

Prayer is a word that we use a lot, one of those words which we hear without thinking, which washes over our ears without swirling around in our minds long enough. Prayer. What is it?

I think that it is always imperative to return to the Scriptures, over and over again, to center ourselves on the definitions and descriptions which God has revealed, lest we slowly and gradually slip into believing things that are not true. Because a half-truth is a full untruth, it is imperative that we constantly calibrate our truth compass, wisdom and understanding, to the true North of God’s revealed Word in the Scriptures.

We tend to be comforted by what is easy, regardless of its veracity, which becomes the safety of empty tradition. Prayer can become like this, whereby we gradually drift into normalized Christianese expressions, empty repetitions without thought, tacking on “in Jesus’ name” like a mindless conclusion, as if it were a “sincerely”. Of course, there is always the danger of prayerlessness, but that is a danger that is a clear problem, the result of ingratitude and self-sufficiency.

Yet, the danger of thoughtless prayer is a more camouflaged danger, because it hides within the Christian virtues, having a form of godliness, but denying its power. It looks like prayer, but it does not make much of God. Look at how Paul mentions prayer in v3, then immediately breaks off in gratitude for the greatness of God, the grace of the Father, the beauty and power and significance of His work. Prayer should always do this. Prayer is never about prayer. It is about the Father who is capable, strong, and willing to help.

And it does, when we slow down and contemplate the *power* and *grace* of the God to whom we are invited in to seek, when we think through the gospel and its implications. It is the gospel of the grace of God which connects gratitude to God (3-8) and petition to God (9-14), what God has promised and what we ask God to give.

Verse 9 begins with a strong causal phrase, which is obscured in the ESV to “And so...”, but it literally reads, “because of this”. Because God has worked in bringing them the message of the truth, the gospel, and because they had believed it, and because it was bearing fruit and increasing as they understood it, they pray.

Look at the parallels:

1. “since the day you heard the gospel” (v6) - “since the day we heard” (v9)
2. “We thank God” (v3) - “giving thanks to the Father” (12)
3. “always” (v3) - “not stopped” (v9)
4. “when we pray for you” (v3) - “praying and asking on your behalf” (v9)
5. “you understood” (v6) and “learned” (v7) - “knowledge and understanding” (v9)
6. “bearing fruit and growing” (v6) - “bearing fruit and growing” (v10)

This strong connection between our gratitude for the grace, work, and power of God through the gospel and our petitions for God to work powerfully and mercifully to sustain us through the gospel, is quite different than we often assume, for we are to be asking God to do what only God can do, and that this mighty work is a growth in hearts and minds which results in fruitful behaviors consistent with His will and desires, those which are consistent no longer with the domain of the darkness, those things opposed to Him, but rather consistent with the kingdom of His Son, the Son whom He loves.

You see, prayer is eminently hopeful because God is supremely powerful. He can do whatever He wants. He is not constrained by the Devil, or our circumstances, by our words or our performance, or even our sin or failures of faith. It is not as if His hands are tied until we ask or until we want or until we speak the right phrases or conjure up in our hearts a certain degree of passion or feeling. No! We pray because God is capable at any time, and because we have need at all times. These are the prerequisite beliefs about prayer and asking that must be present if we are to pray in a manner pleasing to the LORD.

Therefore, there is no tension between the absolute sovereignty of God over all things, and the prayers of His people. While some wayward believers have assumed that because God is sovereign, then prayer must be unnecessary, have simply confused necessary and accidental means of God’s causation. That is, the primary cause of all which God does is always and only Himself. All power comes from Him, according to His glorious might, says Paul, and later states, “powerfully working in me.” Yet, while the source and origin of God’s work is always His own sovereign will and wisdom, it is also true that the prayers of His saints, the preaching of His Word, and the active obedience of His faithful people are often the means by which God accomplishes His work. They are not the only means,

because He is sovereign, but they are one of the means revealed in His Word and thus we are commanded to pray.

Other well-meaning brothers and sisters, having been poorly taught, presume that for our prayers to have true meaning and significance, they must be powerful on our end, the potent “releaser” of good, in and of themselves. They believe that the necessary and functional power is in the prayer, not the one to whom we pray. They seek prayer as a key which unlocks the shackles on God’s hands. Thus, if there is not prayer, or the prayer is not passionate enough, or worded correctly, or asked from a perfect faith, then it is not powerful enough to move God. This is simply ignorant and arrogant, a belittling of the uncreated God and a gross overestimation of the creature.

To summarize: There are some who assume that God submits to His people’s prayers. There are some who assume that God works without His people’s prayers. Both are unbiblical. Rather, God works His meticulous sovereign plan of His own accord, and often through the prayers of His people.

Now, think about this for a moment. Why do we ask *God*? If God cannot do it, what do we hope to accomplish by asking Him to do something? Or, is it possible that we make a presumption that our prayers are the powerful ones, even more powerful than God? Do we not, then, even presume that we are the powerful ones in the asking?

But, how does God reveal the nature of prayer in relation to His power and authority and capability? Look at how Jesus prays in John 17. He asks the Father to “keep them in your name”, and then continues, “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given to me. I guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled.” (17:11-12) Jesus knows that He and the Father keep His people persevering in faith. It is He who “sanctifies them in the truth.” If God could not keep people’s faith, laying it up in the heavens, and sanctify them in the truth, then why does Jesus ask God to do it?

Or, look at how Paul prays for the Ephesians, in an obviously similar way as Colossians, asking God, “the Father of glory, to give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, so that you might

know what is the hope of His calling, what is the wealth of His glorious inheritance in saints...” (1:18-19) In other words, Paul prays because He recognizes God’s sovereignty over human hearts, over human understanding, over the knowledge of His will and the revelation of His character and works *in the hearts and minds of men*. This is incredibly helpful in understanding why we pray!

We pray because God is capable of transforming hearts and minds and the very character of people, including us! Prayer is, therefore, exceedingly hopeful, not because our prayers are perfect, but because God is absolutely supreme in power, wisdom, righteousness, and goodness.

And, at the same time, there is the importance that believers *must be* sustained, *must be* empowered by God, *must be* strengthened according to the quality of strength that only God has, *so that we might live lives worthy of Him*, lives pleasing to Him, with hearts that desire to please Him in everything. These are things that are empowered and originate in God, thus we ask God to do it, and yet they are not without our actions, so we are commanded to do them as the outcome of God’s gracious work in our redemption from sin and immigration into His kingdom. Our prayers and actions *matter*.

Even when we believe that God is capable, sometimes we believe that God is unwilling, and that it is our prayers which convince Him to do something that He was not inclined or desirous to do already. So, in this sense, it is not as though we believe that God is locked up and impotent, but rather that He is careless, distracted, or reckless in his approach to the world and our prayers focus Him, or convince Him that what we ask for is the best thing, the good, so that He will do it. Yet, is this not presuming that our wisdom is higher than God’s wisdom? That our sight is clearer? Our hearts purer and our judgment better? Upon reflection, do we not see that this is arrogant presumption, that our prayers somehow convince an unwilling God? May it never be!

For Paul is very clear to address the willingness of God in verses 13-14, showing that the Father to whom we pray is neither impotent, limited, nor unwilling. Because it is God who has *qualified* us to be included in His holy family, to receive His inheritance in the light. The light symbolizes the truth, what is ultimate and lasting and substantial. The darkness hides the truth, conceals reality, and distorts the shapes of the real, but the light exposes

every side of every shape, every curve of everything, and shows it as it really is. Thus, the inheritance which the holy children receive from the Father is true, lasting, real, substantial, eternal. It cannot be shaken. Why not? Because it comes from the Father who gives it. He is willing. He has already qualified those who believe in Jesus. Is He willing? The cross screams through the Cosmos that God is willing and powerful to transfer us from the authority of the Lying Darkness into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

As Samuel Clark explains, this fixed attention on God's willingness, through such promises, gives great encouragement to prayer, as messy as we may be:

“A fixed, constant attention to the promises, and a firm belief of them, would prevent solicitude and anxiety about the concerns of this life. It would keep the mind quiet and composed in every change, and support and keep up our sinking spirits under the several troubles of life....

A thorough acquaintance with the promises would be of the greatest advantage in prayer. With what comfort may the Christian address himself to God in Christ when he considers the repeated assurances that his prayers shall be heard!

With how much satisfaction may he offer up the several desires of his heart when he reflects upon the texts wherein those very mercies are promised! And with what fervor of spirit and strength of faith may he enforce his prayers, by pleading the several gracious promises which are expressly to his case!” - Samuel Clark, *A Collection of the Promises of God*

Therefore, we pray to the God who is sovereign and good, capable and willing, the FATHER who gives good gifts of Truth and eternally lasting things: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-mastery. The fruit which the gospel is producing in us that lasts, according to the wisdom of His Spirit and the understanding of the Truth, which is in Christ, the one who was crucified for our redemption, and gave His life so that our sin would be forgiven.

We are so prone to pride. We don't even think about it. We do not reason ourselves to pride. We just assume it. We assume that all things are within our power, or rather that

they ought to be. This assumption, or rather, presumption, is evident in whether or not we pray, and if we do, how often we pray and in the manner in which we pray.

Consider what the apostle did when he heard of the Colossians' faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. What did he do? He brought them before God in gratitude. Consider what he did when heard of their love for the saints. What did he do? He brought them before the Lord in gratitude. Now, considering that Paul also heard of a great threat to their faith and stability, a dangerous false teaching, or series of false teachings, which devalued Jesus, by either explicitly or implicitly denying the sufficiency of the work of God through Him and rejected that Jesus is sufficient to know God fully and live full abundantly, what did he do? He brought that need before God, in the name of Jesus, and asked God to do what only God could do.

Therefore, the primary theme of this prayer is that the exceedingly capable God would fill believers with the *knowledge of Himself*, revealed in His redemptive salvation of us through His Son, so that we would live lives worthy of this great salvation.

Paul knew that nothing he could do would conjure up their faith, their love, their growth, the fruit-bearing of their souls to good works, or their perseverance in hope. Paul knew his limitations, and he knew their limitations. Therefore, he prayed to the God of glorious might and power, who willingly sent His son to purchase our redemption with His own blood.

Prayer always begins with the deep recognition of our limitations and the deep appreciation of God's lack of them. His sovereignty beckons that we pray to Him. And His goodness and mercy amplify that call. His faithfulness draws us near to ask "the Father" for what we, and others, need in order to grow and change: to know Him. The Father. Don't pass by that word too quickly. We come to the Father. The word here is not Judge, though God is just and will judge. The word here is not Husband, though God often refers to Himself in such a way, and Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church. Certainly not as an impotent one, but as the strong, capable, wise, generous, merciful Father. We come to a Father, like a child tugging on a pant leg to receive help, or both arms raised up in a plea for help. This is prayer. And this is greatly encouraging to we who are struggling to pray. Listen! We don't

have to be mature or strong to be heard by God. We come as children: ignorant, messy, forgetful, distracted, needy. Listen to Paul Miller:

“(But) this is the gospel, the welcoming heart of God. God... cheers when we come to Him with our wobbling, unsteady prayers. Jesus does not say ‘Come to me, all you who have learned how to concentrate in prayer, whose minds no longer wander, and I will give you rest.’ No, Jesus opens his arms to His needy children and says ‘Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ (Matthew 11:28.) The criteria for coming to Jesus is weariness. Come overwhelmed with life. Come with your wandering mind. Come messy.” – Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*

You can come to God in prayer because He invites you to. We have no requisite authority or purity other than Jesus for us, or “in Him” as Paul says often in this letter. That is, Jesus alone gains you perfect access to the Father. That is why we ask “in His name”. He is our hope laid up in the heavens, the one who is our King, and by whose authority we are adopted as children of God and are then not merely allowed into the courtroom of the source of all that exists, but invited in.

As those invited in, then, let us see what the apostle prays when he presents his prayers before the Father. What does he ask for? Why does he ask for it? What does He want God to do for the Colossians, and by extension, for all the saints?

There is a clear flow of thought in his prayer. To break it down, it could be simply stated as this: “I pray and ask God to fill you with the knowledge of Him, so that you would live lives worthy of Him, which is with a desire to please Him in all things.” That is the basic content of his prayer. He wants us to live lives that are worthy of the great grace which God has shown us. I can remember the scene on the bridge in *Saving Private Ryan*, an incredible movie, when Captain John Miller has brought Private James Ryan to safety through the terrors of buzzing bullets and the imminent nearness of the enemy and the death of many of their squad. And there, upon the bridge, Captain Miller is dying as the P-51 Tankbusters fly overhead to rescue them, having accomplished the mission to save Private Ryan, and the Captain tells him as he breathes his last breath, “James, earn this. Earn it.” Now, in reality, James couldn’t earn his redemption. Captain Miller and his crew had already purchased it with their own blood, their own lives. It was already accomplished. Yet, the command is to

live worthily of this purchased life. Live in the light of such a great and costly gift. That is the idea within the gospel command to live a life worthy of the calling *which we have already been given through the sacrifice of Christ*.

And we recognize that in order to live a life worthy of the life of the Son of God, we need God to reinforce us. That is, God provides the means of us living lives that are worthy of God's great gift, His grace, which Paul further defines as "desiring to please Him." We need God to fix our eyes upon Jesus, not to earn something yet to come, as if our redemption were contingent upon us, but to please the one who has already given and promised and secured everything for us.

In fact, this emphasis on everything is also very clear in this passage. If you look at how many times the word "all" or "every" is used in describing the prayer, it is clear that Paul is being very emphatic that God provides *everything* from the generosity of His own glory. The word is used 5 times between verses 9-11. "All spiritual wisdom and understanding" (v9), "fully pleasing" is literally "desiring to please in all [things]" (v10), "bearing fruit in every good work" (v10), "being strengthened in all power" (v11), and "for all endurance and patience" (v11).

This is a word of sufficiency. The dangerous false teaching in Colossae was rooted in the idea that Christians needed other means of grace, other experiences, other encounters, other mediators, other methods, etc. in order to be strengthened, to please God, to gain wisdom, to do truly good works. Paul is combating that very idea in his prayers, firmly rooted in the sufficiency of God's grace through the knowledge of the gospel, the word of His truth, as the only means by which we know God, are strengthened by God, to live lives fully pleasing to God, enduring all things patiently and joyfully because of what God has done, qualifying us for His inheritance and transferring our status from Darkness dwellers to citizens of His beloved Son's kingdom.

Now Paul recognizes that for us to truly live lives pleasing to the Lord in all things it requires that we know God. Jesus defined eternal life for us in his own prayer to the Father, "This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent." (John 17:5) Therefore, that is what Paul asks God to do, to fill us with all spiritual wisdom and understanding in the knowledge of His will, which he later describes, using the

same word “knowledge”, as “knowledge of God.” (v10) It is something which God increases, as we know Him more and more through His Word. We grow in our apprehension of who God is as God opens the eyes our hearts to see Him rightly. What Paul is asking God to do is what God has already been doing, growing and increasing their knowledge of God in their growing and increasing knowledge of the gospel of Christ Jesus crucified, risen, and reigning.

Therefore, as noted last week, the means by which we live lives pleasing to the Lord is to live in the light of what God has done, and promised to do, in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Like Private Ryan, we are to live our freedom in the light of the cost and conclusion of our redemption, our transfer from the domain of darkness and inclusion in the kingdom of Jesus, and God’s work of qualifying us, or fitting us, for His inheritance of holiness and truth.

So, what does it look like to live in the light of such a great redemption? Well, Paul uses four participles to describe what this life looks like.

1. Bearing fruit in every good work
2. Increasing in the knowledge of God
3. Being strengthened with all power for every endurance and patience
4. Giving thanks to the Father

Let’s look at these one at a time. Firstly, a life lived worthily of the Lord, pleasing to Him as the one who has given so much to forgive you, who were enemies and haters of God, dead in the pride of your sins and self-reliance, is a life that bears the fruit of good works. It is noble and virtuous, godly, Christ-like in character and full of the fruit of the Spirit.

Now, what are good works? We must be careful that we define “good” as that which God defines, according to His Word, again in the light of the gospel. Paul told the Galatians that the fruit which the Holy Spirit produces is love as God defines it at the cross. Now, the love of God expressed at the Cross of Christ Jesus is the love of mercy *through* judgment, not mercy *without* judgement. This is an important distinction because the concept of love in our culture is largely devoid of truth and boundaries, deceptively cast as tolerance of all things, which is really intolerance of God’s right to define and determine what is good,

right, and true. Love, according to the gospel, does not ignore unrighteousness, but pays it down at great cost. The Cross was not merely an expression of God's love towards sinners, but also of God's great wrath against sin, injustice, and unrighteousness. Sin called forth God's righteous wrath, and sin called forth God's merciful love – and both meet at the cross of Christ. Like the Psalmist says, “righteousness and peace kiss”, and nowhere is this quality of righteous love most apparent at the cross. Therefore, love always speaks the truth, and does not cover sin. It may pay the debt of another's sin so that they don't have to, i.e. forgiveness, but it doesn't ignore its presence or reality. Love sees sin and unrighteousness as the greatest threat to the life of another, and acts accordingly, pleading for sinners to be reconciled to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

There is much to say about other “good works”, but the idea is that God defines these works of goodness, so we must turn to what He has said in His Word, the Bible, and “desiring to please” Him, live our lives according to His definitions, commands, promises, and statements within it.

Secondly, a life lived worthily of God means increasing *by* the knowledge of God. While many of the phrases which modify these aspects have the word “in”, this phrase does not. It is in the form which can describe the means of increasing. In other words, it's not merely that we grow in the sphere of the knowledge of God, but that we grow by means of the knowledge of God's will. It's another way of saying that the means by which we grow and change to be pleasing to the Lord is by growing in our understanding of God as He has revealed Himself. It is what we heard last week: it is the gospel which bears fruit and increases among us, because it reveals the character and works of God most clearly. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a reflection the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit...seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4,6 ESV)

By beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, according to the gospel, crucified for our sins, raised to make us acceptable to God, and reigning to subject all things to Himself, we know God and are thereby changed to reflect His character, the way we are supposed to be.

This kind of knowledge of God submits to God's revelation of Himself in Christ Jesus, and refuses to define Him on our own terms. Have you ever been in conflict with someone and, imagining an argument in your own head, you argue for both of you? You assume what the other person will think, feel, and say, and then contradict or agree in your own head? I have, and git's stupid. It is ignorant of the other person. It doesn't know them, it presumes to know them so that I can have my way and prove my righteousness.

And we can do that with God, too. We can presume what He would think, or approve, or do. But, God has already told us who He is through His Word, written down, and ultimately displayed in His Son, the Word made flesh. And Paul is going to expound on the nature of the Son in the immediate context, but the life lived pleasing to God is the life lived submitting to His self-expression and lived in the light of that knowledge, constantly growing in our knowledge of Him and our understanding of His will as we learn the gospel and its implications. The greater the degree that we know God, the greater degree that we live rightly. This is our means, then, of growth – to know God rightly so that we love Him truly and live to please Him in all things.

Thirdly, we must be strengthened to endure. Do you see this one? We like to speak of power. We like power. We want to be strong. Yet, this strength is particularized here. The life lived worthy of God is the life of endurance and patience, not victory and greatness. We overcome by persevering. It is the life which clings to the promises of God when they are not yet fulfilled. Endurance is the perseverance of God-pleasing, good works, faith-filled following of His Word when your heart desires comfort, ease, and the approval of others. Perseverance is the clinging of dependence upon the Lord in catastrophe and suffering and pain and turmoil and terrifying darkness. And how do we persevere? By our knowledge of God, which rests in His sovereignty and goodness, His power and His willingness, His greatness and His grace through His Son.

And not only that, but Paul inserts this troubling phrase, “with joy.” Faith endures with joy. How? Because of the gospel...resurrection. Suffering, though intense and heavy and terrifying at times, is only the prelude to which every chapter following is one of ‘an eternal weight of glory far beyond comparison.’ In the words of Samuel Rutherford,

“Our little time of suffering is not worthy of our first night’s welcome home to heaven.”

Belief in the gospel of the cross of suffering AND the glory of the resurrection is how we live a life worthy of the calling which we have received, to bear a cross like our master and to share in His glory at our resurrection. Therefore, we can endure great suffering with the joy of hope laid up for us in heaven.

Patience is the ability to not lose composure when people wrong you. It is the ability to not be irritated by annoyances and the peccadillos of others towards you. I heard a great word picture of patience. Patience is like steel, which holds its shape under great heat. Impatience is like mercury, which loses its shape and runs all over the place at room temperature. We need to be strengthened by God to endure sins against us by others, to not lose our composure, but to stand firm in the truth and to stand firmly for the well-being and edification of others, even those who annoy us or sin against us. How do we grow in patience? By our knowledge of God as our sufficiency. I don’t need that comfort, that honor, the love of that person, because Jesus is enough, God is my hope, and my full inheritance is held for me.

Now, look at how intensely Paul modifies this strength. We’ve seen its purpose: to endure with joy. But, look at its *quality*. What kind of strength do we need, and what kind of strength does God give? “according to His glorious might.” Wow! This word, “might” is quality of strength. That is, God’s quality of strength, His *glory*, is the kind of strength which God gives for the purpose of endurance. In the only other place where the NT links these two words “glory” and “might”, outside of a handful of doxologies, i.e. “to Him be power, glory, dominion forever and ever”, is in another prayer in Ephesians 3:16, where there is a clear causal connection between God’s attribute of glory and His attribute of power as the cause of strengthening us: “according to the abundance of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being.”

What power, then, could defeat you? What suffering could swallow you up? If God's capability is the strength which grants you perseverance, then how hopeful can you be to endure the suffering which God has ordained for you? Take hope, dear sufferer! God, and His glorious strength, can strengthen you to endure to the end.

Finally, a live lived worthily is full of gratitude. It gives thanks to the Father who qualified us because it knows that there is nothing in me that qualifies me for His favor or His blessing. There is no amount of faith, no greatness of belief, no deeds or thoughts or experiences by which God owes me an inheritance. It is purely a gift, given against all the conditions to the contrary that I present to God. God's grace generates generosity in His children, and this is pleasing to Him and He is worthy of it.

Thus Paul brings it back to gratitude and prayer, the dual responses to the great grace of the sovereign and the willing God. Pray like you are desperate, because you are. If you are in Christ by faith, rejoice like you are rescued, because you are. Since you are in Christ, strive for the holiness without which nobody will see the Lord, because redemption always leads to transformed lives, a desire to please the Lord above everything else, and the desperation to know Him, to please Him, and to walk worthily of the price which He paid when He laid down His life on that great bridge between God and man in order to bring peace between them.

God has promised, in His grace, to strengthen you for such endurance of faith and the patience to wait for the hope which is laid up in heaven for you. God has promised that His gospel will bear fruit in you to good works and increase your understanding of Him and His will. These promises are promises, so pray for them. Ask for them. And in such active dependence upon the Father, behold the strength of His glorious might and His willingness to qualify you by His own sovereign love through the one Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Let me close with the admonition of John MacDuff, the Scottish pastor, who takes our eyes off of ourselves and helps us see the glorious God in the good news of His Son, given for sinners so that we may be included among His holy ones:

“We have only to track the divine footsteps of the Redeemer on earth, there to behold ‘as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.’ What do we see?”

A Being, indeed, of infinite holiness—unsparing and uncompromising in His rebuke of iniquity, sternly denouncing sin in all its forms, driving with a scourge the sacrilegious traffickers from His Father’s house, proclaiming the impending and certain doom awaiting incorrigible sinners, the workers of iniquity; even predicting by discourse and parable the dreadful verities of a judgment-day, and pronouncing everlasting doom on the impenitent and unbelieving; on all traitors to their trust, on all neglectors and squanderers of committed talents; thus repeating, in words not to be misunderstood, the very truth which fell on the ears of Moses in his Rock-cleft, as the sublime voice and vision were dying away—‘And that will by no means clear the guilty.’

But yet, in combination with this, we are called to contemplate one of infinite purity, beneficence, tenderness; whose delight was to feed the hungry, to heal the diseased, to help the helpless, to comfort the bereaved; feeling for them; weeping for them—in His parables, giving a welcome to the Prodigal; in His daily communion, never scorning a suppliant’s request, or a penitent’s tears; listening, even in His expiring agonies, to a cry for mercy from a felon at His side; accepting the widow’s mite; making generous allowance for the lack of watchfulness at His own greatest crisis-hour on the part of trusted disciples; pardoning, with the tenderest of rebukes, the aggravated sin of a faithless follower; the prayer, trembling on His dying lips, of forgiveness for His murderers.

Reader! take in, at a glance, this wide comprehensive view of the Savior’s life and ministry, and in it you have a picture and impersonation of the character of God. ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.’ ‘From henceforth,’ says Christ, pointing to Himself, ‘You know the Father, and have seen Him.’”

— John MacDuff, *Clefts of the Rock*