



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

"Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant"

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Calvin's Four Rules of Prayer

Reading through some old notes on Calvin's Institutes made me realize what always gets dropped when life feels like one giant game of whirlyball: prayer. Calvin says that if we do not pray, we are like a man who "neglect[s] a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him" (3.20.1). "So true is it," Calvin explains, "*that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon*" (ibid.). The metaphor is apt: digging is hard work, but digging for a treasure known to be there is worth the effort.

Then Calvin offers **four** rules for prayer--four rules for when we need the basics all over again. The **first rule** of prayer, according to Calvin, is reverence for the one to whom we pray. We need to remember that we address our Almighty Creator and Father through the mediation of the exalted Lord by the power of the Spirit who searches "*even the depths of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:10). Just work through the opening sections over at www.matthewhenry.org to learn this first and vital step.

The **second rule**, Calvin says, is realizing just how *needey we are before God*. Too often people offer prayers while their "*hearts are . . . cold, and they do not ponder what they ask*" (3.20.6); even worse, "*for the sake of mere performance men often beseech God for many things that they are dead sure will, apart from his kindness, come to them from some other source*" (ibid.). (Just when we are crushed with conviction, Calvin offers a word of sympathy: "*If anyone should object that we are not always urged with equal necessity to pray, I admit it*" [3.20.7]. Even the great Calvin struggled at times to pray!)

The first **two** rules of prayer (*reverence for God and a keen sense of neediness*) naturally lead to a **third: humility**. The humble prayer casts away all smugness or pretension and rests wholly in God's mercy to sinners. For this reason, Calvin argues, it is fitting that we begin our prayers to God by repenting of individual sins. As the Westminster Confession puts it, we are to repent of "*particular sins, particularly*" (WCF 15:5). Do you do this, out loud if necessary?

Finally, a **fourth rule**: "*we should be . . . encouraged to pray by a sure hope that our prayer will be answered*" (3.20.11). Such confidence is the antithesis of pride, since we are to trust in God's goodness even as we revere his holiness.

It should be clear by now that the Institutes' **four** rules for prayer (*reverence, a deep sense of need, humility, and trust*) cohere: knowing God as he has revealed himself magnifies our helplessness; and the humility that results takes God at his Word that he will hear the prayers of his children. The crux, according to Calvin, is this: if prayer is to do us any good, we must place our entire trust in God's self-revealed character, promises, and faithfulness.

Friend, the more we are overwhelmed by our own unworthiness before God and the myriad, sometimes agonizing, circumstances of life, the more we ought "*to grasp with both hands*" (3.20.12) the assurance that God will hear and answer our cries for help. Biblical faith, after all, does not teach us to approach God as slaves, but to pour out our hearts "*as children unburden their troubles to their parents*" (ibid.). ~ **Dr. R. Carlton Wynne - Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics - Westminster Theological Seminary**



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God, the Father Almighty

Below is an excerpt from Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.'s new book, *The Apostles' Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits*.

How do we even begin to speak of God, and by what right can we call him our Father? The audacity of claiming to speak of God seems massive enough, but then we go on to dare to call the almighty God our Father? This is exactly what Christians do and are taught by Jesus to do. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “*Our Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:9 NASB).

Modern theologians have had a big problem with the God of the Bible. When I was a freshly minted seminary student, I was assigned a book by Harvard University theologian Gordon Kaufman entitled “*God the Problem*”. Kaufman wrote his book just a few years after Time magazine had scandalized the nation with its cover story from April 8, 1966, “*Is God Dead?*” The cover story reported that many academic theologians and liberal professors no longer believed in God. Kaufman argued that modern theologians needed to invent an entirely new language for speaking about God. The language found in the Bible, he believed, was out-of-date and unworthy of modern thinkers.

Kaufman went on to argue that theologians must find a new way to argue that the word God is still meaningful. The God who existed in older theology no longer exists, and so existing theologians, he argued, must find a new way of speaking of God as real. But Kaufman was uncomfortable with speaking of God as real in any sense. His book was, in the end, a kind of argument for employing theologians at schools like Harvard University when their theologians no longer believed in God.

A few days into class, an anonymous student drew a satirical cartoon on the class chalkboard of a book entitled “*Gordon Kaufman the Problem by God*”. The whole class got the point immediately. If there is a theological problem, it is not God. The problem is us.

Contrary to Kaufman and the “God is dead” theologians, we do know how to speak about God, and we do know who God is. The reason we know these things is because God has spoken. God has revealed himself in both nature and Scripture, and what separates modern theology from biblical Christianity is the modern lack of respect for Scripture and for the authority of God. Instead of relying on God’s self-revelation in Scripture, so many modern theologies choose speculation and conjecture as their theological method. Much of this filters down into a form of postmodern pop spirituality, which has little to do with historic Christianity and biblical teaching.

Pop spirituality pervades self-help conferences, bestselling books, and television talk shows. These fools speak about the “*supernatural*,” the “*sacred*,” the “*numinous*,” the “*holy*,” the “*divine*,” the “*unconditional*,” or the “*ground of being*.” But no vague, nondescript, ambiguous deity can save—only God can save. These evasive and generalized idols of God amount to little more than flimsy little idolatries. None of these can substitute for the self-revelation of God in the Bible. What Christians desperately need at this time is to return to historic Christianity, the Christianity that emerged from the rich doctrinal commitments and evangelistic fervor of the apostles...

The Apostles' Creed does not merely affirm, “I believe in God the Father,” but it adds, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty.” Just as God is personal, he is also all-powerful. God is immanent, but he is also transcendent.



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God, the Father Almighty - Cont'd

As Scripture indicates, God is El Shaddai, the God who is all-powerful (Genesis 17:1 CEV). This affirmation of God's absolute sovereignty drives all that follows in the creed. God is the one who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ruling creation. Even king Nebuchadnezzar confessed, "*He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'*" (Daniel 4:35).

In the Apostles' Creed the word Almighty is a collective that is meant to represent all God's attributes, the fullness of God's perfections. All God's attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, self-existence, and immutability—are summed up in this one word, Almighty. Only the God who possesses the fullness of perfection and infinite majesty can truly be almighty and sovereign over creation.

Regrettably, the "*God, the Father Almighty*" affirmed in the creed is rarely discussed in many churches. Shallow descriptions of God and sloganizing are substituted for Christianity's rich confessional heritage. Regrettably, many pulpits proclaim a truncated and distorted vision of God. Many preachers fail to open up Scripture's rich teaching on God's holiness, righteousness, glory, and majesty and merely proclaim "*just an ordinary god.*" The God of Christianity is not just an ordinary god. He is the Father Almighty; the Father who can do anything; the Father who possesses all power, the one who created by the power of his word and who rules forever.

The creed starts with an affirmation that God is the Father Almighty. This truth is also where our worship begins. As Peter Martyr Vermigli, a lesser-known leader of the Reformation, said, this one statement of the creed should "*dismiss as nonsense whatever troublesome men or your own disturbing thoughts suggest in contradiction to what the sacred oracles or divine promises contain.*" We measure every doctrine and every thought against this affirmation about God's sovereign authority. If it falls short, we should, as Vermigli asserted, dismiss it as "*nonsense.*"

God the Father Almighty is the God we worship in song, deeds, and in the preaching of God's Word. All hymns must reflect and resound to this glorious King. All preaching must fit his glorious reign. All works of service and love must be rendered for the glory of his name. This affirmation of God as "*Father Almighty*" ought to rule our hymnody, our teaching, and every moment of our daily lives. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. - April 3, 2019**

Complete in Christ

There's a story told about William Randolph Hearst, the late newspaper publisher. Hearst invested a fortune in collecting great works of art. One day he read about some valuable pieces of art and decided that he must add them to his collection. He sent his agent abroad to locate and purchase them. Months went by before the agent returned and reported to Hearst that the items had at last been found—they were stored in his own warehouse. Hearst had purchased them years before!

That is analogous to the alarming number of Christians today who are on a desperate search for spiritual resources they already possess. Theirs is a futile quest for something more. It's a heretical fire fanned in part by the false notion that salvation is insufficient to transform believers and equip them for Christian living.



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Complete in Christ - Cont'd

Those thus influenced believe they need something more—more of Christ, more of the Holy Spirit, some kind of ecstatic experience, mystical visions, signs, wonders, miracles, a second blessing, tongues, a higher or deeper spiritual level, and on and on it goes.

But to have Jesus is to have every spiritual resource. All we need is found in Him. Rather than attempting to add something to Christ we must simply learn to use the resources that are already ours in Him.

Perhaps the watershed passage in all of Scripture on our sufficiency in Christ is the book of Colossians. Paul wrote it to believers who were strong in faith and love (Colossians 1:4) but confused by a heresy that denied Christ's sufficiency. We'll be taking a very careful look at some key portions of this critical text.

We don't know the precise nature of the heresy in Colosse because Paul didn't define it in detail or spend time naming and denouncing its leaders. Instead he refuted it generally by showing that it was rooted in an inadequate and erroneous view of the Person and work of Christ. He wrote the Colossian church an entire epistle focusing on Christ—His place in the universe, His work in salvation, His preeminence as God, His position as head of the church, and His utter sufficiency for every human need. In so doing, Paul demonstrated that the best defense against false teaching is a thoroughly biblical Christology. He warned the Colossians that attempting to add to or take away from Christ always ends in spiritual disaster.

In chapter 1 Paul writes:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:13–20)

The apostle delivers a profound summation when he says that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3) because “*in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*” (Colossians 2:9). He is head over all rule and authority (Colossians 2:10). He is life itself (Colossians 3:4)! What more could the apostle say to affirm our Lord's utter sufficiency?

The error Paul was addressed was multifaceted. These Colossian heretics claimed that Christ alone could not elevate someone to the highest spiritual level. They were advocating a variety of artificial spiritual additives, including philosophy (Colossians 2:8–10), legalism (Colossians 2:11–17), mysticism (Colossians 2:18–19), and asceticism (Colossians 2:20–23). The unassailable truth of Christ is incapable of blending with any of those errors. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur - April 8, 2019**



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Expiation and Propitiation

In the world of the first century, Roman crucifixion was not only a horrific form of torture, reserved for the lowest dregs of the criminal class, but it was also associated with severe shame. Not only were Roman citizens exempt from this humiliating death, but even the word crucifixion was avoided in social gatherings. In the Jewish mind-set, crucifixion was seen through the lens of Deuteronomy 21:23, which declares that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed of God (see also Galatians 3:13). Given such a reality, how is it that the Apostle Paul, along with the rest of the New Testament authors, determined to know nothing but "*Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (1 Corinthians 2:2), even to placard publicly Jesus as crucified in preaching (Galatians 3:1) and, indeed, to boast in nothing else except "*the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (6:14)?

The answer lies, in part, in the sacrificial system of the old covenant temple. God, to the praise of His unsearchable wisdom, gave ancient Israel sacrifices to serve as theological tools, instructing His people about the remedy for sin and the need for reconciliation with God. After the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, the Apostles were enabled to discern in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures how the system of sacrificial worship had been divinely ordained for the sake of unfolding the wonders of Christ and His accomplished work on the cross (e.g., Romans 3:21–26; Hebrews 9:16–10:18). The categories of sacrifice enabled the paradigm shift to seeing the cross of Christ not as a source of deep embarrassment but rather—and wondrously—as God’s greatest gift to humanity and His highest demonstration of love for sinners (Romans 5:8).

Two theological concepts of sacrifice are especially noteworthy for understanding the death of Jesus on the cross as the only sacrifice able to secure pardon from our sins and definitive reconciliation with God: expiation and propitiation. The *first*, expiation, means that Jesus’ sacrifice cleanses us from sin’s pollution and removes the guilt of sin from us. *Propitiation* refers to the assuaging of God’s wrath by Jesus’ sacrifice, which both satisfies the justice of God and results in His favorable disposition toward us. We turn now to consider these concepts more deeply by looking at their roots in the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Expiation

Expiation refers to the cleansing of sin and removal of sin’s guilt. In the sacrificial system of Israel, blood was collected from an animal’s severed arteries and then manipulated in a variety of ways. Blood was smeared, sprinkled, tossed, and poured out. In Leviticus 17:11, the Lord declared that since "*the life of the flesh is in the blood*," He gave Israel blood on the altar "*to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life*," underlining the idea of substitution: the shed blood of a blameless substitute represented life for life, soul for soul. Blood’s importance was underscored most prominently by the sin offering. Through the shedding and manipulation of the sin offering’s blood, God taught Israel of their need for cleansing from sin and for the removal of sin’s defilement and guilt, making divine forgiveness possible (see Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35). On the *one hand*, the blood signified death: displaying the blood before God demonstrated that a life, albeit the life of an unblemished animal substitute, had endured death, the wages of sin. On the *other hand*, blood represented the life of flesh: by the principle that life conquers death, blood was used ritually to wipe away, as it were, the defilement of sin and death.

The Day of Atonement was essentially an elaborate sin offering (Leviticus 16). On this autumn day, the high priest brought the blood of sacrifice into the Most Holy Place, sprinkling it before the atonement-lid of the ark, the earthly footstool of God. Blood was also sprinkled in the Holy Place and applied to the outer altar as well, cleansing both the Israelites and the house of God, the tabernacle, that He might continue to dwell among His people.



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The one sin offering of the Day of Atonement involved two goats. After the first had been sacrificed for the sake of its blood, the other goat was symbolically loaded with the guilt of Israel's sins as the high priest pressed both hands onto the head of the goat and confessed those sins over the animal. Weighed down with the judgment-worthy guilt of Israel on its head, the goat was then driven eastward, far from the face of God into the wilderness—a demonstration that "*as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us*" (Psalm 103:12). The sin offering, then, offered the Apostles a profound understanding of the death of Christ. While the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), the blood of Jesus the God-man, shed on the cross and applied by the Spirit to those who trust in Him, cleanses sinners from their sins. The thorns pressed onto His brow, an image of humanity's cursed estate (Genesis 3:18), were but a token of His bearing the weight of His people's guilt on His head, further demonstrating that He endured our fiery judgment to provide us with true expiation.

Propitiation

Propitiation refers to the assuaging of God's wrath and gaining of His favor. Turning to the doctrine of propitiation, we find a vivid portrayal of the assuaging of God's wrath as we reflect now on the whole burnt offering. Israel's worship was founded on the whole burnt offering, so much so that the altar, the central focus of worship, was even dubbed "*the altar of burnt offering*" (Exodus 30:28).

The first episode in Scripture where the whole burnt offering appears is in the story of the flood in Genesis 6–9. Early on, we are told that the Lord God, who is the main character in the narrative, was grieved "*to his heart*" over humanity's corruption (6:6), and that He determined to punish the wicked while saving Noah and his household. The crisis of the story, then, is the aggrieved heart of God. Even after the waters of divine judgment had abated, however, the situation was not changed. God had not been appeased. His just wrath was not assuaged, until Noah, at the dawn of a new creation, built an altar and offered up whole burnt offerings. Using instructive language that attributes human traits to God, the narrative describes the Lord as smelling "*the pleasing aroma*" of the whole burnt offerings so that His heart was comforted (8:21). As a result of the pleasing aroma, God spoke to His own heart, vowing never to destroy all humanity in such a manner again, and He blessed Noah. Like fragrant incense, the smoke of the whole burnt offering ascended into heaven, the abode of God, and He, smelling its soothing aroma, was appeased. God's heart was comforted—that is, His righteous wrath was satisfied. Later on through Moses, God ordained for the priesthood to offer up lambs daily as whole burnt offerings (Exodus 29:38–46). These morning and evening offerings served to open and close each day so that every other sacrifice—along with the daily life of Israel—was enclosed in the ascending smoke of their pleasing aroma.

The whole burnt offering's divinely ordained impact on God leads one to wonder over its theological significance. The one feature that is unique to this offering is that the whole animal, apart from its skin, was offered up to God on the altar; nothing was held back. The whole burnt offering thus signified a life of utter consecration to God, which means a life of self-denying obedience to His law. In the words of Deuteronomy, this offering represented and solicited one's loving the Lord God with all of one's heart, soul, and might (6:5). Such a life—lived by Jesus alone—offered up to God ascends to heaven as a pleasing aroma and propitiates God.



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Jesus fulfilled the Levitical system of sacrifice only because He offered Himself up to God on the cross as One who had fulfilled the law. In His tormented night of prayer in Gethsemane He had prayed, “*My Father . . . not as I will, but as you will*” (Matthew 26:39), and then He drank the cup of divine judgment as our blameless substitute. Jesus’ life of complete and loving devotion to God, offered up to the Father by the Spirit and through the cross—this is the assuaging of God’s wrath.

Because Jesus’ suffering was as a vicarious penal substitute, sinners can find rest for their souls. The impending thunderstorm of divine judgment that ever threatens us, overshadowing our vain attempts at happiness, cannot be dispelled by wishful thinking or misguided assertions. A Christian basks securely in the warm rays of the Father’s favor only because that storm of judgment has already broken in the full measure of its fury on the crucified Son of God. His shed blood cleanses us from our sins, removing our guilt from the sight of God. His wholehearted, law-keeping life offered up to God through the cross, even as He bore our penalty, rises to heaven as a pleasing aroma. Here, at last, the chief of sinners finds cause to boast in nothing at all except in the One who “*loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*” (Ephesians 5:2). ~ Dr. L. Michael Morales is professor of biblical studies at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, an adjunct professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, and a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America - April 11, 2019

Enjoying God Is a Command

While shaking hands at the church door, ministers are sometimes greeted with a spontaneous, “*I really enjoyed that!*”—which is immediately followed by, “*Oh! I shouldn’t really say that, should I?*” I usually grip tighter, hold the handshake a little longer, and say with a smile, “*Doesn’t the catechism’s first question encourage us to do that? If we are to enjoy Him forever, why not begin now?*”

Of course, we cannot enjoy God apart from glorifying Him. And the Westminster Shorter Catechism wisely goes on to ask, “*What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?*” But notice that Scripture contains the “rule” for enjoying God as well as glorifying Him. We know it abounds in instructions for glorifying Him, but how does it instruct us to “*enjoy him*”?

Enjoying God is a command, not an optional extra: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice*” (Philippians 4:4). But how? We cannot “*rejoice to order*,” can we?

True. Yet, Scripture shows that well-instructed believers develop a determination to rejoice. They will rejoice in the Lord. Habakkuk exemplified this in difficult days (see Habakkuk 3:17–18). He exercised what our forefathers called “*acting faith*” - a vigorous determination to experience whatever the Lord commands, including joy, and to use the God-given means to do so. Here are four of these means—in which, it should be noted, we also glorify God.



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Enjoying God Is a Command - Cont'd

Joy in Salvation

Enjoying God means relishing the salvation He gives us in Jesus Christ. *"I will take joy in the God of my salvation"* (Habakkuk 3:18). God takes joy in our salvation (Luke 15:6–7, 9–10, 32). So should we. Here, Ephesians 1:3–14 provides a masterly delineation of this salvation in Christ. It is a gospel bath in which we should often luxuriate, rungs on a ladder we should frequently climb, in order to experience the joy of the Lord as our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). While we are commanded to have joy, the resources to do so are outside of ourselves, known only through union with Christ.

Joy in Revelation

Joy issues from devouring inscripturated revelation. Psalm 119 bears repeated witness to this. The psalmist *"delights"* in God's testimonies *"as much as in all riches"* (Psalm 119:14; see also vv. 35, 47, 70, 77, 103, 162, 174). Think of Jesus' words, *"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full"* (John 15:11). Does He mean He will find His joy in us, so that our joy may be full, or that His joy will be in us so that our joy may be full? Both, surely, are true. We find full joy in the Lord only when we know He finds His joy in us. The pathway to joy, then, is to give ourselves maximum exposure to His Word and to let it dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). It is joy-food for the joy-hungry soul.

Joy in Communion

There is joy in the Lord to be tasted in the worship we enjoy in church communion. The church is the new Jerusalem, the city that cannot be hidden, the joy of the whole earth (Psalm 48:2). In the Spirit-led communion of praise and petition; soul pastoring; Word preaching; psalm, hymn, and spiritual song singing; and water, bread, and wine receiving, abundant joy is to be found. The Lord sings over us with joy (Zephaniah 3:17). Our hearts sing for joy in return.

Joy in Tribulation

Here, indeed, is a divine paradox. There is joy to be known in the midst of and through affliction. Viewed biblically, tribulation is the Father's chastising hand using life's pain and darkness to mold us into the image of the One who endured for the sake of the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12: 1–2, 5–11; see Romans 8:29). We exult and rejoice in our sufferings, Paul says, because "suffering produces . . . hope" in us (Romans 5:3–4). Peter and James echo the same principle (1 Peter 1:3–8; James 1:2–4). The knowledge of the sure hand of God in providence not only brings stability; it is also a joy-producer.

All of this adds up to exultation in God Himself. In Romans 5:1–11, Paul leads us from rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God (v. 2) to joy that comes in tribulation (v. 3) to exulting in God Himself (v. 11; see Psalm 43:4). The unbeliever finds this incredible, because he has been blinded by the joy-depriving lie of Satan that to glorify God is the high road to joylessness. Thankfully, Christ reveals that the reverse takes place in Him—because of our salvation, through His revelation, in worship's blessed communion, and by means of tribulation.

Enjoy! Yes, indeed, may *"everlasting joy . . . be upon [your] heads"* (Isaiah 51:11). ~ **Dr. Sinclair Ferguson**
- April 10, 2019



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner - May 2019

Birthdays

*Elyse T. (1)
Jackson T. (22)
Mike M. (22)
Brian R. (26)
John H. (30)*

Anniversary

*Tom and Marcy S. (22)
Ben and Charlene S. (25)*

“When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God's wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God's nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace. Even Edwards's sermon on “*Sinners in hands of an Angry God*” was not designed to stress the flames of hell. The resounding accent falls not on the fiery pit but on the hands of the God who holds us and rescues us from it. The hands of God are gracious hands. They alone have the power to rescue us from certain destruction.” ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, The Holiness of God**



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