

The Wednesday Word, October 23, 2024: The Gospel and the New Creature in Christ. Part

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Last time we discovered that the apostle Paul didn't seem to be making progress in His Christian life. In A.D. 56 he saw himself as the least of the Apostles! Four years later, he considered that he was the least of all the saints! Then another 4 years later he claimed to be chief of sinners! And this is progress? Indeed, he seems to have everything back to front.

Back to front? Yes, let me explain. You see, I thought that when salvation first took a hold of people, they came to the church feeling as though they were sinners. After a while, they got their lives somewhat cleaned up and felt as though they had now graduated to become the least of the saints. Then finally, they perhaps got some kind of ministry and became, so to speak, the least of the apostles. Paul seems, however, to be walking in reverse! What was going on here?

There's a famous story back in Ireland about a young man, who when walking to Dublin, stopped and asked how far it was to the city. Twenty miles was the reply. After two more hours of a brisk pace, he stopped and asked again how far he was from Dublin and the answer came, twenty miles. After two more hours of vigorous walking, he again stopped and asked how far he was from the great city. Twenty miles was the reply. In exhaustion, he sat down in the ditch, scratched his head and said, "Well at least I'm holding my own!"

The poor old apostle Paul, however, didn't even seem to be holding his own. When we consider that he's the apostle who wrote most of our New Testament, it is astonishing to hear him say that he is the least of the apostles. And it's extraordinary to read that he considers himself the least of all the saints...did the man not know the saints? Did he not know about the Corinthian fornicator and the saints who got drunk at church services? Was he unaware of the two squabbling women in Philippi who kept their assembly in an uproar? Yes, Paul knew the saints and ministered to them daily, yet he calls himself the least of all saints. But when I understood that he considered himself to be the chief of sinners, quite frankly I was stunned. What had happened to him? Had he lost touch with reality? What kind of man wrote those verses? What sort of person made these confessions? Was it a new convert? Was it a Christian in a fit of backsliding or depression? Was it a carnal believer? No! Far from it, these were the confessions of a mature, ageing Christian in the last years of his life. These were the words of one of the finest and greatest Christians ever to have lived.

This same man goes on to tell Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." (2Timothy 4:7). Therefore, we see these are neither the admissions of someone who has drifted away from the fold, nor the declarations of a backslider overcome with sin. These are... and get ready for this ... these are the confessions of a man who is growing closer to God. The truth is this, the closer we get to God, the more we understand that we are lost without Him. The closer we draw to Him the more we are convinced that salvation is all of grace and grace leaves no room for human merit. The closer we get to God the more we will realize that there is no hope within ourselves. We see there is nothing in us to commend us to the Almighty.

And that's the Gospel Truth!

To be continued next week.