

Becoming Partakers of the Divine Nature

By Richard C Chewning

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Those who have had the privilege to know Dr. Richard Chewning — the patriarch of the Christian Business Faculty Association — have been touched by his brilliant mind, loving heart, and humble spirit. Chewning’s excellent and weighty book, *Becoming Partakers of the Divine Nature*, is his *magnum opus*, and represents decades of deep thinking and writing about the nature of God.

In the book’s preface, Chewning sets forth its purpose: “I write to promote a serious examination of the attributes of God and of his desire to impart specific aspects of his character into the renovated hearts of his adopted children through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:4) — so that their new lives would shine before men in such a way that others might see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16)” (Chewning, 2013, p. v). He notes that the book is not a typical scholarly work in that “it does not reference many authors; it simply makes use of God’s disclosure of himself in Scripture and his expressed will for those who bear his image” (p. v). The veracity of this claim is shown through the extensive use of Scripture throughout the book.

Chewning appropriately delineates his underlying presuppositions in the preface; in doing so, he reveals a high respect for God and a high view of Scripture. He goes on, in the opening chapter, to discuss how having the mind of Christ is essential to the formation of a Christian worldview. When a believer has the mind of Christ, his or her mind, passions, and will are changed over time; the “mind of Christ is the distinctive leaven shaping a Christian’s world/life-view” (Chewning, 2013, p. 18).

Part 1 of the book attempts to answer the question, “What is the divine nature?” Chewning begins by examining the self-revealing and transcendent nature of God, the Trinity, and God as Spirit. He then closely examines God’s holiness, immutability, omnipresence, wisdom, goodness, omnipotence, sovereignty, and love, devoting a chapter to each of these characteristics of God’s nature. Chewning’s goals in the first section are to help the reader to (1) have a deeper appreciation for God’s nature, (2) understand the meaning of “Christ in you and you in Christ,” (3) seek a deeper relationship with Christ, and (4)

desire to become more Christlike (pp. 179-180).

Building on this foundation, Part 2 attempts to answer the question, “How do people become partakers of the divine nature?” Chewning begins by examining human nature in those who do not and do know God. He then explores the concepts of salvation and sanctification through attempting to answer the question, “What does it really mean to be created in the image of God?” He moves on to the biblical concept of the heart, examining the heart as the location of the mind, passions, volition, and love. This section concludes with a look at how God imparts aspects of his divine nature to renovated hearts.

Part 3, “Manifesting Christ’s Divine Nature,” is the most practical section of the book. Chewning describes what a redeemed Christian with a renovated heart and the mind of Christ looks like in regard to dating, marriage, raising a family, and singlehood. He then discusses vocational aspects of manifesting God’s nature in the realms of business, government, and the public arena. While these chapters are practical, they continually refer back to the theological framework developed in the first two sections of the book; therefore, it would be difficult to fully grasp the contents without reading the earlier sections.

It is in this third section of the book that Chewning really shines. For example, anyone parenting students of dating age will find material of interest in Chapter 21, “Christ’s Divine Nature Manifested in Dating Relationships.” Chewning discusses developing healthy male/female relationships, dating “in the Lord,” discerning *agape* and *philos* love, controlling *eros* love, and deciding to become engaged, and does so in a forthright but respectful and discerning manner. The chapter on marriage follows, with advice concerning equality and submission in marriage, establishing appropriate boundaries in the process of establishing a household, and the meaning of becoming “one flesh.” In the chapter on the family, Chewning establishes that children are born with a sin nature, and therefore need to have their hearts transformed and to be taught appropriate behavior. To do so, children must be disciplined, not punished. Chewning teaches that children must not only have an appropriate fear

of and respect for God, but also an appropriate fear of and respect for their earthly fathers. Children must also learn self-restraint and be taught how to “solve problems and negotiate differences that are preferences but not true problems” (p. 339). The chapter concludes with a discussion of how parents impact their children’s perceptions of the Trinity.

For many readers of this journal, Chapter 25, “Christ’s Nature Manifested in Business,” will be of interest. The chapter is summarized in Figure 25.1, “Biblical Principles in Business” (Chewning, 2013, p. 362), which addresses the question, “What does the Lord require of us in the marketplace?” Chewning discusses the following key points:

- Employers doing justice toward employees
- Employees doing justice toward employers
- Businesspeople doing justice toward customers
- Businesspeople doing justice toward competitors
- Managers doing justice toward owners
- Businesspeople doing justice toward government
- Business leaders doing justice toward society

Chewning provides 19 scenarios to think about, with Scripture to consider for each. These scenarios could be used beneficially in classes on management or ethics.

Chewning writes from a Reformed theological perspective, while acknowledging that legitimate differences exist between his theology and that of others. Chewning’s respect for Scripture is high, and the book is well grounded in Scripture. Readers from many Christian theological perspectives will find much of interest in this book, but those looking to take offense at theological differences will find opportunities to do so. For example, those from an Arminian perspective may find Chewning’s discussion of election (pp. 24–27) to be unsatisfying, may struggle through the chapter on God’s immutability, and may find the chapter on God’s sovereignty over all forms of suffering to be particularly difficult. Those who believe in the Holiness doctrine of entire sanctification will struggle with Chewning’s progressive sanctification position, which permeates the entire book. Pentecostals may object that the chapter on mirroring God’s power focuses on not abusing power rather than on using God’s power in ways that bring healing or work miracles. None of these quibbles, however, should provide an excuse not to read the book; its value outweighs these important points of distinction.

Some readers will find the length of the book — over 400 pages — to be an impediment to reading it. Others may not be willing to work through the first two parts of the book before getting to the practical information in the final section. Those who are willing to put in the time and effort needed to absorb this book will be richly rewarded by Chewning’s depth of thought and insights into the nature of God, man, and practical living.

The purpose of Chewning’s book can be summed up in the words of the hymn “Oh to be like Thee”

(Chisholm, 1897):

Oh! to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I’ll forfeit all of earth’s treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

Oh! to be like Thee, full of compassion,
Loving, forgiving, tender and kind,
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting,
Seeking the wand’ring sinner to find.

Oh! to be like Thee, lowly in spirit,
Holy and harmless, patient and brave;
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches,
Willing to suffer, others to save.

Oh! to be like Thee, Lord, I am coming,
Now to receive th’ anointing divine;
All that I am and have I am bringing,
Lord, from this moment all shall be Thine.

Oh! to be like Thee, while I am pleading,
Pour out Thy Spirit, fill with Thy love,
Make me a temple meet for Thy dwelling,
Fit me for life and Heaven above.

Refrain:

Oh! to be like Thee, oh! to be like Thee,
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

Chewning concludes with a prayer “that God — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — will be pleased to use this book as a means of elevating the truth that his relationship with his people declares, so that all may see his awesome glory; for he is the One Who Changes Our Hearts and Makes Us Partakers of His Divine Nature, whereby his children reveal to the world that they have been given to Christ by God the Father through the patient and tender work of the Holy Spirit!” (p. 407). Those who read this book with discerning hearts and an openness to its message will themselves become answers to Chewning’s prayer.

REFERENCES

- Chewning, R. C. (2013). *Becoming partakers of the divine nature*. Quarryville, PA: Great Rock Publishing.
- Chisholm, T.O. (1897). *Oh to be like Thee*. Public domain. Retrieved from http://www.hymnary.org/text/o_to_be_like_thee_blessed_redeemer_this.