

The Wednesday Word, Oct. 15, 2008: The Gospel and the Holy Spirit

Christ's doing and dying are the sole grounds by which God treats us as being accepted and perfectly righteous. But surely, say one, we are made acceptable before God when Christ comes into our hearts! No indeed! As stated in last week's Wednesday Word, the gospel is not about Christ saving us by coming into our hearts; the Gospel is the good news that sinners are saved by the finished, completed, saving acts of God in history in Christ Jesus. This is so far removed from the sinner's heart that it was actually accomplished and completed 2000 years ago. This is Bible Christianity. All other religions teach that salvation is found in some process within the worshiper. The worshiper has to experience something or to do something. But Bible Christianity alone proclaims a salvation which is found in an event outside the believer. The Bible never once presents the gospel as being about Christ coming into our hearts!

I once met a drunk who told me he was saved because he'd asked Jesus into his heart! Since the time of saying this little prayer he'd never opened a Bible, prayed, associated with any believers or sought God to free him from the power of sin. But according to him, he was heaven bound; he'd prayed the prayer-----That's what the preacher had told him to do. Just ask Jesus into your heart and God will give you the gift of eternal life! Salvation had been reduced to a simple formula, "Just ask Jesus into your heart." What a shock he will get on the judgment day and what shame will be there when the faithless pastor, who told him the lie, will have to give an account!

Yes, but what about the work of the Holy Spirit? Don't we need to have the Holy Spirit? Don't we need to be born again? Yes indeed, there is no such a thing as a non- born again Christian. In fact if we do not have the Holy Spirit we don't belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). Every believer is born again and ought to be filled with the Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is a vital work. However, the Spirit's work is the work God does 'in us' and it should never be confused with the work He has done "for us".

The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration (The New Birth) is essential, but it is not the Gospel, it is a different work. It is, rather, as a result of the gospel that the Holy Spirit was sent forth in fullness to the church. The Holy Spirit was not poured out on the church until Jesus was glorified (John 7:39). Furthermore, Jesus promised that after He had completed His mission the Holy Spirit would come to magnify Him. Listen to these words of our Lord; He says,

"..... when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you (John 16:13-14).

"He shall not speak of Himself, He shall glorify me!" This must mean that a church which is Spirit filled will not be pre-occupied with the Holy Spirit. To make the Holy Spirit the center stage of the Church, therefore, cannot possibly be the work of the Spirit, it is the work of man. The real Holy Spirit brings us to a Christ-centered life.

The Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself, (neither does anyone who is filled with the Spirit). The Holy Spirit has come to declare the Christ. Just as Christ came and expounded the Father so the

Spirit expounds, explains and glorifies the Son.

None of us can understand the magnitude and significance of the Christ event without the Holy Spirit. The implications of the Christ event would be lost to us without the ministry of the Holy Spirit to impact them on us. In fact, we must call into question whether or not those preachers who relegate the cross and its Christ to a position of minor importance have any measure of the Spirit at all.

The truth is this, had there not been a Pentecost we would not have grasped or understood the person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus. It was at Pentecost, by the power and moving of the Spirit that we had the first gospel sermon of the New Testament Church. It was as if the disciple's eyes were at last fully opened and they realized that they had walked and talked with the Lord of Glory. Consider how as Peter preached Christ on that day, how differently he behaved compared to some of today's preachers. Here's what he might have said had he been one of the men this generation, "Brothers and sisters we have just had the most marvelous experience. I've never felt like this before. God was all over me with an overpowering experience and I felt it from my head to the tips of my toes. I feel like I've been filled with a new power. I can see angels and I sense the Spirit moving all through me."

Even if Peter felt any of this, he said none of it! He opened his mouth and spoke boldly about Christ crucified. He made no reference to himself, his experience or his feelings. The power of the Holy Spirit had made him into a gospel preacher. His message was now about events which had happened outside of himself!

Our human mind cannot fully comprehend the awe and wonder of the gospel. We need the Holy Spirit moving in us and drawing us to Christ and, as it were, explaining it all to us. God Himself made a visit to this planet in the Person of His Son. This is stunning, but it only really stuns us when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the magnificence of the event! It is striking to think that Christ did not make a grand and glorious entrance witnessed by the millions. Instead, the only announcement of His arrival was given by a heavenly choir, singing to a less than sold out performance, attended by a few lonely shepherds in the hills above an obscure little village. But with and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit we are allowed to hear that song in our hearts. The Spirit is here to enlarge Jesus, to magnify Him, to make us His worshippers and to build our faith and confidence in the Gospel.

If only we would allow the Spirit to magnify Christ! Instead we chase after supposed 'deep things' that in reality are very shallow. Failing to grasp that Christ embodies the 'deep things' of God, church after church leapfrogs over the gospel in the name of pursuing the Spirit! We must ask, therefore, which Spirit they are pursuing? If the 'spirit' doesn't lead to an exalted and pre-eminent Christ then it is not the Holy Spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:10 we read, "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." Since Christ Jesus is the only one who has fully exegeted and declared God (John 1:18) then these deep things must be discovered in HIM. We can do no better than quote what JC Philpot says of this verse: He writes,

"The Spirit of God in a man's bosom searches the deep things of God, so as to lead him into a spiritual and experimental knowledge of them. What a depth in the blood of Christ-how it "cleanses

from all sin,"-even millions of millions of the foulest sins of the foulest sinners! What a depth in His bleeding, dying love, that could stoop so low to lift us so high! What a depth in His pity and compassion to extend itself to such guilty, vile transgressors as we are! What depth in His rich, free, and sovereign grace, that it should super-abound over all our aggravated iniquities, enormities, and vile abominations! What depth in His sufferings-that He should have voluntarily put Himself under such a load of guilt, such outbreakings of the wrath of God-as He felt in His holy soul when He stood in our place to redeem poor sinners from the bottomless pit-that those who deserved hell, should be lifted up into the enjoyment of heaven!"

(J.C. Philpot: The Things God has prepared for those Who Love Him)

The Holy Spirit is often pursued as if He was a fire or a hurricane of excitement, but in reality the Holy Spirit is not the God of the spectacle. We need, therefore, to beware of silly emotionalism, sentimentality and hype taking the place of the genuine ministry of the Holy Spirit and being passed off as such. Far from the Spirit of God coming to us as a fire or the hurricane, He comes more often as the still, small voice. Yet this still small voice of the Spirit makes us believe impossible things, the most impossible of these being the gospel itself!

Have you ever considered the unlikeliness of the whole gospel story. Here we are on a tiny insignificant planet, un-noticeable in the vast array of galaxies and yet God the creator of all things has a special interest in us. Not only has He a special interest in us, but He has become one of us! Not only has He become one of us, but He has died the most cruel of deaths for us and taken responsibility for our sins and failures. Not only did He die for us, but He became a curse for us and not only did He become a curse for us, He became the greatest reject in the world for us!

The whole thing is impossible to believe unless we are possessed by the Holy Spirit. He gives us faith to believe, He opens our eyes to let us see that the baby born in the stable was the mighty God. He, the Spirit, births faith that we might see that our redemption and security are in the Lamb of God alone. He convinces us that our righteousness is in Christ alone! He shows us that, because of the blood, our conscience can be at peace. He assures us that we are fully accepted in heaven right now because of Jesus. He persuades us that there is a fierce judgment to come and yet witnesses to us that we can approach it with confidence because the Lord Jesus was slain as our substitute.

The Holy Spirit continually takes us to the Lord Jesus whom we have never seen and makes Him more and more precious to our hearts. He magnifies the Lord Jesus and causes our desires to go after Him. We could see nothing in Christ Jesus to desire were it not for the ministry of the Spirit. The great English preacher, William Romaine said it this way;

"This is the way in which the Holy Ghost glorifies Jesus: He gives the believer such views of the infinite fullness and everlasting sufficiency of Emmanuel, that he is quite satisfied with Him. His conscience is brought into sweet peace through the sprinkling of the blood of the Lamb of God: and when guilt would arise and unbelieving fears disturb, he is enabled through faith in Jesus to maintain his peace; because, whatever rendered him hateful to God, he sees it removed by his adorable Surety: ----Thus he enters into the promised rest; thus he maintains himself in it." William Romaine: Letter 11 (Dec. 29th, 1764).

The real Holy Spirit makes believers Christ conscious, not Spirit conscious. And this is part of the genius of God! The Spirit draws us to behold Christ and in doing so makes us more like Christ. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The Spirit filled life is a joyful life because it is a Christ centered life. There is immense peace and joy in knowing that Christ has died and has taken responsibility for our sins. There is delight in knowing that He has risen from the dead. There's pleasure in knowing Him in the reality of His resurrection and to know that because of Him alone, God is for us and not against us. There are times of near elation knowing that our righteousness is secure, in a person in Heaven and that now, because of grace, we are joint heirs with Christ Jesus. But in spite of all the wonderful feelings, we should never let them be at the center of our lives. Feelings are subjective; they save no one. No one can live before God with any measure of security based on feelings. But the Holy Spirit comes to us in the gospel and makes Christ's experience for us the foundation of all our hope.

And that's the Gospel Truth!