continue to come among us in tangible ways and lead us into greater conformity to Christ. Please pray with us for rich blessings on the ministries of our denomination.

With warm Christian affection,  
Officers of Classis

Pastor M. Kelderman, chairman  
Pastor B. Elshout, vice-chairman  
Pastor B. DeVries, clerk  
Elder H. Brouwer, treasurer

## SERVICES IN BRADENTON, FLORIDA

Interdenominational services are scheduled to be held at the Red Cross building located at 2905 59th Street, West beginning November 2, 2008. Services will be held each Sunday at 3:00 p.m. until January 4, 2009 when an additional service will be added each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. until after Easter. Visiting ministers will supplement the reading services as often as scheduling permits.

For additional information please contact: William Noorduy, (941) 747-0313, (e-mail: WRNNoorduy@aol.com), Henry Mast, (941) 753-6112, or Marinus Staal, (941) 751-9970, (e-mail: mcs2032@aol.com). Additional details may be found in the denominational newsletters. All are welcome to worship with us.

## HERITAGE SPRING RETREAT

The first Heritage Spring Retreat, hosted by Burgessville HNRC, will take place from May 18, 2009 (5:00 p.m.) to May 21 (11:00 a.m.), D.V. at the Brantford Circle Square Ranch, just outside of Brantford, Ontario. All 18-30 year old singles and married couples are welcome. This year's theme is entitled "Unspotted" (James 1:27) and will include several topics and workshops that will challenge and assist you in living this theme out in the world today. Registration and further details will be provided. Visit [www.HeritageRetreat.ca](http://www.HeritageRetreat.ca) and submit your email address so that you can be notified via email.

## CONTACT INFORMATION FOR REV. DAVID LIPSY

Below is the family contact information for Rev. David Lipsy.

1014 West Holt Avenue  
Harrison, AR 72601-2610  
email: [DavidLipsy@trcar.net](mailto:DavidLipsy@trcar.net)  
website: [TheReformedChurch.net](http://TheReformedChurch.net)  
home phone: (870) 204-6644  
study/church phone: (870) 204-6868

## TEACHERS NEEDED

Lewis Independent Christian School invites applications from qualified primary school teachers for the year beginning August 2008. We are a small, Reformed, parent-led school. Please submit your CV, statement of faith, and philosophy of education to: Mr. William Macleod, Secretary, 80 Newmarket, Isle of Lewis, Scotland HS2 0ED, Tel: 01851 703282, E-mail [wmacleod4@googlemail.com](mailto:wmacleod4@googlemail.com)

Rehoboth Christian School in Copetown Ontario, is soliciting applicants for possible classroom teaching positions in Elementary (K-8), High school (9-12), and Personal Support Workers to begin in October, 2008. For more information, check out our website at [www.rehoboth.on.ca](http://www.rehoboth.on.ca). Applicants please send a cover letter and resumé to the attention of: Mr. Jack Westerink, Principal, 198 Inksetter Road, P.O. Box 70, Copetown, Ontario L0R 1J0, tel. 905-627-5977, fax 905-628-4422 e-mail: [jwesterink@rehoboth.on.ca](mailto:jwesterink@rehoboth.on.ca)

## OBITUARY

**DE BRABER, Cornelia (Connie)**, aged 88, passed away October 7, 2008 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She was preceded in death by her husband, Willard, and brother, Martin Arnoudse. She is survived by her children, Willard & Agnes DeBraber, Russell & Linda DeBraber; Sister/Brother-in-law—Wilma & Marvin Slotsema; Sisters-in-law—Maria Arnoudse, Margaret Beverwyk, Thelma DeBraber; 8 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren. (Rev. F. VanderZwaag, Psalm 27:4-5; John 12:46-48).

**EMPLOYMENT / POSSIBLE HOME MISSIONS OPPORTUNITY.** Seeking a single male to be a live-in assistant for an elderly minister. Generous compensation package; terms negotiable. Spare time should easily permit participation in various church outreach opportunities, such as our prison and door-to-door witness. Would be ideal for a mature university student, one contemplating the ministry, and/or a seminary graduate without a call. Please direct all inquiries to the Rev. Michael Ives, Home Missionary of the PRC of R.I., [michael@reformedparish.com](mailto:michael@reformedparish.com).

## When the Fruit Is Brought Forth

Nearly a century ago a young girl on the Hudson fell into an evil life and the county records show the history of her descendants. They were 900 in number. Of these, 200 are on the county records as criminals; 9 of her own children served an aggregate term in state prisons of 50 years; and a considerable proportion of her descendants were prostitutes and drunkards.

History records a corresponding fact: Jonathan Edwards was a man whom the Word of God had changed from sin to holiness. A record of his descendants is known. Out of 1,400 of these, 8 have been presidents of American universities; 100 have been professors; 100 have been ministers of the gospel; 600 have been doctors; 30, judges; 25, officers in the Army and Navy; and others, mayors, senators, governors, and ambassadors.

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

# The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

Augustine . . .

*Filling the world He lies in a manger!*

John Calvin . . .

*Christ voluntarily took upon Him everything that is inseparable from human nature.*

Jan Hus . . .

*Rejoice that the immortal God is born that mortal men may live in eternity.*

Martin Luther . . .

*The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.*

Richard Sibbes . . .

*Before Christ could marry us He must be born in our nature, for the husband and the wife must be of one nature.*

Thomas Watson . . .

*Christ took our flesh upon Him that He might take our sins upon Him.*

## Children Called to Christ

Like mist on the mountain,  
Like ships on the sea,  
So swiftly the years  
Of our pilgrimage flee;  
In the grave of our fathers  
How soon we shall lie!  
Dear children, today  
To a Savior fly.

How sweet are the flowerets  
In April and May!  
But often the frost makes  
Them wither away.  
Like flowers you may fade:  
Are you ready to die?  
While "yet there is room"  
To a Savior fly.

When Samuel was young,  
He first knew the Lord,  
He slept in His smile  
And rejoiced in His word.  
So most of God's children  
Are early brought nigh:  
Oh, seek Him in youth—  
To a Savior fly.

Do you ask me for pleasure?  
Then lean on His breast,  
For there the sin-laden  
And weary find rest.  
In the valley of death  
You will triumphing cry—  
"If this be called dying,  
'Tis pleasant to die!"

— Robert Murray M'Cheyne  
January 1, 1831

### BOUND COPIES OF "BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH"

Once again, we make available to our *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* readership the possibility of purchasing bound copies of this periodical. Please place a check in the box corresponding to the option(s) in which you are interested and forward to the subscription manager by January 31, 2009.

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- Enclosed please find \$50.00 (\$30.00 for binding and \$20.00 for a set of ten issues) for a bound copy of the ten 2008 issues of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*.
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# Self-Image (6)

## *I Love Myself*



The words “I love myself” are less likely to come from your mouth than the words “I hate myself,” but they likely come out more in our actions instead. You probably know the person who has a group of friends around them who bolster their self-love and tell them all the right things. They are proud and have the world at their fingertips; it seems nothing can stop them. They think the world of themselves and they conclude, “I love myself.” Are you perhaps one of them? On the other hand, we often frown at the counselor or friend who tells us, “You just have to love yourself more.” We often brush this statement aside as unbiblical, but is there not an element of truth to it? Is there no room for a balanced and biblical self-love?

In last month’s issue, we considered the extreme way we can use the phrase, “I hate myself.” There is a biblical self-hatred. So there is also a biblical self-love. In order to get to the root of this biblical self-love, consider the summary of the law that Jesus gave in Matthew 22:37–39: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” A biblical self-love begins with loving God. As long as we are on the throne of our lives, loving ourselves excessively, we will have an unbiblical self-love. An unbiblical self-love puts ourselves in God’s rightful position over our lives and we think that we are in control of our own destiny. However, when we assume the right place as sinners before God, He begins to work in us at the same time a love for Him, a healthy love for ourselves, and love for our neighbor.

Jesus continues the summary of the law by saying that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. There is a biblical view of self by which we must measure and show our love to others. The person who loves himself in a biblical way loves God above all; God is ruling over his life. There is a biblical self-hatred because of sin, but there is a biblical self-love because of the image of Christ being remade in him by the Holy Spirit. The point that Jesus is making is that we love ourselves to some extent, not irrationally promoting ourselves, but seeking to promote the image of Christ in ourselves for the glory of God. That measure of love for ourselves must be the measure of love that we show to others.

When the young lawyer came to Jesus to ask how he might inherit eternal life, Jesus reminded him of these com-

mandments. But the lawyer challenged Jesus with the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

The young lawyer was blinded with self-love and superiority. Jesus addressed this with the story of the Good Samaritan, who had a biblical self-love and showed compassion to the man in need regardless of his ethnicity, race, or nation.

Those who live out of the love and compassion that Jesus has shown to them will demonstrate both a biblical self-love and a biblical love for others. As humans, we seek to promote our own physical and spiritual welfare, don’t we? There is an element of self-love, but this is tempered with a healthy dose of self-abhorrence before God on account of our sin. And when we are born again and the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, we love ourselves because of Christ’s image being remade in us.

That is why it is so important that the image of Christ is remade in us through a relationship of faith and dependence upon Him. Without the establishment of a saving relationship with Christ, we will not value ourselves with biblical value as Psalter 250:2 shows: “A foolish man knows not their worth, nor he whose mind is of the earth.” Without Christ, we will either hate ourselves excessively or we will love ourselves excessively. Even in Christ, Christians struggle with falling into either extreme, but we need to be brought daily to a balance of both self-hatred and self-love. Are you keeping these two things in balance? Are you loathing yourself as a sinner before God, yet also loving yourself, not because of who you are as a sinner but because God is remaking you into the image of Christ for His glory? (Phil. 2:12).

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**Maarten Kuivenhoven** is a theological student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

## NATIONAL NEWS....

### Congress Renews Federal Funding for Abstinence Education

The U.S. Senate passed a bill that extends Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) through September 2009. Recipients of CBAE funds—the largest funding stream for abstinence education—include pregnancy centers throughout the country and charitable organizations. The U.S. House has previously passed the bill; it now goes to the president. (*CitizenLink*)

### Family Advocates Defend Homeschool Freedom in California

The 2nd District Court of Appeals has ruled that California parents without teaching credentials do not have a right to homeschool their children. Since then, more than 230,000 people have signed a petition asking the state's highest court to apply the ruling only to the family involved—not to all Californians. Candi Cushman, education analyst for Focus on the Family Action, said the vagueness of California law, coupled with the court decision, leaves home-schoolers vulnerable to the whims of the public school system. (*Citizen Link*)

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

### Iran Pursues Islamization

The Iranian government is set to ratify a bill that will make “apostasy,” or leaving Islam, a capital crime, say human rights groups and experts. The Iranian parliament approved a new penal code by a vote of 196-7, calling for a mandatory death sentence for apostates. The Christian and Baha'i communities of Iran are most likely to be affected by this decision. (*Compass Direct*)

## MEDITATION

Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15–16a).

## WORLD RELIGIONS — ISLAM

Islam (Arabic for “Submission to the will of Allah”) is a monotheistic, Abrahamic religion originating with the teachings of Muhammad, a 7th-century Arab religious and political figure. An adherent of Islam is known as a Muslim, meaning “one who submits [to Allah].” Muslims believe that Allah revealed the Qur’an (Koran) to Muhammad, through the angel Gabriel. They do not regard Muhammad as the founder of a new religion, but as the restorer of the original monotheistic faith of Abraham, Moses, and other prophets. Islamic tradition holds that Jews and Christians distorted the revelations Allah gave to these prophets by either altering the text, introducing a false interpretation, or both. Almost all Muslims belong to one of two major denominations: Sunni (85%) and Shi’a (15%). Commonly cited estimates of the Muslim population in 2007 range from 1 billion to 1.8 billion. About 20% of Muslims live in Arab countries, 30% in the Indian subcontinent, and 15.6% in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country by population.

The Qur’an states that all Muslims must believe in Allah, his revelations, his angels, his messengers, and in the “Day of Judgment.” In accordance with the Islamic belief in predestination, Allah has full knowledge and control over all that occurs. For Muslims, everything in the world that occurs, good or evil, has been pre-ordained and nothing can happen unless permitted by Allah. Although events are pre-ordained, man possesses a free will in that he has the faculty to choose between right and wrong, and is thus responsible for his actions. Islamic law (the *Sharia*) covers all aspects of life, from matters of state, like governance and foreign relations, to issues of daily living.

Each Muslim subscribes to The Five Pillars of Islam:

- The *Shahadah*, which is the basic creed or tenet of Islam: “I testify that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” This testament is a foundation for all other beliefs and practices in Islam.
- *Salah*, or ritual prayer, which must be performed five times a day
- *Zakat*, or alms-giving
- *Sawm*, or daily fasting during the month of Ramadan, commemorating the month in which the Qur’an was revealed to Mohammed
- The *Hajj*, which is a one-time pilgrimage during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah to the city of Mecca.

Jihad means “to strive or struggle” (in the way of Allah) and is considered the “sixth pillar of Islam” by a minority of Muslim authorities. Within Islamic jurisprudence, jihad is usually

taken to mean military exertion against non-Muslim combatants in the defense or expansion of the Islamic state, the ultimate purpose of which is to universalize Islam. Jihad, the only form of warfare permissible in Islamic law, may be declared against apostates, rebels, highway robbers, violent groups, and un-Islamic leaders or states which refuse to submit to the authority of Islam. Under most circumstances and for most Muslims, jihad is a collective duty. (*Wikipedia*)



The Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount



A Muslim pilgrim in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.  
Photo: Ali Mansuri.

From *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*  
Publication Number (USPS 010584)  
540 Crescent St., NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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## ABBA FATHER

“Abba, Father!” We approach Thee  
In our Savior’s precious Name;  
We, Thy children, here assembled,  
Now Thy promised blessing claim;  
From our sins His blood hath washed us,  
’Tis through Him our souls draw nigh,  
And Thy Spirit, too, hath taught us,  
“Abba, Father,” thus to cry.

Once as prodigals we wandered  
In our folly far from Thee,  
But Thy grace, o’er sin abounding,  
Rescued us from misery;  
Thou Thy prodigals hast pardoned,  
Kissed us with a Father’s love,  
Spread the festive board, and called us,  
E’er to dwell with Thee above.

Clothed in garments of salvation,  
At Thy table is our place,  
We rejoice, and Thou rejoicest,  
In the riches of Thy grace;  
“It is meet,” we hear Thee saying,  
“We should merry and be glad,  
I have found My once lost children,  
Now they live who once were dead.”

“Abba, Father!” all adore Thee,  
All rejoice in Heav’n above,  
While in us they learn the wonders  
Of Thy wisdom, grace, and love;  
Soon before Thy throne assembled,  
All Thy children shall proclaim,  
“Glory, everlasting glory,  
Be to God and to the Lamb!”

—JAMES G. DECK

## The *Banner* of Sovereign Grace Truth

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE  
HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

*A Periodical for Young and Old*