

Theology for Life

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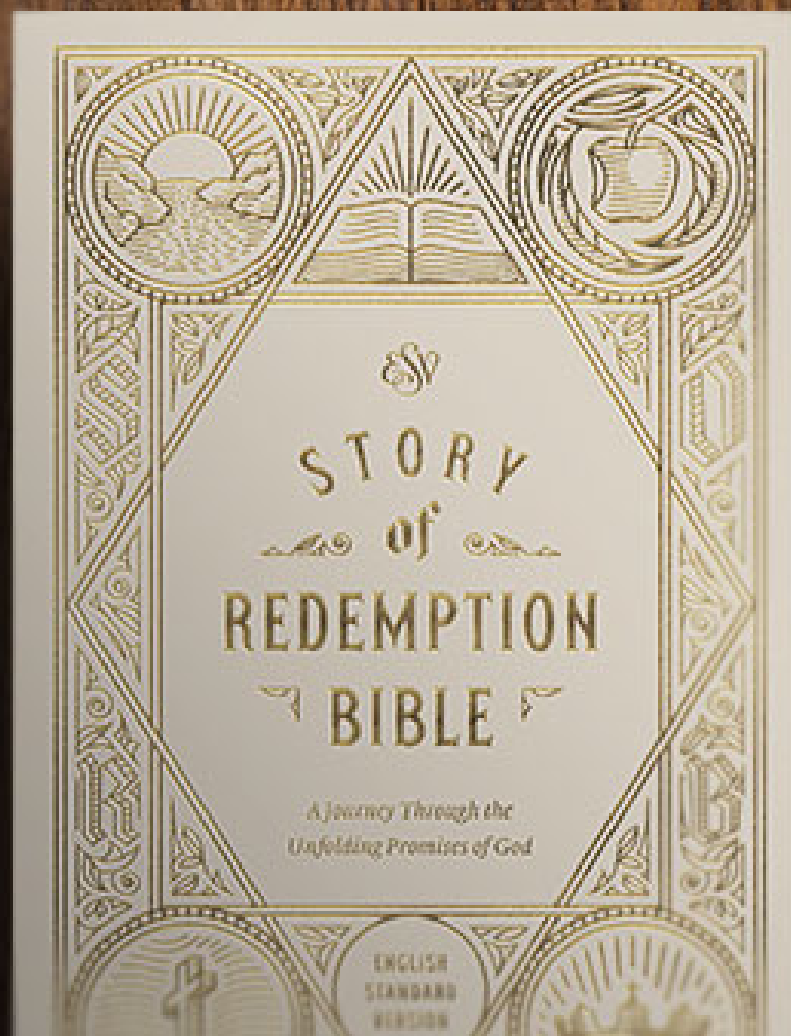


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- **Three Ways God's Justice Comforts Us**
- **The Meaning and Purpose of the Justice of God**

❑❑ CROSSWAY

*A Journey through the
Unfolding Promises of God*



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Editor's Corner

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Divine forgiveness is amazing, and the people of God magnify the amazing mercy of God in Christ when they think about their sin and what we deserve as fallen creatures through Adam. What seems to amaze the biblical authors (such as Paul) about divine forgiveness is not merely the source of forgiveness—God; what amazes them is that the Lord forgives sinners without ignoring or compromising the justice of God.

Romans 3:21-26 is a critical biblical text, because, after explaining the righteousness of God in Christ, and the satisfaction of the wrath of God the Father, the Apostle Paul says in verse 26, “It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Paul knew it was essential for the Lord to never sacrifice the holiness of God to give pardon; for if that were to occur, the Lord would no longer be God. In Christ, our Creator provided a way to show mercy without doing away with divine justice. The Lord remains just and declares the people of God righteous, while maintaining the mercy and righteousness of God.

Since God is just, He will fully satisfy the “claims of his justice” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 12). There are only two ways this can happen—the justice will be paid by the actual sinner who violates the law of God, or it will be paid in full by another who stands in the place of the sinner. Only Jesus Christ can stand in place of sinners and receive the punishment sinners deserves. If sinners do not trust the Lord to satisfy divine justice for them, then they will have to endure the full brunt of the Father’s wrath themselves (John 3:36; 14:6).

In Romans 8:3-4, we discover that the Father sent the Son, “in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin” and “condemned sin” in the flesh of Jesus (Romans 8:3-4). When the Lord forgives sinners in Christ, the Lord does not throw the demands of the law out the window, but meets them fully in Jesus’ propitiation. In Christ, the sinner is shown mercy, and the Lord fully satisfies the perfect justice of God at the same time, which should lead sinners to marvel at the forgiveness of sins.

The great hymn, “Jesus, Thy Blood, and Righteousness”, reminds the people of God that the blood of Jesus has made full atonement for sinners. Christians can trust the Lord because He is

just and always fulfills the promises of God, even the promise to punish sinners with the fullness of His wrath. Christians know the Lord fulfills His promises in Christ, because He poured out His full wrath on the sin of His people. The Lord alone is a majestic, trustworthy Lord who is worthy of the love and loyalty of His people.

We are living in a time where justice is demanded for economic, racial, and sexual injustice, both past and present. In Christ, the people of God have the answer to the injustices of our day, because the Lord entirely fulfilled the wrath of God the Father. Now the people of God can be about justice because they serve a God of justice. Christians dwell in unity because they dwell in union with Christ and are in communion with Christ. The Spirit unites, preserves, and builds the Church through the preaching of the Word and the means of grace. We dwell in unity, and Christ preserves that unity through the Word. Now, Christians can work for justice not for justice's sake, but because of Christ who satisfies the justice of God.

Christians have a message that is relevant for our times and for all times in Christ alone. The blood of Jesus satisfies the wrath of God. The people of God worship not a cruel God, or a God who punishes them unjustly, but a God who saves and who has satisfied divine justice. Now they can work for justice by calling men and women to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. Now they can proclaim the glad tidings of Good News in Christ alone, and fight against the injustices of our day with the gospel that changes hearts and transforms lives.

In this issue, you'll find a variety of articles and book reviews aimed at helping you understand divine justice, and how it has been fully and finally satisfied in Christ. As you consider the topic of divine justice, our hope and prayer is that you'll be helped, equipped, and pointed to the Lord Jesus.

In Christ alone,

Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

Three Ways God's Justice Comforts Us

By Owen Strachan



Can you trust a God who executes judgment? A skeptical culture poses this question to Christians today. I think, however, we can ask a better one in return: Can you trust a God who *doesn't*

execute judgment? Scripture shows our sin-cursed world not only faces divine reckoning, but *needs* it. Here are three biblical facets of God's judgment that give unexpected comfort and hope to the believer.

1. God's Judgment is in Christ's Hands, Freeing Us to Trust His Character

As human beings we have an innate sense of right and wrong—a conscience. We have a desire to pursue justice, and we act on this instinct as believers. But our ability to execute justice is limited. Sin deserves a response—the strongest possible response—but we aren't able to provide it. As Scripture reveals, there's only One who can, the One long foretold, the Warrior-Savior who crushes the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

“Our theology-averse age has lost sight of divine vengeance.”

The work of judgment, God tells us, is not in our hands. It's in Christ's hands, for vengeance belongs to the Lord (Romans 12:19). How good this is! We are frail, fallen, and finite. But Christ is not. He is not limited. He is not powerless. He does all things well. The work of justice flows freely from His holy nature. And we are freed to take great comfort from this truth. The burden of carrying out judgment, and making the world just, does not ultimately fall to us. It falls to Jesus. What a relieving, unburdening truth this is.

2. God's Judgment Means Standards Will be Upheld

Justice is in short order in our world. Everywhere we look we find suffering and death. Because of the curse, the world seems to the natural mind a “cosmic accident”, a grand lottery we all eventually lose. But this is not reality. Reality is a righteous Father, a forgiving Savior, and a life-giving Spirit. Reality is justice on the march—drawing near, in range.

Our theology-averse age has lost sight of divine vengeance. This doctrine doesn't fit well in a soft, therapeutic, “best life now” kind of Christi-

anity. There's a lot of "blessing" in such a system, but little justice. Christ becomes a brand-consultant to the upwardly mobile. This doctrine is also largely missing in garden-variety "new way to be Christian" Christianity, which promises equity and grace, better social conditions, and radical acts, but little judgment of evil by the avenging King. Christ ends up a community organizer with a gift for resistance activism.

Such emaciated visions of Christian faith may still speak of divine love and Christ's cross. But they fail to see that the cross is neither a mere display of affection nor an improvement program. The cross shows God unleashing grace in Christ, as God upholds justice through Christ (Romans 5:12-21). This effective death for sinners does not cancel future judgment. The atonement actually *guarantees* God will one day punish the unrepentant. The atonement shows us what the Lord will soon do—without a perfect substitute to bear His wrath.

Until that fateful day, Caesar (local government) bears the sword (Romans 13:4). The state wages just war and carries out retributive justice, even justice unto death. Christians testify to the goodness of such common grace. We uphold standards of right and wrong, knowing God has not gone soft. He has not cancelled the need for all accounts to be settled with Him. One day, Christ will return. Justice is delayed for now, but it's closing in.

"Christianity is a forward-looking faith. The celestial city, as John Bunyan reminded us, is not far off."

3. God's Judgment Destroys Evil, an Outcome We Rightly Desire

As Christians, we should zealously desire the end of evil. We should pray for the abortion industry to be swallowed like Pharaoh's army in a sea of destruction. We should cry out for the cessation of racism. We should yearn for the end of murder, casual cruelty, genocide, sexual wickedness, and thousands of other evils, and oppose them in word and

deed.

This work has already begun. When Christ died, He washed His Bride (the Church) with His precious blood (Ephesians 5:25; 1st Peter 1:19). When He rose from the grave, He triumphed over death, securing victory for His people. The end of death's reign was enacted through Christ's finished work. Yet we await the consummation of this defeat. The strong man is bound, and his house is plundered, but he isn't cast into the lake of fire (Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27). Soon he will be. On a day the Father has appointed, Satan will meet his end. It is a loving God who drives wickedness out of the land, Aslan-style.

Sin will not cease because of a vague trajectory in the cosmos toward goodness. The end of sin will come because Jesus will split the sky and make the whole earth His threshing floor (Revelation 20:11–21). This truth should inspire surging hope in the church. It should also drive us to evangelize all we can, remembering that the blunt force of the Christian doctrine of judgment has often awakened the slumbering. We do not want any sinner to taste the wrath of God. So, like the revivalist sermonizing of Jonathan Edwards many years ago, we pray, preach Christ, and implore fellow image-bearers to flee "Sodom".

Think on These Things

Christianity is a forward-looking faith. The celestial city, as John Bunyan reminded us, is not far off. There is a momentum, a driving urgency, in the kingdom. We can't ever forget what God is doing, where history is going, and how short the time is. You could say it this way: We should be so eternity-minded that we are of some earthly good.

We should be so eternity-minded that we are of some earthly good. The promise of divine justice is glorious, but in the biblical story it yields to a still greater promise. This is the completion of our glorification (Revelation 21:21–27). In the New Jerusalem, we will worship the Lamb who atoned for sin, destroyed evil, and fulfilled the ancient prophecy by crushing the serpent's head.

A skeptical culture asks us, “Can you trust a God who punishes sin?” We not only answer “yes”; we respond that we cannot trust a God who *does not* punish sin to the uttermost. How comforting, and how kind, of God to save us, protect us, and bring us all the way home.

Divine Justice and Social Justice

By Dave Jenkins



As I write this article on July 1st, 2020, the United States is facing a crisis on multiple fronts. On one front, you have the COVID-19 epidemic. On the other front, you have protests

which are (for the most part) okay, but many of those protests have turned to riots and anarchy in the streets—night after night, day after day—all across America. In my hometown of Seattle, up until today (July 1st), there was an area overtaken by protestors, called the “CHOP Zone” in Capitol Hill—a major part of the downtown Seattle area. Today the mayor of Seattle issued an executive order declaring that they were tak-

ing back the police precinct, which was over-run (and closed) by the protestors three weeks ago. But why? As an elected official, why let a major part of your city sit “occupied” for three weeks? Why wasn’t anything done, and why only today do something to end it? Meanwhile, during these three weeks, chaos and anarchy have reigned in this “zone” in Seattle, resulting in multiple deaths.

Meanwhile, we’ve seen calls from New York to Washington State and everywhere in-between for the police departments of those locales to be defunded. In New York City, the council voted yesterday (June 30th, 2020) to defund the police there by one billion dollars.

In Los Angeles, the city council voted that the police department would be defunded by approximately 100-150 million dollars. The message our government officials are sending is loud and clear: concede to the demands of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the social justice movement now!

Now, let me be clear here: black lives matter; but they are not the only lives that matter—all lives, including every race, tribe, tongue, and people group matter. It’s not merely one race that matters (or people group), for every person is made in the image and likeness of God. All lives truly do matter, because all lives matter to the Lord. After all, every life has dignity, value, and purpose before the Lord.



The idea that one group of lives matters so much that everyone else's rights are suspended is appalling. All lives matter to the Lord God, both born and *unborn*.

It is not simply justice that the protestors on the street want, although that's part of it. Part of the problem is that they are making demands for justice to be done for one group, to the exclusion of others. The question at stake with the riots causing anarchy in the streets is *not* whether they can protest (since not many are really against the non-violent protests). The debate over rioting versus protesting brings the question of *why*. A riot, by definition, is *not peaceful*; it involves violence to people and/or property (even affecting the ability to make a living). In contrast, a protest may be something such as march down an important street in front of specific buildings (or people groups). What those engaging in riots (supposedly) want is social change at the expense of whatever it costs. They demand attention through their violence because they believe if they peacefully protest they won't get the change they want. In some cases, all they want is *attention*, not real *change*. Sometimes even people engaging in rioting and anarchy have given up on the system and just want to cause problems.

All of these ideas reveal that the matter of equality and justice is not only a matter of getting justice for some, but justice according their *view* of it. What we must understand here is that *God defines justice*. And to understand that, we have to get a biblical understanding of what is happening in our hearts, and how we all—whether pursuing peaceful protests or rioting—are worshipping someone or something. To get a biblical understanding of what is happening, and how we are all worshippers (despite the fact that some are not worshipping God)—including how divine justice has been forever satisfied by the Lord Jesus in His finished and sufficient work—we must turn to Revelation 5:8-14.

In Revelation 5:8-14 we discover what kind of worship is accepted to the Lord God, who fully satisfied divine justice and who is in control of all history. This passage of Revelation says:

“And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll

and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

Some occasions are so momentous that they warrant a new song. As an example, the Russian composer Peter Tchaikovsky was approached in 1880 to write music for a number of events occurring in Moscow. These included the dedication of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Tsar Alexander II's coronation, and a commemoration of the Russian victory over Napoleon at Borodino. Tchaikovsky wrote the *1812 Overture*, famed for the resounding cannons that conclude its score. New compositions mark other special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, inaugurations, and dedications.

There has never been a more momentous event, however, than the

one recorded in Revelation 5, which John said warranted a new song in heaven. This event was the ascension and enthronement of the Son of God after successfully completing His saving work. John watched as Christ approached God's throne and took the scroll of the divine will. The apostle wrote in Revelation 5:8-9, *"And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb...And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'"*

The new song that John heard in heaven is the song of redemption, celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the vision of Revelation 4, John heard the song of creation sung to God's praise (verse 11), *"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things."* This song is similar to the creation song that God spoke of in Job 38:7, when *"the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy"* (NIV). But with Christ's redeeming work, there is a new cause for God's praise. William Hendriksen writes: "They sing a new song...because never before had such a great and glorious deliverance been accomplished and never before had the Lamb received this great honor." Revelation 5 adds to chapter 4, in the same way that Christ's redemption adds to the glory of God in creation. The new song is offered to Jesus because, having redeemed His people, He has taken the scroll, which will determine the flow of future history, and that means that Jesus is controlling history in the interests of those He has redeemed.

Worthy to Be Worshiped

The host of heaven sang a new song, not only for the greatness of the occasion, but also for the worthiness of the Savior, who has ascended and taken up His reign. Revelation 5:9 states, *"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals."*

Christ's worthiness is extolled not in the sense of His glorious divine person, but in light of His successful saving mission on Earth. Hebrews 5:9 similarly asserts that Christ was "made perfect" by His obedient suffering, as "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." Christ was always perfect in His being, but now He has qualified Himself to be the Savior of His people. In this sense, He has become worthy to take the scroll and to be praised.

Revelation 5:9–10 presents the third of five songs in the vision that began in Revelation 4. It contains the praise given to Christ by the twenty-four elders, who represent the redeemed church. They sing the new song: ***"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."*** Christ is glorified for his sacrifice in death to redeem his people from their sins.

First, Christ is praised for being "slain". He did not die from an unavoidable tragedy, but rather as a voluntary act of sacrificial love for His people. Ancient history lauded the philosopher Socrates, when he willingly submitted to unjust execution out of the principle of loyalty. American children extol the name of Nathan Hale, the Revolutionary War patriot, who regretted that he had only one life to give to his country. Socrates died for a principle and Nathan Hale died for a cause. But the Christian has an even higher reason to love and adore God's Son, Jesus Christ, since we can say, "He died for me." Jesus said in John 10:15 and 18, *"I lay down my life for the sheep...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."* Therefore, when people ask who killed Jesus Christ, the best answer is that Jesus willed His own death, for the sake of the people He loves.

Second, Christ is worthy because of what He achieved by His death: *"By your blood you ransomed people for God"* (Revelation 5:9). Different English translations render *ransomed* as "purchased" (NIV) or

“redeemed” (NKJV). The Greek word *agorazo* has the general meaning of purchasing, but often had the specific connotation of ransoming a prisoner or slave out of bondage. Here we see the essence of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross: at the cost of His own blood, which is evidenced in His death, Jesus delivered His people from the bondage and condemnation of sin. Many writers, especially in the early church, envisioned Jesus as paying a ransom to Satan. This is a mistaken idea, however, since the devil never had the true right to possess God’s people. Instead, Jesus made payment to the justice of God, which demanded death as the penalty for sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). Jesus foretold that *“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* in Matthew 20:28. Paul, therefore, wrote in Ephesians 1:7, *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.”*

Significantly, the adoration of the Church in Heaven centers on the redemptive sacrifice of Christ’s cross. Similarly, when true Christians explain the substance of their faith, they always focus on His sacrificial death to purchase us from the debt of sin. In 1915, Benjamin B. Warfield made this point to incoming students at Princeton Theological Seminary: to Christ’s people, His most precious title is “Redeemer”. Warfield explained further that the reason is because *“it gives expression not merely to our sense that we have received salvation from [Jesus], but also to our appreciation of what it cost him to procure this salvation for us.”*

Warfield proved this claim, not from the tomes of theology, but from the volumes of the Church’s hymnody, listing song after song extolling Christ as Redeemer: “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise”; “All hail, Redeemer, hail, for thou hast died for me”; “I will sing of my Redeemer, and his wondrous love for me: on the cruel cross he suffered, from the curse to set me free.” Warfield listed twenty-eight such hymns, and twenty-five more that used the word *ransom* to celebrate Christ’s sacrifice.

Warfield might have added the new song of the twenty-four elders to prove the centrality of redemption in believers' worship of Christ. If the death of Christ to ransom us from sin is the center of Heaven's worship, it must also be at the center of the Church's witness on Earth.

We should notice not only the emphasis of the elders on Christ's redemption, but also the kind of redemption they praised. We see this at the end of Revelation 5:9, which says, *"By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."* The question is asked regarding *for whom* Christ paid a ransom with His blood. Universalists reply that Jesus died for everyone, so that all are forgiven, even if they refuse to believe in Him.

"In other words, Christ redeemed particular people from all over the world— that is, the elect."

Others assert that Jesus died for all people equally, offering His blood for their salvation, yet only those who receive this gift in faith benefit from the cross so as to be saved. This view is called *general redemption* and is associated with Arminian theology. But this also conflicts with Revelation 5:9, along with other Bible verses on Christ's redemption. The elders sing that Jesus actually "ransomed" those for whom He died, so that they no longer remain in bondage. This can describe only those who are saved. Moreover, they use a definite, not a general term for the objects of Christ's redeeming work. He did not die for "every tribe and language and people and nation," but for "*people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*".

In other words, Christ redeemed particular people from all over the world—that is, the elect. This affirms the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement or particular redemption. This doctrine does not state that Christ died to make redemption possible for everyone, if only they will believe, but rather that Christ died particularly for His own people, fore-known and given to Him by the Father in eternity past (John 17:2; Ephe-

sians 1:4), who are actually and effectually redeemed by the His blood, paid as their ransom. These same persons go on to believe because the Holy Spirit applies the benefit of their redemption through the gift of saving faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). Revelation 5:9 teaches an effectual redemption and a ransom that successfully purchases people for God.

Restored to Offer Worship

This emphasis on God's sovereignty is continued in Revelation 5:10, where the elders go on praising Christ because He had "made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." The emphasis here is on what we have been saved *to* and what Christ has made us *to be*: a kingdom and priests to God.

The elders' song teaches a salvation theology of restoration. Adam was placed into the garden to be king and priest in service to God, but lost this office through his fall into sin. Israel, in Exodus, was established by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Israel's calling was to live out the rule of God in obedience to His Word and bear a priestly testimony of God to the nations. Instead, the Israelites turned from God's Word to follow the idols of the nations around them. But whereas Adam and Israel failed, Jesus Christ triumphed. Jesus succeeded not only through His own ministry as King of kings and true High Priest, but also in making His Church "a kingdom and priests to our God", as Revelation 5:10 says.

How thrilling this message is when we remember that Christ's Kingdom consists completely of once-condemned sinners. The Church acclaims Christ's worthiness, not her own! But we celebrate that Christ cleanses and forgives prostitutes, such as the woman who anointed His feet in Luke 7, murderers such as Moses and King David, and arrogant persecutors such as Paul. Paul notes the presence of others who were sexually immoral, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, greedy, and drunkards. *"But you were washed,"* he exclaims, *"you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our*

God” (1st Corinthians 6:9–11). Douglas Kelly points out the invitation that this presents to every sinner: *“Absolutely nothing we have done in our life that is wrong, unworthy, nasty, unclean or impure disqualifies us to apply to the blood of the Lamb. You are invited to sing the song that they sing.”*

It is noteworthy that in Revelation 5:10, the word “kingdom” is singular, and “priests” is plural. Christ made a kingdom consisting of priests. The Church is under the monarchy of Christ, so that His truth is to be taught, His commands are to be obeyed, and His saving grace is to be offered. The ancient Church was not to bow to the demands of Caesar or to accommodate the tastes of pagan culture.

Likewise, the Christian Church today is not to affirm the edicts of Congress or of a president when they are contrary to Christ’s Word. Moreover, the Church serves Christ’s kingdom in a priestly way. We see this in the description found in Revelation 5:8: *“When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”* They are worshipping Him with the new song of redemption, holding the kind of small harp described in the temple worship of the Old Testament (Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1) and offering their prayers before His throne.

What a picture this presents of the Church’s worship! As the twenty-four elders prostrated themselves before Christ, we also must worship “with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28). The playing of harps while singing the new song shows that true worship engages not merely the mind but also the emotions and the will. As the Jewish priests daily burned incense before God, so also are we to pray fervently. In Revelation 6, we will see that God’s judgments fall on the wicked in response to the petitions of His people, as Revelation 6:10 explains. In Revelation 5, we should understand more generally the prayer lives of God’s people. We are reminded that prayer is not only petition, but also worship: we honor God by thanking Him and by praying for His intervention; as Jesus taught us, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in

heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The elders praise Christ, not only for making them a kingdom and priests to God, but also because “they shall reign on the earth”. It is crucial, then, for Christians to realize what it means to reign on earth in Christ’s behalf.

“These evangelists remind us that, just as Christ said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), so also do Christians reign by the spiritual authority of biblical obedience and gospel proclamation.”

In response to an alarming moral decline, American Christians have sometimes sought to reign by gaining control of worldly authority structures. It is questionable whether this is even possible without a loss of spiritual integrity and legitimacy. More importantly, Christians should realize that our spiritual authority is always more potent than any worldly coercive power.

We think of Polycarp of Smyrna, who inspired the early church by submitting to the fire rather than betray his Savior. We think of Martin Luther, who launched the Protestant Reformation from a pulpit, not from a princely throne. We think of Chinese house-church pastors such as Allen Yuan and Samuel Lamb, who were imprisoned in labor camps for over twenty years, but immediately resumed preaching about Jesus when they were released. *“The more persecution, the more the church grows,”* Lamb stated. Yuan said only a few years ago, *“We have a saying in Beijing. If you dare to preach, people will believe.”*

These evangelists remind us that, just as Christ said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), so also do Christians reign by the spiritual authority of biblical obedience and gospel proclamation. Derek Tidball comments: “The role of the Church, then, is to be a faithful witness and to take an uncompromising stand for God, even to the extent of its members laying down their lives.” He cites the example of the Romanian pastor, Joseph Tson, who was threatened with death by his Communist

interrogator. Tson answered:

Sir, your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying. Sir, you know my sermons are all over the country on tapes now. If you kill me, I will be sprinkling them with my blood. Whoever listens to them after that will say, "I'd better listen. This man sealed it with his blood." They will speak ten times louder than before. So, go on and kill me. I win the supreme victory then.

Before that spiritual power, Tson's jailers quailed, and the Communist regime fell, largely through Christians' witness and prayers.

Creation Welling Up in Worship

Revelation 5 concludes with the entirety of creation responding to the adoration of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders by welling up in worship to God and the Lamb. First, we are shown the innumerable host of the angels, who offer their song to Christ: *"Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands"* (Revelation 5:11).

In describing the angels as "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands", the point is to show the innumerability in the very millions of God's heavenly servants. It is significant that they give their praise to

Christ following after the twenty-four elders, for it is through the redemption of the Church that the holy angels learn the glory of Christ's saving work. Peter described the gospel doctrines as "things into which angels long to look" (1st Peter 1:12). Now that they have comprehended the glory of Christ's saving work through the worship of the

Church, the angelic hosts offer their own praise: *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor*

and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12).

This sevenfold list of praise to Christ seems to ascribe to Him all the glorious possessions properly belonging to God Himself. The fact that the Greek text provides a definite article only for the first item, “the power”, suggests that the whole list consists of a unified whole. Like that of the glorified Church, the angels’ worship responds to Christ’s atoning death on the cross. Their testimony, therefore, shows that what once seemed like defeat for Jesus has been revealed as total victory. The cross was seen as weakness, but was actually power. The cross displayed poverty, but gained true riches; the cross was foolishness to the world, but wisdom from God. The cross represented shame, but earned the highest honor for Christ. The cross was a place of deep disgrace, yet revealed the very glory of God’s grace; and the cross stood for the curse of sin, but achieved eternal blessing for those on whose behalf Jesus died. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!” the angels conclude, inviting us to enter their praise.

Finally, the worship extends to the entire creation joined together in praise of God and the Lamb: “*And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’*” (Revelation 5:13). Here we see the farthest extent of Christ’s redemptive domain. As the angels comprehend the Lamb’s glory in the worship of the Church, so also Christ’s redemption of His people undoes the curse of sin on the entire created realm. The Creator and the Redeemer together are praised by the work of their (His) hands, the twin works of the Godhead having achieved their designed end in universal doxology.

The Sovereign is Good

As we return to Apostle John’s world at the time of writing the book of Revelation, we can see what this worship scene would have meant to the weak and threatened churches of Asia (and Asia minor). It is Christ

who reigns, not Caesar, and Christ's finished work of redemption has secured a destiny in which all things will work for the salvation of his people and the praise of God's grace. The chapter concludes with the only proper response: *"And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped"* (Revelation 5:14). That was how the beleaguered Christians were to respond: by adding their own *amen* of faith in Christ's sovereign rule and by giving themselves over to joyful adoration, fulfilling their calling as a Kingdom of priests.

In the spring of the year 2000, James Montgomery Boice, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, was diagnosed with cancer. He was sixty-two years old. Eight weeks later, on June 15, 2000, he died. On May 7, 2000, he addressed the congregation he served. In the midst of his remarks to the congregation that morning, he said to them, *"If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you'd change it, you'd make it worse. It wouldn't be as good. So that's the way we want to accept it and move forward, and who knows what God will do?"* The great comfort of our lives is the fact that Jesus is good, and He has taken hold of the scroll. He is in control.

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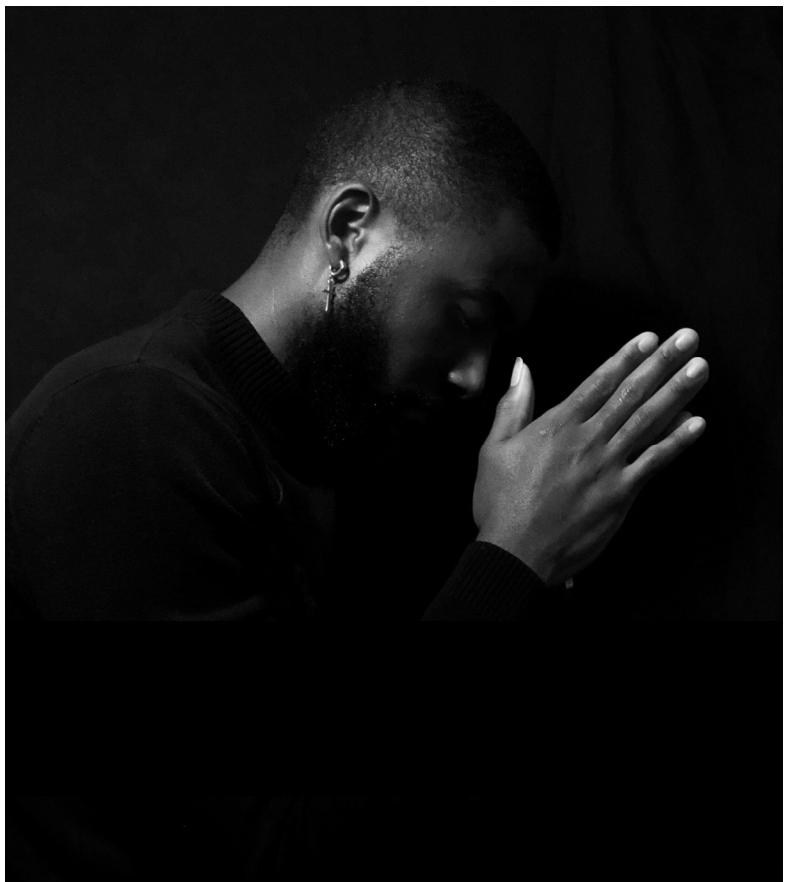
Learning to Lament: Ten Things about Psalm 13

By David Schrock

To help us understand the need for lament in biblical worship, here are ten observations from Psalm 13, an individual lament of David.

1. Psalm 13 is an Individual Psalm That was Recorded for Public Use

Psalm 13 begins with the superscription (ss.), *“To the Choirmaster. A Psalm of David.”* From this inspired introduction, we learn the source of this Psalm (David) and how it was to be used (in the corporate assembly, as led by the choirmaster). This use of first-person pronouns (I, me, my) in corporate worship is interesting because it causes the corporate gathering to speak of personal pain. This teaches us something about our own singing today



and the use of pronouns, but it also shows us how these Psalms were used. They are meant to be used by all the saints, even as they come from the personal life of David.

2. Psalm 13 is a Prototypical Psalm of Lament

In the Bible we find individual laments (Psalm 6, 88, 142; Jeremiah 20:7–11) and corporate laments (Psalm 44, 89; cf. Lamentations 5; Jeremiah 14; Isaiah 63:7–64:12; Habakkuk 1). These Psalms typically express a sense of divine loss and longing for God's return. While each lament is different, they follow a typical pattern:

- Invocation/Address to God
- Complaint
- Petition(s)
- Expression of Trust
- Vow of Praise

Psalm 13 follows this pattern as David cries out to God, unburdens his soul, makes his petitions, and finishes with a vow of praise.

3. Psalm 13 Should be Read with Psalms 3–14

These twelve Psalms of David express the grief he experienced prior to his coronation. Many of the themes expressed in one Psalm are taken up and expanded in others. For instance, Psalm 12:3–4 records David's petition to cut off those who boast "we will prevail" and Psalm 13:3–4 carries a similar petition for God "to enlighten his eyes, lest his enemy say, 'I have prevailed.'" Likewise, Psalm 13's fourfold cry "How long?" responds to God's promise to act in Psalm 12:5 ("I will arise"), a word that responds to earlier petitions ("Arise, O LORD" in Psalm 3:7; 10:12).

By observing these shared words in proximate Psalms, we learn how the Psalms tell a unified story. Altogether, we should read Psalm 13 as a lamentation that trusts in God's promise, but grieves that His promise has not yet been fulfilled.

4. David's Confidence in God's Salvation is Found in Psalm 3 and Answered in Psalm 18

Reading Psalm 13 canonically (i.e., with respect to the arrangement of the other Psalms), we discover that David's confidence for salvation stems from his belief that salvation comes from the Lord. As Psalm 3:8 reads, "*Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people.*" This confidence leads him to pray for salvation in Psalms 9:14 and 14:7 because he trusts his God will save him.

In God's perfect timing, this salvation is presented as Yahweh's deliverance of David from Saul (see Psalm 18). Psalm 18:1–3 express David's joy in Yahweh's long-anticipated salvation:

*I love you, O Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.*

5. In Psalm 13, Death is the Enemy

As David waits for the salvation of God, his life is put in jeopardy. Verses 3–4 put it this way:

*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.*

David pleads for God to answer him and to keep him from death (Psalm 13:3). His petition for his eyes to be enlightened reflects the perilous situation of his life. Moreover, we should observe the contrast between David's enemy (singular) and his foes (plural). In context, it seems that death, as a singular enemy, is pursuing David. His foes, in turn, will rejoice if his first enemy succeeds.

Consequently, David prays for God to save his life. Strikingly, as we move to the next section of Psalms (Psalm 13:15–24), there are stated (Psalm 16) and implied (Psalm 22) references to resurrection. By reading

Psalm 13 with the rest of the Psalms, we can see how these Psalms work together to answer David's prayers.

6. The Anguish of David is Physical and Spiritual

Peter Craigie makes this observation:

The psalmist prays that the Lord would “enlighten” his eyes; the eye that was dim was clouded with both ill-health and its consequent grief (Job 17:7), so that the prayer is a request for restoration to health and deliverance from grief. When the eye was enlightened, it would signify a state of health (Deuteronomy 34:7). But there is more than a prayer for physical health in the psalmist's plea; at a deeper level, he desires to return to close fellowship with the Lord. Thus, when God's face was hidden, the light of his countenance could not shine upon the psalmist (see vv. 2-3), but when God turned to him again, not only would the psalmist see the light of the divine countenance, but his own eyes would be enlightened (Psalm 1-50, 142).

While the language of Psalm 13 reflects physical affliction and the threat of death, there is also a spiritual and emotional impact. Yahweh is seemingly absent to David, and without God, he feels the lifelessness that results.

Such a combination of physical and spiritual despair reminds us that we are psychosomatic unities, which is a technical way of saying our souls impact our bodies and our bodies impact our souls. Accordingly, this teaches us the freedom we have to pray for physical health, even as 3rd John 2 instructs that God's gift of health will always serve the purpose of our inward sanctification (2nd Corinthians 12:7-10).

7. Psalm 13 has Three Coordinates for David's Lament—the Absence of David's God, the Affliction of David's Soul, and the Attack from David's Enemies

In the opening verses, the fourfold “How long, O Lord?” questions

the absence of God (Psalm 13:1), the sorrow in David's soul (Psalm 13:2a), and the ascendancy of David's enemies (Psalm 13:2b). In these three directions, we see what is happening in David's soul.

Importantly, these three coordinating griefs repeat in Psalm 13:3–4. He cries out for God to consider and answer him (Psalm 13:3a), to enlighten his eyes and spare his life (Psalm 13:3b), and to protect him from his enemies (Psalm 13:4). From the repetition of these three complaints, we can infer how they impact one another and the way that one grief follows another.

Critically, when David expresses his vows in Psalm 13:5–6, he turns all of his attention to God. The enemies fall from view, and he turns his eyes away from himself. Instead, he casts himself on the Lord, and he trusts that when God considers him, all will be well.

Indeed, we can learn much this approach to grief. While multiple factors typically vex our soul, it is the Lord to whom we can trust. When we entrust ourselves to Him, we can trust Him for our life and for the enemies who stand against us. David models this, and we have reason to consider the outcome of his life and imitate his faith.

8. David's Confidence is Found in Yahweh's Loyalty

Whereas many songs today express God's love in romantic terms, the nature of God's covenant love carries the idea of loyalty. As Gerald Wilson observes:

The psalmist finds the grounds for hope in Yahweh's hesed—translated here as “unfailing love.” The term has more of “loyalty” or “enduring allegiance” about it than the emotions we normally associate with “love.” The context is one of commitment to a covenantal agreement between parties—perhaps a king and a vassal. The covenant partner who demonstrates enduring loyalty to the covenant relationship and faithfully fulfills his covenant obligations, not because he is forced to but because of a sense of commitment to the relationship—such a person is said to do hesed (“unfailing [covenant] love”).

(Wilson, Psalms Vol. 1, 279).

As a general rule, we would do well to imitate the way in which the Psalms speak of God. And in this case, we learn that David's confidence to praise God in the midst of seeming abandonment comes from God's unfailing covenant promises.

Songs that express God's love in sentimental and romantic terms do not stand up well when God feels absent. However, when God's love is grounded in His works in redemptive history and His covenant promises sealed with Christ's blood, God's people will be able to find reason to sing (as David did), even when God feels far away.

9. David's Vow of Praise Leads Us to Jesus

Whereas David's confidence in God's *hesed* leads us back to the promises, God made to Abraham and Israel, his confidence in his future salvation leads us to Jesus. Not immediately, but ultimately, David's words, "my heart shall rejoice in your salvation", tell us salvation will come in the person and work of *Jesus*.

It must have been striking when Jesus's parents received the news, "and you shall call his name *Yeshua*" (Matthew 1:21). For any faithful Jew, the word *Yeshua* would not only harken back to Joshua, son of Nun—the one who led the people of God into the Promised Land. It would also conjure up a word that fills the Psalms; for instance:

- Psalm 3:8: *Yeshua* belongs to the Lord.
- Psalm 14:7: Oh, that *Yeshua* for Israel would come out of Zion!
- Psalm 18:50: Great *Yeshua* he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever.

Certainly, those who sang the Psalms in the temple of Solomon could not have known the full meaning of *Yeshua*, like we do. But in the same breath, God did. And as Acts 2:25 says of David (writing Psalm 16), "*For David says concerning him*"—the 'him' is the Christ, the son of David, who would come as the salvation for David, Israel, and the world.

Incredibly, as we read the Psalms, we see how God saved David. But we also see how David trusted God for his salvation. In Psalm 13:5, he did not yet possess that salvation, but with eyes of faith, he looked to the future when God's *Yeshua* would come.

In history, salvation was first given to David when God delivered him from Saul (Psalm 18). However, such an ancient salvation also served as a type for the true salvation in Christ; and in this way, we can see how Acts 2:25 references David speaking of Christ. Truly, as we read the Psalms, we too should see what David was trusting in and join him in that belief.

10. Psalm 13 Teaches Us How to Combat God's Ostensible Absence

While God is ever-present and all-knowing, it does not always feel that way. Psalm 13 grapples with this reality and teaches us how to respond. While sinful responses towards God's apparent absence abound (e.g., denying His existence, celebrating His non-interference, acting with indifference), Psalm 13 teaches us how to cry out to God, express our sorrow, and trust in His salvation.

On this point, the late Psalm scholar, Gerald Wilson, observes four ways Psalm 13 (and other Psalms dealing with God's absence) can be applied today (*The Psalms Vol. 1*, 284):

- The experience of divine abandonment is real and painful and is rightfully brought to God in laments and questions. God is not offended by our honest questions or even our heated complaints. Both confirm our desire for relationship and our faith that all is not as it should be.
- Divine absence need not be seen as the result of some failing within ourselves. Even the righteous suffer, and indeed suffering without divine intervention can be understood as one of the hallmarks of faithful living.
- Suffering the absence of God can be redemptive as others are

brought to realize through our experience that the painful realities of life do not deny the existence, power, and compassionate concern of our God.

- God is worth holding on to faithfully even when we do not experience him as present.

In his remarkably pastoral section on Psalm 13, Wilson goes on to suggest poetic writing, self-denying service, and corporate assembly as other means of meeting God when He feels absent (*ibid.*, 284–85). Indeed, when we do not feel like God is near, activities that bring us in contact with His Word and His people are the next best thing.

The feeling of God's presence is a mystery. For reasons known only to Him (and only sometimes revealed to us), He keeps His presence hidden. In such moments, enduring Christians must find means of grace to hold fast to God. Thankfully, the Psalms are one of those means, as are the places and people who sing those songs together. For that reason, let us continue to meditate on these ancient words and bring them into our private and corporate worship.

Biblical Apologetics: How Shall We Respond to Unbelief?

By David Steele



Unbelief is in the air. Unbelief is gaining ground in postmodern culture.

Over 100 years ago, the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, *“I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great innermost corruption, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means is poisonous, stealthy, subterranean, small enough—I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind.”*

The bankrupt philosophy of the so-called four horsemen of atheism continues to gain in popularity. Why? Apparently, unbelief is ‘in’. Unbelief is hip. But the question that is burning a hole in the table for Christians is this: How shall we respond to unbelief? How shall we, who have a heart for lost people, answer when they malign the Christian faith and mock the very foundations of historic Christianity?

The apostle Peter instructs believers to respond rightly: *“But in 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”* (1st Peter 3:15, ESV). In other words, we must develop the mindset of an apologist (*ἀπολογία*). John Frame’s definition of apologetics is helpful: *“[Apologetics is] the discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope...it is the application of Scripture to unbelief.”* Cornelius Van Til writes, *“Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”* Tragically, the mandate to engage in apologetics often turns ugly. Well-meaning Christians have turned apologetics into a nasty slugfest. Nothing could be further from the truth. Notice six crucial principles of biblical apologetics.

1. Apologetics Involves Verbal Proclamation.

Christians are commanded to proclaim the good news. The Greek word, “proclaim” (*κηρύσσω*) means to announce or proclaim; to preach or publish. St. Francis of Assisi was on to something when he quipped, *“Preach the gospel and if necessary, use words.”* The point: Make sure your life matches the gospel. However, actions alone *cannot* convert. Actions *must* be backed up with verbal proclamation. *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17, ESV). Simply put, the gospel is meant to be published. The gospel must be proclaimed. Postmodern gurus and emergent sympathizers may be quick to downplay preaching and promote a “deeds, not creeds” mentality. Jesus disagrees: *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come”* (Matthew 24:14, ESV). The first principle of apologetics involves verbal proclamation.

2. Apologetics Involves Bold Proclamation.

The New Testament apostles boldly proclaimed the truth. Paul prayed for an extraordinary boldness (Ephesians 6:19). And Luke made it

clear how bold proclamation characterized his ministry: “*He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance*” (Acts 28:30-31, ESV). We, too, must boldly proclaim the Word of God without apology. Now is the time for bold and courageous proclamation.

3. Apologetics Involves Logical Proclamation.

Peter argues that we must “*always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...*” (1st Peter 3:15, ESV). “Reason” (λόγος) involves a word, an utterance or reasonable speech. The Apostle Paul was quick to reason with the thinkers that flooded the first-century marketplace of ideas:

- “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2, ESV).
- “So he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17, ESV).
- “And he *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4, ESV).

We must be able to spell out the gospel message. We must clearly and logically explain how a holy God created men and women in His image. These image-bearers fell from God when they sinned, which separated them from a holy God. But God, in His mercy, sent Christ—born of a virgin—to live a perfect life, obey the law of God, and die on the cross. Christ satisfied the justice of God and extinguished the wrath of God for every person who would ever believe. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead—conquering sin and death—and opened the way to a restored relationship with God for anyone who would repent of their sin and turn to Him alone for forgiveness. It is our privileged responsibility to proclaim the truth of the gospel in a logically compelling way.

4. Apologetics Involves Hopeful Proclamation.

We offer a message of hope! We offer a message that promises liberation (John 8:36). It tells sinners they can be forgiven; that they can be delivered from the penalty and power of sin; and one day they shall be free from the presence of sin (Luke 1:66-67; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13; Romans 4:7; 1st Peter 2:9). Apologetics involves hopeful proclamation.

5. Apologetics Involves Faithful Proclamation.

This message of hope is for everyone. Therefore, our task is to share this hope with people as we are given the opportunity: *“And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation’”* (Mark 16:15, ESV). The Great Commission involves faithful proclamation to all peoples (Revelation 5:9).

6. Apologetics Involves Christ-Centered Proclamation.

Peter makes it clear: *“But in 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”* (1st Peter 3:15, ESV). First, we must maintain an attitude of gentleness (*πραῦτης*), which implies humility or an unpretentious spirit. It involves a kind answer. Additionally, we must be respectful (*φóβος*) as we engage in apologetics, a term that conveys deep admiration for another person.

Our response to unbelief is crucial. The world is watching. May our apologetics match the biblical model. And may we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a winsome and compelling way. For, in the final analysis, all of God’s elect will hear and believe. *“Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen”* (Acts 28:28).

The Danger of Neglecting Lament in the Local Church

By Mark Vroegop



“Positive and encouraging.” When I tune my radio to the local Christian station, that’s the theme I hear—over and over. It’s not

just the station's motto. The music is upbeat. The hosts are jovial. There's plenty of laughter. The only "downer" is the news. But then we get back to our regular programming.

Unfortunately, most church services are similar. Step into the majority of Sunday worship gatherings, and you'll most likely find a steady diet of triumphal songs, hope-filled lyrics, and high-energy musicians. Popular sermons are engaging and peppered with a funny story or two. Positive and encouraging is the new liturgy.

Now I'm not throwing Christian radio and Sunday-morning worship under the bus. I'm not suggesting that our worship should become morbid and negative. There certainly is a place for celebration. But I believe there's a subtle danger when we neglect the song of lament.

Reservoir of God's Grace

My personal journey tuned my heart to this biblical prayer language for people in pain. I soon discovered I wasn't alone. After our daughter's still-birth, I struggled going to church. And I was the pastor. It's not that people treated me unkindly or rudely. Rather, it seemed I wasn't on the same page. It felt as if there was no place for my pain. Sundays were filled with warm greetings and chipper small talk. Our congregational singing was upbeat and victory-oriented. Everyone seemed happy. However, my low-grade sadness and daily fight for hope created a minor-key song in my soul. And it felt like I was singing a solo.

When the tone of preaching and worship is only celebratory, we accidentally send a message that real believers don't struggle. I began to see lament as a rich, but untapped, reservoir of God's grace. I now believe there is a danger in neglecting lament in the church. Let me highlight four...

1. Missing the Balance of the Psalms

Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. The Psalms are full of them. Whether the lament is corporate, individual, repentance-oriented, or imprecatory (strongly expressing a desire for justice), you cannot read

the Psalms without encountering laments. It's noteworthy that at least a third of the 150 psalms are laments. Consider this: one out of three psalms in the official songbook of Israel wrestles with pain.

Aren't the Psalms one of the first places you turn to when you're in pain? Minor-key songs were vital to God's people. And if we neglect lament, we miss the wise and comforting balance of the Psalms.

2. Neglecting Hurting People in the Church

Through the years, I began to talk about lament. I incorporated it into funeral services. I taught on it in my sermons. We modeled prayers of lament in worship services. The effect was startling.

Grieving people came out of the shadows. Corporate lament validated their struggle. They expressed gratitude that their language was being spoken. They understood that church was a safe place for questions, struggles, and fears. But even more, lament communicated that church is a place where grief doesn't make you feel all alone. Lament deeply ministers to hurting people.

3. Communicating a Thin Theology

When the tone of preaching and worship is only celebratory, we accidentally send a message that real believers don't struggle. Even worse, some people get the impression that sorrow and doubts are only present in weak Christians.

Yet, a third of the Psalms wrestle with troubling circumstances. Lament wonders, out loud, why a good God doesn't do more. Every believer struggles with that question. Lament-lite churches send a message that it's not okay to "go there". Their theology just can't handle the reality of emotional pain.

4. Failing to Prepare People for Suffering

Brokenness is built into the fabric of our humanity. Hardship, disappointment, and pain will eventually enter a person's life. And the time to prepare for suffering is before it happens. Lament models what to do with strong and raw emotions. It validates our struggles while pointing

us to God.

Lament teaches us how to be real, but also how to trust. And if a church neglects lament, people will not be prepared for hardship when (not if) it comes. There is nothing wrong with being “positive and encouraging”. But if that’s the only tone in church, something’s missing. The balance of the Psalms, the number of hurting people, the depth of theology, and the necessity of preparing people for suffering create a need for a regular diet of lament.

Celebration certainly isn’t wrong, but with a consistent absence of lament, it’s incomplete. The Bible is full of lament for a reason. This minor-key song provides hope, and it creates a pathway to trust.

Lament is how you live between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God’s sovereignty. And it might surprise you how many people are on that journey. While grieving people need positive and encouraging words, they also need to know that the church is a place for questions, fears, and struggles. Lament is their song, and it would be wise—for all of us—to sing it a little more.

The Meaning and Purpose of the Justice of God

By D.A. Carson



When we suffer, which we will, there will often be

mystery. Will there also be faith? In Christian thought, faith is never naïve or gullible, but rather relies on the strength of its object. Faith that depends on a God, who is a cruel tyrant or cheap trickster, will be bitterly disappointed in the end.

When Christians think seriously about evil and suffering, one of the paramount reasons we're certain God can be trusted is because He sent His Son to suffer in our place. The One for whom we live knows what suffering is about—not merely in the way He knows everything, but by experience.

When we're convinced we're suffering unjustly, however, we may cry out for justice. We want God to be

just and exonerate us immediately; we want God to be fair and mete out suffering immediately to those who deserve it.

We Make Assumptions

The trouble with such justice and fairness, though, is that, if it were truly just and truly fair and as prompt as we demand, we would soon be begging for mercy, for love, for forgiveness—for anything but justice. For very often, what I really mean when I ask for justice is implicitly circumscribed by three assumptions—assumptions not always recognized:

- I want *this* justice to be dispensed immediately.
- I want justice in *this* instance, but not necessarily in *every* instance.
- I presuppose that in *this* instance I have grasped the situation correctly.

We need to examine these three assumptions. First, the Bible assures us that God is a just God, and that justice will be done in the end, and will be seen to be done. But when we urgently plead for justice, we usually mean something more than that. We mean we want vindication *now*!

Second, to ask for such instantaneous justice in *every* instance is inconceivable: it would too often find me on the wrong side, too often find me implicitly inviting my own condemnation. But justice instantaneously applied only when it favors me is *not* justice at all. Selective justice that favors one individual above another is simply another name for corruption. And no one wants a corrupt God.

And third, when I plead so passionately for justice, it's usually because I think I understand the situation pretty well. I wouldn't be quite so crass as actually to say I need to explain it to God, but that is pretty close to the way I act.

Someone might object that since the psalmist frequently appeals for justice, for vindication, it cannot be wrong to do so. And I agree, so long as those three hidden assumptions aren't surreptitiously operating to-

gether. For instance, if the psalmist—or any believer since then, for that matter—appeals to God for justice, not simply in this instance, but because God is a just God, the appeal is somewhat transformed. If such a believer also recognizes that the Lord’s timing is perfect, that unless the Lord extends His mercy we will all be consumed (after all, the psalmist asks for mercy more often than he asks for vindication), and that sometimes our cries for justice cannot be more than vague but intense appeals for help, precisely because we don’t understand what’s going on very well, then the nasty, hidden assumptions that frequently mar our cries for justice have largely been done away with.

We Demand Instant Gratification

Suppose God gave instant gratification for every good deed, every kind thought, every true word; and an instant jolt of pain for every malicious deed, every dirty thought, and every false word. Suppose the pleasure and pain were in strict proportion to the measure of goodness or badness God saw in us. What kind of world would result?

Many writers have asked this sort of question. They conclude that such a system would turn us into automata (much like robots). We wouldn’t join in worship because of the intrinsic worth of God, but because it gave us selfish pleasure. We wouldn’t refrain from lying because it’s wrong and abominated by the God we love, but because we wanted to avoid the next nasty jolt. We wouldn’t love our neighbor because our hearts had been transformed by the love of God, but because we preferred personal pleasure to personal pain.

I think if God were to institute such a world order, things would be far worse yet. God doesn’t look only on our external acts. He looks on our heart. Such a system of enforced and ruthlessly “just” discipline wouldn’t change our hearts. We’d be smoldering with resentment. Our obedience would be external and apathetic; our hearts and devotion would not be won over. The jolts might initially gain protestations of repentance, but they wouldn’t command our allegiance. And since God ex-

amines the heart, He'd be constantly administering the jolts. The world would become a searing pain; the world would become hell. Do you really want nothing but totally effective, instantaneous justice? Then go to hell.

We Assume a Standard

There is another factor we must frankly face. When we ask for justice, we presuppose some standard of justice. If the standards are God's, He has made those standards clear enough: the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We have returned to hell by another route.

We must be grateful God is a God of justice. If He weren't just, if there were no assurance justice would be served in the end, then the entire moral order would collapse (as it has in atheistic humanism). But we must be equally grateful that God is not only a God of justice. He is a God of love, of mercy, of compassion, of forgiveness.

We Receive Vindication

Nowhere is this character more effectively demonstrated than at the cross. At one level, this was the most unjust act—the least fair act—in all of history. He who was sinless became our sin offering; He who had never rebelled against His heavenly Father was brutally executed by rebels; He who had never known what it was *not* to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength was abandoned by God, prompting Him to cry out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”

And it was this act, this most “unfair” act, that satisfied divine justice, and brought sinful rebels like me to experience God's forgiveness, to taste the promise of an eternity of undeserved bliss.

Living in Light of God's Justice

By Michael Cooper



A few years ago, while I was working on my undergraduate degree, I was running late for an 8:30am Hebrew class. So, that morn-

ing, I ran out of the house, jumped in my car, and sped off to Dallas. As I was speeding in my little red Chevy Cobalt, I saw him and he saw me. The lights came on and he pulled me over. The police officer got me for 79 mph in a 65 mph zone. I had a few options because it was my first speeding violation so I took the plea deal, “deferred adjudication”. Basically the judge would “defer my sentence” if I fulfilled his requirements. He placed

“Paul argues that God’s righteousness/justice is revealed apart from the law, but is attested to by the Law and Prophets.”

me on probation for a few months, I paid a couple hundred dollars, and finally took defensive driving so that I wouldn't have a ticket on my record.

This is an example of the human justice system. You break the law and you pay. When speaking about God's attributes, Scripture reveals that He operates according to His righteous standard when

He administers His divine justice. Thus when one thinks about God, one must acknowledge that God is righteous. In our English language we have two different words: “righteousness” and “justice”. However, in both Greek and Hebrew there is only one word group behind these two English words.[1] Speaking then in systematic terms when you read Scripture, righteousness and justice is speaking about one attribute of God.

Defining God's Justice

It is helpful at this point to provide two categories when speaking about God's justice. The justice of God is often viewed as a retributive act, meaning God—because He is righteous—must act to punish those who sin against His character, as revealed in the Law. In this case, God exercises His justice. Yet it is also important not to miss the fact that God's justice is *restorative* as well. For example, throughout the Psalms, when God acts in His justice, He is acting to save according to His covenant love and faithfulness (Psalm 9:7; 33:5; 146:7). As God acts to exercise His justice, He is doing so to set the wrongs of this world to right. The result

of His justice in this world is *shalom*. The Old Testament reveals that God's justice is retributive and restorative. He acts in His justice to punish those who transgress Law, but also to restore peace.

The Pinnacle of God's Justice

In the New Testament we see clearly these two aspects of God's justice achieved in the cross of Jesus. Paul argues in Romans 3:21-26 that God's justice is revealed fully in the death of Jesus. Luther called this paragraph, "*The chief point, and the very center place of the epistle, and of the whole Bible.*"

Paul argues that God's righteousness/justice is revealed apart from the law, but is attested to by the Law and Prophets. This means that God's righteousness/justice is revealed apart from the Law, but remains consistent with the demands and teaching of the Law. It is important here to understand both the restorative and retributive aspects of God's righteousness. Paul states that the righteousness/justice of God is climaxed in the death of Jesus, in which sinful humans can be justified (e.g. "set right"). The way God's faithfulness and salvation is displayed in the world is through the saving act of Jesus Christ, which is received by us through faith. When we trust in the redemptive act of Jesus, God's faithfulness is displayed. This means that God's retributive and restorative justice is displayed in the cross of Jesus. Since we have sinned, we deserve God's justice. Jesus was punished in the place of sinners (retributive), but also through His death sinners are restored back to God.

Here is the dilemma: if God just simply forgave sinners His justice is called into question. If God simply punished sinners His mercy is called into question. Through the Cross, God can remain just by condemning sin, and demonstrates mercy by forgiving sinners who trust in His Son. It is through the cross that God remains just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. The justice of God is now defined by the cross of Jesus; the One who is punished for sinners and restores

sinners to God.

Towards an Eschatological View of God's Justice

The injustice in the world is evidence that something is messed up. The injustices in this world are a result of our individual rebellion. Scripture reveals that this present evil age is moving towards the *telos*, where God's retributive and restorative justice is once and for all revealed. At its apex, the book of Revelation presents a vision of the New Creation replacing the Old Creation. This is an eschatological reality, where God's justice brings about *shalom* through the marriage of Heaven and Earth. The ungodly, Death, Hades, and the Dragon are cast into the lake of fire, while the resurrected saints enter into God's peaceable kingdom. The punishment of the ungodly, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of the New Jerusalem are God's final acts of retributive and restorative justice. The revelation of God's restorative justice is located in the resurrection. The resurrection is God's final victory for those who have faith in Jesus, whereby He vindicates them by triumphing over death itself. Death is therefore judged and God's justice is revealed. Michael Bird states, *"Those who denied justice and inflicted injustices receive justice at the end. God's people rejoice, the nations worship God, and the entire universe gives God glory."*^[2]

"We can work for justice in this world as a part of our preparations for the next world."

The Church as a Billboard of God's Justice

The Church, then, as it anticipates this eschatological reality, lives in the present as a signpost of God's justice. Michael Bird again explains: *"The church is meant to be the billboard for the world to come...The life of the church is to hint at what the world would look like in a redeemed state: righteousness flowing like a river, lions lying down with lambs, swords beaten into plowshares, and grace and mercy*

mingling together. We can work for justice in this world as part of our preparations for the next world.”[3]

Practically, members of a local church have experienced the justice of God in the person and finished work of Jesus. As a result we are called to live out God's justice in this world as a preview for the next. The way in which God's justice impacts our individual lives, through the death of Jesus, ought to now shape the way we live in this world in light of God's eschatological justice. Whether it is calling those who commit injustice in this world to repent, or treating our neighbors the way we want to be treated, God's justice (as revealed in the person of Jesus) must be displayed through the Church.

References:

- [1] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 204.
- [2] Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 307.
- [3] *Ibid*, 308.

The Patience of God: A Neglected Attribute of God

By Mark Jones



God's patience is, as far as sinners are concerned, a highly treasured attribute among his people: *"But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and*

abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them” (Nehemiah 9:17). But the patience of God does not today receive the emphasis it should, especially in preaching. In His mercy, God has a certain disposition toward sinful creatures, but His patience has in view the delaying or tempering of the punishment that sinners deserve.

Edward Leigh understands the patience of God as that attribute *“whereby he bears the reproach of sinners and defers their punishments; or it is the most bountiful will of God, whereby he does long bear with sin which he hates, sparing sinners, not minding their destruction, but that he might bring them to repentance.”* This view, then, presents a twofold understanding of God’s patience, either deferred punishment in itself or deferred punishment issuing forth in redemption.

Divine patience must not be understood as God suffering (i.e., being passible). This does not contradict the fact that God died (suffered) on the cross. This statement holds true in a sense only in reference to the concrete person of Christ (in the union of His divine and human natures) and not to God in an abstract or general manner, as we are discussing here. In brief, Reformed theologians have generally understood God’s patience as that attribute whereby He delays the execution of His judgment in its fullest extent.

Patience and God's Other Attributes

The Puritan, Stephen Charnock Charnock, elaborates: *“[Patience] signifies a willingness to defer, and an unwillingness to pour forth wrath upon sinful creatures; [God] moderates his provoked justice, and forbears to revenge the injuries he daily meets with in the world.”* Charnock deftly brings God’s attributes together harmoniously as the logical outcome of His essential simplicity: *“Goodness sets God upon the exercise of patience, and patience sets many a sinner on running into the arms of mercy.”* Mercy and patience are necessarily and closely tied together in God’s dealings with sinful humanity.

Having said that, God’s patience does not extend to fallen angels. Though they are spared their ultimate punishment for a time, they do not

have an opportunity to repent and be forgiven. God does not show mercy to them in the sense that he does to fallen sinners. Thus, mercy and patience are necessarily and closely tied together in God's dealings with sinful humanity.

Exercising Power over Himself

God's patience does not make Him weak, and His slowness to anger (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8) does not make Him incapable of anger. When promises are delayed, there resides no slackness in God. Likewise, we must not view God as a pushover just because He temporarily withholds punishments. God has complete knowledge of the thoughts and actions of all creatures all at once in His eternally present eye. Just because He

does not now exercise power to punish does not imply that He lacks such power to do so. Instead, His complete power and exhaustive knowledge explain why God can exercise such patience such as in Nahum 1:3: *The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*



God does not need to be in a rush. His patience is His power, and when He exercises the former, He shows more of the latter than He would if He created a thousand worlds. How? Creating worlds shows a power over creatures and matter; exercising patience shows power over Himself. We often think of God's patience in relation to His goodness and mercy, and rightly so: *"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"* (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15). But His power, knowledge, and eternity, for example, are also vital components of divine patience.

The Reason We Don't Feel the Weight of Our Sin

By Dane Ortlund



It is probably impossible to conceive of the horror of Hell and of the *ferocity* of retributive justice and righteous

wrath that will sweep over those found on the last day to be out of Christ. Perhaps a word like ferocity here makes it sound as if God's wrath will be uncontrolled or blown out of proportion. But there is nothing uncontrolled or disproportionate in God.

The reason we feel as if divine wrath can easily be overstated is that we do not feel the true weight of sin. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, reflecting on this, said:

You will never make yourself feel that you are a sinner, because there is a mechanism in you as a result of sin that will always be defending you against every accusation. We are all on very good terms with ourselves, and we can always put up a good case for ourselves. Even if we try to make ourselves feel that we are sinners, we will never do it. There is only one way to know that we are sinners, and that is to have some dim, glimmering conception of God.¹

In other words, we don't feel the weight of our sin because of...our sin. If we saw with deeper clarity just how insidious and pervasive and revolting sin is—and, as Lloyd-Jones suggests above, we can see this only as we see the beauty and holiness of God—we would know that human evil calls for an intensity of judgment of divine proportion. Even someone with such a profound sense of

the loving heart of Christ as Thomas Goodwin has no trouble likewise asserting that if *"His wrath against sin was the fire,"* then *"all earthly bellows would...not have been able to make the furnace hot enough."*²

And just as we can hardly fathom the divine ferocity awaiting those out of Christ, it is equally true that we can hardly fathom the divine tenderness already resting now on those in Christ. We might feel a little bashful, uncomfortable, or even guilty in emphasizing God's tenderness as intensively as His wrath. But the Bible feels no such discomfort. Consider Romans

"We might feel a little bashful, uncomfortable, or even guilty emphasizing God's tenderness as intensively as His wrath..."

5:20: “*Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*” The guilt and shame of those in Christ is ever outstripped by His abounding grace. When we feel as if our thoughts, words, and deeds are diminishing God’s grace toward us, those sins and failures are in fact causing it to surge forward all the more. The guilt and shame of those in Christ is ever outstripped by His abounding grace.

But let’s press into this inviolable principle in the economy of the gospel. We’ve been speaking of God’s grace and the way it is drawn out, always to match abundantly the need for it. But there is, purely speaking, no such “thing” as grace. That’s Roman Catholic theology, in which grace is a kind of stockpiled treasure that can be accessed through various carefully controlled means. But the grace of God comes to us no more and no less than Jesus Christ comes to us. In the biblical gospel, we are not given a thing; we are given a person.

“When we sin, the very heart of Christ is drawn out to us.”

Let’s drill in even deeper. What are we given when we are given Christ? More acutely, if we can speak of grace as always being drawn out in our sin, but as coming to us only in Christ Himself, then we are confronted with a vital aspect of who Christ is—a biblical aspect that the Puritans loved to reflect on: *when we sin, the very heart of Christ is drawn out to us.*

This may cause some of us to cringe. If Christ is perfectly holy, must He not necessarily withdraw from sin? Here we enter into one of the profoundest mysteries of who God in Christ is. Not only are holiness and sinfulness mutually exclusive, but Christ, being perfectly holy, knows and feels the horror and weight of sin more deeply than any of us sinful ones could—just as the purer a man’s heart, the more horrified he is at the thought of his neighbors being robbed or abused. Conversely, the more corrupt one’s heart, the less one is affected by the evils all around.

Carry the analogy a little further. Just as the purer a heart, the more horrified at evil, so also the purer a heart, the more it is naturally drawn out to help, relieve, protect, and comfort; whereas a corrupt heart sits still, indifferent. So with Christ—His holiness finds evil revolting, more revolting than any of us ever could feel. But it is that very holiness that also draws His heart out to help, relieve, protect, and comfort. Again we must bear in mind the all-crucial distinction between those not in Christ and those in Christ. For those who do not belong to Him, sins evoke holy wrath. How could a morally serious God respond otherwise? But to those who do belong to Him, sins evoke holy longing, holy love, and holy tenderness. In the key text on divine holiness (Isaiah 6:1–8), that holiness (6:3) flows naturally and immediately into forgiveness and mercy (6:7)."

Here's how Goodwin explains it as he brings to a close his book, *The Heart of Christ*, with a series of concluding applications. Reflecting on the "consolations and encouragements" that are ours in light of Christ Himself feeling pain in our own sins and sufferings, he writes:

There is comfort concerning such infirmities, in that your very sins move him to pity more than to anger... For he suffers with us under our infirmities, and by infirmities are meant sins, as well as other miseries... Christ takes part with you, and is so far from being provoked against you, as all his anger is turned upon your sin to ruin it; yes, his pity is increased the more towards you, even as the heart of a father is to a child that has some loathsome disease, or as one is to a member of his body that has leprosy, he hates not the member, for it is his flesh, but the disease, and that provokes him to pity the part affected the more. What shall not make for us,³ when our sins, that are both against Christ and us, shall be turned as motives to

him to pity us the more?

The greater the misery is, the more is the pity when the party is beloved. Now of all miseries, sin is the greatest; and while you look at it as such, Christ will look upon it as such also. And he, loving your persons, and hating only the sin, his hatred shall all fall, and that only upon the sin, to free you of it by its ruin and destruction, but his affections shall be the more drawn out to you; and this as much when you lie under sin as under any other affliction. Therefore fear not.⁴

What is Goodwin saying here? If you are part of Christ's own body, your sins evoke His deepest heart, His compassion and pity. He "takes part with you"—that is, He's on your side. He sides with you against your sin, not against you *because* of your sin. He hates sin. But He loves you. We understand this, says Goodwin, when we consider the hatred a father has against a terrible disease afflicting his child—the father hates the disease while loving the child. Indeed, at some level the presence of the disease draws out his heart to his child all the more.

This is not to ignore the disciplinary side of Christ's care for His people. The Bible clearly teaches that our sins draw forth the discipline of Christ (Hebrews 12:1-11). He would not truly love us if that were not true. But even this is a reflection of His great heart for us. When a body part has been injured, it requires the pain and labor of physical therapy. But that physical therapy is not punitive; it is intended to bring healing. It is out of care for that limb that the physical therapy is assigned.

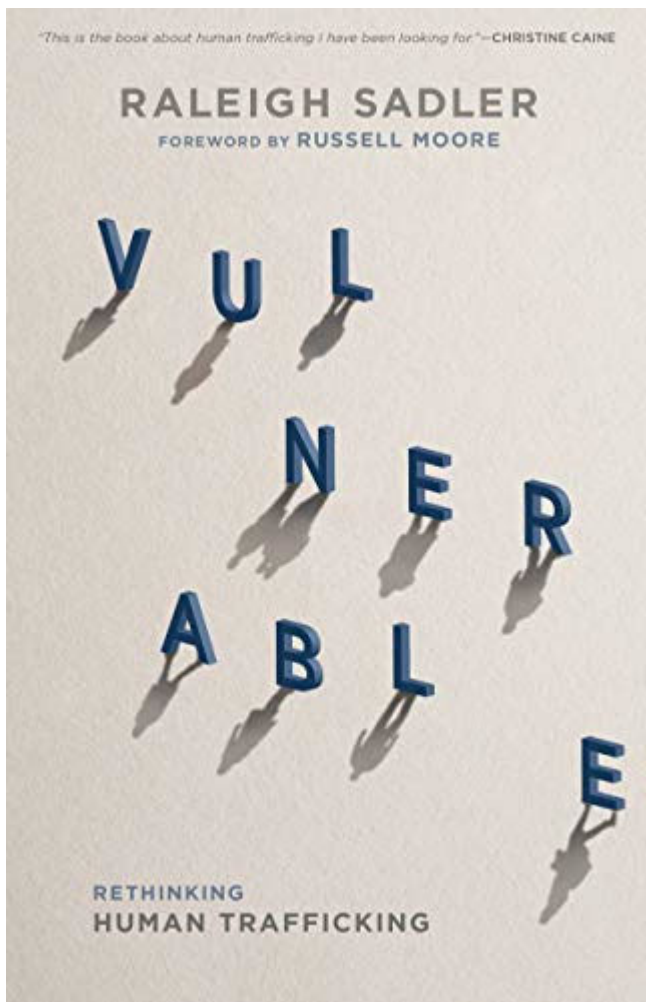
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1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Seeking the Face of God: Nine Reflections on the Psalm* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 34.
2. Thomas Goodwin, *Of Gospel Holiness in the Heart and Life, in The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 7:194.
3. That is, what shall not be turned to our advantage and welfare.
4. Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011), 155–56.

A Book Review:

Vulnerable: Rethinking Human Trafficking

Reviewed By David Steele



“Preach the gospel—and if necessary use words.” This pithy quote by St. Francis of Assisi has captured the hearts and minds of many. The sentiment sounds right and may even feel right, but fails in the final analysis to do justice to the gospel. Yes, the gospel is meant to be lived. Yes, the gospel makes a difference in the lives of others and demands sacrificial service. But St. Francis falls short in the matter of proclamation. We may serve people and love them, but if we fail to proclaim the message of the good news, the “gospel” loses its efficacy. Raleigh Sadler’s book, *Vulnerable: Rethinking Human Trafficking*, works hard to maintain a commitment to proclaiming the gospel *and* reaching people, by engaging them at every lev-

el. The heart of the author is unveiled at the beginning of the book and serves as the general theme of the book: *“Jesus Christ motivates vulnerable people, like you and me, to love other vulnerable people for us, to the point of death.”* Christ’s vulnerability, then, serves as a supreme example for His people and motivates them to love others.

Sadler exposes the trafficking industry and calls Christians to make a difference. His ultimate aim is to eradicate all human trafficking. *Vulnerable* is filled with stories of people who have been marginalized, manipulated, or trafficked in some way. The interview with Michael Horton is the highlight of the book, as Dr. Horton weighs in on the subject of trafficking. *“I’m not a co-redeemer with Christ when I’m opposing human trafficking; rather I’m witnessing to that redemption that Christ has already won, and will one day consummate when he returns bodily,”* writes Horton. Such a perspective provides a keen biblical balance that remains obedient to Scripture, but also steers clear from any liberalizing proclivities of the so-called “social justice” movement.

Vulnerable: Rethinking Human Trafficking is not an easy book to read. The pain and suffering that the author reveals, however, is a reality that Christians must face. The only answer is the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

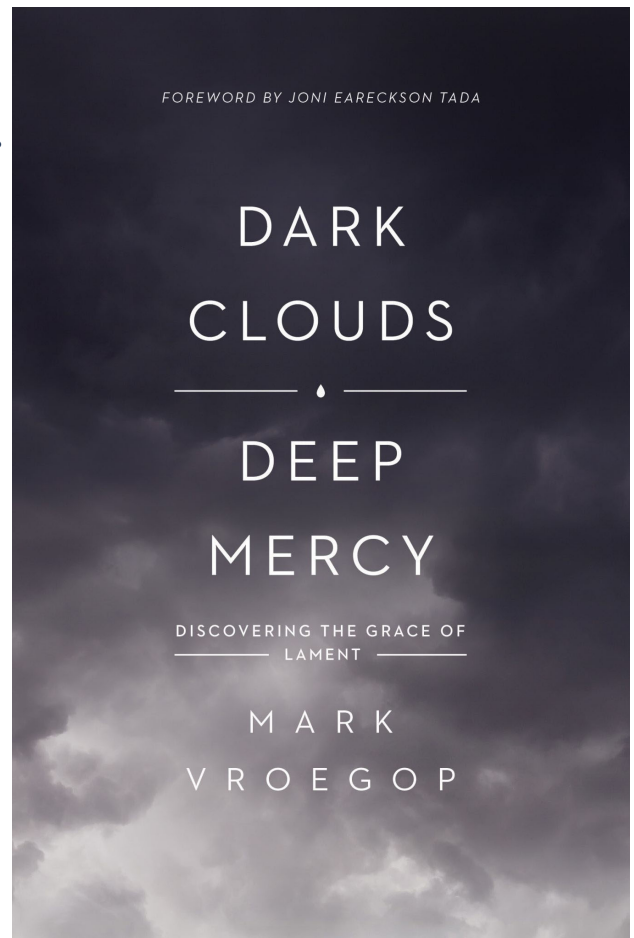
A Book Review:

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament

Reviewed By David Steele

Life is a series of events that is filled with moments of intense joy and seasons of pain and suffering. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* by Mark Vroegop is concerned with the latter. The author is acutely aware that people who live in a fallen world will inevitably face what William Cowper refers to as the “dark clouds of Providence.”

There have been a few notable contributions in recent days that address the subject of suffering. Tim Keller’s, *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering* and Paul David Tripp’s, *Suffering* are two examples of books that tackle the subject of suffering, maintaining faithfulness to Scripture



and offering readers a glimpse of hope through the prism of Scripture. Like the aforementioned books, Vroegrop wrestles with subject. But *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* is unique in that it focuses on the subject of lament.

“The aim of this book,” writes Vroegrop, “is to help you discover the grace of lament—to encourage you to find deep mercy in the dark clouds.” His mission is accomplished in three parts:

- Part 1: Learning to Lament/Psalms of Lament
- Part 2: Learning from Lament: Lamentations
- Part 3: Living with Lament: Personal and Community Applications

The author defines lament as “a prayer that leads to trust”. Such a prayer leads to two crucial questions:

1. “Where are you, God?”

2. “If you love me, why is this happening?”

Lament, then, is “the transition between pain and promise”. With this solid foundation, the author shows how Christians are both commended and commanded to make lament to God.

Ultimately, painful seasons of life can be “platforms for worship”. These seasons lead the people of God to trust Him fully and deeply.

“Trust,” writes Vroegrop, “is believing what you know to be true even though the facts of suffering might call that belief into question. Lament keeps us turning toward trust by giving us language to step into the wilderness between our painful reality and our hopeful longings.”

I found *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* to be an immensely helpful and practical book. This book gives believers permission to grieve—even wail and mourn. But after grief comes another day, which leads to worship.

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy is intimately tied to the Word of God and directs the people of God to the pathway that leads to Him. Indeed, as the author notes, “Lament is the language of those stumbling in their

journey to find mercy in dark clouds.” Five takeaways are offered as a means of encouragement:

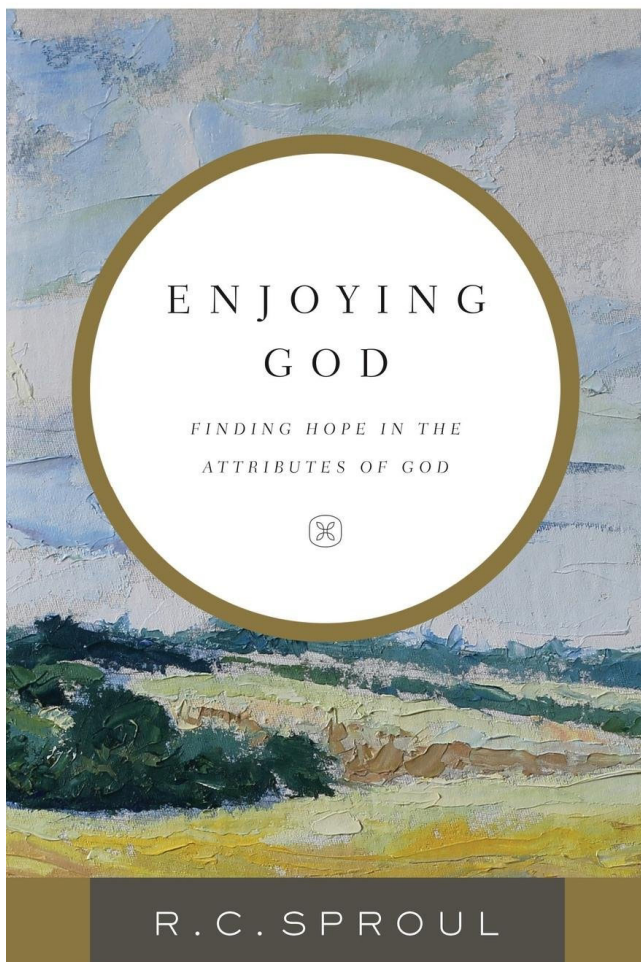
- “Lament is how we tunnel our way to truth.”
- “Lament is how we experience grace no matter what we face.”
- “Lament gives us hope because it gives us a glimpse of truth.”
- “Lament vocalizes a desire for justice that is unfulfilled.”
- “In dark clouds, there is deep mercy as we discover the grace of lament.”

Readers will truly discover how to apply the grace of God in this well-written and deeply God-honoring book.

A Book Review:

Enjoying God: Finding Hope in the Attributes of God

Reviewed By David Steele



***Enjoying God: Finding Hope in the Attributes of God* by R.C. Sproul is written with the layman in**

mind. The author intentionally sets unnecessary theological jargon aside and aims for hearts and minds of everyday people. The end result is a biblical vision of God, which draws readers into a profound sense of worship and awe.

The focus in *Enjoying God* is theology proper, which sets forth a sampling of God's attributes including omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, truth, immutability, justice, and love to name a few. Eleven chapters are devoted to exploring God's attributes. Each chapter includes a brief explanation linked to the pertinent biblical passages.

I cannot think of any living author, outside of R.C. Sproul, who has so revolutionized my view of God. My first introduction to Dr. Sproul came in 1988 as I devoured his best-selling book, *Chosen by God*. Those were formative years, where the theological foundations in my life began to slowly take shape. Since then, I have consumed every book I can find by Dr. Sproul. **He consistently points to a God who is holy, holy, holy.** And he faithfully exposit the Bible in a way that exalts the living God.



Recommended Reading on Divine Justice

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of divine justice and how it impacts the life of the Christian and ministry. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that—hopefully—readers of this issue of *Theology for Life* will grow in their understanding of God's justice so they can grow in His grace.

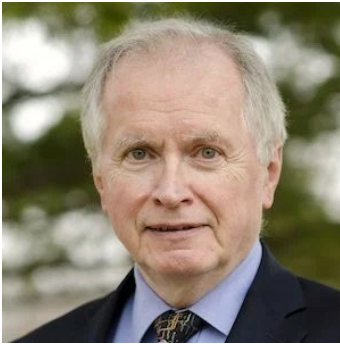
If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

- *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop
- *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott
- *Pierced for Our Transgressions* by Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach
- *It is Well* by Mark Dever and Michael Lawrence.
- *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* by J.I. Packer and Mark Dever

I hope you find these as helpful in your walk with the Lord as I have.

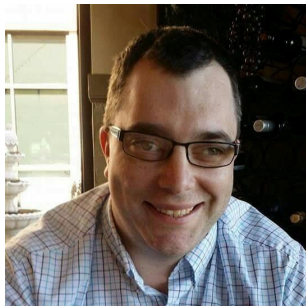
In Christ Alone,
Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

About the Authors:



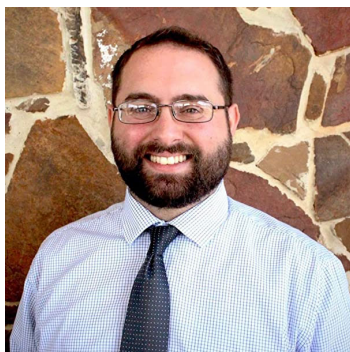
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D.A. Carson is emeritus professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and founder and theologian-at-large of The Gospel Coalition. He has edited and authored numerous books. He and his wife, Joy, have two children.



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David Schrock is married to a lovely woman named Wendy. He is a father of three energetic boys—Titus, Silas, and Cohen. He is currently Pastor of Preaching and Theology at Occoquan Bible Church (Woodbridge, Virginia). Associate Fellow for the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission.



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