



Glasgow RPCS Newsletter



DECEMBER 2017

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Worship Services:

Lord's Day Morning: 11am
 Lord's Day Evening: 6pm
 Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 7.30pm
 Saturday Prayer Meeting: 7pm

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Upcoming Events

Friday 5th Jan 2018: Congregational Buffet

→ Church upper-hall, 7pm

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 Visit our Facebook page

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Minister's Article

Addressing God in Prayer (Part 2 of 2)

Last month, we began looking at how we should address God in prayer. Or, to be more precise, we began examining whether we should use the old English pronouns ('thee', 'thou' and 'thine') when we address God directly.

As I stated then, I am conscious that it is difficult to address practice in prayer without running the risk of giving offence and I write with the prayer that needless offence will neither be given nor taken. However, the question is one that does need to be addressed: I wrote last time how, within the last few months, I overheard one person say to another that he could not enter into the spirit of any prayer in which God was addressed as 'you' while, on another occasion, I was asked why I did not use 'thou' in addressing God in prayer. Clearly, then, it is an issue which needs to be addressed—but, again, I want to stress that my intention in doing so is to defend those who avoid using the old pronouns rather than attack those who do.

You will remember from last month that those who wish to preserve the old pronouns in prayer as a matter of principle (as opposed to those who continue to use them out of habit or custom) tend to use three arguments in doing so. The first, and by far the most common, has to do with reverence and we considered that argument last time. The second has to do with accuracy.

Argument from Accuracy

This argument is one which has only recently begun to be used but is now quite commonly advanced – and, I suspect, tends to be used increasingly by those who feel that the argument on grounds of reverence is rather weak. The argument is that the old pronouns reflect more faithfully the distinction between singular and plural in the Bible.

And, clearly, they do. This singular/plural distinction is, sadly, lost in modern scripture translations—although, most of the time, the context makes plain whether an individual or a group is being addressed. But not always. For example, in Isaiah 7:10-14, the Lord says to Ahaz, 'Ask *thee* a sign of the LORD *thy* God'. Shortly afterwards, when the Lord announces the sign, he says, 'therefore the Lord himself shall give *you* a sign'. Here, the use of 'thee' and 'thy' highlights that it is Ahaz alone who asks for a sign but the later use of 'you' informs us that the sign will be given to a group of people. Similarly, in Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says to Peter, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have *you*, that he may sift *you* as wheat: but I have prayed

for *thee*, that *thy* faith fail not'. Here, the plural 'you' tells us that Satan's desire was to sift all the disciples but the later use of 'thee' tells us that Christ's particular intercession was for Peter alone.

In both these cases—and there are others—the difference between the singular and the plural is not reflected in modern English speech or translation due to the adoption of 'you' in contemporary English language for both singular and plural.

Now, certainly, there is a case for these changes from plural to singular, and back again, being reflected in our English translations. However, that does not lead us to conclude that an English version of scripture should be clothed forever in the language of the 17th century. For example, when the context is unclear, all that would be required is something like an asterisk to indicate the singular usage. So, to take the second example above, it could appear in our translation like this 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you*, that he may sift you* as wheat: but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not'. In this way, at the bottom of every page, a little note would read: *you* denotes plural form*. That is quite straight-forward really. Those who would say it is rather cumbersome need to acknowledge that it is much more straightforward than providing glossaries at the back of King James Bibles containing definitions of hundreds, if not thousands, of archaic words.

Should this issue of accuracy, however, affect our prayers?

First, it needs to be understood that the use of 'you', in ordinary language, has now *completely replaced* the use of 'thou'. No one says 'How art thou?' or 'How are thou?' In other words, the ordinary recognised form of address in the second person singular is now 'you' and not 'thou'.

Second, the reason for the pronoun mutation had nothing to do with a deliberate desire to confuse singleness and plurality. As is the case with so many linguistic mutations, it just happened. And, crucially, there is no realistic possibility of deception involved in its use. In other words, no-one walking into a prayer meeting and hearing someone address God as 'you' would dream that the person praying was a polytheist addressing a plurality of Gods. To put it simply, and fairly, 'you' is now just the ordinary, recognised—and *accurate*—form of address to a single individual. On that ground, it is certainly accurate to use it in addressing God in prayer.

Third, it should be noted that, in order to be consistent, those who believe that '*thou*' should be used in addressing an individual, on the ground of accuracy in language, should also use it in

ordinary, everyday conversation when addressing any individual—for the same reason. If accuracy matters, then it matters.

Fourth, it should be noted that the requirement for accuracy cuts both ways. After all, some people find it difficult to preserve accuracy when using these pronouns! Although the sincerity of prayers which use poor grammar is not to be questioned and the content of such prayers most certainly not to be despised, it has to be acknowledged that reverence is bound up with many other concepts in scripture, not the least of which is beauty—as is reflected in the words of the Psalmist who speaks of the ‘beauty of holiness’. Certainly, making all due allowance for varying levels of giftedness and ability, all our public prayers should strive, in a non-artificial way, towards beauty and accuracy in both thought and expression—is this not held to be one of the main virtues of the King James Version as a translation?

But what, then, are we to make of some prayers which, in their attempts to be reverent through use of old pronouns—which those who offer them often feel forced to use—end up effectively mutilating the English language into forms never seen before and not current today? For example, ‘We pray that *thou would* grant us grace’ or, ‘*thou knoweth*, O Lord’—such forms are true to no correct usage past or present. (For the record, the former petition should be ‘We pray that *thou wouldst* grant us grace’ while the second should be ‘*thou knowest*, O Lord’). If people are to insist on these forms, *on the ground of accuracy*, then surely they should insist on *using them accurately* and should expend some effort in order to learn the correct accompanying verbal forms—for example, the difference between ‘would’ and ‘wouldst’, between ‘doth’, ‘doeth’ and ‘dost’, and between ‘knoweth’ and ‘knowest’.

But, does anyone speak like this? And does anyone really want to? And, crucially, does anyone really believe that they ought to?

If someone wished to quote Psalm 17:3 in prayer, would it not be more sensible to say ‘You proved my heart, you visited me by night, you tried me’ than to say ‘Thou prov’dst mine heart, thou visit’dst me by night, thou didst me try’? This difficulty is more serious than it might appear. A recent convert, having little or no knowledge of these forms, would be seriously intimidated at the thought of having to use them in public prayer and some more nervous dispositions would possibly stumble altogether. Now, admittedly, there are many things we need to get on with learning and doing for Christ’s sake – but is acquiring the knowledge of 17th century verbal forms and their correct usage, in order to pray publicly, one of them? And has anyone, including a church leader, the right to bind such a burden on someone else’s back?

We conclude, then, that the need to be accurate in our words and prayers is not a ground for

retaining the old English pronouns in our prayers.

Argument from Offence

The third and final argument for the use of these old pronouns is that failing to use them gives offence to those who believe they should be used on the grounds of reverence or accuracy.

Sadly, although the concept of giving offence is a really important one and one which is either altogether neglected or misunderstood in the modern church, I fear it is used too often in more conservative circles as the last line of defence when all other arguments fail – something along the lines of ‘I can’t give a good reason why I’m offended – but I am’.

After all, we need to recognise here that *the practice of not using old pronouns only continues to give offence because it continues to be taught by some as being an irreverent thing to do!* Why else would anyone be offended at it? In other words, if it ceased to be portrayed and taught as being an irreverent thing to do, it would immediately cease to give offence.

Furthermore, just as there is a duty not to give offence, so there is a duty not to be needlessly offended. Do we have a *plausible* biblical reason for being offended when someone addresses God as ‘you’ rather than ‘thou’?

In any case, appealing to the duty not to offend the ‘weaker brother’ has its limitations. For example, if anyone genuinely believed himself to be a weaker brother in this area, why is he *still* a weaker brother? The moment anyone knows himself to be a weaker brother, he cannot, on biblical grounds, be a weaker brother any longer. Why? Because once anyone comes to realise that their position reflects ‘weakness’ in their understanding and that their viewpoint is, effectively, a scruple of conscience, then it follows that they ought not to be offended anymore by the contrary behaviour of one whom they now realise to be a ‘stronger brother’.

Again, it is important to realise that even genuinely weaker brethren do not have the right to bind the church, everywhere and forever, to their scruples – think of the consequences if that were to be the case! 1 Corinthians 8-10 is constantly misunderstood and misapplied in discussions regarding Christian liberty. According to Paul, certainly, in their state of initial ignorance, the scruples of the weaker brethren are to be lovingly and tenderly dealt with – but the context and development of the Apostle’s argument makes very plain that they are to be *taught out* of their scruples of conscience and into a full recognition of the truth and obedience to it.

In case this seems an abstract point, it is as well to take another real instance – one which is relevant to many Christians and highlights the matter at stake: *Should the Lord's people forever to be denied the use of proper wine in the Lord's Supper – which the Lord commanded to be used – on the ground that the conscience of some weaker brethren will not allow them to participate in an alcoholic beverage?* Surely everyone, in such a case, can see that the weakness of understanding on the part of a weaker brother is not to determine the conduct of the Christian or the Church in all cases for all time?

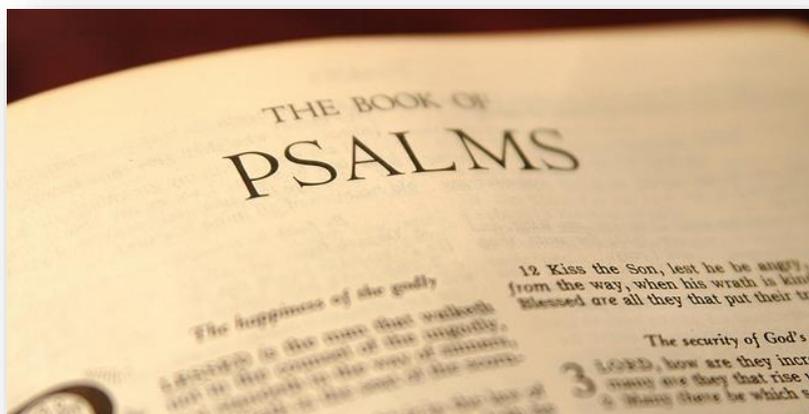
Conclusion

We conclude, then, that the requirements of reverence, accuracy and offence do not necessitate using old pronouns in prayer. Furthermore, because the use of special pronouns for exclusive use in addressing God is *a relatively recent human tradition* and one which *runs counter to Biblical usage* and *hinders many in prayer*, and is *unnecessary*, the facts of the case ought to be patiently taught and, while being graciously considerate towards those who have long used them out of custom, their use ought to be gently and lovingly discouraged among newer converts.

Rev. Kenneth Stewart

Spotlight On...

Psalmody Class



On a biweekly basis—before the Lord’s Day evening service—some of the congregation meet to learn new Psalm tunes and improve their singing of the more familiar, better-known tunes. The class is led by a member of the congregation who is a qualified music teacher and a very helpful guide—particularly to those of us who are less musically inclined!

We usually focus on two tunes per week, then periodically revise what we have done in previous classes. After the given tunes for the class are introduced, the men and women usually split to focus on their respective parts (bass/tenor for the men, and soprano/alto for the women), before congregating to sing the tunes in harmony.

Obviously singing in parts comes more naturally to some than others, but like anything, the more one works at it, the easier it becomes. While there is still much room for improvement, we have seen noticeable progress in our Psalm-singing since the class began, and are thankful to those who have been leading us for all their efforts.

With such a class there is the obvious danger of becoming so focused upon the tune that one does not give due consideration to the words of the Psalm being sung. While this is something to be wary of, it does not mean we should not seek to improve our singing of the songs of praise God has given us. The Psalms are indeed a great gift from God. As we seek to glorify Him in our lives, through the Psalms we are able to sing praise to His name and speak of all His gracious benefits. Regardless of how gifted we may or may not be in our singing voices, it is important to remember that the Lord has given us these voices—shall we not then use them, and seek to improve our use of them, in ascribing to Him the praise, honour and glory that is due?

“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised” (Psalm 145:3)

Insight into...

Resolutions

The turn of a year often brings talk of resolutions, whereby people seek to change or adapt a certain aspect of their lives. Often such 'resolutions' lack both substance and longevity. In 'Resolved', Steven Lawson uses Jonathan Edwards' example to highlight a resolution that should underpin the lives of all the Lords' people. (source: Ligonier Ministries, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/resolved/>)

For the last four years, I have spoken at a conference on the West Coast called "Resolved." The name is drawn from the Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards and is aimed at college students and "twenty-somethings" in the next generation. As an eighteen and nineteen-year old, young Edwards wrote seventy resolutions, which became his personal mission statement to guide his life. To launch the first conference, I spoke from Edward's first resolution, what Edwards determined would be the single most important pursuit in his life—the glory of God.

Edwards began his Resolutions with what he desired to be the driving force of his life—an all-absorbing passion to pursue the glory of God. "Resolved: that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory and to my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved: to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved: to do this whatever difficulties I meet with, how ever so many and how ever so great."

With this before his eyes weekly, this first resolution set the tone for his entire life. In every arena, he resolved to honor God supremely. Everything else in his life would be subsidiary to this one driving pursuit.

What is the glory of God? The Bible speaks of it in two ways. First, there is His intrinsic glory, the revelation of all that God is. It is the sum total of all His divine perfections and holy attributes. There is nothing that man can do to add to His intrinsic glory. Second, there is God's ascribed glory, which is the praise and honor due His name. This is the glory that man must give to God.

For Edwards, to be resolved to live for God's glory means to exalt His most glorious name. It means to live consistently with His holy character. It means to proclaim and promote His supreme greatness. This is the highest purpose for which God created us.

Why did Edwards place this resolution first? He understood that Scripture places the glory of God first in all things. Edwards was gripped with a transcendent, high view of God. As a result, in writing his "resolutions," he knew he must live wholeheartedly for this awesome, sovereign God.

Thus, Edwards intentionally chose to "do whatsoever I think is most to God's glory." Here is the interpretive principle for everything in life. You want to know what God's will is? You want to know whom to marry? You want to know what job to take? You want to know what ministry to pursue? You want to know how to invest your resources? You want to know how to spend your time?

There it is! Everything in life fits under this master theme. Anything out of alignment with this principle pursuit is in dangerous territory. Sometimes our decisions are not between right and wrong. Sometimes they are between good, better, and best. These are sometimes the hardest decisions. Edwards said that he would not live for what is merely good. Nor for what is better. He purposed to live only for what is best. Whatever is most to the glory of God—that is what is best!

Edwards believed that God's glory was inseparably connected with his "own good, profit, and pleasure." Whenever he sought God's glory, he was confident that it would inevitably yield God's greatest good for his life. The glory of God produced his greatest "pleasure". So it is with us. Would you know unspeakable joy? Abundant peace? True contentment? Then pursue God's glory.

With unwavering determination, young Edwards chose this first resolution to mark "the whole of my duration." As long as he was alive, this was to be the driving thrust of his life. He must always live for God's glory. He would never outgrow this central theme. He must never exchange it for a lesser glory.

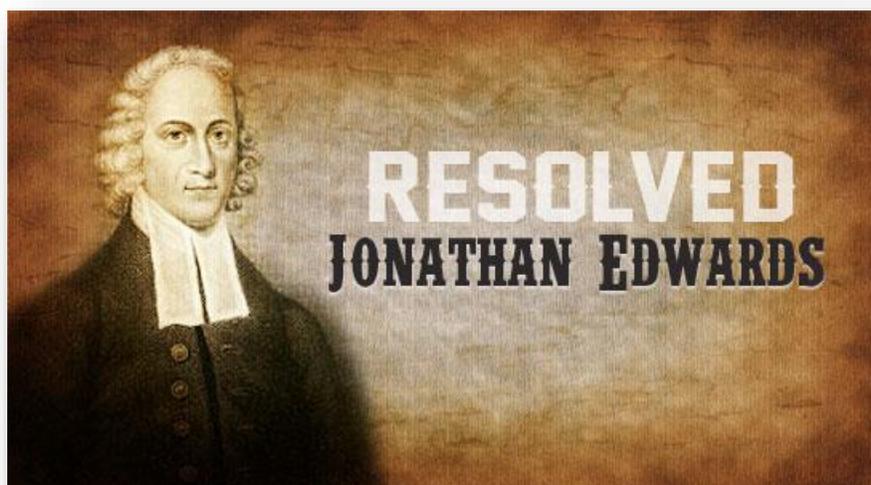
Also, Edwards' believed that his commitment to God's glory would bring the greatest "good of mankind." By seeking God's honor, the greatest advantage would accrue to others. Thus, living for the glory of God would lead to the greatest influence of the Gospel upon the world. Souls would be converted. Saints would be edified. Needs would be met.

Would you have maximum impact upon this world? Would you lead others to Christ? Would you live for eternity? There it is! Live for God's glory.

No matter what, Edwards resolved to live for God's glory despite "whatever difficulties I meet with, how ever so many and ever so great." Regardless the cost, despite the pain, he would pursue God's honor. Even if it meant persecution or poverty, his mind was made up, his will resolved. He would pay any price to uphold the glory of God, regardless of the hardship that awaited him.

This is my challenge to the next generation: Would you seek the highest goal? Would you know the deepest joy? Would you realize the greatest good? Would you cast the widest influence? Would you overcome the greatest difficulties?

Then make this first resolution of Jonathan Edwards your chief aim. Be resolved to live for God's glory.



RP Global

Read about the upcoming organisation of a Mandarin speaking Reformed Presbyterian church (sources RP Global Alliance, www.rpglobalalliance.org)

The Pacific Coast Presbytery of the RPCNA will organize the Irvine Reformed Presbyterian Church on December 16th. Irvine Church is a Mandarin speaking congregation. Mr. Hsing Tang will be ordained and installed as the church planter and minister of the gospel.

Irvine is a city of about 250,000 people situated in Orange County, California. It is home to a number of corporations in the technological sector and also various further education institutions like The University of California, Irvine (UCI).

In 2016, Asian Americans made up about 45% of the Irvine population. Pray the Lord will bless the labours of Mr. Tang and the new congregation as they seek to bring the gospel to the many Mandarin speakers in the city.



Irvine, California

In the News...

'Nigeria – Three years of Muslim Fulani attacks have displaced over 500,000 people in Benue state'

– Barnabas Fund

<https://www.barnabasfund.org/en/news/newsdesk-30-november-2017#nigeria>

Over half a million people from the Christian majority Benue State have been displaced as a result of more than 40 different Muslim Fulani herder attacks on Christian communities between 2013 and 2016, newly released figures reveal.

A community leader said: "We paid dearly for the atrocities of the herdsmen with over 2,000 lives of our men, women and children. Till date, over five hundred persons are missing while... the future of almost a million youths are truncated." He further explained that in 2014 alone, hundreds of millions of pounds worth of properties were destroyed.

On 21 March 2017, 30 people were killed when ethnic Fulani gunmen attacked Zaki Biam, a predominantly Christian village.

Neighbouring Plateau State, which is also predominantly Christian, has witnessed persistent Muslim Fulani attacks too. In October 2017 alone, over 55 people were killed in attacks on Christian communities.

From *The Nigerian Tribune*

Pray for comfort for the Lord's people at such a turbulent time in Nigeria.

May they know His help and strength and find hope in His Word.



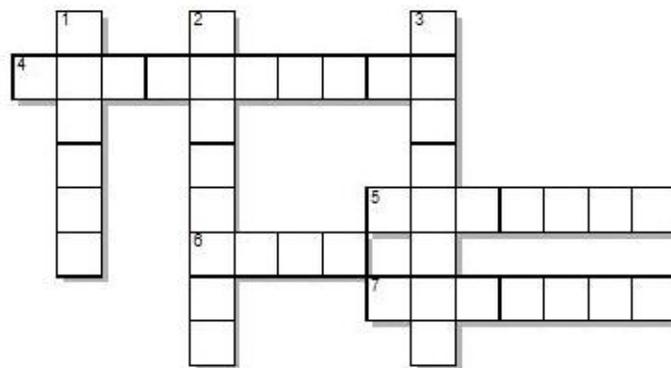
Kids' Challenge

In Acts 16:25-34 we read about the Philippian jailer and how God changed his life.

You can read the story then fill out the crossword below using the given clues.

You'll see that it is a dramatic story as God caused amazing things to happen, but the most important words are found in the memory verse below.

The Philippian Jailer



ACROSS

- 4 Time the earthquake took place
- 5 They were praying and ...
- 6 Who was in prison with Silas
- 7 The jailer was told to ... on the Lord Jesus Christ

DOWN

- 1 The jailer was baptised with his ...
- 2 Where jailer was from
- 3 Having believed in God, the jailer ...

MEMORY VERSE

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31)

Visit the links below for further information on:



Our church: www.glasgowrpcs.org



The Scottish RP church: <http://www.rpcscotland.org/>



The global RP church: <http://rpglobalalliance.org/>



Other sources used: <http://www.ligonier.org/>

Glasgow
RPCS
Newsletter

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*“And I have declared to them
Your name, and will declare it,
that the love with which You
loved Me may be in them, and
I in them.” John 17:26*