

Salvation of Body and Soul

Dear Friends,

False views of Christ, through the history of the Church, have all failed in some way rightly to appreciate the two natures of Christ and how they relate in the one person of our Redeemer. Either our Lord's humanity has been emphasized to the detriment of His divinity, or His divinity has been stressed at the expense of His humanity. Any concept or confession of Christ that does not acknowledge His essential deity and full humanity being in the one person without confusion, without conversion, and eternally and inseparably in union, is false and injurious to both the honor of God and the welfare of man.

Similarly, problems arise in Christian anthropology when we fail to grasp that God created us as a union of physical body and incorporeal soul. The man who seeks to secure himself by his attention being devoted exclusively to material things is called by Scripture a fool (Lk. 12:20). However, the man who practices a rigorous asceticism, purportedly nurturing his soul to the detriment of his body, is heading for problems of body and soul. Accordingly, Paul tells Timothy to find relief for his stomach ailments by the use of some wine. (1 Tim. 5:23). The apostle is not denying that prayer calls down the healing hand of God (Jas. 5:15). But in his advice to his afflicted son in the faith, Paul reveals the wise balance with which he views men who are a composite of body and soul. For physical maladies physical means to some extent should usually be applied.

The context in which Paul gives his instruction to Timothy makes it evident that young Timothy's pastoral work and personal devotion to the Lord were being adversely affected by his stomach complaints. Thus, Paul gives his practical instruction not only to bring relief to Timothy, but also to enhance his spiritual work.

I believe that in the aftermath of this latest festive season, many of us have found ourselves out of physical and spiritual balance. The frantic activity in which we participate robs us of both devotional time, in which we nourish our souls, and rest time, in which we refresh our bodies.

Allow me to speak from my own experience on this matter. I am a man of very regular habits. I work best when I keep a measured pace of work and rest. I believed that although many are not so regular, most would be better off physically and spiritually if they were more regular and disciplined in their working and resting habits. Be that as it may, part of my daily routine is my taking an afternoon nap (I have done this my whole adult life, not just during my ministerial years, when daily schedules can be somewhat flexible. Where there's a will, there's a way!). But for days before and after Christmas, my naps were forsaken. The result was that I had less energy, I got less done, and I was less pleasant to those surrounding me. But the striking thing to me was that I did not even realize that my energy and effectiveness were diminished and my mood soured until I resumed my regular rhythm of rest and work. It was when I found my physical refreshment and resilience returning that I realized how worn I had let myself get.

I wonder how many Christians live lives of frazzled distraction, fruitless effort, and aimless activity which results in no progress—all because they fail to respect the God-imposed limits of their physical constitution? The paradox is that when we aim to do less, we accomplish more, and we do so with a sense of inward satisfaction and outward graciousness. I say to you members of the flock of Christ: *Take a little nap for your frequent emotional and physical ailments.*

A half-hour of undisturbed relaxation in the middle of the day can do much to break the tension and ease the stress that builds in anyone's life on any given day. Our resort to something as mundane as physical rest should not be despised as an unspiritual crutch. It is our Lord Himself who tells us that it is vain for us to endeavor to increase our productivity by extending our waking and working hours (Ps. 127:2). He who condemns the sluggard so often in the Book of Proverbs equally condemns the strident activist. Recall His words to busy Martha (Lk. 10:41,42).

There do come times of legitimate crisis when a nap or even a night's sleep may be impossible to enjoy. Even in such crises, our denying ourselves physical necessities such as food and rest takes its toll on our health and disposition. However, in a true crisis, we may have to die a bit in order to live. But when we regularly and without overriding necessity do that by which we are deadened and dulled physically and spiritually, we are not dying nobly in a high cause, but rather we are uselessly committing a form of suicide.

The priority in Scripture is the peace of justification before the arduous working out of our salvation in sanctification. The priority is devotion to Christ before service for Christ. The priority is our entering into the Lord's rest, before we are enlisted as his soldiers in spiritual warfare. These blessed and essential priorities should be reflected not only in the determination of our souls, but also in the things we do with our bodies. Let us try better to understand and respect the body/soul entities that we are by God's doing, so that we may better live and serve for His glory and His people's good.

Yours in the peace of Christ,

William Harrell

The Power of God

Dear Friends,

I hear increasing talk from pastors of some churches about the need for empowering ministries amongst the people of God. Such talk can represent the identification of a true and legitimate need in the churches, or yet another diversion from the one thing necessary for the people of God. It all depends upon what sort of power is being sought, and the ends for which it is being sought.

The only power we believers should seek is the power of God's Holy Spirit. The ends for which we should seek it are that we might glorify our God and serve for the good of our neighbor. With those pastors maintaining that they and the members of their churches need more of such power for those holy purposes, I full agree. However, just as many in our day have hungered more for entertainment rather than edification in the ordinances of God, so it should not surprise us to observe that the power many believers seek is other than that infused by God's Holy Spirit for the glory of God and good of man.

The old, liberal, and utterly failed Social Gospel was concerned with power. Its advocates sought to equip people—especially those most deprived of this world's goods and least competent at living in contemporary society. Initially, such liberals sought biblically to vindicate their agenda with appeals to what James wrote, for example, about faith without works being dead (Jas. 2:14-17). Eventually, they cared nothing about any biblical basis or boundaries for their determination to better society by means of their raising the economic and social aspirations, if not achievements and status, of the poor and needy. Their success was limited largely to the engendering of a sense of social guilt in those who had a large share of this world's goods, while fostering a sense of discontented and frustrated entitlement in those who had little of the world's goods. Thus, the Social Gospel, which focused on empowering the downtrodden, failed because it was principally misguided and practically bankrupt.

I fear that many I hear today speaking of empowering ministries are flirting with a similar departure from the moorings of Scripture, and are beginning to float down a stream driven not by theology, but rather by the currents of sociology, anthropology, psychology, and materialistic consumerism. While we should, indeed, feed and clothe the hungry and naked (Mt. 25:31ff), we must ever bear in mind the true priority of Scripture that informs us that man shall not live by this world's bread only, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Mt. 4:4).

In His wilderness temptations, Jesus resisted the satanic suggestion to make His bodily feeding paramount over His feeding on His obedience to the will of God (Mt. 4:3,4; Jn. 4:34). By such self-denial and determined fidelity to the will and provision of His Father, Jesus was not diminished in power. After the course of His temptations we read of Him returning to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:14). For those who hunger only for this world's possessions, positions, and the applause of men, what they attain will be the full extent of their reward (Mt. 6:2).

Paul informs us that if it is only in this world that we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19). That is because the true power of God's Holy Spirit enables us to will and to live a life of self-sacrifice. We are to have the mind of Christ, whereby He humbled Himself to the point of His submitting to a criminal's execution (Phil. 2:3-8). If we are disciples of Jesus, we do not expect or demand the crown of worldly competence and applause. Instead, we bear our own cross daily (Lk. 9:23). We are not to set our affections on the things of this world, endeavoring to use the power of God to attain them. We are to be heavenly minded (Col. 3:1ff), we are to humble ourselves before God (1 Pet. 5:6), we are to lose our lives for Christ's sake (Mt. 10:39), and to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, reckoning that our heavenly Father will provide for us a competent portion of this life's necessities (Mt. 6:33).

The only power God gives to His people is the power to die to self and live to God. It is the power to reckon ourselves crucified with Christ and living a new, holy life freed from the fears of self-obsession and freed for a life of loving and serving our God and our neighbor. Any ministry that empowers people to

think primarily of themselves—their needs, their desires, their accomplishments, their demands—is counterfeit and accursed. Any ministry that motivates people to seek a power that will enable them to command this world's respect and to acquire this world's possessions and positions, is foreign to those who truly love the heavenly Father (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Those with the eyes of their hearts having been opened by God to know the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe (Eph. 1:18,19), know that the power of God forms Christ in them, changing their characters and not surrounding them with pleasing circumstances. Of this kind of empowering I say let us have ever increasing degrees. All other power can only puff poor sinners up with lifeless and loveless conceit.

Faithfully yours,

William Harrell

Submission and Exaltation

Dear Friends,

The Word of God tells us that our sin has made us so stupidly imperceptive of the contours of reality that even an ant can teach us valuable lessons regarding foresight and industry (Ps. 6:6). If our consideration of an insect can make us wise, how much more wisdom is to be gained by our contemplation of the higher creatures in this world of God's making? I have always maintained, for example, that the swift and decisive snapping of a dog—indeed, usually only his warning growl, backed up by his convincing willingness to add bite to his bark—can teach an unruly child respect and obedience more quickly and thoroughly than can many a hapless parent. But I have another lesson in mind from our canine friends, one that cannot be subject to the debate that arises over the question of whether a dog's savage growling or biting really teaches a child discipline as opposed to dread.

My dear helpmeet was telling me about her having seen a dog brought onto a television talk show with his rugged cowboy master. To the amazement and delight of the audience, the dog focused absolutely upon his master, looking and listening for the man's instructions conveyed by word and gesture. The dog completely obeyed his master's will, without allowing anything to distract or impede him from his devoted performance. I believe that there was not a soul who saw the disciplined obedience of that dog to his master's complex commands, who thought the dog to be less intelligent and admirable than the other more undisciplined members of the canine breed. That dog was a marvel precisely because he had thoroughly submitted himself to the higher intelligence of a man.

The lesson should be easy for us to draw from this example. As Christians, we are to have our minds transformed by the glorious mercies of God (Rom. 12:1,2); we are to bring our every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5); we are to begin and continue our quest in true wisdom by our having highest and most reverent regard for the Lord (Pr. 1:7); we are to have, in sum, the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5ff). This means that with increasing consciousness and committed consistency, we trust in and obey our God in all things, forsaking our reliance upon our own understanding (Pr. 3:5,6). Our personal desires and aspirations—even be they as apparently legitimate as asking that a thorn be removed from the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7ff), or that a cup of undeserved death pass from us (Mt. 26:39)—are not to be pursued uncritically, but rather are to be submitted to the wiser and more holy and loving will of our

heavenly Father.

Some, no doubt, feel that such absolute submission to the will of God is neither directed by Scripture nor desirable for men to practice. They may ask, what becomes of that spontaneity and those novel and imaginative ways of thinking and acting that make people so engaging? The answer is that there really is nothing engaging about the _expression of undirected impulses in man, matter or beast. Nothing is more spontaneous and undisciplined as young children playing in a nursery. But while they can make much noise, they cannot make soul-stirring music. They lack the discipline and training that would technically enable them to produce pleasing, harmoniously ordered sound.

How could there be anyone more engaging, intriguing, interesting, and attractive than a person completely surrendered to the divine will? Is it not the case that the most profoundly wise, tenderly loving, unfailingly courageous, and generously giving person we could possibly know is the Son of Man portrayed for us in the pages of God's Word? And He was not concerned with forging His own way, staggering folks with His imaginative brilliance, and dazzling them with perpetually novel sayings and deeds. Rather, He thought and did nothing but what His Father directed Him to think and do (Jn. 5:19). The complete submission of Jesus to His Father's will was precisely what made Him so profoundly attractive, so astonishingly wise, so brilliantly independent of the tired ruts of fallen men's attitudes and actions.

We are told in Scripture that God has not given us a spirit of timidity, whereby we would feel forever pressured to please and placate others by our antics. Rather, we are given a spirit of power, and love, and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7). By discipline is meant our desire and willingness to hear and heed not our own distracting impulses, but rather the sound wisdom, effectual power, and immeasurable love of God. The more we follow the life-giving commands of our heavenly Master, the more distinguished we shall become from the mass of humanity which is not alive with imagination, but rather is dead in trespasses and sins. The more we deny ourselves and devote ourselves utterly to the Word of our God, the more a captivating light and commanding presence will issue from us, leading men to see, and some to glorify, our heavenly Master.

Yours increasingly captivated by Christ,
William Harrell

Desires Fulfilled

Dear Friends,

It is common for a pastor to hear various members of his flock lament over the apparent disinclination the Lord has to hear and grant certain of their prayerful petitions. Christians frequently point to such verses as Psalm 20:4,5, wherein David prays that the Lord would grant the desires of His people's hearts and fulfill all their petitions, and wonder why so many of their petitions and desires are unfulfilled. The reason is not that God has misled us by His Word, but rather that we tend to misunderstand the true nature of such promises in Scripture.

When we are told that our God will give us the desires of our hearts, we do well to consider how He will do it. Few, if any, believers would understand by such a promise that the holy God of heaven is binding Himself to grant every desire we have. Suppose a man desires success in robbing a bank. No Christian would assert that Psalm 20:4 warrants the belief that the Lord would countenance, let alone fulfill, such a sinful desire. The rub comes with those desires we deem natural and legitimate. Surely, we are inclined to reckon, the Lord has promised to fulfill all such desires.

This understanding boils down to an *I want*, therefore *God gives* dynamic. When God delays fulfilling our wants, or denies our requests that He do so, we are tempted to think hard thoughts about our heavenly Father. The truth is that the Lord does give us the desires of our hearts. However, He does so not by an indulgent and uncritical granting of our desires, but rather by His purifying, strengthening, and re-directing our desires before He fulfills them.

It is not only our sins that alienate us from God and bring misery to our lives, but it can also be our seemingly innocent pleasures. Thus, James informs us that quarrels and conflicts erupt even amongst believing people as each seeks to have his own desire fulfilled at any cost (Jas. 4:1-3). The desire that our Lord pledges Himself to grant is not the petty, trivial, self-regarding desire that naturally fills a sinner's heart. Rather, it is the longing for righteousness that our God will satisfy (Mt. 5:6); it is our desire for conformity to Christ (Phil. 2:1-13), and our seeking first the kingdom of God that the Lord will grant (Mt. 6:33).

As in every other area of the Christian life, so in this matter of our desires, Jesus is the perfect example. In His anguished prayer in Gethsemane, He expressed a desire to have the cup of His atoning sufferings pass from Him

(Mt. 26:39,42,44). Yet, even as our Savior expressed that desire, He also articulated a higher desire with the words: *yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt*. That higher desire grew stronger in the second of the three petitions of Jesus: *if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done* (v.42). The point for us to realize is that the desire of our sinless Savior was on one level sinlessly self-regarding. Who wants to suffer inconceivable anguish? Nor was Jesus obliged so to suffer. The atoning work with all of its tortures He voluntarily undertook. But from this desire He ascended to the higher desire that He might manifest the glory of God and accomplish the highest good for His people through His going to the cross. It was this supreme desire that the Father granted to His Son. Neither Jesus, nor His Father, nor any of the redeemed regret that this highest desire was the one granted.

We find a similar situation with Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Three times the apostle asked God to remove the thorn. There was nothing sinful *per se* in Paul's request. It was just that his desire was not the highest. When the Lord made it clear to the apostle that His divine grace was sufficient, His power perfected in weakness, then Paul most gladly boasted in and desired to bear his thorn by God's grace and for God's glory.

Our Lord does not always make clear to us in such detail the form and fruit of our higher desires when He refuses to grant the lower ones we may currently have. Yet, let us be encouraged with the knowledge that our wise and loving heavenly Father is committed to and knows how to plant and cultivate perfect desires in His beloved children, which desires neither He nor we will regret that our heavenly Father sowed and stimulated in us and satisfied for us. While our delayed or denied gratification may cause us temporary frustration, anxiety, and emotional distress, even such things are but momentary, light afflictions that will soon give way, not only to the development of higher desires and deeper satisfaction, but also to an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:16-18). In the meantime, our pain will be lessened, our patience extended, and our peace restored when we remember, and, with humble trust and gratitude, submit to the process whereby our heavenly Father leads us to have the highest desires which will give to us greatest joy and to Him highest glory when He grants them.

Yours growing in holy desires,

William Harrell

Learning from the Lower Creation

Dear Friends,

The Lord tells us not to despise the day of small things, for they are always connected to greater things. Our family is currently going through some pain and perplexity. Our pain is not caused by the great and deep blows of the death of a beloved brother or sister in Christ. Rather, we grieve over the death of one of God's lower creatures, our dog, who has faithfully devoted himself to us for ten years. Those of you who know this have been wonderfully understanding and comforting to us. I trust, therefore, that you will further understand my endeavor to bring some spiritual profit to you as I share how healing has been coming to us for this little wound. If my expressions seem a bit scattered, you will appreciate, I trust, that it is because I write to you still in the recovery room of the soul, and, therefore, perhaps not being quite as balanced as at other times.

Why should we grieve the loss of a family pet? Did we make an idol of our dog, imputing to him all sorts of attributes that he was incapable of denying because he was a dumb beast? Wherein do we find comfort for our pain? Do we by strong, wishful thinking try to convince ourselves that he is with the Lord in heaven? Do we snap ourselves out of our delusion, and remind ourselves that he was but a beast with no soul? Let me try to share with you something of our finding comfort and healing for our pain.

Psalm 29 is a remarkable psalm. It ascribes glory to God in testimony to seven (the perfect number) natural or creational manifestations of God's sovereignty. Very little is said in that psalm about the glories of redemption. I suggest that part of the reason for this is our need to know that our God is the God of creation, that He made all things and upholds all things by the Word of His power. If the truth be told, most of us do not have a vital grasp of this, and hence we grow anxious over practical and mundane things, while we glibly assume that all is well with our souls.

The glory of God is manifested in all of creation (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:20). But what place does this lower creation have in the economy of God? The Word tells us that God made it all and declared it all very good. The first career of Adam, the first man, was to have dominion over the creation—a dominion he exercised by naming all the animals, designating them according to the distinctive character of each. The first animal we meet in Scripture was a serpent who spoke. Does

that hint, as C. S. Lewis has suggested in his writings, that in the new heaven and earth the animals will not only be present, but will be present with powers they originally had that were removed from them when God cursed the creation, subjecting it to vanity on account of man's sin (Rom. 8:20,21)?

It was the Lord who regarded the animals as having enough significance in His creation, that He instructed Noah to preserve every species of them in the ark. Wise Solomon did not despise the lower creation, but saw in it divinely arranged instruction, even in an ant (Prov. 6:6). He spoke of trees, beasts, fowl, creeping things, and fish (1 Ki. 4:33), not because he was a sentimental pantheist, but because he was a wise believer in the Lord, who related in a right and balanced way with the creation of his God.

God does not refuse to use animals as imagery for His people, saying that His people will mount up with wings as eagles (Is. 40:31), and likening them to lambs over which He is the Shepherd (Ps. 23). Jesus spoke of the lilies, dressed in splendor bestowed on them by God, and He spoke of God knowing whenever a sparrow falls to the ground (compare Mt. 10:29 with Lk. 12:6).

The lower creatures have served the Lord and His people. Balaam's ass saved that wicked prophet's life, not because an angel spoke through her, but because the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey to speak words of warning to Balaam (Num. 22:28). Then, we find Jesus riding a willing donkey on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:2ff).

In prophetic literature we are told of the lamb and wolf peacefully coexisting (Is. 65:25), while in apocalyptic literature we find images of lion, calf, and eagle, along with man, surrounding the heavenly throne of God (Rev. 4:7). We are told of trees in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 22:2) with twelve kinds of fruit and leaves healing the nations (how much more will the fruit accomplish?!).

What are we to make of this all? We should understand that the wonders of all creation manifest the glory of God (Ps. 19). These things are the outer traces of His ways (Job. 26:14). We should not worship them, but neither should we hold them in contempt. If we hold these lesser things of our God in low regard, what confidence can we have that we hold the higher things, such as our brethren in Christ, whom we are to honor above ourselves, rightly in high regard?

You may note that many of my points in this letter are questions, hints and suggestions. Where is the true answer to these questions? The sole answer is

found in the wisdom, love, and power of our God. When Job was in great pain, he was full of questions and sometimes seemed to be as a man grasping at straws. When he saw God, all of his questions were answered, all of his tears dried, and his latter state was better than his former.

One day we shall see the face of our Redeemer (Rev. 22:4), and now, by faith, we reckon that in the light and love of His countenance, we shall have answers to all of our questions and a drying of all our tears. Meantime, as we try to see darkly through the glass of Scripture, I am convinced that the glory to come will not be one devoid of lower creatures, but more full of them than is this old world that is passing away. And as I humble myself to ponder the excellent virtues of the lower creatures, as Scripture tells me to do (Phil. 4:8), I am led to think that they shall not cease richly to adorn the new earth, which shall be freed from its bondage to corruption to rejoice in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). I am led to think that I should hold all things in this world, especially my fellow man, God's crown of creation, in higher, not lower regard. And as I follow this lead, I find peace, comfort, and hope in the wisdom, loving mercy, and power of the Lord.

Yours in His healing hand,

William Harrell

Charity and Entitlement

Dear Friends,

Who would ever think that a society could become so degenerate and vicious that it would inculcate in the minds of its members that virtues were vices to be hated? Even in seriously wicked societies, men still pine for the flourishing of virtues and welcome their being and exercise in others, if not in themselves. Thus, men who are liars, thieves, adulterers, and murderers may refuse to give up such sins in themselves, but they would prefer, if not demand, that others around them restrain themselves from practicing such transgressions. It would seem that few people would prefer living in a neighborhood full of people who lied, stole, and killed, as opposed to their living amongst honest and decent folk. Yet, when the queen of all virtues is held in contempt, can the hatred of her attendant graces be far off? We live in a day and amidst a society where love is becoming rare in its exercise, due largely to our culture's systematic attempt to declare it a vice worthy of contempt and destruction.

Many may think I overstate the case. Some may object that many people in our society do love, and that even those who do not would welcome being loved. I believe that the trend is otherwise. Some may say that at least Christians esteem and practice love. I maintain that love is a vanishing virtue even amongst those who profess to worship the God who is Himself love.

It may seem incredible that anyone, let alone the majority of a given society, should hold in contempt the exquisite treasure of which Paul writes in

1 Corinthians 13. Who would not at least admire a virtue that is patient, kind, not jealous or arrogant, that does not brag or act unbecomingly, that is not provoked, does not hold a grudge, and does not seek its own way? Yet the rarity of this highest virtue, not simply being practiced but being esteemed and desired, indicates that many people regard charity as a curse to be avoided.

What accounts for the fall in love's stock in our day? I believe that two features prevalent in our culture are strongly antithetical to love. The notions of egalitarianism and entitlement have perhaps done more than any other forces in our day to stigmatize the exercise and even the concept of love and the gracious fruits that issue from love.

The belief and practical determination that all people are and ought to be equal, not simply in opportunity, but in attainment, undermines the desire to give or receive love. The narrowing of the egalitarian aspiration to one's acquisition of his fair share of material possessions and political, psychological, social, and economic power further serves to make love appear as a condescending vice rather than a crowning virtue. People who are taught to assume that they are as good, worthy, capable, and deserving as the next fellow will hardly be receptive to the notion of a compassionate regard from another whose charity may serve to lift them from their low and needy place of misery. Hence, something as beautiful and beneficent as the loving exercise of compassion becomes viewed as a patronizing insult to one's essential dignity.

Reinforcing the egalitarian impulse is the concept of entitlement that has gripped not only the lower members of our society, but the higher members as well. Across all strata of our society there runs now an impulse toward entitlement that has been exalted to sacred status. The poor consider themselves entitled to an equal share of material things; the middle class think themselves entitled to the fruits of their labors; the rich are entitled to their property. All men make impossible demands on the health care system, feeling entitled not only to live to aged extent, but also to do so with minimum pains and maximal powers.

Into this vortex of pride and presumption, with its emphasis on demanding supposed rights and de-emphasis on fulfillment of responsibilities, the notion of gracious and giving love seems not only foreign, but also useless at best, insulting at worst. Those who have imbibed the spirit of

egalitarianism and entitlement not only refuse to exercise love, but hate to receive it as well, viewing it as a force intent on ruining their rights and stealing their dignity.

The Church of Christ in our day has sensed this devaluation of love in our culture. In many quarters of the Church, there is commitment to an endeavor to speak to the proud and presumptuous in terms they not only understand but demand, namely, affirmation and empowerment. Such approach to our decaying culture may win some degree of acknowledgment from presumptuous men, but it will never melt their hearts and refashion them into people who lovingly count others as better than themselves.

Our calling is not to disguise our love for our Lord or one another. We are not to turn the precious coin of His love for sinners into the useless currency of pandering to men's pride. The love of our God is the treasure of all treasures. Let us value it accordingly, and give it to others freely, rightly reckoning that its warmth will yet melt many hearts that are not only icy but also stony. Beloved, whatever man makes of it, let us love, because love is from God.

Yours in Christ's love,
William Harrell

Looking Outward and Onward

Dear Friends,

Yesterday marked the first Lord's day of the twenty-third year of our local assembly called Immanuel. Our attainment of twenty-two years of worship, fellowship, and service as a congregation passed without special public notice. I believe that this was so because we were too busy concerning ourselves with other more outward and onward matters than the commemoration of our own past. The month of June definitely had a mission emphasis, with foreign and domestic servants of Christ visiting our church, as well as our own summer mission team members once again committing themselves to the repair of the house of a needy soul living near our church building. The fact that missionaries from places such as Korea (en route to Singapore), France, and Uganda went to the effort to come to us, reporting on their works, indicates the vital worldwide vision we maintain. While it is true that we provide regular financial support to these and to a growing number of other foreign missionaries, that form of support is so minimal in some cases as to be but a small token. None of the missionaries have ever come to us for the money, but rather, all acknowledge their coming to us for something they rightly deem to be much more precious and effective, namely, our prayers. It is our commitment to personal and family, but especially to corporate prayer for the work of Christ in the world that has engaged us in so many vital ministries abroad, and has drawn so many choice servants of Christ to us to report on their trials and triumphs so that our prayers for them might be better focused and more effectively aimed.

Domestic servants of Christ also continue to visit us. Many pastors and members from other like-minded churches, come to us for the spiritual invigoration our loving fellowship provides and for the enlightening wisdom and enabling power the ministry of the Word conveys to them. Expressions of sincere gratitude from such visitors continue to grow, as do the number of such soldiers of the cross who reckon an opportunity for them to stop in Norfolk to worship with the Immanuel saints to be a sustaining, and often healing, encouraging, and, at times, redirecting privilege.

Of course our own local mission team, with its members being devoted to benevolent works performed for those who are neighbors of our church property, takes our focus outward as well as do the interests we have in other foreign and domestic ministries. It never ceases to fill me with amazement and most profound gratitude to God when I consider how readily our own men, women, and young people, give their time and energies in order to work in hot, dirty, always difficult, and sometimes dangerous conditions so that the house of one of our neighbors might be made more sound and attractive. To look at the happy faces of our teenagers when they return to the church for lunch and devotions during these missions, one believes that their devoting their vacation time to perform such sweaty and exhausting work is deemed by them to be a high privilege and great pleasure. The same observation holds for men and women on the mission team, along with its supporting members, many of whom use their

vacation or leave days from their jobs, to serve so cheerfully in this challenging work.

These outward concentrations grow and remain vital, but not at the expense of our own congregational health. True, we may have been so busy with these ministries that the twenty-second anniversary of our church passed without our taking public notice. But when, on the first Lord's day of our twenty-third year together, our worship was filled with members and visitors to the point where we seriously overflowed our building capacity, it indicates to me that we continue gradually but surely to flourish as a local church. All of this is the Lord's doing, and it should be marvelous in our eyes. It also seems to indicate that the best years of Immanuel are ahead of us, not behind. But we should never forget that we are what we are today, and what we are growing to be tomorrow, because of what we have been committed to up to this day, namely, a serious ministry of the Word and prayer. More than twenty-two years ago, I was told by a member of the Presbytery committee examining me in consideration for a call to be the church planter of Immanuel, that if I focused only on preaching and praying, the church plant would not last a year. Far from that concentration resulting in the demise of Immanuel, we have grown for more than two decades in the grace and knowledge, the love and service of the Lord. By our God's grace, we have been preserved from the rising and fading theological and ecclesiological fads that have wearied many other churches. May our Lord's grace continue to preserve us and take us from strength to strength as we continue to feed on His ever relevant and never changing Word, and as we continue to pray and to serve in accordance with His Word and our prayers.

Gratefully yours,

William Harrell

Worshipping Rightly Abroad

Dear Friends,

Good parents teach their children good manners not only for life in their home, but also for life in general society. Similarly, good pastors teach their people the whole counsel of God so that they may apply it to themselves and live it out not only in their local fellowship, but also outside the boundaries of their own fellowship, including when they visit other assemblies of the Lord's people. It is with respect to our visiting and worshipping in churches other than Immanuel that I desire to share some observations and instructions. I do this at this time because we are in the midst of summer when family vacations take many of us to assemblies other than our own for Sunday worship. The consistent feedback I receive from our members who are obliged to worship for a time in churches other than our own is that it is hard for them to find a church wherein worship on the Lord's day is as Reformed and edifying as it is in Immanuel. These reports are surely accurate, since we live in a day when carnal gimmicks are replacing the gospel in many churches. My concern is that we not only realize such ecclesiastical facts of life, but that we respond rightly to them. The first thing we all need to do when we, in God's providence, must attend a church less Reformed than our own, is to mortify even the traces of spiritual pride in ourselves. It is far too easy for those who have been blessed with a rich spiritual diet, a godly and spiritual church leadership, and corporate worship that is in spirit and truth, to feel superior to others who appear to be less than that. It is also common for those who feel such spiritual superiority to act censoriously toward their supposed spiritual inferiors. If spiritual pride results from our ministry, either we have failed rightly to minister the gracious gospel, or those affected by such pride have misapplied the faithful ministry of which they boast. It is never a sign of spiritual maturity and growth in grace when one becomes a censorious nit-picker. Those who are truly growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord grow in their humble gratitude for what the Lord has given them, and exercise increasingly the judgment of charity toward others. By that judgment of charity, we make the best, not the worst, of other people and situations. The love of the Lord, as described in 1 Corinthians 13, is ever inclined to believe the best of others. Thus, when we find ourselves amidst another fellowship, whose worship may be less Biblically based than our own, we should suspend the harshest judgment that would deem the people amongst whom we are visitors as blatant apostates, and we should suppose, instead, that they are perhaps sincere, but not so well taught. Some fellowships where irregular features of worship are practiced may, in fact, be in a process of revival and reformation of which we may be ignorant. It would be a sin for us, in such ignorance, to act critically in such a fellowship, and thereby, perhaps serve to smother the flickering wick in a way that our Lord would never do.

Another way of putting this matter is that when we worship, whether at home or abroad, we should be eaters of meat, and not pickers of bones. Those who focus on bones are inclined to reject the whole meal, and they consequently depart

from the table un nourished. It is a sign of growth in spiritual maturity that a soul learns to feed off of whatever the Lord provides for him, even if it comes to him through ravens. Soft civilians often experience hunger, or fear hunger, when their steaks disappear. Yet, those trained in survival disciplines learn to feed themselves, if necessary, on protein rich bugs, as John the Baptist fed on locusts. There may be only crumbs of truth ministered amidst a swarm of silliness in a sermon, but the wise and spiritually mature are able to feast on the crumbs, as the Canaanite woman was willing to feed on crumbs that fell from the Lord's table. Related to this, we do well to distinguish our personal taste and preference from essential principles of worship and the ministry of the Word. A man who is invited to eat in another's home, and who refuses to eat the fare prepared for him, simply because it is not what his mother or wife usually makes for him, is rude, insulting, and destined to have not only a stomach empty of food, but also a life devoid of friends. Gracious guests are ever open, humbly, to the possibility that what their hosts do differently just may be done as well, if not better, than that to which they are accustomed. And even if it is done worse, gracious souls are grateful for the effort. Rather than our fostering spiritual pride, we should be humbly grateful for what the Lord has given us at Immanuel. We are not better than our brethren elsewhere, but we are what we are by God's grace. By that grace, let us pray for the greater growth of our less blessed brethren, and, with loving patience and wise consideration, serve to help show them the better way (Ps. 122:6).

Gratefully yours,

William Harrell

One Thing Necessary

Dear Friends,

The sons of Korah tell us that God is our refuge and strength, and an abundant help to us in trouble (Ps. 46:1). Likewise, Solomon tells us that the name of the Lord is a strong tower into which the righteous run to find safety (Pr. 18:10). The Apostle Paul takes these conceptions further when he declares how our inseparable union to God in Christ makes believers to be more than conquerors in all things (Rom. 8:35-39). If these declarations of Scripture are true, why do so many Christians fail to find the safety and strength they claim that they seek in the Lord?

One major reason why so many who profess trust in Christ for salvation experience exposure to devastating and defeating blasts, that seem to indicate that they have no shelter or security in God, is because they fail vitally to run into the name of the Lord for their safety. By this I mean that it is too common a malady that we rest contented with our having but vague and sentimental notions of our God. We may sing of His majesty and speak of His powerful victory for us in Christ, but if we are not growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, then it becomes with the Savior as it did with day old manna for Israel in the wilderness—that which had been earlier the bread of life to us becomes spoiled. If our faith is not regularly exercised, then the power of God appears weak, remote, irrelevant to us, and so it will be to us, for we are protected by the power of God through faith (1 Pet. 1:5).

A vibrant and victorious faith that overcomes the world (1 Jn. 5:4) is fixed upon Christ as the one thing necessary in all situations, for all needs, and at all stages of our lives. We can grow so accustomed to and charmed by the incessant hawking of advertisers in our day, that we come to believe that there are many things necessary in our lives, and that there are numerous and varied things that secure us. We do well to remember that faith has only one object, and it is not our natural endowments or attainments, it is not our worldly position or possessions, it is only the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Let us remind ourselves of some of the many times and ways the Word of God teaches us that Christ is the *one* thing necessary (Lk. 10:41,42). Scripture declares that because God so loved the world, He gave *one* thing, His Son, to save those who believe in Him (Jn. 3:16). Christ is the *one* thing necessary for our salvation (Acts 4:12). He is the *one* source for our having peace that passes understanding (Jn. 14:27; Phil 4:7), and the *one* thing necessary for our contentment and competence in all things (Phil. 4:11-13).

Christ is the *one* thing sought, found, and taught by prophets and apostles (1 Pet. 1:10-12). He is the *only one* who has destroyed the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8). *Only He* bore our sin and gave us His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ is the *only one* in whom we have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). He is the *one* in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:2,3), and with whom our lives are hidden in God (Col. 3:3). Christ is the *one* true lover of our souls, whose love is immeasurable and never failing (Eph. 3:19). Christ is the *only one* who never leaves or forsakes us (Heb. 13:5). *Only He* is the light leading us out of darkness (Jn. 8:12). Christ is the *one* way out of death into life (Jn. 14:6); the *one* pathfinder leading His people from this cursed world to the glory of heaven (Jn. 17:24). Furthermore, our Savior is much more besides what is here listed.

When our faith vitally lays hold of this unique Christ, we rightly see Him as the one necessity of life. We will not run into vague notions about Christ to be safe, but these solid truths pertaining to our blessed Redeemer form for us a fortress that no enemy can enter, and thus we race into Him to be secure.

We need not fear, as some do, that if we recognize and rely upon Christ as the one thing necessary, He will be the only thing we have. Even if He were the only thing we had, we would be infinitely richer than had we the whole world without Him. However, if He is our only love, we are directed and enabled by Him to love all men; if He is our only Helper, we find all things being made to work together for our good (Rom. 8:28). If we seek Him first, we shall be given all good things with Him (Mt. 6:33).

Let us then focus our faith on this infinitely considerable and gloriously unique Christ. Then, when serious, adult troubles arise, we will not look upon Him with an immature faith that sees Him as fit only to sooth a child. Nor shall we resort to this world's trinkets for our security, finding only bitter frustration instead, but we shall hope in our strong and inconceivably substantial Savior, and never be disappointed (1 Pet. 2:6).

Yours in Christ,

William Harrell

Refuge from the Storm

Dear Friends,

We have endured and survived a hurricane named Isabel. She was remarkable for being exceedingly destructive over an extensive area. Countless trees have fallen to her winds, numerous homes, businesses, and personal property items have been damaged or destroyed by her potent gusts, lashing rains, and flooding storm surge. We have come through this fury not unscathed, but less injuriously affected than most. For that, we thank our preserving God and our many brethren throughout this nation and the world who prayed for us.

What are we to make of such a dark providence? Surely, our sovereign God ordained and governed the character, course, and effects of this hurricane. Those of us who did not evacuate can testify from the howling winds and flying debris, as well as from the awful destruction evident to all in the storm's aftermath, that there are awesome powers afoot in our world. How much more awesome must be the God who wields those powers! The doctrine of divine omnipotence takes on a more vibrant meaning for those who have experienced a phenomenon that rendered all men helpless to do anything except flee from its inexorable approach, or endure its devastating might.

It certainly is deeply moving—emotionally upsetting—for all who have been touched by a force that within hours destroyed structures men had labored many days, if not years, to build. Who would not be unsettled when all around one lie ancient trees that for decades grew tall and strong? They delighted us with autumnal color displays, the sight of birds, squirrels, and a variety of insects, while serving to evoke blessings from us for the cooling shade they provided during long days of burning summer sun. In a few hours, thousands of such trees were toppled, littering the landscape with their mortified trunks and withering foliage.

People now hasten to settle insurance claims, to clear the debris, to rebuild their homes and their lives. But inescapably the feeling remains beneath all of this distracting industry that within the span of a few hours, man's contrived security and comforts were reduced to chaos. It happened then, and we are haunted by the sinking feeling that it could happen again.

Many seek refuge in the odds of statistical probabilities. Such a hurricane had not come to us for more than seventy years before Isabel struck. Others try to relieve their anguish by telling themselves that there is far more of the world unaffected by such storms than those areas wrecked by them. They try to convince themselves that Isabel was but a tempestuous, temporary visitor, interrupting the order of their lives for a time, the way a nightmare disturbs one's sleep, and for a time, haunts one's waking hours.

The truth is that it is not hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, or wars that are the dark dreams of life in this world. Such forces that inflict massive misery upon people are glimpses of the reality of man's situation. Most of our lives are lived in a mindless fog—a delusion that we are safe and secure in our attainments and worldly possessions. The blasting winds and pounding floods of our hurricane gave us a glimpse into what God's Word tells us is the true state of sinful man. Asaph, for a time, envied the material wealth and carnal ease of the wicked. But when he went into the sanctuary of God, he perceived that the Lord had set them in slippery places (Ps. 73:18). This is the unseen truth that man seeks to suppress. Accordingly, he builds his house upon the sand of a divinely cursed and perishing world (Mt. 7:26ff). He seeks to gain the whole world while neglecting his soul (Mk. 8:36). He lives each day in deluded ignorance of that great day of judgment when the heavens and earth will melt in the consuming fire of Christ's glory (2 Pet. 3:12). Then men will be awakened from their dream of security to see the entire world fall in a day, in an hour (Rev. 18: 10,17,19), while the wicked seek to hide in caves, vainly trying to escape the wrath of the Lamb of God (Rev. 6:16).

If nothing else, Isabel should have opened our eyes to the reality of what Scripture teaches us, namely, that the world and its lusts are passing away (1 Jn. 2:17). Accordingly, we should ourselves see, while we seek to show to others, the living, enduring, and imperishable hope that believers have in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Let us more vitally value the name of the Lord, that high tower into which the righteous run and find true safety (Prov. 18:10). Let us prize our heavenly citizenship, knowing that is where we have sure and unshakable security in our fellowship with the living God, His holy angels, and just men made perfect amidst a new heaven and new earth, where there will be no more fears or tears, where there will be no more curse, and where all things will have been made by our God new and lastingly glorious.

Yours humbled and in hope,

William Harrell

Strengthening Joy and Sanctifying Sorrow

Dear Friends,

Who, when given a choice between experiencing joy or sorrow, would choose sorrow? It is natural and completely understandable that we should prefer pleasure to pain. The benefits of delight are numerous. Those who are cheerful usually enjoy more sound physical and emotional health than do those bearing the burden of affliction. The joyful ones also tend to draw more friends, who would rather bathe in the sunshine of happiness than to be cast down into a gloomy depression. In fact, Scripture tells us that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). Therefore, it is natural that we should prefer joy over sorrow. But is it spiritual that we should do so?

The joy of the Lord is not the same thing as unqualified joy. There is, in fact, a world of difference between mere happiness and holy delight. It is with joy as it is with all other facets of the Christian life, namely, that it has a proper place within the spectrum of godly attitudes and emotions. Despite the desires and demanding of many in our hedonistic age that joy should be ranked supremely over all other Christian experience, joy is nearer the tail than the head of the experience of all believers.

It is true that Scripture declares the joy of the Lord to be our strength. However, Jesus also declares that those who mourn are blessed with divine comfort (Mt. 5:4). The Apostle Paul writes about the considerable benefits of godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:11), while the writer of Hebrews teaches us not to despise the discipline of the Lord that makes us sorrowful for a season, but afterward yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). Whereas godly joy may be our strength, godly sorrow serves for our sanctification. This places those sorrowing over their sins, mourning over the carnal glibness of the worldling, and grieving over the dishonor evil men seek to heap upon the Lord and His people, in a better spiritual condition than those who seek only to rejoice.

We find this priority set out in Psalms 14 and 53—two almost identical psalms. They begin with verses of powerful conviction, that when rightly read, should work deep conviction in any soul. It is only after such godly sorrow has been aroused, that conviction gives way to the Lord's people thinking and living as more than conquerors. The same priority is found in Jesus calling His disciples to bear the cross here and now, while trustingly awaiting God's conferring upon them the crown of glory in due course.

Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* makes clear to us that joy comes as the end of man's being perfected by the gracious, redeeming, and sanctifying work of God. It is man's chief *end* that he should enjoy God forever. Here in our earthly pilgrimage, godly sorrow is a much more constant companion and sure guide for the believer. Far from our seeking at all times to make ourselves happy, we are called to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, knowing that He will exalt us at the proper time (1 Pet. 5:6). Therefore, we must place special emphasis—in Paul's directive that we rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4)—upon our holy Lord, whose prayers and providence for us

nurture our sanctification, even at the expense of our happiness in the short run (Jn. 17:15-17; 1 Thess. 4:3).

There are good and necessary reasons why godly sorrow now takes priority over godly joy. One reason is that for as long as we live in a cursed world, amongst fallen men, with devils tempting and afflicting the saints of God, we can never experience the perfect joy we shall experience for eternity in glory. The shadow of sin clouds all of our experience in this life, and thus our joys will always be alloyed with sorrow. Sinners and Satan intend such sorrowing experiences for evil, but our God uses them for our good.

Some may ask how we can be strong in the Lord without joy? The answer is that there is not a disconnect between godly joy and godly sorrow, but rather a priority, or chain of causation. Joy may strengthen us, but we, being the mixed, impure, although redeemed, souls that we are now, cannot experience too much joy without our becoming intoxicated, proud, and spiritually complacent. Recall Paul's thorn in the flesh, given to him by God that the apostle might not exalt himself (2 Cor. 12:7).

We do not need strength *per se*, so much as we need to be sanctified. Strength without sanctification makes monsters of men. When we rightly reflect upon the glorious potencies that will be ours in heaven, we should readily understand that if we were there without being perfected in godliness, we would abuse the awesome powers that will then be ours, and become worse than devils.

Even though we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, redeemed by the atoning work of Christ, and adopted as children of our heavenly Father, we still, so long as we draw breath in this world, have the residue of sin within us. Our sin is, as Paul represents it, like a dead body we drag around with us. But it is still sufficient to make us cry in anguish: *Wretched man that I am!* (Rom. 7:24).

Let us not dread or deny the blessed necessity of our mourning over our remaining sins and over the effects of sin in our world. Such godly sorrow works for our sanctification, and it is that sanctification wherein we are increasingly conformed to the holy character of Christ that gives us cause and capacity for truly, deeply, and lastingly glorifying our God and enjoying Him forever. The joys we have now are but imperfect pledges of that perfect and lasting joy to come, when all sorrows will have passed away (Rev. 21:4), having performed their sanctifying service under the superintendence of our holy God.

Yours in holy grieving that is not without hope,

William Harrell

Harmony Sweetened by Suffering

Dear Friends,

Whenever our family is away on vacation, as we were recently, and we return to Immanuel, we are always struck with an increasingly profound awareness of what a rare and precious work the Lord has been accomplishing in our congregation. Perhaps the first thing that strikes us when we return from an absence from the assembly of Immanuel is how wonderfully hearty the singing of praise is in worship on the Lord's Day. I have always been conscious of the great privilege and responsibility that is mine in my being the pastor of such a fine collection of saints. Nor do I ever think that I am taking any member or the whole body for granted even to a small degree. However, when I return to Immanuel being refreshed from my rest, it is as though I hear the assembly's singing with new ears, and behold this body of living stones with enlarged heart.

In some ways, it must be admitted, our church resembles in character that of the Corinthians. Not many of us are wise, mighty, or noble according to the flesh (1 Cor. 1:26). In fact, with no offense to any intended, individually we probably range from the ordinary to the base, broken, and despised (1 Cor. 1:28). I certainly count myself in this range, and not at the top of it either! But though we may be individually unremarkable in terms of worldly endowments and attainments, we bear spiritual treasure in earthen vessels. When we come together as a people of the Lord, we make music with our lovingly blended hearts, hands, and voices that, I believe, moves the holy angels to wondrous and joyous amazement, while it pleases and glorifies our Lord.

This harmony of which I speak is not limited to our melodic congregational singing. It sounds forth in our warm, loving, and practically—even sacrificially—caring fellowship. The harmony is there in the growing deeds of benevolent service being performed by young and old in our body, as they reach out to near neighbors as well as to brethren and those without Christ in foreign nations. This music is made when our members hungering and thirsting for righteousness, raise a chorus of prayer asking the Lord to bless the preaching of His Word, and come to worship with faithful expectation of hearing the voice of God through the instrument of a poor man in the pulpit. The care and counsel we share with each other also carry their own tunes.

This rich, deep, and blessed unity that we enjoy, wherein our differences of capacity and giftedness blend into an exquisite harmony, certainly makes us very different from the badly divided, carnal, complacent, and loveless church at Corinth! This difference is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our sight.

However, music depends for its being upon some form of tension, friction, or percussion in order to produce the varying frequencies and amplitudes of sound wave vibrations of which the pitch, timbre, and volume of musical notes are composed. Music

also must have its pauses, as well as its holds and extensions of notes. We do well to recall this analogy when we are facing trials and afflictions, as a good number of Immanuel members are now doing. Our fear is that amidst our furnaces of affliction we shall grow sour due to our anguish. We are also inclined, as well as tempted, to feel that the pressure of persecutions and sufferings will mute the music of our souls' praise to our God. It will not be so.

Some of the sweetest music has been produced in and through some of the deepest and darkest seasons of believers' anguish. The psalms of David, composed when he fled from Saul's murderous persecution (e.g., Ps. 54, 56, 57) are among the most sweet and poignant musical productions of man. And whose ears could have taken in, without a profound moving of the soul, the sound of our Savior and His disciples singing just after the Last Supper? I have also wondered whether the praises Paul and Silas sang amidst the darkness of their Philippian dungeon, with all of their light and liberty, plans and hopes seeming to have been snuffed out, were not the sweetest sounds our God ever heard from any of His sons in Christ.

Our God, who is not only the theme and object of our songs of praise, but also the one who puts those songs into our mouths and hearts, sovereignly ordains our trials and triumphs as part of His orchestration of our praise. Our pains will not kill the music of our souls, but will serve to add depth and gravity to our singing and serving for God's glory. Let us strive to remember that there is a divine Master ordering all that we experience, so that our souls will produce ever sweeter, richer, and more wondrously textured motifs as the symphony of our corporate life together in Immanuel is being played.

Ever yours,

William Harrell