

REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER

Reflections on Tim Keller's 'Prayer' and God's word

KICKING OFF

John Calvin begins his 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' by claiming that *"all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: **the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves...** That man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinise himself... that man is never sufficiently touched by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty."*

Q: What are your thoughts on this?

Calvin lists a number of examples where people came face to face with the presence of God and were **'stricken and overcome.'**

Let's begin by reflecting on a few of these moments - Exodus 20:18-19; Judges 13:20-22; Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:28. Even someone as Godly as Daniel when he sees a pre-incarnate vision of Christ is rendered completely helpless - Daniel 10:7-8.

Q: What difference should it make then to our lives and our Church if we truly revere God, both reflecting on his majesty compared to our 'lowly state'?

GOING DEEPER

Tim Keller begins chapter 1 by describing his own search for a better personal prayer life and those who did the same, following a very ancient path of processing their feelings with a brutal honesty in God's presence. Praying to our unique God who knows everything and from whom we cannot hide leads to *"a self-knowledge that is impossible to achieve any other way."*

Read Romans 8:12-17

Q: In these verses, who are the children of God?

Q: How are God's children obliged to live?

Q: What do verses 15 and 16 describe?

Martin Lloyd-Jones made the case that what Paul is describing in these verses is a *"profound experience of God's reality, a religious experience that is mystical in the best sense of the word."* Keller also found in the writings of so many theologians of the past, that God offers us no choice between truth and Spirit, doctrine or experience.

Q: What might we expect to see if we focus purely on Biblical truth and doctrine without Spirit and experience, or vice versa? Why is a balance of doctrine and experience, what the Scottish theologian John Murray called **'intelligent mysticism,'** so important?

TAKING IT HOME

Keller writes, *“One phrase of Murray’s resonated particularly, that we were called to an intelligent mysticism. That means an encounter with God that involves not only the affections of the heart but also the convictions of the mind. We are not called to choose between a Christian life based on truth and doctrine or a life filled with spiritual power and experience. They go together.”*

Now read 1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV)

“8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Also the ESV of verse 8

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and **rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.**”*

If you have time also read Ephesians 3:16-19.

Q: In your own words, what are Peter and Paul describing in these verses?

PRAY

Pray together, asking God to help us experience our theology - as well as our praises and concerns.