

The Wednesday Word, Feb. 25, 2009: The Gospel and the Guilty Conscience: Part 2

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Hebrews 10:14

We have already been delivered from condemnation and guilt at the cross. In Christ we have already received the gift of no condemnation. The Father will not and cannot condemn His blood bought saints because Christ has already taken away their sin. Christ is now seated in heaven where there is neither further offering for nor remembrance of sin. Our standing before God is now perfect because the work of the cross is perfect. Sins may interrupt our enjoyment of fellowship with God but they cannot alter our position before Him. Our righteousness is Christ’s righteousness and it is both unchanging and complete.

Yet there are so many of God’s people unable to find peace in their everyday life. They say that they don’t “feel” right or don’t “feel” saved. They are unsure and troubled in their faith. Instead of looking to Christ alone, they look into their own hearts, and find a distinct lack of comfort there. But why spend your time dwelling on your heart? There’s nothing but a cesspool of blackness in there. You can absorb yourself pursuing the myth of a pure heart, but you will never find it ... myths are too elusive. Begin to occupy yourself with Jesus ... His heart was pure enough for all of us and still is. As Luther said, “When I look at myself I think it impossible that I could be saved: When I look at Christ I think it impossible that I could be lost.”

The remedy for guilt, therefore, is not more self-effort, but more gospel! The more grounded we are in the perfect work of God in Christ the more we will see that Christ Jesus is our entire righteousness. God in His love, continually beholds us in Christ and sees us as perfect. In His free abounding grace He has given us eternal life. If, however, we fail to grasp this and have not been steeped in the gospel, our sins will easily grip us with despair. Then the thought strikes—What if I’m not saved at all?

Brother Earnest Effort

To illustrate this, let me introduce you to dear Brother Earnest Effort. He’s a decent soul, but alas, he has not been established in gospel truth. All he knows to do is ‘to do’! He makes his efforts and his heart condition the center of his Christian life. Without knowing it, he is brewing himself a lethal cocktail! After continually taking stock of himself he sees the ongoing rottenness of his very being. After all, he lives with himself. Everywhere he goes — there he is. He has tried rededicating himself to God so often that his re-dedicator has just about worn out. He still sees his secret thoughts and they are not good. He knows the cesspool of filth that bubbles up at the most inopportune moments. He gets deeply troubled by the continual plague of lusts and wicked thoughts that bombard him, but instead of looking to Christ for deliverance he looks for comfort and aid everywhere else. He tries more discipline and gets up earlier to have his quiet time. He volunteers to help with the feeding program for the homeless. But still, everywhere he goes there he is! And Brother Earnest Effort is a member of a church. He sometimes hands out the bulletins and is on the greeting committee. His church is full of nice decent people who talk about the Christian life, but it’s a church which does not have the gospel on center stage. Brother E. Effort takes his seat each Sunday and week after week Pastor Practical Preacher gets up and teaches the folks how they can have a better life, how they can be debt free, how to succeed in life, how to have a better marriage, why they should not gossip, how to overcome a bad temper and the like,

but Brother Earnest Effort, while he appreciates all the new information he gets each week, remains deeply anguished, troubled and untouched. Brother Effort agrees with Pastor Preacher, but looks again at his heart saying to himself, “Pastor Preacher is quite right, I shouldn’t gossip and judge; I shouldn’t get annoyed and angry with people the way I do, but after all this time I still keep falling into these things. There’s only one thing that must be the matter, I must not be saved!”

After several years of this, Brother Earnest Effort feels so condemned that he eventually drops out of Church life, separates himself from the church assembly and joins the ranks of the casualties and spiritual cripples! One of the ironies of the whole thing is, after killing him with legalistic subjectivism, the church then condemns him because he dropped out. Pastor Preacher says with pious voice, “He went out from us, but he was not of us; if he had been of us he would surely have remained with us”. Thus Brother E. Effort is discarded and is left to wonder why it is that the Church is the only army on earth that buries their wounded!

What Brother Effort was not taught however, was that true guilt free victorious living can only be realized through continual exposure to the gospel. That’s why the gospel is the essential message for believers. But Brother Earnest Effort never really got to hear the gospel because Pastor Practical Preacher pandered to the subjective cravings of his congregation. Brother Effort, therefore, never grasped the good news that the big issue wasn’t him, but rather the big issue is the Lamb. Is the Lamb, a suitable sacrifice, —that’s the issue! Was He qualified to die? Was He sinlessly perfect? In the Old Testament, the High Priest examined the lamb. If the sacrificial lamb was found to be without blemish or impediment it was reckoned as a fitting sacrifice and the guilty party went free. The priest examined the Lamb not the one who brought the lamb. If the lamb was accepted then the one who brought the lamb was accepted and reckoned as innocent in virtue of the fact that the lamb would die as his substitute.

So it is with us today. Our Lamb, The Lord Jesus, has been slain and because of His shed blood all charges against us have been dropped. The Father has examined Him and is satisfied. His sacrifice has been accepted and as proof of this Christ has been raised from the dead. This is the basis of the guilt free life! God sees your lamb, the Lord Jesus without flaw, spot or imperfection and that, therefore, is the way He sees you. Your sins have been perfectly purged by the perfect blood of your perfect High Priest and by that same perfect offering you have been perfected and sanctified.

“But,” you ask “what happens when I sin?” You’ve got two options. 1) Beat yourself up over your wretchedness and try harder or 2) take your sin to the blood and confess that Jesus Christ has died for you and has been punished in your place. Then thank Him for His wonderful cross and His perfect work that has removed all your sins. Thank Him that He already looks on you as being perfect. Thank Him that He stooped to save you and then lifted you up to heaven and seated you in Him in the heavenly places.

And that’s the Gospel Truth!