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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 10

After describing the glorious gospel by which we were saved in Romans 8, Paul enters into a details description of the *benefits that flow from a saving relationship with God*. One of those benefits is that the Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer.

Romans 8:26, "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness [having made this wonderful statement, Paul goes on to describe where as Christians we are most weak: in approaching an infinite, eternal, and unchanging Being...]; for we do not know how to pray as we should..."

Paul then goes on to describe how the Spirit helps us in our praying:

Romans 8:26b-27, "...but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God.*"

Yet this is not the only way the Spirit helps us when it comes to prayer. Throughout the Bible there are examples and teachings on prayer and Daniels 9 is one of them.

Thus far we have seen that prayer begins with confession.

Daniel 9:4a, "And I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said..."

Recall that the word "confess" in this passage primarily means to "acknowledge" something- here it is to acknowledge what God says about our sin. There are at least three things that God has said about our sin:

1. What we've done is wrong (v. 5)
2. Sin is heinous in His sight/it offends Him (v. 8),
3. It is our fault (vv. 11ff)!

Most Christians will admit the first two. It is the last one where we get hung up. We tend to blame others for our sin. We like to blame others: *I'd be more godly if it wasn't for my spouse!* Or perhaps, *I wouldn't have done that had they not done this!* All of this falls short of biblical confession which no doubt is why so many in conflict flounder in their walks. The apostle John put it this way:

1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin [if we don't confess our sin and so take responsibility for it], we are deceiving ourselves..."

Clearly, Daniel here was NOT self-deceived. He knew that the trial and difficulty that God's people currently were in was on account of their national rebellion. And so he confessed this and much more! We've seen the first two sins he confessed:

- He and God's People were Guilty of Active Rebellion against the Lord
- He and God's People were Guilty of Violating the Natural Order of Things

And this brings us to the third sin that Daniel confessed: that he and God's people stood guilty before God and thus they were condemned.

- Guilty before God and so Condemned

Daniel 9:5, "We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly..."

The word for “acted wickedly” is רָשָׁעַ (rāšā ‘) in the Hiphil theme means “to be condemned as guilty.” The focus isn’t so much on what Israel did, but what they were before the Lord. They stood condemned! And so if God gave them what was just, it would have been wrath and judgment! Notice how he expounds upon this.

Daniel 9:8-10, “Open shame belongs to us, O Lord [in other words, we stand guilty before God and therefore are deserving of public shame, judgment, wrath], to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness [as such God deserves our worship, reverence, and obedience, but...] ...we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets.”

You can’t miss it. The people of God stood guilty and therefore culpable before God. In other words, they are as the condemned and sentenced criminal awaiting execution! In this event, defense and vindication are not the focus. What is the focus is the terrifying expectation and anticipation of the execution of judgment. That is how Daniel pictured the nation.

This is why it is so amazing that we ever could be angry with God on account of a bitter providence. All of us on account of our sin are as the condemned and sentenced criminal awaiting execution. So how could we ever complain? In the words of Jeremiah:

Lamentations 3:39, “Why should *any* living mortal, or *any* man, offer complaint in view of his sins?”

Yet we do complain, don’t we? Sometimes we even can be heard saying, “*I just want what is coming to me... what I’ve earned through my sacrifice and service!*” We give very little thought to the fact that the only thing we have ever earned is death on account of our sin (Romans 6:23)! Accordingly, true confession involves the recognition that:

- We have a disposition that is in rebellion against God.
- In our sin we have twisted the natural order of things thinking that God and this world exists for our good and pleasure and not we for them!
- On account of our sin, we stand guilty before God and therefore have a judicial right to wrath, sorrow, sickness, injury, and death!

4. He and God’s People were Guilty of Violating COVENANT Law

Notice Daniel’s fourth confession that he and God’s people were guilty of violating covenant law.

Daniel 9:5, “We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled...”

The idea behind this word is covenant rebellion (מָרָד [mārad]). It does denote an active transgressing of God's word, BUT it is a loaded term. Notice that the law that is transgressed is that which was given in the context of a love-relationship; a covenantal bond/commitment! As such, all rebellion brings with it such ideas as betrayal, disloyalty, and treachery; that is the idea behind this word! Notice how Daniel explained this.

Daniel 9:6, "Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets [genuine prophets were raised up by a loving God to speak to His covenant treasures- His people! As such, they are His servants and so His hands, feet, mouth, and voice...], who spoke in Thy name [IOW, they did not speak their own opinion, but that of God's covenant will!] to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land."

Daniel is piling on the indictment here. Do you understand how heinous our sin is? God's will/word are not the decrees of a lofty Being who sits on high caring little if nothing for His people. Rather, God's word represents the covenant desire of a bridegroom who only wills that which is best for His people! Listen to how Christ describes this treachery in Mark:

Mark 12:1-8: "And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard, and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey [at the time, this would have been viewed as quite a nice plantation made to rent out to a groups of vine-growers the owner didn't know- the focus here is on his generosity!]. And at the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive *some* of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. And they took him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and that one they killed; and *so with* many others, beating some, and killing others. He had one more *to send*, a beloved son; he sent him last *of all* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' And they took him, and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard."

Do you look at your sin in this light? It is always committed on the part of a people in covenant with a gracious and loving God! It is NOT just a violation of God's law, BUT involves the killing of His Son, over and over again! Accordingly, it is treacherous and heinous! It always is the action of a lover betraying their beloved. That is the emphasis here!

5. He and God's People were Guilty of Neglecting God's Word

Finally notice that Daniel confessed that he and God's people were guilty of neglecting God's word.

Daniels 9:5, "We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Thy commandments and ordinances."

This speaks of purposed neglect of God's word. The individual here NOT only does not read the word of God, BUT what he knows he purposely sets aside. Daniel expounded upon this further:

Daniel 9:11, "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him."

William Ernest Henley's poem "Invictus" (which is Latin for "Unconquered") is shocking how arrogant and brazenly rebellious it is against God, His Majesty, and His word!

OUT of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance 5
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbow'd.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade, 10
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate: 15

I am the captain of my soul. (Arthur Quiller-Couch, 1919, p. 1084)

Some of you may know that this poem is what Timothy McVey recited when asked his final words! *Talk about an arrogant way to go to hell!* And yet, it was this very sin that Daniel confessed on behalf of his people here! Christian, let this humble you! If we truly are going to confess our sin to the Lord, we must be honest! Every time we willingly sin we quote this poem to the Lord! Truly, in the words of Nathan to David, "Thou art the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7)

And so if you are going to "set your heart" to prayer; if you are going to work at being a prayer warrior, let me encourage you that when you come to that portion of the Lord's Prayer where you say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors..." use the pattern that Daniel set down here. True confession, based on this passage, involves a recognition that:

- We are Guilty of Active Rebellion against the Lord- this is our disposition
- We are Guilty of Violating the Natural Order of Things- ultimately making God our

servant and we not HisWe Stand Guilty before God and so Condemned

- We are Guilty of Treachery in the 10th degree- Violating God's Covenant Law
- We are Guilty of Neglecting- setting at naught- God's Word

Let us look at what Daniel asked of the Lord as he and the nation remained in the Valley. What he prayed for stands out not only because of what he prayed, but also because of what he didn't pray!

Reconciliation

Daniel 9:16, "O Lord, in accordance with all Thy righteous acts, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people *have become* a reproach to all those around us."

Plain and simple, this is a prayer for God to be reconciled with His people. Recall that the doctrine of reconciliation involves the removal of God's wrath from His people and thus the restoration of their relationship. Now in this definition, we tend to stress the "restoration" part so much that we often think of reconciliation as God and man coming to terms, burying the hatchet, and so now able to get along. Yet I remind you: God did nothing to offend or alienate man! Accordingly, reconciliation has very little to do with man, and everything to do with God and His wrath/alienation on account of our sin. This is why Daniel first asked of God, "...let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away..."

And yet there is more to this passage. Notice the phrase at the beginning, "...in accordance with all Thy righteous acts, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away..." This seems like an odd way of asking for forgiveness. Isn't it God's righteousness that demands our punishment when we sin? Isn't it because God is just that men go to hell? And yet Daniel roots the basis of his request for reconciliation in God's righteousness/justice! How can this be? Paul describes it this way speaking of Christ on the cross:

Romans 3:25-26, "Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

This text is written in the problem/solution motif. The problem is this: Forgiveness/God's Forbearance! As much as we love the doctrine that God forgives sin, by itself it really is NOT good news! For while God might forgive our sin, justice demands our death! Accordingly, for God to forgive our sin, in the words of the text before us, "...to pass over the sins previously committed..."- He must violate His justice! In other words, to forgive us He would have to act in an unrighteous way. This again is NOT good news! An unrighteous god is not something we want to be around. But herein is the beauty of the cross of Christ and so the solution to the

apparent problem is found in how God can forgive our sin and yet NOT violate His righteousness, and this is found in an exchange!

If God somehow could find a righteous person who had never sinned and at the time of execution give that person's life in the place of the sinner, forgiveness could be given and justice satisfied! The problem is that no such "righteous person" could be found among man- "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). So what did God do? He Himself became man, Jesus Christ, fulfilled the law perfectly, and then offered Himself up in our place!

Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law..."

That is what Paul is describing in Romans 3.

Romans 3:25-26, [On the cross] "God displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation [a wrath-removing sacrifice] in His blood through faith. [Why?] *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness [His justice], because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that [through the cross] He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Isn't that amazing? Outside of Christ, justice demands that God condemn the guilty sinner! And yet because of the cross of Christ, justice now demands that God forgive all in Christ Jesus! It is this that Daniel roots the reconciliation for which he prayed here:

Daniel 9:16, "O Lord, in accordance with all Thy righteous acts, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away from Thy city Jerusalem..."

That is why Daniel continued to lay so much stress here on the guilt of God's people and so the ultimate cause for why they were suffering, "...for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people *have become* a reproach to all those around us." He wanted God's people to understand that their forgiveness was based NOT on anything they had or could do, BUT on the Justice of God! Did you get that? It is NOT the genuineness of your prayers that brings about forgiveness- or even the fact that you asked- BUT the cross-work of Christ by which He paid for your sin!

And so in the crucible, Daniel did NOT pray for God to turn down the heat. RATHER, his first concern was the reconciliation and so the restoration of the relationship God had with His people! And honestly, isn't that what we want? Would you rather live in a paradise without God or a wilderness with the Lord? Actually God's people were faced with such an option to which Moses prayed while in the desert, Moses responded to God's command to lead the people to the Promised Land saying this:

Exodus 33:15, “Thy presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here.”

In the words of Samuel Rutherford:

Nay, whether God come to His children with a rod or a crown, if He come Himself with it, it is well. Welcome, welcome, Jesus, what way soever Thou come, if we can get a sight of Thee! And sure I am, it is better to be sick, providing Christ come to the bedside and draw by the curtains, and say, ‘Courage, I am Thy salvation,’ than to enjoy health, being lusty and strong, and never to be visited of God. (Rutherford, 2006, p. 367)

This brings us to the second petition covenant blessing.

Covenant Blessing

Daniel 9:17-18a, “So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary. O my God, incline Thine ear and hear...”

For God’s face to “shine on His sanctuary” is for God’s covenant presence to abide in and amongst His people. In the context of the Exodus alone God’s presence, as signified by the pillar of cloud and fire, represented nothing less than

- Protection, Exodus 14:10, 14, 19-20, 24-25.
- Guidance, Exodus 13:18, 21.
- A source of great encouragement, Exodus 14:30-31.
- A sign of the uniqueness of God’s people, Exodus 33:16.
- And ultimately, INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP, Exodus 33:9-10.

In fact throughout the Old Testament the “presence” of the Lord- the face of God shining on His people denoted DEEP, COVENANTAL COMMUNION/FELLOWSHIP listen to the Aaronic Benediction:

Numbers 6:24-26, “The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.”

What is the result of God’s face “shining on us”? Blessing, spiritual provision, grace and peace! Asaph prayed this:

Psalm 80:18b-19, “Revive us, and we will call upon Thy name. O Lord God of hosts, restore us; cause Thy face to shine *upon us*, and we will be saved.”

The idea behind this is NOT salvation from sin, BUT sanctification and so the spiritual welfare of

God's people in which they would be "revived" and "restored"! Speaking of God's saving activity among His people Isaiah said this:

Isaiah 63:9, "In all their affliction He [God] was afflicted, and the ANGEL OF HIS PRESENCE [which is one and the same as "God's face shining on them"] saved them; and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old."

Implied in each one of these passages is a unique relationship in which God personally fellowships with His people and so blesses them NOT according to the standards of this world, BUT that of the next! This, not our salvation, but this Covenant Presence is what is forfeited when the believer chooses sin over God. The Puritans called it, "A Dark Night of the Soul." And this was Daniel's second concern while in the valley! Again notice, it wasn't the cessation of the trials and difficulties of life, but the restoration of God's Covenant Presence and so the blessings of the Lord which makes "the valley of Baca a spring" (Psalm 84:6)! In the words of Asaph notice:

Psalm 73:28, "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works."

Before any prayers for offered on behalf of the situations of life, Daniel prayed first for the restoration of the relationship God's people had with God. When we sin, it is that which is compromised. Accordingly when the trials and difficulties of life come upon us, it typically is that which is first to go. So before we rightly pray for "kings in authority" (1 Timothy 2:2) or any other temporal issue, let us be most concerned about our relationship with the King of kings! That clearly was the chief concern of Daniel as he prayed on behalf of the nation. In the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, "Our restless spirits yearn for thee, where'er our changeful lot is cast. Glad when thy gracious smile we see, blest when our faith can hold thee fast." (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 646)

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