

*This week we begin a short series on 'The Gospel and the Guilty Conscience.' Many believers are suffering needlessly from guilt. It's true that we all have much about which to feel guilty, but the gospel has radically dealt with this problem. Soli Deo Gloria!*

### **The Wednesday Word, Feb. 18, 2009: The Gospel and the Guilty Conscience: Part 1**

*"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:22*

The Lord Jesus is our ever-living, ever-glorious High Priest and, as His followers, we have the privilege, through Him, of enjoying full access to heaven. This access to heaven, however, has been given, not because of anything we have done or are doing, but rather because Jesus Himself is the living way. Our works as His followers cannot improve upon His finished and completed work nor can they add to His perfection. Christ is 'All in All'; He is the way to heaven and also the destination. He is the door and all that is inside the door.

Furthermore, because of our perfect Savior and His finished work we now have a guilt free life; - --- a life of abundance (John 10:10) which comes to us through the gospel. As believers we are to continually absorb ourselves in the powerful and energizing knowledge that God Himself came to this earth as our personal representative, undertook our cause, suffered and died for our sins and rose from the grave. As we steep ourselves in this Good News, this gospel, we are enabled to abandon our own righteousness, and see that because of grace alone we are now reckoned as being perfectly righteous with neither perverseness nor iniquity found in us (Numbers 23:21).

However, many church going 'believer-centered believers' are self-absorbed and focused on their condition. They are certainly not thrilled with Jesus. This is a direct result of the gospel not being preached, expounded and applied. Even for a genuinely saved person, a focus on self is not the way to peace! On the contrary, a self-focused life sets us up for serious attacks from the Prince of Darkness. Unless we are grounded and established in the gospel we have no protection against the ongoing onslaught of guilt and condemnation sent our way by Satan. When these attacks happen, unless the gospel has been grasped and embraced by us, the only options left open are those of despair and depression. The reality is, there are many believers dying with guilt instead of enjoying the abundant guilt free life of this 'so great salvation'.

When there is a steady diet of subjective preaching it causes believers to continually look inward to their hearts. When our heart and our spiritual condition become our focus we have set ourselves up to be ambushed by his satanic majesty (this is not to say that it is never right for the believer to be challenged about his heart condition, but a steady diet of that kind of preaching divorced from a gospel center actually destroys the very thing it is intended to establish.)

The gospel truth is this; in Christ, every believer is already absolutely and totally perfect and, therefore, free from guilt. One of our problems, however, is that, as believers, we often find it very hard to embrace such a message. Do you ever find that? Let's be honest, sometimes it's hard to put all our confidence and trust in an invisible Christ who somehow took our guilt way back at some point in history. Every now and then, when faith fails, we want something a little more tangible. Sometimes we think that there should be something extra that we can do or contribute to this

business of salvation ---at least that way we could have something more 'solid' to rest upon. We want to make some kind of atonement for our sins, we want to show how sorry we are for our wretched failures and in that way demonstrate to God how deserving we are of His forgiveness. The great difficulty, nonetheless, with this type of thinking is that, apart from it being an insult to Christ, it makes God into someone we have to continually barter with, impress and appease.

There is an awful and confused caricature of God which often pops up in the thinking of those who are not gospel-driven. God is viewed, by them, as being the God of a clenched fist and angry frown who peers over the side of Heaven with a magnifying glass in one hand and a club in the other just waiting for us to step out of line. But nothing could be farther from the truth. For example, in Mathew 12:20 we discover some excellent truth about God. Jesus, as you know, is the best self-portrait God ever painted and in Matthew 12 we are told that He will neither break the bruised reed nor extinguish the smoking flax. If anything was ever a picture of weakness it is the bruised reed. It's been walked all over and crushed. That's the way so many of us feel. We messed up! We failed! We couldn't keep the marriage together! We can't keep away from pornography. We are guilty as charged. But the grace of God towards us is so amazing that we discover in spite of being in this beaten down condition, Jesus will not break us. For every failure Satan wants to smother us with guilt, but our Father in Heaven covers us with grace. Even in our greatest failures, Christ's grace remains unchanged and His throne of grace remains unshaken. I suspect this may make some of our self-righteous readers squirm. Alas, for them the welcome of grace goes only to the strongest and is denied to the weakest----spiritual Darwinism at its best!

God's grace in Christ is unfathomably huge. However, if we sit around all day meditating on our past sins then we shut out the gospel and live in condemnation. We may well mourn over our sins and their blackness, but we must ever refuse to be condemned and guilt-ridden by them. As we begin to become Christ-occupied we embrace that He has lived and died for us. Being Christ-occupied enables faith and confidence to grow in our hearts. We begin to see that Christ alone is our entire hope and righteousness. Faith sees and embraces that He is full of mercy, grace and compassion for His children. The old Hymn says it well,

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven;  
There is no place where earth's failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of our mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

There is plentiful redemption

In the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.

'Tis not all we owe to Jesus;  
It is something more than all;  
Greater good because of evil,  
Larger mercy through the fall.

If our love were but more simple,  
We should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

Souls of men! why will ye scatter  
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts! why will ye wander  
From a love so true and deep?

It is God: His love looks mighty,  
But is mightier than it seems;  
'Tis our Father: and His fondness  
Goes far out beyond our dreams.

But we make His love too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify His strictness  
With a zeal He will not own.

Was there ever kinder shepherd  
Half so gentle, half so sweet,  
As the Savior who would have us  
Come and gather at His feet?

And that's the Gospel Truth!