

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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WHOSE KINGDOM SHALL HAVE NO END

Albert Mohler, Jr. has recently written that, “Secularization exerts upon the church both passive and active pressure. The pressure is passive in that as society turns away from any semblance of a biblical morality, churches sacrifice confessional conviction on the altar of cultural relevance. But the pressure is also active in that it often makes explicit demands on the church to surrender its essential theological claims. In the last century, the demand was to abandon doctrines such as the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection in order to be considered intellectually respectable. In our times, the pressure often takes the form of demands to abandon a biblical, sexual morality in order to be considered morally acceptable. That deal, by the way, never works, even socially. The secular demand is eventually for the abandonment of all doctrines and teachings that conflict with the Spirit of the Age. But where churches abandon these teachings, the larger society does not. There is no external threat – even in a secular age – that can truly threaten the gospel of Christ, nor the eternal promises that Christ has made to his church. Indeed, Jesus’ promise to his disciples in Matthew 16:18 is this: *On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Not even death will truly threaten the promises of God in the gospel of Christ. The great threat we face is not to the church’s existence, but to its *faithfulness*. Nothing in the cosmos, not even the gale and torrent of a secular tide, will negate the promise of Christ for his church. But the church’s faithfulness is always at stake, and that is particularly true in a secular age. We must be aware, discerning, and careful in our thinking, our preaching, and how we raise our children. If people can be secularized within our churches, they can also be secularized while living in our homes – if we are not marked by conviction and faithfulness. . . . If not careful, churches will look less and less like churches and more and more like the secular world around them. In a sense, liberal theology begins to slowly replace orthodox faith. Or, in other cases, churches simply stop talking about or teaching important truths revealed in the Bible. As history revealed, hell just disappeared from the preaching of many churches, and no one seemed to notice. The same is true when it comes to many biblical teachings, ranging from divorce to the exclusivity of the gospel. In this respect, silence is decidedly *not* golden. The failure to teach truth eventually leads to failure of Christ’s people even to *know* the truth.”¹ Along a similar line, Os Guinness declared, “By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance; by our breathless chase after relevance without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have become not only unfaithful but irrelevant; by our determined efforts to redefine ourselves in ways that are more compelling to the modern world than are faithful to Christ, we have lost not only our identity but our authority and our relevance.”²

John Owen is rightly considered to be one of the greatest theologians of all time. One of his outstanding works in *The Glory of Christ*.³ This work was completed just before his death. In a letter dictated the day before he died, he wrote: “I am going to Him whom my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love; which is the whole ground of all my consolation . . . I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but whilst the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable . . . the promise stands invincible that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”⁴ Isaiah 42:8 declares, *I am the LORD, that is My Name; I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to graven images* (NASB). “His glory is

the manifestation of His nature, attributes and power (cf. John 1:14; 2:11). *My glory . . . My praise!* The revelation of His glory is designed to draw forth the praise of those to whom He reveals it. His glory and praise are incommunicable.”⁵ E. J. Young elaborates: “In the Semitic languages the name expresses the nature of a person. God is Yahweh, and when we understand what is signified by that word, we know what is the Name of God. There is obvious reflection upon the revelation of the name at Sinai. Until the time of the exodus God was known to His people as El Shaddai. At the time of the exodus, however, He gave to them a further revelation of His nature, which found expression in the word Yahweh. From a reading of Exodus 3 we learn that this word has to do with the eternity or aseity of God, and that it reveals this eternal God as the One who sovereignly chooses His people and performs for them an act of redemption. This covenant name is Yahweh, who has chosen the servant. Therefore, because God is the eternal One who has entered into covenant with His people, the truth stands unchangeable that the servant in whom the Lord delights will come to bring salvation to this people and to deliver them from their bondage. Inasmuch as the Name of the Lord is Yahweh, He will not give His glory to another. The reference here is to His essential glory, which He possesses in and of Himself. Were God to give His glory to another, He would be denying Himself, negating His own nature.”⁶

I. **THE GLORY OF THE SON.** The noted Dutch theologian Petrus Van Mastricht wrote, “in glory comes the celebration or manifestation of the eminence recognized through its brightness, which is more properly called glorification than glory. By it the inward eminence that has been recognized, together with its proper estimation, is made public and extolled. And this is done: (1) by God himself, as he glorifies himself, when he makes manifest the ineffable and incomprehensible preeminence of his essence in his attributes and operations (Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Lev. 10:3). (2) By the divine persons themselves, among themselves: thus the Father glorifies the Son (John 17:1), the Son in turn (as the radiance of his glory, Heb. 1:3) glorifies the Father (John 17:4; 8:49), and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14) and the Father, and thus he is called *the Spirit of glory and of God* (1 Peter 4:14). (3) By angels and men, when they make manifest their recognition, experience and estimation of the divine glory, and amplify and extol, as much as they can, that very eminence of God (Isa. 6:3; Luke 2:14; Ps. 8:1; Rev. 4:10-11). (4) By the Word of God, and especially the Word of the gospel, which accordingly is called the glorious gospel (2 Cor. 3:7-8), since it makes known to us the glorious attributes of God – his power, wisdom, grace, righteousness – and the glorious Son of God (Phil. 2:11). (5) By the works of God (Ps. 90:16; 111:3): of creation, preservation, and governance (Ps. 8; 19:1; 104:24, 31); especially by those exceptional works which we call miracles, inasmuch as in them the glory of the divine omnipotence appears more splendidly. But chiefly (6) by the operations of grace, in which he is concerned with his church. That entire counsel of peace, in which he decided to save the church, and that most wise economy, which he has brought forth in his governance; to what end do they point other than the glorification of God? *That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Phil. 2:11)? Accordingly the angels declare, *Glory to God in the highest!* (Luke 2:14). In particular, (a) the glory of mercy and of avenging justice shows itself in the eternal business of predestination (Eph. 1:5-6; Rom. 9:22-23). (b) The glory of wisdom, in his seeking out a way of deliverance that is harmonious with both justice and mercy, and indeed in distributing as it were the task that each person of the Trinity assumed to himself in this business of redemption, all because of which Paul exclaims, *Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* (Rom. 11:33), and the Savior is denominated the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:24). Again, (c) the glory of love and grace toward the world (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Furthermore, (d) the glory of holiness, by which he could not even tolerate our sins in his own Son, and thus rigidly punished them Rom 8:32). In addition, € the glory of avenging justice, by which he did not spare his own Son (Rom. 3:25). Therefore, for these and other reasons, the gospel is called the glorious gospel of the blessed God (1 Tim. 1:11), and the light of the glorious gospel of Christ is said to shine (2 Cor. 4:4).”⁷

II. **ENSIGNS OF HIS GLORY AND POWER.** “It is undeniable that the expectation of the Church is unique. This is because the message concerning Christ’s coming links the past with the future, as is shown in the doctrine of the *session*, which both refers back to the redemptive-historic past and points to the future. Scripture never depreciates the past when it deals with the future. In the Revelation of John the apocalyptic visions are replete with references to him who is the first begotten of the dead (Rev. 1:5) and who washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5). Christ is in the midst of the seven candlesticks as one like unto the Son of man (Rev. 1:13). He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5) who is worthy to open and to read the book of history, the Lamb who receives the adoration: *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood* (5:9, KJV; cf. 5:8, 12, 13; 7:10, 14, 17; cf. also 11:8; 12:11; 13:8). The eschatological imagery is replete with holy memories of the past, and everything is presented in the light of that which took place – the battle which was crowned with victory (12:5, 7ff.; 17:14), the following of the Lamb (14:4), the testimony of Jesus Christ (12:17), the song of the Lamb (15:3), the faith of Jesus (14:12), the marriage of the Lamb (19:7), the bride of the Lamb (21:9), the apostles of the Lamb (21:14), and the Lamb’s book of life (21:27). Here the expectation of a glorious future is permanently safeguarded against the threat of a vague ahistoric longing for a better world. This expectation is deeply rooted in history and derives its strength from what became historic reality in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁸We read in Revelation 5:9 and 12 that the Lamb is *worthy* to receive adoration and praise. The grounds for this is His death and the blessings this has brought His people. He possesses power and wisdom to accomplish salvation. This echoes Isaiah 52:13 where we are told that the suffering Servant of the LORD *will act wisely*.

- A. **Worthy to Receive Authority.** In Matthew 28:18, Jesus declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Note that this was said *prior* to His ascension.
- B. **Worthy of Riches.** Wealth is associated with royalty. He has obtained an inheritance because He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1-4).⁹
- C. **Worthy to Receive Strength.** He not only has the authority, He has the power to rule as King. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, but notice how this is connected in Acts 2:33 with the outpourings of the Holy Spirit.
- D. **Worthy of Honor and Glory.** Honor is due Him. Glory was His before the foundation of the world (John 17:1-5).

III. **THE THRONE.** The Greek word *thronos* is used sixty-two times in the New Testament and forty-seven are found in Revelation. The word denotes a royal throne with emphasis on God’s power, majesty and authority. “The special nature of God’s kingship is seen in the awesome throne-vision of Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-13; cf. also 1 Kings 22:19), but most clearly in Ezek 1:4-28. Here Yahweh’s kingly power is seen under the symbolism of transcendent creatures, representing the world rule of their Lord. They each have four faces, representing God’s omnipresence, and face the world, while above their outspread wings, *sparkling like crystal, and awesome* (1:22), stands the vault of heaven. It is above this world, that is to say, entirely and inaccessibly out of human reach, that God’s throne is seen, surrounded by an unearthly brightness. Here is a pictorial rather than conceptual description of the sheer transcendence of God and of his omnipresence in the world.”¹⁰ Aune points out that the term *throne* (which can be used by figurative extension, to mean a *ruling power* or a *supernatural force or power*) is used in this context as a circumlocution for the name of God, as in Rev. 7:3; 8:9. The *throne of grace* (Heb. 4:16) and the *throne of majesty* (Heb 8:1) are likewise circumlocution for the name of God.¹¹

CONCLUSION: The saying “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” may have been coined to describe the Roman Caesars. The Roman historian Suetonius (70 AD-130 AD) chronicled the lives of these men in his work *The Twelve Caesars*.¹² The degree of depravity that characterized *all* of them is horrific to read. Some, like Nero and Caligula, were among the worst. Christ’s reign is totally different.

Thomas Oden writes, “In the spiritual community he brought forth, Christ does what governors and rulers do: *gubernatio* (governance, rulership, guidance) and *defensio* (protecting, guarding from harm), yet without coercion. He guides by his Word and guards by his Spirit. Through this guiding and guarding activity, Christ orders, directs, and preserves the church (Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, FC 49, pp. 298-300); Bucer, *De Regno Christi*, LCC XIX, pp. 177ff., 262ff.). *The royal office is to rule and preserve the church* (Wollebius, CTC 17, RDB, p. 98). Although masculine images predominate in traditional regal language, classic exegetes were able to use feminine images, especially in the protecting role of Christ as ruler. Luther spoke of the ascended Christ as a *Shelter, beneath whom we hide ourselves as young chicks do under the wings of the clucking hen* (*Serm. On John 15:23-30*, 1522, WLS I, p. 150; WA 10 III, 136f.). The benefits conferred by Christ’s kingdom were summarized by Calvin: *we are accorded freedom of conscience for pious and holy living, are provided with his spiritual riches, and also armed with strength sufficient to overcome the perpetual enemies of our souls* (Calvin, *Catech. Of the Church of Geneva* LCC XXII, p. 96). *Such is the nature of his rule, that he shares with us all that he has received from the Father. Now he arms and equips us with his power, adorns us with his beauty and magnificence, enriches us with his wealth* (Calvin, *Inst.* 2.15.4).”¹³

ENDNOTES

¹ R. A. Mohler, Jr., *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture and the Church* (Nelson Books, 2020), p. 21.

² Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Baker, 2003), p. 15.

³ Owen’s works have been reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in 23 volumes. “Meditation and Discourse on the Glory of Christ” is found in Volume 1. This has also been reprinted and revised by Christian Focus Publication under the title *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace*, with a preface by Sinclair Ferguson (2004).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵ W. E. Vine, *Expository Commentary on Isaiah* (rpt. Nelson, 1997), p. 95.

⁶ E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* III (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 122.

⁷ P. Van Mastricht, *Theoretical Practical Theology: Faith In The Triune God* (rpt. Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), p. 474.

⁸ G. C. Berkhouwer, *Studies In Dogmatics: The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 247.

⁹ The Bible does not allow wealth and riches to be monopolized by the type of crass materialism that permeates our society. Listen to this summary to Moulton: “*Ploutos* comes from the same root as the Greek verb *pimplemi*, I fill, and is connected etymologically with the Latin word from which *plenty* comes, with the Sanskrit *purnam*, and with the English *fill*. And it is true that we are made far more rich, full, complete (another word from the same root) on the spiritual level than we can ever be on the material. The New Testament therefore uses our series of words for riches thirty times in a spiritual sense.” H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1977), p. 202.

¹⁰ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* II, ed. Moises Silva (Zondervan, 2014), p. 469.

¹¹ D. Aune, *Revelation: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1997), p. 309.

¹² Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves. Revised with an Introduction and Notes by J. B. River (Penguin Books, 1957).

¹³ T. C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology* II (Harper Collins, 1989), p. 515.