

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	98		Gary L.W. Johnson
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The Fifth Petition (Part IV)

Lords Day 51

Question 126. Which is the fifth petition?

Answer: "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners, our transgressions, nor that depravity, which always cleaves to us; (a) even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbour. (b)

(a) Ps.51:1 <<To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.>> Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Ps.51:2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Ps.51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Ps.51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Ps.51:5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Ps.51:6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Ps.51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Ps.143:2 And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. 1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Rom.8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (b) Matt.6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: Matt.6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

We are examining that part of the Lord’s Prayer that addresses “forgiveness,” and forgiveness in the biblical sense always involves guilt. What is guilt? Simply put, when the Bible speaks of guilt, it means liability to punishment. It is an objective condition and not merely a psychological (subjective) state of mind. Having said that, however, we must affirm that the feeling of guilt is a true, organic response of the body, triggered by the conscience. Your feelings, which are your perceptions of your own bodily state, pick up the emotion and register it as a miserable feeling. This subjective sense or feeling of guilt, however, as stated, is not, strictly speaking, what the Bible means by “guilt.” Guilt (REATUS POENAE is the old Latin phrase¹) is culpability that may be objectively considered by others and recognized by oneself. It is the state in which one finds himself before God and others when he has sinned – a state of liability to punishment.²

Perhaps no other place in Scripture captures this like Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, especially in the second Beatitude, “Blessed (lit. ‘happy’) are those who mourn.” Happy are those who mourn? Isn’t that like saying, “Healthy are those who are sick?” What an obvious

contradiction. “If the first beatitude cuts sharply across the ways of the world,” writes James Houston, “then this second saying follows hard on its heels. No one would ever naturally connect mourning with happiness.”³ The word translated “mourns” is PENTHEIN. It is one of the strongest words in the Greek language for mourning. Trench tells us that the word means “to grieve with a grief which so takes possession of the whole being that it cannot be hid.”⁴ Likewise, Barclay writes, “It is the sorrow which pierces the heart; it is no gently, sentimental, twilight sadness, in which a man can languish and luxuriate. It is sorrow which is poignant, piercing and intense.”⁵ The participial form of the verb heightens the state of the experience. It is not those who have mourned, but it is those who (now) mourn, and even more specifically (participially) it is those who are mourning.⁶ Whereas the Beatitude (poor in spirit) has more of a reference to something we know or recognize, thus more directly addressing our minds, the second Beatitude is concerned with our emotions. Furthermore, this attitude is one that is essential to those who are “poor in spirit.” We can only understand *this* mourning in *that* light.

I. THE NATURE OF THIS MOURNING

Not all mourning is encompassed in this beatitude (cf. II Corinthians 7:9-11; Hosea 7:14). There is a natural mourning resulting from loss. There is an envious mourning when people mourn because of the good of others. There is a selfish mourning when people either mourn for attention or because of self-pity. There is a devilish mourning when people mourn because they cannot satisfy their lusts. Finally, there is a desperate mourning when people mourn in despair. All people suffer grief at some point, but not all are blessed because they mourn.

A. Its Source. It stems from being poor in spirit. It cannot be severed from the first beatitude. “Because you know you are spiritually bankrupt, your emotion takes over, and you mourn that bankruptcy.”⁷

B. Its Substance. This mourning has a certain character and is suffered in a certain way. This mourning is needful and profitable. It is a sorrow never to be repented of. “When a man hath wept and blubbered,” wrote Richard Sibbes, “and spent a great deal of time in passionate tears, in cursed tears, in froward tears, in revengeful stomachful tears, he must blot out these tears with new tears; he must unweep this weeping, and undo this mourning because he hath thus mourned; he hath reason to repent of his sorrow.”⁸

NOTE: This mourning is not ostentatious (cf. Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:16). Luther wrote, “so also a man is said to ‘mourn and be sorrowful’ – not if his head is always drooping and his face is always sour and never smiling; but if he does not depend on having a good time and living it up, the way the world does, which yearns for nothing but having sheer joy and fun here, revels in it, and neither thinks nor cares about the state of God or men.”⁹

C. Its Cause. What are the objects of this mourning? It is directly linked with sin (cf. Psalms 32 and 51, where sin is mourned). Spiritual poverty is the result of sin. This sorrow is not only over personal sin but also “over the unhindered workings of the godless power of this world, whether one experiences this bodily or merely sees it raging about him. Those who truly hold to God’s Kingdom and His righteousness cannot behold this without grief.”¹⁰ Jesus’ blessing therefore embraces all mourners, even in earthly sorrow, who hope in God.¹¹

II. THE PROMISE TO THESE MOURNERS

“They shall be comforted.” The word translated “comforted” is PARAKALEIN (in the passive). The noun form is used of the Holy Spirit in John 14:15 (The Comforter). In addition

to comfort, the word also includes the thought to exhort or to encourage as well as to counsel.¹² Note the future aspect – “they *shall be* comforted.” Does not the Gospel promise forgiveness to the believing sinners? Yes, it does! There is the promise and comfort in knowing deliverance from the penalty of sin. There is also the promise of deliverance from the power of sin (Romans 6:11-14). But *all* Christians await their deliverance from the presence of sin (Romans 8:23).

CONCLUSION: Those who mourn their poverty of spirit do *not* become rich as a result.¹³ The Psalmist asks, “Who can understand the errors of his ways?” (Psalm 19:12). We are debtors and as such we have contracted the “retributive justice”¹⁴ of a Holy and righteous God. Our debts cover not only our actual personal sin, be they debts of omissions or commission, but also those traceable to ignorance and infirmities; sin, without limits and without number – and added to this is the biblical truth that we stand guilty before God due to original, imputed, and inherent sin. B.B. Warfield solemnly observed, “There is emphasized in this attitude the believer’s continued sinfulness in fact and in act; and his *continued* sense of his sinfulness. And this carries with it recognition of the necessity of unbroken penitence throughout life... The attitude of the miserable sinner is not only not one of despair; it is not even one of depression; and not even one of hesitation or doubt; hope is too weak a word to apply to it. It is an attitude of exultant joy. Only this joy has its ground not in ourselves but in our Savior. We are sinners, and we know ourselves to be sinners, lost and helpless in ourselves. But we are saved sinners; and it is our salvation which gives the tone of joy which swells in exact proportion to the sense we have of our ill-desert; for it is he whom much is forgiven who loves much, and who loving, rejoices much.”¹⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ REATUS POENAE: Liability to punishment; specifically, one of the two effects of sin. Sin has two immediate effects, (1) MACULA, or deformity of soul, and (2) REATUS, liability under transgressed law. Man is liable to POENA, since PECCATUM and the resultant MACULA constitute him as guilty before God. The medieval scholastics distinguished between REATUS POENAE and REATUS CULPAE, liability to guilt, on the assumption that the OBEDIENTIA CHRISTI satisfied for and removed only the CULPA, or guilt, of sin, leaving to man the work of temporal satisfaction of the POENA. The Protestant scholastics refuse to separate PEONA and CULPA in this manner, and therefore refuse to make a distinction between REATUS CULPAE and REATUS POENAE. Instead, they argue a single REATUS, or liability, on the basis of the fall, a liability to both guilt and punishment. This Protestant view rests on a revision of the doctrine of the OBEDIENTIA CHRISTI. cf. R.A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 258.

² Jay Adams helpfully remarks, “One may be guilty, yet free from such feelings. This is what Paul meant when he spoke of those who were ‘past feelings’ (Ephesians 4:19), who had ‘scared their consciences with a hot iron’ (I Timothy 4:2). By continually disregarding the pangs of conscience, such persons learn to live with them and at length they no longer feel them. Their consciences are like a piece of scar tissue cauterized to the point where it no longer experiences pain at all. Eventually conscience fails and no longer makes them aware of their guilt. Whenever I speak of ‘guilt’ in this book I mean ‘liability to punishment’ not the unpleasant feelings that accompany it. But realize that reconciliation postponed and repeatedly avoided can lead to the false peace of a cauterized conscience. Whether or not you feel a sense of guilt therefore, is quite irrelevant. The only question is, ‘Are you guilty?’ If you have wronged anyone by doing (or failing to do) something the Bible forbids (or commands), you are guilty – whether you feel like it or not.” *From Forgiveness to Forgiving* (Calvary Press, 2003), p. 163.

³ James Houston, *In Search of Happiness* (Lion, 190), p. 222.

⁴ R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 238.

⁵ W. Barclay, *The Beatitudes and The Lord’s Prayer for Everyman* (Harper & Row, 1964), p. 29.

⁶ F.D. Brunner, *The Christbook: A Historical/ Theological Commentary*, I (Word, 1987), p. 138.

⁷ J. MacArthur, Jr., *Kingdom Living Here and Now* (Moody, 1980), p. 60.

⁸ *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. A.B. Grosart, VI (rpt. James Nichol, 1863), p. 270.

⁹ *The Place of Trust: Martin Luther on the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. M.E. Marty (Harper & Row, 1983), p. 53.

¹⁰ H.N. Ridderbos, *Matthey: The Bible Student Commentary*, (rpt. Zondervan, 1987), p. 89.

¹¹ J.A. Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies*, trans. C.T. Lewis and M.R. Vincent, I (rpt. Kregel, 1971), p. 103.

¹² Jesus said, “ I will ask the Father, and He will give you *another* Counselor” (NIV), implying that they had one already, even Himself (cf. also I John 2:1). ‘Comforter’ in Hebrew (MeNaHem) is the name of the Messiah, and ‘to see consolation’ (NeHaMaH) is a frequent expression in rabbinical writings. cf. A.H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, (MacMillian, 1949), pp.50-51

¹³ “The mourning for sin that drives the soul to Christ, that is the blessing mourning; but when any man or woman satisfies themselves in their mourning, and thinks that because they mourn for sin God will accept them without having their hearts carried into Christ, this mourning will vanish and come to nothing.” Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints’ Happiness, Delivered In Divers Lectures On The Beatitudes*, (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1986), p. 49.

¹⁴ Retributive justice, which relates to the infliction of penalties. It is an expression of the divine wrath. While in a sinless world, there would be no place for its exercise, it necessarily holds, a very prominent place in a world full of sin. On the whole, the Bible stresses the reward of the righteous more than the punishment of the wicked; but even the latter is sufficiently prominent (Romans 1:32; 2:9; 12:19; II Thessalonians 1:8, and many other passages). It should be noted that while man does not merit the reward which he receives, he does merit the punishment which is meted out to him. Cf. Berkof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 75.

¹⁵ B.B. Warfield, “Miserable –Sinner Christianity in the Hands of Rationalists,” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, VII (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 144. I would encourage you to read this masterful article by one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church.