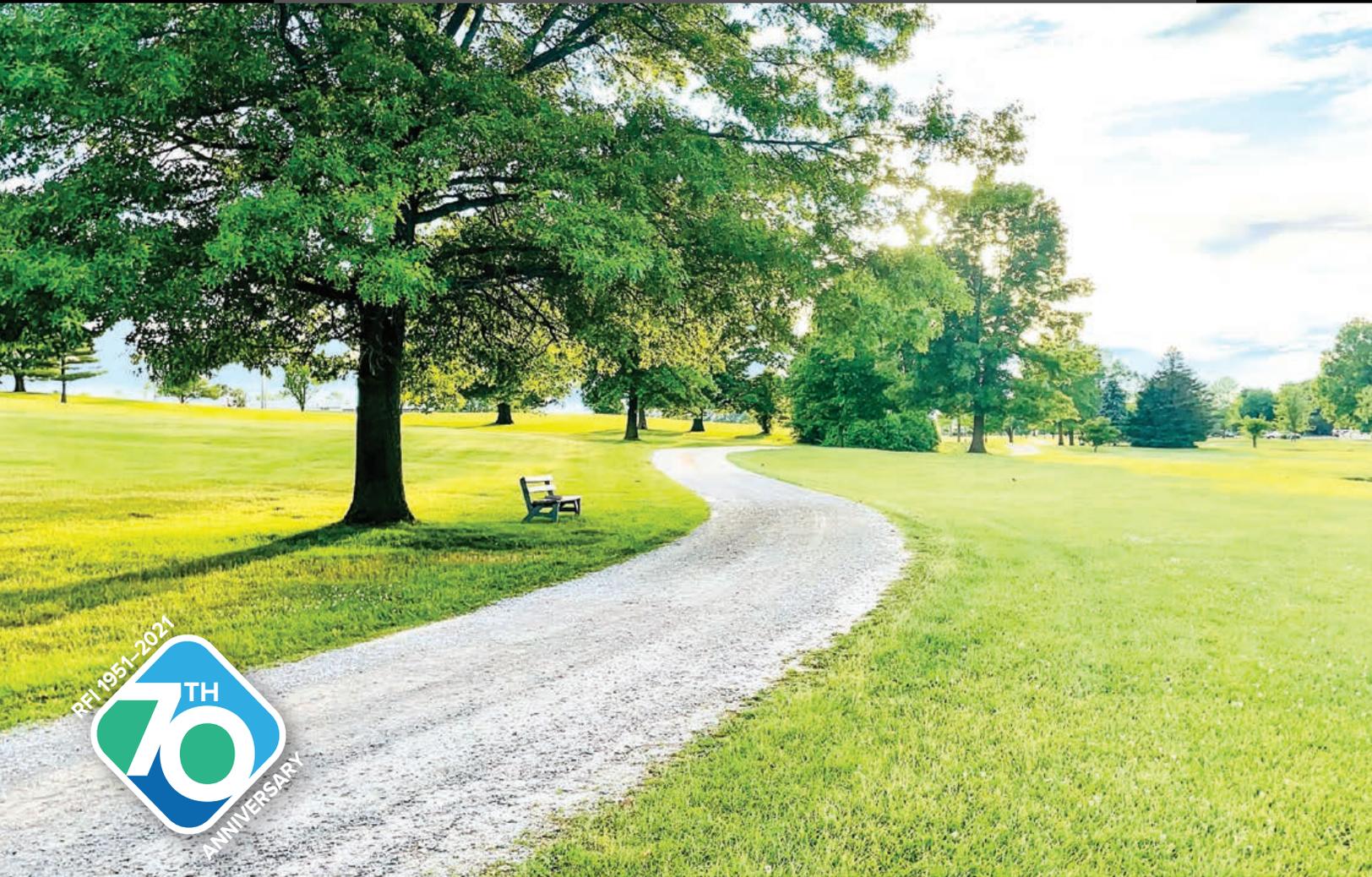


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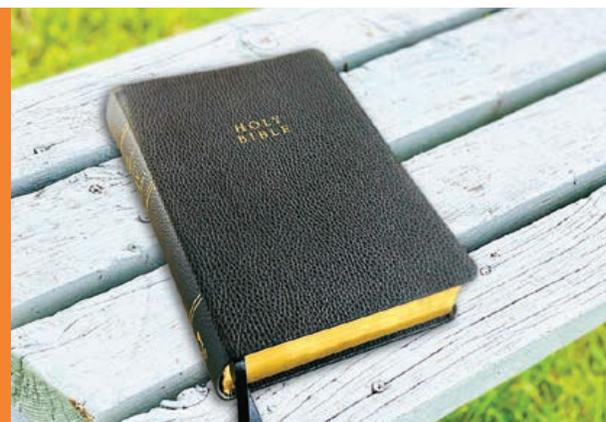
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WHY GIVE HONOR AND RESPECT?
FRIENDSHIP: THE NEMESIS OF NARCISSISM
BIBLE STUDIES ON JONAH
MOTHERHOOD UNDER SIEGE
BLOODSHED, DISCIPLINE, AND PATIENCE

THEMES IN JAMES
PREPARING FOR WORSHIP
FIGHTING WORLDLINESS THROUGH UNION WITH CHRIST
JESUS, MY SECOND ADAM
BOOK REVIEWS



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About the cover:

"The Christian life is a struggle. It demands entrance through a narrow gate and a daily walk down a narrow path. It involves living by faith through self-denial and waging a holy war in the midst of a hostile world."
—Dr. Joel Beeke

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Why Give **HONOR** and **RESPECT?**

America is not an honor society. Nor do we prioritize respect. Rather, disrespect is the norm. It is common for us to treat our elders as our equals (or inferiors). The model TV child is often one who disrespects and belittles his parents. We malign and mock our governing authorities. Employees slander their bosses. Husbands publicly insult their wives and wives ridicule their husbands. In short, we treat others as inferior and less valuable than ourselves.



**Mrs.
Elisabeth
Bloechl**

We are all image bearers of God (Gen. 1:26–27). This means that we all possess real worth because God has put his own image in us. As one author wrote, “All human beings are made in God’s image and are worthy of honor. As the psalmist writes, God has crowned humanity ‘with glory and honor’” – Psalm 8:5

Rather than give honor and respect, we demand it from others. Peter preaches a very different message. Peter charges the church to make honor and respect a priority. Throughout 1 Peter he drives home his point. “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (2:17, English Standard Version; see also Rom. 12:10). “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (3:7). “[I]n your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (3:15).

He even tells us to give honor and respect to people who give us the opposite. “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even

if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct” (3:1–2; see also Eph. 5:33). “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust” (2:18; see also 1 Tim. 6:1). “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (2:12). We quickly retort that if we have that mentality, we will become doormats. Nevertheless, Peter calls us to it and justifies his command by pointing us to our ultimate example: Jesus (2:4, 7, 21–23).

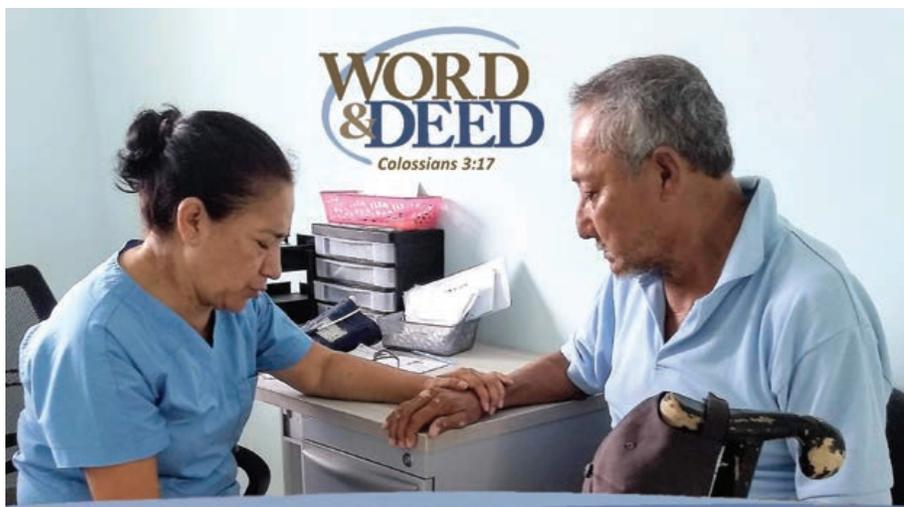
This concept of honor and respect is not unique to Peter’s epistle. We find commands to do both throughout the Bible (as indicated by the cross references above). A few more examples: honor your father and

mother (Ex. 20:12), honor worthy widows (1 Tim. 5:3), honor the lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:12–13). So, it is safe to conclude that honor and respect are important aspects of the Christian life. Knowing this leaves us with several questions: What is honor, and what is respect? Why does God command us to practice both? And why are they so important?

Though there are several definitions of honor, the most helpful I have found is one taken from *Table Talk* magazine. It reads, “to honor means to esteem and treat another with respect because of who they are or what they have done.”¹ To respect means “to view or consider with some degree of reverence [i.e., deference, esteem]; to esteem as possessed of real worth” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary). Though similar, there is arguably a slight difference between the two. Respect is owed to those in positions of authority, while honor is owed to all (though also given to those in positions of authority). In any event, we are respect and honor someone because of who they are.

We are all image bearers of God (Gen. 1:26–27). This means that we all possess real worth because God has put his own image in us. As one author wrote, “All human beings are made in God’s image and are worthy of honor. As the psalmist writes, God has crowned humanity ‘with glory and honor’” (Ps. 8:5).² Therefore, Peter is justified in calling us to honor all. Every person’s identity is, at core, an image bearer of God. So every person deserves honor. However, we are also to give special honor and respect to certain people because of who they are in relationship to us.

God is above (and separate from) all created thing (Ps. 97:9; Eph. 4:6). As the creator and highest authority, he



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has the right to structure his world as he pleases. It pleased him to reflect his own nature by building structures of authority into the world. God placed all of mankind in a position of authority over the earth and animals (Gen. 1:26). God also placed some people in positions of authority over others (e.g., rulers, church leaders, masters, husbands; see above). God didn't give these people authority because of anything particularly remarkable or even admirable about them. He gave them authority to display his own glory through them (consider, for example, Pharaoh or Cyrus [Ex. 9:16; Isa. 44:8]). As such, we are to submit to those in positions of authority with respect and honor because their authority comes from God.

We can see then that giving honor and respect are not negotiable. The question we must now answer is, what does this look like in our context? The Westminster Confession offers a helpful summary:

[T]he Larger Catechism unfolds the meaning of honor as paying what is due to them—to superiors, reverence, prayer, obedience, imitation of their godly virtues, maintenance of their dignity, and bearing with their infirmities (WLC 127); to inferiors, love, prayer, instruction, rewards, correction, and protection (WLC 129); and to equals, recognition of their dignity, deference, and rejoicing in their advancement (WLC 131).³

In other words, if someone is in a position of authority over us (husbands over wives, bosses over employees, governors over governed) it is the duty of the inferior to show honor by obeying, praying for, and upholding the reputation of their superiors,⁴ while the superior shows honor to his inferior by seeking his well-being. For example, an employee ought to do—and do cheerfully—what his boss says (Eph. 6:5–8). Likewise, the boss ought to pray for, instruct, correct, and protect his employees instead of using his authority to intimidate or manipulate (Eph. 6:9). Finally, the employee ought to treat his fellow

employees with courtesy and rejoice with them in their successes at work. In short, in every instance, we are to treat others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). And this, regardless of whether the recipient fulfills her duty to honor us.

It is vital that we follow God's instruction here for two reasons. First, to do otherwise is an act of rebellion against God himself. As one author wrote, "To fail to honor those around us, whether superiors, inferiors, or equals, is to engage in rebellion against God. Especially in the case of our superiors, casting off earthly authorities is tantamount to casting off our heavenly authority, the One who placed those earthly authorities over us."⁵

Second, how we treat one another in the church binds us together and sends a message to the watching world. The church Peter was addressing faced ridicule, dishonor, and persecution from those outside of the church. Therefore, it was vital for them to cultivate a culture of honor within the group. This would allow the Christians to derive their security and worth in God and God's people, even when the broader culture rejected them.⁶ It also testified to those watching that Christianity is indeed honorable.⁷ Though we may not face the same kinds of alienation today, we are still often tempted to desire the fleeting honor our culture awards. (Or to return shame with shame, disrespect with disrespect.) The church that is marked by mutual honor and respect for our superiors counteracts that desire by pointing us to Christ and eternity.

Earlier I mentioned that Peter commands we show honor and respect despite ridicule, shame, or persecution because Jesus did (2:21). He is our highest example. Yet, Jesus' shame and eventual death accomplished more than making him a good example. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (2:24). Jesus' death and resurrection purchased

our salvation, for his perfect life and propitiatory death are credited to us. We, as it were, died with him. Even so, we have risen with him (see Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Still more, our dishonor (like his) is transformed into eternal honor (1 Peter 2:6–7).

Knowing this gives us not only a reason to show honor and give respect, but also the motivation. We were once those who shamed and ridiculed Jesus. In turn, he rescued us out of death and clothed us with honor. In grateful praise we join the heavenly chorus saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12). Our hearts overflow with gratitude and a desire for others to know this astonishing love. So, we delight to honor even those who shame us, and joyfully respect our weakest leaders.

1 William Barclay, "What Is Honor?" *Table Talk*, February 2019, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2019/02/what-is-honor/> (accessed April 9, 2021).

2 Barclay, "What Is Honor?"

3 Kevin D. Gardner, "The Fifth Commandment Root of Honor," *Table Talk*, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2019/02/fifth-commandment-root-honor/> (accessed April 6, 2021).

4 "Superior" and "inferior" carry negative connotations today. However, these words in no way imply a difference in worth, dignity, or value.

5 Gardner, "Fifth Commandment Root of Honor."

6 David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 60.

7 deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 75.

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Friendship: The Nemesis of Narcissism



Mr. Michael R. Kearney

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39, English Standard Version). It is a cardinal commandment of the Christian life and, at first glance, a simple one. But what should we make of Jesus’ comparison to self-love? Most children, whether raised in a Christian home or not, are taught that selfishness is bad. So did Jesus mean, “Let sanctified love for your neighbor replace the sinful love which you feel for yourself”? Or was he saying, “You can’t love your neighbor properly until you properly understand how to love yourself”? Loving ourselves is natural to the fallen human condition, but Christ’s reaction to it is ambiguous—can self-love be a Christian concept? In this article I’d like to examine how Christian friendship offers an answer to our cultural crisis of narcissism by revealing a God-glorifying form of self-love.

A Culture of Narcissism

American historian Christopher Lasch leveraged the term “culture of narcissism” to refer to the prevalence of an exclusive and all-encompassing focus on the self.¹ As traditional sources of identity like religion and the family eroded, individuals shored up their sense of identity by embarking on an endless quest for self-improvement, lured on by prospects of fame and fortune. Lasch published his book about narcissism in 1979; more than forty years later, our age of social media names like “Facebook” and “YouTube” has proven him to have been prophetic.

Narcissism harkens back to the Greek myth of Narcissus, a hunter who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water and eventually melted away from his own burning lust for himself. Sigmund Freud, a founder of modern psychology, based his diagnosis of narcissism as a personality disorder upon this story. Lasch broadened the term from a psychological label to a description of contemporary life, and since then it has become common to describe any number of self-centered behaviors as narcissistic.

But there is an important nuance in the story of Narcissus: his admiration of his own image takes the place of love from another person. We should not mistake his attitude for self-confidence; rather, Narcissus’s obsession reveals his insecurity. Reveling in the imaginary embrace of an identical twin proved easier for Narcissus than receiving the love of a real other. Accordingly, Lasch describes narcissism as something more insidious than mere arrogance or bragging; it includes “dependence upon the vicarious warmth provided by others combined with a fear of dependence, a sense of inner emptiness . . . pseudo self-insight, calculating seductiveness, nervous, self-deprecatory humor.”² Gazing longingly into a mirror is a pathetic and poignant posture for many around us today; it communicates not confidence in our own image, but a restless and insatiable thirst for a stable identity.³ The self is the center of our misery, and so a Christian

response to narcissism must begin with a discussion of the self.

Revelation and the Self

The Christian faith communicates in the language of body and soul, and it attributes importance to both. Our bodies and souls are united in a single person. Of course, they are not inseparable. Our souls will depart from our bodies at death. Even while we live, we are familiar with experiences like daydreaming or *déjà vu*, in which our consciousness momentarily wanders to some distant place while our bodies remain stationary and functioning. But in our ordinary experience of life, body and soul move as a harmonious unit.

Moreover, our bodies are given to us as the place of appearance of our souls in the material world. Our bodies provide all sorts of sense data that confirm and support our existence as real people. Think about it: if you were just a soul with no body, how could you savor the visual beauty of a sunset, the sound of a symphony, or the embrace of another person? Just as scientists have instruments that allow them to gather information, so too our bodies are given to us as instruments by which we learn about God, the external world, and ourselves.

In *Philosophy of Revelation*, Herman Bavinck described self-consciousness as a primeval gift through which God makes himself known to us. Bavinck believed that within each human mind resides an inescapable “consciousness of dependence” which

reveals the existence of God.⁴ The very fact that I think of myself as a person is a gift from God meant to draw me toward him. Rut Etheridge describes the deceit of worldly philosophy as “the ceiling of self”—the assertion that we can never get outside ourselves to know anything about reality.⁵ Actually, Bavinck’s work locates the explosive that demolishes this ceiling within the self, in the consciousness of dependence. This awareness demonstrates that a real God and a real world exist, and they do not revolve around me. Bavinck underscores the fact that our selves are given to us as instruments through which our relationship to God may be established.

So it is clear that we may lawfully love ourselves, including our physical bodies, as gifts and creations of God, bestowed upon us as means by which we may know him and his world. Loving ourselves is not automatically narcissistic, for the simple reason that our selves are not our own. Our bodies—not merely our souls, but our real physical flesh—are “a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God,” and we are to glorify him in them (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Those who engage in physically self-

destructive behaviors trample upon this precious possession. So, too, those who glorify the flesh without acknowledging its source do great dishonor to the Creator of all.

But narcissism presents something far more sinister than appreciation for one’s bodily existence as a creature before God. Narcissus ignored God’s image and lusted after his own. We are called to love ourselves from the inside, in the first person. Narcissus tried to love himself from the outside, in the third person. Although it comes clothed in more fashionable attire, this same basic impulse is present today whenever we obsess over appearances and perceptions, wishing to worship the social media selves we have curated rather than acknowledging our real selves as creatures before God.

Imagine Michelangelo’s famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: Adam with his face uplifted toward his Creator. Before the Fall, every aspect of Adam’s physical being pointed to God: muscles with which to tend the garden, eyes with which to take in the beauty of creation, a mouth with which to name the creatures, ears with which to catch the sound of the

Lord walking in the cool of the day. As the pinnacle of this physical existence, Adam rejoiced in his relationship with Eve, his complement and helper, whom he called “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). As Paul said to the Ephesians, this spousal affection represents a pure and God-glorifying form of self-love: “He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28–29). Only after the Fall came the shame of nakedness, an anxious awareness of how one looks in the eyes of another person. After the Fall, self-love is no longer so simple; now, as one philosopher put it, “I am never at one with myself.”⁶

Nevertheless, even the desire to see a reflection of ourselves is not inherently bad. The Bible is full of commands to examine and test ourselves (1 Cor. 11:31; 2 Cor. 13:5). Peter stresses the importance of maintaining a good reputation among unbelievers (1 Peter 2:12). James specifically uses the analogy of a mirror to describe the person who looks into the law of God and changes his or her behavior accordingly (Jas. 1:22–25). And God in his great wisdom has provided a means by which we can see ourselves in greater clarity than any technological mirror can provide. That means is friendship.⁷

Sharpening One Another’s Countenance

If our bodies are the instruments with which God equips us to serve him, our friends’ bodies are the instruments by which God ministers to us. He has not left us to commune with disembodied



spirits; he communicates to us in tangible ways—through his Word and sacraments, certainly, but also through the presence and actions of flesh-and-blood friends. Our love for Christian neighbors stems from viewing them as gifts from God, just as we view our own physical existence as a part of his fatherly care. With their hands as well as their hearts, our friends demonstrate the love of God to us.

When Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to lead and guide his disciples into all truth, certainly he meant that each believer would individually experience the Spirit's inward presence (John 16:12–15). But he preceded this statement with the overarching command to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12), and this gift of the Spirit is clearly communal as well. Within the unbreakable bonds of Christ's love that unite the universal church, we ought to expect the Spirit to move not just inside our own hearts but also through the mouths of others. In the timely words of a friend who brings Scripture to bear on your soul, you may hear echoes of the very voice of God. Your Christian friends are the closest thing you will experience on this side of glory to the actual living, breathing presence of Jesus Christ himself.

And one of the merciful things that Jesus does to us in our sanctification is to reveal us to ourselves. Sharing time and space with a Christian friend accomplishes this. In such interactions I glimpse things about myself which I could never see in a mirror, both strengths and sins.⁸ In the language of the King James Version, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17). If you want to know yourself better, get to know a Christian friend.

You will be challenged, humiliated, refreshed, and encouraged.

We ought not to shy away from the deep love which should characterize such friendships, even to the point at which David could say that Jonathan's love for him surpassed the love of women (2 Sam. 1:26). This pleasure in the physical presence of our Christian friends is a far cry from lust. I glimpse a picture of the face of a dear Christian brother or sister, and I am filled with unimaginable joy that surpasses any worldly idea of attraction. That joy grows exponentially when the person really stands present before me—a moment that has grown all the more precious in the days of coronavirus. In that dear friend's face, I get to glimpse “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). So we rejoice over our beloved friends and family members as physical manifestations of God's grace to us, and in doing so we unite the cardinal commandments of loving God and loving our neighbor in one.

Lasch was right; narcissism is the defining phenomenon of our day. The title of Chuck DeGroat's recent book, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*, hints at the devastation of cults of personality within the community of faith as well.⁹ But where the demonic tentacles of narcissism creep into the lives of Christians, the love of Christ can still triumph. We are not condemned to stare into a pool, like Narcissus, and wonder if there is anyone out there who could love us as we wish to be loved. We are already surrounded by the love of God, not just in his constant providence but more particularly in the guise of Christian friends. And as we learn to become dealers in this precious commodity of brotherly love, giving and receiving it, we will experience the beautiful truth

that made it possible for the Scriptures to say, “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1).

1 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979).

2 Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*, 33.

3 Michael R. Kearney, “Faith and Fruit in a Post-Christian World: Identity,” *Outlook* 69, no. 3 (May/June 2019): 10–12.

4 Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, ed. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 56.

5 Rut Etheridge III, *God Breathed: Connecting through Scripture to God, Others, the Natural World, and Yourself* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2019), 5.

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, [1944] 2012), 362.

7 Of course, the same could be said, perhaps even in stronger terms, about a Christian marriage. Friendship, however, is both more of a universal experience than marriage and more underappreciated in terms of intimacy in our current culture.

8 In philosophical terms, this awareness of oneself in relationship to others is referred to as empathy. See Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989).

9 Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020). See John van Dyk's discussion of this book in *Christian Renewal* 39, no. 10 (April 10, 2021): 12–13.

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Bible Studies on Jonah

How Can I Know God's Will?
Romans 11:33–12:2



Rev. William Boekestein



How can I know God's will? That generic question takes shape with a host of specific questions God's people face. How long should I live with my parents? Where should I go to college? *Should* I go to college? Should I change jobs? Should I marry? If so, who? Should I have children? If so, when, and how many? Should I stay where I live or move somewhere else? How can I best care for aging parents? Dozens of other questions make us wonder whether we will do the right thing.

What if we could just flip a coin, or draw straws, or roll a die and do whatever the object indicated? Could it be so simple? After all, people in Scripture seemed to determine God's will using such methods. Even the heathen sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah" (Jon. 1:7, English Standard Version). There you go! Knowing God's will is as easy as the flick of the wrist!

But before we cast off all responsibility for making hard, reasoned decisions we should try to understand casting lots in Scripture and determine whether it serves as a pattern for our decision making today. If it doesn't, is there a better way?

The Question of Casting Lots

The sailors manning Jonah's getaway boat were desperate to know God's will. They felt sure that the supernatural storm that threatened the ship was a divine penalty against someone on board. They just didn't know who. If they knew they might implore the guilty party to make restitution to his god. Perhaps the voyage could be saved. So the sailors cast lots. No one knows exactly what that meant. They might have each drawn sticks out of someone's hand, having determined that the one who drew the short stick was guilty. Maybe they threw a die; the person with the lowest number lost. Perhaps, as with the biblical Urim and Thummim (see 1 Sam. 28:6 and Ezra 2:63), they placed two stones in a bag, one indicating yes, the other no. Whichever stone each man drew from the bag answered the question, "Is this storm your fault?" Either by common superstition or because they were coming to believe that "the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:33) the sailors were sure they had found their answer.¹ Jonah quickly confirmed the lot. "I know that this great tempest is because of me" (Jon. 1:12).

This example of casting lots is one of many in Scripture. In the Old Testament the casting of lots identified the sacrificial scapegoat (Lev. 16:8), the divisions of the land of Canaan (Josh. 18:6-8), and the tasks of the Levites (1 Chron. 24:31) and musicians, to name just a few examples. The practice carried over into the New Testament not only

among the Jewish religious leaders (Luke 1:9) but also among believers in Jesus. Matthias was chosen by lot over Joseph to replace Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:26). Lot casting, when done by those trusting in the Lord for results, was an appropriate way of discerning the Lord's will in unique situations in which existing revelation provided insufficient insight.

This raises the question, "Should such methods be used today?" There are good reasons why John Piper says, "I think it's a bad idea, almost always."²

Lot Casting Has Always Been Unusual

The eighty Old Testament references to the lot represent only a tiny fraction of the decisions Scripture records. The overwhelming majority of decisions have always been made by the practice of wisdom. Godly people never cast lots to make decisions on the many matters about which God had already clearly revealed his will.

Lot Casting Was in Lieu of God's Complete Revelation

With one exception (Acts 1:26), every biblical instance of casting lots comes before God spoke to his people by his Son Jesus. Lot casting was one of the "various ways" in which God spoke to his people in time past. In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). The example of casting lots to replace Judas was a special case. The apostles were "a unique group that had to be chosen directly by the Lord . . . So when the apostles needed one and only one replacement for Judas, and they had two to choose from, it made sense that lots would determine the selection."³ After choosing Matthias by lot God gave the church specific instructions for identifying (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) and appointing leaders (Acts 6:1-7). R. C. Sproul argued that by casting

lots "we're asking God to give us direct, immediate revelation which he gave in sacred Scripture. But when the canon of Scripture was closed we don't get that kind of supernatural revelation afforded to us today. . . . We're called to live our lives and to make our decisions on the basis of the teaching of Scripture."⁴

Lot Casting Was a Pre-Pentecost Phenomenon

In the Old Testament the Lord occasionally poured out the "Spirit of wisdom" upon people to fulfill hard callings (Ex. 28:3), make tough decisions (Deut. 34:9), and see beyond their contemporaries (Dan. 5:11, 14). Isaiah prophesied of the Christ that "the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom, and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:2). When Christ ascended into heaven he poured out "the Spirit of wisdom" (Eph. 1:17) on all believers. Paul can say of Christians, "You also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge" (Rom. 15:14). Those with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) can know the things of God (v. 11) in a way superior to Old Testament believers.

Casting lots should be a last resort preceded by prayer and careful thought on a matter not clearly addressed by Scripture in which any of multiple decisions would honor God. If we can't rely on lot casting to make decisions, what can we do?

A Better Way

What follows are seven principles for knowing God's will. None are as simple as casting lots. But taken together they can help make us able to decide well.

Don't Pry into God's Secret Will

God doesn't reveal the entire counsel of his will according to which he works everything (Eph. 1:11). The

good news is, you don't have to know God's secret will. You need to be concerned about God's revealed will, the will of his commands, which he has shown "to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Knowing God's will doesn't require breaking a code or seeing beyond time and space. You don't need to worry about who God has determined you will marry. If you lack the gift of singleness (1 Cor. 7:7–9) you just have to marry in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39) with a commitment to fulfill your unique marital obligations (Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19). You don't need to see the name of your future employer written in the clouds; you just have to provide for yourself (Eph. 4:28) and others (1 Tim. 5:8) in a way that honors your gifts and opportunities, and the genuine interests of society. "God does not ask more of His child than He makes known as His will."⁵

Internalize God's Word

Instead of using Scripture as a reference book for finding answers to our specific questions—who should I marry?, for example—we should use it as an exercise regimen that fortifies us to make good decisions. Scripture informs our minds. It shapes our hearts. It gives us the experience necessary to make decisions that we've never faced before. Piper reminds us that "the normal way . . . for discerning the will of God is . . . 'being transformed in the renewal of your mind that you may be able to prove what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable and perfect'" (Rom. 12:1–2; cf. Eph. 5:17).⁶ Scripture isn't like a horoscope used to find easy answers. It is nourishing food that strengthens us to walk the hard path God has prepared for us.

Listen to Godly Counselors

When the Christian community came to greater maturity deacons could be chosen by a vote of the church

rather than by casting lots (Acts 6:1–6; 15:22). The believers served as a multitude of counselors in which there is safety (Prov. 11:14). Because the believers at Rome were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge" they were "able to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14). "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (Prov. 12:15). Unless you are a fool, on weighty matters you will seek and carefully consider the input of people who love you and who love God. By asking for counsel we aren't inviting others to tyrannize our consciences but to provide insights that we have accidentally or purposefully missed.

Make Little Decisions Well

Jesus taught this important principle: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much" (Luke 16:10). Big decisions will terrorize us if we aren't habituated to wisely make small ones. And most of our decisions are not on the level of who should I marry?. They are more like, will I read the Bible and pray today? Will I do my own homework instead of copying from my friend? Will I binge watch YouTube late into the night or get the sleep I need to meet tomorrow's challenges? Before making a major decision about marriage you will have made thousands of little decisions about friendship, commitment, and integrity. "A man whose will is set on doing God's will, as far as he knows it, is alone in the proper state for receiving further Divine Illumination."⁷

The habit of good decision making requires prizing faithfulness over fulfillment. A selfish pursuit of God's will only as it pertains to our personal happiness can "infect and enfeeble" our Christianity.⁸ Ironically, faithfulness usually leads to fulfillment.⁹

Observe Providence

If you aren't a trust fund kid and

didn't get the academic scholarship you had hoped for, providence might be steering you away from a \$200,000 Columbia University education. That's okay. If you get a dream-job offer in a city that doesn't have a church in which you could be rooted in the gospel, you should probably turn down the job. Because of God's unique providential dealings with each of his creatures, some aspects of knowing and doing God's will are contextualized. Providence won't always tell us what to do. But it can be a factor. Paul was never certain where God would lead him. But he didn't have to be. The Holy Spirit opened and closed doors (Acts 16:6). Still, we need to be careful not to misread opened and closed doors. "If God opens the door for you to do something you know is good or necessary, be thankful for the opportunity. But . . . don't assume that the relative ease or difficulty of a new situation is God's way of telling you to do one thing or another."¹⁰ Providence must not be hijacked by our burning desires.

Pray for Wisdom

God praised Solomon for seeking godly wisdom (1 Kings 3:5–14). Paul petitioned God to enlighten the eyes of understanding (Eph. 1:18). When we lack wisdom for a particular decision, we should "ask of God, who gives generously to all" (James 1:5). Asking for wisdom is not demanding a wet or dry fleece or a sign in the heavens. It is asking for more astute sensitivity to God's revealed principles, a closer resonance with his heart, and a stronger commitment to God's value system. True wisdom, the kind we need to decide well, is a delight in "knowing and loving and doing the Father's will." Praying for wisdom means praying "for a great hunger for the will of God" which is satisfied only by doing that will (John 4:32, 34).¹¹

Trust God

God's sovereignty assures believers that when we commit to doing his will and make decisions according to his Word, we cannot go wrong. This isn't to say that our decisions will always be wise. But God will always harmonize our choices with his good will. God's grace assures believers that he loves us and will never leave us. He unites us with Christ to empower us to do his will. This is why God can command his children not to worry about even the most basic decisions of life (Matt. 6:25) and to repent when we fail to trust.

Godly decision making is not easy, but it is simple. Maintain a clear conscience and make the decision that that seems to best honor God. Don't worry if big decisions feel scary. If we realize that our choices matter we should expect to not be able to make big decisions lightly. But "God doesn't take risks, so we can."¹² The Holy Spirit gives us both the wisdom and the courage to make godly decisions. The Spirit helps believers to say, "We are not of those who shrink back" (Heb. 10:39). Because we believe we can do the will of God (v. 36). God's elect children can make hard decisions trusting God that they are as secure in Christ as Christ is in the Trinity.

Questions

1. What questions do you have about God's will for your life?
2. Summarize the Scripture's use of lot casting.
3. Why is lot casting usually not appropriate today?
4. How much of God's will do you need to know?
5. How should believers internalize God's Word in order to be fortified to decide well?
6. What role do godly counselors play in your decision making?
7. Describe both a right and wrong way of using providence to make decisions.

1 Brent A. Strawn suggests that the sailors' casting of lots is evidence of their developing piety and as their way of "participating in the larger theological point of the book of Jonah with regard to the nations." "Jonah's Sailors and Their Lot Casting: A Rhetorical-Critical Observation," *Biblica* 91 (2010): 74.

2 John Piper, "What Do You Think of Casting Lots to Determine God's Will?" *Desiring God*, March 23, 2009, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-do-you-think-of-casting-lots-to-determine-gods-will>.

3 Kevin DeYoung, "Should Churches Select Elders by Casting Lots?" *The Gospel Coalition*, February 11, 2011, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/should-churches-select-elders-by-casting-lots/>.

4 R. C. Sproul, "Message 10, Ask R. C. Live," July 2014, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/conferences/live-qa-events/ask-rc-live-july-2014/>.

5 Andrew Murray, *God's Will: Our Dwelling Place* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1991), 52.

6 Piper, "What Do You Think?"

7 Murray, *God's Will*, 40.

8 Murray, *God's Will*, 32. Ironically, "Most of us would be more fulfilled if we didn't fixate on fulfillment quite so much." Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 76.

9 DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 30.

10 DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 76.

11 Murray, *God's Will*, 17, 29.

12 DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 39.

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GOOD QUESTION

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HOW CAN I OBEY GOD?

When the prophet Haggai confronted the Israelites for prioritizing themselves over God, "the people obeyed" (Hag. 1:12). The reasons why, as Haggai explained in the following verses, can help us obey God even when it's hard.

Believe God's messengers. The people obeyed "the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him" (12). The faithful receive the faithfully preached word as God's word (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13).

Fear the Lord. The people perceived that in their present course God was against them. Their reverence of God (12) and his commitment to discipline led to repentance.

Trust that God is with you. The people had been living

as though God was absent or non-existent. We can too. Believe God's promise: "I am with you" (13).

Follow good leaders. It is no accident that Haggai aimed his message at the leaders and that the leaders are mentioned first in the reformation. Imitate Christ-following leaders (1 Cor. 11:1).

Pray for the Spirit's help. "And the Lord stirred up the spirit" of the people to energize their obedience (14). When the Spirit stirs our hearts we will be ready and willing to do God's will.



Motherhood under Siege



Mrs. Annemarieke Ryskamp



It's of crucial importance that we maintain our personal faith in Jesus as the Son of God and read God's Word by ourselves and as a couple and family, and stay close to him by prayer. "For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall."

—Ps. 18:28–29

A fierce spiritual battle is raging all around us, and times are difficult for all Christians as the devil prowls around like a lion, seeking whom he can devour (1 Peter 5:8). Mothers are an easy target, because they can be hit from many different angles. Not only the God-ordained institutions like marriage, children, and the care of elderly parents are under siege, but also a huge issue for modern mothers is distraction by the (social) media. A woman who fears God provides stability, comfort, beauty, and order in her home. This is a tall order and requires faith, hard work, and a willingness to be prepared for most anything. Be encouraged that you are truly a modern Proverbs 31 woman if you take your call to be a mother seriously.

In this article I want to shine a light on mothers and how they can feel encouraged in their faith journey and resist the devil, by being aware and wary of all the attacks on their most important and God-glorifying tasks.

Marriage

The temptations from the world start early. Marriage itself is under attack. You're not cool if you want to marry, especially someone from the opposite sex. You're certainly uncool if you want to wait for sex till you are married. Even if you did everything right by your marriage to a biological and Bible-believing male and you waited for its consummation, you still embarked on a difficult journey in a fallen world. Every relationship needs a lot of attention and maintenance. The world will help you to have too-high expectations and will help you to feel unhappy and neglected or jealous and controlling.

A common problem is that women start to idolize their husbands and put that relationship above their relationship with God. I can testify that a single woman has

more time to devote to God, like Paul observed (1 Cor. 7:8). This time and attention goes to her husband as soon as she is married.

So where should she go when she cannot resolve differences with her husband? Of course her physical safety and that of her children is paramount, but for other issues she should go over her husband's head and approach God directly about it. The institution of marriage was God's idea, wasn't it? He is the one having to provide the grace and the wisdom and the necessary changes of heart in both your husband and you. God is the very best counselor in marriage problems. God can also change circumstances that you can't, even in a miraculous way. Trust him for providing the necessary solutions to your problems.

Work to keep the lines of communication open with your husband, and with your children. Always make time to listen when they want to talk. Many problems can be avoided by listening and talking about it before it becomes a problem.

That's not to say that you couldn't talk to your friend, or mentor, or counselor, or read a book about it (Prov. 11:14). These all fall under the work that you are willing to do to improve your marriage. For example, I found the book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* helped me to understand the different communication styles of men and women. They speak different languages! Of course there are many good Christian books, but stay vigilant, because there are also many books with bad advice out there. Make sure your number one book is always the Bible, and if you get advice, make sure it's biblical before you take it to heart. If you want to see a professional counselor, make sure this person has a mature

faith and counsels you from his or her faith and is not setting the goals from a worldly point of view.¹ The world will quickly advise you to divorce this man, but that's against God's will entirely: "To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband . . . , and the husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10–11, English Standard Version). Let God take care of your marriage, in his time and in his way. Trust him. He really knows best.

Maintaining your marriage is extremely important in light of your main God-given task, which is raising children. It has been proven many times that a child thrives in the context of a family unit according to God's creation. That is a father and a mother who are faithful to each other. Of course we live in a fallen world where all kinds of bad things can and will happen. But one of the best ways to love your children is by building a strong marriage.

Children

We know that all children are miracles, gifts from God. Sadly the world is valuing that life less than ever before, with abortion too often the answer for an unexpected pregnancy. If God blesses you with children, either biological or adopted, please realize that raising children is the most important task there is in God's eyes. Why? Because he created them, and you get the honor (even if it doesn't feel that way) to raise them to God's glory. May your goal always be to make sure they know their heavenly Father and Jesus the Son, who died for them too: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6, New King James Version).

Realize that they are not *your* children. They are God's, and you

may (temporarily) take care of them. This knowledge relieves you of some of the responsibility and at the same time intensifies it in other ways. You do have the responsibility to raise them to the best of your ability and as much to God's glory as you know how. The good part is that God has the final responsibility. He knows your child and he knows you; he knows your weaknesses; he knows the future: he knows how your child will turn out. That might not be according to your ambition or wishes, but it's always within God's knowledge. When you have to let go of your child at some point, you know that God will still be in control all the time.

The devil is aware of all this and loves to work according to his own world order, going against everything that God has ordained. The worldly pressures on our children are tremendous, which increases the effort we need to put in to protect them. The world would like to break up the nuclear family and take our children away to turn them into social justice warriors. But don't underestimate the activism of a mother! God gave mothers supernatural strength concerning the protection of their children. Appeal to God for that strength and stand up for God's ways.

Our world today also gives parents many other challenges that require wisdom to sort through. Some examples include such issues as schools and education, health (e.g., food and vaccinations), and the use of digital media interfering with a healthy childhood.

If this sounds daunting, it is. These are issues for both parents, but still we cannot do this without God's help. Fortunately God is more than willing to bless us in our efforts. Jesus himself promised this: "I have said these things to you, that in me you

may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, English Standard Version). This is how 1 John 5:5 puts it: “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” So it’s of crucial importance that we maintain our personal faith in Jesus as the Son of God and read God’s Word by ourselves and as a couple and family, and stay close to him by prayer. “For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall” (Ps. 18:28–29).

Again, find help when you struggle. Find other Christian moms with children so you can share experiences. Realize that your kids grow up so fast; make time with them count. Listen to them, ask them what is on their mind. They are going to remember the time that you spend with them. Find institutions that are set up to help, like Focus on the Family, Answers in Genesis, homeschool groups, and others that publish Bible-honoring teaching materials. Don’t fight the battle alone. More than ever Christians need to unite and circle the wagons around our children.

Pressure is mounting on all fronts, and it will confront every single

Christian institution, school, congregation, denomination, and ministry. We must all decide here and now where we stand. We need to find our fellow sisters (and brothers) in Christ and stand strong together. We need to encourage each other and make sure we receive our strength from the Lord through prayer.

Honor Your Parents

Many of us will belong to the sandwich generation, where we have to take care of our children and at the same time our aging parents. The Bible is clear that we are not to forget about our parents in their old age. “Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Prov. 23:22). Grandparents have the right to know their grandchildren, and we have the responsibility to see to it. “Grandchildren are the crown of the aged” (Prov. 17:6). This will be another item of busyness for you. Make sure, however, that the busyness is just in your head and feet and let Christ have your whole heart, and he will keep your life whole. Remember to “honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land’” (Eph. 6:2–3).

Through most of history, there weren’t homes for the elderly. They just lived with the children. This is how God meant it: the grandparents can take their share of babysitting, and the younger children can help the grandparents with little things that have become more difficult for them. The world, however, has succeeded quite well in disrupting this too. Its purpose is to pull the family apart and successfully so, because most families are not in a situation where they can have the elderly live with them. However, I’m hopeful it may change back again. I foresee a future where homes for the elderly are considered too expensive and it will be too bothersome for us to keep traveling to the condo where grandpa or grandma is living all alone. Then the world will not have succeeded and we will return to God’s purpose. Until then, we have the responsibility to do as much as we can, all the time praying for strength and grace, both for us and for our parents. Again God is able to change the circumstances in such a way that the whole family is blessed if we let go and expect Jesus to do it and help us.

Media

The media are one of the devil’s most successful endeavors to get God’s people distracted from their

Fortunately God is more than willing to bless us in our efforts. Jesus himself promised this:

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”

—John 16:33



relationship with their Maker and Savior.

If you are reading this article, you know it's not good. You have probably seen kids being accompanied by adults who never even look at them. Or the kids are always behind the computer, being raised (but more often bullied) by the "friends" online. It's no coincidence that the devil in his society wants the kids online all the time and preferably never with their family or friends in real life anymore.

For the mothers it's all about distraction. It's a tough job to be with kids all the time, especially little kids. It can be lonely too. It's a huge temptation to put your mind to something more adult, more interesting, even more uplifting (like listening to a sermon: that's legit, right?). As the Preacher says, there's a time for everything, so we need to be wise with our time. We need to be honest with ourselves: do we spend more time online than in the Bible or in prayer? Do we need as much distraction as we take? Or could our child need a little more attention? What kind of example are we for our children? Remember that raising your kids is the most important task in the world!

We also need to make sure our children get their share of playing outside, playing with other kids, developing their imagination and people skills; staying healthy (with a healthy immune system) by breathing fresh air (not through a mask). Screen time needs to be limited according to age.

There's another danger about the (social) media that I want to point out, because it concerns the safety of your family. That is that we are giving up our privacy for the sake of

convenience and so we are helping to create a surveillance state. Whenever we log in, we give up some of our history and even our identity. We put family pictures out there, we live the highlights of our life online, we share our children, our opinions, and our dinners. . . . and we give it to institutions that don't care about us. When they know everything about us, they can start to control us. We need to realize that we give them the control and that's exactly how they like it. More and more they can tell you what to buy, and what to think, and even what to do. They will make your decisions for you: "Alexa, where shall we go eat tonight?" It starts as a convenience but will end up with control. So if the world is starting to control us, it's because we allowed it to. We need to be aware that we are in the world but not of the world, as Jesus said. We need to keep praying that we will not be led into temptation but be delivered from evil.

Be Encouraged in the Lord

In Matthew 25:1–13 we read the parable Jesus told about ten virgins. Five were foolish and five were wise. When the bridegroom after a long wait finally arrived, only the wise virgins could go in and celebrate the wedding with the bridegroom. The wise virgins were like the Proverbs 31 woman: they were well prepared for everything. They looked ahead and made sure they had enough oil, just in case. So they went and bought it before they left to meet the bridegroom. The Proverbs 31 woman is not afraid of snow for her household, because she has made sure they are all well clothed (v. 21). We mothers need to be prepared: for our own faith (like the wise virgins) and for our families (like the woman in Proverbs 31). There will be a time when it is too late to work on your own faith. There may come a time

when it's too late to take a stand for your family. So be prepared. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, so plentiful that you won't run out of faith even if the wait, the challenges, the temptations, the problems, take a very long time.

Be like a wise virgin and the Proverbs 31 woman, even though that takes a lot of courage. Keeping your faith alive and well is not to be taken lightly or for granted. It requires work, it requires thinking and Bible reading, it requires sacrifices, and it requires a lot of prayer. This we can do only by the help of the Holy Spirit. We need to stay close enough to our Lord and filled enough with the Holy Spirit that we will be ready to enter the feast of our Bridegroom Jesus when he comes.



1. If you want to see a professional counselor, make sure this person is a mature Christian. A helpful article is written by Beth Claes, "How Do I Know If This Counselor Is Right for Me?" (www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/counselor-right/).

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Bloodshed, Discipline, and Patience



Mrs. Vanessa Le

Are you ever impatient? Not so much impatient with circumstances, but with people? Have you ever looked across the church and shaken your head at that person who never seems to grow up, who constantly struggles in their walk with the Lord, and who never quite manages to be there every Sunday? Have you ever spoken or thought the words “weak,” “immature,” or “foolish” about others? I am certainly guilty of this charge. On the other hand, have you ever had your own sins exposed, only to find that you really don’t want to give them up? You may have become adept at rationalizing your sin, or you may have decided that you’re going to have your guilty pleasure and just go ahead and sin this time. Again, I am guilty of this charge too.

One obvious result of COVID-19 has been to reveal even more the many differences in the visible people of God. Just walk into almost any church, and they will be conspicuous—some people wear masks, and others don’t. Some people socially distance, and others don’t. Some people won’t come to church because they’re required to wear a mask; others won’t come because everyone is not required to wear a mask. Our differences have become painfully obvious.

How should we view our brothers and sisters in Christ when we have polar opposite views on a huge issue like a pandemic? How can we

“pursue peace with all people, and holiness” (Heb. 12:14, New King James Version)? As we read Hebrews 12, we can see three ways to pursue peace and holiness. First, we are to resist sin to the point of bloodshed. Second, we are encouraged to endure the chastening of God as our Father. Third, we are told to strengthen the weak members of the body.

Resist to Bloodshed

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us . . . You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:1, 4). When you think of resistance that leads to bloodshed, what comes to mind? Most likely things like war, persecution, or hospitals and the fight against

disease. Yet those things are not what Hebrews 12 is talking about; it’s talking about resisting sin. The English Standard Version puts it this way: “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” No kidding! Can you imagine resisting sin so strongly that you shed your own blood?

This idea of resisting sin to the point of bloodshed is not new to the book of Hebrews. Jesus himself tells us, “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you” (Matt. 5:30). Commentators are all quick to point out that Jesus is speaking figuratively here, not literally. He doesn’t actually command us to cut off our hands . . . or does he? What is the main point of this teaching? Throughout the Bible, God takes sin seriously. Seriously to the point of bloodshed. Seriously to the point of cutting your hands off. Seriously to the point of death. Seriously to the point of the perfect Son of God himself dying on the cross. In fact, “without the shedding of blood there is no remission [of sins]” (Heb. 9:22, New King James Version). When observing the civil laws in Old Testament Israel, there is a symbolic component, yet there is also a serious physical component. In Leviticus,

Isn't it wonderful that God is a better Father than any earthly parent? He knows us intricately. He didn't just bring us into the world; he designed every part of us—body and soul.



we find the prescription for animal sacrifices—a shedding of blood that covers the sin of the person bringing the sacrifice. Many different types of sins are listed, with the corresponding sacrifices. However, it is interesting to note that there are no categories of willful sins. There are no sacrifices to cover sins that are committed on purpose. For willful sins, there is but one punishment—death. Sin must be resisted at all costs.

What would our lives look like if we took these commands more seriously? Instead of spending all our time explaining why Jesus doesn't actually want us to cut off our hands, what if we spent our time examining ways that we can cut off sin and cast it from us? What are we willing to give up so that we don't sin? Are we willing to love other people even when their views are the opposite of ours?

Do You Pity Your Child?

God reveals himself to us in many ways, and one of those ways is as a Father. Any parent with more than one child can quickly tell you that Child #1 is a completely different person than Child #2. For us, our first two children are almost polar opposites. Our first boy is energetic and talkative. Nonstop. I'm positive that these traits are built into his DNA, because from the moment during pregnancy that I could first feel movement, it was constant. He can never sit still. His tongue pretty much keeps up with his body—I cannot count the times we have had to tell him to stop talking and hold his peace. By way of contrast, our second boy is thoughtful and studious. He can sit for hours building with his blocks. He doesn't have trouble talking when you can get him by himself, but he seldom speaks over big brother. As parents, we can see the weaknesses of our

children, yet somehow we love them just the same. I find it rather amusing that talkativeness is a trait that has long been a pet peeve of mine. I will readily admit that I cannot stand people who talk all the time! Yet, because he is my son, not only do I put up with his idiosyncrasies, but I also love him wholeheartedly. And, because I know him, I do not expect the things out of him that I would expect out of my other children. I know that he is wiggly, and I accommodate that. I find creative ways to help him learn, and I try to listen when he talks. Also, I know that he will need discipline and correction in a different way than my other children.

Isn't it wonderful that God is a better Father than any earthly parent? He knows us intricately. He didn't just bring us into the world; he designed every part of us—body and soul. Hebrews 12:10 compares our parenting with God's: "For they

Remember—remember—that God is patient too. And think of all the times when others have to wait for you! Are you patient with your children? Do you know they are weak and frail, with different strengths and weaknesses? If so, apply some of that patience to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Love them, correct them, debate with them, but never forget to be patient with them.

[human fathers] indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.” If an earthly father knew what was best for his child, he would do it to the utmost of his ability. The problem is, we are humans and don’t always know what is best! Even if an earthly father knew what was best, however, he would still not have the power to carry it out! Isn’t it wonderful that God as our Father knows what is best for us and chastens us “for our profit”? Also, isn’t it wonderful that God as our Father has all the power to carry out his perfect plan for our lives?

God would have every reason to condemn us and label us as weak, immature, and foolish. Yet, when we are saved and adopted into his family, he in fact does the opposite. He is merciful to us. He removes our transgressions from us. And how does he feel about us? “As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:13–14). God is patient with us! He comes alongside us and meets us where we are—in the midst of our sin, our impatience, and our pride—and teaches us gradually, one step at a time. He gives us exactly the circumstances (afflictions included!) that we need in order to grow. He is faithful to punish us for our sins, yet he never breaks us. “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather healed” (Heb. 12:12–13).

Lessons from Cockroaches and Snails

As you look across the church, are you tempted to look down upon that weak person who is so scared they insist on wearing a mask? Are you tempted to scoff at that immature person who refuses to wear a mask for the benefit of others? Are you tempted to shake your head at that foolish person who hasn’t come to church for the past three weeks? Are you tempted to justify your own sin? If so, remember that God created both of you. He ordained the lives of both of you. He knows both of you, inside and out, and you both are pleasing in his sight only because of the redeeming work of Christ. He is faithful to discipline both of you. And learn a lesson from cockroaches. Yes, you read that right—cockroaches. Because us comparing ourselves with one another is like one cockroach having a beauty contest with another cockroach. It’s weak. It’s immature. It’s foolish. It’s ludicrous! It’s like forgetting that you have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and not by your response to a virus. It’s like thinking that you have enough righteousness of your own to stand before God and declare that you are not like those other people in your church.

Has COVID-19 brought trials into your life? Are you seeing God’s faithful hand of discipline in those trials? Are you willing to accept the discipline of God to help you become holy? As you see others who are different from you, are you willing to reach out to them by writing a note

of encouragement? Are you praying for your fellow believers on a regular basis? Or are you simply dismissing them as being wrong?

There’s a children’s song where the daddy snail is teaching the young snail a lesson. “Have patience, have patience, don’t be in such a hurry. If you get impatient, you only start to worry. Remember—remember—that God is patient too. And think of all the times when others have to wait for you!” Are you patient with your children? Do you know they are weak and frail, with different strengths and weaknesses? If so, apply some of that patience to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Love them, correct them, debate with them, but never forget to be patient with them.

Expect God to discipline you in some unpleasant ways. Be serious about resisting sin at all costs. And if you need to use words like “weak,” “immature,” and “foolish,” try them out on yourself first. God is patient with you, too, and he may be teaching you a much-needed lesson.

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Themes in James:

Charitable Judgment and the Foolishness of Boasting



Mr. Gerry Wisz

Last time, I considered James's admonition to his early Christian readers: "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers" (Jas. 4:11, English Standard Version). He goes on to say that if we speak evil of or judge a brother, then we are really speaking evil of and judging the law. It sounds as though the behavior of fellow Christians can never be spoken of negatively, even if it falls short of Christian behavior. Is this what James means? If so, how can he write the things he does to his readers? After all, he's obviously making judgments of their Christian behavior—or lack thereof—and

is blunt about the necessity of correcting it.

Do you remember Paul's encouraging words in Romans 8? He asks, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (vv. 33-34). If that's the case, the little insults, frowns, even slander behind our backs are nothing really. We are justified in Christ. Peter tells us that if we are to be judged or suffer, may it be as Christians, and not for sinful behavior (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

People will speak evil of us and judge us *because* we are Christians. That shouldn't surprise us.

But James is writing here about speaking against and judging brethren. So often we misunderstand each other and don't take the time to get to know each other, so that misunderstanding persists or even grows. We may have cultural or doctrinal differences that inhibit our unity. We may be unable to forgive a slight or perceived slight and—giving the devil a foothold—make more of it than it is, or refuse to resolve it biblically and so let it fester instead. These are all things



If one must judge, then **judge charitably,** as one who also stands before the great judge, God, the one lawgiver and judge himself.

we need to grow through, and out of, together, and not ignore.

To speak against or judge God's law in this context is to say that God doesn't know what he's doing or didn't quite get things right, especially about this person or that one or this particular situation involving these people. Church leadership is often a target here, but not only. Christians of different backgrounds, cultural assumptions, or denominational affiliations—though all followers of Christ—can, because of these differences, cause or be a cause of divisions in the body through evil, slanderous speech and unwarranted judgment—this, even though Jesus' high priestly prayer to his Father before going to the cross was to ask that we all be one (John 17:21). This kind of behavior often occurs when something that's indifferent is treated with urgent necessity, or when believers otherwise have a hard time separating essential doctrine and practice from the nonessential.

What to Do?

When we're in this place it's best to remember the apostle Paul's words to the Philippians. As Christians we each have the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That's the thing to strive after. And if in anything we think differently, God will reveal that to us as well, so long as we're following that call and holding true, being faithful, to what we've already attained in Christ (Phil. 3:14-16). There's a sure guide. James tells us that this is the way to place the emphasis on doing instead of judging (Jas. 4:11b).

James can't mean don't judge the Christian behavior of others at all. He means don't major on it,

and if one must judge, then judge charitably, as one who also stands before the great judge, God, the one lawgiver and judge himself. God is the one who is able to save or destroy, not you and not the other guy (4:12). So we're to be toward one another then with that in mind.

This right or charitable judgment is seen in what James says later about how we as brothers and sisters should confess our sins to one another and pray for one another, that we may be healed (5:16). That involves judgment, doesn't it? It certainly does. But to what end? To healing, not condemnation. Likewise, James later notes that if anyone among the brethren brings back a wanderer from the truth, then that brother has saved the wanderer's soul from death, covering—that is, not hiding but seeing absolved—a multitude of sins (5:19-20).

Doesn't identifying a brother or sister as a wanderer also require judgment? It certainly does. But what of this judgment? Does one pursue them as the Good Shepherd pursues the lost sheep—even if only in prayer—or does one relegate them to the out box? They may refuse your overtures, until that one time when they don't. "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends [fails]" (1 Cor. 13:4-8). "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Preoccupations

Earlier in his letter, James called out these early Christians' attitude toward wealth and success, things

that preoccupy them even as they prove elusive to them. You'll remember earlier he writes, "You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends [fails]”

—1 Cor. 13:4-8

“God is love”

—1 John 4:8

your passions” (Jas. 4:2-3). It's their desires, the passions that war within them, that run these

Christians, so it's not evident to the observer that they are Christians at all.

Along with this preoccupation with money is a disdain for the poor. We saw it earlier in how they separate the poor from the rich in church, treating the rich with special fanfare while having the poor stand somewhere else or sit at their feet, in effect, interpreting social status as ultimate human worth (2:3-4). For many in our time, it seems the less social status one has, the more inherently worthy one is—the opposite of what James is admonishing these believers to stop doing; it's still the same kind of problem, only in reverse.

Either way, this can be a complicated issue to unravel, but one thing we can know to be true is that each person is made in the image of God, regardless of social status, race, or gender. That means there's an inherent worth to the person himself or herself just because of personhood. James has more to say to those with means in the first-century church, but for now let's consider his correction of these Christians in regard to boasting.

This is not just any kind of boasting, but of a particular kind—boasting of tomorrow (4:13-15). You know it and have heard it. Maybe you've also done it. I know I have. Oh, the grass is always greener on the other side, you know. Why would anyone stay, live, and work here, in this place? Why work at this job and in this

career, when there's that one over there? That's what I'll do instead of following the herd: move, pay less, and make more. Well, best wishes. Hope it all works out. And that may very well be God's will for you.

Prudence or Bloviation?

There's nothing wrong with doing one's due diligence and making decisions for the future. In fact, that's a much better way of going about life than living by the seat of one's pants, especially if there are others in your family to consider in addition to yourself. The Proverbs give us many encouragements for just this.

But boasting of tomorrow has little or nothing to do with due diligence. It's openly arrogant, and James calls it that (4:16). It's typically a loud-mouthed way of showing one's superior intelligence, planning or management skills, or, for lack of a better term, luck—as compared with all of us run-of-the mill folk who are just doing our daily work. Moreover, in its demonstrated hauteur, it shows itself ignorant of or disbelieving in the providence of God. It shows someone who thinks himself entirely in charge of the events and outcomes of his life—even though Psalm 139 tells us that all the days ordained for us were written in God's book before one of them came to be (v. 16).

I remember hearing not long ago of a government employee, a public servant, who, because of his line of work, retired a decade or so before most other people retire. He retired with a full pension, excellent health benefits,

and a sizable portfolio of stocks. He'd boast to anyone who'd listen how he was going to sell his place for a large sum, move to Florida to buy more real estate at a lesser sum, and live the rest of his days in luxury. Remarkably, before the first year of his retirement was out—before he'd even listed his house for sale—he was whisked away to the hospital in an ambulance after suffering a massive heart attack. He was quickly admitted but died nonetheless.

This shouldn't make us happy or make us smile. Love doesn't rejoice with evil. What this should do is make us pause and wonder to what extent we need to hear this warning. Do we live our lives as though the providence of God doesn't exist, as though we've evolved from the primordial goo in this eat-or-be-eaten world, have personally found that thin ledge of advantage, and so can rule our little roost until we resink into the goo? Is that how we think life works? Instead we "ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (4:15). That shows that not our desires or passions but something different, rather Someone other, is running us.

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Preparing for Worship



Rev. Jonathan Landry Cruse



I remember back in senior year of college having a pretty easy class scheduled for Friday mornings. Early Friday mornings, that is, and I was not and am not a morning person. I would set the alarm for about ten minutes before the start of class, roll out of bed, brush my teeth, hop on my bike, and be sitting in the back row on time. And I wasn't just there on time; I was able to participate in class and do well with my grades. Like I said, it was a fairly easy course. It took almost no preparation whatsoever.

Worship isn't like that.

Worship is not the kind of thing that you can just roll out of bed and be ready for. Meeting with God is such a momentous event that it takes careful and sincere preparation. God himself tells us that he expects us to prepare to meet with him. If we think back to Mount Sinai, right before God made his first sustained appearance to old covenant worshippers, he instructed the people to come near the mountain but not to enter his presence until they were prepared: "Then the Lord said to Moses,

‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people’ (Ex. 19:10–11).

Israel was to prepare for three days before they met with their Maker and Redeemer! What kind of preparation do we afford God? Maybe we give him only three minutes while the prelude is playing on Sunday morning. That is certainly important to do. Many churches helpfully remind people to “prepare their hearts” during a time of meditative music or silence before worship properly begins, perhaps additionally providing a pertinent verse of Scripture to reflect on. But if that is the extent of our preparation, then we will not be fully ready to meet with God. We can—and should—do more.

The Westminster Confession says that properly keeping the Sabbath entails, in part, the preparation of our hearts and the ordering of our common affairs beforehand (WCF 21.8).

So what kinds of things can we do beforehand to ready our souls to meet with our great God and Savior? Since we have established that worship is comprised of both the ordinary and the extraordinary, it follows that our preparation will involve both simple, ordinary practices as well as challenging, soul-stretching, extraordinary ones.

“Ordinary” Preparation

There are a number of simple things we can do in the days and moments leading up to worship to best prepare us to meet with God. There are even things we can be doing during and after the service to ensure a richer experience in worship. Preparing will lead to richer participation during and fruitful, spiritual profiting afterwards.¹ I list below some that have benefitted me and my family over the years. These are practices

we aim to keep. We sometimes fail, and you will too. But I can promise this: all the suggested practices for Lord’s Day preparation are simple and achievable. And I think you’ll find your soul enriched as you seek to implement them.

Don’t Stay Out or Up Late on Saturday Night

Start here: on Saturday night, be a boring homebody. My suggestion is to stay in and go to bed early. I know that may sound difficult for some people, as many fun things happen on Saturday night. To your non-Christian friends, however, declining invitations to late-night get-togethers because you have church the next day will be a peculiar and therefore powerful witness. I recognize that “early” will mean different things for different people, and the amount of sleep we need to feel well-rested varies from person to person, so use your best judgment in applying this principle.

We want to be wary of droopy eyelids in the worship service. A late night with friends does not aid in waking up on time the next day, ready and alert for what God has in store for you. Puritan Thomas Watson urged worshipers centuries ago to “take heed of drowsiness in hearing; drowsiness shows much irreverence. How lively are many when they are about the world, but in the worship of God how drowsy. . . . In the preaching of the Word, is not the bread of life broken to you; and will a man fall asleep at his food?”² Get a good night’s rest before the Lord’s Day. Our weak flesh doesn’t need many excuses to catch some extra z’s during worship. Coming into the Lord’s house alert and well-rested will allow no foothold for the devil.

Don’t Be Rushed Sunday Morning

We’ve all been there. Maybe something unexpected happened, like the new puppy went to the bathroom on the carpet right before you stepped out the door, or you get

the whole family in the vehicle only to learn that the subzero overnight temperatures have killed the battery. Some things we can’t avoid, but others we can. For instance, save needless hemming and hawing in front of the closet mirror on Sunday by deciding what to wear Saturday. Lay out your clothes the night before. That’s all my wife and I do, and we leave the rest of our wardrobe preparation for the morning. But if you know you need to iron a shirt or dress, you could do that Saturday night as well. My grandfather would shine all his children’s shoes Saturday night and meticulously line them up for ready use the next morning. If you have a lot of kids and mornings are inevitably hectic (okay, even one kid can do that), go the extra mile by setting up breakfast the night before. Seriously. Place the bowls and spoons around the respective seats at the table and set the boxes of cereal in the center for the family to swoop in and choose from.

Also, if you are serving in a particular way on Sunday (such as bringing snacks or teaching Sunday school), make sure you give yourself extra time for the preparation needed for that responsibility. We have a dear congregant who readies the coffee for our church practically every Sunday, and in order both to prepare for this service and for her own soul on a given Sunday morning, she comes in each Saturday to get things set up beforehand. That is quite a commitment not only to serve each Sunday but also sacrifice a portion of her Saturday to do so. But the lesson we can learn is the importance of preparedness. Anything you can do to avoid the pressure, panic, and frustration of a rushed commute to church should be done.

Cultivate a Good Attitude

If hustle and bustle is our norm on Sundays, then short tempers and emotional outbursts of some kind or another are almost

inevitable. Hopefully following the aforementioned steps will help prevent that. But more than prevent a bad attitude on Sundays, we want to combat a bad attitude. That is, we should go on the offensive by intentionally striving to have a good, even joyful demeanor as we get ready and head off to church. We are going to do the most important thing on earth. How could we not be filled with anything but eager anticipation? To this end, Pastor Jason Helopoulos writes, “Cultivate a spirit of joy on Sunday mornings in your home. If this is the highlight of our week, then let’s act like it. Talk about how wonderful the day is going to be, wake the kids up with excitement, turn on good Christian music for the whole family to listen to, and put a smile on your face.”³

I have fond memories of the way my dad did exactly this when we were growing up. Every Sunday morning I awoke to the sound of Christian music playing from the living room entertainment center or sometimes from his upstairs office computer. He played songs we loved as a family and immediately brought a joyful spirit to our home. The standard weekday “just five more minutes!” for more sleep was cut off at the pass. For your home it might not be music, but consider what practices you might be able to implement that remind you and your family that this day is not only unique but also wonderful. The psalmist cries out, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (122:1). Does that ring true for you?

Review for Sunday

Many churches provide their order of worship online in the days leading up to the service or perhaps email a copy of the bulletin to the members of the church. On Saturday, why not review what will be coming up the next day? Read through the passage that will be preached and familiarize yourself with the text—even do some background reading if you wish!⁴ Also, see what

hymns and psalms are being sung on Sunday. If you don’t know one of them, read through it at home and practice singing it. Sadly—especially with music—sometimes we can be distracted by the “newness” of things. This is one way of preventing that kind of distraction on Sunday when our focus should be on God. So if at all possible, do some review before you get to church and don’t be caught off guard by what goes on in the service. Unfamiliarity is quite good at breeding contempt.

Learn to Linger

We have seen from Acts 2:42 that the early church not only devoted themselves to preaching, praying, and the sacraments but also to the fellowship of the saints. Sunday is a day for community: the community of faith. It can be easy to attend church much like one might attend the movies. We grab our seats and scroll through our phones or chat with our buddies while we wait for the service to begin and sit dutifully during the “show,” but then once we hear the benediction (the cinematic equivalent of rolling credits), we gather our things and head straight for the car.

If this looks something like your average Sunday, then, dear friend, your experience of the blessing of God’s day and God’s people is lamentably incomplete. We have already talked about the importance of getting to church on time. In addition to that, staying just a few minutes late could be the simple change that will revolutionize your churchgoing experience, says Pastor Whitney Clayton. In his experience, the people who regularly put this into practice make stronger friendships and inevitably find ways to serve.⁵ So don’t zip on home immediately after the service. Stick around and love your neighbors by asking about their lives. Get to know the community of faith in which God has placed you. Look outside of yourself and your situation by finding

ways to serve. Prepare for Sunday by readying yourself, your family, and your schedule to hang around a few minutes afterward.

“Extraordinary” Preparation

Some aspects of preparing for worship are more spiritually weighty than those mentioned above. This does not mean they are any less achievable, but they are practices that recognize the extraordinary and supernatural exercise you are about to undertake. With the Spirit’s help, you can implement these as well for the good of you and your family and especially for the glory of the God you worship.

Honor the Sabbath

It has been called the forgotten commandment of today (it’s the fourth of ten, by the way). “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you” (Deut. 5:12). Debates continue to rage over what it means to properly observe the Sabbath day, and we will not be entering into them in this book.⁶ Suffice it to say that we have certainly failed at preparing to meet with God if we have not even carved out the time to meet with him. He has hallowed this one day in seven, and he desires that we hallow it in our lives as well.

In my observation, work and youth sports are two of the most common threats to sanctifying Sunday and the time we have to worship God.⁷ We try to make church meet our needs and fit our schedule. If we have to drive our kids to a soccer tournament, then we go to the early service or listen to a sermon on the way there, or, more often than not, we miss worship entirely. When we miss out on worship, we miss the banquet that God has set for our starving and thirsting souls. We don’t want that for ourselves, and certainly not for our families. So we see that worship and Sabbath observance go hand in hand. Let us not neglect to meet together on

God's day to do his bidding, as sadly is the habit of some (Heb. 10:25).

But it's hard. There are so many things that compete and clamor for our attention and time, and many of them seem like good things. It can be really difficult to say no. The sooner we cultivate this biblically mandated practice of keeping the Lord's Day holy, the better it will be. In my estimation, the fact that God has set aside every Sunday in its entirety makes it easier to say no to certain things and guard my schedule. I never need to question what I might be doing that particular Sunday or not since God has told me in his Word what to do: I am to worship and rest. It's the idea of freedom within limitations. I have freedom to worship God and say no to other activities because this is the limitation that he has placed on his creatures—and what a grand limitation it is!

We need to recognize we're not being rude to those around us when we decline to participate in worldly activities for the sake of heavenly ones. Why not? In one sense, it's as simple as the truth that God made the appointment with us first. You've certainly had that frustration of trying to schedule a lunch with a friend. Perhaps the two of you have pulled out your phones and are comparing schedules:

"How about Wednesday lunch?"

"Sorry. Can't. I have a doctor's appointment. But Friday works."

"Nope. No good for me. The in-laws are in town."

It's not considered rude when you can't make something work because of a prior engagement. Likewise, our response to the world regarding Sunday activities that draw us away from concerted, uninterrupted worship is that we have a scheduling conflict. "No," we must say. "I can't make that work. I have an appointment with God."

Properly preparing for the Sabbath will mean properly thinking about the Sabbath. It is not a burden or a chore. It something that we are to call a delight (Isa. 58:13)! It is a gift; hence, God says we were not made for the Sabbath, to bow down to it in slavish dread and exasperation, but it was made for us. The Sabbath is a wonderful provision from God to remind us every week that the way to him is through the gospel and rest, not through the law and works. [Michael] Horton explains, "It is the opportunity to receive a kingdom rather than to build one; to be beneficiaries rather than benefactors; to be heirs rather than employees."⁸

I certainly want that. In fact, I need that, and so do you. In knowing we need it, we will be more likely to apprehend it. So seek to have a proper, biblical conception of what the Sabbath is. The Sabbath reminds us we belong to God and not this passing world. It reminds us we are more than conquerors and cannot be defeated. It reminds us that Christ is king, and he has secured eternal peace for his people. It's not about sitting quietly in a dim living room, going mad with boredom. And while it is about saying no to certain things that we might like, it is also about saying yes to things that are far better: "Setting aside the ordinary callings and pastimes of the week, our calling on the Lord's Day is to share, together with our coheirs, in the powers of the age to come. It is not by simply *emptying* the day with a list of rules, but by *filling* it with treasure hunting, that the Christian Sabbath orients us, our families, and our fellow saints to our heavenly citizenship."⁹

Pray

We should always be in prayer, but Saturday evening and Sunday morning would be particularly good times to spend in earnest prayer before our Lord. The world, the flesh, and the devil are always clamoring

for our affections and attention, and perhaps never more viciously than on the Lord's Day. According to C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape*, a primary task of devils is to distract people from the present and from eternity. In Christian worship, eternity enters into the present, so you can be sure devils will be at work with distraction. There will be innumerable excuses popping into our heads to keep us from church. We are too tired, too busy, too introverted, too whatever. Then when we are there we will also face an onslaught of distractions. Funny how carpet patterns never seem so interesting as when an earnest preacher sets out to exposit a perceived tedious passage of Scripture. Drifting eyes are a sign of a restless and wandering heart and are equivalent to sleeping with the eyes open.

So what is a person to do? Pray. And pray for what exactly? Here are just a few suggestions. Pray that God would give you the proper desire to worship him and serve him with his people. Pray that the Spirit would open your heart to be challenged and changed by the preached word. Ask that your thoughts would be kept captive to Christ and the cares of the week past or the worries of the week ahead would not distract you (or things like carpet patterns, either!). Pray for those who will be leading the service in music, prayers, and Scripture reading. Pray for your pastor and for his sermon preparation and delivery. Pray that unbelievers would enter through the doors and come to saving faith. Above all, pray that Christ would be exalted, magnified, and glorified among his people.

Get Right with Your Fellow Worshipers

Did you know that at one point in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus takes up the topic of worship? It's actually tucked into his teaching on anger. He says, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember

that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23–24).

The language of bringing an offering to an altar places us in the setting of worship, as Jesus drew on the practice of temple worship that was still in effect during his lifetime. Jesus offered this as an example and practical application of the principles he had just set forth regarding anger. The illustration includes two believers (hence, the use of “brother”) who are at odds with one another. According to the teaching of our Savior, this kind of anger, conflict, and division among believers is not acceptable in the place of worship. The command is to make things right with the offended brother and then come to worship, the implication being that the “gift”—the worship—would otherwise be sullied and not acceptable before God.

Why is this? Why is reconciliation between fellow worshipers such an important part of preparation for worship? It’s because worship is all about reconciliation. As we have seen throughout this book, corporate worship is when Christians can experience the reconciliatory heart of God and the reconciliatory power of the gospel. Sin alienates us from God—it got us kicked out of the garden and cast away from God’s presence. And yet God sent his Son to bring us back home to him. Though we will experience that fellowship with God perfectly and everlastingly in heaven, we get a taste of it now. We get a picture of what it looks like to be reconciled to God every Sunday: we are invited to his house, we are encouraged to come before his feet for prayer and instruction, and we are seated around his table to feast on his grace.

Paul tells us that a major reason we have been reconciled to God is so that we would be reconciled to one

another (2 Cor. 5:18). Since God has forgiven us our many sins, we can forgive others for whatever sins they may commit against us, and we can have the humility to ask for forgiveness whenever we have done wrong against them. And perhaps we would do better if we realized that this issue cannot be separated from worship. We prove that we really have not understood the reconciliation we have received from God if we refuse to be reconciled to our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is hypocritical to enter church on Sunday, into the very house of reconciliation, if we are harboring anger or resentment or bitterness toward others who have been welcomed to that house.

As we touched on in a previous chapter, properly participating in the Lord’s Supper will entail this outward-facing, horizontal love and reconciliation with our fellow worshipers. Acts tells us that the early church grew and flourished as the saints met for worship and the sacrament “with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people” (Acts 2:46–47, King James Version). Paul condemns those Corinthians who came to the table while there was division in the church (1 Cor. 11:18). It is fitting, then, that the Westminster divines instruct us to prepare for the Lord’s Supper by examining our “love to God and the brethren” and by “forgiving those that have done [us] wrong” (WLC 171). This is the necessary way to approach not only the Supper but also all of worship.

Get Right with God

The most important aspect of preparing for worship is also the most obvious, but it must be stated nonetheless: we need to have a proper relationship with the One we worship. If we are coming as enemies of God, as slaves to sin and not as servants of the Most High, the whole endeavor is in vain. You can be a churchgoer your whole life, but if you have not received

Jesus Christ in faith then it will be for nothing. Undoubtedly on the last day there will be many who will fall before the judgment throne of Christ crying out, “Lord, Lord, did we not regularly attend your worship services? Did we not often come early to set up and stay late to tear down? Did we not sing in the choir and serve in the kitchen and help in the nursery? Did we not labor in your church as elders, deacons, trustees, accountants, secretaries, custodians? Did we not bow our heads when we were told to pray and stand when we were told to sing and listen when the pastor preached?” And to this Jesus will reply, “I did not know you” (see Matt. 7:21–23).

You need to know God—or rather be known by God (as Paul says [Gal. 2:20])—to really worship in spirit and in truth. You need to know yourself as a sinner in need of saving and believe the good news of a substitute Savior who came into the world for sinners just like you and me. We need to be right with God by having the righteousness of Christ covering our sin as we enter his holy presence. Receiving that message in faith and repentance prepares us to meet with God each Lord’s Day not as a judge but as a loving Father.

Of course, the elements of the worship service that we have studied are the very things often used by the Spirit to bring about that faith and repentance. In worship we learn of our sinful condition and of our spiritual plight. But in worship the gospel is also proclaimed, and the saving power, mercy, and love of Jesus Christ are offered freely to all who will take of them. In other words, God uses worship to make worshipers. Hearts of stone are melted under the simple ordinary means of preaching, sacraments, and prayer, and new hearts that beat for God are formed in their place. This is the Spirit’s doing. For our part, though, we must come ready to receive what God has for us. If you do not know Christ in a saving

way, when you enter into a church service be ready to receive what is offered to you there—it could just be that the Holy Spirit will change your heart.

Once God becomes your God you will truly worship him. Knowing him through faith in Jesus Christ is the preparation needed for right and reverent worship. That's where it begins. That is the start of it all—and it's the end of it all as well, which is why I conclude with this exhortation. Your love for worship will grow in proportion to your love for your God and Savior; once you see all that he has done for you, all that he has given to you, all that he has lavished on you, you are his and he is yours. My prayer is that the words of Isaiah 25:1 would capture what it is you do on Sundays—and why you do it:

O LORD, You are my God.
I will exalt You,
I will praise Your name,
For You have done wonderful things.

Is God your God? Have you come to know and believe and experience the things he has done in the gospel? If so, exaltation and praise are the only fitting response. The “wonderful things” of God demand a life—and even more specifically a worship—that is full of wonder, love, and praise.

Conclusion

In many respects, the entire aim of this book has been to prepare you for worship. It is my conviction that the best way to prepare for worship is identical to the best way to participate in and profit from worship, and that is to know what is happening.

When we worship God, we are drawn by his Holy Spirit into his very presence to have a personal encounter with him. What would otherwise

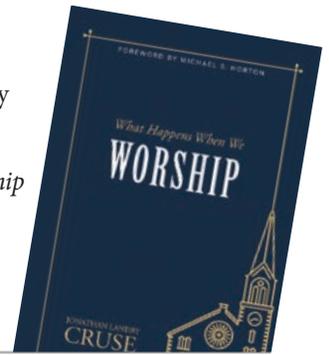
be a terrifying thought becomes a joyful experience as we learn that we are covered in the perfection of Jesus Christ and fully accepted in the Beloved. We come before God not on our own but with the body of believers that we have been spiritually united to. There is strength in numbers, and these numbers are ultimately not seen by how many bodies are in the pews but by the innumerable multitude around the world and in the heavenly places that we join with in worship.

In worship God confirms to us that we are doing the most important thing, and this gives us joy and purpose. It begins fittingly with a call from God since we are most satisfied when we are submitting to our Maker and doing his bidding. Throughout the service, as we are reminded of and reprimanded for our sins, we are also offered gospel hope. We learn that we do not belong to our sin, but to God's Son. This is further confirmed as God consecrates us as his own through the preaching of his sacred and sanctifying Word and then communes with us as his dear children around his Table.

From start to finish the service impresses on us our true identity. We receive the indelible name that God gives us, not the false and fragile names that the world has offered in the preceding week. And now, confident of our status before him, emboldened through the justification we have in the Son, and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, we go. We are equipped to face the hardships of a world of sin because of the superabundant grace that God has poured out on us. We go out with a mission: to be God's emissaries and shine light in a dark world. Empowered by God's Spirit, we are called to find more worshipers.

Don't forget to bring them with you next week.

This article is excerpted from Jonathan Landry Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020).



1 For an extended resource on how to best participate in a worship service, Joel Beeke's *The Family at Church* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) is commended.

2 As quoted in I. D. E. Thomas, ed., *A Puritan Golden Treasury* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 315.

3 Jason Helopoulos, “Preparing for Sunday Worship,” *Kevin DeYoung* (blog), October 30, 2014, The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/preparing-for-sunday-worship/>.

4 Even if you are unable to access your church's order of worship before Sunday morning, you should at least have some idea what the sermon will be on if the pastor is preaching through a book of the Bible.

5 Whitney Clayton, “The Small Change That Can Radically Improve Your Church Experience,” *Facts & Trends*, July 18, 2018, https://factsandtrends.net/2018/07/18/the-small-change-that-can-radically-improve-your-church-experience/?fbclid=IwAR3wk_KpojQPxCgI7vycBrUifU7N32-sLkekmpylE8a9P-JdYXXNnnGDp7s.

6 I recommend Joseph A. Pipa Jr., *The Lord's Day* (Fearn, Rosshire: Christian Focus, 2013) or Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000) for further study. The latter has a bibliography of other helpful titles on this important topic.

7 A few friends suggest other common threats: fishing or hunting, golf, extra sleep, and “family time”—apparently for some worship isn't considered quality time with family.

8 Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 199.

9 Horton, *Ordinary*, 176, emphasis original.

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Fighting Worldliness Through Union with Christ (Part 1)



Dr. Joel Beeke



The Christian life is a struggle. It demands entrance through a narrow gate and a daily walk down a narrow path. It involves living by faith through self-denial and waging a holy war in the midst of a hostile world.

Wonder if you are aware that there is a war waging for your heart. It is a war that began in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1–6, 15) and will continue until the appearance of the new heaven and new earth. It is a war between light and darkness, sin and righteousness, holiness and wickedness. According to Genesis 3:15, it is a war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, or between Christ and Satan. The apostle John reminds us that this war is between the love of God and “all that is in the world.” The world we live in is the great theater of this war, which has battlefields everywhere:

- in seats of government and centers of culture,
- in the legislatures and courtrooms of the commonwealth,
- in the offices and workshops of business,
- in the marketplaces and entertainment districts of cities,
- in colleges, schools, and churches,
- in our homes and families, and,
- most importantly, in our hearts and minds.

As long as we are in the body, we must live in the world. Retreat or escape is not an option. God wills that we live in the world as it is, but that we live here as the people of God, being “in the world but not of it,” or, in biblical terms, to “live godly in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:12, King James Version).

The Christian life is a struggle. It demands entrance through a narrow gate and a daily walk down a narrow path. It involves living by faith through self-denial and waging a holy war in the midst of a hostile world. And what a war it is, for the world doesn't fight fairly or clearly, doesn't agree to ceasefires, and doesn't sign peace treaties.

Myriads of so-called Christians today fail to realize the war waging for their souls. Because of this, they are being destroyed by worldliness. They think like the world, look like the world, and act like the world. But worldliness ought to have no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

In order to equip us to overcome the world, we will consider two things in this article: first, the nature of worldliness, and second, the remedy of worldliness. A third topic, part 2 of this article, “The Fight Against Worldliness,” will be considered in the September/October *Outlook*.

The Nature of Worldliness

A common rule of engagement on the battlefield is to know your enemy. This is just as true when it comes to confronting the spiritual battle of worldliness. From a mere strategic standpoint, it is important to know our enemy. But it is likewise essentially important in the case of worldliness because our enemy disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Worldliness can be very deceptive. Sin rarely, if ever, appears to us as the horrendous beast that it is. If worldliness appeared in all its blackness, darkness, and

addictiveness many would be repulsed by it. Rather, this enemy disguises itself to appear alluring, tempting, and fascinating (Prov. 5:3–5). And worldliness is a sin that easily entangles us without our knowledge.

What Worldliness Is Not

Before discussing what worldliness is, we should look briefly at what it is not. We must do this because it is too easy for worldliness to cloak itself in hypocrisy and self-flattery. Satan constantly attempts to counterfeit godliness. One way he does this is by making us think that worldliness is some extreme form of wickedness that we then feel safe from committing. But matters are not always so plain.

First, worldliness is not always an open rejection of God. Though such rejection is worldliness, this rejection is not synonymous with worldliness. Worldliness begins much earlier than absolute rejection. It begins when we do not view things from the perspective of God's Word. We do not need to openly and publicly reject him to be worldly; we might be worldly and yet be quite religious.

The world can come to us wrapped in Christian clothing, speaking Christian words. In 1 John 4:1 we are warned, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Verse 5 says, “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.” These people were worldly, controlled by the world's mindset, under its dominion, and saying what the world likes. But they were not openly against God. They styled themselves as “prophets” of the truth of God revealed by the Holy Spirit. So we need to realize that just because a person is religious, oriented toward spiritual things, and talks about God's Word, he may still be worldly.

Second, worldliness is not always the same as a grossly immoral life. Often worldliness does produce scandalous sins, but it need not do so all the time. Worldliness can appear to be very upright and moral in its outward actions; many professing Christians live worldly lives. They are worldly in more “acceptable” ways—that is, acceptable to their fellow men, not to God.

For example, the apostle James warns against “the friendship of the world” and teaches that we must keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (James 4:4; 1:27), but against what sins does he warn most strongly in his epistle? Not fornication or drunkenness, but showing favoritism to the rich (James 2), having a bitter, destructive tongue (James 3), getting into quarrels because you are not getting what you want (James 4), and taking advantage of your employees and workers (James 5).

Third, worldliness is not always blatant conformity to popular culture. We often tend to think of worldliness as the girl who shops all the time. She buys lots and lots of stuff. She is concerned with wearing the nicest clothes. She wears a lot of makeup. She attempts to fit in to all the latest fads. She dates boy after boy looking for someone to make her feel good about herself.

Though this is a form of worldliness, it is only an excessive form of worldliness. John did not speak of worldliness in terms of possessions or outward habits so much as lusts and pride. That means a monk eating dry bread crusts, wearing a scratchy old robe, and living in a hut without an internet connection could be worldly.

What Worldliness Is

So what is worldliness? Worldliness means the state of being or becoming like the world; or as Paul puts it in Romans 12:2, being conformed to this world. Because this world is the

realm of fallen mankind, worldliness is any human activity pursued without God or against God. It is all that is antithetical to God; it rebels against the Lord and his Christ (Ps. 2:2), refusing to reflect the glory of God as we were created to do.

Our divine guide for understanding worldliness will be 1 John 2:15–17. We may say in general that worldliness is in its essence all human love not ruled by the love of God. John wrote in verse 15, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” You see that the Bible defines worldliness in terms of love. It is a self-centered love for people and things in the world. John contrasts love for the world with love for the Father.

The two loves are incompatible. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24a). One love must rule our lives: a holy passion for God and the things of God. But since the fall of man, our souls are pulled as by hook and line toward the world.

What did John mean by “the world”? The Greek word *kosmos*, or “world,” has several meanings in the New Testament. In this case he is not talking about planet Earth, or the entire human race. Rather, he is using the term to refer to the kingdom of which the ruler and his subjects are lost in sin and set against anything pleasing to God. John is talking about Satan’s kingdom of darkness, which includes all people who are under his rule and living according to the standards of this world. And he is talking about all the “things,” whether ideas and teachings or material possessions and physical experiences, that the world uses to promote its agenda.

God created man to enjoy all things richly out of love for God—relying on God’s power, obeying God’s will, and pursuing God’s glory. But man has rejected God’s love for us and cast love for God out of his heart. He now loves only himself and the things of God’s creation with an idolatrous love. Worldliness, therefore, is all human love not ruled by the love of God. Here are some ways worldliness shows itself, so that you can discern it in yourself.

First, worldliness brings a desire to please sinful man and not God. This is part of what John means when he said, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” We naturally seek to please those whom we love. Christ said in John 5:42, “But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.” How did they demonstrate that? In verse 44, Jesus said, “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” They lived for the smiles, praises, and promotions of men instead of God.

Second, worldliness brings a higher concern for the physical than the image of God in one’s soul. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life conspire together to make us crave things for the body. Often this is a craving for beautiful, expensive, and pleasant things. We covet the nicest-looking car, newest technology, a girlfriend or boyfriend, and every other material thing. This form of worldliness often disguises itself as needs. Natural and healthy desires grow into ravenous and roaring lions, demanding satisfaction with the words, “I need it.” John contrasts this with our true need: “he that doeth the will of God.” This is the meat and bread of our souls, to do the will of the God who made us and calls us to glorify him.

Third, worldliness brings a preoccupation with temporal things

instead of the eternal kingdom of God. John says, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17). This world’s best pleasures are temporary. The world is our passage, not our portion. God has marked the day of our death on his calendar. What will you gain if you gain the whole world? In the end, nothing but a nice coffin. But eternal glory awaits the child of God.

Fourth, worldliness feeds the pride of life. Pride comes in all varieties, forms, and shapes. Pride is not something we can easily nail to a wall. Pride can be present when we sin willingly, and pride can be present when we attempt to do the good. Man’s very nature and essence rests in a prideful estimation of himself.

This then is worldliness: the sad, empty, and blasphemous love of the world.

The Remedy of Worldliness

The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ there is a remedy for our worldliness. As 1 John 5:4–5 states, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” It is faith in Jesus that causes us to triumph over worldliness. Faith obtains victory over the powers of this world because faith unites us to Christ, enabling us to draw upon the resources of the Savior. If you want your lamp to work, you must connect it with a power source. Likewise, faith connects us to the One who alone has overcome the world.

Sharing in Christ’s Death

Christ died to cut the cord between sinners and the world. As Galatians 1:4 says, Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us

from this present evil world.” Christ didn’t come just to deliver us from eternal condemnation, great as that is, but he came to deliver us from this present evil world. He endured beatings, shame, pain, and rejection to wrench those he calls his own out of this present evil world and into the kingdom of God.

Paul tells us in Romans 6 that believers share in Christ’s death thereby dying to sin’s power. In verse 6, he states, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” The word for “knowing” involves more than merely head knowledge or creedal affirmation; it refers to a personal experience of gospel truths. There must be a vital experience of the old man’s crucifixion with Christ. The old man designates the old depraved nature that is thoroughly corrupted with sin and in love with this present world. This old, world-loving nature has been definitively put to death in Christ’s death. The apostle tells us that the purpose of this death was “that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Because of Christ’s death, the Christian is no longer in bondage to sin. Outside of Christ the sinner is in bondage to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Sin is a terrible master that has sufficient power to coerce

and control in spite of the sinner’s best intentions or efforts. But because Christ destroyed sin’s dominion by his death and because the believer shares in that death, it is illogical and impossible for the believer to continue under sin’s control.

If you have been united to Christ in his death, you are dead to your old Adamic nature which was enslaved to this world. As Paul exclaims in Galatians 6:14, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” The saving virtue of Christ’s death had been applied to Paul’s soul, making the world totally undesirable to him. The world had lost its color for Paul and become completely unappealing because of the cross.

Sharing in Christ’s Resurrection

Sharing in the death of Christ necessarily means sharing in his resurrection. It is impossible to be united to his death without being united to his life. “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Tim. 2:11). Just as certainly as believers partake of what Christ achieved by his atoning death, so they partake of all the victory of his glorious resurrection. Romans 6:4 states that “like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

The Christian has a new walk because of Christ’s death-defying, sin-destroying power. Those in Adam walk “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). But when God comes in his grace and unites sinners to Christ, they are made alive (Eph. 2:5), being “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The Christian, by the virtue of Christ’s resurrection, no longer walks in worldliness but rather in obedience to God. He is no longer given over to the powerful rule of the world, the flesh, and the devil. For “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). If you are in Christ, you have received a new nature that is different from the world. You have been recreated unto obedience which you must walk in.

Watch for part 2 of this article, “The Fight Against Worldliness,” in the September/October *Outlook*.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI, and a prolific author and frequent conference speaker.

Jesus, my second Adam.

This is a hymn about the active and passive obedience of Christ. Rev. Najapfour poetically contrasts the First Adam, from whom we inherited our sinful nature, and the Second Adam, from whom the elect obtain righteousness. The tune, written in a minor key with a lilting 3/4 meter, attempts to capture both the despair of the “curse of death” in stanza 1 and the joyful reality of being “alive in him and dead to sin” in stanza 3.

There is a long tradition of naming hymn tunes for the place where they were composed. My hometown is Mount Sinai, New York. But this name also coincides with the subject matter. The Lord’s voice on Mount Sinai announced the Israelites’ inherent sinfulness (Ex. 20:19). But from the thunder of Mount Sinai, the Lord graciously led his people into the promised land of Mount Zion, “the city of the living God” (Heb. 12:18–24).

Jesus, my second Adam

MOUNT SINAI L.M.

Lyrics by: Brian G. Najapfour, 2019

Music by: Michael R. Kearney, 2021

1. When my first par - ent Ad - am fell,
2. Oh, but the Sec - ond Ad - am came.
3. His full o - bed - ience brought me life;

In him I fell in sin as well.
The curse re - vers - ed was his aim:
His death killed my sin like a knife.

His curse of death be - came mine too;
To keep in full God's per - fect law,
A - live in him and dead to sin,

Sin cut me off from God; 'tis true.
To pay the price of sin I owe.
I now sing praise to Christ my King.

Book Reviews

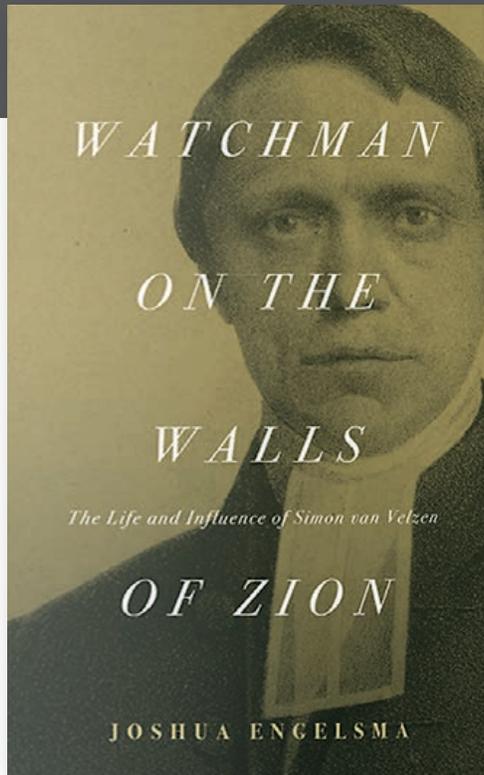


Rev. Jerome Julien

Watchman on the Walls of Zion: The Life and Influence of Simon van Velzen, Joshua Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021. 229 pages. Hardcover. \$26.50.

RFP: <https://rfpa.org/products/watchman-on-the-walls-of-zion>

Who was Simon van Velzen? Unfortunately, there are many who might ask this—even many in western Michigan! Of those who led in the original secession from the Dutch church (*Hervormed*) in 1834, the names of Albertus van Raalte and Henry P. Scholte are known, but few know much about the other men used of God: Brummelkamp, de Cock, van Velzen, along with leaders who in some way had a part in the earlier years leading up to the Afscheiding of 1834: Schotsman, Witsius, and even a Brakel. (RFP recently published a volume by



Marvin Kamps on Hendrik de Cock.) As yet, as the bibliography included in this volume shows, at least for van Velzen very little is available in English. With this fine volume by a pastor in his first charge, another small but excellent step has been taken to provide material in English on this man. Engelsma has introduced us to this man of God who so many have misunderstood. This is not a ponderous book that many readers will put away as being too difficult to read. Rather

it is one that is easy to read—and informative for God’s people today.

Simon van Velzen (1809–1896) was used of God to give confessionally Reformed people in the Netherlands and here in North America a place to worship God in spirit and truth. The times of the Secession were not easy—they were years of trials on every hand, years of fear. Yet God used men like van Velzen to proclaim his truth. Van Velzen was a man known for his faithfulness to God’s truth. Of course, he was a man who knew the weakness of men, for he was but man, but God anointed his lips and directed his life for God’s use.

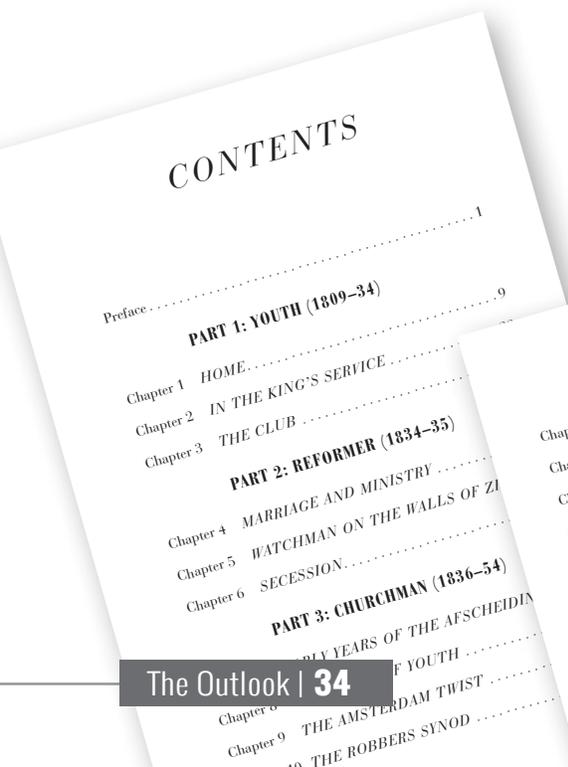
We owe it to ourselves to read this short volume. Some love to sing “Faith of Our Fathers.” The writer of this so-called hymn was writing about the fathers of the Roman Catholic Church. Van Velzen was not one of these, but rather a father in on the Reformed faith. Read and learn what the fathers of the true faith did for God’s church!

Thanks, brother Engelsma, for your dedication and great interest. We look forward to other volumes about our church fathers.

Please visit www.rfpa.org/outlook to purchase or learn more.

Rev. Jerome Julien

is a retired pastor and a member of Walker United Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI.



A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments

James Durham. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018. 377 pages. Hardbound. \$30.00.

Lectures on the Book of Job: With Practical Observations

James Durham. A new edition, corrected and revised. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books/Naphtali Press, 2018. 200 pages. Hardback. \$23.00.

The author of these volumes, James Durham (1622–1658), was a well-known preacher in Scotland who stood with the Puritans and Presbyterians in the spiritual battles of those days.

The volume on the Ten Commandments focuses on the meaning of the Law—commandment by commandment. A preacher seeking fresh approaches to God’s law will find them here. The most lengthy



exposition is on the fourth commandment. This is worth reading. Besides, there is included a fine explanation on the sin against the Holy Spirit.

This volume has long been out of print. After its publication in 1802, it appeared again two hundred years later. This is a carefully checked *new* edition with notes to bring the language up to date.

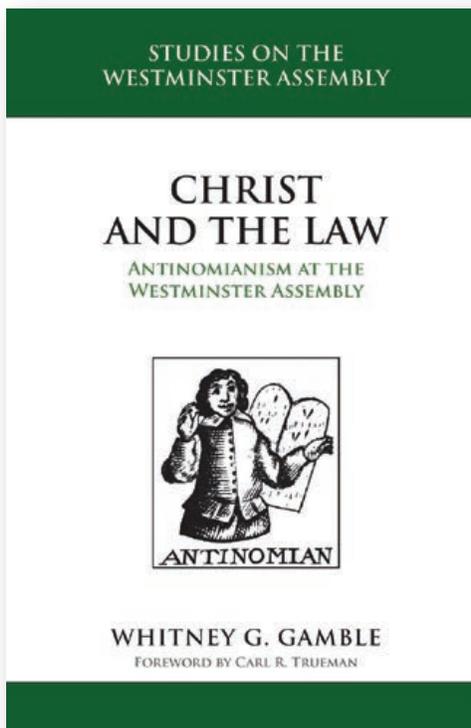
Are you looking for a small book to help you in your personal devotions? The book of Job will be opened up for you by using the second volume listed above.

Each chapter is explained in about four or five pages. Originally printed in 1759, and again in 1995 and 2003, this book has been revised, corrected, and updated so we can use it more easily. So important this work was considered to be that the great Charles Spurgeon included it in his well-known *Commenting and Commentaries* even though he had been unable to procure it for his own library.

Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly, Studies on the Westminster Assembly, Whitney

G. Gamble. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018. 187 pages. Hardback. \$30.00.

Perhaps you have heard a minister speak of antinomianism in relation to Christian living, or perhaps you have heard a critique of the antinomian viewpoint. The word in question means “against the law,” and is the idea that the law is not needed for godly living. While these may be oversimplifications, they refer to a deadly theological cancer.



Dr. Gamble, associate professor of biblical and theological studies at California’s Providence Christian College, writes in the introduction to this fine historical-theological work that there were “differing positions on the nature of sin in the justified among the delegates to the Westminster Assembly.” Present were Arminians, antinomians, and the Reformed.

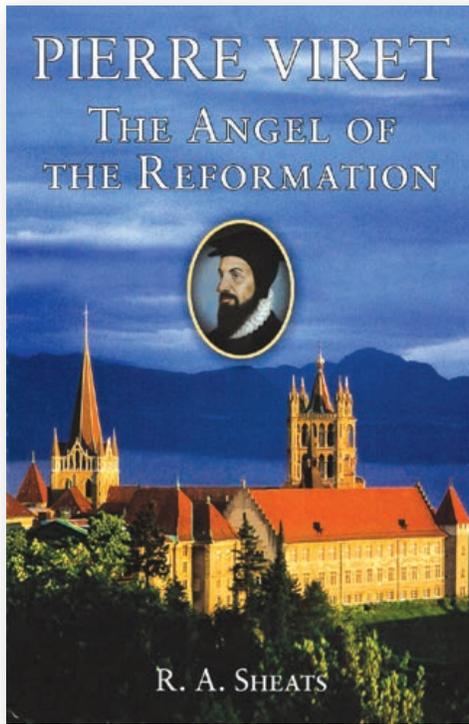
Our author gives an interesting study of the issue. Some may find that her points are not always helpful because of their own theological position, but all will be instructed concerning this heresy, as some in the Westminster days called it—and many properly still do.

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation

R. A. Sheats. Tallahassee, FL, and Lausanne, Switzerland: Zurich Publishing, 2012. 323 pages. Hardcover. \$30.00.

Available from Reformation Heritage Books: <https://www.heritagebooks.org/products/pierre-viret-the-angel-of-the-reformation-sheats.html>

There were many leaders in the days of the Reformation. Some are not as well-known as others. One of these men God used in the movement and development of this mighty work was Pierre Viret. The lack of knowledge about Viret is understandable since the author's bibliography contains many volumes in French but only a couple in English. This makes this volume very valuable to the English reader. The publisher indicates that following this publication the author has been translating Viret's original works in French to English.



Viret (1511-1571) was considered a model preacher of the Word. Illustrating his great ability was the fact that when he arrived at Geneva, so many wished to hear him that he was assigned to St. Pierre's Church because of its

capacity. For forty years his exposition of Scripture was a great blessing to God's people wherever God placed him. The subtitle of this volume is a name by which Viret was known in his day because of his peace-loving spirit. In spite of this, he was ready to take a stand for God's truth when it was necessary.

Viret was deeply concerned about the need for education to prepare men for the ministry. He formed a school called the Lausanne Academy. After some years things did not go well for it, and it was moved to Geneva, where it became the Genevan Academy under John Calvin.

In spite of Viret's seemingly continual bouts with illness, often nearing death, he was used greatly by the Lord in those early days of the Reformation.

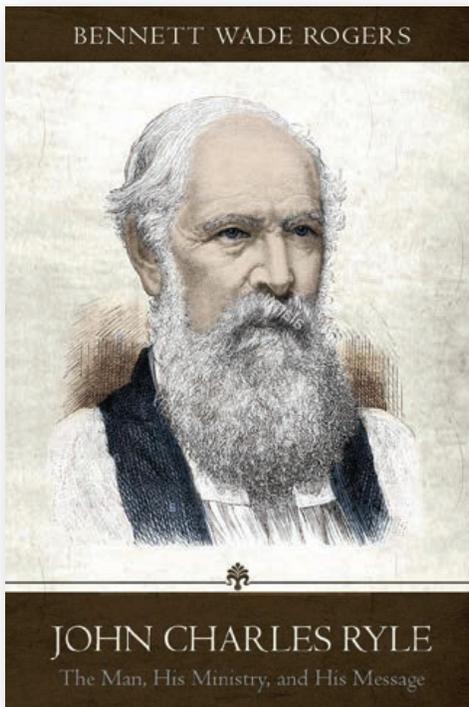
This well-worked-out volume, beautiful in production, filled with illustrations, will be worth your while to read. R. A. Sheats has done an excellent job of introducing this Reformer to us. Highly recommended.

A Tender Lion: The Life, Ministry, and Message of J. C. Ryle

Bennett W. Rogers. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019. 380 pages. Hardback. \$8.00.

The name of J. C. Ryle is well-known by more than a few of our readers. For example, his work on the Gospels is well-known and often used. He was a well-known evangelical in the Church of England—one who was humbled by seeing his influence being well-received. He was not among the Church of England's leaders who desired to lead the church back to Rome. His stand was strong and his preaching was well-loved.

This volume is, as the notes on the dust jacket put it, an "intellectual biography" of this great preacher. Rogers is



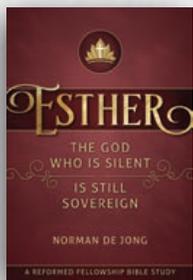
meticulous in giving the background of Ryle's work. Sometimes, because of his deep desire to lay out the whole story, what he writes will be hard to follow for the normal reader of biographies. However, it is a thorough work, and it will give the reader a good picture of the trends and problems in the nineteenth-century English church.

For those who spend the worthwhile time reading this volume, it will become clear that Ryle was "a moderate, or evangelical Calvinist" who believed that Christ "tasted death for everyman," that God loves all men, not just the elect. Further, he was a proponent of "a moderate premillennialism" (pp. 19-24).

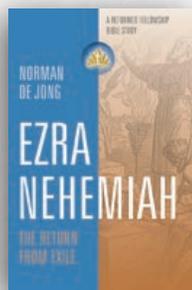
Keeping this in mind, a reader will find much helpful insight into the English church.

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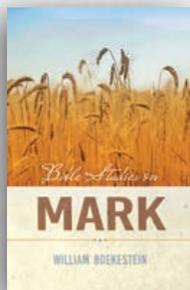


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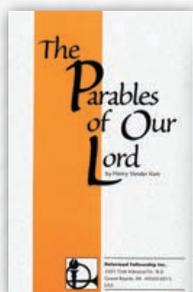


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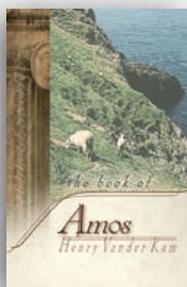


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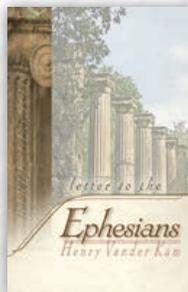
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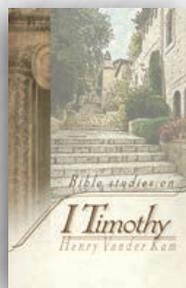
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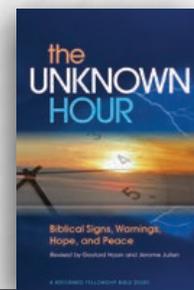


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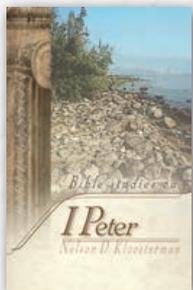
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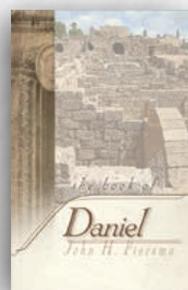


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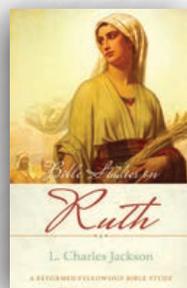
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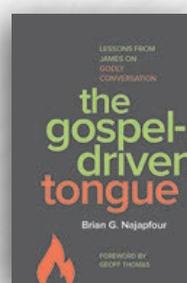
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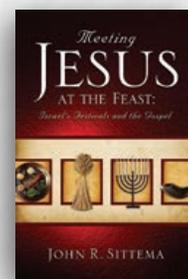
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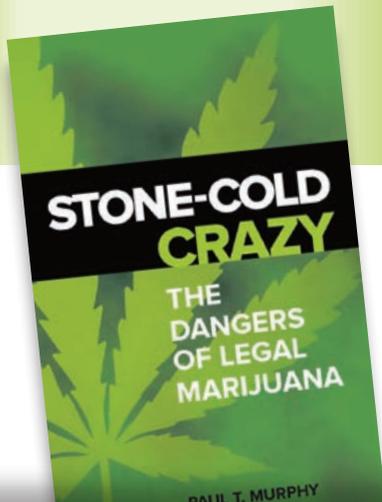


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NEW, COMING IN 2021



STONE COLD CRAZY The Dangers of Legal Marijuana

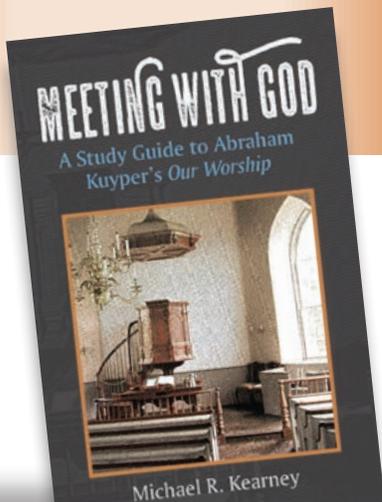
Rev. Paul T. Murphy

In this booklet the aim is to make a case against use of marijuana in our society and particularly among Christians. I will outline my reasons. The reasons for anyone, especially Christians, to oppose marijuana use are historical, pharmacological, medical, psychological and psychiatric, legal and criminal, commercial, social, and certainly spiritual.

This is not an academic matter for me. I confess to having been a heavy drug user in my days before faith in Christ. I write therefore from the inside, if you will, as one well aware of what marijuana usage and the culture surrounding it entails.

—Rev. Paul T. Murphy

Booklet, 28 pages • Price TBD



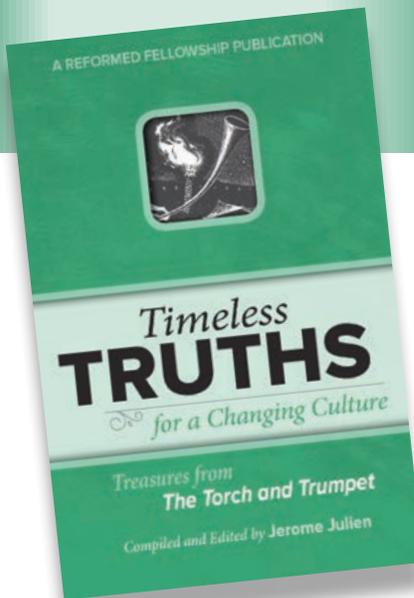
MEETING WITH GOD A Study Guide to Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*

Michael R. Kearney

“Not only were we made to worship (Ps. 150:6), but we can’t not worship (Rom. 1:25). The question is whether or not we will worship well. Right worship was a guiding concern for Abraham Kuyper, a giant in the Reformed worship tradition. Michael Kearney’s *Meeting with God* is a welcome companion to Kuyper’s truly excellent 300-page book on worship. This faithful summary of Kuyper’s most practical liturgical insights deserves to be read by leaders and members in Reformed churches today.”

—Rev. Willam Boekstein

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TIMELESS TRUTHS FOR A CHANGING CULTURE Treasures from The Torch and Trumpet

Compiled and Edited by Jerome Julien

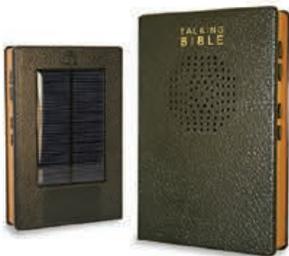
Seventy years ago the Reformed Fellowship, a very young organization, published its first magazine called *Torch and Trumpet*. Since then its name has been changed to *The Outlook*. The publication has been blessed to have had faithful editors, writers who have represented a broad group of Reformed churches, and board members who have come from Christian Reformed, United Reformed, Protestant Reformed, Presbyterian Church of America, and Orthodox Presbyterian churches.

In an early issue of *Torch and Trumpet* it was stated that the magazine’s “purpose is to give sharpened expression to [the Reformed] faith, stimulate the doctrinal sensitivity of those who profess this faith, help promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches, and further the interests of all Kingdom Institutions of Reformed caliber.”

Sad to say, many of the articles which have been published during those early years are collecting dust and have been forgotten. As we rejoice in God’s faithfulness, it is our desire to place before you only a small portion of the many articles which have been published during the first ten years. Choosing the articles that are included was difficult for there were many others that could have been reprinted.

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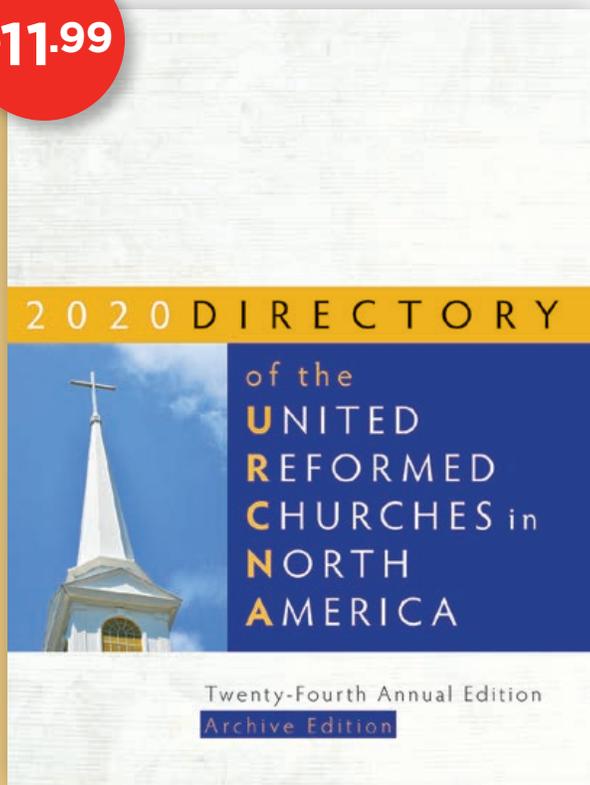
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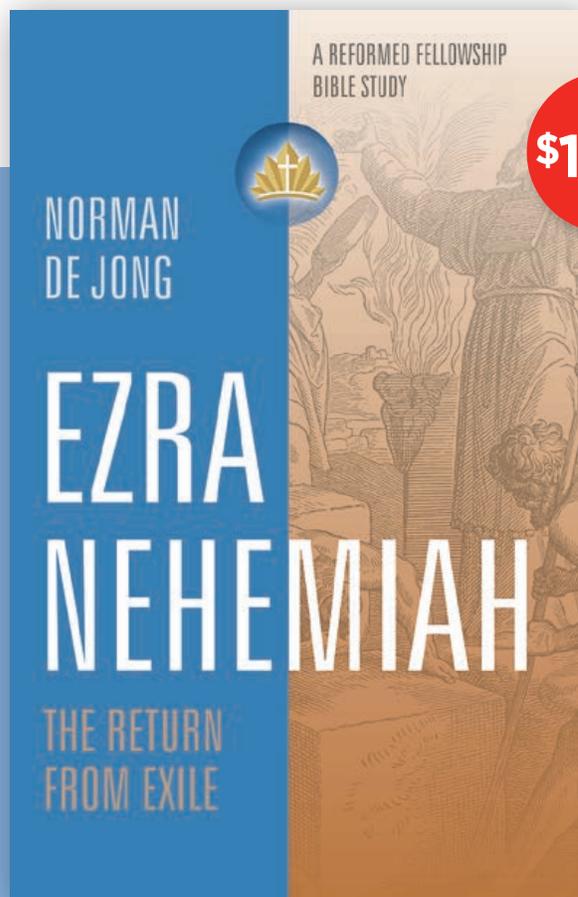
Twenty-Fourth Annual Archive Edition of the directory of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

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Both books will be available in the bookstore in early May at reformedfellowship.net

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Ezra Nehemiah: The Return from Exile

Most are aware that Ezra and Nehemiah record the return(s) to the Promised Land, the rebuilding of the temple, and the fortification of the walls of Zion. But there is so much more packaged within these sacred pages.

No period of salvation history is more fascinating because the resettlement sets the stage for Christ's advent in Bethlehem, promised in Eden.

This Bible study, by grace, will fortify your apprehension of Holy Scripture as you trust in Holy Spirit appropriation. Kudos to Dr. De Jong and Reformed Fellowship for delivering yet another priceless tool for rightly dividing the Word of truth.

— H. David Schuringa, Ph.D., Contributor
Christian Renewal Magazine