

## How to praise God

*I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.*

*Psalm 9:1-2*

The Psalms are filled with praises to God. David, the chief psalmist, understood the importance and benefits of praising the God that made him and kept him. We see evidence of this in this psalm, as in many others. If we are careful readers and meditators, we can also glean from an expert like him the elements that should characterize our praise. For example, he begins with the key principle of praising God with “my whole heart.” This then indicates that it is possible to praise with only part of our heart. Of course, we understand that here by “heart” he refers to our innermost being. Have you ever found yourself praising half-heartedly? We all know how possible that is. But David’s insinuation here is that the only acceptable praise for our God, who made us and all things, must be whole-hearted. Otherwise, we are the losers, because we miss the blessing of being filled with the truth of who He is.

David also expands his praise by showing forth all the marvelous works of God. After basking in His Person, we also are blessed to consider the abundant works of God, which should make us not only marvel at his power and goodness, but also communicate it through our praise. He then describes an acceptable attitude of praise, when he describes being glad and rejoicing “in Thee.” Even in the most difficult circumstances, in which our human response may struggle for gladness, we have the choice to allow the knowledge of our God and His marvelous works to make us glad and rejoice in Him alone. Finally, he describes the form of his praise: singing. Not only singing, but singing *to His name*. So how should we sing praise to His name? Make sure that our song is characterized by all the foregoing characteristics, as we recognize and are consumed by Him who is most High!

## Love of righteousness

*The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.*

*Psalm 11:5-7*

In this psalm describing the struggle between the wicked and the righteous, we have a glimpse of the righteous judgment of God. The concept of judgment must be viewed from a number of aspects, from an initial definition and discernment of what is right and wrong, then the testing and trial of persons, followed by the determination of who is righteous and unrighteous, and then the final reward or sentencing of each. As we observe the Lord's work in our passage, it is interesting to see that He tries, or tests, the righteous, but in His omniscience He hates the wicked, who is in love with violence and the end it brings. Even in the Revelation we see the wicked react to God's judgments, which should be a means for repentance, with deeper hatred for God. David under inspiration describes the standing of each before a righteous Lord, who defines and loves righteousness.

Our human nature will react negatively to the statement that the Lord hates the wicked, because we view the word hatred from the typical emotional state that it creates in our human souls. But hatred on the part of the holy and righteous God simply describes an absolute position of his nature. Since He is all righteous, unrighteousness and wickedness are diametrically opposed to his nature, and therefore His nature is in direct opposition to them, which logically is pure and righteous hatred, without any element of emotion.

At the same time, the righteous psalmist David, who began the psalm declaring his trust in the Lord, attained that righteousness not by works, but by the trust that brought God's righteousness upon him. Since that righteousness came from God Himself, He cannot be opposed to or hate it. And yet He still tries the righteous, so that the imputed righteousness may work itself out in the life and response of the tried, to refine and purify the trusting life through a deeper reliance upon and appreciation for the Lord of his righteousness. So even though tried, may we who put our trust in Him love that righteousness that He seeks to grow within us.

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# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

*And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD.  
Jeremiah 9:3:*

Jeremiah lived in treacherous times. Truth had already "fallen in the streets" as Isaiah had previously predicted. Prophet, priest and king were all confederate in their apostasy and "he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey". Prevarication wore the cloak of religious garb and while political sycophants entertained the king with fanciful delusions of prosperity and peace, the enemy assembled at the gates ready to wreak havoc on the deceived people of God. God's patience has it's threshold and Israel had foolishly squandered their last vestige of hope by disparaging the Lord's true messenger.

In his trenchant poem *The Present Crisis*, James Russell Lowell captures the spirit of his compromised era:

*Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.*

Depending how you assess our current age, we are either cursed or blessed with a super abundance of information. There truly is no excuse for ignorance in our information-saturated times. What used to take hours of research in the card catalogues at the local library can now be accessed in seconds with a few keystrokes from the comfort of an easy chair. But there is an inherent and present danger that must be assiduously averted; the "father of lies" has infiltrated the ranks of the learned. The devil, as his name asserts, is a deceiver. Of his many personas let us add that he is the editor-in-chief of all "Fake News". It is imperative to apply the interrogative "What is Truth?" before we permit the entrance of the perverted wisdom of this generation to infect our minds.

There is in the heart and mind of every believer a sublime arbiter of truth- the Spirit of Truth who promised to guide us "into all truth" and who "teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie". This is a blessed protection from the skewed sophistry of a world gone mad by it's hatred for all things holy.

As we are bombarded with messages that are borne of minds controlled by the devil it is all too easy to fall prey to ideas that "proceed from evil to (more) evil". The Christian must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, scrutinize all information with a jaundiced eye and cast out the profane leaven that will utterly corrupt his wholesome temple. Beloved, let us gird up the loins of our minds and be valiant for the truth in this desperate time of religious apostasy, moral declension, and pseudo intellectualism.

Have a blessed day .

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Finding Grace in a Corrupted World

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*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*

– Genesis 6:5,8 –

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Jesus told us that the days immediately preceding His return would be “as the days of Noah were.” (Mt. 24:37). It therefore behooves us to study the Genesis record and familiarize ourselves with its description of the antediluvian world in which Noah and his family lived and out of which they were divinely delivered. In so doing, we will find signposts that point us toward mankind’s readying for the man of sin and will equip us, like Daniel, with an understanding of the times.

Noah lived in a global pandemic of pinnacled sin and degradation. We have been conditioned to picture the days of Noah as somewhat pre-historic and unenlightened. In truth, however, that civilization was likely highly advanced, possibly as advanced as our own. Yet it was “corrupt”. The inspired record declares “The earth was also *corrupt* before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was *corrupt*; for all flesh had *corrupted his way* upon the earth.” (Gen. 6:12-13)

Corruption means to alter and degrade from something’s original state or intended purpose. It is critical to note in the Genesis account that “all flesh” had *corrupted* “his way”. Given the context of Genesis six, it becomes evident that mankind was perverting sentient life to the point that God had to intervene in judgment. Is it possible that we are nearing a similar apex in our modern culture? Let us consider for a moment the ways in which mankind today is tampering with and altering God’s established order.

Our generation boasts the unparalleled privilege of peering into and unraveling some of the mystery of the womb, yet we abort well over a million babies annually in America alone. We have redefined marriage from that of one man and one woman to include same genders, and continue like the men of Sodom to pine for other ways to pervert this bedrock institution of civilization, with polyamory, incest, pedophilia, and bestiality waiting in the wings to claim some kind of societal stamp of normalization. The legitimate scientific discoveries of our generation, particularly in the areas of genetics, have given rise to massively expanding endeavors of corruption. Cloning is already a decades-old reality and genetic engineering is a burgeoning field that has put Frankenstein-like monstrosities on our horizon. A fascination with the paranormal, especially in the area of extraterrestrial life, is becoming mainstream. Physicists are actively seeking a “god particle”. Siri, Alexa, and Google Home are quite possibly the camel’s nose under the tent, designed to whet our appetites and foster a global acceptance for advancements in the field of Artificial Intelligence. Those advancements and perversions are happening at a shockingly rapid pace, with scientists seriously discussing and investing in a new field of study – transhumanism – whose goal is to “broaden human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet earth.”

Yes, the greatest pandemic our modern world is experiencing is not a virus – it is the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost and the corruption of the way of all flesh. Yet we need not despair. For in the midst of that antediluvian nightmare so long ago, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Our God, no matter how disgusted He is by mankind’s perverse pursuits, is ever seeking the solitary heart that will hear His word and obey His voice. *It is the individual that God saves and uses to change the world.* Noah was a preacher of righteousness in his generation. He carried out God’s commands meticulously and found his master’s grace sufficient, his mercies manifold, and his deliverance sure. May we, like Noah, eschew the corruption all around us, finding that same grace in the eyes of our wonderfully worthy Lord today, and may we be similarly used to courageously witness His righteousness to the lost and confused souls that surround us.

## Prepare Your Heart

And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

II Chronicles 12:14

Our Christian walk is something that is supposed to grow stronger every day as we gain knowledge through scripture reading, prayer, and the daily experiences that occur in our lives. God divinely appoints a wide variety of situations for us so we can learn to utilize all that He has provided. There is no perfection this side of heaven, but it is the Lord's plan for us to grow spiritually stronger and also closer to him as we travel through this life. One of the main hindrances for this to occur is when we stop all together or are casual in seeking the Lord.

Today's text warns us with the example of Rehoboam, who did evil because he *prepared not his heart to seek the Lord*. God never intended for us to be content with the spiritual knowledge that we have gained, but instead that we should be continually preparing our heart to seek Him and His ways. When we are slack in this area, we are allowing ourselves to be subject to the evil influences that constantly surround us. How many bad and harmful choices are made because of not being in tune and in touch with the Lord? Our walk and relationship with Him will become anemic when we stop seeking Him and the resources that He provides for us. In Rehoboam's life we see that he forsook the law of the Lord; and though there was a time when he sought the Lord and humbled himself to obtain deliverance from an enemy, he did not continue in his pursuit of God which led to his downfall. Just as a speeding car that runs out of gas will coast to a stop, the Christian who stops seeking the Lord will also deplete the fuel that powers their spiritual life. May we continually remember to *prepare our heart* to seek the Lord for His fellowship, guidance, and fullness.

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## Nothing hid

*His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.*

*Psalm 19:6*

The picturesque personification of the sun in this verse makes what seems to be a final point in the first part of Psalm 19. As the sun makes its circuit across the sky with the brilliance of a new bridegroom and the strength of a conditioned runner, it provides one more illustration of how the glory of God is exhibited by the order and magnificence of His creation, whether by day or by night. Without any speech or language, the various aspects of God's creative power described in these first six verses provide a continuous witness to mankind that there is an awesome Creator behind all of this, and their message is inescapable. This truth is the appeal of the apostle in Romans chapter 2, that this witness leaves every cognizant person on earth without any excuse for unbelief. Yet, as the following verses focus on the law of the Lord, echoed as the testimony, statutes, commandments, fear, and judgments of the Lord, this is not at all a change of subject. It is instead the continuing description of the witness of God to the crown of His creation. He did not leave mankind with only the penetrating witness of the creation about us, but has extended His personal word to us through the pens of His patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. This word furthers the witness of an omnipotent yet personal Creator to the human conscience, which longs to have the emptiness left there by sin filled by Him. His word converts the soul, such that the simple are made wise to the extent that their heart rejoices at his statutes, realizing that He has given them for our good. The enlightenment of His commandments makes the redeemed heart desire His word above transient worldly desires for wealth or delectable tastes. The understanding heart is also aware that the warnings of His word reveal the guarding care of a loving Heavenly Father. May we with the psalmist respond to such a gracious witness with the plea that our speech and our thoughts be continually acceptable to our strong Redeemer.

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# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

*If it had not been the LORD... Psalms 124:1*

It is a frightening yet necessary exercise to, on occasion, consider what our lives might have been "if it had not been (for) the Lord". At whatever juncture that transformative moment of conversion took place it is certain that our lives would have been much the worse had it not been for the Lord. What benign influences have gently guided our steps since we surrendered our future to the Good Shepherd. A life we once were so enamored by with its arrogance, pride, and lust would most certainly have brought us to a myriad of sorrows. The carnal mind often ruefully looks back at the missed opportunities and drowns itself in the contemplations of "If only I had done this thing or that". The believer who is led of the Spirit never has to wallow in that slough of despond; to the contrary he is confident that his destiny has been assuredly charted by the unvacillating hand of our Redeemer.

If it had not been for the Lord:

The Woman at the Well would be pleading for a drop of water  
in the fires that shall never be quenched.

Zacchaeus would now be counting his ill-gotten wealth  
in the realms of eternal destitution.

The Thief on the Cross would have joined his blaspheming  
companion in the fires of perdition.

The Centurion would now be begging for a mercy that he  
had forgotten to show toward the Son of God.

Saul of Tarsus would this moment be in the dungeon  
of damnation pining over the worthlessness of his self righteousness.

We might rightly add our names to this list because, if it had not been for the Lord, who can tell what depths of misery and depravity we may have plumbed by now. Have we not all encountered those "friends", coevals of our past lives, who now we find are bond to inveterate dissipations or have suffered through bad marriages or felt the pangs of severe disappointments owed to sons and daughters who have taken the satanic bait. For a moment we muse "this could have so easily happened to me"...if it had not been for the Lord.

Believers are not immune to troubles. But the steadying leadership of the Holy Spirit encourages us to trust the only One who can work all things together for good. Innumerable benefits have accompanied our brief journey here. Walking with the Lord was the best decision we have ever made. We have wisely chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away.

Have a blessed day .

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Fully Engaged

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*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*  
– 2 Timothy 4:7 –

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In the early years of my conversion I read a particular author's biography of the apostle Paul (based on the biblical texts). It had many good insights and interesting takes, but one phrase of his work struck a resonating chord and has remained with me for years. He aptly noted that the Apostle to the Gentiles "moved wholly when he moved at all". When we study Paul's life, it becomes apparent that this is a poignant epithet for the Apostle.

Paul's post-conversion life serves as what ought to be the model of normative Christian experience – a fully engaged, passionate endeavor that has Christ's glory as its fuel and the advancement of His Kingdom as its prize. As his life sunsets in Rome and the certainty of his martyrdom by Caesar's hand becomes apparent, Paul cogently captures this truth in his last letter to Timothy. He draws upon two strikingly all-consuming similitudes to summarize the level to which his heart, mind, and body had been occupied during his Christian pilgrimage. "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course."

A warrior cannot be half-hearted. His victory upon the battlefield – indeed, his very survival thereon – does not come by chance. He spends long hours and years in training. He must meticulously apply himself to learning as well as maintaining a multitude of tactics, techniques, and weaponry in mastering warcraft. Then, when on the field of battle or in the ring, there is no room for error. He must ensure that his will to win is greater than that of his enemy and rely upon both that will and his training to decimate his opponent.

For the runner, lung capacity, muscle endurance, and mental stamina are required to cross the finish line. Men do not leave their couches to run marathons. Incremental and continuous training, proper diet, and love for the sport is required to make the body race-ready. Runners do not enter the contest until they have counted the cost and disciplined both their minds and their bodies to the point that they are confident that if they do not win the race, they will at least finish it.

And is not the Christian life even more worthy of our full engagement? Does our commitment to the cause of Christ consume us? Can we possibly live a life pleasing and useful to our Savior with half-hearted attendance to the study of Scripture, lethargy in prayer, or reluctance in evangelism? Do we assiduously keep our bodies as vessels unto honor and maintain them as the temple of His Holy Ghost? Do we jealously keep our hearts exclusively occupied with Him, guarding against sin and the weight that doth so easily best us? Do we discipline our minds to think on the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report?

This is a race that reaches heaven. This is a war with Hell itself. We can afford to be neither fractionally trained nor partially committed. We must be fully engaged. Let us re-dedicate ourselves to Him who alone is worthy of all that we are, that we too, like Paul, may keep the faith.



## A STRONG TOWER

The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Proverbs 18:10

There are multiple names that are attributed to God in the Bible, and each one has a distinct meaning that reveals specific aspects of His character and nature. In the Old Testament, one of the primary names which is used over six thousand times is LORD or Jehovah. The basic meaning of LORD is “the self-existent one” or “He that is who He is”. From mankind’s perspective it is beyond anything we could ever hope to comprehend that the Lord had no beginning, but that He always was and always will be. The eternal nature of His name should bring comfort to our souls as we realize that He has been and always will be there for us in our time of need.

Today’s text tells us that the LORD’s name is a strong tower- a place of safety and security. When the sins and complexities of life rob a person of peace and hope of eternal life, it is His name that is called upon to find forgiveness, peace, and a reconciled relationship with God. When we start learning to discern God’s will and we are wavering to make the right decision, it is this tower that we can run to and find the safety of His guidance. As the ailments of our flesh assault us, causing fear and anxiety, it is this name that reminds us that the Eternal One has us securely in His hands. In this tower we can unload our heavy burdens and find relief in the One who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. This tower has stood the test of time and is as strong today as it has been from eternity past. All that evil men can hurl against it, and even the devil and all his minions cannot affect the tower of the LORD’S name. When everything in this world collapses, this tower will still stand because it stood before the creation of the world, and it will stand when all else fails. May we run to this tower often; may we run there today.

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### Three Components of Service

... your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... 1 Thessalonians 1:3

On the day we first fully trusted the finished work of Christ our Lord, the angels rejoiced, and our reservation was secured for our eternal home in heaven. In His time, God will call us home to dwell with Him forever. As we wait for that day we are instructed to “occupy” in His service. Much of our service for the Lord involves, either directly or indirectly, impacting people for His kingdom.

In today’s text, the Apostle Paul’s commendation to those at the Thessalonian church presents for us the components of a good example to follow in our service for the Lord. The work that they were doing was a work of faith. Before we can do anything for the Lord, our first work is to believe on Him ourselves. He has done all that was necessary to provide salvation for mankind; and now it is for us to exercise true belief in that work. Then, as laborers we are to enter into the Lord’s harvest field. Our labor should not be the result of being forced or coerced, but out of the love we have in our hearts for the One who has loved us with an everlasting love. And when the love of God dwells within us, there should be an outpouring of love for those to whom He would have us to minister. As we labor for Him we are reminded that He calls us not servants, but friends. *Friends!* The fact that the Lord of Lords would refer to us as friends is enough to energize us for His work. There may not always be immediate observable results in the work that we do for Him, but we must be patient in the hope that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. We persevere in our service knowing that nothing we do for Him is ever in vain. As we wait for His return, we also have the hope that all of our service will help populate God’s kingdom for His glory.

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## **In His light**

*For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.*

*Psalm 36:9*

This psalm reveals the vast contrast between the heart devoid of the light of the Lord and the one that has been opened by His light. The enlightened heart of the psalmist David views the wicked life that is still in darkness as described in the first four verses. The transgression of the wicked makes it obvious to the enlightened that there is no fear of God before his eyes. And the continued description insinuates that the wicked heart naturally continues in sin and self-flattery without even realizing it. In verse five, David's view turns upon the hinge of God's mercy, perhaps as he realizes that what he has been observing was typical of his own unregenerate heart, before it was changed only by the light of God's righteousness. Only when His light shines in our dark hearts can these truths of his faithfulness, judgments, and lovingkindness become obvious, as well as the evil of our own sin be revealed. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face (presence) of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6). When that shining light transforms our minds, it brings with it the fountain of life into our souls, a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). Then is the life transformed by His light. But before the light and life came, the darkness was our natural existence. How important for us to remember that "such were some of you," and, when we see that darkness walking about us, instead of just shouting at the darkness, we live and share the message of that merciful light. Then, as we walk in the light as He is in the light, we influence others to see the light of His life, which teaches the heart to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. In that light will we all together exclaim "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!"

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# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

*Jeremiah 32:17: Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:*

For the Maker of heaven and earth it must be admitted, nothing is too hard. When one tries to catalogue the infinitesimal functions that must be maintained to sustain life on this fragile planet, we must stand in awe of our omnipotent Creator. The Fibonacci sequence is a unique ratio that can be used to describe the proportions of everything from nature's smallest building blocks, such as atoms, to the most advanced patterns in the universe, like the unimaginably large celestial bodies. Nature relies on this innate proportion to maintain balance. It was in 1230 AD that Fibonacci discovered this "golden ratio" but it lay hidden in the genius of God's handiwork for millennia before that revelation was made manifest.

Jeremiah employs the ever so rare exclamatory "Ah Lord God!" to give expression to the contemplations of God's great power. Scientists weary themselves in trying to plumb the depths of the inexhaustible mysteries of a God who is "past finding out". To their credit they have discovered some of these enigmas, at least in part; but to do so they have had to depend on the gifts of inquisition, reasoning, and knowledge provided by a wisdom endowed by their Creator. The truly wise man upon standing at the threshold of the unknown removes his shoes and recognizes that the natural mind can only carry us "here and no further". Pusillanimous man should fall to his knees in acknowledged humility in light of such an overwhelming presence. The nearly inarticulate "Ah" is the best a finite mind can utter. We stand mouths agape as we ponder the myriad of mysteries the Almighty has laid before us to consider and then to draw the ineluctable conclusion that with God nothing is too hard.

And so the passage we are to consider tacitly invites us to take hope in our God who has the mastery of all things temporal and eternal. His creation provides to us evidential proof that there is nothing, even to the minutest detail, that does not ultimately come under His purview. We may with our limited understanding find ourselves confronted with seemingly perplexing problems with no apparent resolution, but what solace we find in taking these "Gordian Knots" to the One "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".

As children we all stood before our father or mother with some irresolvable problem that interrupted our puerile joy, be it a broken toy or knotted shoelace or scraped knee or a thousand other complications. We watched nonplussed as they were able to brush away the annoyance with such ease as to assure us that no problem was too hard that they could not ameliorate it. How much more does our heavenly Father invite us to "cast our cares" upon Him whose "great power and outstretched arm" is sufficient to sustain us through all the perplexities of a hostile world and finally deliver us to the realms of glory where the nettlesome vexations shall molest us no more.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Confess and Forsake

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*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*  
– Proverbs 28:13 –

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Human pride is an awful thing. Even post-conversion, man has a marvelous ability to justify his own actions. This is because the fleshly nature simply believes itself to be God.

Until we reach glory, every believer must battle the beast of the breast. David Brainerd, God's streaking firebrand of a missionary to the American Indian, called it "my vile, hellish heart". As was the case with Cain, sin is at the door, awaiting its moment to pounce. Thanks to Christ's resurrection and ascension, we are not left helplessly exposed. The power we possess to fight this parasitic internal monster is the resident Holy Ghost. But He is not a despot. He permits us to own the controls and enables our will, making it the means by which we choose to yield our members as instruments of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. It is gloriously true that the old nature no longer owns the day; however, we must simultaneously recognize that it nevertheless remains a body of death that must be mortified daily, and as such, we must grapple with the reality that we are still prone to sin. What we do about it is critical to our life, our witness, and our spiritual well-being. Yes, it is nothing short of daily and continuous war.

While victorious Christian living is and ought to be the normative state of the New Testament believer, we live in an age where watered-down preaching and the pseudo-science of psychology have infected the Western church to the point that many tend to wink at sin. When not yielded to the Holy Ghost, we are apt to excuse our sins merely as faults, innate character flaws, or simply mistakes. Spiritual laziness, lack of Bible study and devotional meditation, and a dearth of pulpit preaching against sin serves to embolden many contemporary professing believers to either cavalierly accept or else completely ignore sin in their own lives. When this is the case with a true believer, he grieves the Holy Ghost. It thus behooves us to beware, and then to carefully examine our own hearts.

We are all apt to stumble. But God has lovingly provided a means whereby we may quickly rise and continue our upward progress toward the Celestial City. John tells us that *if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. And yet we are often too long in coming to that place. Perhaps because we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think? Richard Sibbes wrote, "Confession is verbal humiliation." There is a certain amount of shame we must own in order to advance, no matter our perception of the size of our offense. If we are to restore our broken fellowship with the Father and return to the shade of His smile upon us, it is imperative that we find a closet space, go deep within our souls, and cast away our pride before God. When we thus humble ourselves, acknowledging our transgression and confessing our offenses *openly and honestly* before our Father, we will find Him waiting to restore the joy of our salvation, uphold us with his free spirit, and enable us to forsake the sin which so easily besets us.

Brethren, let us not pretend that we are wholly sanctified, deceiving ourselves. Likewise, let us not justify sin nor glory in the struggle. Rather, let us be circumspect, hating the accursed thing and keeping a short list of offenses. Then let us humbly cast ourselves upon His endless mercies, that we may maintain right relationship to live in the fulness of the victorious power of His holy presence within.

## **God Giveth the Increase**

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:7

The Great Commission given by our Lord is for every Christian to fulfill in one way or another. By spreading the Word, we can help change the direction of a life that was headed in the wrong way, and as the book of James says "... save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins". If we have played a part in influencing someone with the gospel and they choose life, we must always remember that we have played a significant yet small part; it is Christ that has done the saving.

In Paul's first address to the Corinthians in Chapter 3 we are reminded of how pride and the flesh can creep into the purest of intentions. Strife and divisions existed in the Corinthian church. One way this became manifested was when the members began taking allegiance with Paul or Apollos. They seemed to think that if their conversion occurred by the work of one or the other, they could claim an elevated status. Paul brings them down to earth by clarifying that it mattered not who led them to the Lord, or who was discipling them, but that it was God who performs the most important work. There are many ingredients that go into a person coming to Christ for salvation and their growth in the Christian life. We may share our testimony with someone, and they may politely listen without responding. During that same time, that person might have a friend or neighbor who is praying for them. At some other time, they may pick up and read a gospel tract that was placed before them, but all the while the Spirit of God is working through all those circumstances of their life drawing them to Him. Finally, one day through the word that produces faith, while the Spirit is convicting and drawing them, God commands the light to shine out of darkness and into their heart, and they respond by calling upon the name of the Lord for salvation. After this new birth, the Lord uses pastors and teachers, as well as Christian brothers and sisters to help the new convert to grow; but always remember it is God that giveth the increase.

May we look for some opportunities this week to plant some seeds and watch and pray to see what God will do.

JDE

## Secrets of the heart

*If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;  
Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*

*Psalm 44:20-21*

In the greater context of this psalm, the writer rides a roller-coaster of thoughts and pronouncements characteristic of the human heart. As he begins the psalm proclaiming God's past deliverance of Israel from their enemies, he plunges from there into the depths of complaint as he describes the state of the nation as a result of God's chastening, evidently through the time of Israel's captivity by their enemies. We have the balance of the Old Testament describing the utter disobedience of Israel that led to their ultimate demise, as promised in God's law for such attitudes and resulting behavior. Yet at verse seventeen we see his audacity in claiming innocence in spite of all that had come upon them. This unfortunately is very characteristic of our humanity. We are slow to see or admit our own sins that bring our calamities. Our nature readily yields to the worldly suggestion that our situation is caused by the injustices of others against us, which ultimately leads even to accusation against God, as we succumb to the notion of being a victim without personal responsibility.

However, in our text the truth mercifully grabs his conscience to remind us that God will search out the heart of deceit, even to the point of revealing the strange gods of that deception. While we may have no gods of wood or stone, there are the idols of arrogance, self-will, and self-fulfillment: those that call His name and yet forget it when it's time to do what He says. Jeremiah reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" He answers his own question, "I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins..." (Jeremiah 17:9-10). His loving desire is to reveal the true root of our problem, that it may be cast out. So, with the psalmist, let us ignore the arrogant claims of the heart, and instead allow the Lord to search out the secrets that avoid His blessing. Then let us in loving surrender cast out the strange gods of self-justification, and instead recognize that our greatest hope is His mercy, as the psalmist concludes, "redeem us for thy mercies' sake."

## Sing praises

*Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.  
For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.  
Psalm 47:6-7*

Reading this psalm might give the impression that we ought to sing praises to God. Five times in two verses we are commanded the same thing. There seems to be not much theology required to obey these exhortations. The preceding and following verses of this short psalm provide reasons to praise Him. And there are plenty of other reasons to praise Him throughout the Bible. We often will hear someone praise the Lord for some good thing He has done. There are many wonderful acts of God throughout history for which He deserves praise. Yet here we can see two important aspects of praise. First, we praise Him for who He is. God is the King of all the earth. But the glorious corollary of this for his people is that He is *our* King. The children of the king, president, or other ruling position of a country would normally be inclined to speak well of their important father. How surpassing of that is the privilege of personally knowing our heavenly Father who is *the* King of all the earth. Second, we sing praises with understanding. It seems that some people sing praise just to sing. They may be enamored with the sound of praise, or the emotion of praise. But that is not praise with understanding. In fact, that can be selfish and hollow. Yet to understand His person, power, glory, and majesty brings a foundation within the soul that swells into the praises commanded here. There is then much theology connected with these exhortations. The more we plunge into the depths of His truth, the more that truth will lift up our hearts and voices to praise Him. And since He inhabits the praises of His people (Ps. 22:3), we who praise Him benefit even more. Therefore, let us be the obedient benefactors of these simple and profound words.

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# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

*As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Daniel 9:13*

Times of trouble should be met with deep introspection. Though not directly responsible for the judgements that fell upon his nation, Daniel nobly adopts the plural pronouns *us, we* and *our* when reflecting on the cause for the plight that had befallen the captive nation. True intercession is characterized by vicarious identification with the object of its petition. Our Savior "became sin for us who knew no sin" and "in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people".

The perilous times in which we find ourselves calls for a similar admission. Before our eyes we are witnessing the dissolution of the land of the free. This ruination has been progressively corroding the moral fiber of a once resolutely Christian nation and "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?". Likewise, Daniel witnessed the moral laxity of his time and lamented that in the face of such decline "we made not our prayer before the Lord our God". The judgement came but not without warning. Elijah, Micaiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a host of those who were valiant for the truth gave out the rebuke and also with it, the remedy, but the warnings went unheeded.

As Christians we may be able to argue that we are not directly guilty of the abortions, the virulent sexual perversions, the rampant violence, the political corruption that has brought the judgement of God upon us. But Christians must accept our responsibilities as Daniel did his. We are the salt of the nation. Was it that our anemic prayer lives and our effete evangelism has failed to turn men from their wicked ways? Could judgment have been averted had we been more forward with our intercessions and the understanding of the truth? Did it not grieve the heart of God in the days of Isaiah when "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor"?

These calamitous times must be met with determined, intercessory prayer. This is no time for indolence nor for apathy. We have had this unique self-quarantine where so many of our time consuming frivolities have been stripped away. We are left with the luxury of free time to understand the truth, turn from our iniquities and make our prayer before the Lord our God.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Them that Look for Him

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*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

*– Hebrews 9:28 –*

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The Christian life presents us with a “strait betwixt two.” (Philippians 1:23). What Paul encapsulated in those words was the dynamic tension in every Christian’s life. The ultimate goal of our redemption is to partake in eternal fellowship with our thrice holy Creator in heaven. Until that time, we are to occupy until He come. But it is unfortunately also true that in meeting our God-appointed days, our hearts can get so used to occupying that our longing for our Lord’s actual presence wanes.

We in the Western church, particularly here in the United States, have been heirs to the apex of the gospel’s influence upon men and nations. The democratic republic in which we live was birthed out of the permeation of the gospel in Western Civilization’s culture, conscience, and institutions. For centuries, despite the sin in our land, it remained such a part of the warp and woof of the nation’s fabric that it steadied the ship through many tumultuous times. As such, it has always been fairly comfortable to be a Christian in America. We could sing the songs of Zion in a strange land, as it were, but not all *that* strange. God’s blessings have been so abundant here that we have forgotten, at least practically so, that this world is not, nor was ever it intended to be, our home. Maintaining our dwellings, building our retirement, chasing our dreams – all of this, if we are honest, has employed at least as much if not more of our time and resource than sharing the good news out of love for our fellow man in anticipation of Christ’s soon return.

William Law once wrote, “If you stop and ask yourself why you are not so devoted as the early Christians, your own heart will tell you that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, but purely because you never thoroughly intended it.” This is a stinging rebuke. And we could add that perhaps we never thoroughly intended it because we have lost the full persuasion of His soon appearing. The early Christians lived with an *anticipation of Jesus’s imminent return*. They were less certain that they were going to live out their days than that Christ would come in the air to receive them unto Himself. This blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior drove them to great exploits of faith, obstinately defying the constant threat as well as the reality of horrendous persecutions.

Are we among “them that look for Him”? The question is more practical than it is theological. There ought to be in each of our hearts an intense desire – *a longing and anticipation* – for His soon appearing. Should He come today, are we at peace with that? Have we done all we know how to do, while we have our breath and sojourn in this sin-laden world, in obedience to Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us kings and priests to reign with Him forever? Does the thought of Him returning today excite our hearts? Or are our hopes and desires to see our children and grandchildren and live out our days greater than our expectation of hearing the trumpet and ascending to meet the Lord in the air?

Brethren, God has richly blessed us. But let us be careful to note that His material blessings are temporal while His spiritual blessings are eternal. We may be grateful for God’s material and societal blessings, but let us repent of our comfort in them. In so doing, we will find it much easier to look for Him.

## **But This Man**

*But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.*

*Hebrews 10:12,14*

A consistent theme throughout the book of Hebrews is that of the advent of Jesus bringing the New Covenant and showing it to be better than what existed under the Old Covenant. Chapter 10 describes the inefficacy of all the previous sacrifices that were made for man to secure a right standing with God. God had given specific instructions regarding the quality of those sacrifices, and yet they still had no power to completely cleanse since they were just a shadow of the Perfect Sacrifice which was to come. The priesthood itself proved faulty for it was occupied by fallible and mortal men who themselves were in need of sacrifices. The frequently repeated sacrifices, which did not produce a clear conscience or a holy life, became an external ceremony in which the Lord took no pleasure. All of this only led to a condition that subjected all mankind to a life time of bondage through fear of death.

But *this man*, our Lord Jesus, arrives at the appointed time and fulfills every jot and tittle of the law in order to deliver us from sin and the bondage of external religion without true faith. His pure and sinless sacrifice of himself has the efficacy to not only secure eternal life for us, but also because He himself was tempted, He can help us in times of temptation. When His mission was fulfilled, He sat down to signify that His sacrifice was complete and permanent. As we put our trust in Him and the power of that one sacrifice which totally purchased eternal life for us, we are now safe solely because of Him.

When we are going through the motions of religious duties which depend on carnal efforts, or if we are having seasons of fear and doubts, may we remember that *this man* is better than all for which we have ever hoped. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God. No man could ever produce eternal life and peace; but *this man* did!!! Hallelujah!

JDE

## Pillar and Ground

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*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God the pillar and ground of the truth.*

*– 1 Timothy 3:15 –*

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Pontius Pilate asked our Savior – “What is truth?” Had Pilate inquired with a childlike heart, we can rest assured he would have found the answer (which ironically was standing Personified before him). Understanding the nature of truth is as vital to apprehending it as the truth itself.

Truth is singular. There can by definition exist no plurality in *the* truth. Yet the postmodern concept of relativism has deceived many into believing that truth can exist in multiplied quantities or in multiple versions. Millennial notions of “my truth” and “your truth” are meaningless, though. If truth is not exclusive, then falsehood does not exist. (The child who stole the cookie from the cookie jar and has the evidence all over his mouth yet protests that he did not eat the cookie is simply living in “his truth”. There is need for neither punishment nor amusement at his assertion because “his truth” is no less valid than the parent’s suspicion of his crime.)

Truth is also weighty. It carries with it a transformative authority that cannot be gainsaid. It may be hidden, but it cannot be destroyed. Truth testifies to itself. If it is to be known, it must be sought. Once it is found, it exposes every falsehood. Once it is embraced, it makes every path clear.

Under the old covenant, God vouchsafed His oracles, His law, and His exclusive sacerdotal system of worship to a peculiarly unique people – the seed of Abraham, the nation of Israel. Likewise, under the new covenant, He has entrusted an assembly of individuals from every tribe, nation, and tongue – the Church of Jesus Christ – with the salvific message of the gospel, the completed canon of Scripture, and an ongoing ambassadorship to a hostile world. That gospel, that canon, and that embassy comprises the distinctive transformative treasure that mankind desperately needs but is so very reluctant to seek and embrace – “the truth”.

Our text asserts that the Church of Jesus Christ is the pillar and ground of the truth. Pillars are often thought of as structures that uphold a building. Architecturally speaking, however, they are actually distributive members, *designed to transmit the weight they bear from above safely and equitably to the remainder of structure beneath*. And the “ground” of a building is the firm foundation whereupon the entire structure rests, *the integrity of which dictates the degree to which the building will remain sturdy and fixed throughout its days*.

What the church is collectively, each member is microcosmically and individually. Our Master intends for us to be pillar and ground. The doctrines of the faith – the Triune Godhead, the depravity of fallen man, vicarious atonement, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, the eternal destinies of man, *et. al.* – are weighty things that can either decimate or circumvent the hearts of fallen men. The truth, therefore, must be carefully and evenly transmitted to their consciences in order that the God of truth might begin His work therein. Once transmitted, unsaved men must also be granted hope that they, too, can be transformed from the reeling and unstable ways of sinful existence into grounded and settled trophies of divine grace. Every blood-bought Christian is that hope.

Our God desires to use us today as both distributive and steadfast agents – “pillar and ground.” He has graciously entrusted us with “the truth.” It is our commission until He comes. May we know it, live it, and wield it skillfully.