

fears (12-13). He works in a similar fashion with us too!

When we are afraid or anxious, we must not be reticent in approaching His face or in admitting our unbelieving fears to Him (and seeking His forgiveness and strength to overcome our fears). By His grace, He pardons us and sanctifies us and comforts us. From your reading, singing and meditating upon the Psalms, you know of the many times the Psalmist did this and found relief in his God. We must heed the blessed exhortation: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16)!

It is easy to understand how the Jews were tempted to fear ancient Babylon. Theirs was the army that destroyed Judah and Jerusalem. Babylon was possessed of military power, an imposing legal system and hugely impressive buildings. Babylon was confident in, and proud of, its achievements and abilities. This ethos was evident throughout its mighty empire. This is not unlike the modern Babylon of the world in our own day!

Yet the prophet’s question to Israel is devastating: “who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die” (Isa. 51:12)? For all his pomp, man, even at his best and his most powerful, is mortal. All men have died or are going to die. The great Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has mouldered for over 2,500 years. Likewise, the grave awaits all those who frame ungodly laws to advance their sins and their power. Even the richest and most outwardly prosperous children of Adam are subject to weakness and sickness, pain and ageing—the precursors of death and the everlasting hell that awaits all those who remain impenitent in their sins, and do not seek mercy and forgiveness in the cross of Christ alone.

From the playground bullies to the leaders of our age who misrepresent or mock the Christian faith, and all the wicked who are so highly praised and extolled in our day, as well as the ungodly legislators and rulers of our wicked world—all are mortal and will one day have to stand before the glory of God manifest in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be judged for every thought, word and deed.

Isaiah 51:12 adds that they “shall be made as grass.” The ungodly are fragile and transient, like grass which is cut down and withers away in the desert heat (Ps. 90:5-6), unlike the Word of our God which stands for ever (Isa. 40:6-8).

This is man, fallen and frail man, who is a “son of man” (51:12), just like his father and his father before him: weak, mortal and under God’s wrath. So do not fear him, even if he is rich, attractive and powerful. “Fear God” instead (Ecc. 12:13)! *Rev. Stewart*

“Listen and Wake Up!” 10 sermons on Isaiah 51:1-52:12, in a handsome box set (CD or DVD), is available from the CPRC Bookstore for £12/set (inc. P&P). Free videos and audios of these sermons can also be found on the CPRC website and YouTube site.

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Fearing Man and Forgetting God (1)

“I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?” (Isa. 51:12-13).

The practical importance of these inspired words rests upon three facts. First, we are tempted to fear, to fear man. Second, we are sinfully inclined to forget, to forget God. Third, we are tempted to fear man and forget God because of Babylon. Over a century after Isaiah’s prophecy, Israel was taken captive to Babylon. We too live in the Babylon of this evil world, which in 1,001 ways encourages and commands us, “Fear man! Forget the Lord!”

We also need to understand that the verses quoted above constitute part of Jehovah’s response to Israel’s earnest prayer for God to “awake” and wield His mighty arm to redeem His people, as He did when He destroyed the Egyptians at the Red Sea (9-10). Not only does Jehovah promise to ransom His beloved church (11) but He also addresses their fears. Our gracious Father is very practical here, showing His care for His children. He knows that His people’s request for deliverance is mixed with some sinful fear of man, for He sees the hearts of all.

Thus God provides Israel with a twofold comfort. First, He promises to redeem them (a direct answer to their stated request). Second, He addresses their fears (an important response to their unstated struggle).

Various lessons arise out of this for us today. We see here that true believers can and do struggle with the fear of man, to varying degrees and at certain times. You must not think like this: “There is some fear of man in my heart. Therefore, I am not a Christian.” Just look at Israel here. In Isaiah 51, the saints make a powerful and persuasive prayer (9-10), yet God detects some unbelieving fears in their hearts (12-13).

We also learn from this passage that our prayers, even godly prayers, may arise in connection with our fears. So do not think like this either: “There is some sinful fear in my heart. Therefore, God will not hear my prayers.” For what do we learn regarding Israel in Isaiah 51? That Jehovah answered their requests (11-16), despite the fact that their prayers were mixed with some fear of man.

All this encourages us to go to our heavenly Father when we are troubled and fearful. Jehovah alerts Israel to her fears and helps her against them (7-8). Israel prays for redemption (9-10). God promises to ransom her (11) and reasons with her about her

(continued on p. 4)

The Theodicy (2)

“We are often rightly told that God will not remember our sins and has removed them from us to an infinite distance (as far as the east is from the west) and buried them in the deepest sea. So how can those same sins be brought out into the open on the judgment day, with every believer being rewarded according to his works? Are our sins not to be brought up again as they are all atoned for and simply our works judged? Because surely the quality of the works will expose the sin inherent in them?”

The questioner who wrote the above question is especially concerned with the problem of the public revelation of our sins on the judgment day. Why should they be made known before all when they were paid for by Christ’s atonement? The question is rather narrow and really not all that important in itself. It takes on significance only in the broader context of the judgment of the nations in the judgment day.

I am not even altogether sure what the questioner means by “simply our works judged.” To what works does he refer? The good works done by God’s grace? Those works are God’s works in and through us.

I took the liberty, therefore, of broadening the question into a discussion of the most fundamental aspect of the judgment of God in and through Christ of all men who ever lived: the theodicy, God’s justification of Himself in His reward of the righteous and His eternal punishment of the wicked. This theodicy is the one great reason for the judgment day.

How does God justify Himself in all that He does? How does He, as the sovereign Lord, justify the eternal punishment of the wicked? How does He justify His salvation of some of the human race who are equally sinners with those who go to hell?

This question of the justification of God in all His works is the stumbling block to countless theologians who cannot stomach the truth of God’s sovereignty. Their objections are legion. They say, for example, that an absolutely sovereign God takes away the sovereignty of man, limited as it might be; that God cannot sovereignly choose His people in what seems to them an arbitrary fashion; that somehow man makes himself worthy of salvation by choosing Christ, letting Him into his heart and accepting Him as his Lord; that God is too gracious and merciful to send anyone to hell everlastingly; that hell, therefore, cannot be a reality; that God loves everyone, wants everyone to be saved and will punish only those who have had a chance to be saved but rejected it; that it is unspeakably cruel to send those who never had a chance to accept Christ to be saved. The litany from puny theologians goes on and on and on.

Thus proud man, thinking himself wiser and more merciful than God, makes his own answers and convinces himself that they are better answers than God Himself gives! But Scripture is concerned with the glory of God, not the moans of men.

God justifies Himself in all His works, also in election and reprobation. He does so in such a way that no one, ever again, questions God’s sovereignty. The wicked will all say, “We deserve what we get.” The righteous say, “Blessed be God for His grace to us!”

The first and most fundamental point that has to be made is the point that I underscored in the previous issue of the *News*. I quoted Romans 9 and I referred to God’s answer to Job in his suffering. God is God, and all the nations of the earth are less than dust on a balance or a drop of a bucket. One who is created by God, upheld by His providence and sustained day by day by His power has no right to question God’s ways. Can a spider demand a man to justify the man’s destruction of his web? Can an ant demand of a man a reason why the man broke up his ant hill? “O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom. 9:20). That is the first answer. When the glory of an infinite holy God is revealed in the judgment day, all men and devils will cower in fear and consternation.

God will manifest Himself as the holy God who hates sin and must hate sin to maintain His own infinite holiness. Any attack on God’s justice or anger or hatred of the wicked is an attack on His holiness. Those who speak of a loving God who cannot punish any wicked creature smear His holiness and detract from God’s own blessed glory. When Isaiah, at the time of his installation as a prophet, saw the glory of God that made the seraphim hide their faces with their wings, all he could say was, “Woe is me!” (Isa. 6:5). As the bright sunlight reveals the flaws and dirty spots on a garment, so God’s holiness so shines upon man that all his wretchedness, weakness, sin, guilt and hideous rebellion are clearly seen in all their evil.

In the judgment, God will make every sinner and demon admit that he alone is to blame for what sin he committed. After a lifetime of denial, he will confess that he wanted to sin, he hated God and His law, he deliberately mocked God, and he sneered at His just and righteous commands. In admitting his sin, each will confess that God is God, righteous and true. There is no more room for the wicked to blame God or for excusing sin. Unbelieving thieves, adulterers, abortionists, homosexuals, brutes, murderers, philanthropists, as well as the Antichrist and Satan, etc., will all finally “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:11).

This is the real point. Every man will be asked this one important question: “What did you do with Christ?” This is the issue. Did you honour Him as the Son of God? Did you believe in Him so that you sought all your salvation alone from Him? Never mind the ten million pounds you gave for a hospital. Never mind your unflinching concern for clean air and water. Never mind that you were a preacher. What did you do with Christ? This is the question that rings from the great white throne.

Did you take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Him? Were you willing to give up everything you have in faithfulness to Him? Did you flee to the cross to confess your sins and seek pardon in His bleeding body? What did you do with Christ?

Woe to them who denied Him, who chaffed under His providence, who sheared His sheep and scattered them instead of feeding them, who crucified Him again by their mockery of His work as the Son of God.

God will be justified in all He did on the last day. This is the theodicy. We still have to deal with God’s people but that will be next time, DV.

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