

The Prayer Book under the Microscope

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Bill. Thank you for the non-introduction. And so I shall assume that I am among friends who know me, and proceed on that basis.

Okay, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we are going to study the things concerning yourself and your Son, and ourselves and our salvation.

To understand these things, we need the help of your Holy Spirit. And so, right at the outset, we bow before you, acknowledge the shortness of our sight without the Spirit's help.

And beg that the Spirit will enlighten our minds and hearts as we go along, so that we may receive and enjoy the things that belong to our peace.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, my friends, this is the first of a series of talks.

[1 : 21] It will be a short series, but it will have in it at least three items. The series is called The Prayer Book Under the Microscope.

And the subtitle for today is The Confession of Sin. As I think you all know, I am an enthusiast for the Book of Common Prayer.

I think it's a treasure because it's so biblical. I think it's a masterpiece of receiving and responding to the Word of God.

The central things in the Word of God. The Gospel, if you like to put it that way. It's doxological, that is, it's a book of praise to God.

It's didactic, it's a book which teaches us really what's at the heart of the Bible. It's devotional.

[2 : 31] It stirs the heart to joy and response. So it's a discipling book. And I guess you know, there are those, of whom I count myself one, who want to beat the drum about the value of using the prayer book as a devotional aid on a daily basis.

We had, if you remember, a talk from Nora Johnson about that not too long ago. And I confess, well, not exactly confess, but proclaim, because I'm quite proud of it.

I am a vice chair of the Prayer Book Society of Canada. And the Prayer Book Society of Canada seeks to drill all Canadians in the devotional use of the prayer book.

And, as I say, I'm right with them in the exercise. I have talked in the past, from this podium, about the prayer book services in an overviewish way.

Today, these three talks that I'm going to give now, a prayer book under the microscope, are close-ups. We shall be putting the microscope to work on key elements in the prayer book, just to see how rich the prayer book presentation is, and how much we have to learn from it.

[4 : 09] Now, I'm going to begin by reciting a couple of hymns. You may or may not know them.

I don't remember singing either of them, actually, in an Anglican church. I got to know them both when, I think, I was still 18.

I was being disciplined by the inter-varsity people in Oxford University. I was a young Christian trying to find his way around.

We used regularly to sing from a hymn book, which was prepared, I gather, for children's missions of one kind or another.

It was called Golden Bells. Does anyone here remember singing hymns from Golden Bells? Yes, I just wanted two of you, okay. That's where these two lyrics came from, as far as I'm concerned.

[5 : 11] And they impressed me very deeply and stuck in my memory, right from those days until the present day. They're still with me.

And they're both of them 19th century lyrics. And I think they express key elements of Christianity and make a fine lead-in to what I'm going to do from the prayer book in a moment.

First one has a rather enigmatic text of scripture as its head. I mean, in those hymn books where the scriptural heading is printed for hymns.

Do you know these words? A man shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

The words from Isaiah 32, you can understand why Christians, looking back from the full revelation of salvation in Christ, see these words as pointing forward to the Savior and our salvation.

[6 : 26] Well now, here's the hymn. Beneath the cross of Jesus, I, fame, would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noontide heat and the burden of the dead.

O safe and happy shelter, refuge, tried and sweet, O christing place where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet.

As to the holy patriarch, that wondrous dream was given, so seems my Savior's cross to me, a ladder up to heaven. There lies beneath its shadow, but on the farther side, the darkness of an awful grave that gapes both deep and wide.

And there between us stands the cross, two arms outstretched to save, like a watchman set to guard the way from that eternal grave.

Upon that cross of Jesus, my eyes at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me.

[7 : 50] See what a sanctified imagination will do. And from my stricken heart, with tears, to wonders, I confess, the wonder of his glorious love and my own worthlessness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place. I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face.

Content to let the world go by and count its gain but loss. My sinful self, my only shame, my glory, all the cross.

I think that's great. I met, sometime this last week, I can't remember quite where, the description of 19th century hymnody as marred by what the writer called self-centered sentimentality.

Now, you can find tinges of sentimentality in that hymn, but it ain't self-centered, it's cross-centered, it's Christ-centered. And that's what needs to be highlighted.

[9 : 13] Now, here's another hymn. This one, also a 19th century product, used regularly, so and told, to be sung at the Keswick Convention on Monday nights.

I was never there to be part of that, but the old-fashioned Keswick Convention, as, again, you may know, though you may not, had a sequence of teaching during the convention week.

And Monday night, the theme would be sin. Then Tuesday would be the cross, and Wednesday would be consecration, and Thursday would be salvation in its fullness, and Friday would be commitment to missionary service.

Well, this is Monday night stuff. It was written by a gentleman whose name, unhappily for him, was Bottom.

If I'd been blessed, well, not so blessed with the name of Bottom, I think I would have changed it by deep or smelly or something like that.

[10 : 33] Anyway, this is the hymn he produced. Again, it came to me when I was about 18, and I think it's great Christianity.

It echoes the end of Psalm 139, as you'll sit. Search me, O God, my actions try, and let my life appear as seen by thine all-seeing eye.

To mine, my eye, to mine my ways make clear. Search all my sense, and know my heart, who only canst make know.

And let live deep the hidden part to me be foolish. Throw light into the darkened cells where passion reigns within. Quicken my conscience till it feels the loathsomeness of sin.

Search till my fiery glance has cast its holy light through all, and I, by grace, am brought at last before thy face to fall.

[11 : 43] thus, prostrate, I shall learn of thee what now I feebly prove, that God alone in Christ can be unutterable love.

Get it? sin. Now, those two hymns together tune us in to the way in which the prayer book deals with sin, and teaches us to confess our sins.

sin. I said, the prayer book echoes scripture. As we turn now from the hymn book to the prayer book, let us pause on the journey to remind ourselves how sin is presented in scripture itself.

There's a brief definition of sin in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 4. Sin is lawlessness. one Greek word, and that's the way to translate it in English.

But translations usually render it, sin is the transgression of the law. That was the phrase actually that's used, or was used, in the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647, where the question is, what is sin?

[13:08] And the answer is, sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God. The scripture is full of pictures of sin.

Pictures of sin as an activity, the activity of rebelling against the king, the activity of missing the mark as one shoots one's arrow, the activity as has already been said, of overstepping the limits, the limits that have been set, and so breaking the law.

In both the Old and the New Testament, those picture thoughts recur in what is said, in the very wide vocabulary actually, which the scripture uses to express the reality of sin.

You see what's happening? Sin is always being defined in relation to God. I need to say that because nowadays in secular usage, if the word sin is used at all, what it signifies is some form of offense against the person who the Bible calls one's neighbor, child abuse, or some sort of sexual perversion.

But in the Bible, sin is a theological word, and every time that the idea was introduced, the focus is on the God against whom we transgress, so that our relationship with him is marred, spoiled, disrupted, so that we need something called salvation to put us straight.

[15:07] And when scripture moves from picturing the activity of sin to picturing the state of sin, well, again, the pictures are many, and the vocabulary is wide.

The key thoughts are that first sin is, the state of sin is a matter of being guilty in God's sight. You have transgressed, and as Paul labors to say in Romans, in many places, you live your life under sin, that's a Romans phrase from Romans chapter 3, and to be under sin is to be under a tyrannical master.

Yes, that's a personal image, of course, but then Paul in Romans virtually does personify sin as a tyrannical master, which, or who, compels your allegiance, and then in the end pays you your wages.

The wages of sin, we're told, is death. That's the end of the road. Well, that's where we are, under sin, not able, by anything that we can do, apart from the grace of God, to escape sin's domain.

Well, that makes us guilty before God, and that's the first strand in the Bible picture of the state of sin. Then the Bible has another picture which goes along with that, parallel to that.

[17:03] Sin is a state of being dirty in God's sight. That's what the language of purity and holiness and sin as lack of purity and holiness in Scripture is really all about.

You and I know what it's like to recoil in face of dirt where cleanliness ought to be. I mean, if you are asked to sleep on a bed where the bedclothes have obviously been used, sin, so you realize that to a degree they're dirty.

If you're asked to eat a meal of a plate from which somebody else has eaten and which hasn't yet been washed, you say the plate is dirty. And so well, that's the analogy to God's reaction to sin as Scripture presents it.

He recoils from it. It has the same negative impact on him as dirty plates and dirty bedsheets and so on have on us.

Sin is being dirty in God's sight so that we need to be cleansed somehow before we can have fellowship with him, before he can contentedly have fellowship with us.

[18:38] And so moving to the sinful person directly, Scripture goes on to picture the state of sin as one of being ashamed and alienated and actually sick.

Sick in the sense that sin has control of us, taken away our strength, taken away our energy, sin is draining the life out of us, sin is a grievous sickness, terminal sickness in fact if it's not treated, and those who are sick need a physician and the grace of God provides one.

that apart from the great physician, we are sick and sick unto death. Indeed, for one in one or two places in the New Testament, Paul, in particular, says, we are dead already.

You've got that in Ephesians 2 and verse 1 for instance, you, he has quickened, that is, brought to life, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Dead, there doesn't mean immobile, because Paul goes on to say, in which you walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, that's the devil.

[20:17] you were active, but you were dead spiritually. The thought is simply that the dead don't respond to any form of stimulus.

And the spiritually dead don't respond to any form of stimulus from God. They don't respond to the word, they don't respond to convictions of conscience.

As far as God is concerned, they are totally unresponsive, and that's it. Dead in trespasses and sins. That's the state of sin, and as you can see, it's very grievous.

And the grievousness is compounded by the fact that Scripture, again, with the very vivid and ominous vocabulary, comes back again and again to the thought that those who are in the state of sin, practicing sin as an activity, morning till night, as all of us who are under sin's control actually are, we are under what Scripture calls the wrath of God.

It's a vivid word in the Greek for anger, hostility, God's and in theology, the wrath of God is God's judicial negative to defiant or transgressing behavior.

[21 : 56] Judicial because the God who expresses wrath is God the king who is God the judge. God justly judges and he justly judges sin, gives sin what it deserves when he expresses his wrath in judgment.

Well, you see what this adds up to. Sin is perversity in our nature, this is what our fallenness amounts to, and sin puts us under condemnation from God and hopelessly so, unless the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ intervenes.

The reason I started where I did this morning was that I wanted us, and I still want us, to have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of the cross, the grace of pardon and restoration, the grace of new life, vividly before our minds, as we look into a pit, shall I say, and map the darkness and the misery of sin and the life of sin.

If you are going to look into the crater of a volcano, so they say, you do well to make quite sure that the place where you're standing is itself firm, so that you don't tumble in, I am saying, in terms of that picture, you'll only appreciate, you should only try to appreciate the depth and the misery of sin. If first you've learned to put your trust in the Christ of Calvary, and the atonement, the sacrifice for sin that he made there.

[24 : 05] Alright, that's the Bible presentation. Now, the prayer book, which echoes this, and makes it, as it seems to be, just as vivid as the Bible itself does for thoughtful people.

Consider the poem. We start with morning prayer, and morning prayer, in the prayer book, begins with a solemn exhortation to confess sins.

I think that many worshippers, not you, I hope, but it might be us, many worshippers hear that exhortation with some impatience, just verbiage, oh, let's get on with it.

But no, it's a very solemn statement about the approach to God in worship. Dearly beloved, the scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father.

You can't hide them from God and you shouldn't try, but confess them. That's what we should do, confess them with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by His infinite goodness and mercy.

[25 : 38] And we ought specially to do that when we come together for worship, because nothing is going to be right in our worship until we have settled with God the matter of the sin of which we need to repent, and the forgiveness of which we need to lay hold right at the start of our time of worship in His presence.

So, this is very weighty, and Cramer, composing his morning prayer service, evening prayer as well. He meant it to be waiting.

For him, this was an integral part of worship. In many places where abbreviated morning prayer and evening prayer are used, this whole penitential beginning is omitted, and you pick up with, Lord, open thou our lips, and our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

service. Well, whatever else may be said about that, it drives a coach and horses through Cramer's plan. He wanted the services to begin with penitence, low down, you see.

We must humble ourselves before God and acknowledge our sin and ask forgiveness before we do anything else. And, you know, when we get to our opening words to God in the service, well, they are words of confessing sin, but actually the confession is an extremely weighty and theologically rich declaration of the whole sadness and extremity and distress of being a sinner.

[27 : 46] And it's all said very fully and it needs to be said very thoughtfully when we use this form of words in our worship.

Let me just go through some of the words and underline them. Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred, we have gone wrong.

That's the theme which is now to be developed in many ways. We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. There's one picture.

Have you ever seen sheep going astray? I had a sheep farmer friend in Wales, and I often saw sheep going astray, just as I saw how this good man went after them and brought them back, just as our Savior does with us.

But yes, first you have to acknowledge all we like sheep have gone astray. Straight from thy ways like lost sheep, we follow too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.

[28 : 55] Those hearts are perverse and twist it. This is sin in our system. This is sin personified over our system.

This is sin leading us in the wrong paths along false trails. Devices, yes, that's a word that speaks of the making of plans that calls for cunning thought.

Desires, that's a word that speaks of what deep down in the chambers of imagery where nobody except we ourselves can go.

These are the dreams and the fancies which we embrace. Deep down we'd like to be doing this, that, or the other.

The picture changes. we have offended against thy holy laws. Our creator is the king and he makes the laws.

[30 : 04] This is kingship of course as it was in Bible times. Absolute monarchy, we should call it dictatorship. The king makes the laws, the king then administers the laws.

And it's all of it direct, direct legislation, direct government. Well, we have offended against God's holy laws. They're holy.

They reflect God's own pure, upright, righteous nature. And we have broken the laws.

We've left undone those things which we ought to have done, just as we've done those things which we ought not to have done. sins of omission cannot usually be seen, just because in at least one sense they're not there.

But that's just the trouble. Sins of omission are failures to do what we ought to do. And it is said that on his death bed, Archbishop Usher, the man who, in the mid-17th century, dated the creation at 4004 BC, he was in fact a great and gifted scholar and a very holy man.

[31 : 28] And Archbishop Usher was heard to pray as he was dying, Lord, forgive my sins, most of all my sins of omission. And actually, if you allow scripture to examine you, I think you will very soon feel that your life is littered with omissions.

And these, in a way, are more grievous than any sins of commission of which we're aware. Failures of love, failures of honesty, failures of truthfulness, failures of service.

sickness. We just haven't done it. We've left undone those things which we ought to have done. And there's no health in us. There's the sickness picture.

We are terminally ill, at least if we're not treated by grace. There's no health in us. And so, all we can expect, apart from God's grace, is that this is our sickness, our moral sickness, will get worse.

And then, having pictured sin in all these ways, we begin to pray, do thou, O Lord, have mercy on us, miserable offenders.

[32 : 55] Miserable, as it becomes clear when the prayer book is studied in the Latin version, that Cramer also wrote. If any of you know Latin grammar, it's a gerund here in the Latin, miserandi, and it means people to be pitied.

Pitiful people. Not miserable in the sense of unhappy, but miserable in the sense of needing God's pity.

sin. And if we realize the state in which we and others are, well, we would be pitying each other too. Without God's pardoning and restoring grace, we're lost.

this is a basic truth of the gospel, and this strong form of confession is a constant reminder of it. Have mercy on us miserable offenders.

Spare us according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord and sin. The request here is for pardon and then for full, well, I'm getting the order wrong, actually.

[34 : 18] I'd better say it this way. The request here is for true repentance and on the basis of true repentance, pardon, restoration, and help.

Grant our most merciful Father for Christ's sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life. Again, let's understand the word, the words godly, need not delay us, a life lived to God and for God, for his praise, for his glory, life lived to please him, that is what the word godly means, righteous, again, is a word that doesn't need much explanation, upright, and not falling short in any of the ways in which scripture admonishes us not to fall short in loving our neighbor.

And sober, well, that isn't sober in the modern sense of, or at least it isn't sober limited to the modern sense of not allowing yourself to get drunk.

It's sober in the sense of the Greek word that's translated various ways in the New Testament, *semnos*, for any people who know Greek, it means with a dignity and a seriousness proper to your position.

as distinct from living childishly, when you should be living like a duck, and living in an undisciplined way, when you need, those who depend on you need, that you should live a disciplined life.

[36 : 17] And supremely, living, the thought is, living with the dignity proper to one who was made to bear the image of God. That is to say, to live in a way which reflects God in his world.

Godly, righteous, sober. I don't know whether those words have much place in our own daily prayers, but I think they ought to. It has been said, truly, that for Cranmer, the doctrine of justification by faith is part of the larger doctrine of repentance.

Repentance, which means turning from all known sin, and seeking God's pardon, that's the justification, but for pardon is freely given, that's the glory of justification, justification, and then, in the same breath as it were, asking for help in living right from now on.

Well, that is a true comment on the way Cranmer saw things, and a true comment on the way that the prayer book teaches us to see things.

No justifying faith without repentance, no repentance without justifying faith, no righteousness without God's help.

[37 : 57] All these things belong together. They are part of Cranmer's understanding of what Scripture calls repentance unto life. Okay?

Now we move to the communion service, where again there's a confession of faith, sorry, a confession of sins.

If you had a prayer book, it would be on page 77. You don't need a prayer book to listen to me. I didn't ask that everybody be issued with prayer books. I thought, and continue to think, that what I'm trying to say will come over more forcefully if you're focusing on me as I say it.

Well, I hope that's true. And now I'm going to focus your attention on the confession of the communion service, and say the things that are said here with what I believe to be appropriate and necessary emphasis.

the invitation which precedes the communion confession is an invitation to make our humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling to express our humility.

[39 : 28] Humble confession. we're not actually very good at humility. Pride is the attitude of heart that sin naturally generates.

This is the prime symptom of the sickness which sin is. And pride is always self-justifying, minimizing our faults, and maximizing our supposed excellence, which in fact is folly that we do suppose in our folly that we're excellent from many standpoints, and as I say, it's a delusion which pride generates and fosters and sustains, and humility is the Bible challenge to all of that. there's only one proper position in the presence of God, and that is the position of humility, which is, as I said, is what kneeling, our Anglican tradition of kneeling, is supposed to express.

God understands, and so do we. If your physical condition makes it impossible to pray comfortably, kneeling, in that case, yes, sit and bow your head, and we shall understand what's going on.

But the Bible ideal is kneeling, it's there in the Psalms, it's there in the biblical narrative. Kneeling expresses humility. We are to make our humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon our knees.

[41 : 16] Now, this confession, though it's not so full as the confession in the Bible services, morning and evening prayer, is certainly more poignant, more passionate, if you like to use that word.

It's overused nowadays, but it fits. It's more poignant, then, it's more passionate, than is the case with morning and evening prayer.

This is Cranmer pulling out the stops, and he does it in two ways. By analysis, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word, and deed.

That threefold analysis searches the conscience, doesn't it? What have I done? What did I say? What did I want to do? Which perhaps I didn't do. I wish him dead, do I? Well, I'm not going to go out and murder him, but that's not a charitable way of thinking about another person, and it is a way of thinking in which I fear we indulge ourselves all too often.

[43 : 00] Thought, word, deed. And it is assumed, of course, that when you come to the communion service, you will have examined yourself first, and checked at the level of thought and word as well as the deed.

Self-examination before coming to communion is a godly Anglican habit which petered out about the beginning of the last century, 20th century.

tradition. And it isn't a habit that people are taught today, and it isn't something that people regularly do today. The prayer book assumes that we will have done it, and we ourselves at the Lord's table are the poorer, I think, for not doing it.

And the poverty is pointed to by the fact that, well, we say by thought, word, and deed, as we confess our sins in the middle of the communion service, and our hearts are only able to say, yes, I suppose so.

But we haven't gone over the details, and so we're not as thoroughly into spiritual reality, our own spiritual reality, as the service, Cranmer's service, wants us to be.

[44 : 37] Well, that's the analysis, anyway, that you have in this confession, thought and word and deed. And then, secondly, with the analysis, you have the adverbs, which also intensify the passion, called it that, of the confession.

Note the adverbs, we confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed.

Grievously, I think, is a well-chosen word there. Grievously has both a subjective and an objective reference. With both references, grievously means causing grief, or, well, it should be causing grief, first of all, to us, that's the subjective reference.

when we review our lapses in thought and word and deed, we realize our sins are grievous.

And, if our hearts are spiritually sensitive, we grieve over them. That's the beginning of our repentance. And, if folk around us know what we've been doing, or failing to do, well, that very knowledge will cause them grief, out of simple human compassion.

[46 : 21] Look what a mess my friend is in. We, from time to time, most grievously have committed manifold sins and wickedness by thought, word, and deed.

And, grievously isn't the only advert that is used here to intensify the passion and urgency of the thought. We do earnestly repent.

Earnestly. We are very serious. That's what earnest and earnestly mean. We are very serious about what we're doing.

We are just saying this confession as a routine bit of repetition which the service requires of us. We are saying it from our heart because we are serious about our sins.

We realize that apart from the grace of Christ, we are lost. As I said earlier, we do earnestly repent. Repent. You've heard me sing, I'm sure.

[47 : 32] Repent means halt, right about turn, quick march, the manoeuvre, you see, reversing direction.

No longer walking away from God because you are living a self-centered life, walking towards the desires of your own fallen self, but as I say, you reversed the direction in which you're moving, you are now walking, looking, Godward, not to please self, but to please him.

We do earnestly repent. Well, God grant that every time we say these words, we shall mean them. Cranmer intended that we should, and God knows our own spiritual health requires that we should, and Cranmer piles it on, a third adverb.

Next words. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry, for these are misdoings. Heartily, that is, from the heart, is very much a Cranmer thought.

It keeps popping up in the prayer book, intensifying the personal reality of worship. I mean it, Lord, this is coming from my heart.

[49 : 06] We are heartily sorry for these other students. Have mercy on us, forgive us all that is past, and groan that we may ever hear after, servant, please thee, in newness of love.

Yes, there the pointer is to the fact that the Christ who, through his cross, pardons, is the Christ who also, through his gift of the Holy Spirit, renews at heart level.

This is, as surely we all know, new creation according to the New Testament. It's as truly a mentor of God bringing about the reality of something which has no prior cause.

That's how the world came to be, God said, and it was in existence. When a person becomes genuine spiritually, say if you like, when that person is converted, when that person becomes real, there are all sorts of ways of expressing it, but when that happens, the heart, the inner person, the inner self, is so changed that you have new desires there that weren't there before.

The heart now desires to please God, to love God, to honor the Father and the Son and the Spirit, to live Godly, and previously all that the heart desired was self-service, to use the word which they use at the gas stations, self-service, whereby, you see, you walk looking to yourself, what do I want, and then you walk towards it in order to achieve it.

[51 : 12] What I want is the rule of life, and the heart is so changed when people become real in faith, that the dominant desire now is to love and please the Lord who has loved you, and whose grace is saving you from what the hymn called the darkness of the awful grave that gapes both deep and wide.

Well, grant that we may ever hear after, serve and please the in newness of life, is a phrase which points to that, and whenever we use it, we should realize just how much that phrase, in newness of life is saying.

So the honor and glory of thy name is the way that the confession ends, for the honor and glory of thy name through Jesus Christ, our Lord, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, personal transformation and real pardon.

This is what we seek. And you know that in the communion service, this confession is followed by a prayer of absolution, a prayer for God's mercy on those who have confessed their sins.

May God pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and bring you to everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, when I am leading the communion service, I like to stress you in that prayer.

[53 : 09] It is specifically a prayer for you who have just grieved to earnestly and heartily confess your sins and sought repentance and new life in Christ.

And then, of course, from the comfortable words, which are promises and assurances from God about the reality and adequacy of Christ's mediation.

Yes, he brings us the grace, the pardon, the restoration, and the help that we need. Indeed, he does. And that's what we should be gaining, as we hear the comfortable words, reassurance about that saving list.

Well, time has gone, and I must draw to close. What are the lessons for us from these confessions in the prayer book?

Three lessons. They belong together. Don't treat God's holiness lightly.

[54 : 29] Don't suppose that our God is a friendly creator without standards.

Someone who is more like Father Christmas holiness than like the holy judge of scripture. Holiness, remember, is the quality in God that makes him both awesome because of his greatness and fearsome because of his purity to us human beings in our sin.

Holiness of God in scripture is often presented as frightening simply because we are not fit for fellowship with the holy creator.

No, don't take God's holiness lightly. It's only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can have fellowship with the God, the God of the Bible, the Holy One.

So, a second aspect of the lesson, don't take our sins lightly. Learning that healthy habit of self examination, starting with the heart, is a very good spiritual discipline.

[55 : 58] I think I know most of the books, if not all the books, on spiritual disciplines that have been produced in this last quarter of a century, and I thank God for them, but I'm still waiting to see in any of those books anything about the discipline of self examination.

I haven't seen it yet, but I haven't given up for it. Meantime, I say to you, this is a discipline that we all of us need to learn. And finally, don't take Christ's cross lightly.

I'm going to end where I began with these hymns that I used. First, the prayer for the man and woman who's examining himself seriously before the Lord.

Through search all my sense and know my heart, who only canst make known, and let the deep, the hidden part to me be fully shown, throw light into the darkest cells where passion reigns within, quicken my conscience till I feel the well-signness of sin.

And the other hymn, which really is my sign of life, on that cross of Jesus my eye of times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me, bearing the penalty due to me for my transgressions, Christ dying in my place under God's judgment, quite literally.

[57 : 54] And from my stricken heart with tears, two wonders, I confess the wonder of his glorious love and my own worthlessness. I take across thy shadow for my abiding place.

I ask no other sunshine on the sunshine of his face. That's a good word, isn't it, at a day where physical sunshine is coming into this room.

Thank God for physical sunshine, sunshine, but this is even more important sunshine. This is spiritual sunshine, and this is what we cannot get on about.

I ask no other sunshine but the sunshine of his face, content to let the world go by and count its gain but loss. My sinful self, my only shame, my glory on the cross.

Amen. Now, let us confer, dialogue, comments, anything?

[59 : 10] Let me know your reaction. I was wondering if you were mentioning the importance of self-examination and I wonder if you would give any suggestions about how one practically goes about that.

Are there, is it typically, you mentioned it was a common practice before the 20th century, were there certain passages in scripture that would be recommended that one read and carefully think through?

how would one go about examining oneself before communion? The classic way to do it is by reference to the Ten Commandments, understood the way that the reformers all understood them, as positives implicit in negatives.

Do no murder is concealing the positive. Love and serve your neighbor. Don't commit adultery is the positive.

Honor the sanctity of sex and maintain it by your own conduct. Do not steal is honor and recognize the sanctity of property and ensure that as far as you can everybody receives their due.

[60 : 51] Don't bear false witness against your neighbor. Honor the truth and tell the truth honestly and honorably at all times.

And so when it comes to not coveting, well that takes you straight to the heart, the dreams and the desires, which we don't like to share with other people because we know that they are self-regarding and if other people knew it would diminish their estimate of us, so we keep them secret.

start with the heart. You ask yourself why, well, you ask yourself what have I been after this last week since I was last at the Lord's table and you note the things that you've been after, the things that you've been desiring that other people have, discontents that you felt.

I like those words at the end of the hymn I was quoting, content to let the world go by and count its gain but loss. That's very much Paul, of course, in Philippians chapter 3, but it doesn't reflect the state of mind of a lot of people who come to church regularly on Sunday content with what God in his providence has given you and what in his providence he's not given you.

Content is a spiritual grace which one has to work labor in order to maintain and when you examine yourself you are likely to find that you haven't been consistent to maintain it.

[62 : 55] It isn't the only way of doing it but it's one way of doing it. You can equally examine yourself from the first part of the litany which specifies a whole series of lapses through which we ask God to keep us from and we pause with each one and ask ourselves have I kept myself from this?

This is an area of responsible liberty doing it the way that you find most helpful but there's two ways of doing it one from the Bible one from the prayer book leave it there.

Thank you. James asks us to when we pray to pray believing that we're going to receive answers and I've always struggled when it comes to the part where it says well let me preface this by saying if I'm going to believe that I'm going to get an answer I have to understand what I'm asking for so I struggle when I pray that God would cause me to serve him in newness of life because I don't really

know what I'm praying for.

I've asked an NFL about it and he suggested well to serve God in newness of life means that I serve him like a Christian which means when I fall I will come back and repent but that doesn't seem to answer the whole question because further on in the statement you alluded to it it seems to be more specific it seems to be saying that I am actually going to live victorious and not have to say the same prayer tomorrow I shouldn't have to confess again tomorrow so if I'm going to obey James when he says believe that I'll receive an answer to that prayer and I pray that God will help me serve him in newness of life what am I asking for?

well you're not asking you shouldn't be asking for sinless perfection because we aren't promised sinless perfection until we get to glory but you are asking seems to me I've hinted at it in the talk you are asking for power to express as the dominant thing in your life the dominion of grace that is to say the new heart which in the new birth was given you new heart meaning the whole range of desires to please and serve and honor God there's a whole of a difference between the best life that you can imagine in an unconverted person because that person will still be practicing outward virtues honesty trustworthiness and so on against the all absorbing self or rather within the frame of the all absorbing self centeredness of his heart the passion to please oneself honorable people please themselves by living upright lives but it's pleasing oneself there's a great difference between being that way that's the unregenerate sinner and being the person to whom

[66 : 58] God has given a new heart by new creation the spirit of God indwells you you are living in newness of life in the most literal sense of the word newness now it isn't as I say promised that we shall enjoy sinless perfection that is a life without sin still marauding in our system trying to regain control trying to knock us off the path of pleasing God trying to get us back into the old way of pleasing ourselves and there'll be some inner conflict Jesus actually pointed to that he's talking about the Christian life when he says that if your hand causes you to stumble you should cut it off same with your foot if your eye causes you to stumble pluck it out what he means is that any form of self denial however painful at the moment should be practiced in order to keep yourself as a

Christian from besetting sin it's tough stuff but that's the meaning that's the application of what he said well we have to do some of that actually in our own Christian lives because sin is still there but what you're asking for what you ask for is progress in the fight with sin in the formation of new strengthening of new godly habits in the practice of imaginative and helpful Christian love to benefit other people in the maintaining of contentment peace by the word peace includes contentment as part of the idea it's a big word more success in maintaining peace and contentment than you've had before progress in the

Christian life is what's called for and there's plenty in the New Testament about that but don't minimize the fact that we do it we live this life now in newness very conscious that we're different from what we used to be because our heart has been changed now I don't know if that helps sir but that's the best I can say off the cuff in answer to your question what it does would you say it was a sin to wonder how well you're doing but we do have I believe signposts like first Christians 13 and the fruit of the spirit two simple places that you can look at and and not to measure but

I'm running out of words here to avoid sin it does give a clue as to how much of the spirit has had access to us I believe is that a way of looking at it I believe that it is Bill and that it's the healthy way I mean you look at the specifics of the fruit of the spirit and the specifics of love as a behavioral reaction to anything and everything anybody and everybody that you run up against on the fruit of the spirit it's easy to think it through this is another way of self-determination by the way love well ask yourself do I react with love when people aren't loving me joy do I practice the discipline of rejoicing even when I feel the roof is falling in peace am I able to maintain contentment when one after another things go wrong and hopes get disappointed and so on am I still at peace about it knowing that

God is in charge and he's giving me what he knows is good for me long-suffering patience can I be patient when people are not being patient with me and when blessings that I hoped for are deferred gentleness and so on and so on through yes focusing on these specific qualities of the Christ-like life that's what it is it's the the fruit of the spirit is the personal moral profile of the Lord Jesus in his disciples that's the way to look at it and by using this as one of the criteria whereby you view and assess your life you can get some idea are you going forward or going back that's that's all really that it's it's possible for us to know am I going forward or am I going back which is a different question to ask than how near am I to the perfection

[73 : 27] I aim at you never know the answer to that one but am I going forward or am I going back that's a question that can be yes please yes in the prayer book the confession aspect of it seems to bring into focus the fact that we are in reality sinners saved by grace but the scripture also points out the fact that in Christ we're seen perfect as believers so when we come as a corporate group of believers to bring our worship to Christ and to God is it appropriate do you think to really emphasize this almost negative aspect which is very much reality that we are saved by grace but should we not consider ourselves more made perfect in Christ because God is really looking at Christ in our worship not at what we have done or failed to do

I understand what you're asking sir my response I think Cranmer's response is well the prayer book services are composed for worship occasions Sunday by Sunday when you can guarantee that there will be people in church who haven't yet adequately understood the gospel they haven't yet learned fully to put their faith in Christ for salvation they're on the way for all the prayer book was written for a national church you see it was hoped that every English would be in church worshipping on Sunday and so Cranmer says as Cranmer would say it is appropriate that our services begin with a what would you call it a re-illuminating a re-apprehending of the grace of our the justifying grace of our

Lord the sinners Christians benefit by going over the gospel again and non-Christians benefit by having it rubbed into them impressed on them shall I say Sunday by Sunday that this is where real Christianity starts by frankly acknowledging your sin and learning to express repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for the new life nowadays in our worship we ordinarily begin the worship gathering by singing a hymn of praise to God the idea being that by doing that it's one of the things that gets us together as a community and another thing we do of course in many services anyway is pause for you to greet the person or the persons around you that again is intended to generate the sense of togetherness in worship and togetherness in question is a togetherness in precisely what you were talking about that is the new life in

Christ so there you've got that emphasis introduced right at the start of the service by our modern practice and with that in place I'm going to defend Cranmer for saying it is spiritually healthy to go over the fact that we are sinners who live by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in no other way sinners who live by being forgiven and to let the new vividness of that realization every service animate us as we move into praise Lord upon our lips and our mouth shall show forth thy praise oh come let us sing to the Lord rejoice in God our saviour that it seems to me is every bit as appropriate and health giving as a way into worship as any other so it doesn't the use of the one excuse they're both there in fact in the way we do things we're trying to get the best of the overall situation everybody who needs a saviour from sin being confronted with that need in effect in effect invited to trust in Christ in repentance and faith for that for the pardon they need and the saints being reminded that this is the way they're the only way they live they live by being forgiven being thus animated and stirred to be all the more heartfelt in their praises and their thanks to God so I think that on balance the prayer book has the best of it it's my views now

Bill is about to close the meeting aren't you Bill about Joe do you have a I was hearing on from what you've been saying Dr. Packer I know people who are devoted families people to their wives to their kids to their profession and everything and by all accounts they're outstanding citizens but they're agnostic because and often it's people that have had to pardon themselves from unfair criticisms in their growing up period where they had to defend themselves from unfair to put down when they when there's part of the prayer that says we're not worthy as to God whoever comes under the table I've debated this with a number of friends that that's because of that statement they have etched in their mind or they slammed the door on faith because they can't get around the fact that they're doing everything they possibly can to be a good person and here they feel like God is kind of being squashed and like I say particularly in their growing up years they have been squashed by malicious comment they can't get around it and I don't know how when I'm discussing them in a friendly way how to help them unlock their minds to perhaps seeing it as you've described it as simply us acknowledging that we're safe it's the mark of those who are living in newness of life which is what we prayed for earlier in the service to acknowledge their own unworthiness all the time it's very striking that right at the end of his life Paul was still identifying himself as chief among sinners and the person in newness of life doesn't hesitate to line up with Paul and say

[81 : 28] I am a sinner being saved by grace I can only live by being forgiven and pardoned and helped along the road I'm not there yet you can have assurance of your security in Christ without

having any sense of what we were calling sinless perfection and it is actually an unhappy sign when people want to parade their own natural virtues and say in effect well God ought to be recognizing my natural virtues rather than mattering on to me about my unworthiness and his grace my need of his grace it's a sign of an unconverted heart well I don't know if that again I don't know if that helps in your situation but that's what your question makes me want to say thank you don't you