

Winning the Warfare of Heart Idolatry

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Introduction

Who can forget the story in Genesis where Jacob wrestled with the angel throughout the night and how, later on, God directed Jacob to return to the land of Canaan. Remember him finally meeting his brother Esau again and afterward settling in Canaan with his family. In Genesis 35, in obedience to God's command, Jacob did return to Bethel where God had met him many years before. As he and his family prepared to journey there, he said to them all, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel." Jacob was aware that some of them had brought along idols from Padanaram, where they had lived before. To Jacob, serving idols and serving God could not go together. So he commanded them to put away these false gods.

The Lord Jesus says essentially the same thing in Matthew 6:24 when He warns, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon is another word for worldly wealth. Yet whether our idol is money or power or anything else, that idol, embraced in the heart, puts us in direct opposition to God. This is what James says in James 4:4, "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Let us take this opportunity to identify and seek, by God's grace, to root out the idols of our heart which defile our conscience and hinder communion with the Lord.

Let us consider the first ten verses of James 4:1-10 under the theme, "Winning the Warfare of Heart Idolatry," with three points: the character and cause of this warfare; the effects of this warfare; and the victory over this warfare.

The Character and Cause of This Warfare

The Book of James is a unique, compact, and very practical epistle. At the same time, it is a searching one. The fourth chapter, in which our text is found, speaks against strife among the brethren, about judging one another, and about the need

for caution when speaking about future plans. It is the first of these subjects, strife among the brethren, which we want to examine now.

The text begins, "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" The apostle isn't talking here about the world. He's not asking why there are literal wars and why nations are at enmity with each other. He is talking about us, about God's church, about Christians, Let's pause to think about that.

How much strife is in our life? How often is there anger in our heart or home? Are voices ever raised? Are there arguments between family members? Are we ever impatient with others?

Children, do you ever argue, quarrel, or become impatient with your brother or sister? Do you ever talk back, grumble or complain to, disobey or unwillingly obey your parents?

Husbands and wives, are you ever unloving to each other? Do you ever speak cutting remarks to one another or display, perhaps, impatience or anger toward each other? Do you ever employ the "silent treatment" or "cold shoulder" approach to your spouse or someone else?

Parents and children, are you ever involved in arguments with one another, showing disrespect, anger, or venting frustration? Is there impatience at such times? Are unloving comments made?

The apostle James doesn't ask if there are wars and fightings among us. Taking it for granted that there are, he asks of their origin. Where does this strife come from?

What would be your answer? "It's that wife of mine." "It's my husband." "It's my father or mother, brother or sister. That's who is to blame!" "It's that someone at work or school, this or that son or daughter."

James says it's none of the above. "None of the above? Why, how does he know? He should be at our house for five minutes, then he'd think differently!" Before we are too hasty, let us remember that this text is not the uninformed opinion of an ordinary man who lived some two thousand years ago. This is the Word of God, the God who made us, who sees and knows all things. Our text is not the opinion of man but the inspired truth of God!

Where does this strife come from? These wars? James writes, “Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” They come, says the Lord, from within you, “even of your lusts that war in your members.” The wars and fightings on the outside come from warfare on the inside. They come from desires—strong, even passionate desires—pleasures, and lusts.

We realize that desire, even strong desire, is not in itself sin. God created us fully capable of desiring. This ability was a gift to man. What a wonderful thing it is if we have a healthy appetite, if we have a desire to spend meaningful time with our spouse and children, etc. But in the text, James is not actually talking about our desires themselves, as if desiring is the problem. Nor is he actually talking about the object of our desire. Although it is true that we should desire only good things, that is not what James is writing about here. Instead, and most importantly, he is writing about what we do with our desires—what place or importance they have in our life, in our heart.

What does James say is happening with these desires and pleasures? “They war in your members.” These desires and pleasures are warring. Literally, they engage in conflict. They are fighting and wrestling. What are these desires fighting against? They are fighting against God.

Let me borrow an illustration from an instructor trying to describe this warfare for his class. Right desires are those that are held in a hand that is open and upturned toward God. By doing this, we acknowledge that we receive all from Him. We also offer all to Him. This was the very attitude of Job when he said, “The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). When our hand of desire is open, then we leave the objects of our desire, as it were, in God's hands. We trust that He gives us what and how much He knows is best for us. But what's happening in the heart that James is describing is the closing of that hand into a clenched fist. Under this latter scenario, there is now a competition, of sorts, in our heart. Who has control of our heart at this moment, God or our desires? If our greatest desire is truly God, we can more easily open our hand to His wise providence, mercy, and grace. But because we begin closing our hand of desire against Him, warfare breaks out.

We need to realize that this clenching of our desires doesn't reach warfare-pitch

intensity right away. Desires, we said, are not evil in and of themselves, so long as the object is not sinful. But as we begin to clench our fist, we start to cultivate within our heart a sense of need. I need this object of my desire. How many of us have ever nurtured a desire after a different car, for example, into a need for a vehicle that goes far beyond the basic requirement of transportation? If we continue to feed this sense of need, we develop expectations. We then begin to look to our employer, our spouse, or to someone else to meet our expectations.

Consider, as an example of this process of escalation, the ordinary desire to relax after work. As I focus on this desire, I begin to convince myself that I need that break, In fact I need, even deserve that break right now! Of course, when I walk in, I fully expect those around me to allow for, to create an atmosphere for that rest I am craving. What is the next step? My expectation soon translates into a demand I must have that break! And as we all know, expectations and demands readily lend themselves to disappointments. My expectation, my demand, is unfulfilled. I can even "love" someone because he or she meets my expectations, supplies my demands. I can be disappointed or even resent someone because they don't. How often that which started off as a simple desire, perhaps even a lawful one, was stoked by a heart fully set on the fulfillment of that desire until the desire finally culminates in a demand accompanied by threats. and even punishments. "There will be results if you don't meet this need," becomes the language of our heart, our looks, and our speech. A heart like this is the birthplace of the cold shoulder, the silent treatment, the angry outburst—the birthplace of warfare.

James provides us an abbreviated description of this process in 1:15, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust. [passions/desires] and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived [is fed/accommodated], it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (destruction/warfare/death)." In this whole wretched process the problem was not outside of us but within us. It was not my wife, not my child, not my boss, but my own idolatrous heart, clasping and clinging to my desire, which caused the warfare.

Consider what sad outcome might have resulted if the Apostle Paul had held tightly to his desire that the thorn in his flesh be removed. Instead of learning to adjust his expectations to God's wise plan, he might have, in a moment of

frustration, risen up in self-pity or even rebellion against God's chastening. He would have entirely missed the blessed lessons we read about in this precious and encouraging account (1 Cor. 12:7ff).

What is it to elevate desires in this manner, except idolatry? Is not idolatry worshipping the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25)? Is not idolatry closing our heart tightly around our desires instead of opening the hand of our heart upward to God?

Idolatry, both in the Old and New Testaments, is the object of God's singular hatred, for it seeks to pervert the very purpose for which He created us, namely to know, love, and glorify Him. In idolatry, we become the object of worship and the creation becomes our means of choice to accomplish this. God freely gave His only-begotten and beloved Son to come into this world and to die in order to restore us to that original purpose. Transformed by His grace, we yield all that we are, and seek to employ all that's around us, for His glory.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" What are the results of such tightly held desires? Warfare without and warfare within. It is exactly because we have closed the fist around our desires that our hand remains a fist toward God and others in our life. Perhaps a brief case study, a vignette, will help illustrate how this process looks in daily life.

Let's say a favorite idol is my love of comfort, love of ease. Instead of yielding my day, my itinerary, my schedule, my workload to God, I instead seek to close my hand around this idol, my comfort. In so doing, I become unwilling to part with this treasured desire without a battle, even if God should require it of me for my good.

So how would this idol cause internal and external warfare? While I am tightly grasping my love of comfort and ease, then I shun as many opportunities that threaten that ease as possible. I might avoid evangelistic opportunities, turn from an encounter with a stranger, lest these upset my beloved ease. I might try to bury myself in my work so that I don't have to deal with children squabbling at home, leaving my wife to take care of that as much as possible. Wrapping myself in my comfort, I won't have to deal with my children's discipline as much as I could or

should. Maybe love of ease translates into less meaningful interaction with my wife. When I keep things at a surface level, engage in small talk, limit myself to brief encounters ---this insulates me from vulnerability and involvement. It's easier just to skate along in shallow relationships than to really put effort into cultivating them meaningfully.

Maybe my work is that which disturbs my peace. So I avoid it or excuse myself for doing poorly, for being lazy. I might tend to over-delegate to others what I should do myself, so that I could enjoy more "rest." Maybe I start living for weekends and vacations-do the minimum required. Whose company will I prefer? Enablers. These will help me be at ease, will not criticize or warn, will leave me alone or do my work for me. When my wife takes over all that I don't want to do, I "love" her. When she reminds me of my responsibility, I become resentful.

It is sad enough to consider the damage this kind of life does to our horizontal, person-to-person relationships, but the damage is not limited to this. We said that this kind of life is idolatry. This love of ease, or whatever other idol occupies the throne of my heart, adversely affects my relationship with God too. Consider the vertical fallout that also flows from this love of ease.

Since true prayer can sometimes be laborious, my idol prompts me to mechanize or minimize it. Will I not tend to become slothful in every spiritual endeavor? Will I not gravitate toward the bare necessities, for example, my body occupying a place in church while my mind is elsewhere? Will not my devotions be reduced to mere mechanized apparitions? Wrestling with temptation, fighting indwelling sin, winning others to Christ-these all require me to exert effort, to leave the comfortable idolatry I have carefully nurtured. At bottom, so long as I cling to my idol, I am far more interested in my comfort and ease than in God's glory and the growth of His kingdom. I'd rather sit in my self-constructed kingdom of ease than show compassion to or get involved with a sinner who appears to be on his way to hell!

This brief vignette sketches but one idol of the heart; one desire held with clenched fist. How many there can be in our life! A tightly held desire to control things around me can lead to anxiety and worry, prodding me to manipulate others or events so I can run things myself. This same idol fosters pride, even a spirit of

independence from God. What lies at the bottom of such a desire to control? Unbelief that is demonstrated by my unwillingness to trustingly yield my life's circumstances to God's sovereign control.

What are a few typical heart idols? Consider the fear of man, a craving to please others, gluttony or laziness or sensuality, a desire to control or need to be controlled. The list is practically endless. God calls us all to examine our own heart, praying for His Spirit's light and guidance as we do. Our aim is to discover those idols of the heart that we might be clenching tightly, idols we have been unwilling to give over into our Savior's sovereign and gracious hands.

To spur us on to this work, let us, in the second place, consider some of the effects of this warfare.

The effects of this warfare.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you...ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." In verse one, James asks where the strife, the arguments, the anger, and the quarrels between us come from? They arise from the war within, he answers,

Look at the words the Spirit inspired James to write. In verse 1 we have "wars" and "fightings." In verse 2 we have "kill," "fight," and "war." Is the Spirit exaggerating by using such words? Certainly not! Consider each word.

"Wars and fightings among you"—strife, quarreling, disputing—these are the fruits of idolatry. Wars between nations are only just grand extensions of the smoldering battles of idolatry in individual men's hearts. But keep in mind that James is addressing church-going Christians. "Lusts that war in your members." Literally, these are pleasures that do military service, lead the army, go out to battle. The outward strife comes from the general within, from lust, pleasure, tightly held desires. What else could account for warfare within a man's own heart, but his lusts, his desire for pleasures fighting against the striving of

of Heart Idolatry God's Spirit? Even competing lusts strive against each other for the mastery of the man.

“Ye lust, and have not.” The word lust here is different than the one used before. This word means to crave, to set one's heart on, to covet. “Ye kill and desire to have.” Ye murder, it literally says. It is not the desire that kills, but it is you who kills in order to maintain this controlling idol within. Lest you think this word murder is too strong, just recall Jesus' teaching about murder in Matthew 5. What murders are committed by looks, anger, words, and even thoughts—all in the arena of the idolatrous heart!

Why do we thus murder? Because someone won't enable, won't assist us in serving our idols. Think how often we resent even a gentle reproof if it comes to us while we are indulging our idol. Children, did Mom or Dad ever ask you to do something right while you were in the middle of an exciting game or other activity? What was your immediate reaction? How did you feel at that moment? Doesn't complaining sometimes bubble up within you? Grumbling perhaps? Maybe even anger or rebellion? Or perhaps pleading, together with unwillingness? This is the fruit of idolatry going on within your heart.

“Ye kill and desire to have.” These words “desire to have” indicate a real zeal for, a setting of one's heart on, a jealousy over some object or desire. Think of smoking, drinking, drug use or any other habitual sin. People sometimes describe a sense of feeling driven by their cravings for such things. How vehemently we may try to defend them, be jealous over them, and guard them. But so it is with all heart idols. We naturally justify them or make excuses for them, watch over them, and protect them from God. Notice that James, in this whole passage, doesn't once say what that desire is that we are fighting for, lusting after, or craving. It is not the object he has in view, but rather the idolatrous state of the heart. It is any desire rivaling our desire after God that God hates. In Exodus 34:14 God said, “Thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

Let each of us search out these idols within us, whether they be lawful or sinful desires in themselves. Let us closely examine whether these desires are controlling us, demanding service from us—if they are things that rival God. This was what

Paul was writing about in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any' and again in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

We expend such effort to protect, feed, and foster our idols, our tightly held desires. Are they fulfilled after all this warfare and strife? Are these desires fulfilling? No, says our text-mercifully not! What a blessing when God thwarts our idolatrous hearts! What would it be if He would simply allow us to gorge ourselves on all our idols? In verses 2 and 3 we read, "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

All the lusting, the desiring, the striving—what's the end result? "Ye have not." Does this mean we never get our way? Never indulge our idols? No, it doesn't mean that. But we never get real fulfillment, true satisfaction from these idols. So often God either deprives us of our idol or He sours our enjoyment of it. Go back to the vignette about the love of ease. Perhaps I might feel guilty later on because I didn't finish what needed to get done, whittling away the time instead. This consequence, this guilt sours the idol. Or perhaps I come to see that my love of ease has hurt my child or spouse who so wanted my time and attention, time and attention I spent on myself, avoiding interaction with them. This kind of remorse sours the enjoyment of my idol.

Sometimes God drives us out of our false refuge, our idol, or He drives the idol out of us. How many, who supposedly couldn't give up smoking or drinking, suddenly were able to once God sent cancer, emphysema, or cirrhosis of the liver into their life. Sadly, we sometimes see these idols for what they are too late! Beloved, let us examine ourselves this very day and by the grace of God bury any known idols, as it were, even as Jacob did the idols of his own house in Genesis 35:4.

Notice at the end of verse two, James faults us for not praying. Appearing before God in prayer has a wonderful way of siphoning off our heart the things we

don't really need. In the scenario James was sketching, the Christian, at first, wasn't asking God. He was trying to force his own way, acquire for himself that which was desired. In verse three, some even prayed, James said, but still didn't receive what they sought? "Ye ask, and receive not." And why do they not receive? "Because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

Once a friend of mine asked me two questions. He said that I shouldn't answer the first until I heard the second. "What would you want God to give you?" His second question was, "What would you do with it if He gave it to you?" The first answer was easy to give. The second gave me pause for thought.

Did God create all things for our glory? Revelation 4:11 says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." So often, enamored as we are with our desires, we neglect this basic truth. We pray for a blessing on our food. We give thanks afterward for it. But how often do we use the strength and health we gain by it for sin? Think, for example, of athletes who use the great strength and agility God gives them to enrich themselves, bring themselves glory, while at the same time leading thousands of people into Sabbath desecration and idolization of sports figures. Think of the wisdom God gave men to invent things like TV and computers, and yet consider how pitifully these inventions are routinely used to promote sin. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

So God is saying here that we can even ask Him for things that might be good in themselves, and yet because our motive in wanting them is wrong, He still withholds them from us. Think what this could potentially include. Perhaps you are praying for a wayward son or daughter, while even now you are still not teaching the ways of God to your other children who are still living under your roof. Perhaps you are praying for health and/or recovery, yet you have no serious intention that if you were restored you would seek or serve the Lord any more than you did before. Perhaps you pray for a blessing on your work at home or on the jobsite, yet you routinely spend an immoderate amount of the money you earn on luxury, pleasure, and self. Seeking satisfaction everywhere else, in everything else, except in God—perhaps God is now seeing to it that you will not find that

satisfaction anywhere except in Him. This is what James is writing about.

The greatest loss, however, is not just that God doesn't give us what we want. In verses 4 and 5, James writes, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"

Jesus Himself warned, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon [wealth]." Look at the names James uses--adulterers and adulteresses. He is not changing subjects here. Rather, he is telling us that serving our desires, holding tightly onto our dreams in opposition to God, is spiritual adultery. The word translated "friendship" can just as accurately be translated "love"—the love of the world is enmity with God. This is the same word that Peter used when saying to Jesus, "Thou knowest that I love thee." If I, congregation, were to love another woman besides my wife, you would be justifiably appalled, calling this adultery. In like manner, God will not suffer us to love this world, even lawful blessings, in opposition to Him. To do so, to hold onto our desires, cravings, and will tightly, is essentially renouncing His revealed will for us. This is "changing the truth of God into a lie, and worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator" (Rom, 1:25). This is embracing something tighter to our heart and bosom than God. That is sin,

Are there any desires or fears ruling your life? Causing strife within and without? These must be brought out into the light, dear friend. They must be dealt with, mortified, and buried. We may not give place to any idols in our heart, for to do so is to give place to the devil and to dishonor God. Let us consider how we are to combat these idols in our last thought.

The victory over this warfare.

Is there a remedy for the wars and strife in our lives? James continues, "But he giveth more grace." Romans 5:20 assures us, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." God's free favor and power are readily able to overcome internal idolatry. What are the key words in the verses that follow? "Humble yourselves," "submit yourselves," "resist the devil," "draw nigh to God," "cleanse your hands," "purify your hearts," "be afflicted, mourn, weep," and then again,

"humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." What precious instruction this is!

Humility-what is it, in a practical sense? Is it not to take our rightful place before our God? Is it not to open up that clenched hand of ours to Him? This is what it means to submit ourselves to Him. It is to turn our heart to Him, not setting our desires and affections too much on anything temporal or earthly. It also means warding off temptations from without-"resist the devil." As the deceiver suggests to us so-called needs; as he tries to get us to need someone else's approval, for example; as he tries to get us to become more independent in self or less dependent on God; more anxious and less trusting; he is to be resisted, actively.

Putting off the old man, battling heart idolatry not only means repentance, "drawing nigh to God" in prayer, but it also means "cleansing our hands," that is, putting away sinful patterns of living and replacing them, by His Word and grace, with Christ-like patterns of thinking and living. To do this, we must know what God would have us to be like in our present setting and relationships. It is not enough to put off the old man and his deeds, but we need a clear picture of what putting on the new man looks like if we are to aspire after it.

Foremost in this pursuit, we need to ask daily for His direction lest we be tempted all over again to plot our own course. We need to ask daily for His grace to detect and strength to resist heart-held idols. This means to consciously ask each day, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do today? What would please Thee the most? It means having a heart ready to respond to His direction and answers with prompt obedience, while being wary of the opposition of idols.

The word purify in "purify your hearts" means to cleanse morally. What can morally cleanse a human heart except the blood of Jesus Christ? What but the cross has the power to intimidate our heart idols into subjection? What but the fear of God can shrink the fear of man? What but faith can shrink away anxiety and worry?

Verses 9 and 10 speak of a total surrender of our hearts, agendas, and desires to God. It means we come off the throne and beseech God to ascend it instead. It means we stop feasting ourselves on our own craven images and delight ourselves rather in God our Maker and Savior. If we don't purpose to do battle at the heart level, don't be surprised if you gain but little progress in sanctification. In fact, you

may well question whether you are truly sincere about your religion at all. How can we approach God in true love if our heart is set on others? So let us not approach our God, our heavenly Husband, unless we have sought out, by His grace, the hidden idols of our heart, and finding them, renounce them.

Humility-this is the grace that affects the greatest change, and is prominent in this passage. This rarest and yet choicest of graces is found in richest abundance at the cross, in Christ Jesus. Let His blood be our main focus, at the very vanguard of our warfare against heart idolatry. This blood brings cleansing, and it has great power. By all means, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." When we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, He shall lift us up (v. 10). May the temple of our hearts and lives be thoroughly purified so that the King may abide therein with joy. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty. Amen.

The Good Shepherd

Rev. M. Fintelman

- Psalter 381:1-3
- Scripture: John 10:1-21
- Text: John 10:11
- Psalter 220
- Psalter 55
- Psalter 53

Dear Friends,

A shepherd is often used in Scripture to portray the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Isaiah 40, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

The prophet Ezekiel also writes: "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

A shepherd therefore, is one who gathers, cares for, and guides his flock towards green pastures with a kind and loving but firm sense of assured confidence. Christ as a shepherd gathers the dispersed and leads them in the paths of righteousness for His own name's sake.

Christ's people are often represented in Scripture as His sheep. The Psalmist extols God in the 100th Psalm, "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture." Thus, whenever Christ is called Shepherd in Scripture we immediately form a picture in our minds of the close relationship between a shepherd and his sheep.

When we reflect upon the suffering and death of Christ, we would honor Him more if we would look to Him by faith and remember the excruciating suffering He was willing to endure for His flock as the Chief Shepherd. It was the Lord Jesus

Christ, the good and perfect Shepherd, who was smitten for the little ones as Ezekiel prophesied. It is this good Shepherd who gave His back to the smiters and endured reproach and spitting for His wandering sheep. It was this good Shepherd who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He opened not His mouth. With this in mind let us focus with God's help on the words of the suffering Savior from John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." We will contemplate:

The Good Shepherd

1. Who this good Shepherd is
2. What the good Shepherd does
3. For whom the good Shepherd gives His life

Who this Good Shepherd is.

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever is the good and chief Shepherd. The first words of this verse are "*I am.*" The whole gospel of John seems to revolve around these significant words: "*I am.*" Seven times in the Gospel of John, Christ sets forth His well-known "I am" statements. In John 6:35 He says "I am the bread of life." In John 8, "I am the light of the world." "I am the door, and, I am the good shepherd" in John 10. "I am the resurrection and the life" in chapter 11. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" in chapter 14, and in chapter 15 He says "I am the true vine."

Seven times Christ affirms His deity and seven times He affirms His timeless existence. The Jew in His day and the world today needs to hear that this despised Man from Galilee is the eternal God, the living Christ, the King of kings. Now just as a coin has two sides, and both sides are valid, so also Christ has two valid natures. As Luke primarily portrays Christ as Son of man in his gospel account, John's gospel is used to primarily portray Him as Son of God—as divine,

"I am" helps us to comprehend this more fully. These words are spoken with divine authority by the same eternal "I am" we read of in the Old Testament. In Moses' time the Lord revealed Himself as the pre-incarnate Savior when He spoke to Moses from the burning bush. The Lord had commissioned Moses to lead the children of Israel, Moses questioned the Lord asking Him: "But whom shall I say

has sent me?" And the Lord responded: "Tell Israel that the *I am* has sent you." He was not consumed in the burning bush. So also this good Shepherd would one day be in the fire of God's eternal wrath yet not be consumed as He hung on Calvary's cursed tree.

Now He is not just *a* shepherd, but *the* Shepherd. He is not merely, shepherd, but the unique, promised Shepherd of the Father. Many have come and gone claiming in one form or another to be a shepherd to lead us to greener pastures we are all seeking, but only this Shepherd's promises are true. There are many today who offer the formula of lasting peace with hollow promises from one kind of man-made gimmick or another. Especially affluent Western society is mesmerized with the power of the dollar, the fashion of the time, and the aesthetic beauty of the age. Millions today in America spend billions seeking peace from external things. But sadly, Western civilization also abounds with self-centered religion. Too often also religious America goes to church to see how much peace we can get out of religion. We ought rather to ask, "How can I most honor God in my life?" When that is our priority we will find spiritual peace the byproduct of resting through Christ in the Triune God. No matter where we live or which way we turn to try to fill the void within our sinful heart, nothing will grant us settled peace outside of Christ. He is the Prince of peace. Trust in this good Shepherd, my friend. Do not rest until you may walk in His abiding peace.

Christ also tells us that He is good. He is the *good* Shepherd. Christ's goodness is hinged inseparably to His special attribute of mercy. Christ's mercy is a manifestation of His goodness.

Scripture tells us in many different ways that the Lord delights in mercy, and justice is His strange work. Micah overflows with the message of mercy when he prophesies, "he retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy" (7:18). Was it not His merciful grace bought through a way of great suffering that makes you contemplate His goodness, dear believer? Is this not what makes mercy so sweet, when we see His forgiveness contrasted against our just condemnation? When we see our black and sinful natures against the background of His spotless white righteousness, the stupendous nature of His wondrous love and mercy causes us to stand in awe.

It should humble our hearts when we see how willingly He suffered, the just for the unjust. In verse 10 of this chapter we read about the murderous thief, and in verse 12 about the delinquent hireling, thereby highlighting the goodness of this great Shepherd in contrast to thieves and renegades. We are all thieves and renegades. We have all stolen God's honor and turned into traitors, despising our original Paradise glory for an opportunity to be as wise as God. But this good Shepherd gives His life for thieves and renegades.

What the good Shepherd does

Let us consider next *what the good Shepherd does*. He giveth His life, our text says. The good Shepherd gives His life. In this one word is the whole gospel-He gives. Here we can feel the very heartbeat of God-*He gives*.

Jesus Christ was the suffering Servant; He came not to do His own will, but the will of His Father in heaven. He actively, voluntarily gives His all for His sheep.

His whole life on earth was a life of giving. He gave up the music of the angels in heaven to listen to the curses and slandering against Him on earth. He gave up His heavenly throne to sit with publicans and sinners. He gave up communion with His heavenly Father and was forsaken by Him as He cried out in anguish on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Oh, to what immeasurable depths Christ willingly suffered! Even His descent into hell was an act of giving, so all who by grace may put their trust in Him never will have to enter through those dreadful gates. But most amazingly, He gave His life's blood in great pain and anguish, so that sinners may receive that blessed exchange of blood for sins. The Bible tells us without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

"He giveth" can also be rendered, to "lay down," as in verse 15 where we read, "I lay down my life for the sheep." His whole life was also a life of laying down. He lay down in Bethlehem's manger in our flesh. He lay down His life, having many despising and rejecting Him. He lay down and became a worm and no man, writhing in anguish, in Gethsemane's garden. He lay down His feelings as His own disciples forsook Him and fled. And when the brutal scourgings began-as the whips from the cruel tormentors tore into His back-He was silent. As a sheep

before His shearers is dumb He opened not His mouth!

He did this all to save sinners from their sins. He did it to justify sinners, to justify the ungodly. But what does that mean to justify, you may ask. In brief, it means to declare righteous. Only the perfectly righteous may enter heaven. We must earn that righteousness or another must do it in our place. We can never earn that perfect righteousness, but Christ has done so in His double obedience. He actively obeyed the law while in this life. And while on the cross He passively and obediently bore His Father's wrath. By this double obedience, Christ has merited salvation so He can credit that salvation to a sinner's account. And the sinner in turn receives this salvation by the empty hand of faith. This is what is commonly called justification. That is what Paul writes about in Romans 5, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is a profound truth and the heart of the gospel. It is a hard truth for our natural minds to grasp because it is in contrast to what we as fallen sinners tend towards. We give so half-heartedly, but this good Shepherd gives fully and freely, no strings attached

Now even though there is a parallel to the natural sheep/shepherd relationship, Christ's work far supersedes any human effort. A natural shepherd feeds his flock; this Shepherd leads us to green pastures: "he maketh me to lie down in green pastures" David writes. A natural shepherd heals the sick; this Shepherd not only heals but also restores and grants liberty: "He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," Isaiah prophesied of Christ in chapter 61. A natural shepherd tries to bring more sheep into his fold; this Shepherd adds daily unto His flock "such as should be saved" the Bible tells us. And a natural shepherd tries not to let any escape; this Shepherd will never let one of His perish, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," Christ promises in John 10:28. David risked his life for sheep by killing the lion and the bear, but Jesus gives His life-willingly--for His sheep! That is almost past understanding for the believer at times, yet by faith we see what is written in 2 Corinthians 5, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." What an incentive not to spend ourselves on this world's passing pleasures! How we should desire to expend all of our energy for the sake of the

gospel!

Oh what a blessed Shepherd we have! Does this not encourage us to daily fight the good fight of faith, take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Him? He gave up His glory in heaven and assumed to Himself our human flesh, so that one day we may reign with Him forever!

*Above He left the harps and hymns
And came to earth full of sorrows and sins;
Though here below is death and pain
We will one day with Him in glory reign.*

For whom the good Shepherd gives His life.

Finally, we are led to contemplate for whom this good and great Shepherd gives His life. He gave His life for the sheep, John says in this passage, all those who are His own. He has marked them with His indelible seal of divine election, Paul writes in Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

Sadly, today the doctrine of particular atonement is largely despised, but if we would hold true to our biblical heritage, we do well to keep this doctrine in view. We may not, however, distort it by using it as an excuse for an indifferent attitude, saying, "If I'm elect, I'm elect, and if not, then I'm not." If we use this doctrine in this manner, we are continuing in the sin of unbelief, which is the mother of all sin, Election should not be a stumbling block to keep us from seeking the good Shepherd, but an encouragement to drive us out to His cross to where all the elect must, and *will* come.

God's divine election affords the believer much comfort for if it were not for election we would never be able to exercise the gift of faith to look to Christ for salvation. Furthermore, as John Calvin writes, "The doctrine of election is spiritually profitable for the true Christian." We are saved by faith in the good Shepherd and it is God's electing grace that is the source of that faith. This leads to comfort and assurance of faith and can never degenerate into fatalism or passivity.

We also see this in Psalm 135. We read in verse 4 that the Lord had chosen Jacob for Himself. This sovereign choosing causes the psalmist in verses 19 and 20

to praise and bless God's gracious name.

Nor does election suppress the mission mandate as others advocate. Rather, it should invigorate us to more mission work. We don't know who the elect are. Who would ever have thought ungodly Manasseh and persecuting Saul were both elect before they were saved? In Acts 13:48 we see Paul preaching to a mixed multitude of saved and unsaved and when he was done, we read, "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed," You see, evangelism and election go together like a hand and a glove. How we should be zealous to spread the gospel to the unsaved, so more of the Lord's marked sheep may be gathered.

One other thing we should also keep in mind is that even though Christ's death was prophesied in early Old Testament times, yet He did not suffer and die just to fulfill doctrinal prophecy for the elect in the strictest sense of the word. He *gave* Himself lovingly for His sheep, with a shepherd's heart of desire for His sheep. Calvin put it this way, "He was not compelled by necessity, but was induced purely by His love for us." He suffered His painful life and death because He loved His sheep with an everlasting love. He was not just fulfilling a business contract for His people on the cross. His heart of mercy gushed open as He gave His life; His all, as the good Shepherd.

Christ's sheep are all those who trust in Him and who follow Him, and who know His voice, Christ says in verse 27 of this same chapter. Are we following the Lord Jesus Christ? Can you hear Him speaking to you through His Word? Do you know His voice? Do you desire to be made more conformable to this great Shepherd? He leads His flock through this wilderness, often stopping beside the still and peaceful waters of His Word to restore our souls.

Or does all of this sound strange to your ears? Has there never been times in your life when you have sorrowed over your sins committed against this good Shepherd, trusted in Him to forgive you, and sought to live a life of thankfulness unto Him? If not, then know one thing, dear friend: if you do not repent and believe the gospel, then as Christ suffered hellish agonies for His sheep, you will forever suffer them as an unbeliever! Oh dear impenitent friend,

*While He proffers peace and pardon, let us hear His voice today,
Lest if we our hearts should harden, we should perish in the way;*

*Lest to us, so unbelieving, He in judgment shall declare:
Ye, so long My Spirit grieving, never in My rest can share!*

While it is yet the acceptable time of salvation, harden not your heart. He still extends the olive branch of pardon and peace.

But maybe there is someone who says, "I do hate my sins, and am trying to flee from them, but still I don't possess a consciousness of wedded union to this great Bridegroom."

You are like the deliriously lovesick adolescent wandering through the field of life thinking about her love, plucking off one petal at a time from the flower in your hand, saying, "He loves me, he loves me not." My friend, throw away the weeds of doubt and look to the Rose of Sharon! Just as the eternal "I am" promised to deliver the oppressed and afflicted Israelite out of the land of bondage by His almighty hand through the leadership of Moses, so the Lord still promises faith, liberty, and assurance through the faithful exposition of His Word today.

Faith and the assurance of it comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Diligently and prayerfully attend the house of God faithfully, looking to the hills from where all your help must come. Use the means of grace prayer, Scripture study, and meditation upon this good Shepherd, so you may by the Spirit's blessing be assured in your faith.

One of the marks to know if we are one of His sheep is to examine our hearts to see if the pastures of this world give lasting satisfaction, or if we desire a better heavenly country. We desire to be with someone whom we love. If we love Jesus Christ in truth we will long sometimes to be with Him where He is.

When Jesus came down to earth, He left His heavenly abode, and for thirty-three years He suffered humiliation and degradation, especially at the end of His earthly stay in the flesh, but now He is risen and is home again. He was not home here, nor will any of His true sheep be at home in this world. There will be times of longing, sometimes more and sometimes less, for those greener pastures above, which will be ushered in when Christ shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation. Greatly blessed are you if you are among those that love His appearing! Then, dear believer, all sorrow and sighing shall flee away and there

will be no more night. There the streams of pleasure shall flow forever more. Oh, trust more in Him and His promises which all find their culmination in Him! Then one day we may be with that flock where the strong rams and the little lambs shall sing together: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain from the foundations of the world! Amen.

Seeing God's Glory

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

- Psalter 259:1,2,4
- Exodus 33:12-34:9
- Psalter 273:1-5
- Psalter 34:1-2
- Psalter 32: All

We call your attention to the words of Exodus 33:18, "And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Here we have Moses' prayer to see God's glory, which we shall expound as, first, a prayer circumstantially motivated, and second, a prayer wonderfully answered.

I. A Prayer Circumstantially Motivated

Usually when we meet Moses in Exodus, we see him in his public work as a servant of God. Sometimes he is working miracles. Often he is proclaiming God's word or judging some particular evil. But in Exodus 33 we see Moses in the secret place as the servant of the people, speaking with God face to face in a time of great need. Let me give you some background of the circumstances under which Moses was communing with God.

The people of Israel had sinned heinously in making a golden calf. God was terribly displeased. At first He was minded to let loose His wrath against them, and destroy them all. He proposed to make a new nation of the seed of Moses. "I will make of thee a great nation" (Ex. 32:10). Moses besought the Lord to show pity and turn from such fierce wrath, and to repent of such an evil against the people, for the sake of God's honor in the eyes of the heathen, and the promise made to the fathers (vv. 11-13). So the people were spared. God now commands Moses and the people to go up unto the land of promise. He promises to send an angel before them, and to drive out the people who now dwell in that land, but He Himself would not go up in the midst of them, "for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way" (Ex. 33:1-3).

We are told that "when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned" (Ex.

33:4). As for Moses, he sees that he has more praying to do. To commune with God, Moses pitched a tent outside the camp, calling it "the Tabernacle of the congregation," and there he spoke with God.

Attended by his servant, Joshua, Moses went out to the tabernacle to meet with God. Knowing the greatness of their sin, and knowing how justly they deserved God's wrath and curse, the people looked to Moses and his priestly intercession for salvation. So they watched Moses and Joshua exit the camp. They stood in the door of their tents and saw the glory of God coming down as the pillar of cloud, and Moses going into the tabernacle to commune with God, and to plead for the people.

Exodus 33:12-23 relates some of the conversation between God and Moses. Moses, said he couldn't go on without the Lord: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence," he said (33:15). He yearned for God to be with His people and to be in their midst. Moses would rather die than go on without this sign of God's favor. Then he made the ultimate request: "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory":(33:18).

Moses could scarcely have asked for more. No doubt, like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, he little knew the magnitude of what he asked. As Charles Spurgeon said, "It was vast faith which enabled Jacob to grasp the angel; it was mighty faith which made Elijah rend the heavens, and fetch down rain; but this prayer contains a greater amount of faith than those prayers combined."

How did Moses dare to ask for such a blessing? I believe that former communion with God encouraged him to ask for greater communion. Had Moses not spent forty days in sweet communion with God? Had not the Lord spoken unto him "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"? Like Jacob, he had wrestled hard with God and, by grace, had prevailed.

Moreover, Moses had come with one petition after another, and God had answered them all. That made him bold. Faith doesn't retreat but gets bolder with each answered prayer. If it receives two answers, it prays for four more. Faith scales the walls of heaven,

The desire to see God's glory is the essence of Moses' prayer. It is also the highest request of every true believer. Every genuinely converted man and woman,

boy and girl, longs to see the glory of God. Moses' example encourages us to be filled with boldness in prayer. It calls us to be in constant fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Only intimacy with God can raise us to such levels of boldness to ask, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

Most of us are too hesitant to go to God. We bring Him far too little, and our expectation is far too small. We too seldom realize that seeing the glory of God is the essence of conversion: Conversion sees the glory of God, not physically but spiritually, by faith. Only a true Christian sees the glory of God. When you see God's glory, you know that you are a Christian.

An unbeliever, of course, sees something of God in creation and acquires some knowledge of God as he moves through life. David says, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). Paul tells us that the world reveals enough of the power and wisdom of God to leave people without excuse for their unbelief (Rom. 1:18-21). But only a true Christian sees the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Most prayers, including those recorded in the Bible, rise out of circumstances. A good example of that is Jacob wrestling with the angel of God because he is afraid of meeting his brother, Esau (Gen. 32). Jacob prayed to God because of the danger of his circumstances. Consider also Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:22-53), Daniel's confession of sin (Dan. 9:3-19); and Paul's prayers for the churches of Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse (Eph. 1:15-23, 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-15). All of those prayers were motivated by circumstances. So also the circumstances of our daily life motivate many of our prayers.

There were at least three circumstances that gave rise to Moses' petition "Shew me thy glory":

1. *He wanted to see more of God.* Moses had seen much of God's glory in his life, and he wanted more. All of Moses' life was one long experience of God revealing His glory to men and nations. When Moses' parents looked at him in the cradle, they knew that he was a special child. By faith they understood that this child was ordained by God to be a great man. And so it proved. At the age of forty, Moses tried to free his captive people in Egypt by slaying an Egyptian, but that didn't work, Moses had to wait another forty years.

That's when he saw the burning bush out of which God spoke to him and commissioned him to speak to Pharaoh and to free the people of Israel from slavery.

The ten plagues followed, then the exodus through the waters of the Red Sea, and then everything that happened on Mount Sinai, including meeting God and receiving the Ten Commandments. In those experiences, Moses saw the glory of God. And the more he saw of God's glory, the more he prayed, "O God, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

2. *He wanted assurance of God's forgiveness.* When Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with God, Aaron was given the responsibility of leading the people. Sinai was shrouded in smoke and clouds while Moses stayed there, talking with God for forty days and nights. But while one brother was up on the mountain, receiving the Ten Commandments, the other brother was at the foot of the mountain, helping the people to break that Law. While Moses was receiving the commandment "Thou shalt not make a graven image," Aaron was melting gold trinkets to make a statue to worship in place of God. He built an altar for it, and proclaimed a feast. He had the people offer sacrifices. "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play," that is, to dance before the image of the molten calf. He even had them strip off their clothes and go naked "unto their shame" (Ex, 32:25).

Now Moses and Aaron were both great men of God. But there was a great difference between the two. Moses' first concern was always the glory of God, and the honor of His Name. Aaron, by contrast, couldn't say "no" to the people, regardless of what they asked, He was more concerned about his popularity than saying "no" to sin. When Moses came down the mountain and saw what the people were doing, he was so angry that he broke the tables of stone, as a sign that they had broken their covenant with God. Shouting, "Who is on the Lord's side?" he enlisted those who stepped forward to help him slay 3,000 Israelites.

Moses, on God's behalf, applied the rod of reproof and correction. All this took its toll, however. Witnessing such gross sin and then administering such severe punishment in the name of God exhausted Moses' spirit. He

desperately needed the calm refreshment and restoration that can only be found in the presence of God.

So you see the explanation for the prayer, "O God, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Moses is asking, "Take my eyes off this world. Put my eyes upon that heavenly One who is the Lord of glory. Take my mind off the sorrows and trials of this present time. Let me be so taken up with heavenly things until I forget the things of earth that vex my spirit. Oh that I might see again that heavenly vision of the glory of the Lord."

3. *He needed strength for the journey.* A long journey lay before Moses and the people, and the prospect of a great conflict with the people of the land. In fact, Israel would spend the next forty years in travail, sorrow, and difficulty traveling through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Moses needed his soul fortified for that great ordeal. He needed the strength and depth of his relationship with God to carry him through.

One thing that worried Moses was how superficial the faith of God's people was at that time. God had taken the people out of Egypt. He had brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai. He had shown His glory on top of the mountain. They had cowered in terror at the trumpet, the lightning, the thunder, the fire, the smoke, and the voice of God who had commanded them, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." And yet, only a short time later, the people lost heart when Moses failed to return and said to Aaron, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot [know] not what is become of him" (32:1).

Moses' prayer reminds us how shallow and superficial we all are. What we need is not simply the grace of God touching the surface of our lives; we need the grace of God carving its way deep into our souls. Moses longed for depth. He was asking, in effect, "O God, we are so shallow-don't simply scratch the grace of God into our souls but carve it down deep. Show us thy glory."

The church today needs depth and strength. We desperately need communion with God. We live in a stifling, wicked world. It is difficult to

breathe in such an atmosphere, saturated as it is with sin, and still go forward. We need help from above. So let us cry, "Shew me thy glory."

II. A Prayer Wonderfully Answered

To see how wonderfully Moses' prayer was answered by God, we must first understand what is meant by the glory of God. God's glory is the splendor of His being, what He is absolutely in Himself, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable (Fisher's *Shorter Catechism Explained*, p. 14). God's glory is the radiant beauty, or brightness (Heb. 1:3) of the sum of all His attributes, His wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. God's glory is the light in which He dwells, "the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16).

Children, you know that sunlight can be broken into various colors. You take a wedge of glass, called a prism, and put it onto a stand. In a darkened room, you shine a jet of pure white light onto the prism. It will break up the light into all the different colors that make up the light: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. That's a faint illustration of what God's glory is like. It is the total splendor of His holiness, justice, truth, wisdom, power, grace, and love. Those attributes are inseparable from His glory; they are the source of His glory. What Moses asks now is, "O God, show me what manner of God Thou art. Make me stand in awe at the wonder of Thy being. Portray to my mind and soul all the wondrous truths of who Thou art."

God responds to Moses' prayer in three ways:

1. *He promises to answer it.* He doesn't shake the mountain in justice, holiness, and wrath. Rather, He promises to come to Moses in the still small voice of the gospel. "I will make all my goodness to pass before thee," God says (v. 19a).

God's goodness is the brightest diamond in His crown, for His greatest glory is that He is good. He is goodness itself; it is the essence of His every attribute as well as His every act. As Thomas Boston wrote, "All the variations of the creatures which He made were so many beams and apparitions of His goodness." He is good in creation, in providence, and above all, in redemption. He is the overflowing fountain of all good. No

wonder, then, that when Stephen Charnock wrote the great classic *The Existence and Attributes of God*, he devoted more pages to divine goodness than to any other attribute.

What a promise—all my goodness shall pass before you! Moses would no doubt witness God's sovereign goodness towards His chosen people. But herein lies the apex of God's goodness. When we see God's redemptive goodness, we see not only His goodness in our regeneration, conversion, justification, and sanctification, but we are also led back to our Savior in Gethesemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. From there God's goodness takes us back to eternity past, where we gaze by faith upon our election, then to eternity future, where we, by hope, anticipate dwelling in the eternal goodness of Jehovah.

God's goodness is boundless and timeless. From eternity to eternity, God is "the overflowing fountain of all good" (*Belgic Confession*, Art. 1). God "is good and doeth good unto all" (*Westminster Confession*, Ch. XXI, Para. I). Oh, that we might both hunger and thirst for His goodness, and heed the words of the psalmist, "O taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8). Let us be in constant awe and admiration of God's goodness.

God goes on to promise that He will also show Moses the sovereignty of His grace and mercy. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (v. 19b). God's glory is more fully seen when sovereignty is joined with goodness. To see God's sovereign grace and mercy, therefore, is to see God's glory, and to see it more fully. In the gospel, that glory is revealed in Christ as the brightness of God's glory (Heb. 1:3) and the Word made flesh: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

2. *He gives more than he asked.* God goes on to show Moses the entire spectrum of His glorious attributes.. We read, "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, is merciful: and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by

no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7).

In essence, the answer to Moses' prayer is that the glory of God is the character of God. It is the glory of God to be what He is! Our problem is that we do not know God as He is. The more we know God as He is, the more godly ("like God") we will become. The difference between much godliness and little godliness is how much we know the glory of God. Moses longed to know that glory, and to possess a like degree of godliness.

Sometimes we say a person is unbalanced. Sadly, we are all unbalanced because sin has spoiled our character. We are prone to extremes. Not so with God! Everything in God is in perfect poise. Justice and holiness on one side are perfectly balanced with grace and love on the other. It is the glory of God's redemption work that in setting forth Christ Jesus "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," He is most just in the punishing of sin, but also most gracious as "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26).

We need to strive for grace to be like God, to be balanced in our character so that on the one hand we can uphold a high standard of holiness, righteousness, and justice; and on the other hand, to show kindness, mercy, and patience. Sin and the pressures of an evil world pressure us to lose that balance. We must never forget to look to God's character as the pattern for our own. Let us pray, "Lord, dig deeper; form me in accord with Thy communicable attributes. Help me to reflect Thy balanced character as a parent to my children; as an office-bearer to the congregation; as an employer to employees-yes, in every relationship of life."

That is what we need today. If we profess faith in Christ, we need to dig deeper into the character of God to understand what He is like, that we might live according to the pattern of His glorious image. God tells Moses, "I will make my goodness pass before thee." When you and I are in the right place, we will love that picture of God. We will strive to imitate what we see in it so that we may become more like God.

3. *He imposes two conditions.* In order to see God's glory, Moses must yield to two gracious limitations or conditions. First, God says, "Moses you cannot see my face, but I will pass before you and will cover you with my hand, and you will see my back parts as I go by." Second, God told Moses to hide in the cleft of a rock as God's glory passed by. As Exodus 33:20-23 says, "Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

God is willing to show some part of His glory to Moses but Moses is not allowed to see the whole of God's face because "No man can see me, and live." Looking upon the full glory of God is like looking at the light of the sun. If you stare at it too long, the sun will blind you. Likewise, man cannot look on God. His glory is so intense that the eye of man cannot stand it. So God set a limit, for Moses' sake, saying, "Moses, you can only see some of my glory."

God also put Moses into a safe place—"a clift of the rock," a crack or crevice in the rock Moses was to stand upon—from which he could observe "the back parts," or at least part, of God's glory. In doing so, God was teaching Moses the absolute necessity for a Savior and Mediator. He was saying that man in his sinful condition cannot live when God comes near, nor look upon even the least part of His glory, unless he has taken refuge in Christ the Mediator. Outside of Christ, without the protection of His broken body and shed blood, not Moses, and not any of us, can look upon the glory of God and live. So the Christian learns to sing from Psalter 34: stanzas 1 and 2, as we now do together:

*I love the Lord, His strength is mine;
He is my God, I trust His grace;
My fortress high, my shield divine,
My Savior and my hiding place.*

APPLICATION

The well-known hymn of Augustus Toplady states:

*Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

Moses needed that lesson. In chapter 32 he said to God, "This people have sinned a great sin." Now he says to God, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Moses was offering to be the savior of the people. That was a noble sentiment but it wasn't enough. No man could bear the wrath of God. Moses offered himself as a substitute, but God said no. "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book," was God's answer. God was already preparing Someone far better than Moses to bear the sins of the world. The law would come by Moses, but grace and truth, and the complete remission of all our sins, by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

It was good that Moses was so zealous for the glory of God. But Moses also had to learn that the Messiah to come would be the only Rock of refuge, for his own soul as well as for his fellow Israelites.

There is an important lesson here. Every true Christian should desire to see the glory of God (Ps. 63:1-2). We shall see it in the face of Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all [as Christians), with open face (a reference to Moses going to the tent of meeting) beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The "glass" or mirror in which we see the glory of the Lord is God's Word, and the preaching of God's Word. Scripture is God's witness to Christ: "They are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Knowing God's Word is essential for salvation, and for our sanctification and growth in grace. As we see the face of Christ in Scripture, we behold the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6). And what happens? Well, says Paul, we are changed. The Word of God changes us "into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." That is how sanctification proceeds.

My friends, this is what we need. We need to look into this mirror of glory, the

Word of God. We need to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Then we shall be changed "from glory to glory," and come forth from God's presence with a radiant countenance. Men shall know that we have been with God. Isn't that what happened in the days of the apostles? Those ignorant, unschooled men were scoffed at by the Pharisees--initially. But those leaders began to think again when they saw the boldness and conviction of men who had been with Jesus and witnessed the glory of God (Acts 4:13). May God therefore move us to pray all our lives, and with all our hearts, "Shew me Thy glory." Amen.