

The Creation of the Woman

Dr. J.R. Beeke

- Psalter 372
- Read Genesis 2:18-25 and Ephesians 5:20-33
- Psalter 4
- Psalter 360
- Psalter 126

Dear congregation, Genesis 2:18-24 graphically describes God's creation of the first woman. It begins with the Lord God's remarkable statement, "It is not good that man should be alone." The negative, "not good," is emphatic. Until now, God has done everything good; He has pronounced His benediction upon all of His creation. Here, for the first time, we find that something is lacking. Without female companionship and a partner in reproduction, man could not fully realize his humanity. Out of this need comes the creation of the woman who will be Adam's wife and companion.

The creation of woman in Genesis 2 has far-reaching consequences. It sets the foundation for three important areas: the relationship of a husband and a wife within marriage; the relationship of Jesus Christ, the Husband of His church, and the church as Christ's bride; and the function of a man and a woman within the church. In this sermon, we will address primarily the first of these, the relationship of a husband and a wife within marriage. Our text is Genesis 2:18-24, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his

father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

With God's help, we wish to consider the following theme and points:

The Creation of the Woman

1. The woman made as a helpmeet for the man
2. The woman made by God as His special handiwork
3. The woman made to be one with the man

1. The woman made as a helpmeet for the man

God's creation of Eve is set within the context of the creation story. The first part of that story is the preparation of the man for the woman's arrival. Adam had been made in God's image. He was filled with God's pristine glory. And yet, God showed Adam that in all the created order, with all its variety, there was no creature suited to be his companion.

God chose a fascinating way to teach Adam this lesson. God had stood side by side with Adam while a great variety of animals passed before Adam. As they passed by—from the ant to the zebra—Adam studied each animal, then named it. That was no arbitrary naming. Adam noted each animal's nature and relationship. In the back of his mind, he must have wondered if one might be suitable as his companion. Yet there was none. As Genesis 2:20 says, "For Adam there was not found an help meet for him."

After he named all the animals, Adam realized that not one had been created in the image of God. Each had a body, and even, in a sense, a personality. But none had a soul. Adam could not commune with any on a spiritual level. No matter how good Adam's relationship was with an animal, something was missing. Let me illustrate.

Perhaps you have an excellent relationship with your dog. You have great fellowship with that animal. You share many enjoyable hours with him. You play games with him; you show affection. But all your fellowship must be on a dog's level because a dog can only communicate on that level. Adam no doubt realized that if he was to have a companion, the companion would have to be specially created by God in His image, just as Adam himself had been.

So Adam was prepared for a woman, and the woman was now to be prepared for him. She was to be created as his ideal counterpart in the world. Man and woman were made differently, and yet, by God's creating act, they were to be more alike than anything else in creation

Eve was created as a perfect woman. What a striking woman she must have been! When commenting on the creation of man, Luther said that Adam must have been an extraordinary specimen. He thought that Adam must have excelled the animals even in those points in which they excelled; he'd have power greater than a lion's, and eyesight sharper than an eagle's. But if that was true of Adam, what are we to say of Eve? Luther thought Eve would have been as strong, fast, clear-sighted, and brilliant as Adam. In addition, Luther said, she must have had a beauty and grace that excelled him. This much we can say for sure: Eve, too, was created in pristine glory.

In spite of Eve's physical, mental, and moral excellence, verse 18 says she was made "for" the man, "an help meet (or suitable) for him." In this perfect pre-fall condition, every woman has a clue to her unique, God-given position in marriage. She is to be a "help meet" for her husband.

Genesis 2:18 greatly angers radical feminists and is sometimes a cause for concern, if not anxiety, for other women as well. To speak of woman being made for man, or of her need to be obedient to the man in marriage, is anathema. Many women and even men—think such ideas outdated, unjust, and prejudiced against women,

Our fallen human nature never likes to surrender its desired independence. Man doesn't want to be subject to God, and woman doesn't want to be subject to man. Rev. J. Fraanje once wrote that "Independency"—today we would perhaps say "autonomy"—is the word written on the inside of the gate that led out of Paradise.

We need clear thinking today on this issue. We need to understand, first of all, that the word *help* is not a derogatory term. God created us to serve Him and to help our neighbor. It is an honor for a woman to help her husband, for *help* is a word frequently used in reference to God Himself in the Psalms (10:14; 22:11; 28:7; 46:1; 54:4; 72:12; 86:17; 119:173, 175; 121:1-2). If God is not ashamed to be the help of fallen sinners, why should we look askance on Eve being the "help" of

her unfallen husband? Being a help meet is not a degrading position. The verb form of this word basically means to aid or supply that which an individual cannot provide for himself. The Septuagint translates it with a word that the New Testament uses in the sense of "physician" (Matt. 15:25). It conveys the idea of aiding someone in need, such as the oppressed. Certainly a godly wife delights to meet the needs of her husband.

Meet comes from the Hebrew word meaning "opposite." Literally it is "according to the opposite of him," meaning that a woman will complement and correspond to her husband. She is to be equal to and be adequate for the man.

In what way is she to be equal? We need to grapple with this word *equality*, which we hear so much about today. Are men and women truly equal?

Yes and no. There are important ways in which men and women are equal. (1) They were both equally created in the image of God. That is what made them fit companions for each other. It explains why animals are not fit companions for us. (2) They were both placed under the moral command of God and thus were given moral responsibility. (3) They were both guilty of disobeying the command of God and were therefore judged by God for their disobedience. (4) Paul tells us in Galatians 3:28 that both men and women are equally objects of God's gracious redemption in Jesus Christ. (5) As husband and wife, a man and a woman are equally called to leave father and mother, to cleave to each other, and to love each other as one flesh.

In another sense, however, man and woman were not created equal. Because the woman was created for the man, they were not created equal in authority. God has a different structure of authority laid out for husbands than He does for wives. The inequality of that authority structure doesn't mean that a husband has the advantage over his wife or that one position is better than another, however. Nor does it mean that one position is higher than another. We have to purge our minds of that way of thinking, which is all too common in the business world of our day. The higher we are on the corporate business ladder, many think, the better off we are.

That's not what God has in mind with man and woman, In the God-given structure of authority, a husband and wife mutually submit to Christ (Eph. 5:20), then, under Christ, to each other, fulfilling each other's needs. Already in paradise,

there is glory and humility in both the man and the woman. The man's glory is that he is the head; his humility is that he is not complete without the woman. The woman's glory is that only she can give the man fulfillment; her humility is that she is made of man.

Post-fall, these complementary roles come out even stronger, especially for husbands and wives who desire to model their marriages in Christ according to God's directions. Paul enlightens us on these roles in Ephesians 5. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church - absolutely (He gave Himself, v. 25b), realistically (Christ realized that the church, in herself, needed cleansing, v. 26), purposely (i.e., to make the church holy and blemish-free, v. 27), and sacrificially (i.e., to care for the bride as one cares for his own body, vv. 28-29).

In turn, the wife is to show her husband reverence and submission, Paul says (vv. 22, 33). Elsewhere, Paul gives us four reasons why: because the woman is made from man (1 Cor. 11:3, 8), because the woman is made for man (1 Cor. 11:9), because the man was created first (1 Tim. 2:12-13), and because sin entered the world by the woman (1 Tim. 2:14). As the man is to show loving headship, so the woman is to show loving submission

Submission is not degrading. It is found even within the persons of the Godhead; in fact, marriage parallels the divine Trinity in this regard. Theologians speak of the *essential* Trinity, which the Westminster Confession defines as "three persons in the Godhead, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." They also speak of the *economic* Trinity, in which various members of the Godhead deliberately and willingly submit themselves to one another in the work of redemption. The Son submits to the Father as Mediator and Servant. The Holy Spirit submits to the Father and the Son in His salvific work. Paul points to the parallelism between such submissions and marital submission, when he says, "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3; see also Eph. 5:22-24).

Some feminists respond to such texts by arguing that submission is part of the curse, now abrogated by Christ's atonement. Their arguments, however, don't reckon with submission among the divine persons, nor with the fact that the subordinate relationship of wife to husband is found first in Genesis 2, *before* the

fall and the curse.

Submission within marriage has parallels also within the church, which is the family of God. Though women may and should exercise numerous roles of caring ministries in the church, Paul makes clear that the headship principle prevents them from bearing office in the church. Moreover, this submission in marriage and in the church is to be voluntary. In short, if a woman cannot be a loving, submissive helper to the man who proposes to her, she should not marry him any more than a man should propose marriage to a woman to whom he does not intend to show loving, self-denying leadership.

2. The woman made by God as His special handiwork

The woman is not only made for man; she is also made by God as a special act of creation. Both the man and woman were special creations of God. They were created in equal dignity. Genesis 2:21-22 says, "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof."

God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam as an initial step in the creation of woman. This "deep sleep" must have been something like anesthesia today, and the operation that God performed much like medical surgery. God took away one of man's ribs and filled the empty place with flesh, closing up the wound.

From the rib, God then "made"-literally, in Hebrew, "built" or "constructed" a woman. God miraculously, meticulously, beautifully, laboriously, formed woman with His own hands, making her every bit as special as the man he had created before her.

There is something particularly beautiful, even poetic, about this creation. The woman is made for the man and might therefore be thought of as man's servant. But Genesis says nothing of this. Instead, as Matthew Henry put it: "The woman was not made out of the man's head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

Then the loving Father presented the bride that His own hands had carefully formed to the man. He "brought her unto the man" (v. 22b), which is a special

phrase in Hebrew that means “presented or conducted her to the man.” The word also implies the formal, solemn giving of the woman within the bonds of the marriage covenant, which Proverbs 2:17 calls “the covenant of God.” God, as the woman's Creator and Father, brought her to the man, as the Puritans used to say, "as his second self, to be a help meet for him."

In bringing the woman to the man, God established marriage as the first, most basic of all human institutions. Before there were governments or churches or schools or any other social structures, God established a household based on the mutual respect and love of a husband and wife. All other human institutions derived from that. From the authority of the father came the patriarchal systems of human government, which would eventually give rise to monarchies and democracies. From the responsibility of parents to educate their children came the more formal systems of education that we call schools and colleges. From the need to care for the family's health came physicians and hospitals. From the obligation of parents to train their children in the knowledge of God came temples, synagogues, and churches. All human organizations can be traced back to the home, the family, and ultimately to marriage.

Adam, whom God then awakened, immediately recognized Eve as his companion—the perfect fit for the longing that had been awakened in him. In response, he broke into a kind of wedding song, celebrating his similarity and union with the woman by naming her.

Adam said, “This is now” (v. 23a)—i.e., “this time” -- now, at long last, Adam finds that which corresponds to him. The close association is emphasized by their names, since she is called “woman” [*ishah*] because she was taken out of man [*ish*]. The Hebrew word for “woman” is formed simply by adding the feminine ending of “-ah” to the word for “man.” A parallel difference would be between lion and lioness, or tiger and tigress. So Adam, by divine revelation, realized the woman was taken out of him. His act of naming his wife reinforced his leadership and authority over her, but her name also indicated that he understood her equality with him as his partner.

The divine miracle that Adam witnessed filled him with inexpressible joy, inspiring him to cry out in beautiful poetry, “This is now bone of my bones, and

flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (v. 23).

Adam and Eve then entered into a sinless marriage. "Marriage is honorable," wrote Matthew Henry, "but this surely was the most honorable marriage that ever was, in which God Himself had all along an immediate hand."

To Adam's wedding song, God appends in verse 24 a beautiful, sacred blueprint for marriage, which involves a leaving, a joining, and a oneness: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." These are probably the words of Moses, the inspired author of Genesis, who provides us with this sacred precept that Jesus repeats in Matthew 19 and Paul repeats in Ephesians 5:31–32, saying, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." These three essential traits-leaving, cleaving [or joining], and oneness-still exist post-fall, in Christ, in a good marriage.

3. The woman made to be one with the man

The three parts of God's blueprint for marriage are important marks of a good marriage:

(1) *Leaving*. Leaving father and mother is a tremendous adjustment. The closeness of family unity must yield to a new family unit with a new head. This new unity takes priority over the parent-child relationship. There's a chain of reasoned thought here: One must leave in order to cleave, and two must cleave to become one flesh.

(2) *Cleaving*. A newly married couple must join together. The original Greek word can be translated "cemented together." The bridegroom and bride form a new relationship inseparable from each other. The woman becomes part of the man, and vice versa. They become more than each other's intimate companion, best friend, and faithful partner.

(3) *Oneness*. The expression *one flesh* is the strongest Hebrew construction to indicate a change of state. This is implied already in Eve's being formed out of Adam. The goal of marriage, however, is not just to become one physically, as

important and fulfilling as that may be, but in every aspect of the relationship: one in heart, one in love, one in trust, one in purpose, one in thinking, and, above all, one in Christ. A oneness that is no deeper than physical will soon dissipate and most likely end in an unhappy marriage or in a divorce court. But a marriage that has an overall oneness in heart, mind, and action will have special physical oneness as well! Physical oneness does not produce a great marriage; but a great marriage, in Christ, produces great physical oneness as well as a great intellectual, emotional, and spiritual oneness.

Oneness is the great goal of marriage to be one with God through Christ, then, out of that oneness, to be one with each other. But how can a sinner, who has separated from God, become one with God? Only through the Savior, Jesus Christ, who Himself engaged in a leaving, a joining, and a oneness in wooing and winning His bride. Paul puts it this way, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). Here is how He did that:

(1) Christ left His Father willingly. He left the crown and throne and courts of glory to come into this world, to seek out His bride. He endured heart-wrenching separation from His Father on the cross. He thus paid the dowry price for His bride so that she might become part of His body, His flesh, and His bones.

(2) On Calvary's cross, Christ joined Himself to His bride. As He was dying, she was mystically formed out of Him as the Second Adam, just as Eve was formed out of the first Adam when in a deep sleep. As the woman came from Adam's side to symbolize their being joined together, so from the wounded, bleeding, dying side of our Savior, the church of God was taken out, as it were, to be born, to live, and to be joined with her Savior. This is a great mystery indeed!

(3) The greatest part of this mystery, however, is: "They shall become one flesh." The church of God, says Paul, makes up the total fullness of Christ as Mediator. He is the Head; the church is the body. "And gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). This mystical union will be perfected one day in heaven's ideal, unbreakable union.

When we are born again through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, we become personally united with Jesus Christ. We become one "in Christ." That is

why Paul never tired of describing a Christian in this way. In his epistles, Paul uses this phrase or a similar phrase-*in Christ, in Christ Jesus, or in Him*-at least 164 times. That is Paul's favorite way of describing a Christian,

For example, Paul writes, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," or, as the original has it, "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). By being united with Christ, a person becomes a new creation. He is one in Christ; he is united with Christ. Likewise, in Ephesians 1:3, Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places *in Christ.*"

The believer's union with Christ is profoundly intimate. When Paul speaks of union with Christ, he uses a special prefix in Greek, best translated as "co-," meaning that tie is indissoluble. Literally, he says in Galatians 2:20, "I am co-crucified with Christ." That is, when He died, in a sense I also died. In Romans 6:4, Paul speaks of being buried with Christ, in Ephesians 2 of being raised with Christ and of sitting with Him in heavenly places, and in Romans 8 of being glorified together with Christ. Paul is saying that the intimacy of the believer's union with Christ is so great that there is a sense in which, when He was crucified, the believer was also crucified; when He died, the believer also died; when He was buried, the believer was also buried; when He was raised from the dead, the believer was also raised; when He ascended, the believer also ascended. Who can comprehend this mystical union? One poet said:

*One in the tomb, one when He arose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat.
With Him our Head we stand or fall,
Our life, our surety, our all.*

Oh, what dignity exists in all this dignity in Eve's creation as a woman, one with her husband, sharing that dignity with him! And now, through faith, dignity in the recreation of Christ's bride, to be made one with the Bridegroom to share in His dignity and glory, to be loved by God with some of that very same love with which God loves His own Son! Truly, there is no dignity like the dignity of recreation of

being made the very bride of Jesus Christ.

Closing Applications

What about your marriage-does it reflect oneness in Christ? When it is not what you expect it to be, do you ask: How can I (not my partner) make a more profound oneness? Do you work toward cultivating greater intimacy in your marriage?

Today, marriage is under attack. Hedonism is rampant. Adultery is gaining widespread acceptance. Unbiblical divorces can now be granted via the Internet.

The basic structure of society is falling apart. Too often believers fare little better. We need desperately to understand the value of marriage and to work hard at achieving excellence in marriage through the Lord Jesus. We must strive for oneness so that our marriages may be open epistles of God's grace in an ungodly world.

We must not surrender to the love of self that is fostered by our culture. The only way to have a truly successful marriage is to put Christ first, your spouse second, and yourself third. Love of self must be broken at the foot of the cross of Christ. Only when we see ourselves as sinners in rebellion against God and bow before Him for forgiveness and help in pursuing holiness, will love fill our marriages and spill over into all our other relationships. Then we will truly understand that a marriage does not exist for self but for us for the children and society, and ultimately for the glory of God.

Are we daily seeking God's glory in our marriage? Husbands, are you striving to be a loving head in your marriage? Wives, are you striving to show loving submission to your husband? There is no room in a biblical marriage for bosses only for loving headship and loving submission as one man and one woman seek to live out, by God's grace, the Christ-church relationship on earth.

Finally, a word to young people: The oneness that God intends marriage to be in Christ means that you must not marry an unbeliever. If you marry someone who has a personal agenda for marriage rather than God's agenda, you will most likely be setting yourself up for years of heartbreak and sorrow. Second Corinthians 6:14 says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with

darkness?”

Look for a marriage partner given to you in God's favor and out of His hand. And if you want to be a good marriage partner yourself, wrote Thomas Manton, “Clear up your right and title by Christ” (*Works* 2:164). Make your own calling and election sure. If you and your partner are God-fearing, your marriage will greatly benefit because you will have someone to help you strive to live to God's glory, to live a holy life, to bear the crosses God will send your way, and to confidently approach God through Christ in prayer and worship.

Pray for God's direction and counsel and blessing as you wait on Him to lead you to a God-fearing partner suitable for you. Ask Him for one who is a help meet for you..

Dear friend, are *you* married to Jesus Christ? Adam and Eve were not ashamed because they were clothed with God-given, original righteousness. Are you, too, not ashamed because you are clothed with the God-given righteousness of Jesus Christ? Remember, this blessed Savior demands your faithfulness. He is jealous for your wedded love. You must not stray from Him.

What do you think of this perfect Bridegroom? Are you married to another lord—to the prince of this world? Satan's promises are lies. His dowry is anguish. His embrace is death. His chamber is darkness. His bed is in flames of fire.

Whatever our case may be, let us flee with all our shortcomings in our natural married life and in our spiritual marriage to the perfect Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Let us leave the godlessness of this world and cleave to Christ, to be one with Him—now and forever. Amen.

Following God Fully

Dr. J.R. Beeke

- Psalter 62
- Read Numbers 13:17-14:10
- Psalter 415:2, 6, 10
- Psalter 73:1, 5, 6
- Psalter 100

"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it."

-Numbers

14:24

With God's help, I want to take up with you the theme of Following God Fully. I have three main thoughts to convey to you.

First, *the meaning* of this expression: what it means that Caleb followed God fully.

Second, *its root in grace*: why Caleb could follow God fully.

Third, its reward of grace: the reward God granted to Caleb because he followed Him fully.

Scripture provides for us many thumbnail biographical sketches. Some, examples of people we should not follow: Judas Iscariot, Ahab, Cain; others-great men and women of God-whom we are called to follow as mentors as we journey through this world. Among these great mentors is a godly man, seldom preached about and often ignored even in sound literature, by the name of Caleb. Caleb is an eminent example in godliness and God attributes to him great grace, saying that he followed God fully all the days of his life.

If you are a true believer, I am sure this is your desire. You don't desire to serve God half-heartedly; you desire to love Him with all your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength. You desire to live a consistent life; you desire to follow God fully. Today we set before you this great man of God, praying that you and I may

be given grace to follow his example through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that Caleb was one of the twelve spies sent out into the land of Canaan to bring back a report to Moses. He was one of two spies that brought back a report of encouragement encouraging Israel to do battle against the inhabitants of the land and to conquer them as God had promised them they would do. After forty days, when the spies had completed their task and brought back their report, it is remarkable that all twelve agreed on several facts. They all agreed the land Canaan was a good land, flowing with milk and honey. They brought back a huge cluster of grapes from Eshcol. They all agreed that the inhabitants of the land were, for the most part, war-like people. They all agreed there were giants in the land: big men, eight to nine feet tall "children of Anak" (Num. 13:22). They all agreed that cities were walled about; they were great strongholds. They all agreed that it would be complicated and difficult to fight against these foes. They all told the true story as far as the *facts* were concerned. However, when it came to the consequences of those facts - when it came to the conclusion, the bottom line, "What shall we do?"—the twelve spies disagreed with one another.

The majority report, presented by ten, was very negative. They said there was no use to try to overcome these enemies; they were too strong and too large. It is impossible. They said: "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:31-33).

Can you imagine two and a half million people, for that is what Israel numbered at the time, hearing this dreadful report: "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers" (Num. 13:33)? "We have come through the wilderness, we have come at last to the Promised Land and now we face giants and walled cities and impossibilities." Fear and unbelief took hold of them. Fear and unbelief are the parents of their conclusion. Fear and unbelief, friends, always bring a negative report. Fear and unbelief can have a right account of the facts but they assess those

facts incorrectly.

The ten false spies left out one important fact—they forgot God and His promise! They looked at the circumstances rather than God. They forgot what God had said: "Go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it" (Josh. 1:11). You and I are prone to do the same thing, aren't we? Difficulties and troubles enter our lives, personal troubles, domestic trials, trials with our occupation, church troubles. We are prone to look at circumstances rather than God. We are prone to respond in unbelief, aren't we? Unbelief measures the walls and tallies up the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Canaanites and all the giants; and the conclusion is--we can't do it!

The people are inclined to follow the majority. What a tragedy: two and a half million people led astray by ten men! What a responsibility every Christian has to lead people rightly, and especially a servant of God. We ministers are, in some senses, spies in the land. Every week we are to search the Scriptures. We are to spy out the truths of God's grace in the Scriptures. We are to report on them the following Sabbath and tell of the wonders and the glory and the might of our God. Every Sabbath we are to tell people about the dangers they face and the way to Zion, about their enemies, about their problems, and the narrow road that leads to salvation. Yet, we are not to overwhelm people with these problems but direct them to Jesus Christ and tell them that our God is able: without Christ we can do nothing but in Christ we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. That is the report we are to bring - our God is able! Look not to circumstances, look to the living God. The ten spies forgot that. They forgot about the God of the Red Sea. They forgot the God who said to them, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he shall shew to you to day" (Exod. 14:13); "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (verse 14).

How dreadful this majority report was! There was no faith in God's sovereignty. No faith in God's omnipotence. No faith in God's promises. These ten false spies didn't even rise to the level of ungodly Balaam who confessed, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). Unbelief makes our problems big and it makes God small. The

tragedy of unbelief is that it drags masses of God's people into the "slough of despond" with it. When they are in their right place, God's Joshuas and God's Calebs have a different spirit, not a contagious unbelieving spirit that easily persuades people that the giants of Anak are larger than the promises of God thereby making the promises look weak. Then the vitals of faith are chipped away at and spiritual growth is stunted and people stop fearing God. But Joshua and Caleb bring God into the equation. Joshua and Caleb stand up and Caleb stills the people and says, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30). You see, Joshua and Caleb believe that God is bigger than the largest giant in Canaan. Let us go, they say, and claim the inheritance that God has promised us. All twelve spies use their eyes; all twelve use their minds; but only Joshua and Caleb had a heart for God and for His people. They had a heart to walk the way of faith, dear friends. That is the way you and I are called to walk in this world—the way of faith.

The way of faith is not an easy way. God never promised His people an easy life, did He? The way of faith is a blessed way though not an easy way. It is a sure way though not an easy way. The way of faith urges people to trust God, to believe in His Son, to repent before Him, to walk in His ways, *to follow God fully*. Faith trusts - that is the nature of faith. Faith believes, trusts, and rests.

Caleb says that the giants shall become dwarfs before the promises of God. He says, "Rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not" (verse 9). So you see, this is the minority report of two who believe in God. This minority report is positive in nature. Caleb and Joshua believe that God will never go back on His Word. Dear friends, when we believe and live that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we honor our God.

Joshua and Caleb dared to stand up against incredible pressure; you can imagine the other ten, and the two and a half million people behind them. Two men stand up boldly for the cause of God despite pressure from all their peers. Caleb, in this instance, appears to be the spokesman for the two. God honors his standing up even when the people take stones to stone them: "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones" (verse 10). Caleb doesn't flinch. Caleb doesn't say that

maybe he had got it a bit wrong or suggest that they sit down and talk over whether they really should go in to Canaan or send a second group of spies to compare notes. Caleb and Joshua do not suggest any compromise. No, Caleb says, "Stone me with stones but I will follow the Lord. Do what you must do but I must follow the Lord *fully*." That leads us to our text tonight.

1. Its Meaning by Grace

Notice, first of all, that "following God fully" is God's testimony of Caleb—not Caleb's testimony of himself. There is a big difference, isn't there? If you asked Caleb himself, no doubt he would say, "O my wicked heart. I have been so inconsistent. I have been so faltering. My obedience has been so meager." However, *God* said of Caleb, "My servant...hath followed me fully." That is what counts, friends, not what we say of ourselves, but what God says of us.

God gives a similar testimony of Job. We can't imagine Job saying, "I am thy perfect servant Job." However, God said of Job, "My servant Job, there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8), Caleb was such a man who received the benediction and approbation of his God. That is what we want, friends; that is what we want more than anything in all the world: that God will look down from heaven upon us, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and grant us His divine approbation. That He would say, "This is My child who has followed Me fully."

What does it mean to follow God *fully*? It means at least four things. It means first of all that Caleb followed God all his life. He followed God *persistently*. Turn to Joshua 14:13-14. This is what God's Word says of Caleb after his forty years in the wilderness, where he was surrounded by unbelieving people. "And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel" (Josh. 14:13-14). Here you have a testimony about Caleb in his old age that parallels our text. When he was a young man in his forties and when he was an old man in his eighties, God says the same thing of him. This is a man of consistency and persistency. This is a man of godliness. This is a man who did not serve God by fits and starts, as John Warburton used to say. Here is a man who served God

habitually, constantly, evenly. All those years he lived in the camp of the Israelites, Caleb refused to yield to the murmuring rebels that surrounded him. He was faithful unto death and God crowned him with a crown of life.

I wonder about you and me, friends. Do we follow the Lord persistently and consistently? Some people follow the Lord only for a season, don't they? They are like flames that rise up, then quickly die away. They seem to have meant well but when persecution comes, their flame of Christianity dies out and the smoke fades away until there is nothing left. Think of Lot's wife. She left Sodom and Gomorrah, but she gave up, looked back, and became a pillar of salt. Think of the Jews in John 6:66; they walked no more with Jesus. Think of the Galatians; Paul says, "Ye did run well" (Gal. 5:7); "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" (Gal. 3:1)

Still today, there are many people like that. Years ago, a former church member who was hospitalized seemed to be under great spiritual impressions. I had a strong hope that the Lord was converting this young man. He went back into his family, encountered the peer pressures around him, and all the impressions faded away. Can that be said of you or me? In times of adversity, do we lose our "Christianity"? In

times of pressure and persecution, do we fall away? Oh, what a tragedy! In times of persecution and difficulty the world watches us with a penetrating gaze: Is Christianity worth its salt? The world is watching you and me to observe if our Christianity persists in the face of persecution and affliction.

Secondly, to follow God fully means to follow Him sincerely--not only persistently but also *sincerely*, from the heart. It means to not be a hypocrite, not to be an outward Christian only. Everyone was against Caleb and Joshua. Numbers 14:10 says, "All the congregation"—notice that word *all*—"bade stone them with stones." They endured insults and jeers. Like Moses, they had to bear the reproach of Christ. Yet, Caleb could do nothing else because his heart was sincere before God.

Why were the people so angry that they were ready to stone Caleb? Because he exposed their religion or rather, their lack of religion. He removed all their excuses for not going into Canaan. He took away all their arguments. They were determined to cling to their unbelief, and Caleb reproached them. When you

reproach another man who is an unbeliever, you will often evoke persecution. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Timothy 3:12 says. It will happen, sometimes sooner, sometimes later; sometimes intensely, sometimes minimally. When we walk in the ways of God, we will suffer persecution.

Dear friends, we are called to confess God's name no matter where we are and no matter what the case. I once spoke on a train with a young woman who was an atheist. As I began lovingly to rebuke her because she told me she was going to go live with her boyfriend, she said to me, "You are not going to try to convert me, are you? I don't want to hear that kind of talk." She said, "It is too late in the evening to talk to me about God. Beside, I don't even know if I believe in Him." I asked, "What would you like me to talk to you about?" "Other things," she said. I said, "It seems to me that this is a pretty important thing for you to talk about because if God doesn't exist, then you are not under His command and you can go the way you want to, can't you? However, if God does exist, what do you think He would say about what you are going to do?" "Well," she said, "He would say I was going to live in sin, so I don't want to think about it.' That is natural man! We don't want to be confronted. We don't want guilt on our own doorstep. We don't want to face who and what we are. When we biblically and lovingly confront other people with who they are, we will suffer persecution, but we must be willing to pay the price.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "Your best friend is the one who is willing to tell you the most truth about yourself." Scripture said it even better: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6). A man who follows God fully, follows God sincerely; he wants to say a word for God wherever he goes.

Martin Luther once said, "Suffering persecution is a mark of the true church." You know the marks of the church: the pure preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, the exercise of discipline in the church. Well, Luther would have us promote another mark because 2 Timothy 3:12 says: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." A person cannot go to heaven unrebuked or unpersecuted. How can you follow a suffering Savior and never have to suffer for His name's sake?

I wonder, congregation, do you ever suffer for the cause and the sake of Jesus Christ? Do you fear God more than man? John Brown wrote, "The fear of God means to esteem the smiles and frowns of God to be of greater weight and greater value than the smiles and frowns of men." That is the way to live. "Oh God, let me live in Thy smile. Let me fear Thy frown. Let me walk in Thy ways. Let me follow Thee *fully*." That doesn't mean, of course, that we may provoke people unnecessarily. It doesn't mean that we are anything other than truly loving to all people. But true love sometimes must say, "No." True love sometimes has to confront. If you really care for someone you want them to come with you, to follow the Lord, *fully*.

Thirdly, to follow God *fully* means to follow God, as an old divine used to say, *indivisibly*, or as-Thomas-Boston-said, "*universally*." That means with all my heart—not only with a sincere heart but also with all my heart. To follow God *fully* means to say with David, "I will make haste to run in the way of *all* thy commands" (Ps. 119:32). Some people pick and choose what part of God's will they want to do. They are very consistent in certain areas. Perhaps they are conservative Sabbath-keepers but neglect daily family worship. Perhaps they have very good habits in some areas of their lives but in other areas they say, "I know that this or that is wrong but you can't be perfect. You shouldn't be righteous overmuch. I know it's wrong but I'll just go ahead and do it. I think God will have mercy on me." That is the way some people pick and choose. When a certain commandment comes too close to home, they take refuge in the other commandments that they are supposedly following. Their obedience is partial, halting, and feigned.

Caleb wasn't that way. He said, as it were, "I want the whole fabric of my life to be one pattern. I want to have a seamless, one-track mind when it comes to obedience to God. I want to put blinders on and I want to follow God in the narrow way of salvation all my life. I do not want to turn to the right nor to the left. I want to follow God in everything. I want to follow Him with my thoughts, I want to follow Him with my words, I want to follow Him with my deeds. I want my life to be all of one pattern. I want my life to be an open epistle of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. O God, give me grace to follow Thee *fully*."

That is what we want if we are Christians, isn't it? We want an undivided heart. We don't want to follow God just when it is pleasant to do so. We don't want to be like Mr. Byends in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* who said of himself and those who lived in the town of Fairspeech, "We are always most zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers." In other words, there are people who walk religiously in the comfort of "silver slippers" so long as everything goes their way. But as soon as something crosses their will, they place their will above God's command. True Christians, however, detest such partiality toward God and His commandments. We want to be men and women and children of God who follow God with undivided heart.

How is it with us, friends? Are there pockets of our lives where we are engaging even now in any known sin? We must forsake them. We must cry for mercy to conquer our so-called bosom or besetting sins. We must pray to the Almighty that we may have strength to pierce every sin with the sword, to put every sin to death. The true child of God who is walking close with God will say, "O God, I wish every sin in me were dead." Can you say that? Are you following God *fully*?

Finally, to follow God fully means to follow God *exclusively*. Not only persistently, sincerely, and indivisibly, but exclusively. That means that we follow no one else whenever and wherever he or she does not follow Christ. It means, like Paul said, to follow Paul only in so far as he followed the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the maxim and the model of the entire Reformation movement to which we are all so greatly indebted. That is what the Reformers did; they followed no man further than that man followed the Lord Jesus Christ. Following God must be the pre-eminent pursuit of our lives. We must have no other goal in mind, no other desire in mind. Our soul must be consecrated to God. Our entire being must be caught up with this burning passion to walk in the King's highway of holiness.

Our text says, "my *servant* Caleb." A servant obeys his master. A servant yields total consecration; a willing servant is faithful. God says, "Caleb is My servant. He serves Me. He follows no one else." That is what we need, friends. Pray for grace in every trouble and trial that comes your way to follow God persistently, sincerely, indivisibly, and exclusively.

Perhaps you say, "That is so impossible. My heart is a well of iniquity, 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?'" (Jer. 17:9). Indeed, that is true, isn't it? How was it possible, then, for Caleb to follow God *fully*? Our text tells us: "because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully." Let's consider what that means in our second thought,

2. Its Root in Grace

"Another spirit." These two words obviously contain the secret of how Caleb could follow God fully, but what do they mean? "Another spirit" means that Caleb had a different spirit than did the ten false spies. Theirs was a spirit of unbelief, his a spirit of faith. Theirs was a worldly spirit; his was heavenly. Theirs was a spirit of angry disobedience, his of affectionate obedience; theirs was satanic, his was of God; theirs was lazy, his was active. They wanted the rest without the journey, the reward without the labor, the victory without the warfare. They were led by their own spirits; Caleb was led by the Holy Spirit. He had a noble, courageous, and gentle spirit, a generous and heroic spirit, a self-denying and loyal spirit because he was moved by the Holy Spirit. That is the ultimate cause of the difference between Caleb and the ten false spies. It wasn't Caleb's own strength; it was the Holy Spirit working in him. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). That is the spirit Caleb had.

Perhaps then you ask, "Why did Caleb have that Holy Spirit and why didn't the ten false spies have that Holy Spirit? What made the difference?" We answer: Only the free and sovereign mercy of God. The Holy Spirit was God's free gift to Caleb and God was pleased for reasons locked up in the secrets of His own heart by His sovereign electing love to have mercy on Caleb and not upon those ten false spies. It pleased God to do so and we cannot go beyond that, can we? We cannot probe beyond the sovereign mysteries of God's eternal love, nor need we do so, for there is nothing beyond that love. For His own reasons, God made Caleb His servant, and gave him His spirit to serve Him. Therefore there was no explanation in Caleb; there was nothing beyond sovereign covenantal mercy and love. Why did Caleb have another spirit? Because of sovereign grace; because God loved him with an everlasting love, therefore, with cords of lovingkindness, He drew him to follow

Him *fully*.

Caleb's obedience was first of all the work of the Holy Spirit in Caleb. Caleb was the instrument through which the Spirit worked. Caleb was involved; it didn't happen outside of him, but it was all of grace. Caleb was enabled to follow God fully through the meritorious work of the Perfect One the Lord Jesus Christ--of whom God said, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). Caleb followed God *fully* because of the electing heart of the Father's love, through the meritorious obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God is involved. Jesus Christ followed His Father fully: "It is my Father's will"; "I am about my Father's business." He engrafted Caleb into Himself-into the vine..and the sap of Christ flowed into the veins of Caleb. Out of Christ and by the Spirit of Christ, Caleb followed God *fully*.

We need to pray for that spirit. We need to pray that we will be indwelt and governed by the Spirit of Christ so that we receive by true faith and with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save our soul so that we follow God *fully*.

Perhaps you have one objection: If Caleb followed God *fully* by grace only, why did God give Caleb a reward? Notice the conclusion of our text: "him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Num. 14:24). That leads us to our third thought, which is to examine God's gracious reward promised to Caleb.

3. Its Reward of Grace

To follow God fully, in the first place, means to follow Him by grace, persistently, sincerely, indivisibly, and exclusively. Secondly, that following is rooted in grace that is why Caleb could follow God *fully*. Thirdly, God rewards Caleb for following, out of grace. God's reward to Caleb is not a reward of merit; Caleb did not merit it. It is a reward of grace. What God does in His people by way of sanctification, He really gives to His people and He rewards His own work in them. Let me give you an example. Do you remember the story of the Canaanite woman? Christ worked faith in her. He matured that faith through her trials and then He crowns His own work by stating, "O woman, great is thy faith" (Matt.

15:28). God gives away His graces to His people, including the grace of faith, and then when they by His Spirit act out that faith, God rewards His own work within them with the crownings of grace.

Let me illustrate. When my birthday is approaching, my wife will take the money I have given to her, and tell our children, "Go buy a present for Dad for his birthday." When I receive the present, I don't say to my children, "I really don't need to thank you for this because you spent my money to get it." What a cruel father I would be to respond like that! Rather, I treat the gifts as if my children had earned the money to buy them. I thank them for those gifts with all my heart, and graciously reward them with embraces and kisses and affirming words. You see, God rewards the obedience of His people by His own grace. He gives them grace to follow Him, but is genuinely grateful when they do follow Him, and graciously rewards them.

Article 24 of the *Belgic Confession of Faith* is a beautiful statement on the doctrine of sanctification. At one point, it affirms that God is not obliged to us for the good works that we do, but we are obliged to Him, because He gives us the grace to do the good works. God's grace leads us to walk by grace, out of grace, to His glory. Therefore, the wonderful promises in Numbers 14:24 are just grace on top of grace. John tells us, "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Literally, this means grace piled up on top of grace. The lives of God's people are like the ocean tide coming in: one wave of grace upon another — in prosperity and through affliction. Prosperity is grace; adversity is grace. Where would you be without adversity and persecution in your life? You would remain spiritually immature and become spoiled but God gives grace — wave after wave — precisely according to what we need. On top of it all comes His waves of gracious, precious promises. What a wonderful promise He gave to Caleb, crowning His own grace—"him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Num. 14:24).

Actually, there are three promises here. In the first place, God is promising to preserve Caleb's life: "him will I bring into the land whereinto he went." Six hundred thousand men of that generation who were unbelieving, their spouses, and many of their children are all going to die in the wilderness, Caleb is in his forties

already and they are going to wander for forty years, but God says, "him will I bring into the land." Caleb and Joshua will outlive them all. He will be an old man in his eighties, nevertheless, "him will I bring into the land." It is a blessing when God promises long life upon obedience.

Secondly, God promises to give Caleb the land he spied out for an inheritance. That is fulfilled in the book of Joshua in a remarkable way. In Joshua 14:10-11, Caleb says, "And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." So God gave Caleb remarkable strength and endurance. Joshua then gives Hebron to Caleb and you remember what was in Hebron—the giants: Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the children of Anak. In the next chapter, Joshua 15:14 astonishingly says, "And Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak." Don't forget, Caleb is now eighty-five years old. An eighty-five year old man drove out those very giants before whom two and a half million people trembled and said, "We can't go in." That is what God can do!

One of our deceased ministers said he once saw an old rickety truck going down a road in Nigeria with a crudely painted sign that read, "God plus one = majority." That's what Caleb experienced. "Him will I bring into the land" and him will I bless. God promises so much. He does "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). It would be great, wouldn't it, if God did everything we asked? Paul says He will do more. He will do everything you *ask* or *think*. That is truly great. No, Paul says, He will do more; He will do *above* what you ask or think. Even more, He will do *exceeding* above what you ask or think. Paul proceeds yet further; he breaks the boundaries of Greek grammar. He says the same word twice in Greek, which doesn't make grammatical sense, but Paul was carried away with the greatness of God's gracious promises. The King James Bible translates it, "he does *exceeding, abundantly*, above all that you ask or think."

Caleb, you are eighty-five; what do you think you are doing going into the

land? Caleb believes God; he enters the land and slays the giants. Oh, what a great God! Is your God like that?

I read a wonderful story some months ago of a little boy in Connecticut who was on his deathbed. George Whitefield visited him, and spoke to him about God and His way of salvation in Christ. The boy was converted. Some weeks later, his unbelieving father said to him, "Son, are you not afraid to die?" The boy said, "No, Daddy, I'm not afraid to die." His father said, "Why not?" The little boy said, "Because I am going to Mr. Whitefield's big God."

Whitefield made God look big. So did Caleb. Do you? Do you have a big God? Do you believe in Him—the God of promises? The world never gives what it promises; God never gives less than He promises. And He promises, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

Thirdly, God promises to give Caleb's descendants the land to possess, Caleb will have something to leave behind. He will leave a blessing to his children. We read in Joshua 15 that his children were blessed. The Lord is faithful as the covenant-keeping Jehovah to fulfil His promises "from generation to generation."

The only way to live blessedly is to follow God *fully*. To follow God out of grace, rooted in grace and rewarded by grace. To follow God unconditionally, trusting in His promises.

May I ask you: Do you follow God *fully*? Do you follow God at all? That is the first question, isn't it? As long as we are unrenewed, you see, we don't follow the Lord at all. We have only one brief lifetime to follow God. Samuel Rutherford said, "If I had a thousand souls, I wouldn't risk one of them outside of Jesus." You have but one soul and are you risking that soul outside of Jesus Christ? Don't do it! Don't destroy yourself; don't play games with God; don't keep on going your own way. Bow before the Most High. Surrender in repentance and faith at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. Seek His face. You and I either belong with the unbelieving spies or with the believing spies. By nature, we want to be among the popular majority, but by grace, God brings us into the despised minority. That is a blessed place to be! The God of Caleb still lives--seek grace to follow his example, no matter the cost, even if you are threatened with death. Follow God *fully*!

Remarkably, Caleb was not the one who died. He faced great dangers and great enemies, but God kept him. He lived to be an old man, but what happened to his enemies? The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation and that very day God killed all ten false spies. Then, eventually, all the people aged twenty and higher died. Like Caleb, those who follow God fully by gracious faith, will live to see God's promises fulfilled as their exceeding great reward.

Pray for grace every day to follow God fully. God will bring those who follow Him into the heavenly land of Canaan to His glory and their comfort. Don't rest until you are assured, for Christ's sake, that you are among that happy throng. Amen.

Matchless Mercy for God's Heritage

Dr. J.R. Beeke

- Psalter 376:1,5
- Read Micah 7
- Psalter 310
- Psalter 159
- Psalter 30

"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Micah 7:18-19

On July 1, 1993, the foundations of the Heritage Reformed Congregations were laid. The denominational name was chosen in April of the following year. As we look back over the first decade of the HRC, we confess our sins, acknowledge the Lord's faithfulness, and look to our precious Savior for the unknown future.

The Sunday after the new denominational name was given, this sermon on Micah 7:18-19 was preached. We pray that God may continue to keep the HRC faithful to its real scriptural and Reformed heritage as we look forward to the decade to come.

Our young denomination has received a new name a name that includes the significant word, "heritage." Heritage is a biblical name; it occurs some thirty times in the Scriptures. Sometimes it refers to God as the heritage of His people, but more often it refers to believers as God's heritage. At times, it also refers to an inheritance, or to the riches God's children possess in Christ.

The name *Heritage* was chosen, I believe, for at least three reasons. First, to direct our attention to the real heritage of our former denomination which finds its

roots in the Dutch Second Reformation in the writings of such notable divines as Willem Teellinck, Wilhelmus à Brakel, Gijsbertus Voetius, and Alexander Comrie, as well as in the Reformation proper, in men such as John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, and John Knox. In the North American context, that heritage has also been rooted both in English Puritanism, via William Perkins, John Bunyan, John Owen, and many others, and in American Puritanism, represented by Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, and John Cotton. We desire to be true to this rich heritage insofar as it is true to the Word and Son of God.

Second, and more importantly, the name *Heritage* was selected, I trust, because deep within us we feel a great need to return to the founding watchword of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). Scripture is the real foundation of our heritage; yes, Scripture itself is our best heritage. Its inspiration, inerrancy, and authority must ever be our mainstay. What is not in accord with Scripture must be explicitly rejected.

The bare affirmation of Scripture's infallibility, inerrancy, and authority, however, is not enough for us. God gives us His Word as both a word of truth and a word of power. As a word of truth, we must trust in and rest our all upon Scripture for time and eternity. We must also look to Scripture as the source of the transforming powers used by the Spirit of God to renew us from within. That power must be manifested in our lives, our homes, our churches, and our communities. Other books may inform or reform us, but only one Book, the Holy Bible, can and does transform us, making us conformable to the image of Christ.

Finally, and most importantly, let us never forget that even Scripture is not an end in itself, but purposes to point us to *the* heritage of every true believer, Jesus Christ, and through Him, the Triune God. God Himself, in Christ, is ultimately who we have in mind when we ascribe the title "Heritage" to our churches. Our heritage is not so much a "what," as it is a "who"—the ever-blessed Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Psalm 16:5-6 says, "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Now, this blessed Triune God will have a heritage in His living church. But how is this possible, when all have sinned and come short of His glory, when

sinners are by nature under the curse of the law and the wrath of God? How is it possible when everyone has a bad record, and worse, a bad heart? It is only possible, dear friends, because of the heart of God. God's heart is a heart of mercy; He delights in mercy — yes, matchless mercy. Let's look at that from Micah 7:18-19, which says, “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

This marvelous text speaks of "Matchless Mercy for God's Heritage." Let's look at this theme through three questions: Who is God's heritage? What is their inheritance? Who is like unto God?

Who is God's heritage?

God delights in all His attributes: love, holiness, truth, grace, omniscience, omnipotence, and all the rest. God and His attributes are inseparable. He preserves all His attributes untarnished; nevertheless, our text tells us that God takes special delight in His mercy. God "delighteth in mercy," Micah says.

Micah implies—and other texts in Scripture state even more explicitly—that God does not delight in executing justice as much as in manifesting mercy. God does not rejoice over the destruction of a sinner as He does over the salvation of the lost. His saving compassion moves towards the vessels of mercy, not toward the unbelieving and impenitent. As the Puritans often said, mercy is God's darling attribute. Mercy is God's Benjamin—the son of His right hand and the son of His sorrow, for mercy cost Him the sorrows of the Son of God.

Thomas Watson put it so beautifully: "The Scripture represents God in white robes of mercy more often than with garments rolled in blood; with His golden sceptre more often than His iron rod. The bee naturally gives honey, it stings only when it is provoked, so God does not punish till He can bear no longer. Mercy is God's right hand that He is most used to; inflicting punishment is called His strange work (Isa. 28:21)."

What a person delights in, he usually becomes proficient in. That is certainly the

case with God. God is proficient in showing mercy to all men in a general way through His beneficent nature, but He particularly excels in showing mercy in a saving way, says Micah, toward "the remnant of his heritage" in passing by their transgression and pardoning their iniquity.

But what is the saving mercy of God? God's saving mercy is His sovereign, gracious pardon toward guilty sinners and compassion toward miserable sinners. Mercy makes things right for sinners through justification, and keeps things right within them by sanctification. Mercy pities them in misery, relieves in affliction, comforts in distress, and counsels in difficulties.

On whom, then, does God exercise His saving mercy? On believers. God's mercy flows from His own heart to every sinner who comes to Jesus by faith (John 3:36). That faith, of course, is itself a receptive gift of God and not a meritorious work of man (Eph. 2:8-10). There is no competition in Scripture between *sola fide* (faith alone) and *sola gratia* (grace alone). God views mercy in contradistinction to all merits and works. Mercy is the free gift of God.

Those believers are elect believers. God's mercy showers on all the elect, for only the elect come to Jesus by saving faith. Indeed, God's mercy cannot fail for His people, for it is ratified from eternity in the Trinity's counsel of peace, or covenant of redemption. The Father's covenant is sure; the Son's blood is sure; the Spirit's application is sure—therefore, mercy is sure.

God's free mercy and His electing love are best friends. Election preaches that God delights in mercy. God thought of mercy from eternity. He planned mercy before anyone needed mercy; He chose fit objects for mercy from eternity. He selected them entirely out of His own good pleasure without any merit in them. The heart of mercy is that God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Rom. 9:15). If God had sent into the world a gospel full of conditions and human merit, it would have been no gospel to anyone, for no one but Christ can fulfil the conditions of God's justice.

Those believers are also needy believers. Sinners who, like the publican, cannot live without mercy are the recipients of mercy (Luke 18:9-14). Sinners who can find no reasons in themselves to be recipients of mercy but yet cry out, "Give me Jesus, else I die," shall never perish. God's mercy is always overflowing to every

needy believer. His vial of wrath drips, but His fountain of mercy runs. His anger lasts a moment, but His mercy endures eternally. Believers shall bathe themselves eternally in God's ocean of mercy, without ever diminishing its abundance.

Dear friend, are you, too, by grace, a believer and a recipient of mercy? Have you experienced that God delights in mercy, and that therefore everything that transpires in your life has mercy at its core? Can you concur with Thomas Watson who wrote: "There is no condition, but we may spy mercy in it. In all afflictions we may see some sunshine of mercy. That outward and inward troubles do not come together is mercy. Mercy sweetens all God's other attributes; it makes His Godhead appear amiable and lovely. His mercy in election makes Him justify, adopt, glorify; one act of mercy engages God to more"?

Truly, God gives His people a vast inheritance of mercy. Our text richly opens up that inheritance for us.

What is their inheritance?

The heritage or inheritance of believers is, Micah tells us, justifying mercy, sanctifying mercy, and eternal mercy. Let's consider each of these briefly.

(1) *Justifying mercy* is expressed in two ways in verse 18. First, God is a God "that pardoneth iniquity." That expression in Hebrew literally means that God "lifts up" iniquity. He lifts it up by lifting it off our shoulders and placing it upon Christ's. As Isaiah says, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isa, 53:4). And by carrying our sins as sinless Savior, Christ takes our sins away, pardons them, and buries them. He's the scapegoat for us, who takes our sins upon Himself, and pays their full price, delivering and forgiving us. Through Christ, Numbers 14:18 is fulfilled for us, "The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression."

Dear friend, is Jesus also your scapegoat? Have you experienced, by faith, His justifying mercy for your own unworthy soul?

Second, Micah tells us that God "passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage." The expression "passeth by" or literally, "passeth over," signifies movement. The identical word is used in Exodus 12:23 of Israel's deliverance from Egypt: "For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth

the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over [or 'pass by'] the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you." How can God do this—how can He pass over sin? God passes by His people's transgressions because divine justice did not pass by Christ, but fixed and poured itself upon Him. For Christ's sake, God has justifying mercy upon every believer, pardoning iniquity and passing by transgression.

(2) *Sanctifying mercy* is expressed in three ways in our text. First, "he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Literally, Micah says, "God does not make strong His anger for ever." God is justly angry with the sins of His people; He hates their sins with perfect hatred. Sin is so contrary to His holy nature that He cannot but show indignation against it. And yet, because that indignation is poured out upon Christ and borne by Him, God does not retain His anger against believers—not in the area of sanctification and personal experience, either.

Dear believer, when you slip or backslide, and bring guilt upon your own conscience, fly directly to Christ with all your sin and the sense of divine anger you feel. Confess your sin, forsake it, and seek for its forgiveness only in Christ, for God delights in mercy in Christ. As you trust Christ and God's promises in Him, you will experience that God does not retain His anger but will enable you to experience daily, sanctifying cleansing, so that you can say with Isaiah 12:1, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me."

Second, Micah says, God "will turn again, he will have compassion [literally, pity] upon us." We often feel we have sinned against the Lord too often to remain a recipient of mercy, but Micah says that God so delights in mercy that He will turn again." God will turn once more to you, repenting believer; He will grant you one more look of love; one more glimpse of the way of salvation through the blood of Christ; one more promise from His Word, convincing you of His peace that passes all understanding. He will turn His reconciled countenance in Christ Jesus to you, and you, like Peter, will weep bitterly that you have so sinned against Him and yet weep in joy for His awesome forgiveness.

Blessed be God that He turns again! If He did not turn again, you and I would only grow harder and colder. Because He turns again, our hearts may again be

broken, healed, and comforted. Because He turns again, His work in you shall never fail, never die. Because He turns again, your repentance is intensified, your hope is encouraged, your love is enflamed, and you receive inward strength to persevere in faith.

Because He turns again, you experience His compassion and pity, for Christ's sake. You experience, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). As Christ had compassion upon the fainting multitude, upon Jairus, upon lepers, and upon the handicapped and blind, so God has compassion upon all those who mourn over their soul's pitiable condition and take refuge in His Son with all their sins, confessing their unworthiness before Him, resting upon mercy alone.

Third, Micah says, "he will subdue [literally, trample or suppress] our iniquities." He will take away the tyranny of sin; he will sanctify us and renew us. This is sanctification indeed! Sin subdued is the next greatest blessing to sin pardoned. Wherever God pardons sin, He will also subdue sin—here on earth, partially; in heaven, perfectly. The same grace that casts sin behind God's back puts its foot upon the corruption of the believer and tramples sin in the dust.

But what a struggle the battle between the flesh and the spirit ignites! The flesh will seize every opportunity to reestablish its dominion in the soul. Flesh wants grace out of the way; it wants to rule the heart and have sin carry the day as before. Flesh blinds our eyes to the reality of sin; it deadens our conscience; it dulls our spiritual affection. We need the sovereign grace of God every bit as much to subdue our sins as we need it to pardon our sins.

(3) Finally, Micah also speaks of *eternal mercy*: "And thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The Dutch annotations say, "Our sins shall not be looked upon by God, but shall be put in everlasting oblivion, covered, unregarded, and sunk away for ever." Those who have sins forgiven and subdued while they live, shall have them drowned when they die. God promises, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25).

Blessed, eternal mercy: forgiveness of *all* your sins, dear believer! What an inheritance! Were there one sin left between God and your soul, you could never

enter into God's presence with eternal joy.

Let us never rest when there are any sins between God and us. Let us press on, every day seeking fresh applications of this mercy of mercies—the forgiveness of all our sins.

Forgiveness is matchless mercy—necessary, great, sure, free, and eternal mercy, and leads believers to cry out with amazement, like Micah, "Who is like unto God?"

Who is like unto God?

Micah becomes bold. He challenges the false gods of heathen lands all around. "Who is like unto God?" he asks. "What other god lifts up the burden of sin, passes by transgression, turns again to unworthy sinners, tramples upon sin, and casts sin behind His back forever, burying it in the bottomless ocean of His grace? Where is there a god like unto this God—a God who takes care of His heritage that they shall never perish, a God who loves them so profoundly because of His eternal, purchasing, preserving grace? Where is there another god who sees and sympathizes with every sorrow and care of His children?"

How applicable Micah's exclamation is yet today: "Who is like unto God?" The question is rhetorical. There is not, of course, any other like unto God, not Moloch, Baal, or Ashteroth; not the god of self-righteousness, the god of materialism, or the god of this world (cf. Isa. 40:18). What can any god other than Micah's God do for us in that hour when flesh and heart fail?

If there is no God so merciful as Micah's living God, why should we not bring all our sins to Him? Why should we not, like the prodigal, arise and return to our Creator-Father? Dear believer, should we not cry out, "Let this ever be our God—the God whom we believe in, the God whom we know and worship, adore and love! 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee' (Ps. 73:25).

Let's close with a few applications. Dear believer:

(1) Consider the greatness of God's mercy in showing saving mercy to such a person as you. Were you the most virtuous, the most gifted, the most honest, the most worthy? Oh, wonder of wonders! The Lord laid hold of you, stopped and

turned you, and brought you to know His mercy in Christ. He lays hold of the polluted publican; He singles out the wandering prodigal. He regenerates, and brings them to repentance and faith in Christ. He lifts the poor out of the dunghill, and sets among princes. If you consider that the accumulated guilt of your and my soul would be enough to sink an entire world into perdition is not our salvation a vivid proof that God delights in mercy? "*Who is like unto God?*"

(2) Consider the greatness of God's ongoing mercy by meditating on how you have been toward the Lord after you have first tasted His mercy. How unbelieving, how proud, how fainthearted, how selfish, how ungrateful, how unfaithful! Should we not be ashamed? Have we not sinned against the merciful heart of the Father, against the merciful blood of Christ, against the precious comforts of the Holy Spirit, and yet, has the Lord ever spewed you out of His mouth? Have you ever been disowned by Christ? Has not the mercy which once flowed to you in the early hours of your new birth continued to flow ever since like a surging, ever-widening river, bursting its banks? Why? Because God delights in mercy; and what He delights in must come to pass. Nothing and no one can stop His hand of mercy, or say unto Him, "What doest Thou?" "*Who is like unto God?*"

Does the mercy of God work within us a great love to God, and admiring, reverential thoughts of Him? Does it confirm for you that true religion resides exclusively in mercy? Does it provide fresh strength and encouragement for new obedience?

(3) Let mercy be your delight. If God delights in mercy, and you are His child, shouldn't you delight in mercy? Shouldn't you be merciful to the guilty, the poor, the ignorant, the lonely? Do not be the first to cast a stone at the adulterous woman, for your Master did not condemn her. "Who is like unto God?" Are you like Him in mercy?

Mercy ought to run through your entire character since you are an heir of mercy. Never say of another, "I can't or won't forgive," for in so saying, you condemn yourself. If you don't forgive your brother his trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you. How can we, with one hand stretched out against our brother, lift our other hand to God and pray the publican's prayer?

Are you not yet a true believer in Christ? Then I'm afraid that you don't truly believe that God delights in mercy. In fact, you probably have many objections against His mercy. You perhaps ask questions like these:

If God is merciful, why do so many go lost? Remember this: The fact that God delights in mercy does not tarnish His justice. Those who persevere in rejecting the gospel and living impenitently shall justly go lost. Of all the lost that shall throng the corridors of hell, not one has received more than the due reward of his deeds (Luke 23:42).

If God is merciful, why is there an unpardonable sin? Let's turn that question around: If we grasp even a small portion of the heinousness of sin, the wonder is that there is only one sin that is unpardonable! God could have made a long list of unpardonable sins; instead, He reduced that list to one: that person who wages war against the Holy Spirit and completely sears his conscience so that it makes it impossible for him to seek for pardon. Don't misinterpret God's mercy—no one has ever sincerely cried for mercy in vain.

If God is merciful, why do I feel that God can't have mercy upon me? That could be due to any number of reasons, such as a faulty view of God; fears you've sinned too much in the past; fears you're still sinning too much in the present; a conviction that there simply is nothing special about you for God to notice you and save you, etc. At any rate, your feelings in this matter are not to be trusted. God's Word is better than your feelings. You may be a filthy sinner, but He declares that He delights to wash and dine with black sinners. You may have repeatedly offended Him for forty, sixty, even eighty years, but His arm is still not shortened that He cannot save. He has strength for the weak, wisdom for the foolish, righteousness for the unrighteous.

Are you a lost sheep bleating on the mountains of your sins? The Good Shepherd hears you and will reach you. Don't allow your thoughts to run contrary to the gist of the gospel, yes, to the declarations of heaven. God is able and willing even to save rebellious sheep such as you are—sheep who have nothing left but the publican's prayer: "God be merciful (literally; be *full of mercy*) to me, the sinner."

I must proclaim most freely that which God has most delight in: mercy. His mercy endureth for ever! I would let this pulpit ring with mercy! No heart is too

hard for God to reach; no beggar too bankrupt; no sinner too steeped in iniquity.
Who is like unto God?

Friend, the very fact that you and I are still alive after all we've done to provoke God is irrefutable proof that God is a merciful God. Why do you still keep your distance from Him? However grossly you have offended Him, He is ready to forgive. He will hear your prayers, even when they are feeble and broken. He says to you still: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22).

Finally, let us admonish each other not to abuse God's delight in mercy. We must never fall into the antinomian spirit which abuses mercy by saying that if we let sin abound, grace will abound the more. Sin is never a trifle with God. It is always deadly fire. Calvary is a sacred place—a place that we may never abuse at whim. How shall we minimize sin when our Savior died to save us from it? Do not trifle with sin because God is merciful. Rather, because God is merciful, let us flee from sin and flee to Calvary. There is no other place of divine mercy on the face of the earth. There, at Calvary, cling to the horns of God's altar that are dripping with the blood of Immanuel—the blood in which mercy and justice meet and kiss each other. Say with a poet:

*If Thou hadst bid Thy thunders roll,
And lightning's flash to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been;
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Savior I have viewed,
And now I hate my sin.*

God has nailed every other door closed, but the door of Calvary and of the empty tomb. The dying, living Immanuel is our only and sufficient hope. The open door of the gospel proclaimed to you is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus on every side—on the lintel and the two side posts. And written on that door, you can find: "Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall never perish, but have everlasting life."

Yes, there is another door—a bloodless door, a door that leads to death. On that door is written, "He that believeth not shall be condemned." To be without Christ

is to be without mercy.

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). And don't be discouraged as you seek God and the graces of repentance and faith. There is not one word in the entire Bible to discourage poor, guilty, coming, repenting, believing sinners. God's throne of grace is open; God's house is open; God's heart is open. He delights in mercy-matchless mercy. "*Who is like unto God?*" This is the heritage of sinners who trust exclusively in Christ for salvation. May it be the heritage of every one of us as the Heritage Reformed Congregations-now, in future decades and generations, and forever. Amen.