

The Poor Doubting Christian Drawn to Christ

Thomas Hooker

Don Kistler, Editor

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Religious scholars might consider Hooker's book timeless and relevant, though at the outset non-academics may find that absorbing a work composed during the author's lifetime (1586?1647) is a challenge. The author writes in the style of his time, states the 1845 introduction: "Antiquated though it may be in some instances, it has a simplicity and force of expression which ought not be sacrificed to so unimportant an object as giving ancient thoughts a modern dress."

Hooker served as the first minister of Hartford, Connecticut, and the first rector of Esher in Surrey, England, where Francis Drake was his patron and benefactor. As a member of the clergy, Hooker was compelled to write this book as a result of communicating pastorally with Drake's wife, who was spiritually troubled because she felt she had committed "the unpardonable sin." This sin is the one that Jesus cannot forgive because it is blasphemous against the Holy Spirit.

While Mrs. Drake and her supposed sin are not topics of the text, the work succeeds in describing and waylaying the intrusive doubts that can plague a Christian with respect to placing full confidence in God's forgiveness. "There is more power in God to show mercy to you than there is power in sin to destroy you," the author writes, and exhorts readers with ways to overcome their obstacles to reliance on Christ. He tells readers they run the risk of losing sight of God's grace if they pore over their corruptions too deeply.

The book is divided into five chapters with archaic titles. In modern language, they are: Things that hold people back from accepting Christ; Things that can help one accept Christ; How a Christian can refer to the Bible for evidence of His existence and to assure a peaceful state; Ways to generate interest in God's promises and improve them for one's benefit; and How a man can be taught so that he may gain the skill of living by faith.

Christian or not, readers may detect a sense of understated excitement at the thought that this book was written centuries ago and still manages, with the use of colorful analogies, to speak to current spiritual lives. One analogy is that men who are wise will purchase a well-wooded parcel of land, especially if the ground contains rich mines, for with the land they have everything. "He who has the grace of faith has them all; he has holiness, cleanness, love, a pure mind, and a good conscience—in fact, what does he not have?" Hooker continues: "He who would have grace must first of all get faith. Faith will bring all the rest. Buy the field and the pearl is yours."

DOROTHY GOEPEL (January / February 2001)

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