

BEHIND THE LEATHER CHAIR

TEXT: SELECTED SCRIPTURES

December 5, 2011

INTRODUCTION:

The Reformers were not only concerned about reforming the church's doctrine (justification) but also the church's worship (Note: Much of the following material has been adapted from "Calvin's Theology of Worship," by Hughes Oliphant Old in Give Praise To God, pp. 412-435.). Calvin, in particular, wrote much about the church's worship.

In the Institutes, he defines worship as consisting of 4 elements: adoration, trust, invocation and thanksgiving (cf. 2.8.16). All four elements are a work of the Holy Spirit as He is sanctifying us, working within us, causing and enabling us, as Paul says, "to worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Philip. 3:3).

First, worship consists of adoration.

1. ADORATION

The ministry of praise was extremely important to Calvin. He taught that adoration was the natural reaction of the creature when confronted by the majesty of God. An example of adoration would be David's great prayer of praise in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13,

"¹¹Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹²Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name."

Every aspect of worship is to be characterized by adoration (i.e., prayer, preaching, sacraments, reading of Scripture, etc... are all to be done in adoration).

2. TRUST

True knowledge of God, gained through the gospel, enables trust, communion with God. True worship, Calvin taught, is not so much an attempt to achieve communion with God. Rather, true worship presupposes communion with God. Because true knowledge of God is necessary for authentic worship, preaching and sound teaching are important and essential.

The Holy Spirit works trust in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and strengthens our trust by the use of the sacraments. This is why the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper in the church's worship is of paramount importance. The Lord's Supper teaches us that worship is a "trusting abiding/rest" in the presence of God. Through this sacrament, Calvin taught that God has been pleased to give us a pledge of further assurance of His never ceasing liberality to us in Christ (4.17.1).

Paul expresses this liberality in Ephesians 1:7-8 like this, "7 In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,⁸ which He *lavished* upon us..." (emphasis mine). The word *lavished* (ἐπερίσσευσεν) means, "to overflow, to super-abound, to have in great abundance, of things that one greatly increases" (BDAG, p. 805.).

And so by faith in Christ—the knowledge of who is given through the gospel—the Holy Spirit assures us that we have every reason to trust God because of the Father's super-abounding, never-ending, gracious goodwill toward us. This is what the Lord's Supper signifies and seals (guarantees) to us. God's grace and goodwill toward us in Christ produces a confident rest/trust in us so that we can put our lives totally in His hands. Immediately after the Fall, Adam and Eve lost this confident trust and rest (cf. Gen. 3:10). Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit elicits in us trust, which is worship.

3. INVOCATION

The third element of worship is invocation. We are going to give a bit more attention to this today, so we will come back to this element in a moment.

4. THANKSGIVING

The fourth element of worship is thanksgiving. When we have experienced the fulfillment of praise, the joy and assurance of communion/trust and the answer to our prayer for help/invocation, we respond with thanksgiving to God. True thanksgiving is the public recognition of having received God's help in a time of need. This then leads us to the element of invocation.

LESSON:

In the ancient Near East, a suzerainty treaty (treaty with a great King) included the "invocation" clause, under which the lesser king (vassal) could call on the name of the greater king (suzerain) when in danger (see Michael Horton, *Christian Faith*, p. 108).

In Genesis 4:26, after the Fall, we have the first account of man calling upon God, "...At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD." Immediately after the Fall we see that through the line of Seth (not Cain) a church began to emerge and

his descendants began calling upon the name of the Lord. Invocation is a form of prayer. It is a cry for help/deliverance from God. For example, Exodus 2:23-25 states, “²³ During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.” Another example is the simple cry from the tax collector as he prays in the Temple, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13). Or, the promise we have in Romans 10:13, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Calling upon the Name of the Lord is not a plea for help just for initial conversion (what is regularly referred to as “getting saved”). Rather, we are always in constant need; there is never a time when we do not need to call on the name of the Lord for help/salvation (e.g., sanctification is as much a part of salvation as our initial justification!).

Simply then, an invocation is turning to/calling upon God in time of need. Calvin called invocation resorting to God’s faithfulness and help as our only support (i.e., Abrahamic Covenant in the example above in Ex. 2:24). God, our great Suzerain, has included a gracious invocation clause in His covenant with us. He promised Abraham—as well as His descendants—that should He fail to keep His promises, He pronounced a self-maledictory oath upon Himself! What grace! So, from the divine side, the covenant God made with Abraham is a suzerainty treaty. God unilaterally swears to personally perform all the conditions and suffer all of the curses for its violation. But, the strange and wonderful fact about the Abrahamic Covenant is that it is not just a Suzerainty Treaty. For, on the human side, the Abrahamic covenant is also a royal grant, an inheritance freely bestowed in grace on the basis of the Suzerain’s performance (cf. Horton, *God of Promise*, pp. 41-42). Amazing! The God of promise and performance is faithful and therefore can be totally trusted and invoked for help!

The whole worship service is to be characterized by invocation. For example, we begin every service by asking for God’s help (Ps. 124:8, “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” We ask for the Spirit’s help to sing. Like David, we pray “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise,” (Ps. 51:15). We ask for the Spirit’s help for preaching and for granting understanding (Eph. 1:15-23). We pray Psalm 119:18, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” We ask for the Spirit’s ministry in the sacraments; to work through them in conjunction with His promises to assure our hearts and thus strengthen our faith. And lastly, we conclude our service asking to receive from the Lord His final word of gospel blessing upon our lives as we go forth into our vocations and callings (could you imagine concluding the service under the law’s curse?!, e.g., Rom. 3:10-20).

We need the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the law and gospel strike the ears without reaching the heart (Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, "2 Corinthians," p. 175). Calvin writes, "...we cannot sufficiently prize, or hold in sufficient esteem (i.e., worship) the glory of Christ, which shines in the gospel, like the splendor of the sun when beaming forth...where the power and majesty of the Spirit do not come forth to view, as to draw up men's minds and hearts heavenward" (Ibid, p. 179). And so in invocation, we are acknowledging that our worship must be empowered by the Holy Spirit so that it is not just empty legalistic rituals and religious activity.

This brings up a very important point about invocation (worship) that we need to understand. Very few have been more concerned with and written more about the glory of God than Calvin. What I am about to share with you has been one of the most liberating discoveries that I have found in regard to the glory of God and worship.

First, it is essential to human nature to be in constant need. Second, it is essential to divine nature to be in constant sufficiency. Theologians refer to this as the aseity of God (i.e., meaning that He has life in Himself and draws His unending energy from Himself). God is self-existent. He has always been. He exists in an eternal, self-sustaining, necessary way. He continues forever unchanged, because it is His eternal nature to do this (see J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, pp. 26-27).

The name, YHWH, given to Moses suggests God's absolute self-sufficiency (cf. Ex. 3:14). On Mars Hill, Paul explains to the Athenian idolaters, that the true God who created all things, "is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:23-25).

Thus, the way we glorify God in worship/with our lives is by acknowledging our need and then calling upon the utterly and always sufficient God in time of need. Hughes Oliphant Old writes,

"The worship that God requires of us is not so focused on the glory of God that it is oblivious to our need, because our need is for Him, and God having created us for Himself is glorified in our turning to Him in time of need. He is glorified when He is praised as our Help and our Savior. The glory of God is open to human need" (*Give Praise to God*, p. 421).

Amen! This is so freeing and life-giving! Do you know why legalism is such an affront to God? Legalism blinds man to his need of Christ. Legalism persuades (cf. Gal. 5:8) a man's heart to think, "I don't need any other righteousness than my own." But, those who are right with God continually confess their sin and need of Christ's righteousness. In fact, Calvin called the confession of sin a prayer of praise because it is the ultimate confession of need for God!

Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians remarks how even in his daily experience as a Christian, he found it hard to “believe that Christ was given, not for the holy, worthy, and righteous, and such as were His friends, but for wicked sinners, for the unworthy, and for His enemies which have deserved God’s wrath, and everlasting death” (*Commentary on Galatians* (Kregel), p. 13).

In Mark 2:17, Jesus says, “Those who are well have NO NEED of a physician, but those who are sick [have great need!]. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (emphasis mine). God delights in displaying His glory by serving sinners in grace in their time of need! If Christ can’t serve you and meet your need, then you can’t have any part of Him. In John 13:8, “Peter says to Jesus, “You shall never wash my feet.” Listen to how Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”

Jesus teaches us that those who have been washed through His once-for-all death (initial conversion) also need daily cleansing of their sins (symbolized by their ongoing frequent need to wash their feet). In other words, only those who continually recognize their need of Christ and call upon Him for help are the ones who truly belong to Christ. We don’t call upon Christ for conversion and then look to some other source for sanctification (salvation)! And so we see that God is glorified when a sinner confesses His need of Christ and trusts in Christ.

The glory of Christ is not oblivious to our need but rather is manifested in serving and meeting our need! God created us for Himself and He is glorified in our turning to Christ in faith in time of need—which is every second of every day throughout our entire lives.

God’s glory is revealed when Christ is praised and trusted in as our Help and our Savior. As Old writes, “The glory of God is open to human need.” Thus, Martin Luther writes,

“Hold this fast, and suffer not thyself to be drawn away by any means from this most sweet definition of Christ, which rejoiceth the very angels in heaven: that is to say, that Christ is no Moses, no lawgiver, no tyrant, but a mediator for sins, a free giver of grace, righteousness, and life: who gave Himself, not for our merits, righteousness, and godly life, but for our sins” (*Galatians* (Kregel), p. 13).

I experienced the reality of what Luther describes here this past week with my two-year old girl—Alexandria. “Puffer,” as we like to call her, was being a mischievous 2-year old terror in the playroom. When she heard the voice of Daddy say, “Puffer, what are you doing?” My voice immediately evoked fear and shame in her because she knew what she was doing was wrong. So, Puffer immediately hid behind the leather chair in the playroom and covered her eyes in order to make it feel like I wasn’t there and that she could hide her actions.

When I walked up to her, I again said, “Puffer, what are you doing?” With reservation and caution, she peered through her fingers and then slowly raised her eyes over the chair. While peering over the chair, she looked at me and quickly laughed with a half smile and then immediately retreated with a look of doubt, “What will Daddy do? Is it safe? Can I come out from behind the leather chair?”

Now, you have to understand, I am the Suzerain in our Kingdom (home)! So, I bent over the chair and corrected her behavior. But at the same time, I picked her up with a big smile and embraced her and kissed her and began to laugh. Guess what her response was? She let her guard down. Her doubt and hesitation turned into trust, resting in Daddy’s arms and she began to laugh with me. But, this time her laughter was different. Her initial laugh was a laugh of embarrassment and deflection. Now, her laughter was a response to my laughter (caused by my laughter). It was a spontaneous display of affection and enjoyment of simply being in Daddy’s safe arms.

This is a faint picture of gospel-driven worship! This is how Christ comes to serve sinners. Such gracious service displays the glory of Christ and creates in His people joy and affection (worship—adoration, trust, invocation and thanksgiving).

God calls out in judgment, “Adam, Eve, where are you?” And there they are, crouched behind their leather chair of fig leaves in fear trying to hide their guilt and shame thinking, “What is our Creator going to do? Is it safe? Can we come out?” Having no prior word of good news (gospel!), Adam and Eve had no other expectation than judgment (cf. Gen. 2:15-17). But, in a remarkable, totally unexpected act of redeeming, glorious grace, God displays His glory by making a promise to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15—the protoevangelium, first gospel).

The God of judgment becomes the God of promise and performance. Instead of justly imposing the penalty of the covenant of creation (cf. Gen. 2:15-17), God graciously removes Adam and Eve’s pitiful attempts of self-justification (fig leaves) and clothes them with animal skins (substitutionary atonement—innocent slain to cover the guilty—and justification). In effect, God says to Adam and Eve (and to you and me today!), “It is safe. You can come out. Come on. Don’t worry. I will give you proper clothes so you don’t have to live with your guilt and shame. Come on out and let’s walk together again.”

The rest of redemptive history is simply the unfolding how the totally sufficient God of Promise and Performance works on behalf of unworthy, wicked sinners to restore them from behind their leather chairs to a place of trust and rest on His chest like the apostle John and Mary at His feet. The ultimate fulfillment of God’s gracious acts in the Garden are fulfilled in Christ as He speaks to sinners who are full of guilt and shame and fear, “²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Jesus comes to us as our great Lord (King) and Servant, to serve us in our time of need in order to create a resounding symphony of adoration, trust, invocation, and thanksgiving, all of which culminates in the revelation of the glory of God and laughter for us!

REFLECTION:

This brings us to the Lord's Supper. Do you know why Christ instituted The Lord's Supper? He instituted it to continually remind us, "It is safe to come out from behind the leather chair." Christ stands ready to continually bring us from out behind the leather chair to worship (adoration, trust, invocation and thanksgiving). The sacraments then—when rightly administered—are indispensable to true worship. In the sacraments, Christ is saying to us, "Come on out. Let's share a meal together and fellowship. It is safe at My table. I am full of grace and truth. I am faithful to you by virtue of My covenant promise. I always stand ready to serve you and help you in your time of need."

The question then before all of us this morning is simply this: Are you standing ready in faith for Christ to serve you? Oh, listen! The Good News of the Gospel is that Christ stands ready to display His glory today by serving you at His table. He is open to your need and this sacrament stands as a continual reminder of this fact.

And so to help us "get it" (i.e., the gospel, the Good News of God's liberality and goodwill toward us in Christ), God graciously adapted to our small capacity and gave us visible and tangible signs of His favor toward us "in Christ." Thus, despite our ongoing battle with sin, by keeping the Lord's Supper central in our lives we may assure ourselves:

- that we do possess eternal life,
- that we do have entrance into the Kingdom of God,
- that we can no more be cut off from God than Christ,
- that we cannot be condemned for our sin because Christ has been condemned in our place (Gal. 3:13).
- that we have confident access to God that will never be closed (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12).
- that Christ has taken our sin, our unrighteousness upon Himself and clothed us with his righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

The effect of such a deeper pressing of such great gospel truth into our lives is a life of worship: adoration, trust, invocation and thanksgiving. Let us then remember that we are coming this morning to be served rather than to serve. For, "the Son of

Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”
(Matt. 20:28; cf. Dan. 7:13-14).

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