

The Wednesday Word, Jan. 14, 2009: The Gospel and our Relationship with God, Part 2

I thank God for summer missionaries, but not when they confuse the gospel with the fruit of the gospel. Many of the summer missionaries I have encountered believe that the gospel is all about their wonderful relationship with God. They insist that the foundation of salvation is found in an ongoing experience of relating to God. But this is not the gospel! Rather than making their experience of God the center of their message they ought to tell of God in Christ. They could, for example, tell of His cross as the greatest trading post in the world! After all, it is there, at the cross, that we exchange our unrighteousness for Christ's righteousness; our condemnation for His acceptance; our unworthiness for His worthiness; our inability for His ability: our death for His life.

Our dear summer missionaries and anyone else trying to preach the gospel, for that matter, ought to focus on Christ Jesus, the eternal Word who became a man and as a man neither sinned nor was conquered, but took the sins of His people at the cross and made them His own. We should proclaim that, in grace, He took responsibility for sins and thus these sins are all done away with in Him. Our sins were no match for His perfections and holiness and now, because Christ shed His blood for them, we can no longer find them! There is no remembrance of them. They are gone forever.

When we proclaim the gospel, we should tell that since Christ is our Savior, His righteousness is ours. Furthermore, we should make it very clear that this righteousness is not infused into us, but, rather, is found outside of us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our summer missionaries, like all of us, would do well to learn from George Whitfield, the great 18th century preacher who brought awakening to both America and Great Britain. He often, like the apostle Paul, "reasoned of righteousness" (Acts 24:25) by asking his listeners, "Is Christ your righteousness?" This is the great question! He would further ask, "Have you come to the place where you see your need of Christ's righteousness? Have you ever hungered and thirsted after His righteousness? Have you ever said, I want Christ with all my being, I want the righteousness of Christ for my own?" I know, I know--these are foreign words and thoughts for many today, but ministry like this from our summer missionaries and the rest of us would bring enormous glory to the cause of the gospel.

But what about our relationship with God? Is this not a vital gospel message? No, it is not! Notice, I didn't say it is not a vital message, it's just that it constitutes no part of the gospel! Our relationship with God, no matter how sweet it is, is not the gospel; it is the result of the gospel! Our relationship with God in no way declares us 'not guilty', but proceeds from our new verdict before God! At the cross we were reconciled and redeemed and, as a result, we can have a new, vibrant, relationship and friendship with God. This relationship, however, should not be confused with the finished work of our redeemer!

Although our relationship with God is not the gospel, we will, however, see this relationship grow and prosper as it is bathed in the gospel. The right to this experimental aspect of salvation is ours by purchase and it should not be neglected. It is important, then, in the light of the gospel, to ask ourselves whether or not we are, in reality, pursuing a relationship with Christ Jesus through His word! Is there a desire to talk to Him and to enjoy Him? Another thing we should ask is, "Have we, because of this new relationship, become Christ's friend?" Remember, I'm not talking about

Him being our friend, -----that truth is not in question! After all, He's the friend of sinners and that qualifies us all as candidates for His friendship. The old Hymn is excellent when it says,

"Thou art the sinner's friend
So I thy friendship claim
A sinner saved by Grace
When Thy sweet message came"

But the big question is, are we friends of Jesus? Of course, we know that He's an unfailing, loyal friend who always keeps His word. But Jesus says to his disciples in John 15:14, "You are my friends if you do whatsoever things I command you." Think about this; one of the things He has told us to do is to preach the gospel. He hasn't ever commanded us to go and tell people about how wonderful our life is. If we really want a relationship of friendship with Him we should start by getting the gospel straight.

Consider this: in every friendship there has to be truth. Jesus always spoke the truth to us. By the way, have you noticed that in human friendships there is often an element of hypocrisy? "What a beautiful baby" we say when in reality we think the poor child looks like a monkey. But Jesus is brutally honest with us. He tells us that there is no saving quality within us. He tells us that we are all, by nature, unrighteous. He tells us that we are entirely lost and our whole head is sick. It's not very flattering is it?

Then, He presents Himself to us as our only hope. He tells us that we should come to Him and exclusively rest on Him. We must believe this. You can disagree with Him if you like, but if you do, you are not His friend. You may be a friend to the church, but you're not His friend. Just try getting on your knees and telling Him that you are His friend, and then say, "But, by the way Jesus, you told us lies for I really am not that bad and neither are the others to whom I plan to witness."
-----You know that one won't fly!

Not only do we need to believe His truth about ourselves, we need to also believe the truth about Him. This is vital for our message! Jesus was born of a virgin: but there are rascals out there who say that they are Christians, yet say, "Oh I don't believe all that nonsense about the virgin birth". Well, if you are in that camp, you've every right to be ...but don't call yourself a friend of Jesus. Again, try getting on your knees and telling Him that His Mother was an immoral woman and that He is a bastard! Well don't get upset at me! That's what you are saying! Reject the Virgin Birth and you make Him a bastard!

So are you Christ's friend? Then believe the truth as He tells it! Believe what He says about you and says about Himself. And above all else, tell the truth about Him. Tell of how he was despised and rejected and hung on a cross as a despicable thing. Tell of how men scoffed and hissed at him and tell that it was sin that placed him there on the cross. Tell of how He was treated as though He had committed the very sins of His people. Don't hold back the truth if you are His friend. And whatever you do, don't go around telling people about your relationship with God and think that by doing so you have preached the gospel.

May we send more summer missionaries than ever before; as Romans 10:13-15 says, "----How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent----?"

The gospel is the message of the good things God has done for us in Christ, in history, outside and apart from us. The person who tells others that they can have a relationship with God is telling the truth, but in stating this, he has not yet preached the gospel. The unsaved need to hear the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ; they don't primarily need to hear about our relationship with God and about how good it has made us feel.

And that's the Gospel Truth!