

The Wednesday Word, June 1, 2011: Law Work!

It has almost become a mania in certain circles to insist that a 'Law Work' must be done in the unregenerate to prepare them for salvation. It is being said by some that no one can receive salvation unless they first feel utterly miserable about their sin of breaking the Law of God. Some even go as far as to suggest that the unsaved make a list of their sins and grieve over them before they come to Christ. This teaching, it seems, is a reaction against the many false conversions characterised by the lack of repentance.

But is this the way to revival? I think not! Horatius Bonar says, "*Few things are more dangerous to the anxious soul than the endeavours to get convictions, and terrors, and humiliations, as preliminaries to believing the gospel. They who would tell a sinner that the reason of his not finding peace is that he is not anxious enough, nor convicted enough, nor humble enough, are enemies to the cross of Christ.*"

Of course, it is true that Christ saves sinners and only sinners. The publican in Luke 18 approached God as though he himself was the worst of sinners. He literally cried out, "God be a mercy seat to me THE sinner." So there is no argument here, Christ saves only sinners; he heals only the wounded and finds only the lost.

But here's the question, does Christ require extensive preparation through the Law before we can come to Him? If He does, then we are saved by Christ plus our extensive preparation. If this is the case then Christ requires some manner of worthiness before He saves, the worthiness of preparation. Thus salvation, in this scheme of things, is no longer free and gracious, it is earned and deserved. In this scheme of things, the gospel is no longer the power of God unto salvation. The new power of God unto salvation, in this theory, is now our preparation by the law and not Christ Crucified. But this is nonsense for holy and pure as the law is, it has not in its entire history produced one single case of salvation (Rom 3:19-20).

By the Law comes a knowledge of sin (Rom 7:7-9). Thank God for that! The Law convicts me of my inability to save myself. That, however, is not the point. The question is, is it essential to have what is called a "law-work," preparatory to faith in Christ? Let me put it this way, must I be entirely ruined and reduced to dust and ashes by the Law before I am qualified to believe? What if I'm only a little bit ruined? Must I wait for more conviction before I flee to Christ? Must I have any other qualification other than to be unqualified for salvation?

For an answer to these questions, we ought to consult the apostolic preaching of the New Testament. There we have the preaching of the gospel by people who knew what they were talking about. In the Book of Acts, we have a number of anointed soul winning sermons, but interestingly enough, in not one of these are the listeners told that they had broken the Law of Moses. The very thing that pricked the hearts of the thousands at Pentecost was not the Law but the gospel, the good news of Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, the apostles, like any good preachers, were careful to apply the message to their hearers. Peter concluded his sermon on the day of Pentecost with these piercing words, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"(Acts 2:36). Horatius Bonar says of this, "*These were words more terrible than law; more overwhelming than those heard at Sinai. Awful as it would be to be told, 'You have broken the whole law of God;' this would have been nothing compared to, 'You have crucified his Son.'*"

The sin of crucifying the Lord of glory was greater than the breaking every law in the book. Here was their condemnation, they had crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. That was their sin. Their actions condemned them. They were brought to an awful sight of the cross and this produced sorrow for sin.

Of this Bonar says, *“The gospel was the apostolic hammer for breaking hard hearts in pieces; for producing repentance unto life. It was a believed gospel that melted the stubbornness of the self-righteous Jew; and nothing but the good news of God's free love, condemning the sin yet acquitting the sinner, will, in our own day, melt the heart and soften human rock-work into men.”*

And that's the Gospel Truth