

Fanny Crosby: The 19th Century Wonder Woman

I admit that I have not seen the new Wonder Woman movie yet, but I have seen a viral video in which it inspired a brave young lass to dress up...as something...and attempt all manner of swordplay with a toy sword and awkward acrobatics. I have also read lots of reviews of Wonder Woman; you can read Phill Lytle's excellent review right [here](#). While I fully intend to see Wonder Wonder, all the hubbub has put me in mind of an actual and probably far greater Wonder Woman of days gone by. While Wonder Woman herself is a daughter of Zeus, I am referring to a daughter of the one true God in heaven. I refer to no other than one of the greatest hymnists who has ever lived: Fanny Crosby. Fanny is mainly known by history as a great blind hymnist, but it might be that she would not want to be remembered for only her hymn writing. She regarded this as only part of her life and ministry, but certainly not all of it. And she was right to think that; her life and ministry included much more. During her life in addition to her status as The Queen of Gospel Music, she would serve as a teacher of the blind, a much in demand public speaker, and a full time minister among the homeless.

The Early Years

Crosby was born on March 24, 1820 in Southeast Putnam County, New York, in a small community called Gayville. About six weeks after she was born Crosby caught a bad cold. In the absence of the community doctor, a well-meaning neighbor stepped in claiming to have medical knowledge and know-how. He applied hot poultices (wet washcloths) to Fanny's eyes in a misguided attempt to draw out the infection. The man succeeded only in permanently blinding her. (At this time her parents didn't know it was permanent and fully believed her sight would return after a time.)

When Fanny was almost one her father John Crosby died. That is when Fanny and her mother Mercy moved in with Fanny's grandmother, Eunice Crosby. Eunice Crosby would do much of the mothering of Fanny until she was five. During this time she did everything she could to strengthen her granddaughter's powers of memory and to help her see the world without eyes. As an adult, Fanny would recall how "Grandma...brought the Bible to me, and me to the Bible. The stories of the Holy Book came from her lips and entered my heart and took deep root there" (This is My Story, This is My Song, Fanny Crosby).

The Formative Years

When Fanny was about five her mother took her to New York to see Dr. Valentine Mott, a famous eye doctor. After inspecting Fanny, he informed Mrs. Crosby her daughter would never see again. This devastated Mrs. Crosby. However, Fanny herself was secretly relieved. She would never be able to see her blindness as anything but a gift from God.

Shortly after this disappointing visit Fanny's mother acquired a job in North Salem, Westchester County just south of Gayville. They still lived close enough to Gayville that Eunice Crosby was able to visit several times a week, but when Fanny was eight or nine they moved again after her mother landed a job in Ridgefield, Connecticut. This was much too far away for her grandmother to come visit all the time.

During these years, God had another kind caretaker took Eunice Crosby's place in Fanny's spiritual and mental education. We know this goodly individual only as Mrs. Hawley. Under Mrs. Hawley's care by ten years of age Fanny could recite by memory the Pentateuch, Proverbs, the four Gospels, numerous poems, and portions of a number of books. Her mental library would only grow as she got older. Eventually, she did not have to have someone read the Bible to her; she could just recite any passage she wanted. Fanny never thought this an extraordinary feat. She sincerely believed that a blind person could do

everything a person with sight could do—and sometimes even better. In one of her autobiographies she says, “It has always been my favorite theory that the blind can accomplish nearly everything that may be done by those who can see. Do not think that those deprived of physical vision are shut out from the best that earth has to offer her children” (Fanny Crosby, *Memories of Eighty Years*).

From an early age she was developing an extraordinarily descriptive mind and a keen writing ability. She wrote her very first poem when she was eight. When she was in her teens she submitted works of poetry to a nearby paper. This paper was published by the soon to be famous P.T. Barnum. It was also during these formative Ridgefield years that Fanny’s desire for formal education began to grow.

The Student Years

In 1834 Fanny and her mom left Ridgefield and returned to Westchester County. In November of that same year they first saw an advertisement for the New York Institution for the Blind. On March 3, 1835, Fanny set off for New York with a traveling companion to enter the institute. After enrolling in and beginning attendance of the school, Crosby quickly became known among the faculty, staff, and student body for her poetry. It was during these early student years that she first became well respected among the literary community of New York and in demand for her poetry skills.

A superintendent of the school named Mr. Jones foresaw the danger of this still young student being ruined by vanity from all the high praise. He therefore cautioned her against letting this vanity get the best of her. At the same time he commanded her to not write poetry for the next three months. He did this partly to temper her growing vanity and partly to test her commitment to writing poetry. After proving herself (and learning to temper her vanity) she was encouraged to write to her heart’s content. This is when a literary mentor

named Hamilton Murray stepped in. Murray was a member of the Board of Managers of the institution who had great writing sensibilities and skill. He took her under his wing and taught her to write better. With his guidance, Crosby was able to branch out into other areas of writing. For instance, with his help she put her mind to writing poetry for campaigns and other political events.

The Teaching Years

In 1843, Fanny graduated from the institute. During that same year she became a teacher there. It was also during that same year that her health began to decline somewhat. Nevertheless, she still took a number of students to on planned trip to Washington D.C. While there, she recited some of her poetry to the politicians. This trip to Washington was such a success that Crosby would later take a second group of students to the U.S. capitol.

By 1845, she was gradually getting more and more into song lyric writing. During that year a man named George F. Roots came to the school to teach music. In 1853, the two composed a cantata called "The Flower Queen."

Fanny was also began publishing books of poetry during these teaching years. In 1844 she published her first official book of poems: "The Blind Girl and Other Poems." This book also contained her very first hymn which she called "An Evening Hymn." In 1851, she would publish another book of poetry called "Monterey and Other Poems."

Some really big events happened in Fanny's life in between these two books, in 1848 and 1849, the land was stricken by cholera. Like thousands throughout the country, many of the students died. It was so bad that during August of 1848, Crosby was ordered to retire to the country so she too would not get sick. This was not an uncommon practice at this time; many city dwellers were departing the city to avoid the close quarters that fostered the disease. She did retire to the

country, and it was not only a salvation for her physical self; it was a life changer for her spiritual self as well. During her time away from the institution, she received a full knowledge of Jesus Christ. This was not something that had just happened all of a sudden. Several years earlier in 1845 she had first met her spiritual mentor, Theodore Camp. He was instrumental in bringing her to Jesus on November 20, 1850 at a revival at the Broadway Methodist Tabernacle.

The Latter Years

Fanny met her future husband, Alexander Van Alstyne when he was a student at the institution in 1855. (He was 11 years younger than her.) After he graduated from school, he became a teacher and became engaged to Fanny. Three years later the couple resigned and very shortly thereafter got married.

Little is known regarding their married life, but there are three facts that are pretty clear: First, although very amicable and still doing some things together, they lived apart and had separate lives for the majority of their married life. Second, a few years after they were married they had a daughter who only lived for less than a day. Third, they would remain married until he died on July 18, 1902.

In 1858, the year she had resigned from teaching and gotten married, the stage of her hymnist career was set. During this year Fanny published "A Wreath of Columbia's Flowers." This would be her final book of poems before starting to write hymns. This next phase of her writing career was instigated in December 1863 after she was asked to write a hymn for the Dutch Reformed Church. She did so well on this project that an arrangement was made for her to meet the famous hymnist William B. Bradbury on February 2 of the next year. A historic years-long collaboration ensued. It was not long afterward that she became known to evangelists and pastors on both sides of the Atlantic as Aunt Fanny and the Queen of Gospel Music. Many of these ministers commonly used her work in altar calls.

The world famous evangelistic team Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey utilized her songs in this way throughout the 1870s and onward. The greatness of Fanny's hymns comes from their ability to be understood and to touch the lives of ordinary people.

By the time she died in 1915, Fanny would pen at least 9,000 hymns. Although she mostly signed them with her given name, she wrote a lot using pseudonyms. She is believed to have used almost 200.

It was also during these years of growing worldwide fame that Fanny became a much in demand public speaker at churches and charitable organizations. It is said that she was exceptionally gifted at this role.

The Last Years

By the 1880s, Fanny was both living and working in the slums. Her work in the missions here gave her the opportunity to evangelize common people on a personal basis.

At the same time she kept busy with her writing life. During these last years, she would write two autobiographies: "Fanny Crosby's Life-Story, By Herself" in 1903 (out of print) and "Memories of Eighty Years" (retitled Fanny J. Crosby: An Autobiography) in 1906.

Fanny died at the age of 95 sometime during the night between February 11 and 12, 1915. On her tombstone are the words, "She hath done what she could" (from Mark 14:8). Of the thousands of hymns Fanny penned, most have been forgotten, but those used in churches around the globe throughout the decades have been priceless tools in touching lives for Jesus and continue to be so. Fanny Crosby was a true Wonder Woman for the cause of Christ—a Wonder Woman for the ages.

When God Hates the Sinner

“Our job is not to love the sinner, hate their sin, but to love the sinner and hate our sin.” (Rosaria Butterfield)



A couple of times on here I have mentioned that I do not like to communicate in cliches, especially Christian ones. The social media fad of posting memes with eight words that neatly and simplistically sum up complex political and theological topics unnerves me.

So I'm not inclined to say things like "Love the sinner, hate the sin". I'm not alone on this. Some people really do not like this phrase. But what makes this Christian cliché so unique is that people in two diametrically opposite camps have condemned it.

On one hand, there are people who feel completely ostracized by Christians and their churches. They have spoken out vehemently against this platitude because, from what I can tell, the words ring hollow and self-righteously judgmental. To them, Christians have substituted loving and humble

relationship for an empty, Sunday School answer theology. The message is shouted from a distance, focused on hatred and does not square with their reality. Hating their sin is, in essence, hating them. But I confess I am still quite ignorant in this area and I cannot fully represent other people's views.

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An Exegetical Fallacy

Yet as interesting, I have read conservative Christian scholars speak out against this phrase as well. Most notably, D. A. Carson, a professor of Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School says:

One evangelical cliché has it that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. There is a small element of truth in these words: God has nothing but hate for the sin, but this cannot be said with respect to how God sees the sinner. Nevertheless the cliché is false on the face of it, and should be abandoned. Fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone, the psalmists state that God hates the sinner, that His wrath is on the liar, and so forth. In the Bible the wrath of God rests on both the sin (Rom. 1:18-23) and the sinner (1:24-32; 2:5; John 3:36). [1. Carson, D. A. "God's Love and God's Wrath." Bibliotheca Sacra 156 (October-December 1999): 387-398.]

Let me make note that in Carson's explanation, the point is how *God* sees the sin and the sinner. The cliché is often used to how *Christians* are supposed to react to both. I am not quite as concerned with how accurate it is in either case as much as I care about understanding and listening to people and

trying to communicate with genuineness and theology that is well-developed and nuanced. The Bible explained in context—and not pithy clichés—is the only thing I think should offend people. So its ‘biblicalness’ is not my focus here.

Instead I want to speak to Dr. Carson’s point about God hating the sinner. I’ve read Psalm 5:5 and 11:5 many times over the years and I cannot get past the mention of God hating people and not merely sin. Same for Proverbs 6:19. And for Esau in Malachi and Romans. And so on.

So there must be some sense in which God hates sinners. At the same time, I don’t think we can deny that God loves all sinners in that he wants relationship with them[2. 2 Peter 3:9] and gives them some measure of blessing[3. Matthew 5:45], among other nuanced definitions of love. We cannot state succinctly and unilaterally that “God hates sinners”. Yet the verses in Psalms and Proverbs and about Esau have to mean something that keeps us just as honestly from saying “God doesn’t hate sinners.” Language is often too multi-dimensional and the Bible too often creates conflicting tensions in logic for us to try to capture this in meme or cliché form.

God still pursues and God still blesses but unless a person comes with the humility of a child, God rejects. In that sense, he ‘hates’.

Hate As Volition, Not Feeling

I think the resolution of the tension comes from understanding that ‘hate’ in both the OT and the NT means that God ‘rejects in relationship’. Covenant relationship with God is a relational standing, like marriage[4. The parallels are so deep, the Hebrew word for ‘hate’ in Malachi has ‘divorce’ in its semantic range.]. God wants relationship with everyone, but he only welcomes those in who are humble enough to receive

Him by grace instead of trying to earn it by works, intelligence or philosophy. God still pursues and God still blesses but unless a person comes with the humility of a child, God rejects. In that sense, he 'hates'.

Which brings me to my point. In Amos 6:8, God says, "*I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds...*" The book of Amos was written in part to express the idea that God hates pride from all peoples and will execute judgment impartially. Because pride prevents the relationship. Yet even his own people in covenant were still guilty of it. It is here that God does love the sinner and hate the sin. But to be like God, we must hate ours as well.

I'm So Humbled By How Great I Am

All the time on social media I see Christians brag on their accomplishments. From education to fitness to sports to serving the poor. I suppose there is something detached from reality about it on the internet that we feel comfortable doing it. I once noticed a comment from a professing Christ follower on my wife's Facebook that said she had lost X amount of weight and that she was "so proud of herself".

How easily we hate the acts of terrorists who shed innocent blood yet sit in comfortable community with those who create disunity in churches. God absolutely hates both.

If the same person had put on Facebook that she left a child in a hot car, the reaction would have been swift and harsh. Instead, people liked the status and praised her. Let me be clear: God hates pride as much as he does the worst things humans are capable of. God finds human pride as gross, disgusting and reprehensible as the worst human acts of evil imaginable, including abuse and murder. How easily we hate the acts of terrorists who shed innocent blood yet sit in comfortable community with those with proud eyes who create

disunity in churches! God absolutely hates both[5. Proverbs 6:16-19].

I confess I have used social media to pridefully promote myself so I'm not casting stones here. But make no mistake, Amos 6 tells us clearly that Israel had puffed herself up due to her accomplishments and feelings of superiority over others. And God expressed passionately that he hated it. He still does. God clearly says, *"Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth"* and teaches, *"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do, to be honored by others. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret."* Yet social media is often a breeding ground for violating these verses. Often in clever, proud-of-my-humility ways.

Why He Must Increase and We Decrease

I do not think biblically it is wrong for a Christian to ever talk about what they have accomplished. But there must be a full and significant expression of praise to God along with it. This is not something to be done for show; God says in Amos 5:21 that he hates that too. He alone truly knows the difference. He knows if it comes from a heart that understands what John the Baptist meant when he said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from Heaven." But before others, we must be satisfied with our good deeds being private, or else exalt God far more than the accomplishment. God will not share his glory with another. And he hates it when we try.

I'll close with something written by Isaac Watts over 300 years ago that we desperately need to meditate on today:

*Now for the loss I bear his name
What was my gain I count my loss
My former pride I call my shame*

And nail my glory to His cross

*The best obedience of my hands
Dares not appear before Thy throne;
But faith can answer Thy demands,
By pleading what my Lord has done.*

*No more my God
I boast no more*

Holiness, Hypocrisy, and Chicago Traffic

“They just go round and round! And round and round!”

I’ve lived in Chicago 15 years now. I had a car from 2002 to 2008 and then again after I got married in 2015. I don’t know what happened in the intervening years, but after I started driving regularly again two years ago, I sensed that I was far more impatient than I was the first few years I lived here. “Impatient” is really too nice a word. I am angry. Often.

People are everywhere. Things move slowly. One way streets mean backtracking. There is endless road construction. Driving here is sometimes like playing a video game: “You avoided that guy backing out without looking! +100!” “You didn’t see that cyclist and almost flattened him ! -200.” “You let 13 people and their four pets pass at a non-crosswalk! +150.” And there

are days I feel like I'm in my own *Truman Show* where all these things keep moving around to block me from getting to where I want to go.

But don't let these lighthearted comments fool you. I seriously deal with some deep-seated issues over this. I do not say this flippantly, but there are times when I am in traffic where I can sense the capacity to harm or even kill another human being within my soul. I do not think I ever will, I am just saying I feel a vindictive spirit rise up within me at times when someone cuts me off or when I am late for something and Chicago is tearing up yet another major street and causing back ups for miles.

There is something about traffic that causes me to imagine what I would do if I were completely sovereign. If had all power, I would immediately give a flat tire to everyone who ran a stop sign. Every time I saw someone on their cell phone while driving, I would disintegrate the phone with my mind. Every time someone passed me with their music extremely loud and the windows rolled down, I would destroy their music system. And give them a flat tire.

The Heart of Worship

In other words, I would have zero patience. And just as with Phill's article last week on [Learning To Love in Chuck E. Cheese's](#), I am amazed at how God can take the daily, trivial, and menial events in our lives and teach us about him. Because recently God has been using my thoughts to remind me that, unlike me, He is sovereign. He has complete authority and power to do whatever is good, even the immediate judgment of terrible drivers. Yet He is described over and over again in the Bible is patient and "slow to anger".

This, far more clearly and shamefully than anything else in my life right now, causes me to comprehend how unlike God I am. I

am not sovereign or patient. Since God is both, it reminds me emphatically of why I am supposed to exalt him over myself. I believe this is the core meaning of the word "holy" in the Bible. God is different in a superior way. He is above us. Separate. Unique. When God says repeatedly in Isaiah "I am God, there is no other," this is what he means. And God will use just about anything to remind me of this. My time in Chicago traffic the last few months has been as edifying as any Bible study I've attended.

And of course the Bible teaches us that we are to be holy in that we should be like God in some key ways, which is different and separate from the world. I already know I am a hypocrite when I drive because I get mad at people daily for doing the very things that I do. But I am equally as hypocritical because I bear and preach the name of my God, Jesus Christ, and yet I am so opposite him when I am behind the wheel.

In recent years there have been those that have asked the question: Has authenticity replaced holiness? I wonder if that question isn't about being so concerned with honesty about our sin that we do not talk about fighting it. I have always had an easy time being transparent but I confess I may to often stop there. On this I do not want to. I want to fight. I want to memorize and meditate on James 1:19-21. I want to be different than the world. Because God is.

My church small group often talks about how easily we get irate in traffic. I am amazed that even the most humble, gentle, passive people at my church will confess to how traffic gets to them like nothing else. So I write this in hopes that others feel my pain but also share my desire to change. Christians cannot be sovereign. But we can be patient. We can choose holiness over hypocrisy. Even in Chicago traffic.

Learning to Love at Chuck E. Cheese's

I wrote the majority of this post eight years ago. I used to have a personal blog where I would review movies and albums, talk about sports, and rant about bad drivers. You know...the basics. Occasionally, I would delve into something a bit more "important." When I wrote this, I had recently been to a birthday party for a fully grown human man at Chuck E. Cheese's. Yes, you read that correctly. A grown up – an adult – chose to have their birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese's. Eight years later and I am still having problems fully processing that fact, which only reinforces in my mind the need to revisit this post. As you will see below, there is a streak of judgmental superiority running through me that needs confronting on a nearly daily basis.

I hate Chuck E. Cheese's. Hate is not a strong enough word. I loathe it in totality. It is a loud, unpleasant, wasteful, soul sucking place that is devoid of anything remotely approaching decent, let alone good. It attracts the loudest, most unpleasant, most wasteful, soulless people in the world. They come in throngs, like Uruk Hai on their way to Helm's Deep. (Nerdy Lord of the Rings reference for the uninitiated.) The patrons coalesce to form a massive, grotesque new organism that heats up the room and fouls the air with its presence. It is a destination I would not wish upon my worst enemy.

Yet I am worse. I am proud. I am arrogant. I am full of disdain. I do not love like I should. Jesus said to love our

neighbors as we love ourselves, and if I believe that to be true then I am not measuring up. No. Scratch that. I am face first, firmly on the ground. I haven't even started the process of measuring up. I've known for some time that I am not a people person and I joke about it regularly. "I don't like people" has escaped my lips many times. It's all said in jest, of course, but deep down a part of me knows that it is true. Pathetically true. I am a Pharisee. I am convinced of my own worth and abilities and I am blind to the valuable human life right next to me. To my eyes, that Chuck E. Cheese's patron doesn't look like much on the outside, but inside, God created that annoying person playing Skee Ball in His image. That person is eternally valuable to God. He loves them enough that He died for them. And I look at them like they are beneath me – a waste of my time and energy!

If I am going to learn how to truly love my neighbor, then more visits to Chuck E. Cheese's* are in order. If I can love people there, I can love them anywhere.

*Perhaps your Chuck E. Cheese's is CiCi's Pizza. Or Ryan's Steakhouse. Or McDonald's. Or Walmart. You get the point. It could be anywhere.

[The Rough Draft of Solace](#)

In an effort to be completely transparent, this is going to be messy. I have attempted to write this article three or four times over the last few weeks and it has been a fight to get it to come together. My thoughts are scattered and confused. The end result will probably feel like a rough draft at times and I am going to have to be okay with that because no amount of effort on my part will fix certain deficiencies. One

additional disclaimer before we get to the meat of the matter at hand: I'm going to be blunt. I want to be true and honest and real. I don't want to hide behind platitudes and clichés. I'll do my best.

Right now, this very moment, there are many people who are hurting. They are experiencing profound physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. Or some combination of all of them. I have friends who are dealing with frightening medical diagnoses. I have friends who are watching their marriages collapse. I have friends who have lost someone dear to them. I hate it. It's overwhelming in the most complete sense of that word. I hear these things and I have no words of comfort or wisdom to offer. I am struck mute by my lack of power. In a practical manner of speaking, there is almost nothing I can do to help any of these people.

I've watched friends deal with so much garbage, so much pain, that it makes me angry and causes my faith in a good God to take a hit. Deep down, I know those feelings are stupid so I do my best to move past them and not allow that seed of doubt to take root in my life. But if I feel this way, safely observing it all from the outside, how much more pain, doubt, and anger do the people living their own personal hell feel? I have no idea. And I really have no right to speculate or assume to know. I can do my best to understand and empathize, but that's mostly empty rhetoric. Understanding is a long way down the road from experiencing, and I have never experienced pain and loss like so many have.

So why am I even writing this article? There are a few reasons, and none of them very flattering. First, I am not good with people. I am an introvert, awkward and uncomfortable around most people. When confronted with a damaged or hurting person, my typical reaction is avoidance or the most superficial interaction possible. And honestly, it's not because I don't care. It's because I have no idea what to say or how to act in those situations. I prefer to

communicate my feelings, thoughts, and emotions in written form. Which brings me to my second reason. If you want a glimpse inside my head, I'll make it as simple as I can: My hope in writing this is that something I say here will be a help to those that are suffering. Yet even here, I ask myself why would anything I write help anyone that is experiencing life-altering pain and sorrow? I've landed on something that might answer that question. My words are impotent. My words will help no one. But if my words reflect the words of God, then they will not return void. If my words can offer even a flicker of light that points to the Great Light, then that has to be enough. It's the only reason to do this.

While I have not experienced loss like many others, my life has not been without pain and sadness. I am beyond grateful that when my family went through its most difficult time, the loss of my sister-in-law to cancer, my friends did not offer us empty platitudes and clichés. They showed up. They cried with us. They hugged us. They laughed with us as we remembered the beautiful soul we had lost. Those things meant the world as we dealt with the pain and confusion and bone-wearying grief. I want to do that now, but I know it is impractical at best. Most people have horror stories of well-intentioned people offering empty words of comfort during times of mourning. I hope this will not be another horror story for some. Yet, if you are looking despair in the face, if your grief is so strong that you just can't cry anymore, if healing and restoration feel a million miles away, just maybe these words will help even a little.

Jesus shares your grief and weeps with you. I've always been intrigued by the events surrounding the death of Lazarus in the book of John. The sickness, the delay in travel, the death, the graveside scene, and then the triumphant and impossible resurrection. It is a fascinating vignette, one of deep truth and a few tantalizing questions. While I have heard

it taught in a variety of ways, nothing has been more uncertain to me than the simple passage found in John 11:35. "Jesus wept." Did he weep because of the questions and lack of faith of Lazarus's sisters? Did he weep because he was bothered by the crowd and their weeping, however genuine? Scripture does say he was troubled by it. Or, did he weep because his friend had died? Perhaps he wept because he was moved to mourn with Mary and Martha. I choose to believe that it was all those things, yet deeper and more profound. I believe that Jesus wept because the very idea of death was so abhorrent to him. As my brother said in his beautiful article, [*Grief, Hope and Theology That Matters:*](#)

"Even more vivid is the account of Lazarus' resurrection in John 11. When confronted with the death of his own loved one, Jesus weeps alongside his family. Jesus fully participates in the grief. By verse 38, Jesus is so enraged in his grief that he does what every grieving person wishes he could do—a miracle. It is in this account that Jesus reminds his followers that He is the resurrection and the life. He is the conqueror of death. Jesus not only hates death; He hates it even more than we do."

Jesus fully participates in our grief. What an amazing and comforting thought!

At the end of *The Silver Chair*, the fourth book in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, after we witness the funeral of an aged King Caspian, we watch the protagonists of the story, Eustace and Jill, cry over the body of Caspian as it lays in a stream. They weep at the death of this great King and friend. The great lion Aslan weeps with them, and his grief and tears go beyond anything they feel, "each tear more precious than the Earth would be if it was a single solid diamond." And then, in an act of participatory grief, Aslan asks the children to take a thorn and plunge it deep into his paw. The blood then drips into the stream

with Caspian's body and not only gives him new life but restores him to the vigor and likeness of his youth. Aslan felt the grief and loss more profoundly than the children, but then does something that we all wish we could do – he conquers death. That is the promise we can cling to in times of sorrow. Our Lord grieves with us. He hates the things that make us grieve more than we do and longs for the day when He will fully restore His creation to its rightful and intended glory.

Jesus bears your burdens and pain. The first time I read *The Lord of the Rings*, during my freshman year in college, I cried when Sam and Frodo, the two brave hobbits who had journeyed far to destroy the ring of power, reach the very doorstep of Mount Doom, the only place the ring could be destroyed, and Frodo is finally overwhelmed with exhaustion. His quest has left him a shell; broken and empty. He falls to the ground, unable to take another step; the weight of the ring, both physical and spiritual, is pulling him down, forcing him to give up. That is when Sam, Frodo's gardener and best friend, resolves to help. He realizes he cannot carry the ring; it is not his burden to bear. The ring was entrusted to Frodo to carry and to destroy. Sam knows this and in his simple and unassuming wisdom, he chooses to do something even better. An act of such profound love and friendship, there is little in the world of literature that is its equal. Samwise Gamgee, though his body has been decimated after mile upon mile of travel, looks at his friend and cries out, "Come, Mr. Frodo! I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you."

Sam does for Frodo that which Frodo cannot do for himself. How much greater is that imbalance in our relationship with God? There are innumerable times in our lives when we find ourselves paralyzed with grief, fear, or pain. In those times, we go through the motions, yet our lives are merely a pantomime. Our steps are leaden and without aim. Our souls are frozen in time, unable to feel or move or trust again. It is in those times that we have the promises of God to cling to:

- Psalm 55:22 – “Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you.”
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 – “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”
- Psalm 37:24 – “Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.”

Moving beyond the written promises of Scripture, we have the very life of Jesus as a promise. He meets us exactly where we need Him. When His disciples were terrified and confused after His death, not only does He comfort them with words of peace and His presence, a few days later, he meets them on the shore of the sea and cooks them a meal. He feeds them – something so tactile and so familiar. It is just one more beautiful picture of selflessness and tender love for His disciples to cling to when they face persecution and death in the years to come. Our Lord will bear our burdens, sustain us, and He will hold us up by His hand and by His grace. As believers, we are called to do the same. Galatians 6:2 tells us to “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” When someone you love is hurting and bearing a burden that is too heavy, remember the words and actions of Jesus. If we are indeed His hands and feet, we can carry our wounded friends even if we cannot carry their wounds.

Finally, **Jesus rejoices over you**. I want the words of Scripture to do most of the talking for this point. In one of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament, we find these words of hope and encouragement: “For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.” The creator of the universe takes delight in you with gladness. The savior of the world rejoices over you with joyful songs. Or, as the New American Standard Bible puts it, “He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.” What verbal expression

can be more demonstrative and powerful than a shout of joy? Our God is so filled with love for you, that He shouts for joy. What a thought! In your time of deep pain and loneliness, it might be hard to feel this. It might be hard to hold on to this truth, but know, in the deepest part of your soul, that it is Truth. Our mighty Savior longs to calm your fears with His love. Even now, He is delighting in you. Even now, He is joyfully shouting and singing over you.

It is my hope that this doesn't just add to the noise. If nothing else, I hope that my words get out of the way and that the truth of Scripture speaks clearly in your life. For those of you that have friends that are hurting, you know what to do. Be with them. Grieve with them. Weep with them. Carry them while they cannot move. Be their champion by singing over them, rejoicing over them, and shouting over them. For those that are hurting, I hope that the people closest to you are fulfilling their roles by being Jesus in your time of need. Just know, Jesus shares your grief and weeps with you, He will gladly bear your burdens, and He rejoices over you with shouts and songs. If you can do nothing else, hold on to that.

No, The Greek Doesn't Reveal Secret Bible Meaning, But It Helps

"Well, I Use the Greek"

One of my favorite things I've heard Dr. Robert Picirilli say is that when talking about Bible interpretation in small groups or informal conversation, people always want to know, "Well, what does the Greek say?" It's a fair question if you understand how God gave us the Bible, and specifically the New Testament.

I didn't take Greek as an undergrad at Welch College because I was a youth ministry major and it wasn't required. And when I started grad school several years ago at Moody Theological Seminary, it still wasn't required for my degree. Yet being older and wiser, I delayed graduation to take all of the classes they had on the subject.

The first two courses were great, and it was a lot of vocabulary and translation. The third, with perhaps my favorite professor ever, Dr. Julius Wong Loi Sing, was the most beneficial for several reasons.

First, and most importantly, he taught us that if you learn to read the New Testament in Greek and it makes you proud instead of humble, then you are reading but not understanding. Which is utterly useless to the Kingdom of God. I'll never forget this quote: "You are not supposed to dominate the Bible; it is supposed to dominate you."

Second, he told us that Greek should be like your underwear; you should use it but people should not be aware of it. In other words, do not constantly and haughtily make everything about, "Well the original Greek says..." and "Now if you understand the Greek syntax Paul uses here..." And lastly, and the point of this article, he taught us that Greek does not contain some kind of hidden, secret meaning to Bible texts. But it does help.

Last year for *Rambling Ever On*, I wrote an article called *#Blessed: The Beatitudes As Modern Day Facebook Statuses*, which if you would like you can read [here](#). In that article I

tried to practice Dr. Wong Loi Sing's advice about the underwear. Yet I think it could be interesting for the readers of REO to see how things go behind the scenes of an article like that, because it says something about the way God communicated the Bible to us.

First, I want to look at Matthew 5:3-16 in English. You don't have to read this to get what I am wanting you to see. Just survey it quickly:

3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

5 *"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

6 *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

7 *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

8 *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

9 *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

10 *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

12 *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

13 *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become*

tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

First, note a couple of things. One, the translation I used (the NASB) separates vs. 13-16 from vs. 3-12. Two, there is little about vs. 3-12 that gives any sense of separation within these verses.

Now, I want to show you these verses in Greek. I just want you to look at them. You do not have to understand one iota of Greek to get what I am trying to communicate here. In fact, to save time and space I'm going to go ahead and highlight some things that stand out to me:

3 Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

4 μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

5 μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

6 μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

7 μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

8 μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.

9 μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται.

10 μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

11 μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν ψευδόμενοι ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ. **12** χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.

13 Ὑμεῖς **ἐστε** τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῇ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

14 Ὑμεῖς **ἐστε** τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη· **15** οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ. **16** οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

A couple of things to notice, which are made easy by my highlights. First, there is a contrast in verses 10 and 11. You can see it in English as it changes from “Blessed are the/those” to “Blessed are you”. But for some reason I never saw it until the first time I read it in Greek. Perhaps because the English obscures the consistency of verses 3-10 by switching between “the” and “those”. In Greek the form is exactly the same every time.

I think the change from vs. 10 to 11 is significant. If I wear khaki pants and a blue shirt eight days in a row and then on the ninth day I wear blue jeans and a blue shirt you will wonder why I changed. The same is true for understanding biblical authors in how they write.

I personally think the change is there because Jesus gives eight beatitudes (vs. 3-10) and vs. 11 begins a commentary on the last one about being persecuted. This sharp change in the

passage can also be seen without any hindrance in English by the use of "for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" in verses 3 and 10. This creates a bun type affect of the passage.

The commentary on persecution, in my opinion, continues through vs. 16 and this can also be seen in my highlights by use of "You are" and other forms of "you" from vs. 11 to vs. 16. In fact, if I play around with the English a little, you can see it even more clearly in English than Greek:

3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

5 *"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

6 *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

7 *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

8 *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

9 *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

10 *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *"Blessed you are when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

12 *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

13 *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under*

foot by men.

14 “**You are** the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let **your** light shine before men in such a way that they may see **your** good works, and glorify **your** Father who is in heaven.

Now you may ask, “What difference does it make?” Well maybe not much. But as a preacher I have to confess, knowing that verses 13-16 should not be separated from vs. 11-12 (or from vs. 1-10) then it affects my interpretation of verses 13-16. How often do you see a new subheading in Bibles over vs. 13? What if I told you that shining your light before men, in context, was directly linked to being persecuted? Does it change your understanding of the verse? Or its application?

One more thing I want you see this, this time only in verses 3-6:

3 Μακάριοι οἱ **πτωχοὶ** τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

4 μακάριοι οἱ **πενθοῦντες**, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

5 μακάριοι οἱ **πραεῖς**, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

6 μακάριοι οἱ **πεινῶντες** καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

Notice that the four words are alliterated, beginning with the same Greek letter you may recognize from math class as Pi (though I was taught to pronounce it with a long ‘e’ instead

of a long 'i'). I know some people find outline alliteration annoying in modern preaching but it's used here. What does that mean? Perhaps nothing. After all, vs. 7-10 are not alliterated. Yet, I think it probably means that vs. 3-6 are one subgroup of the Beatitudes and vs. 7-10 are a second group. Even further, I think if you study them you will see that it could be that vs. 3-6 deal with man's relationship to God and vs. 7-10 deal with man's relationship to other men. This follows the pattern of both the Ten Commandments and The Great Commandment given by Jesus.

And this absolutely changes how I interpret the Beatitudes, especially vs. 8 which I interpret differently than you probably have ever heard. If you want to read more about that interpretation you can read the article the I linked at the beginning of this article or you can go [here](#). Note that I don't think that my interpretation is undoubtedly correct or beyond reproach, but that I got there by study and not some crazy, baseless theory.

Again, it has been my aim to be informative without being pedantic and helpful without being condescending. I am no Greek expert and never will be. But I have benefited from it and I hope that I can help others see its benefit. God did, after all, reduce himself to human language to give us the main source of truth we have.

Questions? Comments? Let us know below!

What Has Valentinius to Do With Christianity?

The title is a play on the most famous quote by the second century heresiologist, Tertullian, who said, "what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian said this because during that time there was much errant Greek thought invading the church. One of these Greek ideals was probably Gnosticism. "Probably" because although Tertullian definitely battled it, there isn't 100% surety that Gnosticism originated from Greek thought. It is only thought to have been born at the beginning of the first century influenced by this Greek thought.

The two main strings of Gnosticism have been classified as Iranian and Syrian. These strings trickled into other areas of thought and religion, chief among these being Christianity. In fact, this was one of its earliest areas and would sadly have a successful run at it. The kind of Gnosticism that invaded the church came to be known as Gnostic Christianity. It became so prevalent that many people both inside and outside the church thought it was just normal Christianity. This false teaching was adopted by several different Christian teachers and turned into one of the most problematic heresies of early Christianity. There were several main teachers of Christian Gnosticism who developed their own branch of this heresy. The two Christian Gnostic teachers that had the biggest influence were Marcion and Valentinius. And probably the most influential of these two was Valentinius, who became so influential in the church that he very nearly became bishop of Rome.

It might be uncomfortable to think of heretical teachers like Valentinius having a profound *positive* impact on Christianity,

but in a way he and other heretics did. These false teachings had some very positive results. They were instrumental in goading the church to collect an authoritative canon that likewise goaded it to more fully and authoritatively evaluate and form orthodox Christian doctrine based on that canon. But this collected canon of the New Testament would not become reality until the third century. For the many years prior to that, it was much harder to maintain a consensus throughout the worldwide church about the actual teachings of the Gospel. Until then there were primarily only letters and writings claiming divine authority floating about. The fact that this was the case and that there was no definite canon during these years made it so much easier for false teachings to creep into and thrive in local church doctrine. So who was this man who introduced such falsehood to Christian doctrine and what did he teach?

Valentinus and His Gnostic Christian Doctrine

Valentinus was born in Egypt sometime in the end of the first century and was educated in Alexandria. It was during these Alexandrian years that he set up the Eastern branch of Valentinian thought. He would later set up the Western branch after he moved to Rome. The primary difference between these two branches is how they viewed the body of Jesus and this was a big issue with them since anything of the flesh is evil and exactly what the "spiritual" needed to be saved from. The Eastern branch resolved this by saying that Jesus had to die to save Himself as well. The Western branch resolved this with the docetic view, which said that Jesus only *seemed* to be a man and he only *seemed* to suffer and die.

Basic Valentinus doctrine says that the first eternal being was First-Being or Profundity. He eventually united with Thought to produce the emanations (aeons) called Mind and Truth. And this production process kept on going with Mind and Truth producing two more emanations, and then those two emanations uniting to produce two more emanations, and so on

and so forth. This went on until 26 emanations had been produced after First-Being and Thought. This genealogical strand of First-Being, Thought, and their 26 offspring was called The Fullness. Every one of these succeeding pairs along The Fullness grew more and more discontent, each succeeding emanation more so than the one before it, because each had less knowledge of and contact with First-Being. This discontentment came to a head in Wisdom (Sophia), the 26th emanation. Her prideful decision to fight to build her way back up to First-Being only resulted in her fall from grace. First-Being tried his best to restore Wisdom to her correct place in an attempt to keep the perfection of The Fullness. It didn't work and therefore the entire line of The Fullness was compromised. As the first phase of a strategy to restore the former holiness of The Fullness, First-Being also produced directly from Himself the emanations of Christ and Holy Spirit. Together the two brought a joy to The Fullness that resulted in the emanations collectively producing Jesus.

In the meantime, Wisdom's passion remained below the Fullness and produced the evil Demiurge who created earth. The Demiurge is the God of the Bible who is actually and unknowingly much lower than the lowest emanation of The Fullness. To save us from him, Wisdom's passion, with the help of Savior, produced the spiritual seed of earth. They intended for the committed goal of this spiritual seed to ascend above this evil Earth to The Fullness with the help of Jesus.

The Disciples of Valentinius

Valentinius taught his false doctrine until his death in A.D. 160, after which his students continued to spread it. These students clearly made their own tweaks to their teacher's doctrine. You can see these tweaks in a set of Gnostic writings called the *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*. They are called this because they were discovered buried near the town of Nag Hammadi in Egypt. It is believed they were buried by Egyptian monks around AD 367 after Athanasius ordered the monasteries

of Egypt to rid themselves of all apocryphal works.

The Nag Hammadi contains 13 codices (a codex is an ancient book), each of which have a number of different writings. There are slightly over 50 writings in all. These writings clarify and expand on Valentinian doctrines to some degree and offer some of the aforementioned interesting tweaks. Probably the most famous of these writings is The Gospel of Truth, which some experts think was penned by Valentinus himself. Irenaeus, perhaps the greatest heresiologist of all time, first mentions this writing in his five-volume work *Against the Heresies* as an example of the great Valentinian threat to Christianity. Irenaeus was just one of a group of Christian heresiologists who arose during the second century to dispute Gnostic Christianity and other heretical teachings in the church. Irenaeus focused his war largely on the Gnostic Christians and primarily the Valentinians. Concerning Gnostic Christianity, Irenaeus concluded that “Against them one might justly exclaim: ‘Oh you nonsense-blabbering pumpkins! You blameworthy and untrue sophists!’”

No, Valentinianism was not the only heresy or even Gnostic line to encourage the church to collect a final New Testament canon and to fine tune its orthodox doctrine, but it did have a huge role in that inspiration. And for all of its supposed knowledge, Valentinianism mimicked its own doctrine by itself being a definite fall of wisdom.

Grace and Glory

*For Jehovah God is a sun and a shield:
Jehovah will give grace and glory;
No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

Psalm 84:11

Psalm 84:11 is one of the most beautiful, majestic Psalms. Here we find these two words together, in juxtaposition that brings hope, blessing and encouragement to followers of Jesus. The Lord will give grace and glory. The context of this most precious Psalm is one of a pilgrim longing for God's house and being on a journey where he is unable to be there. But he finds God's strength sufficient for his pilgrimage (verses 5-7) and so he journeys on toward Jerusalem. The climactic part, verses 10-12, is his testimony that he would rather spend one day in God's courts than thousands elsewhere. Verse 11 is powerful: the LORD God is a sun and shield, and grants "favor and honor," a more modern way to render "grace and glory." Thus we see that there is an immediate application to the present, as he goes on to say "he does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity." (CSB)

Charles Spurgeon states:

Who else could give either grace or glory? But God is full of grace—His very name is Love—it is His Nature to freely dispense of His goodness to others. As it is according to the nature of the sun to shine, so it is according to the Nature of God to give good things to His creatures. In Him all fullness dwells—all grace and all glory are perpetually resident in Jehovah, the Infinite. What a mercy it is that we, poor empty sinners, have to do with a God of such fullness and of such goodness! If He were shorthanded with His love, what would become of us? If He had but little graciousness, if He had but little glory, then we great sinners must certainly perish. But since the Lord is a bottomless well of love and a topless mountain of grace, we may come to Him, and come freely, without any fear that either His grace or His glory will ever suffer any diminution. Note again that the text says, "Jehovah will give grace and glory." Not only has He these wondrous blessings, but He has them that He may give them freely. If He were to keep them to Himself, He would be

none the richer, and when He distributes them, He is none the poorer! The Lord does not sell grace or glory, He does not put them up to auction to those who can give something in return for them. God is a great Giver and a great Forgiver. He gives grace and glory without money, without price and without any merit in the receiver. The Lord gives—there is nothing freer than a gift and there can be nothing freer than that greatest of all the gifts of God, eternal life! That expression, “eternal life,” sums up these two things—grace and glory. “The Lord will give grace and glory.” It is His glory to give His grace and because of His graciousness, He gives glory! [1. Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit #2502]

Yet, “grace and glory,” surely suggest our future blessing in eternity as well. “‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home” (John Newton). I thought of some songs that feature the phrase “grace and glory,” some of which emphasize the here and now, while others the “sweet by and by.”

“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow” – a song of commitment and trust, where the lines of the verses are repeated as “I can hear my Savior calling,” “He’ll go with me through the garden,” “He’ll go with me through the judgment,” and finally “He will give me grace and glory.” The refrain says “Where He leads me I will follow (three times)...He’ll go with me, with me, all the way.” From His initial call to the grace and glory that await, no doubt a reference to Heaven, He will truly go with me all the way. [2. Where He Leads Me: Ernest W. Blandy, 1890]

A group called “Poet Voices” sang a song about a decade or so ago called “Grace and Glory.” Again, borrowing from those beautiful words it states “His love is full of grace and glory that is why I sing.”

Unmerited favor of the Savior falling from His holiness
It is never ending grace extending from His righteousness

To the undeserving, God is serving bountiful supply
His great love's abounding and surrounding us from sky to
sky.[3. Phil Cross, Bridge Building Music, BMI, Chris White
Music, BMI]

Christian songwriter, poet, and comedian Aaron Wilburn wrote a
song some years ago in which "grace and glory," while not the
theme or title, still figures prominently in the message.
Recently performed by a number of singing groups, it was a
favorite of Aaron's mother: "That Sounds Like Home to Me," a
song about Heaven, in which the refrain thrills the believer's
heart by affirming "the hills will echo with the story as we
sing of His grace and glory. Wow! To think that one day we'll
extol His grace and glory throughout the ages.[4. C.A. Wilburn
and Edwin Crook, Werner Chappel Music, Inc.]

Finally, there comes to my mind a song I heard only a couple
of months ago by a trio I enjoy a great deal. Songwriter Sue
C. Smith and collaborators beautiful lyrics, and Karen Peck's
country soprano delivers yet another song of hope "On the
Banks of the Promised Land." My soul is set to soar when I
hear the refrain "Hallelujah, what a morning, when I reach for
that nail-scarred hand, and I'm led by His grace and His
glory, on the banks of the Promised Land." [5. Sue C. Smith,
David Moffit, Jason Dyba]

My conclusions: The Psalm would indicate that grace and glory
are for both now and for the future. It's grace that saves us
now, that guides and guards us in this life, that leads us on
this earthly pilgrimage, but it is also grace that leads us
home, to again quote John Newton.

To glory – what does that mean? The goal, the end of God's
grace working in us is to transport us to glory, as some of
the songs I've quoted suggest. But we might also say that the
grace at work in us brings glory to Him who is worthy of it
all – grace to glory. And most definitely grace accomplishes
glory – His glory and our enjoyment of it and rapture in it –

here on earth temporarily and imperfectly, and permanently and perfectly in Heaven.

These past days have been bittersweet. Services at church have been good, and it is thrilling to see our Hispanic group there, growing in the Lord, and becoming more involved. However, news came of the passing of two friends, both named Tim. Tim Hayes was from Illinois, very active in his church, in missions, and with the Master's Men Disaster Relief Team. I have known him since college days. A massive heart attack. Then, Tim Coats, formerly a Home Missionary in South Dakota, and in recent years a bivocational pastor there in Rapid City. He and Kathy were summer missionaries with us in 1982 in Panama when our kids were very small. Faithful men, good friends. They have now gone from grace to glory, praise the Lord.

Five Amazing Truths About Election On Which Every Christian Should Agree

Editor's Note: This article was written as a follow up to an article published earlier this year by REO on Five Statements made by Arminius that even Calvinists can agree with. If you missed that article you can read it [here](#).

Aside from the myth of the [Rapture](#), nothing stirs up a theological hornets nest like Predestination and Election. Just five minutes ago, I overheard some students at my high school debating Arminianism and Calvinism. They don't even get

that worked up over Trump! While I don't want to diminish the points of disagreement, I find it helpful to discuss five truths surrounding the doctrine of Election that all Christians, whether Arminianist or Calvinist in leaning, can (and should) agree on.

Election equates Christians with God's chosen people.

When the writers of the New Testament use the term "elect" their first century audience would have thought immediately about God's chosen people in the Old Testament. Peter calls believers a "Chosen Nation" and a "Royal Priesthood." In doing so, he identifies the calling of the believer with the calling of God's chosen people Israel. Just like the people of God under the Mosaic Covenant, Christians also have a calling to worship God as one people and to be a priesthood for other "nations" who do not know the God of the Bible. As priests our role is to connect the nations with the one true God. This is not through animal sacrifice, but by the living sacrifice of a Gospel-centered life.

Election speaks to our being in Christ.

The title "Christ" denotes Jesus' position as God's "Chosen one." He is the Lord's anointed, the chosen king, THE servant spoken of in Isaiah; Jesus is the Elect (Luke 9:35). Ephesians 1 tells us that we have been chosen "in Him." Our status as "the elect" is made possible because we belong to "The Elect" One. We are chosen because we belong to the Chosen one.

Election connects us a larger community of faith.

Perhaps this is a restatement of point number one, but from a different angle. As modern Americans, we envision faith as private and individualistic. We need a greater emphasis on the

community of faith. Too often we think that the gospel is about me and God. Paul, however, usually presents the gospel as us and God. While we are certainly not saved because of the faith of others, every passage about election in the scripture is addressed to groups of Christians. When John calls the congregation receiving his letter “The Elect Lady” (2 John 1:1) the point is clear—the people of faith are God’s elect. This emphasis on community is why the church father Cyprian proclaimed that “there is no salvation outside of the Church.” Christianity never imagines the Christian life outside of a community of faith. To be Elect is to belong to something bigger.

Election makes ethnic differences insignificant.

Many Puritans applied the idea of “the Elect Nation” to what they thought were God’s eschatological purposes for the nation of England. In doing so, they missed the purpose of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians, Colossians, and Galatians. There is a reason Paul spends the first chapter of Ephesians discussing Predestination and Election. There is a reason he asserts God’s activity and the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice. In establishing these doctrines, Paul is getting to his point in chapter 2—The unity of Jew and Gentile. God is creating “one new humanity out of two.” (Ephesians 2:15) Any feelings of racial superiority or hostility are burned away by the truth that in Christ we are one people. (For more on this you can read this [article](#))

Election makes no room for pride.

In light of all these truths, the doctrine of election should primarily be a humbling one. We don’t deserve to be God’s chosen people, we don’t deserve to be in Christ, we don’t deserve to be part of a family of faith, we don’t deserve to

be healed of our racism. As much as we may or may not have tried, we have done nothing to deserve God's election. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

If Ephesians 2 is true, rather than prompting us to argue over TULIPs and the order of decrees, maybe the doctrine of election should prompt us to humility, unity, and good works. If it doesn't do that, it's not a doctrine worth teaching.

[“Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation”: A Review](#)

“I wish I could single-handedly revive the art of Scripture memorization in our homes and our churches. There's no greater legacy to bequeath to our children than a storehouse of memory verses to draw upon their whole lives through.” (Robert J. Morgan)

The Title Made Me Feel Bad (In a Good Way)

I can't recall a time in my life when a book title convicted me like this one did. If there is one thing I know I should do but don't do often enough, it's biblical meditation. So I got this book as quickly as I could and read it carefully.

I'll go ahead and abandon any pretense that this "review" will offer any substantial critique of what Dr. Morgan writes here. I think it is dangerous to put people on pedestals where they cannot be critiqued, but my main goal here is to try to influence people to read this book because the content is so important. Any criticisms I have are extremely superficial and will succumb to the weight of the Dr. Morgan's central message.

Evangelical Crusades and Hannibal Lector Bring it Home

The content portion of the book is a tidy 123 pages and I knocked it out in a couple of days in probably less than three hours total. It reads simply enough that I would think an average 9-year old could understand it. But that is not an insult because it's chock full of extremely helpful advice, Scripture references and practical illustrations that I hope not only inspire me but also guide me at 39 years old to make Scripture meditation a bigger part of my life. I've been a pastor for 15 years. I have attended two exceptional Bible Colleges. I have memorized and meditated on Scripture before. But as I alluded to above, I have never made it a habit and such an integral part of my life as you can tell Dr. Morgan has.

Anyone who knows Dr. Morgan or has sat under his preaching knows that you can count on two things with everything he teaches: First, he will incorporate a ton of Bible. I remember once when I was at a service at Donelson, Dr. Morgan's church in Nashville, his ministry cohort Jeff Nichols joked from the stage that when he takes notes on Rob's sermons he can count on there being like 17 well thought-out Scripture references in support of each point. Secondly, he will show you how diversely read he is by citing an insane amount of biographical information and quotes from people from centuries ago and people from today. Just look at the footnotes in the

back of this book and marvel not only of his use of Billy Graham and J.I. Packer, but also Anthony Hopkins and Stephen King. And also his use of people I do not know but that he knows personally and had invaluable wisdom to offer for this book.

And what he does by quoting the sacred and the secular is build a very simple yet very powerful case for how valuable meditation is for learning and behavior. The amount of times the Bible refers to meditation, even if it doesn't use that word, is legion. Old Testament, New Testament, historical books, psalms, prophets, gospels, letters...every section has significant contributions here and that makes this material impossible to ignore.

We Don't Meditate Because We Are Good; We Meditate **Because We're Not**

I confess I appreciate as well how Dr. Morgan weaves in at times his own personal weaknesses and struggles that have led him to be a better meditator. It is easy for someone like me to look at his lengthy pastoral and preaching ministry and to idealize it. But he does not allow for that. He no doubt practices biblical meditation as well as anyone I know and has earned the right to write this book, but he allows us to see that meditation exists in large part because we are so flawed and weak. We must meditate because we know God so poorly on our own. Our minds are so bent to evil and darkness, worry and anxiety, that meditation is as much like medicine for the sinful soul as it is exercise for the mind. I daresay that is what separates Christian meditation from things like Zen Buddhism. The book is definitely written humbly and not haughtily and I am positive that when a person meditates constantly on the Bible, teaching others to do well will likely be from a place of humility. That's how the Bible works in teaching us about how we relate to God.

The 'tips' interspersed are so practical, yet not often practiced. At least by me. I am praying that will change. Sticky notes will be easy. Sharing my meditation with people I come across during the day will be hard. But I will try both, and many other things he advises.

Dr. Morgan lists several times we should meditate—when we wake up in the morning, when we wake up in the middle of the night, when we are lonely, when we are on a plane, when we drive, etc. Basically, we can mediate constantly. At that point the conviction of the book title came and hit me full in the face. I meditate so infrequently. I am too easily distracted. I have little doubt the content of the book, notably the Scriptures within, will change my course on this. I pray that it lasts til I die and is not a short lived emotional response.

Buy It. Read It. Do It.

I hope this book helps millions as it has helped my thinking (and, in theory, my behavior). I am challenged to put the phone down more and to focus my thoughts on Scripture and the nature of God more often. I know that Biblical meditation is not a quick fix to all anxiety and depression and crises. But it is a way to know God better and to allow him to change us even if he does not change our circumstances. These things will always be better for us than having everything "fixed". If we are to know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering and if we are to take every thought captive, we must meditate. Dr. Morgan's book is an extremely beneficial resource to challenge and guide even older Christians in this discipline.

Buy the book by clicking the picture below:

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Reclaiming the Lost Art of
Biblical
Meditation

Find True Peace in Jesus



ROBERT J. MORGAN