

# Insight Into

September / October 2023

*"And we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities,  
like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6).*

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# Insight Into

## General Information

*Insight Into* is the official youth periodical of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in the United States and Canada.

As a Reformed magazine, *Insight Into* seeks to promote the knowledge of the truth and to give biblical guidance to young people in their daily lives.

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# MEDITATION

***“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee”*** (Genesis 12:1).

Rev. W. Visscher

Suggested reading: Hebrews 11:8-13

Where must Abram go? The way was completely unknown to him. The Haak Bible says, “The Lord names no country to try, exercise, and manifest Abram’s faith, obedience, and patience.” In a firm way, the Lord taught Abram to live by faith (to trust in God).

When Abram came to the first crossroads, he didn’t know whether he should go to the right, to the left, or straight ahead. There continually was a prayerful waiting for God’s direction. In this way he travelled from day to day, asking for the right way. Finally, he arrived in Canaan. It was the same with the children of Israel when they left Egypt. They had to follow the pillar of a cloud. When the cloud stopped, the people stopped. When it went forward, the people went forward. Being obedient to God’s voice from day to day meant a dependent life. This obedience is totally different and completely opposite of our desire to organize and plan our lives. It is also completely different than working on a career, for it is coming to God’s throne, asking Him every day as a beggar, asking for light and direction. No, this life is not the life as the world lives, but it is really a blessed life. Abram arrived in Canaan. Pilgrims will come home, but it is upon their knees in dependence on God.

Do you know something of this life?

Taken from *Beacon: Daily Meditations for Young People*

# “Seek ye First”

Rev. E. Hakvoort

Dear friends, I have to ask you a question. It is a question that needs an honest answer. It is the question: What has the first place in your life? As you know, the word “first” speaks about what is the most important. So, what is for you the most important thing in your life? One might say that I receive a good job. Someone else might say that I earn lots of money. And another one will say that I may receive a nice family. And it is true; those things are not unimportant.

But tell me, are they really the most important things in life? For we know that life is but a passage. We are travellers on the way to eternity. One day we will have to die and meet our Maker to give an account of what we have done, whether good or evil. And what can we then take along from the things that matter for the time? And does wealth make us truly happy? That is exactly the reason why Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God.*”

Jesus says: “*but.*” For He knew that by nature the spiritual things do not have the first place. By nature, we take thought for our life. Then we are only concerned about this temporal life. About what we shall eat, and drink, and which clothes we shall wear. Do you recognize that in your life? How long do we stand each morning before the mirror to fix ourselves up? And how long do you stand each morning before the mirror of God’s Word? Or how much time do you spend reading and scrolling on your smartphone (hopefully filtered!), and how much time do you spend reading God’s Word and your daily meditation? Are those times in line with each other?

Must we not say that we all come short? Of course, you read your Bible. You believe the truth. You listen attentively in church, in chapel, in catechism class, and you never fail to know your questions. You know that one thing is needful. You know that without a new heart, you will not receive eternal life and that only God’s children are truly happy. You know that there is no other name given under heaven by whom we must be saved than the name of Christ.

And yet ... the service of God and Christ does not have the first place in our life. And you know why that is, don't you? It is because we have left the Lord in Paradise in order never to return. It is because we need the one-sided work of God in our life. And maybe you draw the conclusion that then I don't need to seek the kingdom of God, and I can wait until that wonder happens in my life. But what does the Lord say in the text? Does He say: But children of God, seek ye first the kingdom of God? No, He says to all who stand there: "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God.*"

He said it to those who were perfectly happy going to church at set times, with learning their religious studies, and having a decent life. To those, Jesus says that with all your outward religion, you are still outside the kingdom of God and still a stranger of grace. Do you see how these words condemn us for not seeking the most important thing in our life? Yet, the Lord seriously and well-meaningly calls us to first seek the spiritual things. "*Seek ye first.*"

Or as the Lord said to Martha, who was busy serving while Mary was sitting at His feet: "*Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful*" (Luke 10:41-42). That one thing we need to seek while we are yet alive. Time and again He stresses that. "*Seek, and ye shall find*" (Matthew 7:7). "*Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near*" (Isaiah 55:6). Do we see it? There are many things that are lawful or even necessary. But they are to be second in our life. They need to be inferior to the one thing that we cannot miss, be it well for time and eternity.

How necessary it is that we receive that good choice not to be repented of. Are we longing for that and asking for that? You might ask: How must we then seek the kingdom of God? Like the Bereans did! When Paul preached the Word, they searched the Scriptures to see whether it was as they heard. No, they did not listen critically like some do. But they listened with a longing to hear their name in the preaching. They listened with a desire to hear about the ways of the Lord and to receive instruction in their life. They had a hunger and thirst for the truth.

And they bowed their knees, asking for God's Spirit to be their guide. Do you recognize that in your life? Do we ask the Lord for a blessing before we go to church and after we come home from church? Does it weigh on your soul that one thing is needful? That is a people who has no rest until they may find it in the Lord. Augustine said it already: "Restless is the heart until it finds rest in Thee, O Lord." When the Lord sheds His love in the heart, you will see what you miss but cannot miss anymore. That makes seeking, asking, and longing for the kingdom of God.

And a seeking people, the Lord will not put to shame. At His time

and in His way, He will come over and comfort their soul with Christ, who came to seek that which is lost. There you find the deepest secret of a seeking people. They love Him, because He loved them first. They learn to seek the Lord, because He sought them first. He is found of them that asked not for Him and that sought Him not. Yet, they learned to first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

We see that in Paul's life. Paul thought that he sought the Lord. But when the Lord stopped him, he experienced that he never sought the Lord in truth. In the street called Straight, Paul truly learned to first seek the kingdom of God. There he learned to pray in truth, "*Behold, he prayeth*" (Acts 9:11). And the Lord did not put him to shame. He revealed His Son to Paul's heart and true faith broke through. And the fruit became clear. Paul learned to seek the honour of the Lord.

Maybe you ask how you can recognize that people? Paul writes "*that in all things He might have the pre-eminence*" (Colossians 1:18). It means that His Word will then receive the most important place in your life. What a blessed people for whom it may become true: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God.*" Do we know it? Do we truly know it in our heart? Can it be seen in our walk and how we interact with our peers? Or do we only know of it, and yet live as if this truth is not true?

*"Christians, bear your faithful ministers upon your hearts when you are wrestling with God. They can tell when they want your prayers, and when they enjoy your prayers. Did you pray more for them, they might do more for your internal and eternal good than now they do."*

~ Rev. Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

*"Strong saints must not deal by the weak as the herd of deer deal by the wounded deer; they forsake it and push it away. But when a poor, weak saint is wounded by a temptation or by the power of some corruption, then they that are strong ought to succour and support such a one, lest he be swallowed up of sorrow."*

~ Rev. Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

# Sin and Excuses for it

*“And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat”*  
(Genesis 3:13).

Rev. Henry Cooke (1788-1868)

**A**n unconverted sinner always has some ready excuse for his sin; and every excuse has one of three objects. The first object is to satisfy the sinner’s own conscience or, at all events, to silence its accusations; the second is to satisfy reason, or to silence the rebukes of others; and the third is to make sin seem less serious, or to justify it, in the sight of God Himself.

It is impossible to list all the sources from which those excuses are drawn, but it may be useful to instance a few of the most common—not to suggest them for the use of sinners, but by merely mentioning their names, to demonstrate their futility. Many seek, for example, their excuse in admitting their sin, but pleading that it is a little one. Others, again, will not plead the littleness of their sin, but urge that it is committed infrequently. Others will plead their ignorance of the evil of their sin, and urge that they did not intend whatever has been wrong in their conduct. Others charge their sin to mere lack of thought, or assert that the temptation took them suddenly and unawares. Others will plead the imperfection of their natural temper, and pretend they deplore that it is weak or ungovernable; while others produce, as a full satisfaction for all that is past, their purpose or determination to amend their behaviour for the future.

But the chief of all excuses is that which shifts the sin from the sinner’s own shoulders and lays the burden of the guilt on another. This was the first excuse and was in reply to the questioning of God Himself. Since that time, it has constituted the great model upon which most excuses for sin have been formed. Before we can fully comprehend the futility of the excuse, we must examine the circumstances that led to it as a final effort to escape from the accusations of conscience, or the knowledge and judgment of God.

Our first parents, while in a state of innocence, had freely conversed with God. But the moment they sinned, being smitten by their conscience, they hid from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. From this we discover that the object of every excuse is, in some manner, to hide our sin.

*“And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat”* (Genesis 3:9-12).

Now in this reply it is to be noted that it is not obvious whether Adam charged his sin more to the woman or to God Himself; for while he related that the woman “gave to him,” he told the Lord that it was the woman whom *He* had given to be with him. So it would appear that he traced the evil back to God and blamed His gift for the shame and the guilt in which he now stood before his Judge. To this excuse, so frivolous and unthankful, God did not pause to reply but immediately said to the woman, *“What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat”* (Genesis 3:13).

*“A fisher, who stands upon the shore and plunges his net into the sea at large, is not so frantic as to think of catching all the fishes in the sea, though he casts the net indiscriminately. So when a Christian minister spreads the gospel net, he preaches to all that come within the sphere of his address; not with the expectation of catching all, but of catching as many as God shall please; knowing that it is the Holy Spirit alone who can bring souls into the net, and effectually catch them for Jesus Christ.”* ~ Rev. Augustus Toplady (1740-1778)

*“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 3:5). There are five negatives in the Greek to assure God’s people that He will never forsake them. Five times this precious promise is renewed in the Scripture, that we might have the stronger consolation, and that we might press and press it again till we have gotten all the sweetness out of it.” ~ Rev. Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)



# A Warning Against Mixed Marriages

Rev. Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

**T**here is another and a peculiar snare of the world to which the saints of God are exposed; and because many have fallen into it, and not a few have in consequence greatly embittered their happiness, stained their profession, and dishonoured God, we would briefly, and in this connection, touch upon it with all tenderness and affection. We allude to the formation of matrimonial alliances between the saints of God and the unregenerate world. The Word of God is against a union so unholy and so productive of evil as this. Not a precept authorizes it, not a precedent encourages it, not a promise sanctions it, not a blessing hallows it! Indeed, so far is God from authorizing it that He expressly forbids it. Thus, *“be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

## **Be not yoked with an unbeliever**

How strong the command, how conclusive the argument, and how persuasive and touching the appeal! Could it be more so? The command is that a believer be not yoked with an unbeliever. The argument is that he is a temple of God. The appeal is that God will be a Father to such, and they are His children, who walk obediently to this command. There are many solemn considerations which seem to urge this precept upon the believer. A child of God is not his own. He does not belong to himself. *“Ye are not your own”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). His soul and body are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and therefore he is Christ’s. He must not, he cannot, dispose of himself. He belongs to the Lord and has no authority to

give away either soul or body. Oh, that this solemn fact could be written upon every believer's heart, "*Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). May the eternal Spirit now engrave it deeply and indelibly there!

But more than this, if this were not enough to urge the command upon a believer, his body is the "*temple of the living God*"! How solemn and weighty is this consideration! And shall he take "*the temple of God,*" and unite it with one who is a stranger to His grace, to His love, to His Son? With one whose "*mind is enmity against God*" (Romans 8:7), and whose heart beats not one throb of love to Jesus? God forbid! "*Know ye not,*" says James, "*that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*" (James 4:4). Then for a believer to form with an unbeliever an alliance so close and so lasting as this, involving interests so important and so precious, is to enter into a league with an enemy of God. It is to covenant, and that for life, with a despiser of the Lord Jesus!

### **Good out of evil**

It is no extenuation of this breach of God's command that the Lord has frequently, in the exercise of His sovereign grace, made the believing party instrumental to the conversion of the unbelieving party. He can, and often does, bring good out of evil, order out of confusion, "*making the wrath of man to praise Him*" (see Psalm 76:10) and causing events that were designed to thwart His purposes to be the very means of promoting them. But this is no encouragement to sin; and when sin is committed, this is but poor consolation. And to enter into a compact of the nature we are deprecating, with a conscience quieted and soothed with the reflection that "*the wife may save the unbelieving husband, or the husband may save the unbelieving wife*" (see 1 Corinthians 7:14) is presumption of the highest kind, a presumption which God may punish with a disappointment as bitter as it is overwhelming. Let no dear child of God be allured into an alliance so unholy, by a consideration so specious as this. Many have fallen into the snare, and have covered themselves with shame and confusion.

To the believer himself, forming an alliance so contrary to the express injunction of God's Word, the evils arising from it are many and grievous. To say nothing of the want of what must ever be considered essential to the mutual happiness of the union—oneness of mind, harmony of sentiment, congruity of spirit—there are lacking the higher elements of happiness—the mutual faith of each other in Christ, the communion of redeemed spirits, the holy intercourse of renewed minds, the unutterable sweetness of talking of Jesus by the way, and as "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7),

the joy of looking forward to the reunion of the glorified beyond the grave. It is, from the very nature of things, impossible that these elements of happiness should exist in the relation we are considering. The individuals thus united are inhabitants of different countries; one is as *“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers ... and foreigners”* (see Ephesians 2:12, 19), the other is a *“fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God”* (Ephesians 2:19); they speak different languages, are travelling opposite roads, and are journeying towards different countries. Surely, we may ask what real union and communion can exist here?

But more than this. There are not merely negative but positive evils resulting from such a connection. The influences that are perpetually exerting their power are hostile to all growth in grace and to an upright and holy walk with God. The temptations to inconsistency of Christian conduct are many, perpetual and alarming. The constant influence of worldly conversation, worldly example, and worldly pursuits weakens by slow but certain degrees the spiritual life of the soul, impairs the taste for (and lessens the enjoyment in) spiritual duties, unfits the mind for communion with God, and opens the door for an almost endless train of departures. We do not claim that all these evils are realized; but we do say that the believer who so shapes his course is fearfully exposed to them; and that he has not been, or may not be, overcome of them is of the mere grace of God. The evils themselves are the necessary consequences of his departure from God’s Word; and that he is preserved from the direst of them is only of the covenant mercies of that God, who, in the midst of all their temptations, is alone able to keep His people from falling.

### **Spiritual assistance**

A child of God, passing through this vale of tears, requires all the spiritual assistance he can meet with to urge him on his way. All the strength, the comfort, the encouragement, and all the support it is possible for him to obtain from any and every quarter, he needs to call into full exercise, in order to bear up against the many and peculiar difficulties that throng his path, and would keep him from advancing. Infirmities within and impediments without, inward corruptions and outward trials, the strugglings of sin and the assaults of Satan, all conspire to cast him down, and often to extort from him David’s exclamation, *“My soul cleaveth unto the dust”* (Psalm 119:25). At such a period, how strengthening, how supporting, how encouraging, and how animating the communion and soothing of a kindred spirit—a spirit one with himself! If it be true, and most true it is, that as *“iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”* (Proverbs 27:17) to a much greater degree, and

in a more endearing sense, is this reciprocity experienced in the high and endearing relation we are considering.

The godly husband and the godly wife are true helpmeets to each other. They belong to the same family, speak the same sweet language, are travelling the same happy road, and are journeying to the same blissful home. For a child of God, then, to unite himself to one who can be of no assistance to him in his journey, but rather a hindrance—who, when he speaks of conflicts, cannot understand them; of burdens, cannot lighten them; of perplexities, cannot guide them; of trials, cannot share them; of sorrows, cannot soothe them; and of joys and hopes, cannot participate in them—is indeed to mark out for himself a lonely and a desolate path, which may know no termination of its trial until it conducts him to the grave.

We would say, then, guard against this needless and unscriptural entanglement with the world. Marry *“only in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 7:39). *“In all thy ways acknowledge Him”* (Proverbs 3:6). Let His Word be your guide, His fear your rule, His glory your aim, and He will direct your paths through life, sustain you in death, and conduct you safely to His heavenly kingdom.

*“Just as a man sojourning in a foreign country will learn a good deal of the language of its inhabitants by simply hearing it talked, so it is possible to dwell among Christians until their language is in great measure acquired. Talking a language does not constitute a nationality. But there is one thing which cannot be picked up or counterfeited, and that is a desire. Let me know my desire, then do I know myself, for I can no more counterfeit a desire than I can counterfeit fire. I think it is an old Puritan who says, “Dost thou want to know what thou art? Go ask thy desires, and they will tell thee. Dost thou wish to know where thou art? See whither thy desires tend.” A good action may be done without any love to that action, and on the other hand, an evil may be avoided—from any hatred to that evil. The good action may be done from an impure motive; the evil may be avoided simply from a selfish motive; but the desire of the soul—that is the immediate issue of the heart, and let me find my desire, then do I find myself.”*

~ Rev. Archibald Brown (1844-1922)



# “Our God For Ever”

Rev. Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

God is a safe portion, a secure portion. He is a portion that none can rob or wrong you of; He is a portion that none can touch or take from you; He is a portion that none can cheat or spoil you of. God is such a portion, that no friend, no foe, no man, no enemy, no devil can ever rob a Christian of.

Oh Christians, God is so yours in Christ, yours by covenant, by promise, by purchase, and by conquest, and by donation, and by marriage union and communion, by the earnest of the Spirit, and by the feelings and witnessings of the Spirit, that no power or policy on earth can ever finger your portion, or cheat or rob you of your portion. *“For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death”* (Psalm 48:14). He is not only our God for the present, nor will He be only our God for a short time longer. Oh no, but He will be *“our God for ever and ever.”* If God be once thy portion, He will be for ever thy portion. It must be a power that must overmatch the power of God, and a strength that must be above the strength of God, that must rob or spoil a Christian of his portion; but who is there that is stronger than God? *“Is the clay stronger than the potter; or the stubble than the flame, or weakness than strength? Yea, is not the very weakness of God stronger than man? and who then shall ever be able to take away a Christian’s portion from him?”* (see Romans 9:21; 1 Corinthians 1:25; 10:22).

But now a man may be easily deprived of his earthly portion. How many have been deprived of their earthly portions by storms at sea, and others by force and violence, and others by fraud and deceit, and others by hideous lying and hellish swearing? Many have lost their earthly portions by treachery, knavery, perjury, subtilty, robbery, etc. Some play away their earthly portions, and others with Esau fool away their earthly portions, and not a few, with the prodigal, sin away their earthly portions. Ahab’s fingers itched to be fingering Naboth’s vineyard (see 1Kings 21:1-5). A man can no sooner come to enjoy an earthly portion, but other men’s fingers itch to be fingering his portion, as daily experience doth sufficiently evidence.

But God is a portion that the fire cannot burn, and the floods cannot drown, and the thief cannot steal, and the enemy cannot sequester, and the soldier cannot plunder a Christian of. A man may take away my gold from me, but he cannot take away my God from me. The Chaldeans and the Sabeans could take away Job’s estate from him, but they could not take away Job’s God from him (see Job 1). And the Amalekites burnt Ziklag, and robbed David of

his substance and of his wives, but they could not rob him of his God (see 1 Samuel 30). And those persecutors in the tenth and eleventh chapters of the Hebrews plundered the saints of their goods, but they could not plunder them of their God.

Until weakness can make a breach upon strength, impotency upon omnipotency, the pitcher upon the potter, and the crawling worm upon the Lord of hosts, a saint's portion is safe and secure. It is true; sickness and disease may take away my health and my strength, and death may take away my friends and my relations, and enemies may take away my estate, my liberty, my life; but none can take away my God from me.

## Faith That Holds on and Continues

*“And they came to Jericho: and as He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging”* (Mark 10:46).

Rev. Alexander Comrie (1706-1774)

See the following particular aspects concerning blind Bartimaeus:

1. He sits by the highway side; he was in the appointed way, and there he cried; from which we can learn that though God now and then comes to call this or that soul (O wonder of His free grace) when they are not in the way of the means, yet upon that way is God's blessing to be expected with good grounds: nowhere else. When a soul withdraws from the means, then, as one says, “She may well believe that she is in the hour of temptation, in the sieve of Satan, and she can never expect a blessing, but go on from bad to worse.”

2. He was called of Jesus before he could come, or cast away his garment. So is it also with each rightly exercised and “continuing” soul. He would never be able to come to Christ nor to cast away the garment of his own self-righteousness, if Christ did not first call him by name; and here is a true distinction between a real work and an almost-work. Oh, the “almost” Christians can come in their own judgment, as often as they will, but those who are convicted find that it is impossible to come before their call.

3. Learn also that generally, before the soul is effectually called, there arises some irresolution, some despondency, a putting, as it were, of the matter beyond hope; therefore come they to Bartimæus and say, “*Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee*” (Mark 10:49).

4. Learn, that what was aforesaid the most difficult, now becomes the very easiest of actions; when he is inwardly called to Jesus, he stands up.

5. Learn, that the soul casts away all that would delay her coming rightly to Jesus. Oh, he cast away his garment, as the soul also casts away the old garment of self-righteousness, before she comes aright.

6. The soul knows what she comes for, what she has need of. Jesus asked him, “*What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto Him, Lord, that I might receive my sight*” (Mark 10:51).

# Thanksgiving

*“Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:7).*

Rev. P. van Ruitenburg

The purpose of an apple tree is to bear as much fruit as possible. The more, the better. The purpose of our lives is to bear fruit for God, through gratitude. Usually we only thank people once for a donation or for blessing us in some way. Only in exceptional cases do you confirm how grateful you are, but there is a good possibility that it will be said that it has now been enough and gladly done. Then we stop thanking. That's very common and there's nothing wrong with this.

With gratitude to God, it is different. God's children continue to give thanks (if all goes well) for old and new blessings, and the Lord never tires of that. Quite understandably, the Apostle Paul raises up the living church to be *abundant* in thanksgiving, throughout the day, repeating it over and over again, because it is undeniable that God wants to think of us.

We may have a day job! In doing so, we must remember that we have not earned God's gifts and yet God showers sinners with His favours. Hence Paul's exhortation. The apostle also has in mind that God bestows the greatest gifts to reconcile enemies to God, namely, His only begotten Son.

I was surprised to see how often Paul writes about *thanksgiving*. I thought he would be afraid to cultivate those people who can always be grateful. The danger of the Pharisee is just around the corner, and so much is thanked for without true gratitude. Yet that didn't stop Paul from clearly and repeatedly explaining that thanksgiving should be an important goal in our lives. We should walk on the earth in thankfulness to God, *“abounding therein with thanksgiving.”*

*“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:15).*

*“Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).*

*“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).*

*“For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God” (1 Thessalonians 3:9).*

# The Journey of Life

Mr. Jim Timmer

The floor had not been cleaned for a long time. Such were the thoughts of a minister as he lodged one evening in a person's house. Should he speak to the landlord and tell her that she had work to do and that she should be more tidy? However, upon closer examination, the minister noted the floor was hard-packed dirt so if the surface was scrubbed, filth lay all below it. This was a lesson for him of the human heart. On the surface, there may be visible sins, but below the surface is an ocean of uncleanness. Something like this struck David as he reflected upon his roots, "*In sin did my mother conceive me*" (Psalm 51:5). My origin is corruption, I am unclean from my head to the sole of my feet, and my heart is like a cage of unclean birds. Where did Job come to in the last chapter of his book? "*I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*" (Job 42:6).

As one reflects upon their journey of life from their youth, then such would say, how much I must be ashamed of. As I think back, I'm confronted with what I said in my foolishness, and what I did in my rebellion. My self-will so often had the upper hand and now I see my sin and feel my guilt. I see sins regarding things I should not have done but also concerning things I should have done. Sin promised happiness and contentment but only yielded guilt and regret. David also reflected in pain, "*sins of youth remember not*" (see Psalm 25:7). Time does not wear out the guilt of sin, as many of God's children will testify. My sins are against God's law which is holy, just, and good. God warned me, "*He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul*" (Proverbs 8:36).

My conscience is as a book in which all my deeds are recorded. It is a silent witness that one day will be opened, which will prove a swift witness against me. This caused the prodigal son to cry out, "*Father, I have sinned*" (Luke 15:18). In all this self-condemnation, where must I turn? What was the solution for David? He felt the enormity of his sin as he confessed, "*It is great*" (Psalm 25:11). Yet his cry was for mercy, "*Pardon mine iniquity*" (Psalm 25:11). My actions were opposed to Thy law and Thy Word. Please acquit me of this enormous debt. "*Remember not the sins of my youth*" (Psalm 25:7). David similarly prayed, "*Enter not into judgment with Thy servant*" (Psalm 143:2).

Is the solution to felt guilt to plunge on and harden my heart against



the pangs of conscience, the warnings of God's Word, and against those who desire my wellbeing? Do I turn further to ways that lead further from God? Is there one among all of mankind who has raised his hand against the Lord and prospered? Should I continue as Cain, who would not hear the mild admonitions of God, *"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door"* (Genesis 4:7). What folly to continue, as the *"wild ass's colt"* (Job 11:12), unteachable and untameable? Can the end be pleasant if I refuse to submit to the laws of wisdom according to God's Word? No, for then the wages of sin is only death, to all eternity!

In relation to persisting in sin, God has warned us through the words of Psalm 32:9, *"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule."* This reference seems to amplify the stubbornness of these animals and may be a reflection of David refusing to confess his sin until Nathan confronted him with the words, *"Thou art the man"* (2 Samuel 12:7). David had gone down this path to his harm and had no communion with God through these many months of refusing to acknowledge his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. David admonishes us that mercy will compass those who confess and repent of their sin as he found by renewal.

*"But be ye not unruly,  
Or slow to understand,  
Be not perverse, but willing  
To heed My wise command.*

*The sorrows of the wicked  
In number shall abound,  
But those that trust Jehovah,  
His mercy shall surround."*

~ Parts of Psalter 84: stanzas 1 and 2

How many in God's Word have found forgiveness and mercy as the sentence of guilt was brought home, by God's Spirit, upon their heart? For example, by the saving work of the Holy Spirit, the enormity of sin and guilt enveloped the Jews under the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Apprehension of their guilt caused them to cry out, *"What shall we do?"* (John 6:28). They were confronted with the amount of guilt, and the realization that from their own side, there was no way of escape. But not only was their terrible guilt expounded to them but also the remedy, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). Christ is the only remedy for sin. Either we must pay this enormous debt, or this debt has been transferred upon God's Lamb who took it away by His death. Were these not the words that John the Baptist spake? *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). God's Word tells us the law is a schoolmaster to drive one to

Christ.

God has often used affliction to be a means in His hand to cause sinners to stop and consider their ways. For example, consider the prodigal son. He was a young man demanding the inheritance that would normally be given to children when their parents die. He had no respect for his father and wanted to immerse himself in the world with all the zest possible to fill his empty soul. He desired to be free from his father's loving restraints and live for here and now.

The prodigal son is a picture of all humans as we are born under God's wrath. This son and each of us desire to throw off God's laws as if happiness can be found apart from God, "whom to know is life." Matthew Henry comments, "Willful sinners waste their heritage; for they misemploy their thoughts and all the powers of their souls, misspend their time and all their opportunities, do not only bury but embezzle the talents they are entrusted to trade with for their Master's honour; and the gifts of Providence, which were intended to enable them to serve God and to do good with, are made the food and fuel of their lusts."

However, the day came when all his money was gone, and affliction drove him to reflect upon his father. He was spiritually awakened and "*came to himself*" (Luke 15:17). He began to long for home and once again to be under his father's roof and guidance, even if it meant he would be but a hired servant. He felt lost and undone and therefore fled from this pitiful condition. For him, affliction was to his profit as David confessed likewise about the blessings of a sanctified affliction.

1) When the prodigal returned, he found **eyes** of mercy. His father was looking for his return and "*saw him a great way off*" (see Luke 15:20). "*Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings*" (Jeremiah 3:22).

2) His father demonstrated a **heart** of mercy. He had compassion upon His son. "*Then Jesus called his disciples unto Him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way*" (Matthew 15:32).

3) His father had **feet** of mercy. He ran to his son, but his son came slowly with the burden of sin and guilt. "*The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; Slow to anger, and of great mercy*" (Psalm 145:8).

4) His father had **arms** of mercy. He embraced His filthy son and fell on his neck. "*I will love them freely*" (Hosea 14:4).

5) His father has **lips** of mercy. He kissed his son and sealed his pardon. "*I am black, but comely*" (Song of Solomon 1:5).

Blessed be God for Jesus Christ, who "*saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him*" (Isaiah 59:16).

# God is Dead!

Martin Luther was once in a period of great depression. Everything seemed to be going wrong and he thought that everyone was against him. For some weeks he went about with a sad face and would hardly speak to his family. One day, he came downstairs to find his wife in deep mourning. She was wearing black clothes. Martin said: "Whoever has died that you should be in such deep mourning?" His wife replied: "I think that God must have died." Martin very crossly told her she should not speak so about the Almighty, especially as God cannot die. His wife calmly turned to him and said: "Why then are you living as if He is dead?" The point went home, and he found relief for his mind that "*God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble*" (Psalm 46:1).

## The Last Triumph

Rev. Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

*"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" (Psalm 89:48). Grace itself gives no charter of exemption from it. An earthen pot, though full of gold, may break. The righteous, who are earthen vessels, though they are filled with the golden graces, are not freed from breaking by death. But their death is precious. Wicked men, like hawks, are set high upon a perch, decked with jingling bells, but then comes their passing bell and calls them away, and when they die, there is no missing them. Their life was scarcely worth a prayer, nor their death worth a tear. "The wicked die in their sins" (John 8:24). Death to them is but a trap door to let them into hell. But when a righteous man dies, his sins die with him. The pale face of death looks ruddy, being sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb. When a believer has death in his body, he has Christ in his soul. The day of his death is his ascension day to heaven. The death of a saint is precious to God; the righteous are said to be gathered. The unrighteous are carried away in a storm, whereas the righteous are gathered like we gather precious fruit and candy it. So greatly does God value the death of a saint that He makes inquisition for every drop of his blood. His death is precious to the saints who survive him. The saints living are affected with the loss of the godly, and carry them to their grave with a shower of tears. When the bodies of the wicked are laid in the grave, there lies a heap of dust to be tumbled into hell. But the dust of a righteous man is part of Christ's mystical body. The dust of a saint is united to Christ while it is in the grave, and as the dust of believers is now excellent, so it will appear shortly in the sight of men and angels. Emperor Trajan's ashes were honoured at Rome, so the ashes of the saints at the resurrection shall be honoured when they shall be made like Christ's glorious body in its beauty, strength, agility, and immortality."*