

JOHN PIPER

# A Tribute to My Father

with other writings



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## INTRODUCTION

My father turned 94 in heaven this year (2013). I have spent this afternoon listening to him as he read his poems and sang hymns with me. I recorded these little duets three years before he died. It has been a sweet afternoon.

I wish I had felt at 17 what I feel at 67. I wish I had known and felt the value of a father's Song. I wish I had sung with him earlier, just the two of us. Perhaps some young son reading this will ask the Lord Jesus to take away the immature embarrassment at his father's Song—the Song of his life.

My father was an evangelist-poet-singer-songwriter. I have in front of me a folder with the lyrics and the musical scores that he wrote. Five of these are the actual pre-lined music paper where he drew in the notes and printed by hand the lyrics between the treble and bass clefs.

There are titles like "I'm in Debt to Jesus," "Christ Is the Answer," "Thy Hand upon Me, Lord," "Take Time to Pray," and "Lord, Make Me Pure." One, called "His Grace Is Sufficient," is printed with the words "Copyright, 1943, by William S. H. Piper" in the bottom margin.

I have written before that my father was the happiest man I

ever knew. One of the reasons for this was his singing faith. To feel the significance of this, you need to understand that he was a fundamentalist. That's not a bad word in my vocabulary. And he's the reason. Fundamentals are worth dying for and fighting for. But that fight has killed the Song in the hearts of many people. But not in Bill Piper.

What you fight for—what you die for—is the joy. The Song. So if you lose it, all is in vain. Fundamentalists fight worldliness. But worldliness means fascination with inferior joys. That's what I learned from his kind of conservatism. You don't create "don'ts" to destroy joy, but to protect it. The Christ-less pleasures of the world are a kind of music that has no eternal soul. You resist for the sake of the Song.

So the music never died. Late in life he was still celebrating the sufficiency of grace—the theme-Song of his life.

*When the days of youth have ended,  
And your body bends with pain,  
When the strength of early years has passed away,  
Bear in mind that Christ has promised  
He is coming back again  
And His grace will prove sufficient 'til that day.*

He wrote that when he was 72. His faith in the sufficiency of God's grace never wavered. So the Song never ceased. Through loss and aging, and, finally, death, he wept and he sang. Actually, in his death I had to sing for him. We were alone in the hospital room. He drew his last breath. I stroked his forehead, and sang,

*My gracious Master and My God  
Assist me to proclaim  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honors of Thy name.*

His Master was gracious. He believed that. So he gave himself to proclaim the grace of God all his life. And lest anyone think that following his Master was a miserable affair, he sang.

O how I love my father, and his great Savior—and his Song. Surely this indomitable Song in our home was the birthplace of my life's theme: *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.* May God make this legacy a fitting tribute to my father, and a great honor to his song-inspiring King.

John Piper  
May 28, 2013

## A TRIBUTE TO MY FATHER

June 19, 2005

This is a fragment of the legacy of truth imparted to me by my father. The word *imparted* was no mere transmission of information. It involved a whole life of proclamation and demonstration. I will mention eleven precious truths imparted to me by my father.

### **1. There is a great, majestic God in heaven, and we were meant to live for his glory.**

Most of these truths that I will mention are rooted in my memory of particular texts that were branded on my mind at home. Few texts were more often on Daddy's lips in relation to me than 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

I am sure that in heaven some day the Lord will make plain the unbreakable chain of influences that led from that verse when I was a boy to the mission statement of Bethlehem Baptist Church: "We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ."

This won't be the only influence you will see of my father on that mission statement.

## **2. When things don't go the way they should God always makes them turn for good.**

Even more prominent in my growing up was the presence of Romans 8:28 in our family: "God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose."

I have several vivid memories of this truth. One was in 1974 when I rode with my father in the ambulance from Atlanta to Greenville with my mother's body in the hearse following behind. They had just been flown in from Israel where Mother had been killed in an accident and Daddy was seriously injured. All the way home, for three-and-a-half hours, he would weep and talk and weep and talk. He was fifty-six. They had been married thirty-six years.

And when he talked, it was Romans 8:28. I remember the very words: "God must have a reason for me to live. God must have a reason for me to live." In other words, God governs our accidents and makes no mistakes.

I will never cease to be thankful that I heard and saw the truth of Romans 8:28 in my father's life, "When things don't go the way they should, God always makes them turn for good."

## **3. God can be trusted.**

How many times did I hear the words of Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your



paths.” And Philippians 4:19: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

I can see us as a family when I was just a child. We were all (Mother, Daddy, and my older sister Beverly) sitting around a card table in my parents’ bedroom folding letters and stuffing envelopes which would be sent to pastors asking them to consider having my father come lead their churches in evangelistic meetings. This was Daddy’s life—he was a fulltime evangelist—and our livelihood. The answers to these letters meant bread on the table and paid bills. Then we prayed over these envelopes, and Daddy closed in a spirit of utter confidence: God will answer and meet every need. He can be trusted.

He told me more than once of a financial crisis when I was six years old in which he almost lost everything. And he said that God used Psalm 37:5 to sustain him and bring him through: “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him, and he will act.” And so I saw and I learned: God can be trusted.

#### **4. Life is precarious, and life is precious. Don’t presume that you will have it tomorrow, and don’t waste it today.**

My memory of my father’s preaching was that he always began with humor, but within seconds, he was blood-earnest and talking about heaven and hell and sin and Christ and life and death. One text above all others rings in my ears with terrible seriousness. He squinted when he said it, and his mouth pursed tightly the way it does after you taste a lemon: “It is appointed unto men once to die, after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). It made a huge impression on me as a boy.

The motto on Daddy’s college wall was, “The wise man

prepares for the inevitable.” The plaque in our kitchen when I was growing up was, “Only one life ’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”

## **5. A merry heart does good like a medicine, and Christ is the great Heart-Satisfier.**

That’s a quote from Proverbs 17:22. My father has been the happiest man I have ever known. Here is the kind of things he said in a sermon called “A Good Time and How to Have It.”

Right from the start, let’s get one thing straight: a Christian is not a sour puss. I grant you that some of them look and act that way, but you simply can’t blame God for it... . Some folks seem to have been born in the objective case, the contrary gender and the bilious mood.

What a legacy of joy my father has left!

## **6. A Christian is a great doer not a great don’ter.**

We Pipers were fundamentalists—without the attitude. We had our lists of things not to do. But that wasn’t the main thing.

Here’s what my father preached in a sermon called “The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth.”

Millions insist upon thinking that Christianity is a negative religion. You don’t do this and you can’t do that. You don’t go here and you can’t go there. To the contrary, the Bible constantly sounds the triumphant and positive note. “Be ye doers of the Word and not

hearers only.”... “Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do with all your might.”

God wants us to be doers, not don'ters. A Christian who is only a don'ter is a sour saint who spreads gloom wherever he goes. A don'ter is usually a hypocritical Pharisee. Years ago, I heard the late Dr. Bob Jones say, “Do so fast you don't have time to don't.”

That left an indelible mark on my life. We had strict standards, but I never chafed under them. They were not the point. Enjoying Christ, doing good, and loving people was the point. The rest was just fencing to protect the good field of faith and purity.

## **7. The Christian life is supernatural.**

I have one precious DVD of my father preaching. It is a message on the new birth from John 3:7: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” Becoming a Christian is not a mere decision. It is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

And therefore he believed in prayer—crying out to God to do the miracle of the new birth. We prayed together every night as a family, because the great need in life is supernatural, divine power to live a life of sacrificial love with joy—and that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, not a work of our own. I saw that my father's work was not a human work. It was divine work. Impossible work. But with God all things are possible.

## **8. Bible doctrine is important, but don't beat people up with it.**

At this point, he admitted openly to me with grief that our

fundamentalist tradition let him down. There was great truth, but too many of them were not great lovers. I can remember him saying: If they only understood Ephesians 4:15, “speaking the truth in love.” So from as early as I can remember, he showed me the importance of both right doctrine and the way of love. They must never be separated.

### **9. Respect your mother.**

If you wanted to see Daddy angry, let one of his children sass our mother. He not only knew the command of God to honor our mothers; he also knew the extraordinary debt that every child owes a mother.

Time and again, he would compare true love not to married love but to mother’s love. He knew the price my mother paid for him to be away so much in fulltime evangelism. Therefore, he would tolerate no insolence or disrespect toward her. I trembled at the fierce gaze in his eyes if I said something sarcastic to my mother.

### **10. Be who God made you to be and not somebody else.**

My father was short—a good bit shorter than I am. But he was content and could joke about it. The one I remember is his recollection as a boy that he was part of a football team called “Little Potatoes but Hard to Peel.” I think God delights to make short men great preachers. (Remember John Wesley!)

For me, this contentment with being who God made us to be meant freedom. Daddy never forced me or pressured me to be an evangelist or a pastor or anything else—just holy. “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Daddy's counsel was always: Love God with all your heart and be what he has made you to be. Then, what your hand finds to do, do it with all your might for the glory of Christ.

I close with one more truth—the central truth of my father's life. This was what he preached and what he loved. So I will let him preach it again.

## **11. People are lost and need to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.**

My father was an evangelist. His absence from home two-thirds of the year (in and out, in and out) meant one main thing: Sin and hell are real and horrible, and Jesus Christ is a great Savior. Here's a direct quote from my father:

In my evangelistic career I have had the thrill of seeing people from all walks of life come to Christ. I have seen many professional people saved. I have knelt with Ph.D.'s and led them to Jesus. College professors, bankers, lawyers, doctors. I have seen them all saved.

Then I have seen many from the other side of life come to the Lord. I have put my arm around drunkards in city missions and prayed with them. I have sat by the bedside of dying alcoholics and led them to Christ. I have seen the poor, the forsaken, the derelicts, the outcasts all come to the Savior. Yes, God takes them, too. Isn't it wonderful that anyone who wants to can come to Christ? (*Grace for the Guilty*, p. 111)

Perhaps you never had a father like this, but right now you hear your heavenly Father calling. How many times did I hear the

Father's voice in my father's voice and see His pleading face in my father's pleading face.

*Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling...*

*Come home! Come home!*

*Ye who are weary, come home!*

*Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,*

*Calling, O sinner, come home!*

I thank you, heavenly Father, for my earthly father. What a legacy he has left to me and my sister and our children and grandchildren—and to the church of Jesus Christ. And to the nations of the world to the glory of Jesus Christ.

## HELLO, MY FATHER JUST DIED

March 6, 2007

The big hospital clock in room 4326 of Greenville Memorial Hospital said, with both hands straight up, midnight. Daddy had just taken his last breath. My watch said 12:01, March 6, 2007.

I had slept a little since his last morphine shot at ten. One ear sleeping, one on the breathing. At 11:45, I awoke. The breaths were coming more frequently and were very shallow. I will not sleep again, I thought. For ten minutes, I prayed aloud into his left ear with Bible texts and pleadings to Jesus to come and take him. I had made this case before, and this time felt an unusual sense of partnership with Daddy as I pressed on the Lord to relieve this warrior of his burden.

I finished and lay down. Good. Thank you, Lord. It will not be long. And, grace upon grace, hundreds of prayers are being answered: He is not choking. The gurgling that threatened to spill over and drown him in the afternoon had sunk deep, and now there was simple clear air, shorter and shorter. I listened from where I lay next to him on a foldout chair.

That's it. I rose and waited. Will he breathe again? Nothing.

Fifteen or twenty seconds, and then a gasp. I was told to expect these false endings. But it was not false. The gasp was the first of two. But no more breaths. I waited, watching. No facial expressions. His face had frozen in place hours before. One more jerk. That was all. Perhaps an eyebrow twitch a moment later. Nothing more.

I stroked his forehead and sang,

*My gracious Master and My God  
Assist me to proclaim  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honors of thy name.*

Daddy, how many thousands awaited you because of your proclamation of the great gospel. You were faithful. You kept the faith, finished the race, fought the fight. “Make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon that they might receive you into eternal habitations” (Luke 16:9). I watched, wondering if there could be other reflexes. I combed his hair. He always wore a tie. The indignities of death are many, but we tried to minimize them. Keep the covers straight. Pull the gown up around his neck so it looks like a sharp turtleneck. Tuck the gappy shoulder slits down behind so they don’t show. Use a wet washcloth to keep the secretions from crusting in the eyelashes. And by all means, keep his hair combed. So now I straightened his bedding and combed his hair and wiped his eyes and put the mouth moisturizer on his lips and tried to close his mouth. His mouth would not stay closed. It had been set in that position from hours and hours of strained breathing. But he was neat. A strong, dignified face.

I called my sister Beverly first, then Noël. Tearfully we gave



thanks. Get a good night's rest. I will take care of things here with the doctor and the nurses and the mortuary arrangements. I will gather all our things and take them back to the motel. "I wish I had been there," Beverly lamented. Yes. That is good. But don't let that feeling dominate now. In the days to come, you will look back with enormous gratitude for the hundreds of hours you gave serving Daddy. It is my turn to be blessed.

The nurse came to give him his scheduled morphine shot. As she walked toward me I said, "He won't need that any more." "Is he gone?" "Yes. And thank you so much for your ministry to him." "I will notify the doctor so he can come and verify. I will leave you alone." "Yes, thank you."

The doctor in his green frock came at 12:40 and listened with his stethoscope to four different places on Daddy's chest. Then he pulled back the sheet and said, "I must apply some pain stimuli to his nail base to see if he reacts." Then he used his flashlight to test Daddy's eyes. "The nurse supervisor will come and get the information we need about the mortuary." Thank you.

Alone again, I felt his cheeks. Finally cool after the fevered and flushed fight. I felt his nose, as though I were blind. Then I felt mine. I thought, very soon my nose will be like your nose. It is already like your nose.

The nurse came. No thank you, an autopsy will not be necessary. Mackey Mortuary on Century Drive. My name is John, his son. My cell phone is... . "You may stay as long as you like." Thank you. I will be leaving soon.

Now I just look at him. Nothing has changed in his face here in the darkness of this dim light. Just no movement. But I have watched his chest so long—even now, was that a slight rise

and fall? No, surely not. It's like sailing on the sea for days. On the land the waves still roll.

He has four-days' beard and dark eyes. I lift an eyelid to see him eye to eye. They are dilated.

Thank you, Daddy. Thank you for sixty-one years of faithfulness to me. I am simply looking into his face now. Thank you. You were a good father. You never put me down. Discipline, yes. Spankings, yes. But you never scorned me. You never treated me with contempt. You never spoke of my future with hopelessness in your voice. You believed God's hand was on me. You approved of my ministry. You prayed for me. Everyday. That may be the biggest change in these new days: Daddy is no longer praying for me.

I look you in the face and promise you with all my heart: Never will I forsake your gospel. O how you believed in hell and heaven and Christ and cross and blood and righteousness and faith and salvation and the Holy Spirit and the life of holiness and love. I rededicate myself, Daddy, to serve your great and glorious Lord Jesus with all my heart and with all my strength. You have not lived in vain. Your life goes on in thousands. I am glad to be one.

I kissed him on his cold cheek and on his forehead. I love you, Daddy. Thank you.

It was 12:55 as I walked out of room 4326. Just before the elevators on the fourth floor in the lounge, a young man in his twenties was sitting alone listening to his iPod with headphones. I paused. Then I walked toward him. He stopped his music. Hello, my father just died. One of the greatest tributes I could pay to him is to ask you, Are you ready to meet God? "Yes, Sir." That would make my father very happy. You know

Jesus is the only way? “Yes, Sir.” Good. Thank you for letting me talk to you.

As I drove out of the parking lot, I stopped. The moon was a day past full. It was cold—for Greenville. I looked at this great hospital. *Thank you, Lord, for this hospital.* I will probably never lay eyes on it again.

## FUNERAL MESSAGE FOR WILLIAM S. H. PIPER

March 9, 2007

Everybody with a little life experience knows that in many cases parting is sweet sorrow. The experience is so common that we have proverbs to express it. Actually, it comes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*—which is more than incidental to say because my father was trained in Shakespearean drama at Bob Jones University.

*Good night, Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow,  
that I shall say good night till it be morrow.*

That experience is not new. Every tear has been a sad and happy tear. But what has been new for me is that it is not the immediate experience of my father's death that makes me cry. It doesn't work on me directly. It works indirectly. It comes at me through other people. Most of my tears since Daddy died on Tuesday have been sitting in front of my computer and reading emails. My father's death and my father's life are touching me

most in these days through the way they are touching others. That was new to me.

## Thank You

I mention this simply to say that so many people have touched me and touched my father in these last years and months of departing from us mentally and then bodily. And I want to thank God and you publicly.

Thank you, Beverly and Bob. Nobody knows what you paid. You have the right middle name. She would have done the same. And thanks to Berchetta and Steve and Brande who supported her and in the last days have made a place for us to be at home.

Thank you, John and Marilyn Vanden Akker for your partnership in the ministry of Rogma and your relentless care for my father. And thanks to all the Rogma board who respected and loved my father.

Thank you, Brent Armstrong, my father's faithful pastor, and all the friends at his church, Oakwood Baptist in Anderson. He could not have asked for a better pastor, even from a distance.

Thank you, Sharon and Larry, Nancy and Fred, Paul and Linda, and Pam and John for loving your uncle well, especially after Elmer and Naomi were gone. What an extraordinary bond existed between our fathers.

Thank you to Shepherd's Care where he spent the last two years of his life. He liked his place and turned it into a sanctuary where memories of gospel triumph were happening all over again.

Thank you to Dr. Bill Logan and the staff at Greenville Memorial Hospital who tenderly honored my father with dignified care and protected him from pain in his last week.

Thank you to Bill Philips and the team here at White Oak who have lifted so many burdens from us and made this day possible.

Thank you to all of you for coming to express your support to us and to honor my father. Your presence is a grace that we do not take for granted.

Thank you to Bethlehem, the church I serve, and to the hundreds of friends who have prayed and written. It is a beautiful thing when the sheep shepherd the shepherd.

Thank you to Karsten and Shelly and Millie and Frances and Able and Ben and Melissa and Lilia and Abraham and Molly and Barnabas and Lesley and Grace for coming to honor their grandfather and great grandfather. And to Oscar and Orison who were willing to stay behind.

And thanks, above all, to Jesus Christ, my father's God and my God. To use the words of George Mueller when he preached his wife's funeral sermon in 1870: "The Lord was good to give her to me. The Lord was good to leave her with me so long. The Lord was good to take her from me." So we thank him for Bill Piper: The Lord was good to give him to us—a child does not choose his parents, God does. The Lord was good to leave him with us so long—sixty-one years for me, more than I deserved. The Lord was good to take him from us—so quickly, so gently, so free from pain. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

### **Let My Father Preach One More Time**

When Daddy turned eighty, there was a great celebration. Some of you were there. When I stood to speak I said, "I have come to preach my father's funeral sermon." What I meant was that I wanted Daddy to be alive and to hear my tribute. And he

heard it. And so I don't intend to preach it again. Instead, it is printed in the booklet you have called "A Tribute to My Father."

Today what I want to do, as much as possible, is let my father preach to you one more time. Not with a recording but through the heart and mouth of his son. You know, when someone asks you, "Who were the key influences in your life that made you what you are?" your answer to that question is only as valid as your memory. And you don't remember but a tiny fraction of the influences that made you what you are. Many decisive influences came into your life before they could even register in your memory. And millions upon millions of influences have entered your life of which you have no memory. This is not only because you have forgotten millions of moments in your life, but because thousands of influences on you, you never knew about in the first place. For example, the prayers of others for you. You don't know about them, but they shape your life.

This fact has two effects on me. One is to make me thankful for the sovereignty of God. He governs all the influences over my life. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "By the grace of God I am what I am." I am glad that neither I nor any other human governs my life. God does. My days are in his hands. And I am glad.

The other effect this truth has on me is to send me back to my father's preaching to uncover more deeply my roots. I have seven of my father's books here. The more that I read them, the more I marvel at how unoriginal I am. And this makes me very happy. Original theologians tend to be heretics. I want what I say to have roots. I don't want to be new in what I believe. I want to be true.

## “Saved, Safe, and Satisfied”

And so I have chosen one of my father’s sermons from the book *A Good Time and How to Have It*. The sermon is on pages 43–49, and it is called, “Saved, Safe, and Satisfied.” The date on the book is 1964. I have simply marveled at how what I preach and write is simply an updating of his vision of the Christian life. He never used the phrase *Christian Hedonism*; he just preached it. He never used the phrase *God is the gospel*. He preached it. He never wrote a book called *Counted Righteous in Christ*. He just preached it. So I have reveled in the roots of my life. And I thought I should let the root speak through the branch.

Saved, Safe, and Satisfied—three of the great themes of his preaching. First, everyone must be saved or perish. Second, when God saves you by his sovereign grace, he keeps you safe by his sovereign grace. Third, Christ himself is our supreme satisfaction. A few comments about these three great themes of my father’s preaching and life:

### 1. Saved

Always, as he introduces a new theme, there flows off of Daddy’s tongue a stream of verses from all over the Bible that lays the foundation for his comments:

Isaiah 45:22: Turn to me and be *saved*, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

Jeremiah 8:20: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not *saved*.



Luke 8:12: The devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be *saved*.

John 3:17: God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be *saved* through him.

Acts 2:47: The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being *saved*.

Acts 16:31: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be *saved*.

## Saved?

But why talk so much of being saved? Why give your whole life to this? The world doesn't think it needs to be saved. Daddy told me more than once: Getting people lost is much harder than getting them saved. People don't think they need to be saved. It doesn't mean anything to them. So why talk so much about it? Four reasons:

- 1) Because we are by nature corrupt. We don't just sin, we *are* sinful. Our nature is bent, corrupted, depraved. We are selfish to the core. We are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1–3).
- 2) We have all acted on this nature relentlessly all our lives and piled up a huge debt of guilt. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In fact, since Paul says, “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23), and Hebrews says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6), all that we do apart from faith in Christ is sin—no matter how virtuous it is.

- 3) Because of this sinful nature and these mounting sins, we are under the just sentence of condemnation. The judge of the universe pronounces a sentence of guilt over us. And this is impeccable justice.
- 4) The punishment following this sentence of condemnation is everlasting torment in hell. Matthew 25:41: “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” My father’s eyes were never more penetrating than when he looked into your eyes and warned about the unspeakable reality of eternal punishment. This is a kind of love with which the world does not want to be loved.

## The Remedy

And of course the great burden of his message was that there is *Grace for the Guilty*, the title of one of his books. And he was unapologetic about being rigorously doctrinal in his evangelistic preaching, because the remedy for each of these four conditions from which we need to be saved involves profound biblical doctrine.

- 1) The remedy for our corruption and our sinful nature is *regeneration*. That is, we must be born again. And this is a gift and miracle of sovereign grace. You can’t make yourself to be born again any more than you made yourself be born. Jesus said in John 3:7–8, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

This is the work of God. If you have not been born again, ask God to do this miracle and give you spiritual life.

- 2) The remedy for the guilt of sin and the mounting up of sins day after day is the *redemption* in Christ Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins, because he bore them for us. Colossians 2:13–14: He has “forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).
- 3) The remedy for the sentence of condemnation that hangs over us because of our depravity and our sins is *justification*. This is the declaration in the courtroom of heaven that those who are in Christ Jesus are not only forgiven, but also counted perfectly righteous as though they had fulfilled every demand of the law. How can this be? How can I, a sinner, be counted righteous before God? Romans 5:19: “As by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The remedy for our condemnation is that, because of Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).
- 4) And the remedy for the curse and the penalty of hell and the wrath of God that hangs over us because of our depravity and sins and condemnation is *propitiation*. When you propitiate someone, you remove his anger. That is what

Christ did when he died (Romans 3:25). “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13). First Thessalonians 5:9–10: “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.” This is not because there was no wrath, but because Christ suffered in our place not only to cover our sins but to remove the wrath of God.

My father preached, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which *we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12), because everyone is sinful, guilty, condemned, and hell-bound, and because Christ is a great Savior. Everything hangs on whether you are united to Christ. In Christ we are forgiven, justified, and free from wrath. And union with Christ comes by one means: being born again through faith in him.

## 2. Safe

And when you are united to Christ by faith, you are safe. Forever. Not because the rest of your life doesn’t matter—as though you can live your life as though other things in your life are more precious than Christ. This is the great misunderstanding of eternal security in so many churches, which causes so much false Christianity. And my father was greatly burdened by this.

The safety of a Christian does not lie in the fact that I once prayed to ask Jesus into my heart and now I can know I am saved even if he has no central place in my life. The safety of a Christian lies in the biblical fact that those who embrace Christ as their Savior and Lord and Treasure, God preserves.

That is, God comes after us again and again to make himself central in our lives. Jeremiah 32:40 is one of the greatest statements of the new covenant that Christ bought with his blood: “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”

Our safety rests on God’s promise that because of Christ he will not let us minimize him without convicting us and causing us again to pursue him. In other words, the mark of a Christian is not perfection—we often stumble and yield to temptation to put other things ahead of Christ in our affections. But the mark of a Christian is that we grieve over this. We hate this about ourselves. And again and again we renounce our love for other things more than Christ and pursue him as our highest Treasure. That is what God promises to do for all who are justified by faith alone. “Those whom he justified he glorified” (Romans 8:30). It is as good as done. It is sure. The justified are safe.

Do we coast because we are safe? Do we love what the world loves because Christ died for us that we might love him above all things? No. That is not the heart of a Christian. Rather, we do what Paul says in Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Because we are safe—Jesus made us his own—we press on to make it our own. We resolve everyday... what? Which brings us to the final point: Saved. Safe. Satisfied.

### 3. Satisfied

We resolve everyday that today Christ will be our supreme satisfaction. The psalmist prays in Psalm 90:14, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” Satisfy us with your love. Not with the toys of the world. Do you pray like that? Is this your longing?

Can you resonate with Paul when he says, “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7–8)?

How often I have quoted C. S. Lewis that people who prefer the world—even the innocent world—to Christ are like children making mud pies in the slums because they cannot imagine what a holiday at the sea is like. Daddy put it like this: “I have often seen a cow stick her head through a barbed wire fence to chew the stubby grass bordering a highway, when behind her lay a whole pasture of grass” (*A Good Time and How to Have It*, p. 48).

#### **A Final Plea: Find Your Satisfaction in Jesus Christ**

This is my father’s final plea—it is what I intend to devote the rest of my life to: Find your supreme satisfaction in Jesus Christ. It does not come naturally to fallen human beings. But Christians have the Holy Spirit. They are in Christ Jesus. We are not of the world. We have a new nature. The mark of a Christian is not perfection but new affections for Christ.

Here are his closing words and mine:

Just remember, my friend, who Jesus is. He is God. When you fully trust Him you have all that God is and all that God has. You cannot be otherwise than satisfied with the perfect fullness of Christ. Because he is God, He is all you need and more. There is no corner of your life He cannot fill, no problem He cannot solve and no need He cannot supply... .Yes, my friend, in Christ we are *saved, safe, and satisfied*. He is a perfect, a complete, Savior. And I must add, He is the **ONLY** Savior. Trusting Christ spells JOY. Failure to trust him spells *judgment*. Now is the time to accept him. “Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart.”  
(*A Good Time and How to Have It*, pp. 48–49)

## THOUGHTS ON MY FATHER

January 13, 2008

My father, Bill Piper, was an incredibly intense preacher of the gospel with a strong evangelistic bent. That's because he was an evangelist. He was not a pastor and never was a pastor. For 50+ years he served as an itinerant evangelist trying all the time to rescue people from perishing.

Because of this he always had the smell of hell singeing his garments and the aroma of heaven beckoning him on. The result was an amazing combination of blazing-eyed intensity as he preached with high levels of joy, praise, and exultation over the hope that he had in Jesus Christ.

My father was one of the most intense people I've ever known when he was in the pulpit and perhaps the happiest person I've ever known when he was at the dinner table. I've never thought those things were in conflict, and they always struck me as describing the way one ought to be.

A Christian has to be realistic. The world is in a horrible state and eternity is looming very close with either hell or heaven, and we must be serious and intense. And on the other hand



Christ has come to redeem the world. He has rescued us. How can we not serve the Lord with gladness and rejoice always?

My father seemed to combine those in a remarkable way. He was a lover of humor. Nobody laughed more than my father laughed. If he told a joke he always laughed most at it, so whether you thought the joke was funny or not you were just drawn in by his belly laughter.

Practically speaking, what I remember about my father is that he left home a lot. He would leave home on Monday and get back the following Monday. Sometimes he would be gone for two or three weeks. The whole rhythm of our life was built around my father's comings and goings.

I've never felt any resentment about my father traveling so much because it was for such a glorious cause. It wasn't like business. It was our life. This is what we lived for: we lived for the gospel as a family. My mother knew what she had gotten into.

It wasn't easy for her to be without her husband approximately two-thirds of the year, but we were in it as a family together. Daddy's leaving was our part in the gospel spreading. And when he came home he would tell us great stories about people who had come to Christ after resisting for 25 years, people who broke on the last day of the crusade and walked with tears to the front. We would hear these glorious stories and how could we not support that or be thrilled to be a part of it somehow?

He did little things for us kids too. My sister had a spoon collection and I had a coin collection, and when he was traveling he would always be looking out for a spoon for Beverly and some coins for Johnny. And because he traveled so many places he could find some pretty unusual items. Little things like that made his going and coming poignant and special.

Now that he is with Jesus, I feel the weight of being the patriarch in the Piper family. That feels like a burden, but it's a good one. I was happy to let him keep it and wouldn't have wanted it from him, but when God said, "Bill, time for you to come home," then that mantle came to me.

There is no great-grandfather anymore, only grandfather, and it feels like a wonderful opportunity for me to love my grandchildren and my kids. I do that mainly through daily prayer. I name before God every day all of my children and all of my grandchildren the way Job did.

Scripture says that Job got up and sacrificed for his children every day, if perchance they had sinned. I pray rather to try and keep them from sinning. Nonetheless, there is a prayer cover that I feel like I owe this Piper clan which my dad once kept up.

About 10 years ago, Sam Storms wrote me and said, "John I felt led and made a commitment to pray for you every day for the rest of my life." I couldn't believe that! So I wrote in the Star article—our church's weekly newsletter—that I've never had anybody make that commitment to me before. That was a bad mistake. I got a letter from my dad the next week saying, "Johnny, before you were born I made the pledge to pray for you every day of my life—and I haven't failed." I just felt awful!

I called him on the phone and said, "Daddy, I knew that! I don't know why I said what I said."

So there are actually at least two people in the world who have made that commitment to me. But that prayer cover as the patriarch is gone. I don't have it anymore. Rather, I am that patriarch. And I want to be as faithful as he was to name all of my children, my wife, my daughters-in-law, and all of my grandchildren, interceding for them every day and covering them with prayer.

## EVANGELIST BILL PIPER: FUNDAMENTALIST FULL OF GRACE AND JOY

February 5, 2008

The title I have given this message about my father is “Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy.” That title is meant to carry several apparent incongruities or paradoxes or ironies. I expect you to feel tension between the word *fundamentalist* and the phrase “full of grace,” and between the word *fundamentalist* and the phrase “full of joy.” But the lead word is *evangelist*. Underneath being a child of God, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and justified by faith, and possessing all the riches of the glory of God in Christ—underneath that most basic identity, my father’s chief identity was “evangelist.” Independent, fundamentalist, Baptist evangelist—full of grace and joy.

### The Paradoxical Christian Identity

It seems to me that any serious analysis or exploration of a human being’s life will always deal in paradoxes. It will see tensions. Again and again, the serious effort to understand another

person will meet with ironic realities. Here is what I mean by irony: It's the "incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs" ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). The dictionary gives this example: "Hyde noted the irony of Ireland's copying the nation she most hated." In other words, it's a great irony to imitate the people you like the least.

It seems to me that there are very deep and basic reasons why every serious effort to understand another person—especially a Christian—forces us to deal in irony or paradox. One of the most basic reasons is that Christians are both fallen and redeemed. We are saved (Ephesians 2:8–9), and we not yet saved (Romans 13:11). We are adopted (Romans 8:15), yet we wait for adoption (Romans 8:23). We are pure in Christ, but not yet pure: "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened" (1 Corinthians 5:7). What an irony that unleavened bread should be told to become unleavened.

Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20); we are sojourners and exiles here (1 Peter 2:11). But the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (1 Corinthians 10:26); and "all things are yours, whether... the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21–22). We were bought with a price and are slaves of no man (1 Corinthians 7:23). Yet, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (1 Peter 2:13). Our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Yet Jesus prays that we not be taken out of the world (John 17:15). Indeed, "some of you they will put to death... but not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:16, 18). In fact, you have already died (Romans 6:8). So consider yourselves dead (Romans 6:11). How ironic that dead should be told to consider themselves dead.

In other words, irony and paradox and incongruities are found in every Christian life because our very identity as Christians is paradoxical. That's what it means to be a Christian. If you're not a paradox, you're not saved. In fact, I would go even farther and say, if you're not a paradox, you're not a human. What could be more basic to fallen humanity—and what could be more ironic—than that those who are created by God in his own image should use that God-like personhood to deny their Maker? Like a digging ant denying the earth; or a flying bird denying the wind; or swimming fish denying the sea.

### **Bill Piper: Human, Christian**

So there are these two great reasons why, as I have pondered my father's life, I have found him to be a paradoxical person: He is a Christian, and he is a human. Does it not seem like a strange incongruity—perhaps not a real one—that a blood-earnest, soul-winner, who hammered away at the temptations of the world and the dangers of the flesh should in his sixties celebrate the body of his wife with words like these:

*Her hair is like an auburn sea,  
Wind-whipped, waved, mysterious.  
Her forehead, like a wall of pearl  
Stands majestic, proud, serene.  
Her wide-set eyes are like clear, sparkling,  
hazel-green pools, calm, compassionate, penetrating.  
Her finely chiseled nose stands firmly between  
cheeks that are fair,  
like pillows of down.  
Her mouth is soft, pleasant and ruby rich.*

*Her skin is like the feathers of a dove.  
Her breasts are like rose-tipped apples of ivory,  
And her belly is like a ocean wave, smooth and restful.  
Her legs are like pillars of granite, strong and firm.  
And her feet like those of a deer, swift and beautiful.  
Her breath is like sweet nectar,  
Her kisses like perfumed flowers,  
And her love like paradise.*

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised that Bob Jones University should produce soul-winners that write like Song of Songs. Maybe the incongruity is just biblical faithfulness. But almost everywhere I turned in my father's life, there were these seeming paradoxes. He was human, and he was Christian.

### **Corporate Paradoxes**

And he lived with other humans and other Christians, who together created *corporate* paradoxes. Does it not seem like a strange incongruity—perhaps not a real one—that the most fundamentalistic, separatistic, worldliness-renouncing school in America, Bob Jones University, where my father graduated in 1942, should have as part of the commencement celebration in those days a performance of “As You Like It” (1939) and “Romeo and Juliet” (1940) both written by William Shakespeare, who in his own day ridiculed the Puritans, and whose Globe Theater was demolished by the Puritans in 1644? Isn't it a strange irony how three centuries can turn worldliness into “a delightful comedy”—as the BJU program said in 1939?

So whether personal or corporate, my father's life appears to be permeated with paradoxes. And under the title “Evangelist

Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy,” I hope to capture some of them in a way that gives you hope in the grace of God through the gospel of Christ.

### **An Old-Fashioned, No-Nonsense Rearing**

William Solomon Hottle Piper—named after a Bible expositor that his father admired—was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, January 8, 1919. He was the third and youngest son of Elmer and Emma Piper. His father had been a machinist (I couldn’t forget that he was missing half of one finger), but after his conversion, he became a self-taught Bible student and then the pastor of West Wyomissing Nonsectarian Church. My father told me that he wouldn’t have been surprised if his father could quote virtually the entire New Testament from memory. My guess is that this was an overstatement, but it signals the massive priority of the Bible and Bible Study that passed from my grandfather to my father to me.

The upbringing of the three boys, Harold, Elmer, and Bill, was old-fashioned, no-nonsense, and strict. He gives us a glimpse into the discipline of his father in one of his sermons.

Behavioristic psychologists teach that temper tantrums and defiant attitudes are normal and healthy. To curb them is dangerous. If you discipline the child you will develop within him inhibitions and warp his personality.

I’m glad I had a father who believed otherwise. I got “warped” a good many times, but it wasn’t my personality!... O, yes, we had plenty of counseling

sessions but generally he did the talking and when he finished I said, “Yes, sir.”

Old fashioned? Indeed it was! Scriptural? Absolutely! Right to the letter.

I was reared in a family of three boys. To this day I can hear some of the neighbors and church members say, “Brother Piper, you are just too hard on those boys.” Nevertheless, all three are following Christ and two of them are Baptist preachers. There was no “doing as you please” in our home. My father believed he was responsible for the behavior of his children and as long as we were under his roof we were expected to obey.<sup>1</sup>

The strictness of his father had some surprising side effects that were profound. He told me about one of them. It turns out that both Bill and Elmer had disobeyed their father. Elmer was the older, so his father said that he was the more responsible and that he would get the whipping for both boys. My father told me with tears in his eyes a few years ago that he could hear the belt on the backside. Though he was just a boy, he said it was one of the most vivid pictures in his life of the substitutionary atonement of Christ in our place.

In a sermon about the salvation of children, he tells us about his own conversion to make the point that young children can be saved.

That children can be saved I know from my own experience. I have a brother who was saved at the age of seven and another who gave his heart to Christ when he was eight. I received Christ as my Savior when I was a boy



of six. Certainly there were many things I did not know, nor need to know. I knew enough to be saved. I knew I was sinful and needed a Savior. I knew that Christ was that Savior I needed. I knew that if I would believe on Him and confess Him as my Savior He would save me. That is all I needed to know and that all any child needs to know to be saved. I trusted Christ and he saved me.<sup>2</sup>

### The Call at Age Fifteen

Besides his conversion at the age of six, probably the most decisive event in his teenage life (and I mean even more decisive than his marriage to my mother at age nineteen) was what happened when he was fifteen. He told me this story face to face several times over the years, and he always came to tears as he said it. He saw it as a moment of supernatural confirmation on his divine calling that never left him and that stamped his entire life. I will let him tell the story from his book *The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth*.

I can vividly recall the thrills that accompanied the delivery of my first Gospel sermon. I was fifteen years of age and had just surrendered my life fully to the will and service of Christ. The young people of our community had joined together to promote a city-wide revival and had invited a well known evangelist.

For the Saturday night service, the evangelist decided to turn the entire service over to the young people. For some reason I was asked to bring the message and to give the invitation.

I had been reared in a Baptist parsonage. All my life I had heard great preaching but I had never tried to do it myself. This was to be my first attempt. I didn't know how but I tried. My heart was filled with zeal and I wanted to do my best for the Lord. The big night came. For my message I had selected some thoughts on about a half dozen Gospel tracts. At the time of the sermon I spread these tracts all over the pulpit and I simply preached from one tract to the next.

I don't recall a thing I said. It probably was a poor sermon. But the thing that mattered was that when I gave the invitation to receive Christ [this is where the tears would inevitably come], ten precious souls left their seats, came weeping to an improvised altar and surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The thrill that came to me then is still with me many years later. I knew that Jesus had walked on the water but I felt as I left the building that night that I was walking on air! Believe me, I was on cloud nine! And, better still, I've never come down. What thrilled me most was the sudden realization that I had immeasurable power at my disposal. That the God of heaven, the God of the Bible, was willing to speak through me in such a way as to touch other lives and transform them and change their destinies.

I never dreamed such a thrill was possible for me. I had not known such power was at my disposal. I said then, "God, let me know this power the rest of my life. Let me

be so yielded to Thee that I'll never cease to know the thrill and joy of winning others to Christ." And I can say with honesty, I am just as excited right now [this book was published in 1980, forty-six years later] about the soul-winning power of God as I was at the age of fifteen.

Young people, believe me, the greatest thrill you'll ever have this side of heaven is the thrill of leading another precious soul to Christ.<sup>3</sup>

From that day on, my father's face was set like flint to be a full-time evangelist. Beside his name in his senior yearbook are the words: "He wants to be an evangelistic preacher." He never turned back.

### **Bill and El: The Gospel Songsters**

In the last two years that he and his brother Elmer were in high school together, they had their own radio program on WRW in Reading, Pennsylvania, called "Bill and El, the Gospel Songsters." They sang and preached. Their theme song was a song called "Wonderful Peace." Until you hear it, you can hardly imagine how different the teenage world was seventy-five years ago.

Perhaps my wife is right in her analysis: When she saw this, she pointed out that in 1936 adolescence as a distinct cultural phenomenon hadn't yet been created. There was no such thing as a vast teen culture. There was no teenage music. Frank Sinatra was born four years before my father. He is usually considered the first teen idol. The beginnings of a distinct youth culture was just about to begin. So when my father was in high

school the overlap between the music that mom and dad liked and what teens liked was much greater then than now.

In other words, my father grew up much more quickly than I did. He skipped a good bit of the usually-wasted years called adolescence, or what later was called the “teenage” years—the term *teenager* did not occur in the English language until 1941. He graduated from high school with his sweetheart Ruth Eulalia Mohn in 1936. You can see from the note in her senior year-book that her heart was bound together already in the calling of his life. Hers reads: “She intends to take up evangelistic work.”

### **Marriage to Ruth, College at Bob Jones**

After graduation, my father traveled with the Students’ League of Nations and studied at John A. Davis Memorial Bible School in Binghamton, New York. Then on May 26, 1938, he and his brother Elmer in the same wedding ceremony married Ruth and Naomi. Elmer married Naomi Werner. And Bill married Ruth Mohn. Bill and Ruth were both nineteen.

They moved to Cleveland, Tennessee, to attend Bob Jones College. The school had moved to Cleveland in 1933 from near Panama City, Florida, where it was founded in 1927. Ruth and Bill both enrolled. My father was an average student and a very gifted speaker and actor. He had leading roles in several Shakespearean plays. He developed a deep admiration for Dr. Bob Senior, the founder of the school, and quoted him often the rest of his life. My father loved the education he got at Bob Jones. He never belittled the school as an educational institution. When the time would come for cutting off ties with the school, it was a deeply painful thing.

He graduated in 1942 and entered full-time evangelism. My sister Beverly was born in 1943, and I was born in 1946. That same year Bob Jones moved to Greenville, South Carolina, and our family moved with them. Greenville became the base of Daddy's evangelistic ministry for the rest of his life. This is where I grew up.

### The Rhythm of Leaving and Coming Home

Life, in my memory, was a rhythm of Daddy's leaving for one week or two weeks or as long as four weeks, almost always on Saturday, and then coming home on Monday. When I dedicated the book *Desiring God* to him, I wrote

I can recall Mother laughing so hard at the dinner table that the tears ran down her face. She was a very happy woman. But especially when you came home on Monday. You had been gone two weeks. Or sometimes three or four. She would glow on Monday mornings when you were coming home.

At the dinner table that night (these were the happiest of times in my memory) we would hear about the victories of the gospel. Surely it is more exciting to be the son of an evangelist than to sit with knights and warriors. As I grew older I saw more of the wounds. But you spared me most of that until I was mature enough to "count it all joy." Holy and happy were those Monday meals. O, how good it was to have you home!<sup>4</sup>

He had been elected to the board of trustees of Bob Jones before coming to Greenville in 1946, the youngest board member ever

ected at that time. In 1952, the University awarded him the Doctor of Divinity degree in recognition of the impact of his ministry in the churches of the United States.

Over the next decades, he preached in all fifty states, half a dozen other countries, held over 1,250 evangelistic crusades, recorded over 30,000 professions of faith, and published seven books of sermons.

### **The Challenges of Full-Time Evangelism**

The personal toll this took on him, and what it cost my mother, was extraordinary. What keeps you going to hard new challenges week after week when it means you must leave the ones you love again and again? Here's what he wrote in his book *Stones Out of the Rubbish*.

As an evangelist, my work necessarily keeps me away from my sweet wife and children much of the time. Some have asked me, "How can you endure being away from them? Why don't you get a church and settle down?" There is but one answer. When I was a boy of fifteen, I sold out to the will of God. His will since that day has been the supreme passion of my life. There have been failures, mistakes and sins since then, but His blessed will has remained more important to me than family, home or friends. God called me to be an evangelist. I said, "Lord, this will mean homesickness, separation from loved ones, loneliness and sacrifice, but NEVERTHELESS, if that is your will, 'I will let down the net.'" The blessings He has given have often been more than I could contain. The fruit I have seen has

repaid me a million times over for whatever sacrifices I may have made.”<sup>5</sup>

Part of the burden he carried was the sordid stereotype of itinerant southern evangelists. It grieved him, but it didn’t stop him.

There is a reason why the words “evangelist” and “evangelism” meet with a feeling of nausea and disgust in the minds of thousands of thinking people today.... All emotionalism worked up in the energy of the flesh, deliberately aroused for outward results, or toyfully played upon by the impression-seeking preacher can leave nothing but bitterness in the bottom of the cup.

Still others of my colleagues have been guilty of employing cheap vaudeville showmanship tactics which have done permanent injury to the cause of true revivals. Spectacular, misleading, crowd-pulling sermon titles, sensational predictions, erroneous prophetic interpretations, high pressure money raising methods, ostentatious dress and dramatic presentations are but a few of the current evils in evangelism.... We serve a spectacular God. The universe He made is full of the spectacular. Christ is a spectacular Saviour. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a spectacular Gospel. The trouble is that some poor sinners saved by grace endeavor to make themselves *spectacular*, thus injuring the Gospel they preach and the cause they represent. The glorious, beautiful, powerful Gospel of Christ does not need to be garnished with vain predictions or colored with sordid emotionalism.<sup>6</sup>

## Not Your Typical Evangelist

My father was not your typical evangelist. He was a doctrinally driven, Bible-saturated evangelist. When he preached to save sinners, he explained doctrine. One outline from his sermon notes goes like this—and it is typical of the sort of preaching he did:

- I. Christ is our redemption
- II. Christ is our propitiation
- III. Christ is our righteousness
- IV. Christ is our sanctification
- V. Christ is our example
- VI. Christ is our expectation
- VII. Christ is our completeness

He believed that the best way to call for repentance and faith was to unpack the glories of Christ in the gospel, which meant unpacking doctrine. He had about 200 sermons in his arsenal. He told me that about twenty of them were blessed above all others, and he would return to these again and again. What marked out his evangelistic preaching as unusual was not the stories, but basic doctrines of man's helpless condition in sin, God's holiness and wrath and the immanent danger of damnation, the glorious fullness of Christ's saving work on the cross, and the free offer of forgiveness and righteousness to any who believed.

He was the most Bible-saturated preacher I have ever heard. When he took up the reality of the new birth, for example, the message was full of the Bible. Here is what I remember most of all from my father's preaching—the relentless onrush of the Bible spilling over from his mind and heart. My father loved



the Bible. He believed the Bible. He built his life on the Bible, and he preached the gospel at the center of the Bible with unashamed authority and almost no frills. And God used him mightily in the salvation of sinners.

## Separation and Exile

In 1957, something happened that broke his heart and changed the scope of his relationships. I don't know all the details. I just know that in June of 1957, Daddy called Bob Jones from a meeting in Wisconsin and resigned from the board of the school. The ways parted. I was eleven years old. Before that I had watched soccer games at BJU and seen films that they made. The campus was just across the highway from our home. But after 1957, there was no more connection. We were not welcome.

The larger issue above the particular details was the issue of separation. Christian fundamentalism today is defined largely by the doctrine of separation. The issue of whether to separate from Billy Graham and renounce his work became pivotal in 1957. His New York crusade began on May 15 and ran nightly for four months. The supporters of the crusade were not all evangelical. And the lines of separation became blurred. My father would not renounce Billy. And in the end, there was a division between my father and Bob Jones. This was one of the great ironies of his life. The movement that nurtured him and shaped him, the school that he loved and served, would no longer support him. Only near the end of his life was there a reconciliation as Bob Jones III reached out to my father. It was a sweet ending to a long exile.

## Death of Ruth, Marriage to LaVonne

In 1974, my mother was killed in a bus accident in Israel. My father was seriously injured but survived. They had been married thirty-six years. A year later, God gave my lonely father a second wife, LaVonne Nalley. I performed the wedding ceremony in December of 1975.

The effect of my mother's death and my father's second marriage was profound on our relationship. It took my father one more step away from closeness to me. LaVonne was a southern lady with deep roots in family and place. In the twenty-eight years of their marriage, LaVonne never came to Minneapolis. My father came twice. Since we only saw each other once a year or so, the relationship with the new relatives was cordial but not deep. It never felt very much like family. So it felt like my father had been drawn into an intimacy that was no longer focused on the family he fathered but the new relationship he had with LaVonne.

My relationship with my father had always been one of admiration and respect and tremendous enjoyment when we played games together or fished. But we never talked much about personal things. And with the death of my mother, and the movement of my father's heart into a new world of relationships, the distance that I felt grew even greater.

## In the Shadow of Evangelistic Effectiveness

It never changed my basic feelings for him. I felt a tremendous affection and admiration for him. In fact, in my adult years, I felt a huge compassion or pity for my father, first because of the sacrifices he made to do the work of evangelism, and then

because of the death of my mother, and then because of his increasing dementia. My emotional default reaction to my father was never resentment that he wasn't home enough. My reaction was: How can I show him that I love him and help him to know how much I esteem his work and the faithfulness he has shown?

I always felt supported, loved, and admired by my father. He spoke well of me. He thought I was crazy for leaving my professorship at Bethel to be a pastor, since he thought I was exactly where I belonged. But when the decision was made in 1980, he supported me and loved hearing news from the church. Most of all he loved hearing stories of conversions.

I have always lived in the shadow of my father's evangelistic effectiveness. I think it's been good for me, because my father's life is like a living parable of the priority that God puts on the salvation of one sinner who repents. "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). My father's life is a constant reminder of that truth. I am thankful for it.

## Homecoming

During the years after my mother's death and my father's increasing inability to travel in evangelism, the Lord opened an amazing door with the creation of international correspondence courses that my father wrote. Rod of God Ministries grew up with tens of thousands of people in Africa and Asia taking these courses. That ministry continues today under the leadership that my father put in place. It was a thrilling gift to

him as he aged because he was able to be involved in writing and teaching into his mid-eighties.

Only in the last couple years was his memory so impaired that he couldn't serve in that way. His second wife LaVonne died August 4, 2003. After a brief stay in independent living in Anderson, South Carolina, near his church, Oakwood Baptist, that cared for him so well, we moved him to Shepherd's Care in Greenville, owned and operated by Bob Jones University. It was, in my mind and his, a kind of homecoming—to the school he loved and to the fundamentalism he never really left—and paradoxically never really belonged to. I look back on God's mercy in my father's final days with tremendous gratitude. The Lord took him on March 6, 2007.

### **Self-Designated Fundamentalist**

After his deepest identity as a gospel-glorifying child of God, my father's identity was most essentially evangelist. This defined his life from age 15 to 88. In the last days, the unreality that his mind created at Shepherd's Care was not casual times with his family but evangelistic crusades. "Across the lawn there is where the meeting will be tonight." From beginning to end, he was defined by evangelism.

But he was also a fundamentalist. By his own self-designation. It was not a term of reproach but of honor. In the first decade of the twentieth century, liberalism was gaining a foothold in most denominations. The common word for the liberals then was *modernists*—those who believed that modern science had made some essentials of the Christian faith untenable. My father defined modernism like this:

By “modernists”, we mean ministers who deny the truth concerning Jesus Christ: His miraculous conception, His absolute deity, His vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind, His bodily resurrection, and His personal visible return to this earth. Modernists also deny the need of regeneration by the Holy Spirit and the fact of a literal hell.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, in the early days of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the battle was not for marginal doctrines or behaviors but essential doctrine—“fundamentals.” When J. Gresham Machen wrote his response to liberalism in 1923, he did not title it *Fundamentalism and Liberalism* but *Christianity and Liberalism* because he believed liberalism was not Christianity at all.<sup>8</sup>

Two years before my father was born, the four-volume set of books called *The Fundamentals* was published (1917). In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick fired his shot across the bow of the ship of the church called “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” My father grew up in this super-charged atmosphere of modernism threatening the very life of the churches in America. In his early sermons in the forties and fifties, he returned to this battle again and again:

Christianity is in the throes of a gigantic conflict with the enemies of the Lord. The followers of Satan have shown their colors and the Faith is being blatantly denied and rejected. Corruption and disintegration have begun in a dozen denominations where the enemy had spread his deadly poison.<sup>9</sup>

The breach between modernism and fundamentalism keeps getting wider.... “The faith once for all delivered unto the saints” has been shunned in favor of bloodless faith which glorifies man, denies his depravity, rejects the absolute authority of the Bible and the Deity of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, by the time my father was ten-years old, most people recognized that the battle to save the mainline denominations from liberalism was being lost. Then the question became how to deal with this, and the debates about degrees of separation altered the meaning of the term fundamentalism in the 1930s. It ceased to mean “orthodox Christianity” over against those who denied essentials, and came to refer one group of orthodox Christians, namely, the ones who believed that the biblical way forward was strict separation from denominations, groups, and relationships that were not fully orthodox and were not separated from those who were not fully orthodox.

Bob Jones University was and is one of the strongest representations of this development of fundamentalism. And my father embraced it and was defined by it—up to a point. For him, the heart of fundamentalism was the true doctrine. His passion was evangelism—saving people from perishing in hell by leading them to the divine Savior and his substitutionary work on the cross. In other words, if the fundamentals were not true, the gospel is a false hope, and evangelism is misleading. Therefore, the note struck more clearly than all notes was the doctrinal importance of fundamentalism:

Though fundamentalists do not agree upon every point of doctrine, they are definitely agreed upon the essential

elements of the Christian faith: the total depravity of man, the absolute deity of Christ, the vicarious, substitutionary atonement for sin through the blood of Christ, His bodily resurrection, the need of the new birth and the blessed return of Christ to the earth.<sup>11</sup>

Another dimension of fundamentalism that he embraced was authoritative preaching that was willing to name evil and defend truth.

Too many present-day pulpiteers are soft pedaling the Gospel. Even many who are robed in the vestments of fundamentalism are void of a semblance of holy boldness in their preaching. They handle sin with kid gloves, avoid great issues and shrink from declaring cardinal doctrines. Pussyfooters in the pulpit! What a tragedy! They are a blight to the Church and a blockade to the Holy Spirit's blessing.

God wants trumpets in the pulpit, not violins, trumpets that sound the reveille and warn of the judgment to come.... The tabooing of negative preaching has taken the fire and brimstone out of the pulpit, dried the tears of repentance and kept the altars empty. I would not for a moment minimize the effectiveness of the positive proclamation of the glorious transforming gospel of Jesus Christ.... It is my contention, however, that the sledgehammer preachers of yesterday were not entirely wrong, and that a balanced, middle-of-the road position must be taken.<sup>12</sup>

Then there was the fundamentalist vision of separation not

just from false doctrine but from all forms of worldliness that weaken the boldness and spiritual power of a Christian.

Every Christian who indulges in the sinful pleasures of this world is a compromiser and a stumbling-block. No dancing, theater-going, card-playing, gambling Christian can hope to be a soul winner or have a testimony for God. If men see this world in you, you will never point them to the next.<sup>13</sup>

I grew up in a home where it was assumed we would not smoke, or drink, or gamble, or play cards, or dance, or go to movies. We were fundamentalists. So why didn't I kick against this growing up? I have never thought ill of my parents for these standards. I have never resented it or belittled it. When I was in my early twenties, I was indignant in some of my classes at Fuller Seminary when certain young faculty members were cynical and sarcastic about fundamentalism. They sounded to me like adolescents who were angry at their parents and their backgrounds and couldn't seem to grow up. I never felt that way about my parents or about the fundamentalism of my past. Why?

## **Fundamentalist Freedom**

I think I know why. My mother and my father were the happiest people I have ever known. This strikes many as an incongruity, a paradox. But this is the key to my father's influence on me and, I believe, one of the keys to the power of his ministry. The fundamentalist forcefulness in the pulpit, the fundamentalist vision of "the razorsharp edge of truth,"<sup>14</sup> the fundamentalist standards that move from the Ten Commandments down to



dancing and card-playing—all of this was enveloped in a world of joy and freedom.

Freedom? Fundamentalistic freedom? Yes. I'll illustrate. When I was in the seventh grade, our class, Mrs. Adams' home-room, won the attendance award for the year. The award? The whole class would go to a movie at the Carolina Theater on Main Street during school time. My heart pounded. I went home and asked my mother—Daddy wasn't home—what should I do? She said, "Do what you think is right." I weighed all the factors, and I went.

The next year, in the eighth grade, a girl called me one night and asked if I would go with her to a dance. It was one of those Sadie Hawkins events where the girls invite the guys. She was a pretty girl. My heart pounded again: Uh... I don't dance, I said. She said, We don't have to dance, we can just sit and watch. Uh... just a minute. I went and asked my mother what I should do. (Daddy wasn't home.) She said, "Do what you think is right." Then she checked her calendar, and we were going to be out of town. Saved.

What was my mother, speaking for my father, doing? She was saying: We have standards, son, but they need to come from the inside. If they don't come from the inside, they are worthless. On these issues, you're old enough now to discover who you are deep inside. When my parents said, "Do what you think is right," they were not foolish relativists. They were wise fundamentalists.

### **"Truthing in Love"**

Soon I was old enough to start talking about these issues with my father. Daddy, why is there a split between you and some

other fundamentalists? One thing I remember above all about these conversations. He went to Ephesians 4:15 over and over and reminded me that in all our devotion to the truth we must “speak the truth in love.” He used to love to play on the Greek verb and translate it “truthing in love.” He felt as if fundamentalism was losing the battle mainly for spiritual and attitudinal reasons, not doctrinal ones.

Already in the 1940s, there had emerged in my father’s preaching and teaching and writing a warning about the dangers of fundamentalism. For the careless listener, this could sound like he was abandoning the ship of fundamentalism. Some would say he did. He would surely say he didn’t. I don’t think he did. Let me try to capture the spirit of this warning from his own words:

Some professing Christians, often those who boast of their fundamentalism, are given to a grievous censorious and critical attitude toward everything and everybody. As one man I knew has said, “Some people are born in the objective case, the contrary gender and the bilious mood.” . . . For one to profess to know Christ and have real religion and at the same time to manifest a sour, critical, negative attitude is disgusting and abhorrent even to the ungodly. Certainly anyone with such an unsavory nature could never hope to be a “savour of life unto life.”<sup>15</sup>

## Critiquing Fundamentalism

Then there is this amazing passage that folds the critique of

fundamentalism in with a much wider concern and shows the scope of my father's burden. He is not picking on anyone here, he is groaning over the lost power of the church and longing for the day of great revival.

When backslidden Christians confess their waywardness and return to God; when worldly Christians stop their smoking, drinking, dancing, card-playing and show-going and heed again the message of separation; when pharisaic negative religionists who boast loudly of what they do not do, forsake their contemptuous pride, covetousness and carnality and return again to their "first love"; when slothful, sleepy, negligent Christians are filled with the Spirit and feel again the thrill of their salvation; when stagnant fundamentalism is replaced by aggressive evangelism; ... when anemic sermons are red again with the crimson blood of Jesus; when the average church ceases to be merely a center of social interest and becomes again a source of spiritual influence, does more praying and less playing, more fasting and less feasting, showers of revival fire and blessing will again fall on America.<sup>16</sup>

He said that there is a world of difference between being separated and being consecrated. If we don't move beyond separation to consecration, our separation is worthless. This is what my parents were saying to me when mother said, *Do what you think is right, Johnny*. The issue in this family is not whether we keep separation rules, but whether we have consecrated hearts.

I have seen many Christians who are separated but

far from consecrated. They boast pharisaically of what they do not do and fail to see that they are doing almost nothing for God... Consecrated Christians are Christians who are so busy serving the Lord that they have neither time or taste for the things of the world. They have found their joy and complete satisfaction in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

*Fundamentalism* ceased to be a term my father could use for himself without profound qualification. And this didn't change for forty years.

If Christianity, as he said, is not rules and dogmas and creeds and rituals and passionless purity and degrees of goodness, and if the devil himself is a fundamentalist (because he knows all the fundamentals to be true), then what is the heart of the matter? What is Christianity? What was it that undergirded and overshadowed everything else in our home and in my father's ministry?

### **Stunned by the Gospel**

The answer was gospel-rooted, Christ-savoring, God-glorifying joy. My father was stunned by the gospel. He exulted in the gospel. Everything in fundamentalism was secondary to the glory of Christ enjoyed in the gospel. The gospel meant salvation, and salvation meant, in the end, total satisfaction in Christ:

Other religions are spelled, "Do," but Christianity is spelled, "Done." If you would be saved, you must place your trust in the finished and perfect work of Christ on the cross. In Him all sin was punished and God's holiness was vindicated. God is satisfied with Christ as

to the perfection of His life and righteousness, and as to the completeness of His work in the sinner's behalf. God's only requirement for salvation is that you, too, be satisfied with Christ and His work.<sup>18</sup>

## Satisfied with Christ

Where did I learn that delight in God is our highest duty? Before Jonathan Edwards and before C. S. Lewis and before Daniel Fuller, there was Bill Piper, unsystematically, unapologetically, and almost unwittingly saying: *God's only requirement is that you be satisfied with Christ.*

Long before John Piper read C. S. Lewis's *The Weight of Glory* and learned about the folly of making mud pies in the slums because one can't imagine a holiday at the sea—long before that—he was hearing his father talk about the cow and the barbed-wire fence by the road.

I have often seen a cow stick her head through a barbed wire fence to chew the stubby grass bordering a highway, when behind her lay a whole pasture of grass. I have always been reminded of Christians who have not learned to completely trust Christ, reaching out to the world for sensual pleasure when rivers of pleasure were at their disposal in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

No, no one is denying that there are pleasures to be had in this world.... That is not the point. The point is that there are other pleasures to be had in this life. Pleasures so great in depth, significance, satisfaction and duration, that they far exceed the pleasures of sin.

They are the pleasures to be found in the knowledge and service of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

### **“Everyone Wants to Be Happy”**

Long before John Piper ever read, “All men seek happiness”<sup>21</sup> in Pascal’s *Penses*, he was absorbing from his father these very truths. This from a sermon in the 1940s: “Everyone wants to be happy. Sinners seek it in pleasure, fame, wealth and unbelief, but they seek in vain. Christians have found the answer to happiness in Christ.”<sup>22</sup>

And what are these pleasures that this fundamentalist is so ravished by? Like Lewis, my father answered: They are everywhere.

The devil never made a rain drop or a snow flake. He never made a baby smile or a nightingale sing. He never placed a golden sun in a western sky or filled the night with stars. Why? Because these things were not his to give. God is the creator and the possessor of them all and he lovingly shares these things with us.<sup>23</sup>

### **Christ Himself, The Supreme Delight**

Is it any wonder my father was a poet? Poets are people who see the indescribable glory everywhere and will not be daunted in their passion to make language serve its revelation. My father found reason to rejoice everywhere he looked. He had an invincible faith that all things serve God’s wise purpose to reveal his glory. Even in his final years of dementia, he rejoiced. In the last month that he was able to keep a journal (April 2004), he

wrote, “I’ll soon be 86 but I feel strong and my health is good. God has been exceedingly gracious and I am most unworthy of His matchless grace and patience. The Lord is more precious to me the older I get.”

In other words, not the pleasures that lie strewn everywhere in life, but the pleasures of Christ himself are the supreme delight. “Every believer has in Christ all the fullness the world longs for. Christianity, therefore, far from being dull and dreary or a harsh system of rules and regulations, is a gloriously free, real, victorious and happy life.”<sup>24</sup>

And, he adds, it never ends:

His grace is infinite. It is fathomless as the sea. In glory, throughout the ages to come, we who are saved will behold an endless display of these riches which we now have in Christ Jesus. [Then, always the evangelist, he says, and I say] I trust that you all are sharing this wealth. If not, you may. Simply place your faith in Christ and start reveling in the riches of God’s grace.<sup>25</sup>

### **“Fully Satisfied with Him Alone”**

One last thing, lest he fail to get all the credit that he should: He preached a very provocative message once called “Sanctifying God” from Isaiah 8:13 (“Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread,” KJV). What was his answer to the question, How do we “sanctify” God—how do we esteem him and honor him and set him apart as the supremely valuable Treasure of our lives?

He gives his answer in the form of a very personal discovery: “I knew... that God was sufficient, abundantly able to supply my

every need and the need of all who would trust Him. But to sanctify Him as such, I realized that day that I must live a contented life, a life fully satisfied with Him alone.<sup>326</sup> Or to quote the echo of the father in the son: God is most sanctified in us, when we are most satisfied in him.

What an evangelist! What a fundamentalist! What a soul full of grace and joy!

Thank you, Daddy. Thank you. Under God, I owe you everything.



## A TRIBUTE TO MY FATHER, ON MY LAST FATHER'S DAY AT BETHLEHEM

June 17, 2012

Today is Father's Day. I was thinking about my father as I walked to morning prayer on Friday. I remembered one scene most vividly and joyfully. The moment of his death. I was alone with him in his hospital room. It was March 6, 2007. He was 88. He was ready.

The breaths were coming rhythmically, but the pace was slowing. I have told the story in detail. But this past Friday one picture was in my mind. When the awaited breath never came again, I looked at the clock on the wall and thought: Both hands straight up. Midnight. Both hands lifted straight up.

As I walked to church I lifted my hands and sang the refrain of the song I can hear him singing more clearly than any other—"At Calvary."

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free;  
Pardon there was multiplied to me;  
There my burdened soul found liberty at Calvary.*

It was a joyful parting. His because he saw Christ, mine because I loved him. “If you loved me you would rejoice that I go...” (John 14:28).

I love him profoundly five years later. My overwhelming and ever-deepening affection is: Thank you for pointing me to Calvary. Thank you. Thank you.

I am coming to the end of my pastoral ministry. There will not be another Father’s Day at Bethlehem. As I ponder the wonder of these pastoral years and the stunning gift of this joyful transition, I give my father the credit he should have. He prayed for me every day of my life, while he had his mind. He taught me the truth of the Bible and the glory of the gospel. He built the fiber of conviction into the sapling of his only son. If I have done any good for Bethlehem, I lay it, under God, at his feet.

## NOTES

- 1 Bill Piper, *The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth* (Greenville, SC: Piper's Evangelistic Publications, 1980), p. 30.
- 2 Bill Piper, *A Good Time and How to Have It* (Greenville, SC: Piper Publications, 1964), p. 65.
- 3 *The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth*, pp. 22–23.
- 4 John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), pp. 13–14.
- 5 Bill Piper, *Stones Out of the Rubbish*, (Greenville, SC: Piper's Publications, 1947), pp. 63–64.
- 6 *Stones Out of the Rubbish*, pp. 27–28.
- 7 Bill Piper, *The Tyranny of Tolerance* (Greenville, SC: Piper's Publications, 1964), p. 28.
- 8 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1923), pp. 49–50.
- 9 *The Tyranny of Tolerance*, p. 38.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11, 17.
- 13 *Stones Out of the Rubbish*, p. 62.
- 14 *The Tyranny of Tolerance*, p. 10.

- 15 Bill Piper, *Dead Men Made Alive* (Greenville, SC: Piper's Publications, 1949), pp. 28–29.
- 16 *Stones Out of the Rubbish*, p. 33.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 18 *Dead Men Made Alive*, p. 24.
- 19 *A Good Time and How to Have It*, p. 48.
- 20 *The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth*, p. 22.
- 21 Blaise Pascal, *Penses* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 113, Thought #425.
- 22 *Dead Men Made Alive*, p. 30.
- 23 *The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth*, p. 39.
- 24 *A Good Time and How to Have It*, p. 70.
- 25 *Dead Men Made Alive*, p. 62.
- 26 *A Good Time and How to Have It*, p. 17.



The mission of Desiring God is that people everywhere would understand and embrace the truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Our primary strategy for accomplishing this mission is through a maximally useful website that houses over thirty years of John Piper's preaching and teaching, including translations into more than 40 languages. This is all available free of charge, thanks to our generous ministry partners. If you would like to further explore the vision of Desiring God, we encourage you to visit [www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org).

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**Desiring God**

2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406  
888.346.4700 [mail@desiringGod.org](mailto:mail@desiringGod.org)