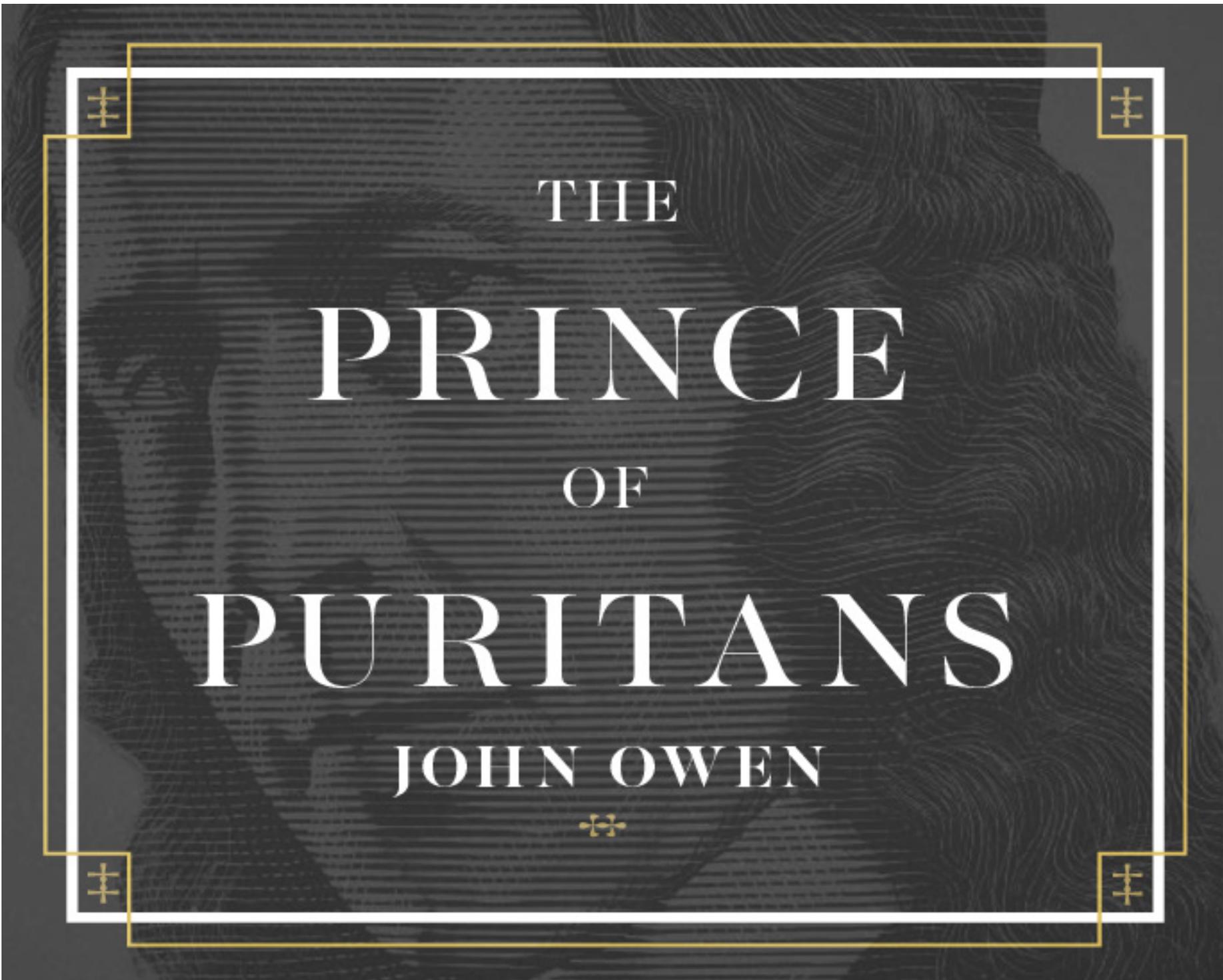


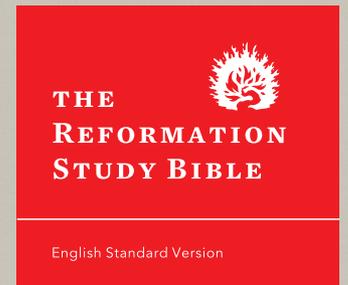
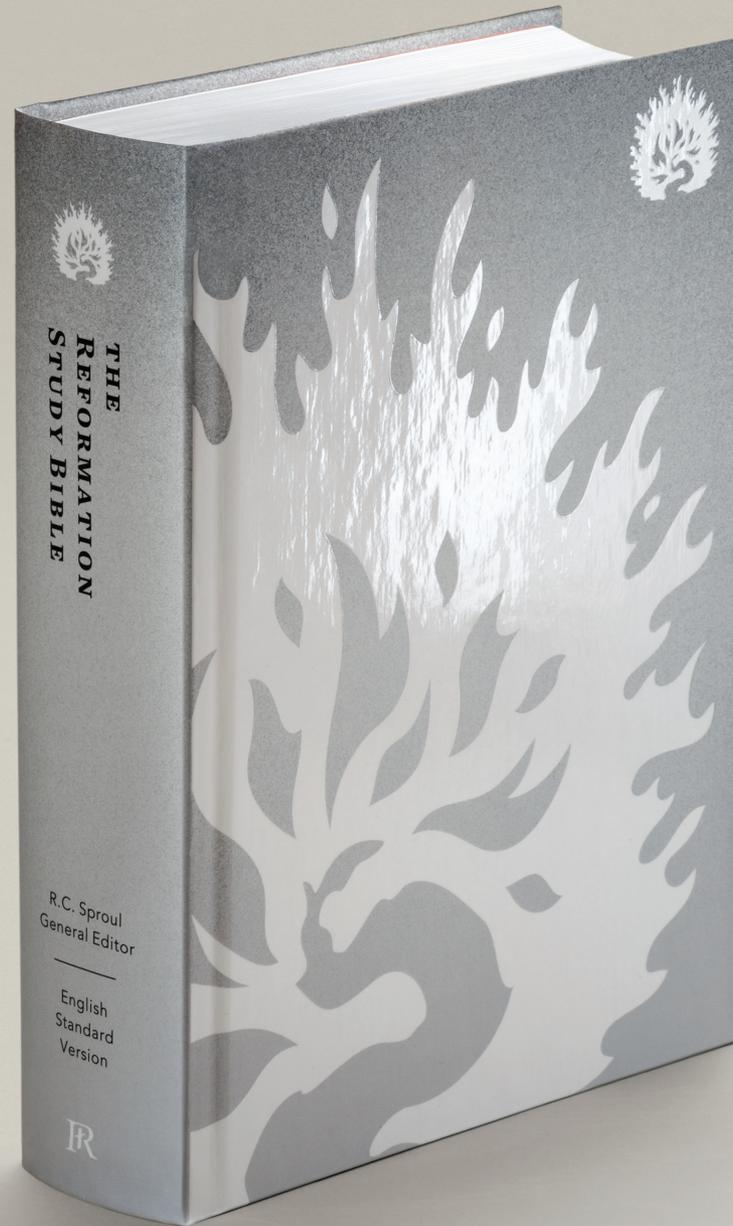
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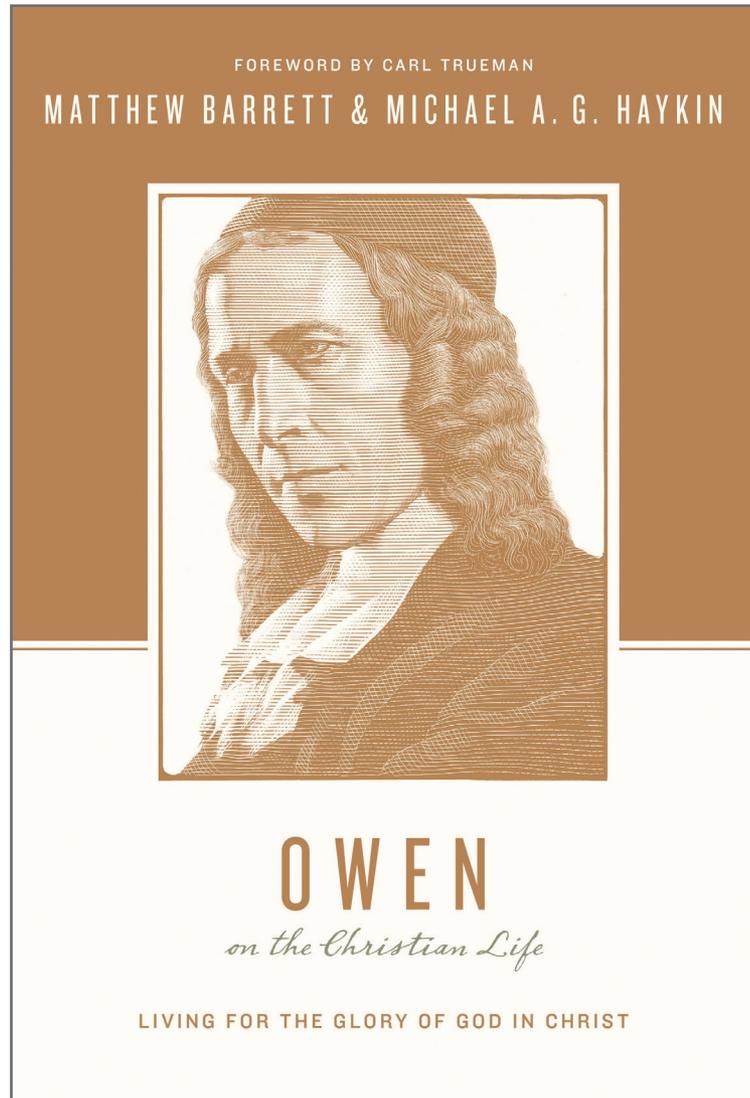
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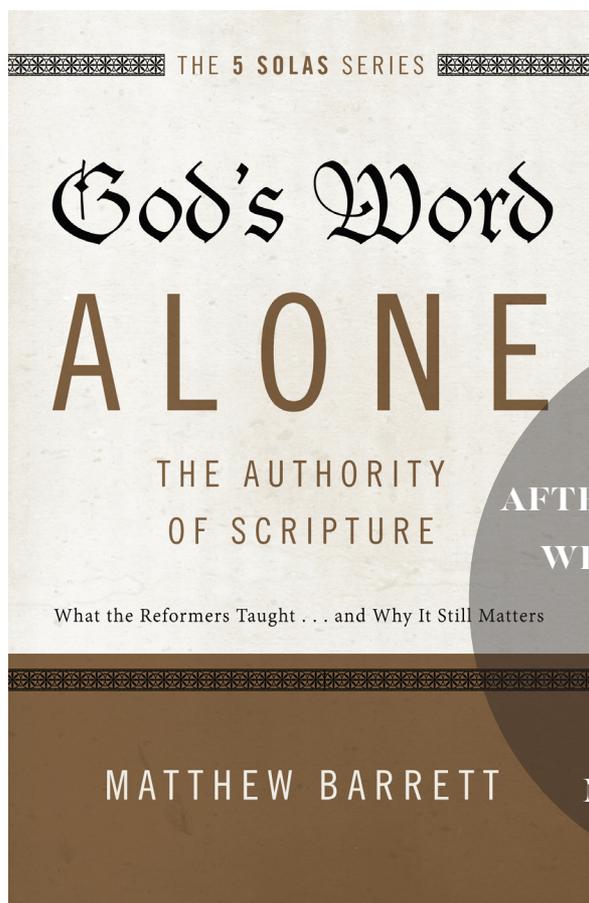
CHRISTIAN LIFE

John Owen is widely hailed as one of the greatest theologians of all time. His many works—especially those encouraging Christians in their struggle against sin—continue to speak powerfully to readers today, offering much-needed spiritual guidance for following Christ and resisting temptation day in and day out. Starting with an overview of Owen’s life, ministry, and historical context, Michael Haykin and Matthew Barrett introduce readers to the pillars of Owen’s spiritual life. From exploring his understanding of believers’ fellowship with the triune God to highlighting his teaching on justification, this study invites us to learn about the Christian life from the greatest of the English Puritans.

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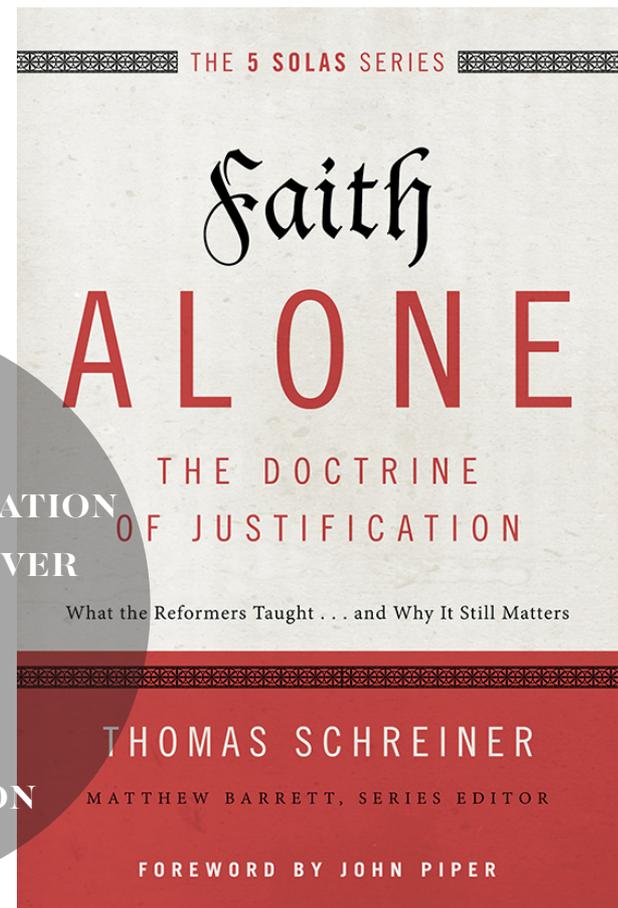


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FROM THE EDITOR

Church history matters. By looking to those giants of the faith in the history of the church, not only do we avoid falling prey to the heresies of the past, but we also stand firmly on the shoulders of others so that we persevere in sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

One set of broad shoulders belongs to the seventeenth-century Puritan John Owen. It is hard to exaggerate the importance and influence of Owen's life and writings. His books were and still are some of the best works in theology that we have, standing alongside those of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and many others. The Christian today will benefit in countless ways from works like *On Communion with God*, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, *On the Mortification of Sin*, and *Of Indwelling Sin in Believers*.

What is so remarkable about Owen, however, is not merely the robust, biblical nature of his writings, but his insistence that theology affects the Christian life. In other words, Owen refused to separate head and heart. Doctrine must lead to doxology every time, otherwise we have not truly understood its purpose. Therefore, Owen is the Doctor who looks into the human soul in order to diagnose our spiritual disease and offer us a cure in Jesus Christ. If read carefully, it is hard not to finish a book by Owen without feeling a desire to know God more.

The upcoming year, 2016, will be the four hundredth anniversary of Owen's birth. So what better timing for an issue of *Credo Magazine* that aims to introduce some of Owen's theology and writings. But as much as we love you reading *Credo Magazine*, this issue would be a failure if you did not study and read this Prince of Puritans for yourself. ■

Matthew Barrett
Executive Editor

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10 QUESTIONS WITH LEONARDO DE CHIRICO

Leonardo speaks his mind about the papacy and why Italy needs gospel churches today.

Leonardo De Chirico is the pastor of Breccia di Roma, a church that he helped plant in Rome in 2009. Previously, Leonardo planted and pastored an evangelical church in Ferrara, Italy, from 1997 to 2009. He earned degrees in History (University of Bologna), Theology (ETCW, Bridgend, Wales) and Bioethics (University of Padova). His PhD is from King's College (London); it was published as Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. In 2015, he published A Christian Pocket Guide to the Papacy (Christian Focus). He is a lecturer of Historical Theology at Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione in Padova, Italy. Additionally, Leonardo is the Director of the Reformanda Initiative, which aims to equip evangelical leaders

to better understand and engage with Roman Catholicism, and the leader of the Rome Scholars Network (RSN).

Did you grow up in the Catholic Church? If so, what drew you to become an evangelical Christian?

1

My family was an ordinary Italian family, nominally Christian and devout to Saint Antony, but with little grasp of basic gospel truths. One day we were visited by a Swiss couple from the local evangelical church that was going door to door. They asked if we were Christians. The answer was “yes, of course.” They further asked if we had ever read the Bible. The answer was “no.” Catholics were not supposed to read the Bible.

They then replied, “How can you be Christian if you don’t read what Christ has done for you?” It was as if a light was switched on in the darkness. It was the beginning of a journey that led my father to become a believer, then the rest of the family followed at different stages of life.

2 **What is the main doctrinal divide, in your estimation, between Roman Catholics and Protestants?**

In Roman Catholicism the tendency is to idolize the church. The distinction between Creator and creature is blurred by way of conferring to the church what ultimately belongs to the triune God alone. The church is elevated to a position that makes it an idol, stemming out of a non-tragic view of sin, the conviction that in significant ways the church continues the incarnation of Jesus Christ resulting in an abnormally conflated ecclesiology. The great bullet points of the Protestant Reformation, i.e. Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, are all biblical remedies against the idolatrous tendency of a self-referential church, which sadly have been rejected so far.

SOME OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE POPE SEEMS TO RESEMBLE GOSPEL EMPHASIS, YET THE SUBSTANCE OF IT IS STILL HEAVILY SACRAMENTAL AND MARIAN, LEANING TOWARDS A LIBERAL FORM OF CATHOLICISM. HE IS THE FIRST JESUIT TO BECOME POPE AND WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET THAT THE JESUIT ORDER WAS FOUNDED TO FIGHT AGAINST THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION BY LEARNING ITS SECRETS AND USING THEM AGAINST IT.

3 **In your ongoing interaction with Roman Catholics in Italy, what approach have you taken and found to be effective when witnessing to them?**

Exposing them to Scripture as much as possible and not assuming they already grasp the basics of the gospel. They may know some Christian vocabulary, but it is generally marred, distorted by traditions and deviant cultural baggage. Most Catholics in Italy are of the “pick-and-choose” variety and so they blend unbiblical traditions and secular unbelief. It is also important to show the personal and the communal aspects of the faith in order to embody viable alternatives for their daily lives.

4 **You have written a very helpful little book on the papacy. So tell us, what are positive and negative aspects of this new pope Francis?**

There is much sentimentalism about Pope Francis. He is a champion of the gospel of “welcoming all” and “showing compassion.” Many secular people, as well as many evangelicals, are fascinated by it. We should ask: What about repentance and faith in Christ alone? What about turning back from idolatry and following Christ wholeheartedly? What about putting the Word of God first? Some of the language of the Pope seems to resemble gospel emphases, yet the substance of it is still heavily sacramental and Marian, leaning towards a liberal form of Catholicism. He is the first Jesuit to become Pope and we should never forget that the Jesuit order was founded to fight against the Protestant Reformation by learning its secrets and using them against it.

5 Let's address the elephant in the room: Is the Pope the Anti-Christ?

Luther, Calvin, theseventeenth-century Protestant confessions, the Puritans, Wesley, Spurgeon, et al., believed that the papacy (not this or that Pope) is the institution out of which the Anti-Christ will eventually come. I share this broad protestant consensus. The papacy claims christological and pneumatological titles and prerogatives (e.g. vicar of Christ, infallible teacher, supreme head of the church with full, immediate and universal power), coupling them with earthly political power. Remember that Popes are monarchs of a sovereign political state. In the papacy what belongs to God and what belongs to Caesar tragically intermingle. This poisoned mixture is the potential milieu for the Anti-Christ to rise from.

6 You are a pastor of a Reformed Baptist Church in Rome. Is a church like yours extremely rare? How has the culture perceived your congregation?

Evangelicals are 1% of the population in Italy and Rome is no different from the rest of the country. We still struggle with the centuries-long prejudice of evangelicals being perceived as a cult. What makes our church distinct is that it is confessional (holding to the 1689 London Confession of Faith and belonging to a Reformed Baptist association of churches), urban (impacting the cultural, political, media, and academic institutions of

BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE VATICAN, ROME CITY CENTER HAS BEEN, UNTIL RECENTLY, A "HERESY FREE-ZONE." NON-CATHOLIC INITIATIVES WERE NOT WELCOMED, IF NOT FORBIDDEN. THE LAST PROPERTY THAT EVANGELICAL CHURCHES BOUGHT IN THE CENTRAL AREA DATES BACK TO 1920. AFTER NEARLY 100 YEARS WE ARE SENDING THE MESSAGE THAT WE LOVE THE GOSPEL AND WE LOVE THE CITY. WE WANT TO BE A GOSPEL COMMUNITY RIGHT AT THE HEART OF IT.

the city with the gospel), and missional (living to the glory of God in all vocations and initiatives). Unlike cults, we cherish church history and claim to belong to the catholic (not necessarily Roman Catholic!) church. Unlike cults, the gospel we believe in is for the whole of life. Unlike cults, we encourage constructive and critical cultural engagement. Thankfully, there is a growing number of churches like that.

Tell us about this new piece of property your church is purchasing. Why is this so exciting?

Because of the presence of the Vatican, Rome city center has been, until recently, a "heresy free-zone." Non-Catholic initiatives were not welcomed, if not forbidden. The last property that evangelical churches bought in the central area dates back to 1920. After nearly 100 years we are sending the message that we love the gospel and we love the city. We want to be a gospel community right at the heart of it. Apart from hosting the activities of the church, the property will also function as a theological study center. With IFED (a Reformed theological institute:

7

THE GREAT DANTE USED THE LAW OF RETALIATION TO PUNISH PEOPLE IN THE INFERNO. POPULAR CULTURE MADE A KIND OF PASTA TO PUNISH GREEDY PRIESTS. A TASTY REMINDER THAT NO GLUTTON WILL INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

www.ifeditalia.org) we are providing outstanding theological training to lots of students. In Rome we will act as an outpost of evangelical theology, next to the Jesuit and the Dominican universities which are located around the corner! The space has the potential to become a springboard for gospel work in the city and beyond. For example, the Reformanda Initiative has just been launched (www.reformandainitiative.org). It aims at helping the world-wide evangelical church to relate biblically to Roman Catholicism.

8 If our readers get the chance to visit Rome, what two places must they see?

Evangelical tourists should see the “dark” sides of Rome as far as religious freedom is concerned. For instance, Campo dei Fiori is a beautiful square next to the baroque Piazza Navona where Popes burnt heretics of all types, Protestants included. In the middle of Campo dei Fiori is an impressive bronze statue of Giordano Bruno recalling his execution that happened there in 1600 because he was a “free thinker” in an age and place where total submission to the power of the church was imposed. A number of Evangelical martyrs found the same destiny there.

Another place to visit is Porta Pia where the Italian army entered the city and conquered it in 1870, thus ending the history of the Pontifical state. The Bible in Italian was forbidden in Rome up to 1870.

It was through the breach of Porta Pia that the first Bibles printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society were smuggled into the city and freely distributed to the people. The tragic irony of Rome is that she is known as one of the cradles of Christianity, but the reality is that the Bible was a forbidden book for centuries. Generally, no tour guide tells you these stories or shows you these places.

9 Let’s get down to the important stuff: which football team should we be rooting for (that is, “soccer” for our American readers!)?

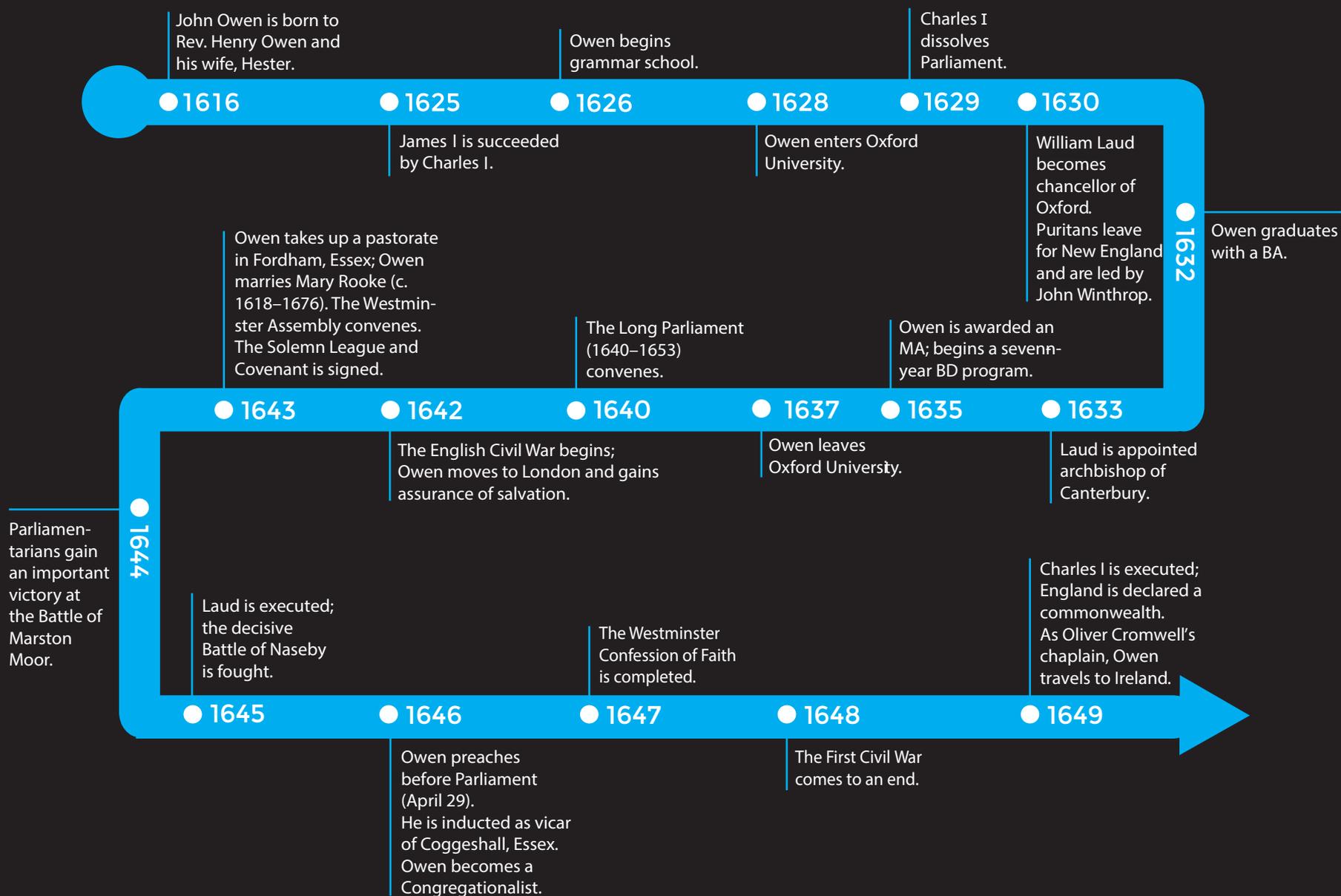
In Rome there are two top teams: Roma and Lazio. People tend to be very passionate about one or the other or – should I say – one against the other! People stop talking to you if you happen to support the other team. I was not born in Rome, so I am excused to support Torino FC, which is not perceived as a rival to most Romans. In this way, I don’t run the risk of losing a friend for supporting the wrong football team!

10 If I have just one meal in Italy, what authentic dish should I order?

Try “strozzapreti” (literally “priest stranglers”!). It’s a savory pasta dish, like thick and twisted macaroni. It can have various combinations with different tomato-based sauces. In popular culture, Roman Catholic countryside priests were teased because of their voracious appetites and impressive bellies. So this pasta was supposed to “strangle” them because of its thickness. The great Dante used the law of retaliation to punish people in the Inferno. Popular culture made a kind of pasta to punish greedy priests. A tasty reminder that no glutton will inherit the kingdom of God! ■

Who is John Owen?

John Owen (1616-1683) is widely regarded as one of the most influential English Puritans. As a pastor, he longed to see the glory of Christ take root in people's lives. As a writer, he continues to encourage us toward discipline and communion with God. His high view of God and deep theological convictions flowed naturally into practical application and a zeal for personal holiness. Here are some quick facts about his life:



Owen is appointed preacher to the Council of State and a chaplain to Cromwell with the expedition to Scotland.

● 1650

Owen is appointed vice-chancellor of Oxford.

● 1652

Owen opposes the offer of the crown to Cromwell. Owen is no longer vice-chancellor.

● 1657

Owen is appointed dean of Christ Church, Oxford University.

● 1651

Cromwell dissolves Parliament and is appointed Lord Protector. Owen is awarded an honorary DD from Oxford.

● 1653

The monarchy is restored under Charles II. Owen leaves Christ Church and Oxford (March); he lives at Stadhampton.

● 1658

Owen takes a leading role at the Savoy Assembly. Cromwell dies (September 3).

The Great Fire in London destroys much of the city.

● 1666

The Conventicle Act prohibits Nonconformist pastors from preaching.

● 1664

The Great Plague kills many in London; the Five Mile Act prohibits Nonconformist ministers from returning to parishes.

● 1665

The Act of Uniformity seeks to impose Anglican uniformity; two thousand Puritan ministers are ejected on St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24); Owen moves to Stoke Newington.

● 1662

Limited religious freedom is granted by the Declaration of Indulgence.

● 1669-1670

Owen discusses Nonconformist unity with Richard Baxter.

Owen's first wife, Mary, dies.

● 1675

Owen dies (August 24); he is buried in Bunhill Fields (September 4).

● 1660

● 1672

● 1673

Owen's church unites with that of Joseph Caryl; the congregation now meets in Leadenhall Street, London.

● 1676

Owen marries Dorothy D'Oyley.

● 1683

● 1689

The Toleration Act receives royal assent.

The Reformed Pastor

MY TOP THREE BOOKS BY JOHN OWEN

by Kelly M. Kopic

Picking just three books by John Owen to recommend is such a difficult task when there are so many good ones. Nevertheless, here are three that have profoundly shaped my own thinking and living:

I *Communion with the Triune God*

While the recent edited version of this classic work was titled *Communion with the Triune God*, the original volume was called *Of Communion with God the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly in love, grace, and consolation, or, the Saints Fellowship with the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost, unfolded* (1657).

That full title explains the goals Owen has in mind for this book, and in my mind, the results are fresh and filled with vitality. In this profound and

pastoral work, Owen unpacks the benediction of 2 Cor. 13:14 with theological skill, psychological insight, and pastoral passion. Probably, no work has had a greater influence on all of my theology and life than this single volume. If you can only read one Owen book, without reservation this is the volume I would suggest to you.

A Discourse on the Holy Spirit

While in reality he published 5 “books” on the Holy Spirit over the years, it is reasonable to treat these as a whole, which turns out to be over 1100 tightly printed pages in volumes 3 and 4 of the standard 19th century edition of Owen’s Works.

It has been argued that Owen’s work on Pneumatology is the most exhaustive (and exhausting!) treatment on the person and work

of the Holy Spirit ever to have been published by that time in the history of the Church. Owen brilliantly draws on early Church Fathers widely known (e.g., Augustine, Tertullian) and others less known but deeply insightful on this subject (e.g., Didymus the Blind). He covers areas expected and unexpected. For example, his treatment on the Spirit's work in the life of Jesus is helpfully suggestive and constructive. Throughout this work readers will stumble upon stunning Trinitarian insights, surprising pastoral applications, and careful navigation between the extremes of his day ("rationalists" on the one hand, and "Enthusiasts" on the other). Following this Puritan you will find yourself in the hands of a faithful guide.

draw attention to one of his fantastic volumes on Christology: *On the Person of Christ* or his *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*.

The Person of Christ is a masterful example of a Protestant scholastic treatment of Christology, filled with careful distinctions and wise reflections even while not forgetting to display pastoral connections. Yet his *Meditations and Discourses*, representing the last work he actually worked on before his death, is filled with a sense of wonder, warmth, and hope. Here is someone who sees Jesus not as a theological abstraction, but rather as the Lover of his Bride. By slowly working through these volumes one cannot help but grow in his or her reverence and love for the incarnate Son of God.

Kelly M. Kapic is Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College. He is the editor of Overcoming Sin and Temptation and the author of Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen. ◀

3 ***Overcoming Sin and Temptation***

For the third spot, I am torn. I would like to pick one of his celebrated works that deal with overcoming sin and temptation since I believe in those books Owen shows striking psychological understanding and fruitful proposals for living in the midst of the ongoing struggle with sin. However, I will instead use this last selection to

PROBABLY, NO WORK HAS HAD A GREATER INFLUENCE ON ALL OF MY THEOLOGY AND LIFE THAN THIS SINGLE VOLUME. IF YOU CAN ONLY READ ONE OWEN BOOK, WITHOUT RESERVATION THIS IS THE VOLUME I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU.

A
FAITH
WE CAN
CONFESS

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION
ACCORDING TO J.V. FESKO

The Westminster Confession is arguably the most important Reformed confession. Written by some of the most outstanding theologians of the seventeenth century, this summary of doctrine still speaks today! Matthew Barrett, executive editor of Credo Magazine, talked with J. V. Fesko, academic dean and professor of systematic theology and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, in order to understand just how important this confessional statement is for the church today. Fesko is the author of Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine, A Christian's Pocket Guide to Growing in Holiness, and The Theology of the Westminster Standards.

John, you've been studying The Westminster Confession for years, but for some of our readers this may be the first time they have ever heard of it. Briefly, can you tell us who wrote this confession and why?

In the middle of the seventeenth-century, the political situation in England was quite volatile. The English king, Charles I, wanted to bring all worship in his kingdom into conformity with *The Book of Common Prayer* (TBCP). He unsuccessfully tried to impose TBCP upon the Scottish churches. Initially the Scots created their national covenant in 1638 by which they sought to establish their churches in the Reformed faith. This covenant was essentially a declaration of war against King Charles. The king was the head of the church and to reject his authority in the church's affairs was to reject his authority as king. The king unsuccessfully tried to approach Parliament to raise money and an army to fight the Scots. Long story short, Charles and Parliament went to war. At the outbreak of the civil war, the English and the Scots made an agreement, the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), by which they sought to

THE DIVINES WANTED TO ENSURE THAT WORSHIP WAS SCRIPTURALLY SOUND, UNFETTERED BY HUMAN TRADITIONS, SO THAT THE GLORY OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST WOULD STAND OUT. IF YOU WALK INTO A ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, CHANCES ARE YOU'LL BE DAZZLED BY GOLD, OPULENT VESTMENTS, PICTURES OF SAINTS, AND PERHAPS EVEN STAINED GLASS WINDOWS. BY CONTRAST, IF YOU WERE TO WALK INTO A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTTISH CHURCH, IT WOULD LOOK NAKED—NOTHING ON THE WALLS, A SIMPLE PULPIT, AND SOME PEWS. THE DIVINES BELIEVED THAT IN SUCH A SEEMINGLY AUSTERE SETTING, ONLY THE GLORY OF CHRIST WOULD SHINE FORTH.

promote and establish the Reformed faith in England, Ireland, and Scotland. Part of their efforts included having Parliament call an assembly of theologians to write a new confession of faith and catechisms to propagate the Reformed faith and unify the three countries under the same doctrine and practice. In one sense, the Westminster Assembly was a failure—Presbyterianism failed to gain a strong foothold in England or Ireland; although, it was firmly established in Scotland. But from another vantage point, the Assembly's success was far greater than they could have ever imagined. Although the Westminster Standards never took hold in England and Ireland, many

UNION WITH CHRIST, AS JOHN OWEN (1616-83) FAMOUSLY WROTE IN HIS WORK *COMMUNION WITH GOD*, PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION FOR THE BELIEVER'S COMMUNION WITH THE TRIUNE GOD AND HIS FELLOWSHIP WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH. THE DIVINES WROTE OF THIS DOCTRINAL NEXUS BEFORE OWEN WROTE HIS FAMOUS WORK IN 1657.

churches throughout the world now use them as their confessional standards.

The Westminster Confession has much to say about the doctrine of justification. How is Westminster's statement on justification distinctively Reformed in contrast to, say, Roman Catholicism and Arminianism?

By the time the Westminster divines wrote the Confession, much theological water had passed under the bridge—there had been a number of significant debates over the doctrine of justification, as well as debates contemporary with the Assembly's work on the confession. Right off the bat, the Confession makes several important qualifications about justification. Justification is not by “infusing righteousness into” the elect and “not for anything wrought in them, or done by them” (WCF XI.i). Both of these statements present objections to two different theological errors—views promoted by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander (1498-1552). Rome taught that God infused his grace into a person by means of his baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit. On

the basis of God's grace wrought by Christ, the believer then sought to maintain and secure his justification. The Council of Trent famously promoted the idea that believers would seek their initial justification by baptism and their second or final justification by their Spirit-wrought works. The divines reject both of these ideas by objecting to infused righteousness and arguing that justification is not based upon anything done by the

believer. Another error they rejected was the view of Andreas Osiander, a Lutheran theologian who taught that believers share in the divine righteousness of Christ. In other words, we are not justified by Christ's imputed righteousness but by being in union with Christ and sharing in his own personal divine essential righteousness. The divines reject this by stating that justification does not rest upon anything “wrought in” the believer.

In addition to rejecting these errors, the divines also state that believers are not justified by God “imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness” (WCF XI.i). They do not mention him by name, but the divines reject the views of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius believed that God looked upon the faith of believers as if it were righteousness. The Reformed, by contrast, taught that faith was instrumental and laid hold of Christ's righteousness. For Arminius, justification rests upon faith, whereas for the divines, justification rests solely upon the obedience and satisfaction of Christ.

THEY DO NOT MENTION HIM BY NAME, BUT THE DIVINES REJECT THE VIEWS OF JACOB ARMINIUS [1560-1609]. ARMINIUS BELIEVED THAT GOD LOOKED UPON THE FAITH OF BELIEVERS AS IF IT WERE RIGHTEOUSNESS. THE REFORMED, BY CONTRAST, TAUGHT THAT FAITH WAS INSTRUMENTAL AND LAID HOLD OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS. FOR ARMINIUS, JUSTIFICATION RESTS UPON FAITH, WHEREAS FOR THE DIVINES, JUSTIFICATION RESTS SOLELY UPON THE OBEDIENCE AND SATISFACTION OF CHRIST.

Rome and Arminius were certainly key errors the divines wanted to avoid and proscribe, but there were other doctrines they also sought to exclude. On the one hand, they wanted to address the concerns of antinomians—those who believed that the moral law was completely eliminated for believers. The divines, therefore, taught that God expected good works from believers, but these good works were not the ground of their justification but instead its fruit. Faith does indeed work by love, but not for justification (WCF XI.ii). In justification, the principal acts of saving faith are receiving, resting, and accepting Christ's work—these are all passive elements (WCF XIV.i). Related to this is the rejection of

justification from eternity. The moderator of the Assembly, William Twisse (1578-1646), was part of a small minority of Reformed theologians who believed that God justified the elect in eternity. When a person made his profession of faith he merely discovered his already justified status. The divines rejected justification from eternity and instead distinguished between God's decree to justify the elect and their actual justification in time (WCF XI.iv).

On the other hand, the divines were also keen to reject errors of Neonomianism, the idea that God lowered the demands of the law through Christ's work. The new standard was sincere obedience. Richard Baxter (1615-91) later famously taught a twofold justification, one where a person was initially justified by faith, which was then followed by a second justification at the final judgment. A person could, in theory, fail to be justified at the final judgment because of his lack of piety and good works. In contrast to the views of Baxter, the divines assert that the elect can never truly fall away, though they can and do fall under his fatherly displeasure (WCF XI.v).

The last two errors they address are worth noting. Again, the divines being ever so polite do not mention anyone by name. Nevertheless, they affirm the imputation of the active and passive obedience of Christ when they say that God imputes his "obedience and satisfaction" to believers (WCF XI.iii). When we read the Confession, we might be tempted to look for these doctrines under contemporary labels, such as the *imputed active obedience* of Christ. Yet, we must read the Confession in its seventeenth-century context and recognize that the divines use phrases and terms common to their own period.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION ON JUSTIFICATION

CHAPTER XI

I. Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

II. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.

III. Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as He was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for any thing in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

IV. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit does, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

V. God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

VI. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

The “obedience and satisfaction” is a common seventeenth-century phrase that refers to the active and passive obedience of Christ.

Last, the divines address a common Anabaptist error, namely, that Old Testament believers were saved in a different manner from those in the New Testament. In concert with some of the earliest covenant theology of the Reformation from Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75), the divines affirm that salvation was the same for both Old and New Testament believers—they were all justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

To say the least, one should be familiar with the various debates that were common to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to have a richer appreciation for the intricate manner in which the divines explain what justification is and what it is not.

You’ve done some great work on the doctrine of union with Christ. Tell us, how did those who wrote The Westminster Confession understand union with Christ?

With the catholic church (note the lower case “c,” where catholic means universal, not Roman Catholic), the divines embraced and affirmed the doctrine of union with Christ. They were not alone in this as many theologians before them—Augustine, Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux—taught the doctrine of union with Christ. Within their own context, the Roman Catholic Church, Arminius, and even the heretical Socinians, taught doctrines of union with Christ. I think the divines were aware of their agreement with the catholic doctrine, and hence, it is much like the water surrounding a fish—the fish doesn’t take much

notice of what is familiar to him. In one sense, then, the doctrine of union with Christ does not feature as prominently as it does, for example, in Girolamo Zanchi’s personal confession of faith, *De Religione Christiana*. In this confession Zanchi has a separate chapter on union with Christ that leads off his treatment of soteriology. On this note, some have even criticized the divines for not having a doctrine of union, but such analysis is erroneous.

The divines affirm union with Christ in a number of places. For example, they recognize that election takes place as the first instance of union with Christ, what theologians of the period sometimes called the *union of the decree* (WCF III.v). The divines also explain, “All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him” (WCF XXVI.i). Union with Christ, as John Owen (1616-83) famously wrote in his work *Communion with God*, provides the foundation for the believer’s communion with the triune God and his fellowship with the body of Christ, the church. The divines wrote of this doctrinal nexus before Owen wrote his famous work in 1657.

Another important place we should examine when investigating the doctrine of union with Christ is the Larger Catechism, which asks:

What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

The answer?

The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and

whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him (Larger Catechism q. 69).

This question starts the Larger Catechism’s explanations of justification, adoption, and sanctification. Like Zanchi, the divines also recognized that union is the context for all of the divine blessings of redemption. But what makes the Reformed understanding of union unique, in contrast to Arminian, Roman Catholic, or Socinian views, is that they believe in justification by an extrinsic or alien righteousness imputed by faith alone (WCF XI.ii). In contrast to these erroneous views, the elect enter into union with Christ the moment of their effectual calling (Shorter Catechism, q. 30), but this union with Christ is not the basis of their justification. The believer’s judicial standing rests solely in Christ’s work, not in “anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone” (WCF XI.i).

For some today, doctrine and worship are to live in two different worlds. One has nothing to do with the other, nor should it! However, The Westminster Confession, which is thick on doctrine, also has a lot to say about worship in the church. How does it connect the dots from doctrine to doxology?

For the Westminster divines, worship and theology were inextricably bound together. The theology of worship (recall Charles I’s efforts to impose TBCP) was one of the chief causes of the civil war. Westminster divines, such as Samuel Rutherford, spent time in prison because they were accused of preaching against TBCP.

An additional layer of complexity is the common seventeenth-century belief that the type of worship practiced by a nation drove the ebb and

RIGHT WORSHIP WAS A REFLECTION OF RIGHT DOCTRINE; HENCE THE ASSEMBLY SET OUT TO WRITE A NEW CONFSSION OF FAITH AND CATECHISMS TO BRING ABOUT THE REFORMATION OF WORSHIP.

flow of world history. When the Spanish Armada was destroyed by a storm off the Western coast of Scotland, England viewed it as a divine vindication of the Reformed faith over the bankrupt theology of Roman Catholic Spain. They believed that a “Protestant wind” destroyed the Spanish fleet!

A number of the Westminster divines also believed in the imminent return of Christ—some thought that Christ would return in less than twenty years according to their exegetical calculations. They wanted, therefore, to reform the theology and worship in the three kingdoms so that God’s wrath would not fall on England, Ireland, and Scotland. Right worship was a reflection of right doctrine; hence the Assembly set out to write a new confession of faith and catechisms to bring about the reformation of worship.

One such example of Reformed worship comes in the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW)—all worship practices must have precedence in Scripture. Where Scripture is silent, the church may not create or impose new practices. To contemporary eyes, this may appear like a rather strict approach to worship, but in reality, it was a great relief to many—it meant freedom, not confinement. In England, the king (or queen) could impose TBCP and require all subjects to

follow its rules without exception. For people who refused, they could be fined and imprisoned, and for multiple violations they could be executed. If you refused, for example, to kneel before the sacrament, then you could be fined. Or, if you refused to come to worship services to avoid certain imposed practices, once again, you could be fined or imprisoned. The Westminster divines believed that no one should be required to kneel to receive the sacrament because there was no warrant in Scripture for the practice. The RPW freed people from the tyranny of abusive authority; they could rest assured they would only be expected to do the things required in Scripture—nothing more, nothing less.

To this end, the Westminster divines created the *Directory for Public Worship*. Important is the first word in the title, *Directory*. In other words, this book offered *directions*; it did not impose commands. Yes, it did identify certain required elements of worship, such as the reading and preaching of the Word, but it did not specify how much of the Word should be read or what type of sermon should be preached. In all of this the divines wanted to ensure that worship was scripturally sound, unfettered by human traditions, so that the glory of the triune God and the gospel of Christ would stand out. If you walk into a Roman Catholic church, chances are you'll be dazzled by gold, opulent vestments, pictures of saints, and perhaps even stained glass windows. By contrast, if you were to walk into a seventeenth-century Scottish church, it would look naked—nothing on the walls, a simple pulpit, and some pews. The divines believed that in such a seemingly austere setting, only the glory of Christ would shine forth.

We live in a day when the authority of Scripture is under severe attack. Can The Westminster Confession help us recover a biblical doctrine of Scripture once again? If so, how?

These days it seems as though people seek God through all sorts of different avenues. They look within hoping that they'll find him through meditation or mysticism. They look without hoping they will find him in self-help books, fantastic tales from people who supposedly died and came back from the dead, or even in the charismatic movement where well-intended Christians constantly seek a new message from God, revelation tailor-made for their own life. In a similar vein many today make God in their own image—they worship a god of their own desires or ideals. Why worship a God who judges wickedness when we can pick attributes that please us as we walk through the doctrinal salad-bar of our post-modern culture?

In contrast to these many trends, the divines begin their confession with the doctrine of Scripture. God's revelation, not our imaginations, defines him—it reveals who he is and what he has done. In the simple words of the Shorter Catechism, Scripture principally teaches what we are to believe concerning God and what duty he requires of us (q. 3). But far from being a lifeless book of rules, the divines believed that God's Word is its own interpreter. Sure, there are challenging portions of Scripture which are sometimes difficult to understand. But because the Holy Spirit has inspired the entire Bible, we can use the clearer parts of Scripture to interpret the less clear parts (WCF I.vii). This principle has been labeled the analogy of Scripture—or, Scripture interpreting Scripture (WCF I.ix). The divines

recognized, therefore, that God not only wrote the Bible, but he continues to use it today—the supreme judge in the church for all controversies of religion “can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WCF I.x). Note the participle, “the Holy Spirit speaking” (emphasis).

THESE DAYS IT SEEMS AS THOUGH PEOPLE SEEK GOD THROUGH ALL SORTS OF DIFFERENT AVENUES. THEY LOOK WITHIN HOPING THAT THEY’LL FIND HIM THROUGH MEDITATION OR MYSTICISM. THEY LOOK WITHOUT HOPING THEY WILL FIND HIM IN SELF-HELP BOOKS, FANTASTIC TALES FROM PEOPLE WHO SUPPOSEDLY DIED AND CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD, OR EVEN IN THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT WHERE WELL-INTENDED CHRISTIANS CONSTANTLY SEEK A NEW MESSAGE FROM GOD, REVELATION TAILOR-MADE FOR THEIR OWN LIFE. IN A SIMILAR VEIN MANY TODAY MAKE GOD IN THEIR OWN IMAGE—THEY WORSHIP A GOD OF THEIR OWN DESIRES OR IDEALS. WHY WORSHIP A GOD WHO JUDGES WICKEDNESS WHEN WE CAN PICK ATTRIBUTES THAT PLEASE US AS WE WALK THROUGH THE DOCTRINAL SALAD-BAR OF OUR POST-MODERN CULTURE?

The divines believed that God continues to speak through the reading and especially the preaching of his Word (Larger Catechism, qq. 154-55).

How often do people come to church in eager anticipation of hearing God audibly speak to them through the reading and preaching of the Word? Do we come to download data and information about God, to hear a pep talk, or for some practical advice? Or do we come to hear the Spirit of the living God speak through the reading and especially the preaching of God’s Word? I suspect if more people had this type of understanding and appreciation of God’s Word, they would realize where the true manna from heaven lies—not in the mystical journey within, or seeking special knowledge from a gifted few, or looking for the one self-help book that will offer great life-skills—and they would seek and cherish God’s Word.

In your opinion, what is it about The Westminster Confession that sets it apart from other confessions as a statement of faith the church today should follow?

I really appreciate the doctrinal precision of the Confession. When you take a close look at the document, its careful turns of phrase, what it says, as well as what it doesn’t say, it’s really a magnificent document. The divines were very careful in constructing this document—they drew lines in the sand on key issues, such as the importance of the decree of election, but also maintained human free will. The razor-sharp distinctions in the chapter on justification preserve the alien nature of Christ’s imputed righteousness and carefully affirm the necessity and importance of good works for the Christian life. At the same time, the divines

allowed for a great deal of doctrinal diversity, which they accommodated through brilliantly and purposefully ambiguous statements in the Confession.

The divines, for example, state that the reward for Adam in the covenant of works was “life” (WCF VII.ii). They don’t specify whether this was eternal life or dwelling indefinitely in the Garden of Eden. This was a subject of debate among the divines. Rather than make a decision, they used the ambiguous word *life* so that both parties could sign off on the document. In this respect, the divines used wisdom regarding where to draw lines in the sand and when to draw circles. On some issues, they said, “Here, and no further!” On other issues, they agreed to have a principled diversity. The church, I believe, desperately needs this ethos. Too often people define orthodoxy as toeing a specific line on every single point of doctrine, and the slightest deviation is characterized as apostasy. The divines knew where to draw lines and where to allow for differences of opinion. We should study the Confession to see where they do this and see what we can do to learn from it.

If readers enjoy The Westminster Confession, what confession or catechism, or what Puritan, should they turn to next?

On the short side, William Ames’s *The Marrow of Theology*, or William Perkins’s *The Golden Chaine* is a good place to start. These men were very influential in the period leading up to the Assembly.

An excellent system of theology is Edward Leigh’s *Body of Divinity*. Leigh served in Parliament during the time of the Assembly, and though he wasn’t a divine, he was intimately familiar with

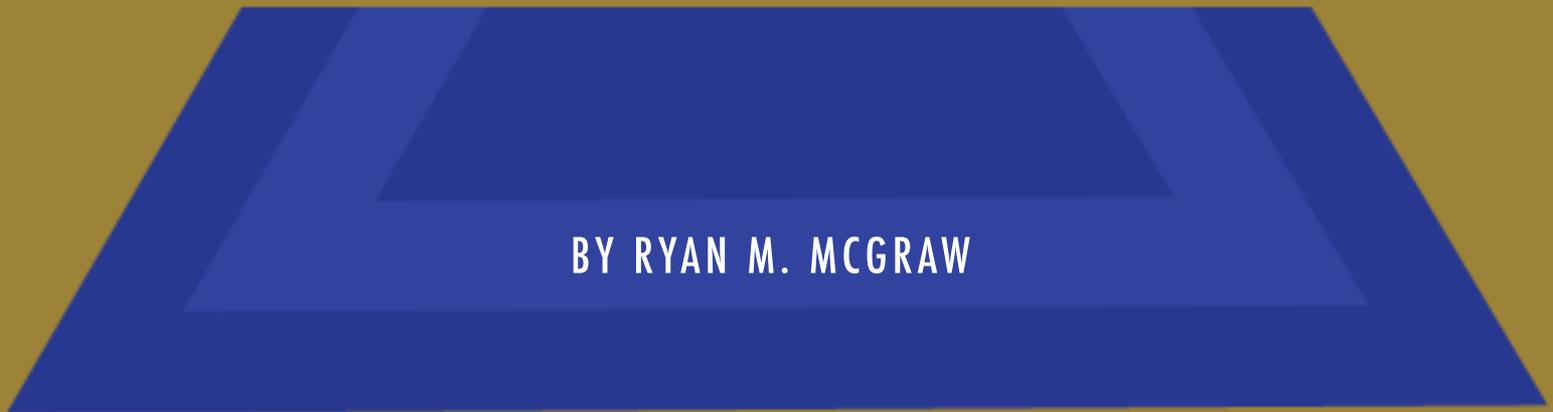
the theology of the period and often catalogs many of the different views and common arguments from the period. Leigh’s work is excellent. In fact, I printed the PDF of his *Body of Divinity*, folded the pages in half, and had them bound in three separate volumes so I could have them readily accessible on my bookshelf.

Another collection to consider is *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*. Goodwin was an independent divine who participated in most of the Assembly’s significant debates. The twelve volumes of his works certainly provide an excellent window into the theology of the period and one of the Assembly’s greatest minds. ■



DOES THE TRINITY REALLY MATTER ?

A LAYMAN'S GUIDE TO JOHN OWEN'S COMMUNION WITH GOD



BY RYAN M. MCGRAW

Writing on John Owen is like building an iPad (sorry in advance to non-Apple fans). The R&D department must work hard to engineer a product using terms that the average person does not understand, but without which there could be no iPad. After long hours of research, planning, meetings, tests, and trips to China, the iPads begin rolling off the assembly line. The end product must be useable, and someone then tries to show people why they need one.

I wrote a very expensive book on Owen and a very inexpensive book on Owen. The very expensive book has hundreds of footnotes and takes great pains to argue from primary sources, set Owen in his historical context, and interact with other scholars. It is very expensive partly because some of these scholars need a paycheck for combing through such works in order to make them better. My very inexpensive book on Owen represents what happens when church members ask, “Why have you spent so much time writing about John Owen?” My primary answer is that Owen is the best author in English to teach us how to enjoy fellowship with all three persons in the Trinity. In that light, my aim is to sell you an “Owen iPad” by helping you understand why he is important and how he can help you know the triune God better.

WE ARE NOT OBLIGATED TO READ THEOLOGIAN FROM THE PAST IN THE SAME WAY THAT WE ARE OBLIGATED TO BELONG TO LOCAL CHURCHES AND TO SIT UNDER A LOCAL MINISTRY. YET CAN WE NOT BENEFIT FROM THOSE MEN WHO ARE AMONG CHRIST'S GREATEST "GIFTS" TO THE CHURCH IN HER HISTORY?

HOW TO BUILD AN OWEN IPAD: THE CONTEXT OF OWEN'S TRINITARIAN PIETY

Some scholars have called Owen the greatest theologian that England ever produced. Yet he is old and dead, so why should you care? He neither wrote blog posts nor had Facebook or Twitter accounts. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-16,

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to

and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul included “pastors and teachers” among the offices listed here. Christ’s positive purposes

OWEN TEACHES US HOW TO HAVE COMMUNION WITH EACH DIVINE PERSON JOINTLY AND DISTINCTLY. HIS BOOK ON COMMUNION WITH GOD TREATS EACH PERSON IN TURN WITH A PRACTICAL AIM.

in giving such men to the church are to equip the saints and to promote unity in the faith and spiritual maturity. His negative purpose is to protect believers from theological and practical instability as well as from false teachers. Christ's plan for your life is for you to read your Bible daily and to sit under sound preaching (Acts 17:10-11). We are not obligated to read theologians from the past in the same way that we are obligated to belong to local churches and to sit under a local ministry. Yet can we not benefit from those men who are among Christ's greatest "gifts" to the church in her history?

In order to profit from Owen's theology, you need some history. Owen was born in 1616. He studied at Oxford University in his early teens, which was the time to go university if you went at all. After completing his BA and MA, he began his seven-year bachelor of divinity degree (for those interested in seminary, do not try this at home unless accompanied by an adult, and for students, your work load is not too bad). Owen dropped out of his divinity degree early due to persecution from William Laud, who required "Puritans" to practice things in worship that were against their consciences, such as bowing to crucifixes and wearing funny bright colored robes known as "vestments."

However, Owen eventually earned the title of doctor of divinity for his writing skills, became a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, and acceded to vice-chancellor of Oxford University where he taught for a decade. After the monarchy was restored, Owen used the exorbitant salary he earned previously at Oxford (about ten times that of the average minister) to help support Puritan ministers who were forbidden from preaching. He went from preaching before thousands in Ireland and mentoring students at Oxford to pastoring a small church of about thirty members. He wrote many important books.

He died in 1683, comforted that the last book he saw coming to print aimed to teach believers how to meditate on the glory of Christ. His life-long battle with the Socinians, who denied the Trinity, the atonement, and almost every essential doctrine of the Christian faith except the doctrine of Scripture, provided the background for his practical development of Trinitarian theology. So we will draw from *Communion with God*, which was his primary practical work on the Trinity.

WHAT THE OWEN IPAD DOES: THE TRINITY, COVENANT THEOLOGY, AND UNION WITH CHRIST

Three components make the "Owen iPad": the doctrine of the Trinity, covenant theology, and union with Christ. The Trinity means that God is one in essence and three in person. This doctrine is revealed in Scripture and is not a contradiction, since God is one of one thing and three of something else. The Father begets the Son

eternally, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son together. The unity of God means that all three persons operate inseparably in every divine work. The distinction between and the order of the persons means that each divine person works appropriately in every divine action. To illustrate, the Father sent the Son to save his elect, Christ took on true humanity, and he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35). In terms of salvation, the Father plans salvation, the Son purchases salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation. God communicates to us from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. In turn, we come to God by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

The next two components work together. God is high above us (Ps. 113). He comes to us in an agreement called a covenant. This means that God must be reconciled to sinners through Christ's death and that sinners must be reconciled to God by the Spirit changing their hearts (Rom. 5:1-10; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Jn. 3:3-5). Yet what good is it if Christ has no personal relation to us and we still stand under God's wrath? We need faith to unite us to Christ (1 Cor. 6:17), which means that all that is his becomes ours. By Christ's righteous life we are counted righteous before God (Rom. 5:17-20), by his cursed death God removes his wrath and curse due to us for sin (Gal. 3:13), by his resurrection we walk in newness of life and hope in the life to come (Rom. 6:1-11), and by his ascension and session in heaven he prepares a place for us (John 14:3) and lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Christ is the bond of union between God and us, ensuring through the Spirit's work in our hearts that we can be saved and walk with God. This means that the gospel is Trinitarian. The

IN PRACTICAL TERMS, THIS MEANS THAT YOU MUST GO TO CHRIST FOR EVERYTHING. WHAT DO YOU DO, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN YOU STRUGGLE WITH INDWELLING SIN? YOU MUST GO TO CHRIST FOR THE SPIRIT TO GRANT YOU REPENTANCE AND OBEDIENCE. IF YOU ARE SERIOUS ABOUT THIS, THEN YOU MUST USE THE MEANS THAT CHRIST GIVES YOU TO PUT AWAY SIN, TRUSTING IN HIM TO BLESS THEM.

Father, Son, and Spirit save us together and each in his own way. We live in covenant with God through Christ, in which he adopts us as his children (Gal. 4:1-4) and makes us joint heirs of heaven with Christ (Rom. 8:17). This should enable us to live the entire Christian life, from the new birth to the resurrection, in loving fellowship with all three divine persons.

WHAT DOES THE OWEN IPAD LOOK LIKE? THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

This is where we should get excited. Owen teaches us how to have communion with each divine person jointly and distinctly. His book on *Communion with God* treats each person in turn with a practical aim.

The Trinitarian blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14 can help us understand and remember how this works. We hold communion with the Father primarily in love. Some Christians treat Christ's intercession as though it is a cosmic wrestling match between

the Father and the Son in which the Son (barely) prevails in holding back the Father's wrath. Owen noted that this insults the Father. It is God the Father who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16). When John wrote, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), he had the Father in view primarily, since the Father proved his love by giving us his Son. While all three persons love us and Christ's love surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19), we should think of the Father primarily when we think of the love of God. This should comfort us and lead us to love the Father every time we say, "Our Father" in prayer.

We hold communion with the Son in grace. While "grace" often means today, "I am a very bad person and I need to keep reveling in my justification before God," Owen meant something different. Grace includes all of the benefits imparted to us by the Father through Christ. This means that Christ gives us everything we need for justification, adoption, sanctification, persevering in godliness, and glorification (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:28-39). Christ is the wisdom and the power of God to salvation (1 Cor. 1:24), which includes more than forgiving our sins (1 Pet. 1:5). Since I am united to Christ's person through covenant, I partake of all that Christ purchased.

In practical terms, this means that you must go to Christ for everything. What do you do, for example, when you struggle with indwelling sin? You must go to Christ for the Spirit to grant you repentance and obedience. If you are serious about this, then you must use the means that Christ gives you to put away sin, trusting in him to bless them. This includes meditation on the nature of sin, confronting yourself with Scripture, fervent

IT IS PRECISELY BECAUSE OF GOD'S JEALOUSY FOR HIS OWN GLORY, WHICH IS BEING OPPOSED BY PHARAOH, THAT GOD USING HIS SOVEREIGNTY TO ACCOMPLISH MIGHTY ACTS IS JUSTIFIED.

prayer for help, Christian fellowship, public worship, sacraments, and other means by which Christ communicates himself to you. You need to be where Christ is and trust in his willingness and ability to enable you to live for his glory. We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

We hold communion with the Spirit in comfort. He creates and maintains fellowship between God and us. As the seal of our redemption (2 Cor. 1:22), he regenerates us and stamps us as belonging to God. As the down-payment of our salvation (Eph. 1:14), he gives us partial possession and a foretaste of heaven while we walk with God on earth. We cultivate communion with the Spirit by growing in personal holiness (Gal. 5:25). When we fall into sin, we live as citizens of hell though we are truly citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:21). Owen argued that to the extent that we cultivate communion with the Spirit we have already begun to enjoy heaven on earth. Elsewhere he wrote that if we do not trust in the Spirit to help us know the Lord, then we may as well burn our Bibles! We must cultivate fellowship with the Spirit by reading our Bibles on our knees in prayer and by promoting godly living through using the means of grace.

OWEN ARGUED THAT TO THE EXTENT THAT WE CULTIVATE COMMUNION WITH THE SPIRIT WE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO ENJOY HEAVEN ON EARTH. ELSEWHERE HE WROTE THAT IF WE DO NOT TRUST IN THE SPIRIT TO HELP US KNOW THE LORD, THEN WE MAY AS WELL BURN OUR BIBLES! WE MUST CULTIVATE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT BY READING OUR BIBLES ON OUR KNEES IN PRAYER AND BY PROMOTING GODLY LIVING THROUGH USING THE MEANS OF GRACE.

your spiritual muscles in order to run the race set before you (Heb. 12:1-2). Take up and read, and learn to love the triune God and to walk with him in every area of life.

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WHY DO I NEED AN OWEN iPad?

Now you have a task set before you. The application of Owen's principles stretches into every area of theology and into every part of the Christian life. To see what this looks like, you can begin by reading my very inexpensive book on Owen. To see how this works and why, you can read my very expensive book on Owen. However, the best way to grow in loving fellowship with all three divine persons is to start reading Owen himself, beginning with *Communion with God*. Owen will help you stretch your mind and train



KILLING SIN BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

JOHN OWEN'S APPROACH
TO MORTIFYING SIN

BY GEOFF THOMAS

John Owen would shake his head a little at another article written about his contribution to understanding the New Testament's teaching on killing remaining sin. He would have much preferred future generations to be helped to see more of the glory of God. He would find our obsession with killing the flesh to be a sign of our struggles in sanctification. However, given our evangelical neglect of the duty to kill our sin, John Owen comes with mighty encouragement to assist us in our holy ambition to be like Christ.

WHAT TO DO WITH REMAINING SIN

Owen hones in on the Pauline exhortation, “If you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Rom. 8:13). The Bible affirms that the Christian has been delivered from the dominion of sin by the Holy Spirit coming into his life. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's new master, deposing King Sin. The Christian has been made free from sin's insistent commands that he give in to sin and satisfy its lusts; every true Christian is now able to defy sin and do what is righteous. But, of course, that does not make him sinless. Oh that he were, but for that he must wait for heaven! The remaining virus of sin and its misdeeds will ever trouble us; it will make its presence felt even on our deathbeds. What are we to do with remaining sin which, while not controlling us, is still within us?

THERE IS NO OTHER WAY THAN BY THE SPIRIT

We keep looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, of course. Our constant trust in the Savior is the source of our victory over sin. That is one biblical insistence, and another is found in the eighth chapter of Romans. Paul tells us that our hope lies

in putting to death the misdeeds of the body—that is, in mortifying remaining sin by weakening, starving, and murdering everything evil that rises up within us to defy God and his law. We are to be engaged in this work by the energy and under the direction of the Spirit of God. Regeneration is vain without the work of the Spirit. Sanctification

IF, FOR EXAMPLE, YOU APPEAL TO YOGA TO KILL YOUR SINFUL NATURES, OR PURSUE A SOLITARY LIFE IN AN ISOLATED COTTAGE ON TOP OF A WELSH MOUNTAIN, OR BEAT YOURSELF WITH A WHIP UNTIL THE BLOOD FLOWS—ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE GRACE OF THE SPIRIT TO OVERCOME YOUR SINS—THEN YOU ARE SAYING THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS INADEQUATE FOR THIS WORK. THAT IS AN INSULT TO HIM.

is vain without the work of the Spirit. The fruit of Christ-likeness will never appear without the Spirit. Intercession is impossible without the Spirit. So we also are impotent to put to death the misdeeds of the body without the Holy Spirit. All other ways of killing sin are vain; all other suggested helps are helpless. It must be done by the Spirit, by him alone, not by appeal to any other

SO AS YOU BATTLE WITH THE SIN THAT SO EASILY BESETS YOU, NEVER FORGET YOUR DUTY: “YOU PUT TO DEATH THE MISDEEDS OF THE BODY” [ROM. 8:13]. YOU DO IT. YOU DON’T LIE BACK ON A COMFY BED OF EASE AND WAIT FOR THE SPIRIT TO DO IT. YOU HAVE TO PUT TO DEATH THE MISDEEDS OF THE BODY, BUT YOU DO SO BY THE SPIRIT, BY HIS POWER AND LOVE AND WISDOM.

power. If, for example, you appeal to Yoga to kill your sinful natures, or pursue a solitary life in an isolated cottage on top of a Welsh mountain, or beat yourself with a whip until the blood flows—anything other than the grace of the Spirit to overcome your sins—then you are saying that the Holy Spirit is inadequate for this work. That is an insult to him.

Remember the promises of God in the Old Testament, especially in the prophecies of Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26, that the Spirit will come and remove those elements of proud, stubborn, rebellious unbelief from our hearts. That is the work of mortification, and it is only as a gift of the Spirit of Christ that deliverance from sin and increased likeness to the Lord can be ours. There is no other way than by the Spirit. All the work

of weakening sin and increasing love, joy, and peace is the work of God. So mortification is a happy work. The very conception is his work; the continuance is his work; the consummation is his work. The Paraclete’s task in us is to weaken sin and strengthen Christ. Only he is sufficient for this work.

So as you battle with the sin that so easily besets you, never forget your duty: “You put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). You do it. You don’t lie back on a comfy bed of ease and wait for the Spirit to do it. You have to put to death the misdeeds of the body, but you do so by the Spirit, by his power and love and wisdom. How so? Owen says five things.

1. THE SPIRIT ALONE CAN CONVINCe YOUR HEART OF THE DANGER OF SIN

Your sin may seem to you to be beautiful, so natural, so obvious, and so rational. “Who could possibly consider it tawdry and ugly?” Consider the story of Jonah, for example. Jonah arrives at the port of Tarshish in defiance of God’s command that he go to Nineveh (which was in the opposite direction). There Jonah discovers a boat on its way west with a berth for him, and he has the money for the fare. Isn’t that an obvious indication of God’s approval of Jonah’s reluctance to go to Nineveh? In ways like that we persuade ourselves that it is all right to do what the Lord forbids. We use providence to support our own rebellion. If we are left to our own wits it will be a very long time before we mortify our pride and look to the cross of Christ. But the Spirit speaks to our conscience, sounds an alarm, and doesn’t stop. “What are you doing here Jonah?” Being convinced of the danger of sin comes only by the work of the Spirit.

2. THE SPIRIT ALONE REVEALS AND TEACHES THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST TO DELIVER YOU

Think of Christ as the greatest teacher the world has ever known. What did Jesus say? Didn't he tell us that if our eye offended us that we should pluck it out? What did his apostles say? "If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13). Jesus and Paul are talking about the same duty. "Hear Christ the teacher," the Spirit says. He brings to our remembrance what the Lord said.

What of our future? Where shall we soon be? Our God is the end of the journey; we shall soon meet at the feet of Christ, and separate is that place from sin. All who have this hope purify themselves, for God is pure. The Spirit constantly reminds us of the future God is preparing. "As it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:8-10).

Finally, the love of Christ constrains us to put our sins to death. As the well-known pastor Al Martin once said,

If you were to see Paul through a normal day spending his energies and his faculties in self-sacrificing service for the Lord Jesus and for the sake of the souls of men, and at the close of that day you were to watch him drop exhausted to his place of rest, and you were to say to him, "Paul, what is it that drives you with what seems to the world this almost insane passion to

preach the gospel, to rescue men as brands from the burning, to establish men in the truth as you write your letters, to give yourself to the formation and the edification of the churches?", Paul would say, "If you want to know in a simple statement the secret of what drives me, it is this: The love of Christ holds me in its grip, it constrains me, that is, Christ's love for me, the fact that I stand in constant amazement that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me." This was the gospel motive, an understanding of the fullness of Christ, which drove Paul with far more zeal than any legal motivation could drive a man.

3. THE SPIRIT ALONE SUSTAINS YOUR HEART IN EXPECTATION OF HELP COMING FROM CHRIST

Listen to John Owen:

Be convinced, I say, of the power that is in Christ to overcome sin. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins" [Matt. 1:21]. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works" [Titus. 2:14]. Romans 6 makes clear that, by virtue of our union with Christ,

ASK THE SAVIOR TO HELP YOU AND NOT TO GIVE UP ON YOU. ASK HIM TO FINISH THE WORK HE HAS BEGUN IN YOU, AND TAKE YOU SAFELY TO THE PLACE WHERE YOU WILL NEVER SIN AGAIN. ALL FULLNESS OF GRACE IS IN HIM: PATIENCE, GENTLENESS, FORGIVENESS, MERCY, COURAGE, ENDURANCE. THESE FULL GRACES ARE AVAILABLE FOR YOU! THE SPIRIT WILL SUSTAIN YOUR HEART IN THAT HOPE.

THE SPIRIT PUTS TO DEATH THE ENERGIES AND RESTLESS AMBITIONS OF SIN BY MAKING US INCREASINGLY CONSCIOUS OF WHERE TRUE LIFE, THE ABUNDANT LIFE, IS TO BE FOUND—NAMELY, IN JESUS CHRIST.

when the sentence of death was passed on him we died in him and with him, and sin’s claims over us are destroyed. So the exhortation in verse 11 runs, “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The Holy Spirit convinces us of our provision in Christ. This is why Christ came: to justify and glorify us. Look at him on earth, setting free men and women bound by lust and sin for years, and bringing them into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Look, then, to Christ. Ask the Savior to help you and not to give up on you. Ask him to finish the work he has begun in you, and take you safely to the place where you will never sin again. All fullness of grace is in him: patience, gentleness, forgiveness, mercy, courage, endurance. These full graces are available for you! The Spirit will sustain your heart in that hope.

4. THE SPIRIT ALONE WILL FIX CALVARY IN YOUR HEART WITH ITS SIN-KILLING POWER

John Owen explains this point especially well:

See your sin in the light of the self-emptying of Christ. Say to that particular sin, “Is this that which caused him to leave the ineffable glory of

his Father’s presence, to come to the confines of the virgin’s womb, to be born amidst the stench of a cow barn – from the adoring wonder of angels to the rude, dumb stare of cows and goats? Is it my sin that demanded that self-emptying?” Bring those sins to the cross of Christ; hear the voice of the Son of God, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” and in your own minds hear the Father answering, “My son, my son, I have forsaken you because of that sin of Mr ----, that sin.” Name your sin and dare to bring it into the “blazing light” of that awful darkness. There is no light like that darkness to show sin in its true colours. Keep the conscience sensitive to the guilt and danger of your specific sins by bringing them to the cross of Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit who brings the Christian into communion with the crucified Christ. The Spirit brings the cross of Christ into the heart of the sinner by faith. He gives us fellowship with Christ by his death, that is, fellowship in his sufferings. So the gospel believer fights sin with the blood of Christ and by virtue of Christ’s cross. As Paul exclaimed, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by whom [or by which cross] the world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). The Holy Spirit will always drive us to fight by the mighty weapon of the cross.

5. THE SPIRIT ALONE IS THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR SANCTIFICATION

What does the Spirit use in putting our sins to death? First, he uses the law of God. That is a great theme from Romans 3:20: “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” Again in Romans 5:20 we read, “The law entered that sin might abound.” Or

consider Romans 7:7: “I would not have known what sin was except through the law.” If you want to see people continue in their ignorance of sin, then never talk to them about the law of God. The Spirit uses the law to convict us of our sin. Certainly he uses Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments, but he also uses Jesus’ exposition of the law in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, as well as Paul’s exposition of it in Romans 12.

In these passages we learn that God will no longer be trifled with; sin can no longer be scoffed at. Even as Christians we commit vile actions and try to brush them under the carpet and forget about them. However, the Holy Spirit’s role is to bring to light the things done in darkness and then help us to deal with them. What amazing grace we have from the Holy Spirit that he should probe into such foul and filthy hearts as ours—dunghills of vile attitude, words, and deeds. What a loathsome work for the Holy Spirit to perform.

Second, and last, the Holy Spirit transforms us “into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2

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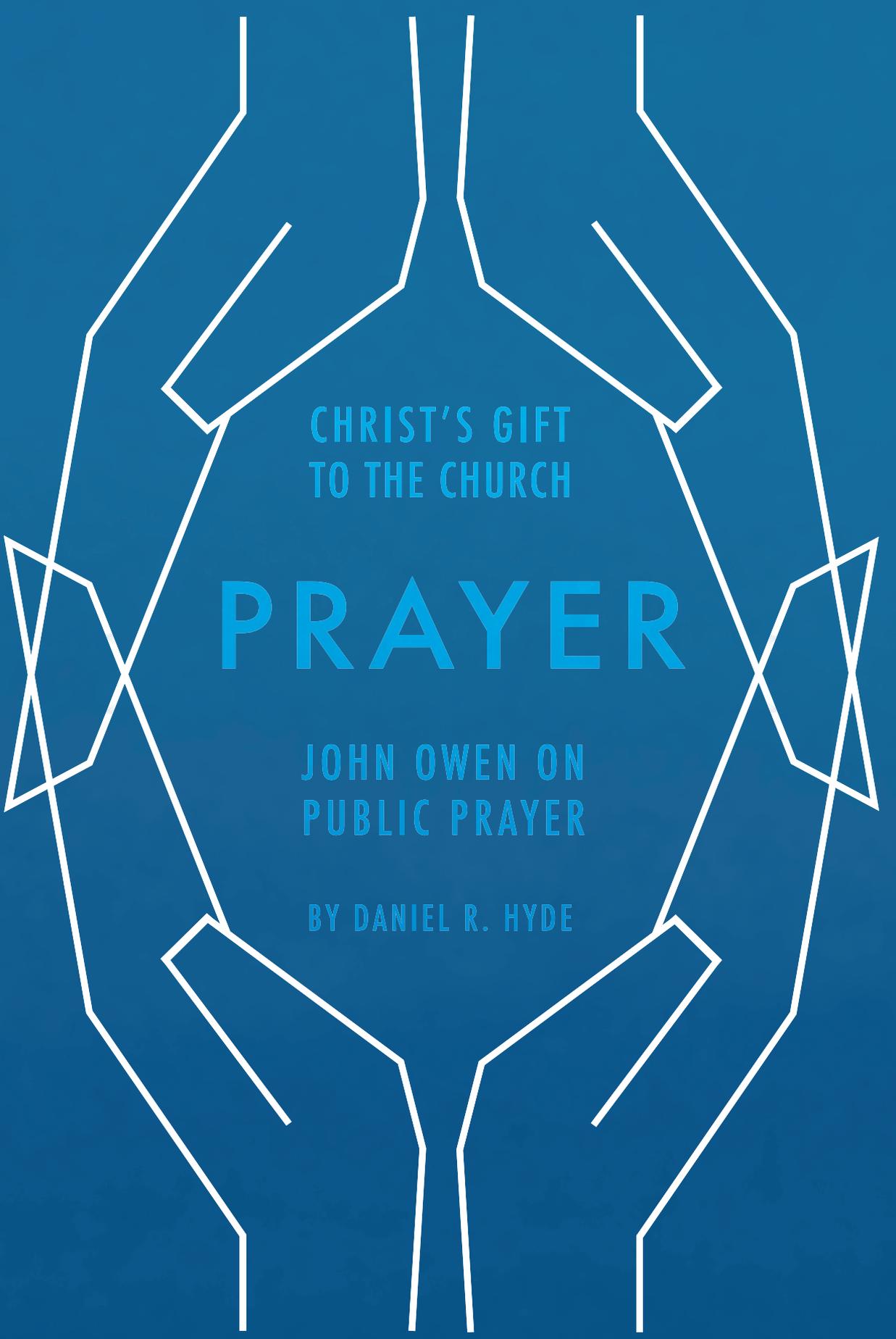
Cor. 3:18). The Spirit puts to death the energies and restless ambitions of sin by making us increasingly conscious of where true life, the abundant life, is to be found—namely, in Jesus Christ.

I close with the words of Owen:

See his perfect loveliness and beauty—what perfection, and that righteousness has been imputed to you. See him willingly taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient to death even the death of the cross, and that was for you. Isn’t that the most wondrous, blessed and glorious object in the whole universe? Behold the Lamb of God, and he is taking away your sin. How can you then live one moment longer under its grip?

It is the work of the Spirit to sanctify you. He mortifies your sins by the law and the gospel.

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CHRIST'S GIFT
TO THE CHURCH

PRAYER

JOHN OWEN ON
PUBLIC PRAYER

BY DANIEL R. HYDE

Despite the burgeoning field of John Owen (1616–1683) studies since the reprinting of his Works by The Banner of Truth Trust in 1965, many aspects of John Owen’s thought remain unstudied and overlooked. While substantial ink has been spilled in secondary works concerning his theological method, covenant theology, doctrines of the Trinity, Christ, the Christian life, and the Lord’s Supper, there is only scant material devoted to his liturgical theology. This lack of scholarship on Owen’s liturgical theology is surprising given the prominence of it in his Works.

When we dig deep into Owen’s writings what we discover is that Owen’s liturgical theology is a multi-faceted and theologically rich understanding of New Covenant worship being a heavenly phenomenon. Let’s look at just one aspect of Owen’s complex liturgical theology, namely, that public prayer is the gift of the Holy Spirit from the ascended Christ.

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT FOR PRAYER

Owen contrasted the ordinances of worship under the Old Covenant, which were many and burdensome, with those ordinances instituted under Christ in the New Covenant. These ordinances that the Lord instituted for his worship were few: “preaching of the word, administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline,” and all were to be administered “with prayer and thanksgiving” (Works, 15:10). Further, in administering these ordinances the ministers of the New Covenant would be gifted by the Holy Spirit to bring edification to his people and glory to God.

Concerning the ordinance of prayer in particular, he wrote A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer to demonstrate that there is a particular gift of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers and especially ministers to execute their calling to pray according to the mind and will of God. This was of central importance to Owen in the context of the liturgical struggles in the latter half of the seventeenth-century: “Hence I know not any difference about religious things that is managed with greater animosities in the minds of men and worse consequents than this which is about the work of the Spirit of God in prayer; which, indeed,

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is the hinge on which all other differences about divine worship do turn and depend.”

Owen turned to passages like Zechariah 12:10, Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:26, and Ephesians 6:18 as *sedes doctrinae* (literally, “seats of doctrine”) to establish this gift of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Of this promise he said, “It cannot be denied but that the work and actings of the Spirit of grace in and towards believers with respect unto the duty of prayer are more frequently and expressly asserted in Scripture than his operations with respect unto any other particular grace or duty whatever.”

THE WORK OF CHRIST IN GIFTING HIS MINISTERS

While the Holy Spirit gave the gift of prayer to all believers, of special concern for Owen was how Christ's spiritual gifts were exercised in ministers. In his Discourse Concerning Liturgies he argued against the imposition of liturgy, which was defended as a means for order as well as edification in administering the gospel ordinances of preaching, sacraments, and prayer. Owen sought to answer the question of "whether Jesus Christ have not made provision for the same end and purpose."

His answer was Ephesians 4:7–13. Here Paul said Christ gifted the church with ministers to build up the church by "the faithful, regular, and effectual discharge of the work of the ministry." How were ministers enabled to do this? Owen summarized Paul to say "by the communication of grace and spiritual gifts from heaven unto them by Christ himself." Owen drew an analogy between the enabling of the Levites in the Old Covenant to bear the ark and to offer sacrifices and the enabling of

OWEN BELIEVED THE SCRIPTURES PROMISED AND CHRISTIANS SHOULD EXPECT THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THEIR PRAYERS.

ministers in the New. Owen's point was that since the Lord Jesus Christ delivered his disciples from the yoke of Mosaic ceremonies, God has appointed the ordinances, those to be ordained to administer them, and the gifts necessary to administer these ordinances in the New Covenant.

THE ISSUE OF THE PRAYER BOOK

Yet Owen had to face the objections of the Church's leadership, who justified their imposition of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) by insisting that the apostles used liturgies. Owen saw this as a denigrating of the ministry, and therefore of Christ himself. He sarcastically said that anyone who believed Peter composed forms of prayer for the disciples "must fetch his evidence out of the same authors...who affirmed that Jesus Christ himself went up and down singing masses!" Underlying the prelates' position was the objection that while the apostles had extraordinary gifts, ordinary ministers did not have these gifts and therefore needed the BCP. Thus the ministers of England had a disability "to celebrate and administer the ordinances of the gospel, to the honour of God and edification of the church, without the use of them."

Owen's response was that if the pastors after the apostles did not need forms of prayer, from where did their ability to pray and lead the people of God come? If their ability came from Jesus Christ, did these ordinary pastors have any gifts beyond what Jesus promised? Moreover, if this was the case with these ordinary ministers, did Jesus promise these gifts for all ordinary ministers to the end of the world? Thus the prelates were placed on the horns of a dilemma: "To say that the provision he hath made is not every way sufficient for the attaining of the end for which it was made by him, or that he continueth not to make the same provision that he did formerly, are equally blasphemous; the one injurious to his wisdom, the other to his truth, both to his love and care of his church." The uniformity the prelates desired was furnished by Christ's gift of the Spirit.

**TO FAN INTO FLAME OUR GIFT OF PRAYER
WE NEED TO PRAY IN PRIVATE, WE NEED TO
MEDIATE UPON THE WORD AND THE LORD, AND
WE NEED TO USE OUR GIFT IN PUBLIC.**

With this in mind, Owen laid out the difference between two types of ministers. First, there were those who experienced their lack in praying “according to the mind of God” and who therefore “regulate themselves in this whole duty in the expectation or improvement of them.” Second, there were those whom Owen described as “being accommodated with other aids of another nature...which they esteem sufficient for them.” Here Owen had in mind specifically the aid of the BCP.

What role did the BCP play in Owen’s mind in the ceasing of Christ’s gifts in this second kind of minister? In discussing the history of prayer books Owen came to one of his overarching conclusions that drove the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer: “all spiritual, ministerial gifts were caused to cease in the church.” This was consistent with his attitude back in 1657 in *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* where Owen said the Spirit was “the principle, the life, soul, the all of the whole” of our worship but “yet so desperate hath been the malice of Satan, and wickedness of men, that their great endeavour hath been to shut him quite out of all gospel administrations.”

The centrality of the Spirit to the work of the ministry was seen in the attempts of Satan and men to remove the Holy Spirit from the church’s administrations. And one of Satan’s means were liturgies: “The imposition of an operose form of service, to be read by the minister; which to do is neither a peculiar gift of the Holy Ghost to any, nor of the ministry at all.” Liturgies led to a “total neglect of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the administration of church worship and ordinances.” While the BCP was defended on the grounds of antiquity, composure and approbation by martyrs, beauty and uniformity, in it “the public contempt of the Holy Ghost, his gifts and graces, with their administration in the church of God, that hath been found even where the gospel hath been professed.”

And so Owen said ministers could lose Christ’s gifts through neglect in two very practical ways. First, they could be neglected when they were “not valued nor sought after, nor endeavoured to be attained.” Humanly speaking, he said this came about because the gifts of the Holy Spirit “will not reside in any subject, they will not abide, if they are by any received, if they are not improved by continual exercise.” God’s gifts must be improved or they will be removed. In the context of the post-1662 “Great Ejection,” Owen expressed his opinion as to what was the “best way to reconcile differences” among the Church of England and the Dissenters by every one stirring up the gifts and graces of God within them. Second, the gifts could be neglected when believers did not

READING AND TRANSLATING HEBREW AND GREEK, READING COMMENTARIES, AND WRITING SERMONS MUST NOT BE ACADEMIC OR PERFUNCTORY. IT MUST BE SATURATED IN PRAYER.

“constantly and diligently, on all occasions, make use of [them] for the end for which [they were] given, yea, abound in the exercise of [them].”

So as one who believed in the work of the Holy Spirit to lead prayer, what was Owen’s attitude in regards to the Book of Common Prayer? His criticism clearly stands in the line of Puritans tracing back to An Admonition to the Parliament (1572), which described it as “an unperfected book, culled and picked out of that popishe dunghill the Masse book, full of all abominations.” Owen’s position, though, evidences that he was no mere proof-texting, anti-liturgical Puritan but was multi-faceted and nuanced.

First, he did not condemn all outward aids of prayer such as composed forms of prayer. His position was clearly that the Holy Spirit nowhere promised his assistance for some to write prayers for others, that there was no promise for believers to compose prayers for themselves, and that the composing of prayers is not an institution of the law or the gospel. Nevertheless, he saw prayer books as lawful and even beneficial so long as they were used as “directions and doctrinal helps unto others, as to the matter and method to be used in the right discharge of this duty” and as examples of how others prayed in order to have their own hearts affected.

Second, he was accommodating toward those who believed they needed forms of prayer: “I shall not judge of what advantage it may be or hath been unto the souls of men, nor what acceptance they have found therein, where it is not too much abused.” Owen was tolerant toward others’ consciences. He would go on to say, “If men can take it on themselves, in the sight of God, that the invention and use of set forms of prayer, and other the like outward modes of divine worship, are the best that he hath endowed them withal for his service, they are free from the force of this consideration.” Every man will stand before God and Owen was not that judge. Owen believed the Scriptures promised and Christians should expect the work of the Holy Spirit in their prayers.

As for those who insisted on set forms of prayer, he did not seek “to condemn all use of set forms of prayers as sinful in themselves, or absolutely unlawful, or such as so vitiate the worship of God as to render it wholly unacceptable in them, that choose so to worship him,” because “God will accept the persons of those who sincerely seek him, though, through invincible ignorance, they may mistake in sundry things as unto the way and manner of his worship.”

Third, while Owen admitted “the general prevalency of the use of set forms of prayer of human invention in Christian assemblies for many ages” he made his position clear that the “beginnings of the introduction of the use of set forms ... are altogether uncertain” and that the “reception of them was progressive.” He went

on to agree with Protestantism in general that the making of certain ceremonies necessarily led to idolatry in the Roman church. What were these ceremonies that were added to prayer? He listed some of them, calling them “a rabble ... of ceremonies” such as turning and winding eastward and westward, to the altar, to the wall, to the people; gestures and postures such as kneeling, rising, standing, bowing, crossing oneself, moving from one place to another, and requiring certain attire by the clergy. In contrast, free prayer had no ceremonies but those of divine institution and natural circumstances.

Fourth, his attitude toward the persons who participated in prayer book worship was quite different. Sometime at the end of his life he wrote *An Answer Unto Two Questions; with Twelve Arguments Against Any Conformity to Worship not of Divine Institution*. The date of this letter is uncertain. Of its date, William Orme said, “About the time of the Doctor’s death, a small manuscript was handed about, containing twelve arguments against conformity to worship, not of Divine institution.” The most certain information of its date is that it was included in the octavo edition of his *Sermons* published in 1720. To the questions of “whether persons who have engaged unto

TO YOUNG MINISTERS I WOULD ISSUE THIS CHALLENGE: AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR MINISTRY WRITE OUT YOUR PRAYERS AS YOU DO YOUR SERMONS, BUT LITTLE BY LITTLE TAKE LESS AND LESS INTO THE PULPIT UNTIL YOU ARE ABLE TO PRAY EXTEMPORANEOUSLY.

reformation and another way of divine worship ... may lawfully go unto and attend on the use of the Common-prayer book in divine worship” and “go to and receive the sacrament of the Lord’s supper in the parish churches, under their present constitution and administration,” his answer was an emphatic “no.”

IMPROVEMENT OF CHRIST’S GIFTS

So what should one make of those in the ministry that seemed not as gifted as others or who lost their gifts through laziness? Ideally speaking, Owen questioned their call to the ministry on the basis that “if they are so and do so, there seems to be a direct failure of the promise of Christ, which is blasphemy to imagine.” Practically speaking, he called ministers to consider that those who are truly called but do not seem to have the requisite gifts, have neglected “to stir up the gifts that they have received by the use and exercise of them.” Ministers were to cherish, stir up and improve their gifts. In a more elaborate passage he said,

That those in whom this work is wrought by the Holy Spirit in any degree do not, in ordinary cases, want an ability to express themselves in this duty, so far as is needful for them. It is acknowledged that an ability herein will be greatly increased and improved by exercise, and not only because the exercise of all mortal faculties is the genuine way of their strengthening and improvement, but principally because it is instituted, appointed, and commanded of God unto that end.

OWEN WOULD HAVE OUR INSTITUTIONS THAT PREPARE MEN FOR THE MINISTRY TO TEACH PUBLIC PRAYER. SPEAKING FROM A NORTH AMERICAN VANTAGE POINT, THE “ART OF PROPHECYING” HAS BEEN FALSELY DIVIDED. OUR SEMINARIES TEACH PREACHING, BUT NOT PRAYER.

Since using Christ’s gifts edifies the church, Owen inquired how these gifts “may be improved, so that they may ‘excel to the edifying of the church,’ which is expressly required of them.” Edification depended on the improvement of gifts, and the improvement of gifts depended on their due exercise. Any lack of exercise of these gifts whether by neglect or hindrance of them by others is to hinder the church’s edification. Therefore, the imposed liturgy being a hindrance ought to be removed and taken away.

What means did he prescribe for improving Christ’s gifts within them? First, the diligent searching of hearts “in their frames, dispositions, inclinations, and actings, that we may be in some

measure acquainted with their state and condition towards God.” The need for this soul searching was that “the want of a due discharge of this duty, which we ought continually to be exercised in, especially on the account of that unspeakable variety of spiritual changes which we are subject unto, is a cause of that barrenness in prayer which is found among the most, as we have observed.” While this may seem like something man may do on his own, on the contrary it “is part of the work of the Spirit as a Spirit of grace and supplication.”

The second means was “constant, diligent reading of the Scriptures.” Owen went on to apply the classic Protestant doctrine that Scripture was divided into law and gospel, saying, “From the precepts of God therein we may learn our own wants, and from his promises the relief which he hath provided for them.” The Word “is the glass wherein we may take the best view of ourselves” since it is “the instrument whereby the Holy Spirit reveals unto us our wants, when we know not what to ask, and so enables us to make intercessions according to the mind of God.”

The third means was meditating on God’s glorious excellencies. By following the examples of the saints and meditating upon God’s name and titles, the believer is aided by the Holy Spirit to pray. This meditation not only leads to prayer but to reverence and godly fear of the Lord as well as faith and boldness to pray.

The fourth means was meditation on the mediation and intercession of Christ as our priest. Owen pointed out that this was an encouragement while the believer prays as well as a means of increasing and strengthening prayer itself. What particularly strikes the believer is the fact that Christ’s intercession is effectual on behalf of believers.

The fifth means was frequency in exercising the gift of prayer. This exercise leads to improvement in a two-fold way. First, God's gifts are habits or faculties that are strengthened and multiplied by acts. Without this exercise, they will become weak and decayed. Second, in exercising God's gifts God will add his blessing to their exercise. Owen described this as "the eternal law concerning the dispensation of evangelical gifts," citing Matthew 25:29 where Jesus said, "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."

The sixth and final means was "constant fervency and intension of mind and spirit." This was contrasted with a mere outward multiplication and exercise of prayers. No blessing would be given to mere "customariness and formality." On the contrary, when the mind was fervent and intent upon its activity and its end, "The whole soul is cast into the mould of the matter of our prayers, and is thereby prepared and made ready for continual fresh spiritual engagements about them."

**THE ART OF PROPHECYING
MEANT BOTH THE ART OF
PREACHING AS WELL AS
PRAYING. IN THE FORMER,
STUDENTS NEED TO BE TAUGHT
HOW TO SPEAK FROM GOD TO
HIS PEOPLE, BUT IN THE LATTER,
HOW TO SPEAK FROM THE
PEOPLE TO THEIR GOD.**

PUBLIC PRAYER TODAY

What can we learn from John Owen's teaching on public prayer? There are four areas of application that I believe are good and necessary for us to draw from Owen's work.

First, Owen would have us as pastors and those studying for the ministry pray fervently that the Lord would enable us to "fan into flame the gift of God" within us (2 Tim. 1:6; ESV). We must not neglect our gifts (1 Tim. 4:14) but must improve them. Paul uses a word here in 2 Timothy 1:6 (anazopurein), that is used nowhere else in the New Testament. This word signifies giving new life to a fire; to rekindle it. We fan our gift, which is likened to a flame, as Owen said, by using our gift. One of Owen's contemporaries, Matthew Poole (1624–1679), elucidated upon this idea when he said, He adviseth him to put new life unto that holy fire (the word signifies the recovering of fire choked with ashes or decaying) which God had kindled in him, by daily prayer, and meditating on the things of God and use of his gifts, improving those spiritual abilities which God had given him.

To fan into flame our gift of prayer we need to pray in private, we need to mediate upon the Word and the Lord, and we need to use our gift in public. To fan into flame our gift of prayer we need to pray in private, we need to mediate upon the Word and the Lord, and we need to use our gift in public.

Second, Owen would have pastors and ministerial students study prayer and pray during their study. To study prayer may seem an odd suggestion, but it is helpful. While the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray by praying through us (Rom. 8:26), he also uses the means of other ministers as models of prayer.

The studious pastor and student should be acquainted with the development of liturgical prayer from the patristic era through the modern period by acquaintance with the classic texts on prayer. We also need to pray during our study. Reading and translating Hebrew and Greek, reading commentaries, and writing sermons must not be academic or perfunctory. It must be saturated in prayer. I have found the longer I am in the ministry the less time I take in actually reading and writing and the more time I spend praying over what I have read and written as I prepare for preaching on the Lord's Day.

Third, Owen would have us challenge ourselves. If fanning into flame our gift of prayer means that we need to exercise ourselves in public prayer, then we need to challenge ourselves week after week to pray in public and not merely to read prayers. To young ministers I would issue this challenge: at the beginning of your ministry write out your prayers as you do your sermons, but little by little take less and less into the pulpit until you are able to pray extemporaneously. When we challenge ourselves in this holy manner, we decrease and the Lord increases; we are humbled and he is exalted; we are weak but he is strong. And in doing this, the Lord will begin to use us in leading our people before the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

Fourth and finally, Owen would have our institutions that prepare men for the ministry to teach public prayer. Speaking from a North American vantage point, the "art of prophesying" has been falsely divided. Our seminaries teach preaching, but not prayer. For the Puritan father William Perkins, these two were held together. The art of prophesying meant both the art of preaching as well as praying. In the former, students need to

be taught how to speak from God to his people, but in the latter, how to speak from the people to their God.

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY

According to John Owen, then, Jesus Christ as head of the Church has gifted those who minister in his name to exercise their ministry for his people's edification and for the glory of God. We need to believe this; and believing, we need to act upon it, working hard to fan our flame in studied prayer, in challenging ourselves to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in teaching our students to do so as doctors, professors, theologians, and pastors.

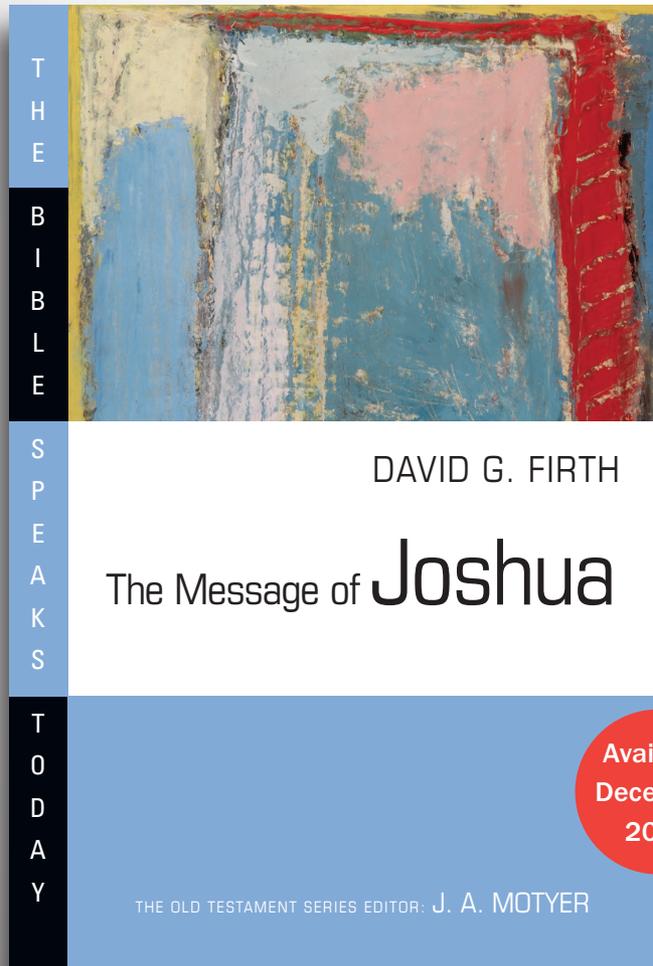
Daniel R. Hyde is pastor of Oceanside United Reformed Church in Carlsbad/Oceanside, CA. He is the author of many books, including *Welcome to a Reformed Church: A Guide for Pilgrims, God in Our Midst: The Tabernacle and Our Relationship with God*, and his latest *From the Pen of Pastor Paul: 1–2 Thessalonians* (EP Books). 

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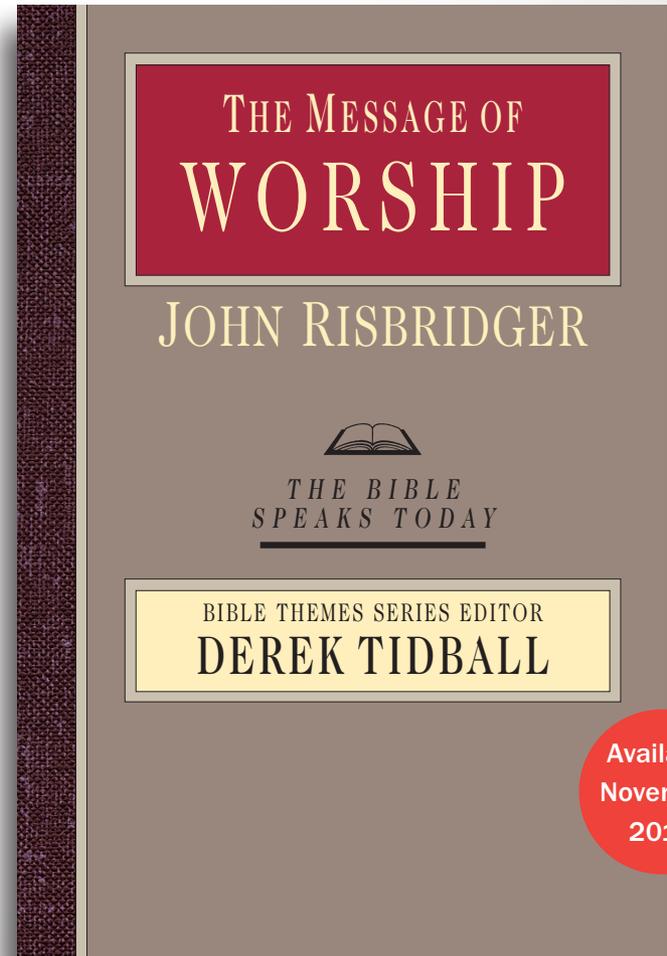


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MY TOP

10

PURITAN AUTHORS

BY JOEL R. BEEKE

If I had to pick my top ten Puritan authors, who would they be and why? Now that is a tough question for a Puritan aficionado like myself. But here are ten Puritans you must become friends with. Read their books. Study their theology. And most importantly, know their God.

1. ANTHONY BURGESS (D. 1664)

Recently, my favorite Puritan to read has been Anthony Burgess, vicar of Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire from 1635 to 1662. In my opinion, he is the most underrated Puritan of all time. I once asked Iain Murray why Burgess was not included in the nineteenth-century sets of the works of the best Puritans. He responded that Burgess was the greatest glaring omission from those reprints.

In fifteen years (1646–1661), Burgess wrote at least a dozen books based largely on his sermons and lectures. His writings reveal a scholarly acquaintance with Aristotle, Seneca, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. He made judicious use of Greek and Latin quotations while reasoning in the plain style of Puritan preaching. Burgess was a cultured scholar and experimental preacher who produced astute, warm, devotional writings.

Burgess's best and largest work, *Spiritual Refining: The Anatomy of True and False Conversion* (1652–54)—two volumes of 1,100 pages—has been called an “unequaled anatomy of experimental religion.” The first volume, subtitled *A Treatise of Grace and Assurance*, contains 120 sermons; the second, subtitled *A Treatise of Sin, with its Causes, Differences, Mitigations and Aggravations*, contains 42 sermons.

Burgess masterfully separated the precious from the vile in *The Godly Man's Choice*, based on thirteen sermons on Psalm 4:6–8. His detailed exegesis in his 145-sermon work on John 17, his 300-page commentary on 1 Corinthians 3, and his 700-page commentary on 2 Corinthians 1 are heart-warming.

Several of Burgess's major works are polemical. His first major treatise, *Vindiciae Legis* (1646), based on twenty-nine lectures given at Lawrence-

RECENTLY, MY FAVORITE PURITAN TO READ HAS BEEN ANTHONY BURGESS, VICAR OF SUTTON COLDFIELD, WARWICKSHIRE FROM 1635 TO 1662. IN MY OPINION, HE IS THE MOST UNDERRATED PURITAN OF ALL TIME.

Jewry, vindicated the Puritan view of the moral law and the covenants of works and grace in opposition to Roman Catholics, Arminians, Socinians, and Antinomians. Two years later, Burgess wrote against the same opponents, plus Baxter, in his first volume on justification. He refuted Baxter's work for its Arminian tendencies in arguing for a process of justification that involves the cooperation of divine grace with human works. His second volume on justification, which appeared six years later (1654), discusses the natural righteousness of God and the imputed righteousness of Christ. Those two volumes contain seventy-five sermons. His 555-page *Doctrine of Original Sin* (1659) drew Anabaptists into the fray.

FOR TWENTY YEARS, MY FAVORITE PURITAN WRITER WAS THOMAS GOODWIN.

2. THOMAS GOODWIN (1600–1679)

For twenty years, my favorite Puritan writer was Thomas Goodwin. Goodwin's 12-volume *Works*, most recently reprinted by Reformation Heritage Books (12 vols.), is a treasure trove of experiential Reformed divinity at its best.

Goodwin's exegesis is massive; he leaves no stone unturned. His first editors (1681) said of his work: "He had a genius to dive into the bottom of points, to 'study them down,' as he used to express it, not contenting himself with superficial knowledge, without wading into the depths of things." One does need patience to read Goodwin; however, along with depth and prolixity, he offers a wonderful sense of warmth and experience. A reader's patience will be amply rewarded.

Begin by reading some of the shorter, more practical writings of Goodwin, such as *Patience and Its Perfect Work*, which includes four sermons on James 1:1–5. This book was written after much of Goodwin's personal library was destroyed by fire (*Works*, 2:429–67). It contains much practical instruction on the spirit of submission.

Then read *Certain Select Cases Resolved*, which offers three experiential treatises that reveal Goodwin's pastoral heart for afflicted Christians. Each deals with specific struggles in the believer's soul: (a) "A Child of Light Walking in Darkness" encourages the spiritually depressed based

on Isaiah 50:10–11 (3:241–350). The subtitle summarizes its contents: "A Treatise Shewing The Causes by which, The Cases wherein, and the Ends for which, God Leaves His Children to Distress of Conscience, Together with Directions How to Walk so as to Come Forth of Such a Condition." (b) "The Return of Prayers," based on Psalm 85:8, is a uniquely practical work. It offers help in ascertaining "God's answers to our prayers" (3:353–429). (c) "The Trial of a Christian's Growth" (3:433–506), based on John 15:1–2, centers on sanctification, specifically mortification and vivification. This is a mini-classic on spiritual growth.

3. JOHN OWEN (1616–1683)

This author's sixteen volumes of works, seven volumes on Hebrews, and a book titled *Biblical Theology*, make up a learned library. The sixteen-volume set, which is a reprint of the 1850–55 Gould edition, includes the following:

Doctrinal (vols. 1–5). The most noteworthy works in these volumes are: *On the Person and Glory of Christ* (vol. 1); *Communion with God* (vol. 2); *Discourse on the Holy Spirit* (vol. 3); and *Justification by Faith* (vol. 5). Mastery of these works, Spurgeon wrote, "is to be a profound theologian."

Practical (vols. 6–9). Especially worthy here are *Mortification of Sin, Temptation, Exposition of Psalm 130* (vol. 6); and *Spiritual-Mindedness* (vol. 7). Volumes 8 and 9 comprise sermons. These books are suitable for the educated layperson and have immense practical applications.

Controversial (vols. 10–16). Noteworthy are *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* and *Divine Justice* (vol. 10); *The Doctrine of the Saints'*

Perseverance (vol. 11); *True Nature of a Gospel Church* and *The Divine Original of the Scriptures* (vol. 16). Several works in this section have historical significance (particularly those written against Arminianism and Socinianism) but tend to be tedious for a non-theologian.

Owen's wide range of subjects, insightful writing, exhaustive doctrinal studies, profound theology, and warm devotional approach explain why I and so many others regard his work with such high esteem. Owen may be wordy on occasion, but he is never dry. His works are invaluable for all who wish to explore the rich legacy left by one who is often called "Prince of the Puritans."

OWEN'S WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS, INSIGHTFUL WRITING, EXHAUSTIVE DOCTRINAL STUDIES, PROFOUND THEOLOGY, AND WARM DEVOTIONAL APPROACH EXPLAIN WHY I AND SO MANY OTHERS REGARD HIS WORK WITH SUCH HIGH ESTEEM. OWEN MAY BE WORDY ON OCCASION, BUT HE IS NEVER DRY. HIS WORKS ARE INVALUABLE FOR ALL WHO WISH TO EXPLORE THE RICH LEGACY LEFT BY ONE WHO IS OFTEN CALLED "PRINCE OF THE PURITANS."

I was most influenced by Owen when I spent the summer of 1985 studying his views on assurance. The two books that influenced me most were Owen's treatment of Psalm 130, particularly verse 4, and his amazing *Communion with God*, which focuses on experiential communion between a believer and individual persons of the Trinity.

4. JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703–1758)

A class at Westminster Theological Seminary, taught by Sam Logan, motivated me to read most of Edwards's two-volume works in 1983. His sermons convicted and comforted me beyond words. What a master wordsmith Edwards was!

More than sixty volumes of Edwards's writings have been published in the last fifty years. The two books that influenced me most were *Religious Affections*, which is often regarded as the leading classic in American history on spiritual life, and Edwards's sermons on justification by faith. Earlier, I was greatly influenced by *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*.

I was touched by Edwards's concept of "fittedness" throughout his writings, and have often found that concept a great tool for leadership and decision-making. Edwards grounded this concept in God; a God who is always fitting will guide his people to want to do what is fitting in each life situation to bring him the most glory. Hence, we must ask of every decision we face: What is most fitting in God's sight according to His Word? What will bring God the most honor?

5. WILLIAM PERKINS (1558–1602)

Perkins's vision of reform for the church combined with his intellect, piety, writing, spiritual counseling, and communication skills

I WAS TOUCHED BY EDWARDS'S CONCEPT OF "FITTEDNESS" THROUGHOUT HIS WRITINGS, AND HAVE OFTEN FOUND THAT CONCEPT A GREAT TOOL FOR LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING. EDWARDS GROUNDED THIS CONCEPT IN GOD; A GOD WHO IS ALWAYS FITTING WILL GUIDE HIS PEOPLE TO WANT TO DO WHAT IS FITTING IN EACH LIFE SITUATION TO BRING HIM THE MOST GLORY. HENCE, WE MUST ASK OF EVERY DECISION WE FACE: WHAT IS MOST FITTING IN GOD'S SIGHT ACCORDING TO HIS WORD? WHAT WILL BRING GOD THE MOST HONOR?

helped set the tone for the seventeenth-century Puritan accent on Reformed, experiential truth and self-examination, and Puritan arguments against Roman Catholicism and Arminianism. Perkins as rhetorician, expositor, theologian, and pastor became the principal architect of the Puritan movement. By the time of his death, Perkins's writings in England were outselling those of John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Henry Bullinger combined. He "moulded the piety of a whole nation," H.C. Porter said. Little wonder, then, that Perkins is often called "the Father of Puritanism."

Perkins first influenced me while I was studying assurance of faith for my doctoral dissertation. Ten years later, his *Art of Prophecy*, a short homiletic textbook for Puritan seminarians, helped me understand how to address listeners according

to their various cases of conscience. My appreciation for Perkins has increased over the years. I am thoroughly enjoying spending more time reading his works as general editor with Derek Thomas on a ten-volume reprint of Perkins's works, of which two volumes are now in print.

6. THOMAS WATSON (c. 1620–1686)

Watson was my favorite Puritan after I was converted in my mid-teens. I read his *Body of Divinity* as a daily devotional. His *All Things for Good* was a wonderful balm for my troubled soul in

a period of intense affliction in the early 1980s. His winsome writing includes deep doctrine, clear expression, warm spirituality, appropriate applications, and colorful illustrations. I love his pithy, quotable style of writing.

7. THOMAS BROOKS (1608–1680)

Brooks became my favorite Puritan writer in my late teens. His *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod*, *Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Assurance*, "The Unsearchable Riches of Christ" (vol. 3), "The Crown and Glory of Christianity" (vol. 4)—a classic on holiness consisting of 58 sermons on Hebrews 12:14—all ministered to me. Brooks's books are real page-turners. He often brought me to tears of joy over Christ and tears of sorrow over sin. His writings exude spiritual life and power.

HE “MOULDED THE PIETY OF A WHOLE NATION,” H.C. PORTER SAID. LITTLE WONDER, THEN, THAT PERKINS IS OFTEN CALLED “THE FATHER OF PURITANISM.”

8. JOHN FLAVEL (1628–1691)

With the exception of Jonathan Edwards, no Puritan divine was more helpful for me in sermon preparation as a young minister than Flavel. His sermons on Christ’s suffering also greatly blessed my soul. What lover of Puritan literature has not been blessed by Flavel’s classics: *The Mystery of Providence*, *Keeping the Heart*, *The Fountain of Life*, *Christ Knocking at the Door of the Heart*, and *The Method of Grace*?

9. JOHN BUNYAN (1628–1688)

When I was nine years old and first experienced a period of conviction of sin, I read Bunyan’s *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*. When I saw the book in my father’s bookcase, I figured that since I had such a bad heart, that book must be for me!

More importantly, my father read Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* to us every Sunday evening after church. When he finished, he started over. I must have listened to that book fifteen times. From the age of fourteen on, I would ask questions about how the Holy Spirit works in the soul, about Mr. Talkative, the Man in the Iron Cage, the House of the Interpreter, and scores of other characters and matters. My father often wept as he answered my questions. When I became a minister, I realized what a rare gift those sessions were. Forty years

later, illustrations from Bunyan’s great classic still come to mind while I’m preaching.

10. THOMAS VINCENT (1634–1678)

When we find ourselves cold and listless, Vincent can help kindle the fire of Christian love. Just try reading *The True Christian’s Love to the Unseen Christ* (1677) without having your affections raised to heavenly places and yearning to love Christ more. Let *The True Christian’s Love to the Unseen Christ* be your frequent companion.

Only a handful of Vincent’s writings were ever published, and of those, only six have been reprinted in the past fifty years. In addition to *The True Christian’s Love to the Unseen Christ*, Vincent wrote *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (1673), a very helpful book for young people and children; and *The Good Work Begun* (1673), an evangelistic book for young people, explaining how God saves sinners and preserves them for Himself. Three additional books by Vincent are more solemn treatises. They include *God’s Terrible Voice in the City* (1667), an eyewitness account of London’s Great Fire and

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF JONATHAN EDWARDS, NO PURITAN DIVINE WAS MORE HELPFUL FOR ME IN SERMON PREPARATION AS A YOUNG MINISTER THAN FLAVEL.

Great Plague and an analysis of how God judges wickedness in a city; *Christ’s Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgment* (1667), which was also

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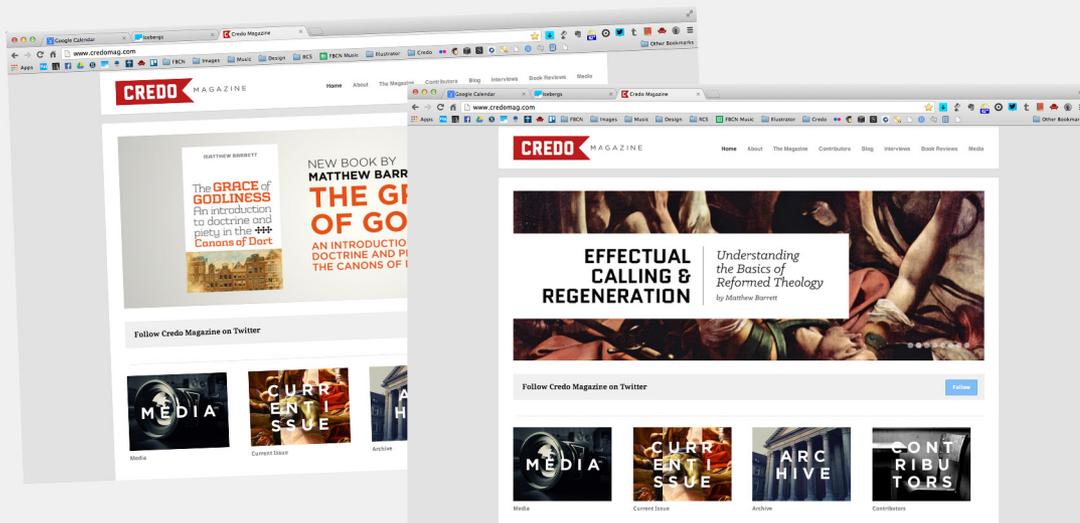
WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES COLD AND LISTLESS, VINCENT CAN HELP KINDLE THE FIRE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. JUST TRY READING THE TRUE CHRISTIAN'S LOVE TO THE UNSEEN CHRIST (1677) WITHOUT HAVING YOUR AFFECTIONS RAISED TO HEAVENLY PLACES AND YEARNING TO LOVE CHRIST MORE.

written after the Great Fire of London and was designed to prepare sinners for the great and terrible Day of the Lord; and *Fire and Brimstone* (1670) was written to warn sinners to flee the wrath to come. All of these titles, minus *The Shorter Catechism*, were reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria Publications from 1991 to 2001.

Vincent's works are uniquely refreshing. He used the English language in a captivating way to glorify God and strike at the heart of Christians. It is no wonder that Vincent's works were bestsellers in the eighteenth century.

Joel R. Beeke is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and editorial director of Reformation Heritage Books. He has written, co-authored, or edited many books, including A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life. He and his wife Mary have been blessed with three children: Calvin, Esther, and Lydia. ■

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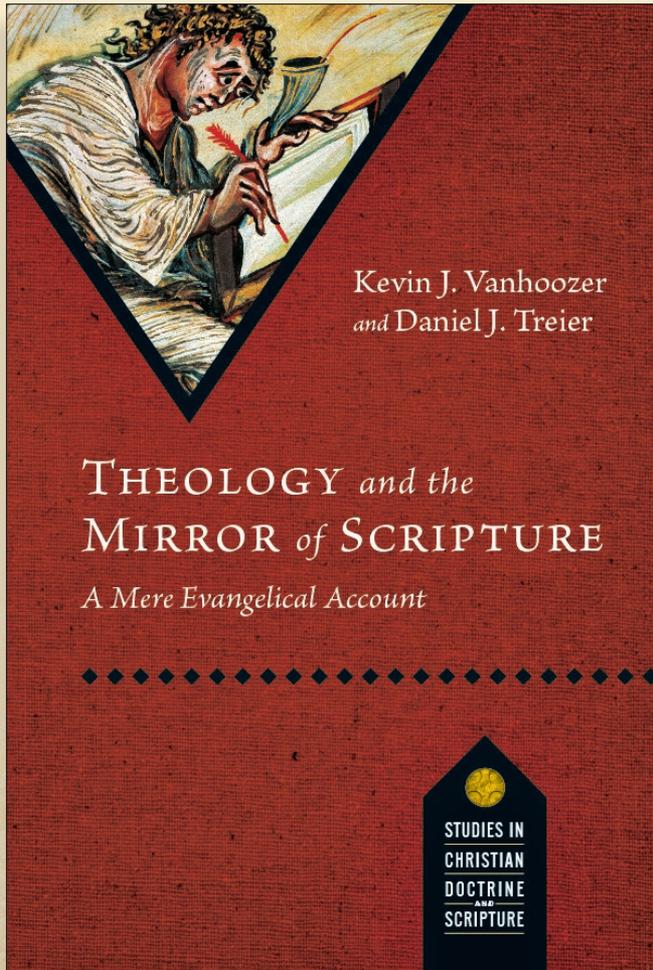
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point to a movement that is presently politicized and polarized, where differences over secondary matters have become the bane of evangelical existence. Accordingly, we propose a third way, which is a common way, a way for traditionalist and progressive evangelicals to find common (catholic) ground, anchored in the gospel.



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DANIEL J.
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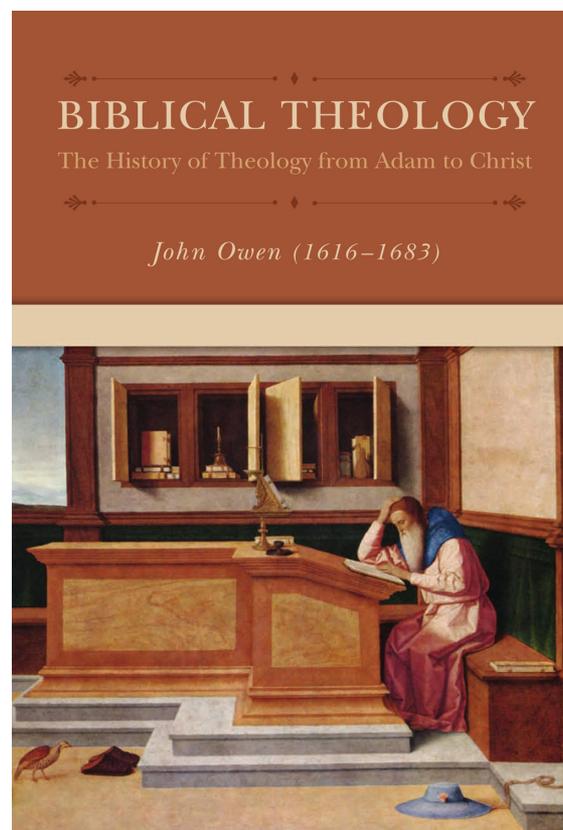
NO COOL RATIONALISM

JOHN OWEN'S PURSUIT OF GOD

by Matthew Claridge

While starting out in his *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), I found John Owen doing his best to discourage his readers from approaching his work with anything less than a simple, genuine love for Christ. In his typically spot-on, cut-throat style, Owen exposes the indwelling sin and household gods we might be tucking under our arm chairs while we irresistibly prop up his book to make sure everyone else can see whom we are reading (if not reading, at least enjoying the idea of reading John Owen).

Consider this spiritual upper cut:
We must face up to the factor of sloth, by which



we may observe some students growing weary of their work. ... Note this especially in men who have attained their object in life—a good living perhaps—and to achieve it have, for some time, been forced to carry the heavy burden of mental effort. ... Some men, I know, are willing for the wearisomeness of study out of an excessive lust for worldly wealth, all the while promising themselves that future ease which will destroy all their potential for useful work. Some persist in study until they obtain their goal, that is, have grasped the wealth or honor which was all along their aim in study. The greater part, however, gradually wavering, soon surrender themselves to sin and shameless idleness.

OWEN PROVIDES THIS DEFINITION OF THEOLOGY: “TRUE THEOLOGY IS NOTHING BUT THE DISCIPLINED EFFORTS OF THE STUDENT’S INTELLECT [DIRECTED ACCORDING TO THE RULE OF SCRIPTURE] TO ENHANCE AND IMPROVE THOSE INNER SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SAVING LIGHT WHICH CONSTITUTE TRUE, HEAVENLY WISDOM.”

If my own heart is any indication, I think there comes a time in the life of many a young theologian when our joyous, innocent pursuit of God gradually and imperceptibly transforms into something else, perhaps a ruthless and jealous pursuit of reputation, perhaps a desperate and mindless pursuit of putting food on the table. When those lesser gods rush in and when, perhaps, we finally catch up with them, how many of us would not be tempted to sit comfortably on our achievements and rouse ourselves to action only when our secured positions or reputations were threatened? If at any time something less than God becomes an attainable end, I will go the way of Owen’s woe-begotten sluggard.

No, I don’t want to grow old and fat in my theological acumen, becoming a cantankerous curmudgeon who is blind to the untraceable winds of the Spirit, who thinks he can be obnoxious because he’s earned the right to it (not least because he’s

become deaf of hearing), who excuses an addled brain with nostalgic references to tenured battles in the fields of truth. The pursuit of this kind of personal comfort is paid with the bread of anxious toil, but the sweet rest offered by Christ is paid with the bread of his own flesh, broken for me.

So, how can I fight against this constant carnal drift toward identifying my beliefs with my ego rather than with the “I Am”? Perhaps Owen can also guide us back home to that time of innocence when the knowledge of God was all we cared for or hoped for. Owen provides this definition of theology: “True theology is nothing but the disciplined efforts of the student’s intellect (directed according to the rule of Scripture) to enhance and improve those inner spiritual gifts and saving light which constitute true, heavenly wisdom.”

This definition is remarkable for a number of reasons. First of all, Owen reminds us of a time when theology as *techne* (technique) had not yet entirely replaced theology as *sapientia* (wisdom). The ostensible goal of Owen’s *Biblical Theology* is to provide a theological survey of redemption history. While he does do this (with various degrees of success given the genuine advancements in biblical theology that have occurred in the past three centuries), Owen seems particularly concerned with the state of theological education in his time. Owen straddled the epochal transition between the pre-modern and Enlightenment era, and therefore was an eye-witness to the changes in education philosophy that followed in its wake. We should remember, of course, that only a few years prior to the publication of *Biblical Theology* in 1661, Owen was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. As the Wars of Religion

gassed out a disinterested and detached rationalism began to arise. Its theological and ethical goals were much more modest, a lukewarm compromise that Owen was quick to spew out of his mouth. He declares, “this moral philosophy . . . so popular in our places of education . . . [restricts] virtue within the limits of this earthly life. This is to cut virtue off from its own immortal source and so undermine and destroy the whole nature of true virtue. It teaches that every man has the strength to perform all of the good deeds that are needed to achieve the status of virtue—something in itself in direct antagonism to the whole teaching of the gospel.”

This cool rationalism that settled for modest ethical and theological goals had one deeply disturbing effect, it severed head from heart. Once those two faculties are compartmentalized, once that intuitive pomegranate is cracked, the fruit scatters in every direction. You don’t have to nail your flag to the mast. You could diversify your spiritual portfolio, commit your intelligence to study, but never give your heart completely to it. Suddenly, a divided heart and being double-minded became a virtue. As Owen says, “If a student has labored merely to equip his mind with a store of facts, and

THIS COOL RATIONALISM THAT SETTLED FOR MODEST ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL GOALS HAD ONE DEEPLY DISTURBING EFFECT, IT SEVERED HEAD FROM HEART. ONCE THOSE TWO FACULTIES ARE COMPARTMENTALIZED, ONCE THAT INTUITIVE POMEGRANATE IS CRACKED, THE FRUIT SCATTERS IN EVERY DIRECTION.

has neglected the high and holy means of sacred meditation, he will look in vain for progress in his labors, for any real or practical value to the Church at large—or for his own eternal security.”

What Owen recommends is not a retreat into anti-intellectualism. Far from it. His definition of theology won’t allow it: “True theology is nothing but the disciplined efforts of the student’s intellect (directed according to the rule of Scripture) to enhance and improve those inner spiritual gifts and saving light which constitute true, heavenly wisdom.” Owen here stands in the stream of faith seeking understanding, not understanding seeking faith (as Modernism would have it). But not only is Owen’s methodology different, the end goal of our intellectual endeavor is different. In the new secular focus, intellectual effort found its ultimate end in achieving the common good, and often just the individual’s common good. Our intellect is spent in the pursuit of pride, distinction, erudition, financial compensation, or even the benefit of others (which compensates us with feeling needed and valued).

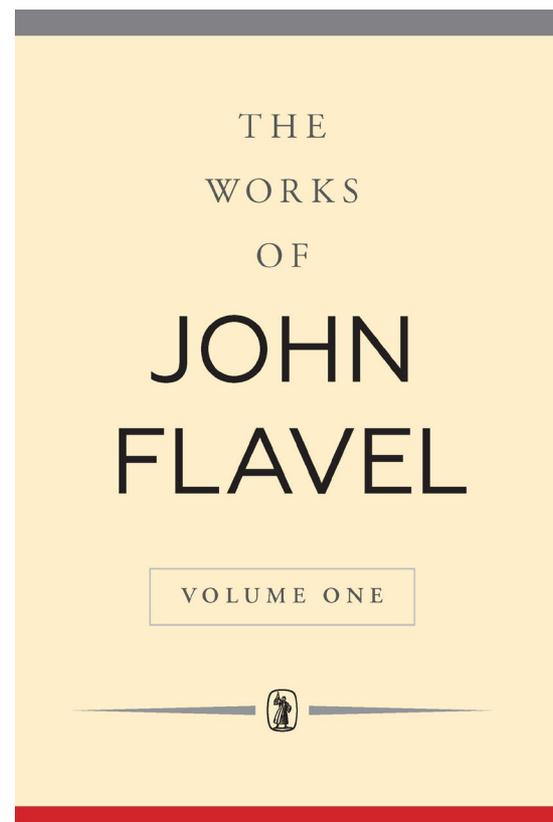
But for Owen, the appropriate use and end of intellectual effort is the knowledge of God. Owen sees the goal of knowledge as an ascent to Love. It’s a striving of all our being, affections, mind, and will toward the supremely satisfying and inexhaustible fount of God the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. The benefits both to ourselves and others in this purpose will come; but they come as surprises, not calculations. ■

Matthew Claridge
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OLD PURITANS WITH NEW DUST JACKETS

PURITANS EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD READ

by Matthew Barrett



One of the first Puritan books I ever read was John Flavel's *The Mystery of Divine Providence*, part of the Puritan Paperbacks series (Banner of Truth). I was young, still in college, and had just discovered a love for reading theology. This book whet my appetite for the Puritans and began to feed my newly found love for Reformed theology. Far from a cold treatise on divine sovereignty, Flavel's little book is filled with comfort, warm piety, and deep theology. Flavel showed me how to trust in the sovereignty and wisdom of God.

In that light, you can imagine my excitement when Banner of Truth released a fresh looking set of Flavel's works. Totaling six volumes, this set provides

Puritan aficionados with Flavel's corpus. Included are works like *The Method of Grace in the Gospel Redemption* (vol. 2), *Gospel Unity Recommended to the Churches of Christ* (vol. 3), *An Exposition of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (vol. 6), and *The Reasonableness of Personal Reformation and the Necessity of Conversion*. And, of course, *The Mystery of Providence* can be found in volume 4.

There are a couple of other books Banner of Truth has put out afresh that I would also recommend. Be sure to get your hands on Thomas Watson's *The Beatitudes: An Exposition of Matthew 5:1-10*, first published in 1660. If you enjoyed Watson's A

Body of Divinity, which certainly tends to be his more well-known book, you will also enjoy Watson's treatment of the start of the Sermon on the Mount. This 2014 reprint has been re-typeset in an attractive cloth bound edition. J. I. Packer praises the book: "What announces itself as an exposition of Matthew 5:1-10 turns out to be a digest of all the central Puritan teaching on the Christian life. The Beautitudes are treated as minishafts into the whole economy of grace—as indeed they are."

Also don't miss the addresses of Martyn Lloyd-Jones delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences from 1959-1978. Banner of Truth has collected these into one volume called: *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*. Recently reprinted, this volume contains chapters such as "John Owen on Schism," "John Calvin and George Whitefield," "John Knox—The Founder of Puritanism," "Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival," among many others.

Last, go out and buy *Christ Set Forth as the Cause of Justification and as the Source of Justifying Faith* by Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), which is part of the Puritan Paperbacks series (Banner of Truth). Published in 1642, Goodwin expositors Romans 8:34, drawing not only theological but valuable pastoral insights from the text. Goodwin will help you take your eyes off of yourself and place them on your Savior, Jesus Christ. Michael Horton has high praise for this book: "Turning to nearly any page in this volume, readers will be rewarded with a remarkably pastoral theology of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone." 

Matthew Barrett
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NEW BOOKS ON JOHN OWEN

Owen's Biblical Theology might be a difficult place to start catching Owen's vision of theology as spiritual wisdom. Thankfully, a growing stream of publications are making Owen's vision accessible and digestible. I think of two recent volumes in particular, Ryan McGraw's *The Foundation of Communion with God* (Reformed Heritage Books), and Sinclair Ferguson's *The Trinitarian Devotion of John Owen* (Reformation Trust). If Owen's *Communion with God* (Crossway) is still a bit to daunting (and Owen is always daunting), these shorter volumes might offer great benefit and an easy inroad. McGraw's volume is a short compendium of Owen's words, divided into short chapters.

Each chapter provides manageable chunks of Owen's dense and deep prose, with a particular focus on Owen's Trinitarian piety and theology of corporate worship. Ferguson's volume provides a wonderfully accessible analysis of Owen's *Communion with God*. Both books seek to explain and capture for the modern reader the "sweetness" Owen sought his whole life through rigorous thinking and feeling: "what am I the better if I can dispute that Christ is God, but have no sense or sweetness in my heart from hence that He is a God in covenant with my soul?"

FIRST PRINCIPLES

LEARNING FROM A GIANT: THREE REASONS TO READ JOHN OWEN

by Matthew Barrett & Michael A.G. Haykin

Why should we read, get to know, and learn from a Puritan like John Owen? As J. I. Packer has argued, we need to read the Puritans, and John Owen especially, because we are spiritual dwarfs by comparison.

Far too often in the recent past the focus of Christians has shifted away from the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ and has instead made Christianity man-centered and success-oriented.

Consequently, Christian spirituality has become sentimental and self-indulgent. In short, we lack spiritual maturity. In contrast, John Owen was a spiritual giant. Many reasons could be listed as to why, but we will focus on just three.

1. HE HAD A BIG VIEW OF GOD

First and foremost, Owen had a big view of God and a passion to see this great God lifted up in worship. The glory of God in Christ was at the very core of Owen's thought, suffusing his writing and preaching at every turn.

Owen was radically God-centered. But for Owen, and for the Puritans generally, intellectual knowledge was not enough. Rather, one must know God experientially, or—as Owen would put it—experimentally.

In other words, it is not enough for God to be studied; God has to be served, adored, and

worshipped. Truly understanding who God is and what He has done in redemptive history is meant to arouse our affections for God. Head knowledge always has to be accompanied by heartfelt experience, which leads us to our next point.

2. HE TOOK HOLINESS AND COMMUNION WITH GOD SERIOUSLY

Second, we can learn much from the quality of Owen's spirituality. In knowing God, Owen knew humanity. While human beings have been made in God's image, sin has radically distorted them in every way. Every person stands guilty before a holy God and every person is corrupt, unwilling, and unable to turn to Christ.

For Owen, it is only through the effectual and gracious work of the Spirit that sinners are converted to Christ and thereafter grow in holiness and likeness to Christ. It is no wonder that Owen's assistant, David Clarkson, wrote of him, "It was his great Design to promote Holiness in the Life and Exercise of it among you."

And for Owen, this communion with the triune God was at the very center of the Christian's sanctification and growth in holiness.

3. HE SOUGHT THE REFORMATION OF THE CHURCH

Third, Owen sought reformation, not only in the individual believer but in the corporate church. Owen was serious about both the Christian life and the church's godliness, which in his mind was to occur through the preaching and teaching of God's Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline.

In this sense Owen was in line with the best of the 16th century Reformers. If there was any

man who sought to initiate and cultivate genuine reformation in England, it was John Owen. If we desire to see spiritual renewal in our own day, we will do well to pay heed to the lessons we can glean from the life and writings of Owen.

LIVING FOR THE GLORY OF GOD IN CHRIST

It is sad that many Christians today have never heard of John Owen, let alone read this colossal Puritan. Owen simply is not read and celebrated to the extent of others, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards.

Nevertheless, he should be. Owen's writings are a gold mine just waiting to be dug up and discovered anew.

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