



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

In Benjamin Franklin's autobiography he shares, "I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection." To do this he thought to "imitate Jesus and Socrates." He listed 13 virtues (temperance being first and humility being the thirteenth) which he believed defined these men. Each day he arose at 5am; and before he retired at 1am, he reviewed his list of virtues to see how he fared for the day. He later concludes that his life was like a garden—just as one will never eradicate all the weeds, at least "one will have the pleasure of seeing the progress of the good." Though Franklin's idea was noble, he rejected God's plan of personal salvation. At issue is not 'our' self-discipline, but 'our' faith in the redemption of Jesus who has the power to "purify us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Praise God that salvation rests not in our perfection, but in His!



VBTS held its 20th Commencement this month in the auditorium of Colonial Baptist Church. It was a wonderful occasion combined with student testimonies, public prayer for each of our graduates (picture above), a heart-stirring challenge from VBTS New Testament Professor Dr. Thomas Dailey, and the granting of seven theological degrees. The following is a list of our graduates with a short description to help you pray for God's continued blessing in their lives.

MASTER OF BIBLICAL STUDIES: 39 HOURS

Pamela – serving as a missionary with her husband in Spain

Jonathan – a police officer serving as an elder in his church

MASTER OF BIBLICAL STUDIES FOR CHAPLAINCY: 72 HOURS

Brett – served in Syria and Iraq; beginning his new ministry as a prison chaplain in Hampton Roads

Charles – pastoring an inter-city church; founder of Urban Theological Mission

MASTER OF DIVINITY: 96 HOURS

Joseph – a candidate for Chaplain in the US Navy

Alex – served in Iraq; seeking a senior pastoral position

Ryan – desiring to be a church planter (location TBA)



Thomas Brooks: “One of the King’s Mighties”

Guest Author: VBTS Dean and Professor of Theology, Eric J. Lehner, Ph.D.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) was an English Puritan of remarkable influence. Charles Spurgeon found the work of Thomas Brooks so helpful that he published selections of it under the title *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks*. In the preface of this book, Spurgeon introduced Brooks as “one of the King’s mighties . . . of the race of giants . . . head and shoulders above all the people, not in stature (like Saul), but in mind, soul, and grace.”

Despite the significant impact that Brooks had on Spurgeon and others, there is little of his biography that is available to us today. The brief story that has survived paints the portrait of a young man reared in a godly home and sent to Cambridge for his education. Ordained to the gospel ministry in his early 30’s, Brooks would first serve several years as a navy chaplain before entering a sustained pastoral ministry in London. His ministry was marked by courage: Brooks remained in London to preach and minister despite numerous difficulties, including his ejection from his pastorate (for refusing on the grounds of conscience to comply with the Act of Uniformity, 1662), the Great Plague (1665), the Great Fire (1666), and the loss of his first wife (1676). Though his faithful ministry to the saints of London ended in 1680, his ministry continues through the 6 volumes of his published work.

Readers of Thomas Brooks are drawn to his readability, his practicality, and his constant attention to Scripture. Two of his best works are worthy of note. In his work titled *Heaven on Earth* (1654), Brooks provides counsel to those unsure of their salvation, showing the difference between true and counterfeit assurance, reasons why true believers lack assurance, and how believers can walk in the path of assurance that releases the soul from doubt and fear.

Perhaps the most highly regarded work of Thomas Brooks is *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices* (1652). With pastoral wisdom Brooks shows how the Evil One employs various strategies to deceive, tempt, and lead people astray and how he afflicts the saints with depression, doubt, and fear. He also explains how Satan seeks to destroy every kind of person through bondage to sin. Throughout the work the Word of God is presented as the divine remedy. So helpful is *Precious Remedies* that Sinclair Ferguson (Professor of Systematic Theology at RTS) remarks, “This is a book every Christian should have . . . Brooks ransacks Scripture and deals with them [Satan’s devices] . . . as a pastor in a way that is bound to help any Christian that reads the little book.”

Readers new to Thomas Brooks will observe three noteworthy features of his writing. First, he employs a rigid structure typical of the style of his day; second, his counsel is given with a note of confidence which 21st century readers may be unaccustomed to; and third, he writes with a clarity and urgency concerning eternal matters as few before or after him. Here is a compelling example: “*Heaven would be a very hell to an unholy heart. . . . an unholy heart may desire heaven – as it is a place of freedom from troubles, afflictions, oppressions, vexations, etc. . . . But this is the least and lowest part of heaven. To desire heaven as it is a place of purity, a place of grace, a place of holiness, a place of enjoying God, etc. – is above the reach of an unholy heart.*” (*The Crown and Glory of Christianity*)

Despite the centuries that have passed since the life of Thomas Brooks, his works remain substantial, readable, and practical—a timeless treasure trove of godly counsel for those in spiritual warfare.

Note: *The Works of Thomas Brooks, Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks, Heaven on Earth, and Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices* are published in reprint editions by The Banner of Truth Trust.