

Introduction: It is vital for us to appreciate the difference free grace makes to our worship and practice of the reformed faith. It colors and sweetens all that we do, saving us from the terrible rote, empty rituals of paganism, as well as from the slavish fear of displeasing a petulant god, which always accompanies all man-centered religious practice. In short, if your god is made in the image of angry and rigid mankind, one slip-up in presenting your offerings to this god can mean his divine wrath being poured out on your head. How different it is for us to have a Father to whom we can go boldly and joyfully in worship in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Mon/Tues: read Genesis 26:3-4 & Hebrews 13:7-8.** No matter where we turn in Scripture, the leaders whose faith we are to emulate, ground their view of God in the great reward of knowing a changeless Savior. Even in the Old Testament, men like Abraham and Moses rejoiced to anticipate the day of Christ and regarded the riches of knowing Christ (albeit in the shadows and types of Old Testament practice) as worth more than the pleasures and ill-gotten gain of this world. This is why the promise that all nations would be blessed by the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has become for us the same covenant we see fulfilled in our day through the Gospel – in every corner of the world, and in every nation. (Genesis 26:4)

In fact, we can go so far as to say that, when it came to gathering the first followers of the LORD, God used the very same faith as we possess in the New Testament to found His Old Testament church. The church of today is founded on the same Old Testament promises, since their Savior and ours is the same Christ: yesterday, today and forever.

This faith we share depends on the same saving and gathering work of Christ.

This is how the Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 54 puts it:

Q. What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church?

A. I believe that the **Son of God**, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the Kingdom of God which has come to earth through the Work and the Spirit of Christ, as that Kingdom now guides and controls the church of both the Old and New Testaments (# 353):

1 I love thy kingdom, Lord,  
the house of thine abode,  
the church our blest Redeemer saved  
with his own precious blood.

2 I love thy church, O God:  
her walls before thee stand,  
dear as the apple of thine eye,  
and graven on thy hand.

3 For her my tears shall fall,  
for her my prayers ascend;  
to her my cares and toils be giv'n,  
till toils and cares shall end.

4 Beyond my highest joy  
I prize her heav'nly ways,  
her sweet communion, solemn vows,  
her hymns of love and praise.

**Weds/Thurs: read Genesis 28:3 & 1 Kings 18:30-33.** Just as the Son of God promised Isaac that He would erect a church “from every nation on earth” (Genesis 26:4) so the same promise grounds Jacob’s faith as the LORD declares that, through him, “a company of peoples” would arise. (Genesis 28:3) Thus the work of the Son of God to gather a people from the beginning of time began with these ancient promises.

This gathering of the world to Christ began with the Twelve Tribes of Jacob, whose names are symbolically tied to the twelve stones which Elijah the prophet uses to rebuild the destroyed altar to the LORD on Mt. Carmel.

(1 Kings 18:31) When the fire came down from Heaven, God was showing all of Israel that He had not forgotten them as His people – though their devotion to Baal had led them far astray into idolatry.

What a forgiving God we have. Time and again throughout His people's Old Testament wanderings, He urges them to return and promises He will forgive all. For example, take in these Scriptures:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deut. 31:1-6)

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;  
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?  
We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
There is no one who calls upon your name,  
who rouses himself to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

But now, O LORD, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,  
and remember not iniquity forever.  
Behold, please look, we are all your people. (Isaiah 64:5-9)

**Fri/Sat/Sun: read 1 Kings 18:36-19:3 & Deuteronomy 13:6-11.** The fire of God's judgment falls upon those prophets of Baal who had sought, under Jezebel's hateful eye, to eradicate the true faith from the Promised Land. Out of all nations on earth, universally in bondage to unbelief and idolatry after the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, the LORD had chosen only Israel to be devoted to the worship of the one, true God. This is why God would not tolerate idolatry within her borders. The prophets of Baal must die for their leading Israel into idolatry – even as Deuteronomy 13:6-11 commands.

But now, what's this? Look at the grace of God at the end of 1 Kings 18, verses 41-46. The LORD cleanses the Land by the blood of the prophets of Baal sacrificed to His justice, and He renews the Land with rain after three years of idol-caused drought. Ahab is even invited to go home and celebrate the life-giving rains in 1 Kings 18:41!

Next week we will focus on the prayer of Elijah that brought the rain in 1 Kings 18:42-46. But for now, we see how clearly revealed are the opportunities for gracious forgiveness and restoration which the LORD provides even to the wicked. Ahab does not deserve relief from drought on his kingdom. *His voice* does not appear to be raised in confession when Israel responds to the fire on the altar with the words, "*The LORD, He is God, the LORD, He is God!*" There is no sign of repentance on the part of this ruler. In fact, it is his damning report of what Elijah did to the false prophets that rouses his wife Jezebel to threaten the life of God's prophet in 1 Kings 19:1-3a.

Meditate and Pray: The fire of God's holy judgment and salvation does not move Ahab to repentance and faith. His unbelief persists in the face of God's answering prayers for rain. I am reminded of another time when Ahab for a time cried out to God in prayer, and God mercifully heard his cry – though it came from a heart of unbelief. Read 1 Kings 21:20-29 and then read a Puritan's encouraging words on God's willingness to hear the prayers of His own children, given the fact that He will even listen to one like Ahab

If God would not leave the (Ahab's) show and semblance of contrition without a recompense, will he be unmindful of real penitence? If *many a time turned he his anger away* from those who *did but flatter him with their mouths, and lied unto him with their tongues*, has he nothing in store for those who are humble in spirit, and who come to him with the sacrifice of a broken heart? Oh! the turning away of temporal wrath because idols were outwardly abandoned, this is a mighty pledge that eternal wrath will be averted if we are inwardly stricken, and flee for refuge to the Saviour. God must have eternal good in store for his friends, if even his enemies are recompensed with temporal good. Yes, as I mark the Philistines and the Ammonites oppressing the idolatrous Israelites, and then see the oppressors driven back in return even for heartless service, Oh! I learn that true penitence for sin and true faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will cause all enemies to be scattered; I return from the contemplation of the backsliding people, emancipated notwithstanding the known hollowness of their vows, I return assured that a kingdom which neither Philistine nor Ammonite can invade, shall be the portion of all who seek deliverance through Christ.

Henry Melville's comments on Psalm 78:36-38 in Spurgeon's *Treasury of David*