

**The Wednesday Word, Oct. 29, 2008: The Gospel and the Believer-Centered Believer -
Part 1**

“Christian, should your eye ever be withdrawn from the cross, you will be sure to go backwards, to grow cold, and to forget that you were purged from your old sins (2 Peter 1:9). That cross is life, health, holiness, consolation, strength, joy; let nothing come between it and you.”

Horatius Bonar: ‘Follow The Lamb’

Paul knew that the knowledge of Christ crucified was the highest of all knowledge. Christ, His person, work and offices, are the hub and center of all divine truth. We believers are, therefore, to ‘Look unto Jesus’ and to occupy ourselves with Him. Ministers of the gospel are to preach nothing more than Christ crucified as the object of our faith, and nothing less than Christ crucified as the way of sanctification. The gospel we preach is about a Person...Jesus Christ. It’s about who He is, His doing, dying, rising, ascension and session (sitting down) at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Now here’s something we must grasp: since the gospel is about Jesus, the gospel is, therefore, not focused on the believer. In the genuine gospel, the believer is not on center stage, rather, in the authentic gospel, the limelight falls on Christ alone. There are pastors who dispute this, but let me point out that ever since the fall of man, when sin entered into the human race, the focus of man’s attention has been on himself. Listen to the Father of our fallen race as he cowers in embarrassed fear before his Creator; he says, “I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). Notice how that four times in one verse he uses the personal pronoun “I”. Adam shows us by this one sentence that sin’s first warping of man’s character was to make him into a raging subjectivist. He, not God, is now the center of his universe. No longer does his life revolve around God and His glory. His life is now centered on himself and his condition.

And that, it seems, is exactly how so many churches want it to remain to this day. Life is all about us, the believer! We, not the Lord Jesus, are our chief concern. The preachers preach about us and how our lives can be improved: we sing about us and how much better off we are and how great it is to be Christians. It’s all about us! It’s ironic; man the rebel has made his experience the center of his concern and redeemed man, for the most part, has done the same. We’ve fallen for the trap! Man not Christ must be the center. Satan’s prophecy, “You shall be as Gods” has, in one very real sense, come true in that man has exalted himself to the center of all things even in the Church! The theme song of so many church people and preachers should be, “Oh come let us ignore Him” for Christ is continually being replaced by the believer as the center of everything.

On top of this we have many believer-centered fad doctrines, which bombard us day after day: Fortunately, like Jonah’s Gourd they spring up in a day and die the next. When pastors should be rescuing the flock from the wretched condition of subjectivism, caused by sin, they often, without knowing it, despise the gospel, placing the believer, his condition and experience firmly at the center of the church meetings.

Eastern religions teach their devotees to look to the inner being and to focus on their experience and condition. There once was a time when there was a great distinction between Christianity and Eastern Mysticism. No longer so!

I once had a good friend who was a devotee of a certain Indian Guru. He would sit for hours looking within and having all manner of wonderful experiences. When he neglected to meditate, his quality of life, he said, was not nearly as good. Meditation, he claimed, brought him peace and joy! He was a classic subjectivist. His experience and condition were the center of his life. He and his fellow devotees would congregate weekly and encourage themselves to keep growing in their experience. Sounds familiar doesn't it? Sound like they were having church! But it wasn't church; it wasn't Christian. The Lamb of God was not the center. Their experience was at the center. Mark it down; all false religions have some form of subjectivism at their heart and core.

Now let's ask a question; over here we have this 'Indian Guru' group of people meeting to encourage one another in their so-called faith. They encourage each other in their experience and growth. The speaker speaks about them and how they can improve their quality of faith and life. They are the center of their meeting. Now here's the question, is this a Christian meeting? Well of course not! Why? Because, as already stated, the Lamb is not the center! Jesus is neither the goal nor the sum and substance of their meeting. Now, in a different location, meeting on the same night, we have another assembly of people. They are not followers of the Indian Guru; they call themselves Christians. Christians? Why then is their meeting to all intents and purposes the same as the Guru group? It's the same cat with different whiskers. They encourage one another in their experience and growth. Their speaker speaks about them and how they can improve their quality of faith and life. They are the center of their meeting. Christ and His glory are not the goal. So let's ask, what's the difference? Both meetings have the common denominator of self-centered subjectivism. "Oh no", I think I hear someone object, "You are too extreme, the Christians are meeting in Jesus name!" Are they indeed? If in fact they are meeting in His name then let Him, the Lord Jesus, be the center. Let the gathering of the people be unto Him (Gen 49:10)!

That is one of the many reasons why Christians desperately need to be continually confronted by the gospel. We are subjectivists by nature. As Luther said, "We need to hear the gospel everyday because we forget it every day." Mark it down; the gospel is God's cure for subjectivism. The gospel proclaims a salvation that has taken place outside of the believer. It is a salvation grounded in someone other than us. Furthermore, it is a salvation grounded in concrete historical facts. Bible salvation is not centered in the believer's experience, but rather in Christ's experience for us on our behalf.

One of the great tragedies in our Churches today is that we take self-centered sinners and teach them how to be self-centered believers. Christ has been dethroned in what should be His own Church and the believer now reigns supreme. We are witnessing the day and age of the decapitated church. Christ the head of the Church (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22-23) has been all but expelled. The head has been chopped off. In all things, according to the Bible, Christ Jesus is to have the pre-eminence, but now that honor goes to the believer.

But you say, we have a lot of activity in our church! I'm sure you're right! However, I remember

as a small boy in Ireland standing in a farmyard and seeing a chicken getting his head cut off. Let me tell you, I've never seen such doings. That chicken got up and ran and ran. There was a flurry of activity but the chicken was dead. Activity, therefore, is not necessarily a proof of life. The Church that refuses to be Christ centered is actually dead while it has the appearance of action and life.

This is not to say that we Christians should not enjoy being saved or that we cannot have marvelous experiences of God. Far from it! But the point is, we dare not put our condition and experiences first. Christ Jesus must be given center stage in His own Church.

What a terrible trade has been made. The glories of Christ have been exchanged for an exaggerated emphasis on the believer's condition. Gold has been replaced by brass! Yet the glories of our Lord Jesus remain infinite and unchanging for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

No subject ought to be dearer, then, to the heart of a believer than beholding and knowing the glory of the Lord Jesus-----and no subject can do the believer more good! Consider Him! He is the great savior from sin; He is our righteousness, our substitute and representative. He is the Lord, the one who has dominion over the entire world; He is the only Mediator between God and man. He is the Sovereign who became the servant. He is the Eternal Word who always was and always will be; He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is the anointed one, appointed and ordained of God for the salvation of his people; Jesus is the only reconciler between God and man. He created all things and is the sustainer all things. He is all of this and more, much, much more. Is it any wonder then that we are to occupy our time by looking unto Him? He is amazing!

And That's the Gospel Truth!