

The Wednesday Word, Oct. 8, 2008: The Gospel and the New Birth

“Jesus is never seen until the Holy Spirit opens the eye. The water from the well of life is never received until the Holy Spirit has drawn it from the depths.”

Spurgeon

Contrary to much of today’s evangelical preaching, we must state that the message of New Birth is not the gospel.

We have often touched on this subject in previous Wednesday Words, but now we need to give it a little more attention. Much as we value the necessity of the New Birth we must remember that it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us and not the work of the Son for us. Yes we all must be born again, but to preach being born again is to preach the fruit of the gospel and not the gospel itself!

The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is, of course, vital. Unless God the Holy Spirit intervenes upon the will and the conscience, the dead sinner will remain dead, the unwilling sinner will remain unwilling and the desperately hard sinner will remain tough and insensitive. But, vital as the work of the Holy Spirit is, His work in us is not the gospel; it is not the perfect, finished saving acts of God in history in the person of the Lord Jesus!

Mark it down; Jesus coming into our heart is not the gospel! In fact, the command to “ask Jesus into your heart” is nowhere found in the Bible. Jesus never once commanded anyone to do anything of the sort nor did the apostles ever suggest that this was the way to salvation! As for Revelation 3: 20 “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me,” this was written to the Church, not to the unbeliever. so there is no warrant for using it as a proof text to support the practice of asking Jesus into the heart in order to be saved!

‘Ask Jesus into your heart’ is a well-meaning sentiment that, as far as I can ascertain, comes out of old time revivalism and as a phrase it was introduced into Christianity to counteract the dead formalism that had taken over so-called Christianity. In this day and age of rampant subjectivism, however, I venture to say that it has become a dangerous phrase because it conveys the impression that the one who has prayed this prayer is now saved simply because he has said this prayer. Salvation is now by formula---“just ask Jesus into your heart” Gone is the need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Gone is the need for faith alone in Christ alone! Yet, there are many preachers who maintain that to neglect to tell people to ask Jesus into their hearts is to neglect to preach the Gospel.

The greatest news in the Universe, however, is not that we can be born again; the greatest news is that God invaded this world in the person of His Son and became the substitute for sinners in His doing and dying. To cause people to major on the ‘doing’ of praying a formula prayer for salvation is far removed from trusting in the ‘done’ of the gospel.

The truth is, the Gospel is not about our heart at all; rather, it concerns God’s heart of sheer grace

that was demonstrated to us, apart from us and outside of us in the Christ event in time and history. The gospel is not about how God acts in the believer, but rather about His saving acts outside the believer.

Because of the gospel event, the Bible declares that we are freely justified by grace (Romans 3:24). We are not justified because He has come into our heart. No! He has justified us freely by grace. 'Freely' is a wonderful word! Not only does it mean 'without a cost' it also means 'without a cause'. There is no quality, therefore, in the human heart which causes God to save us. We are saved by grace and this grace was given to us, not when "Jesus came into our hearts", but given to us in Christ Jesus before we were ever formed. He "saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (2 Timothy 1:9).

Grace, you remember, means that God accepts those who are unacceptable. He does not accept us because He has come into our hearts and changed us into something satisfactory. That then would no longer be grace. He doesn't declare us 'not guilty' because He has found a new righteousness within us. The only perfect righteousness that He has ever found is the righteousness which is in Christ Jesus alone. On this point, I love what John Bunyan says in his book, "Grace Abounding for the Chief of Sinners." At a particular time in his life he was going through deep torment of his mind and tells us,

"-this sentence fell upon my soul: Thy righteousness is in heaven. And I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, today and forever."

In Conclusion: The big issue before us in this matter of salvation is not whether or not Christ is in us, but rather whether or not we are in Christ! The ground of our acceptance before God is found entirely outside of us and not in us. We are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" - Romans 3:24.

And that's the Gospel Truth