

The Wednesday Word, Nov. 5, 2008: The Gospel and the Believer-Centered Believer - Part

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To grow in our Christian life we must practice looking unto Jesus, the one who lived and died for us and is now exalted in glory! There is no other way to run this race (Hebrews 12:1-2)! But how do we do this? How do we look unto Jesus?

The first thing that looking to Jesus means is that we must stop continually looking at ourselves and our condition. A dedicated believer-centered believer, however, cannot obey this instruction of Heb 12:1-2. He is too busy looking at himself and his experience. He has set himself up as a competitor to the gospel. Jesus, however, will tolerate no rivals! To look, therefore, unto Jesus we must take our eyes off ourselves and place them firmly upon the One who has bought and paid for us with His own blood!

The truth is, the believer-centered believer will not and cannot look unto Jesus for he is too self-absorbed. He reminds me of Oscar Wilde who quipped, "Come over here and sit next to me, I'm dying to tell you all about myself." The believer-centered believer, you see, is engrossed in the great God self! Jesus, however, captivates the true believer, for Christ alone is the One who is the center of our conversation and life.

Gospel believers are to turn their eyes away from everything else and fix them on Jesus. We are not the center of the Cosmos! Our focus is to be on Jesus. After all, there is no one anywhere to compare with Him. J-E-S-U-S—just five letters--- but what a universe of power, grace and mercy is contained in that one name. What an amazing name He bears--- JESUS. It speaks of both mercy and grace---it is the purest gospel-name of all. The door to His presence is open to all believers and all of us have free access---all, that is, except the self-absorbed! As one old time preacher said, "Jesus sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves."

What a waste of time it is to continually focus our thoughts on our condition and experience. Just think about our experience versus the story of man's ruin and redemption. It should teach us that regarding this matter of salvation, the focal point is not in us, but rather on events that took place outside of us. Consider this; in Romans 5:12 we read, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin and so death passed upon all men for all have sinned." We further read "For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" Rom 5:15. See how the entire ruin and redemption of sinners hinges upon the actions of two men! Our experience and condition are, therefore, not the central issue of redemption's drama and should, therefore, not be the center of our Christian life!

The Rotten Inheritance!

When the first man, Adam, sinned, we all sinned. We were ruined because of him. Ruination was the legacy he left to all his descendants. What a rotten inheritance! We didn't become sinners when we first experienced sin; we were already sinners when we were born. The poison was already in the blood. We were sinners at birth having become sinners in Adam. This had nothing to do with our experience! We weren't there when Adam sinned. However, as the head of our race, he

represented us and we were reckoned as being incorporated into him. When he stood before God, he stood not only for himself but also for us. It is vital, therefore, that we grasp that we neither became sinners because of something we did nor because of something we experienced. We became sinners because of something someone else did outside of us and apart from us. We became sinners because of an event which happened in the past, in history.

The Marvelous Inheritance!

Conversely, when God undertook our redemption He did not redeem us by doing something within us or in our experience. No, in fact it was quite the opposite for He accomplished His saving acts outside of us. Just as the first man, Adam, got us into trouble so the second man, Jesus, got us out! "Just as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). While we were dead in trespasses and sins, Christ died for us. Christ Jesus is now the new representative man. This was nothing to do with our experience! We weren't there when Christ redeemed us. However, as the head of our new race, He represented us and we were reckoned as being incorporated into him. When He lived and died before God, He did so for us. All that He accomplished is now reckoned to us! What a marvelous inheritance! Just as our rejection before God was based upon the behavior of one man, Adam, so our acceptance before God now depends on another man, Jesus!

The big question, therefore, is, not whether or not we have had this or that experience, but rather, are we in Adam or in Christ. Who is our representative, Adam or Christ? As believers we are found in Christ alone!

Let me explain this business of representation a little further! Those who know me know I love to watch a good rugby match. I remember once when Ireland won a marvelous rugby trophy called the Triple Crown and how that after the match I declared, "we won". But wait a minute, how could I possibly say; "We won"? I didn't train or prepare myself to run around the field. I didn't go to the gym and sweat and put myself through the rigors of extreme pain. But I was able to say; "We won". A friend of mine, here in the States, heard of Ireland's victory and said, "Congratulations on winning the Triple Crown". I said, --- ----"Thanks".

So let me ask you...had I gone mad when I said; "We won" and "Thanks?" Not a bit of me, for when Ireland played rugby they represented me. They won on my behalf and on behalf of everyone who identified with them. When they won, I won! Just so, when Christ Jesus came to this earth and stepped into this 'vale of tears' He did so on our behalf and in our name. He won the competition and gained our victory. By His death He put away sin (Hebrews 10:26); He crucified our old nature (Romans 6:6); He defeated Satan (John 16:11); He abolished death (2 Timothy 1:10); He perfected His people forever (Hebrews 10:14) and brought in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24). When we look at Christ's marvelous triumph we can confidently say, "We won."

As believers we now have the opportunity to leave the tangled mess that is 'us' and occupy ourselves with the glory of God in Jesus Christ. As He lived we lived, as He died we died, as He rose from the dead we rose from the dead. It is a second rate and sub-standard Christianity that occupies itself with its own experience. Yet when pastors insist that the church is there to make everyone into religious subjectivists by keeping us focused on ourselves and not on the exalted

Christ of the gospel, then the prospects for the future of our nation are bleak indeed. We urgently need to return to the gospel so that we can be delivered from believer-centered Christianity.

A note of warning: in the gospel, the good news from heaven, Christ Jesus is the center! Christ Jesus must, therefore, be the center of the church. When I say this, I mean just that. I don't even mean that His work for us, vital as it is, must be the center, but Christ Jesus Himself. Let me explain: I have ministered in some Churches that were alarmed by the flagrant humanism growing in our midst. Some of these churches were holding the line and preaching the truths of the blood, the cross and the deity of Christ.... yet seldom have I discovered such bad and ungracious spirits as I did in their assemblies. They were the type of people who were waiting to pounce if there was any perceived doctrinal error. The grace of God had only reached as far as their heads. There was love for certain truths, but no apparent love for the Lord Jesus Himself. May God spare us all from such, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living fundamentalist! Bonar hits the bull's eye once more when he says,

"There are not a few who are so occupied with truth that they forget "the true one," so occupied with faith that they lose sight of its personal object, so given to dwelling upon the work of Christ that they overlook His person.

What and Who He is seems a question of small importance, provided they know that He has accomplished a work by which they may secure eternal life. "We are forgiven," they say, "we have peace; all is well." They take but little interest in the person of Him who has purchased these blessings. ---- The redemption is all, and the Redeemer is nothing, or, at least, very little to them. The sufficiency of His work is all, the glory and excellence of His person, nothing.

What is this but selfishness? We get all the benefit we can out of the work of Christ, and then have no desire for Him! And this selfishness introduces itself everywhere into the actions and thinking of this class of people.----- His truth is precious; His work is precious; but it is with Him that we have chiefly to do. It is Jesus! Jesus alone! Jesus Himself! whom we feel to be absolutely necessary!

We must go beyond truth to "Him who is true." Truth is precious, but in itself it is cold. But the glory of the Gospel is this that it carries us up beyond truth to its living fountainhead! No, it brings us into the very bosom of Him who came out of the Father's bosom and has now returned to it, carrying with Him all those whom the Father has given Him; there, with Him to abide in happy fellowship, world without end!"

Horatius Bonar: The Night of Weeping

Believer-centered Christianity is a waste of time! In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read "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." This must mean, therefore, that endless hours of subjectivism will not actually improve our condition. We must look unto Jesus if we want to be changed from glory to glory! Christ is the image of his Father; He is God's masterpiece; He is the most excellent and perfect representation of the Father's person given to men. As we look at Him we are transformed into His likeness! Who says so? God says so---(we just read it in 2 Corinthians 3:18)!

For a final thought, we need to ask, why is it that so many churches are believer-centered? Could it be because many church people are really much more interested in themselves than in Christ? Is it that culturally attuned leaders know this? Could it be that they conclude, "If we preach about believers, their growth and progress we are sure to draw a bigger crowd. Let's face it; people aren't hungering after Jesus these days. So if we are to be successful we need to be able to read the culture in which we live and trim our sails accordingly?" Could this be why Christ, His person, His work and offices are out of fashion in so many of our churches? He is not a big enough crowd builder! Christ alone is not a big enough 'draw' to have as the center of the Church. We must, therefore, we are told, have Christ plus psychology, Christ plus laughing, Christ plus the deeper work of the Spirit, Christ plus healing of the memories, Christ plus self-esteem, Christ plus visions, Christ plus prosperity, Christ plus church growth methods, Christ plus feeling good etc. Believing in and looking to Christ alone as the foundation, walls, cement and roof of the Christian life is not enough for many churches. There must be something else! Give us Christ plus contemporary music, Christ plus hymns, Christ plus line upon line teaching, we need more than Christ alone, we already know about Him---let's move on!

It all sounds plausible, especially when you hear it often enough. By the way, there's nothing wrong with having large numbers, in fact they are to be encouraged, but to build a big crowd while dethroning Christ Jesus is an act of betrayal and treason. Some pastors need to ask themselves, therefore, whether they want a Crowd or a Crown!

Here's another scenario that possibly answers the question as to why many churches are not Christ centered. Perhaps Christ Jesus is not on center stage because it's too risky. He would get in the way of our plans and besides that, we want to build our churches! --- But what if that wasn't the same as Him building His? It may be too precarious to find out!

I believe, however, that the Holy Spirit is calling for a people who will love Jesus Christ and worship Him only. He is calling out a people who will live for Christ's glory and His cause. He is calling for a people who will cast their crowns before Him and worship Him alone. In fact, such people are popping up in everyplace desiring to hear about Him and to look to Him. Such people desire to become gospel-centered believers. They have purposed, by the grace of god, to serve and glorify Christ alone and with the help and power of the Holy Spirit they are seeking to restore the person of Christ to His rightful place as the head of the Church.

And that's the Gospel Truth!