

by material drawn from the writings of a Puritan. A large number of Puritans are represented through the course of the book and extensive indices of authors, topics and Scripture texts quoted are helpfully provided at the back of the book.

Some of the devotions appear almost as originally written whilst others comprise several pages from a Puritan work condensed into a single devotional reading. This does make some of the daily readings read more like a set of individual statements rather than a connected flowing meditation. The Editor acknowledges this point in his Preface.

In many of the readings the 'old language' has been retained: in other instances the Editor has 'paraphrased the original with up-to-date phrases'. The Editor says he has sought to be faithful to the original and he has provided references to the original source material. However, this reviewer's preference is to have the exact words of the original as the author wrote it. Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version. Again, it would have been more in keeping and beneficial to have retained the Authorised Version which I believe is the most faithful English translation of the Bible.

Despite the above criticisms however, readers may indeed benefit from these daily readings for there is excellent material here as we would expect from the Puritans for, after the Word of God, their writings generally are some of the highest order. And if these daily readings are a means of spurring persons on to read Puritan works more fully then the book will have proved a blessing and will have fulfilled the desire of the Editor. Puritan voices from the past are indeed ones we would do well to hear again, both on doctrine and on practice.

Joel Brooks

Taking Hold of God Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer

Edited by Joel R Beeke and
Brian G Najapfour

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One is normally expected to say positive things about books

distributed for review, but here is a rare book that has actually impacted my personal spiritual life for good. This is the more remarkable given that is a collection of academic essays in the field of historical theology, focussing on the central theme of prayer. However, by turning to the Reformers and Puritans for guidance in this area, the authors consult some of the church's best examples of 'prayer-warriors', and uncover teaching that is both doctrinally insightful and practically challenging.

From Luther, the distinction of spontaneity in prayer is drawn, in contrast to the ritualistic read prayers of medieval Romanism, and also the personal example of his diligence in prayer. It is estimated that the reformer usually spent two hours engaged in his personal devotions, despite the many demands on his time. Yet Luther also frankly acknowledged that prayer was 'the hardest work of all'. Luther was practical in approach, writing *A Simple Way to Pray* dedicated and addressed to his barber, Master Peter, which taught from the Lord's Prayer as a basis, but urged that the words should not be parroted in the Romanist fashion, but rather made the basis for spontaneous petitions and expressions.

Calvin, typically, delves deeper, considering prayer as communion with the Triune God. Prayer functions within God's predestination of all things, and thus should not be seen as changing God, but rather man. God may have determined to grant the blessing requested in response to the believer's fervent prayer, but even if the answer is a negative one, in prayer the believer draws closer to God, and learns to see and recognise the Divine hand in providence. Calvin also stresses the symbiotic relationship of faith and prayer, with prayer nurturing faith, and faith bearing fruit in further prayer. Prayer can only be accepted in Christ, so that 'Christ becomes the precursor who leads the prayers of his people' (p.37).

Further chapters consider familiar names like Knox, Bunyan, Boston and Edwards, and yet there is also room to consider more obscure Puritans. When is the average Christian, or even the average minister, likely to consult William Perkins on the Lord's Prayer, or tackle the 145 sermons of Anthony Burgess on John 17? Yet there are some real gems here, Perkins in particular offering real

insight on each clause of the Prayer, and obviously influencing his own generation – I recognised some of the material as having been included word-for-word in the later *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. This is one of the most striking services of this work, in opening some of these tomes and distilling the best of their insights into concise and manageable chapters. It may well be that for some of the Puritans, notorious for their colossally prolix writing, this sort of study offers the most effective means to render their work accessible to busy readers.

Yet the book does also encourage personal delving into the Puritans. The chapter on Matthew Henry stimulated my interest in his *Method for Prayer*, a work that puts into practice one of the key concerns shared throughout the book, the use of Scripture in prayer, or as the Puritans would say: 'pleading the promises'. Equally, two chapters additional to the individual studies defend Puritanism as a movement. One considers Puritan teaching on the Holy Spirit's help in prayer, exploding the Charismatics' assertion that Reformed Christians of past generations neglected the Third Person of the Trinity, while the other demonstrates the Puritans' concern to pray for world missions, exposing the myth that such a concern only commenced with the modern missionary movement.

Inevitably in a collection including different contributors, and covering different concerns, there is a diversity, and yet Joel Beeke, editing this work alongside Filipino pastor Brian Najapfour, ensures a consistency in the quality of the research. Furthermore, the practical challenge arising from the work of these men hits the reader with cumulative force, which is drawn together in Beeke's closing chapter, a rousing call for 'Prayerful Praying Today'. We pray that God would grant us grace to take the challenge seriously in our day.

Alasdair Macleod