

WHAT IS THE SIMPLE GOSPEL?

by BILL PARKER

Many people today talk about the word *gospel*, but few ever define specifically what they mean by the *gospel*. For example, most will agree that a person must believe the gospel in order to be saved, but most do not agree on what the gospel is. It is easy to say that the gospel is simply "Christ," or "Christ, crucified." It is easy to say that the gospel is merely the "death, burial, and resurrection of Christ." A preacher in a letter to me once defined the gospel as "the word of God's promise in Jesus who is the Christ." This was, as he stated, the gospel in its simplest form. The problem with all this is that it really does not tell anyone specifically what the gospel is and what it is not. Many who disagree on such vital issues as who God is, who Christ is, the sinfulness of man, and the ground of salvation, can and do agree with the statements above. Also, when we consider the words of God in *Galatians 1:8* -- "*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed,*" does this not prove to us that we need a more specific definition? Of course it does.

Thank God that He has not left us to our own thoughts and imaginations on this vital issue. He has given us His definition of the Gospel. It is stated throughout the Bible in many ways and in many forms, but God gives us the most concise definition by the Apostle Paul in *Romans 1:1-17* and *Romans 3:21-26*.

The Gospel is **GOD'S PROMISE OF ETERNAL SALVATION AND FINAL GLORY IN HEAVEN CONDITIONED ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, BASED ON HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ALONE.** The Gospel, in light of the sinfulness of man (*Rom. 1:18--3:21*), and the utter impossibility of any sinner being saved based on that sinner's best efforts at obedience, reveals how a holy and just God can save sinners in mercy, love, and grace, and still remain holy and just. The Gospel reveals that all this is possible based on the merits of a God-sent Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would become incarnate, obey the law perfectly, and satisfy justice by His death on the cross in order to establish a righteousness whereby God could be both a just God and a Savior (*Isa. 45:21-22*).

The Gospel excludes all the works of man and any work done by or in man as to the ground of this great salvation. It calls on sinners to believe in and trust Christ for all righteousness and life. It calls on sinners to repent of ever thinking that salvation or any part of it could have been conditioned on the sinner. It leaves sinners with no hope of salvation but that which is found in the Person and accomplished work of Christ. Therefore, in order to preach the Gospel, we must preach the sinfulness of man in light of the holiness and justice of God, the Person of Christ as Godman/Mediator, and the righteousness of Christ freely imputed and received by faith for salvation. This is the heart of the Gospel (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Every other subject in the Bible must be preached in this light if it is to be distinguished from the dead works and idolatry of man-made religion.

This Gospel identifies and distinguishes the true and living God from all idols. This Gospel identifies and distinguishes the true Christ from all counterfeits. This Gospel identifies and distinguishes the Holy Spirit from evil spirits. This Gospel identifies and distinguishes the only ground of salvation from all false refuges.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

ROMANS 1:1-7

This sermon is a Bible study taken from the Reign of Grace [ROMANS COMMENTARY](#).

In this introduction, God the Holy Spirit, by the Apostle Paul, establishes a foundational truth of Christianity -- ALL OF THE ENCOURAGEMENTS, EXHORTATIONS, REBUKES, INSTRUCTIONS IN WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE, AND EVEN THE RECOVERY OF JUSTIFIED SINNERS, ARE TO BE BASED UPON THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY OF SALVATION CONDITIONED ON CHRIST ACCORDING TO GOD'S PROMISE. No one is warranted from God to deal with true believers based on fear of punishment nor uncertainty concerning their salvation. On the other hand, no man is warranted from God to speak peace to any sinner who does not give evidence of justifying faith and repentance from dead works.

I. THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL (1:1-2) - Who is the writer of this epistle? Paul begins with a description of himself.

¹ Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, ² (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

A. A bondslave of Christ - In those days of sanctioned slavery, most would have understood his reference to bondslave in contrast to other slaves. Paul joyfully performed the duties of his office in the character of a servant, a bondslave, a willing, loving, and dedicated servant of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. A bondslave in the Old Testament (Ex. 21:1-6) was one whose debt to his master had been fully paid, according to strict law that had been satisfied. His service was not to pay what he owed, but it was based on his debt already having been paid. He was a servant who had been set free from the bondage of law and now served his master out of love. This is a picture of Gospel obedience and service from the spirit of adoption and grace.

A sinner is convinced of sin when he sees no possibility of paying his debt to God's law and justice by his own obedience. He sees himself as void of a righteousness that answers the law's demands. A sinner is convinced of righteousness when he comes to understand the love of God in conditioning all of salvation on Christ and in sending Christ into the world to become incarnate to fulfill those conditions. He sees how Christ established for him an everlasting righteousness of infinite value that answers the law's demands. It is then that a sinner is made willing to return to God, his Master, as a free man and serve his Master out of love. This service is not the slavery of an unwilling bondman trying to pay a debt, seeking to establish a righteousness of his own. It is the service of a willing, loving bondslave whose debt has been paid in full by his Substitute and Surety. He serves not to establish a righteousness before God, but he serves based on a righteousness already established by Christ. All of his obedience and service is motivated by the absolute certainty of salvation conditioned on Christ alone.

B. An apostle - Paul's office was that of an apostle. There are no apostles today. The office of apostle ceased with John at his death. An apostle was one who had actually seen Christ with his own eyes and received his apostleship by direct appointment from Christ personally. Anyone who claims to be an apostle today has the spirit of antichrist. Paul was born into God's kingdom and to the office of apostle.

C. Separated unto the Gospel - (1:1b) - Separated means set apart from all false religions and idolatry, and dogmatically committed unto the Gospel of God to make known or to preach the Gospel of God for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners. When salvation comes, all true believers are separated in true repentance from dead works and former idolatry, from that religion that teaches justification before God based on anything other than the imputed righteousness of Christ. The Apostle Paul, in light of the imputed righteousness of Christ, had seen the evil of efforts at religion and morality aimed at the ground of salvation. He therefore repented from them as dead works and acts of open idolatry and separated himself from all religion other than the religion of Grace, of salvation conditioned on Christ alone (cf. Phil. 3:7-9).

This is the command and call of all justified sinners. This is that repentance which is the first evidence that our faith is justifying faith. Paul, having been convinced by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of no hope of salvation in any other way for any sinner, was committed and set apart to dedicate his life to the preaching of the Gospel.

1. "The Gospel of God"--Immediately upon mentioning the Gospel, Paul begins with God, specifically, God the Father. The Gospel concerns God the Son (v. 3), but it is God the Father who is the Source and Originator of the Gospel. God the Father elected a multitude of guilty sinners out of Adam's fallen race and conditioned all of their salvation on God the Son. He sent His Son to become incarnate to satisfy all those conditions. God the Father is the Source of salvation. His love is the moving cause of salvation, and His glory (the revelation of all the perfections of His nature) is the goal of salvation. God the Father is the ultimate object of our faith and worship. We come to Him in the name of Christ based on the merits of the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ.

True Christians do not worship three gods, nor one god who acts out different roles at different times, nor one who exists in different forms. These notions are no less heresy than to say they worship three gods. True Christians worship ONE GOD WHO SUBSISTS IN THREE DISTINCT PERSONS, each Person a full partaker of the one undivided essence, the triune Godhead, a plurality of Persons in the one undivided essence. God the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. God the Father did not become incarnate, nor die on the cross, nor did God the Holy Spirit. We worship ONE GOD, three distinct yet equal Persons. Although we have no proper illustration to explain this truth, it is revealed and explained in the Scriptures (Matt. 28:18-19).

2. No new Gospel (1:2) - It is the same message of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. The only difference is that the New Testament reveals the actual accomplishment of what was promised, predicted and typified in the Old Testament. Noah, for example, preached and was justified based upon the righteousness that was to be established by the actual incarnation and death of the Son of God (2 Pet. 2:5; Gal. 3:6-9).

II. THE PERSON OF THE GOSPEL - (1:3-6) - Of whom is Paul writing? He describes the Lord Jesus Christ who is the central figure of the Gospel.

³ *Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;* ⁴ *And declared [to be] the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection the dead:* ⁵ *By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:* ⁶ *Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:*

A. The constitution of Christ's Person - God has graciously and wonderfully revealed His infinite wisdom in the constitution of Christ's PERSON. The Gospel of God concerns His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. It identifies Christ and distinguishes Him from all counterfeits, beginning with the constitution of His Person, and then the nature of His offices and work of redemption. The name "Jesus" signifies Jehovah

who saves, and the title "Christ" or messiah (anointed) designates His offices concerning the nature of His mission. Since God's Gospel is His promise of salvation conditioned on Christ alone, it is only fitting and logical that we begin with THE PERSON whom God the Father had appointed to satisfy those conditions. So, the apostle, verbally inspired by God the Holy Spirit, begins with Christ's perfect, sinless humanity, because it was essential that God the Son become incarnate in order to satisfy the conditions of the salvation of God's elect.

1. His Humanity (1:3) - Christ "was MADE of the seed of David according to the flesh"--His humanity (both body and soul) was created or formed in the womb of the virgin Mary who was a natural descendent of King David. WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST? He is ONE PERSON WITH TWO DISTINCT NATURES: DIVINE AND HUMAN! He is Divine in that He is God in every respect, infinite in every attribute of His holy character, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Remember, our God is ONE GOD in three distinct PERSONS, each PERSON a partaker of the one undivided essence. Christ is human in that He is man, both body and soul. He is a partaker of all the qualities of character that constitute true SINLESS humanity. He was made like His brethren in all things, yet without sin.

2. His Deity (1:4) - He was not made the Son of God but declared to be so. His Deity cannot be and was not created since He created ALL things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Christ is the ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON. God has many sons by creation and then many by adoption, but He has only one who is a full partaker of his essence or nature, co-equal in every attribute of Deity. Paul is showing here that Christ's resurrection from the dead, based on the very righteousness He had established, proved Him to be God. No one else could have satisfied law and justice on behalf of a multitude no man can number except that PERSON be God. No mere man, however perfect and sinless he might be, could have accomplished such a task. Other mere men, such as Lazarus, had been raised from the dead, and their resurrection in no way declared them to be God. Christ's resurrection declared Him to be so because of the righteousness He had established, the conditions He had satisfied as the Representative and Substitute of the whole election of grace.

B. The Apostle Paul's whole point is to show how great marvelous Christ, the Mediator and Savior, is. BEHOLD THE INFINITE WISDOM OF GOD. GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS: GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH. We cannot comprehend the height nor the depth of this glorious mystery, but unto faith, it is full of glory. We preach and trust a PERSON. All the privileges, benefits, and advantages of the offices and mediation of Christ will not avail us unless we reduce them all unto faith in His PERSON. All that He has done, is now doing, and shall do is great because of the excellency and glory of His PERSON. As long as we hold this foundation of Christianity, that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who alone gives life and efficacy unto His whole work of mediation, our faith in all its actings will be in His PERSON.

We must continually be reminded and understand that Christ is ONE PERSON WITH TWO DISTINCT NATURES, one Divine and a partaker of all the qualities of essential Deity, and one human and a partaker of all the qualities of true sinless humanity. Christ became incarnate in order to suffer and die, so that He, by His obedience unto death, could establish a righteousness whereby God could justify sinners. Everything He did to fulfil these duties and establish such a righteousness, He did in His entire PERSON as GODMAN. All of His actions are acts of His whole PERSON, yet some are suitable only to His Deity and to be attributed only to His Deity. For example, no man, however exalted, is to be worshipped or has power to give and sustain life, but this PERSON who is man is to be worshipped and does have the power to give and sustain life. On the other hand, God cannot suffer, sorrow, and die, but this PERSON who is God can and did suffer, grieve, sorrow, bleed and die. These were acts of His entire PERSON, yet suitable to His humanity, without sin. Why is understanding this so important? It is because:

1. His Person and work are vitally connected--"according to the Spirit of holiness"--Imputed sin demanded His death, and righteousness established demanded His resurrection. Imputed sin demanded His condemnation under God's law and death as the result. Righteousness established demanded His justification and, therefore, His resurrection. These truths establish the GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE IN CHRIST. God promises to save the very chief of sinners, whoever he may be ("though your sins be as scarlet or red like crimson") based on that very same righteousness that demanded Christ's resurrection, His justification and life according to holiness.

Commenting upon verses 3-4, Robert Haldane wrote that we see that it is upon the foundation of the union of the Divine and human natures in the one PERSON of Christ, the Messiah, that Paul proceeds to establish all the great and important truths that he sets forth in this epistle. We must always remember that the office of apostle gave dignity and worth to the persons of the apostles just as the office of president of the United States gives dignity and authority to whomever holds that office. But this is not so with Christ. It is HIS PERSON that gives authority, dignity and value to all His offices. It is HIS PERSON that guarantees the absolute success of all the duties He performs in each office to accomplish His design and goal to glorify His Father in the eternal salvation of all those whom He represented, whom the Father had given Him, for whom He lived and died. Therefore, to deny the effectual, definite atoning work of Christ and resort to universal notions of the atonement, is to deny His very Person as sent of God.

2. His Person and work are vitally connected to our salvation (1:5) - "By whom we have received grace"--Grace here refers to all of the work of the Holy Spirit in God's people, with all subjective graces such as faith, repentance, humility and love. All of this is the direct result of Christ's work for His people by establishing that righteousness that demands their justification and eternal life. Everything necessary to bring God's elect, Christ's sheep, unto glory is the direct effect of His establishing a righteousness that was brought in and consummated by His death. "Obedience to the faith" is true belief and submission to the Gospel of God, to God's promise of all grace here and all glory hereafter based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. "By whom" and "for His name"--Christ has all the preeminence in our salvation. We freely receive the whole inheritance of grace because HE has satisfied all the conditions. Therefore, any notion that salvation is conditioned on the sinner cannot give Christ ALL the pre-eminence in salvation.

"The called of Jesus Christ" (1:6) - Justified sinners are not only called to Him but also byHim. Again, the Holy Spirit, by the Apostle Paul, attributes our calling and conversion to Christ because all of this is the direct result of Christ's work for us, on our behalf. Everything Christ as our Substitute merited for God's elect shall in each successive generation be effectually communicated to each of them by the Holy Spirit. The righteousness that Christ established for us, in our name and nature, demands that we go free. This is spiritual freedom that includes our regeneration, calling and conversion (the new birth into Christ's kingdom). Here, we see the distinction between the Holy Spirit's work IN us as the result and effect, and Christ's work FOR us as the only ground of salvation.

III. THE PEOPLE OF THE GOSPEL - (1:7) - To whom is the Apostle Paul writing? They are the saints "beloved of God."

⁷ To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called [to be] saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. The beloved of God identified by calling and conversion - Notice, this does not refer to all without exception in Rome, but all the "beloved of God" in Rome who are identified by their conversion. This conversion is the only evidence of regeneration and of being objects of God's love. Paul calls all true believers saints. They are saints NOW, and although some are Jews and others Gentiles, some are men and others women, some are rich and others poor, and although there may be differences in personality

and growth, they are all equally saints and all equally "beloved of God." Saints are justified, separated out of the world by adoption into God's family, evidenced by justifying faith and repentance from former idolatry and dead works.

B. The beloved of God identified by state - Their state is one of peace secured by grace. Paul mentions grace before peace. The whole as well as each part of salvation proceeds from the foundation of GRACE. Many of the old Gospel writers referred to grace as God's love in action. God set His love upon a multitude of fallen, condemned enemies, and grace was His conditioning their salvation upon Christ, His Son.

1. True peace with God is based on Christ satisfying all those conditions as the Substitute and Representative of the whole election of grace. Grace, then, of necessity excludes all conditions on the sinner, and the subjective principle of grace implanted in our hearts in regeneration enables us to receive the doctrines of grace preached out in the Gospel. "Peace" between God and men is based solely upon the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ. It fills our hearts with joy when we understand that it can never diminish nor waver because it is based on Christ's satisfaction of law and justice.

2. Grace and peace are from "GOD OUR FATHER," not our enemy, not a consuming fire, not a sovereign tyrant not an unconcerned, unapproachable potentate. God is our Father in that He has actively engaged every perfection of His Being to insure our eternal blessedness. Grace and peace are secured and communicated by the "LORD JESUS CHRIST," based upon the entire merit of His whole work of redemption that He has accomplished for us. Here is a double pledge from God of the absolute certainty of eternal grace and peace. God our Father is the Source of blessedness, and this is communicated to us by Christ our Lord. BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED!

ROMANS 1:16-17

This sermon is a Bible study taken from the Reign of Grace [ROMANS COMMENTARY](#).

Here, the Apostle Paul states THE THEME OF ROMANS. Having concluded his opening address, he now begins to explain the particulars of the GROUND OF SALVATION that include justification, reconciliation and adoption. He starts by stating, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." Why would anyone be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Who would attack anyone who preached free grace to guilty sinners? The Apostle Paul knew from personal experience that true Christians would bear the reproach of Christ from the world. He knew that they would be attacked and ridiculed in every way possible because the Gospel of Christ addresses all by nature to be guilty, condemned, idolaters, spiritually kin to Satan, and enemies of the only true and living God.

The Gospel removes the cloak of self-righteous religionists and exposes all efforts at worship and morality before justifying faith as fruit unto death. It is this light which men by nature hate as it exposes their deeds, all efforts and morality aimed at the ground of salvation, as evil (John 3:19; 7:7; 15:18-22). Read I John 3:13. This hatred is aimed at true Christians when they tell lost religionists that their deeds are evil. Withhold this specific truth, and the world will not hate you in this sense. The world loves its own (John 15:19). A justified sinner's faith in Christ condemns their self-righteousness and exposes their false hope. Men are ashamed of the Gospel when they claim to believe it but speak peace to sinners apart from the only ground of peace and refuse to stand with Christ and His people in declaring that the world's deeds are evil.

I. THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION (1:16) -

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

A. This does not mean power as an attribute of God. God is omnipotent, but the Gospel is not an attribute of God. The Gospel does reveal how every attribute of God is honored in the salvation of sinners by Christ. The Gospel of Christ is GOOD NEWS. It is God's absolute and unconditional promise of salvation conditioned on Christ alone. This "power of God" refers to the Gospel as an INSTRUMENT that God has ordained and uses to accomplish His goal of saving His elect. When the apostle writes that the Gospel is God's power unto salvation, he excludes every other instrument as a means of salvation. "He that believeth the Gospel SHALL BE SAVED, and he that believeth not the Gospel SHALL BE DAMNED."

God's Gospel is the power of God unto salvation only as God the Holy Spirit applies it to the hearts (minds, affections and wills) of sinners in the new birth that includes regeneration and conversion. This is when a sinner, by the Spirit of God, under the true Gospel preached, heard and understood, comes to saving faith in Christ and repentance from dead works and former idolatry. God the Holy Spirit is the only Agent, and the Gospel preached is the only instrument. Apart from the Gospel preached, there is no salvation (Rom. 10:13-17). Sinners are not saved by voices, visions, and mysticism. THE GOSPEL IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION. Therefore, any notion that salvation has come, or can come, without the Gospel, or before the Gospel of salvation conditioned on Christ alone was preached, heard, and understood, is a denial of the Gospel. It notion that salvation has come, or can come, under a false gospel, is a denial of THE Gospel to be the power of God unto salvation.

B. Verse 17 shows us specifically why the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It is because in the Gospel the "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD" is revealed, and THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE ONLY GROUND OF SALVATION. We cannot know the only true God

SAVINGLY, nor the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from this righteousness revealed. It is only as we see God the Father sending His Son, as the Mediator and Surety of guilty, defiled sinners, to establish this righteousness that we can see every perfection of God's REDEMPTIVE character actively engaged and honored in our salvation. It is in this RIGHTEOUSNESS ESTABLISHED BY CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE UNTO DEATH that we see Christ's mediatorial glory. It is this righteousness established by a Divine Surety, WITHOUT THE AID OF ANY SINNER, that all occasions for boasting in the sinner are excluded.

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL (1:17) -

¹⁷ For therein is the righteousness God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

A. The "righteousness of God" revealed in the Gospel is the very HEART OF THE GOSPEL. Wherever the best of sinners are either ignorant of or have not submitted to this righteousness as the only ground of salvation, they do not believe God's Gospel, and they are yet under the wrath of God and alienated from God (10:1-3). This righteousness ALONE removes God's wrath, gains and secures His favor, and entitles sinners to justification and eternal life. Consider these questions:

1. Why is it called "the righteousness of God"?

- (a) To distinguish it from the righteousness of men and totally exclude man's righteousness from the ground of salvation.
- (b) Because God purposed it, promised it and provided it by the obedience and death of Christ, His beloved Son.
- (c) Because this righteousness is everlasting, unchangeable and of infinite value, having been wrought out and established by that PERSON, Jesus Christ, Jehovah Tsidkenu, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer. 23:6).

2. What exactly is this righteousness? IT IS THE ENTIRE MERIT (virtue and worth) OF CHRIST'S WHOLE WORK OF SATISFACTION TO GOD'S LAW AND JUSTICE BY HIS OBEDIENCE UNTO DEATH FOR GOD'S ELECT, GIVEN TO HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.

3. Why is this righteousness revealed? It is revealed in order that God be glorified as both just and justifier in the salvation of sinners.

B. All religions ultimately must be reduced to the GROUND or basis upon which men hope to avoid Hell and gain Heaven. The "righteousness of God" revealed in the Gospel, imputed to sinners and received by God-given faith, is everywhere in Scripture opposed to all other grounds, established by whatever means, under all persuasions and by whatever supposed agency. This one simple truth, which has such staggering implications, has never entered the minds of natural men and women. The minds of unsaved men and women are blinded by the "god of this world" who knows well that he can keep sinners in his family and under his power as long as they are trying to establish a righteousness of their own (2 Cor. 4:3-4). It is the privilege and responsibility of God's people to proclaim without compromise this great and simple truth to guilty, Hell-bound sinners. It is our desire and prayer that God the Holy Spirit will use this truth to save sinners, to make it effectual to their hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). In light of this, it is impossible to put too much emphasis on this truth of which the majority of professing religionists are ignorant. How can we over-emphasize the one difference between eternal blessedness and eternal misery? This righteousness is the very heart and life of the Gospel, "the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Remove this

righteousness, and we have no Gospel.

III. RIGHTEOUSNESS RECEIVED BY FAITH (1:17b) -

A. "To everyone that believeth"--No one is excluded from salvation except those who exclude themselves by unbelief. God will save no sinner apart from faith. Saved sinners are justified by faith. They live by faith, stand by faith, walk by faith and die in the faith. Faith itself is not the source, cause, or ground of salvation. **IT IS GOD'S APPOINTED MEANS OF SALVATION.** It is the foundation grace and the mother of all other graces. As stated before:

- (1) FAITH BELIEVES GOD'S PROMISE OF SALVATION CONDITIONED ON CHRIST ALONE, BECAUSE FAITH KNOWS THE GOD WHO MADE THE PROMISE, and
- (2) FAITH RECEIVES AND RESTS UPON THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST AS THE ONLY GROUND OF SALVATION, BECAUSE IT KNOWS AND LOVES THE CHRIST WHO ESTABLISHED THIS GROUND.

Faith, then, is no part of that righteousness that is the only ground of salvation. Here, we see righteousness (the ground of salvation) and faith (the means of salvation) distinguished. The very moment faith believes the promise and receives Christ's righteousness, God's wrath is removed and the believing sinner is adopted into God's family and actually entitled to the full inheritance of grace. Before, and until we actually possess justifying faith, we are guilty, defiled sinners, under the wrath of God (John 3:36; Rom. 6:17, 18; 1 John 5:12).

B. Receiving this righteousness by faith always produces Godly repentance, repentance unto life, i.e., repentance that evidences spiritual and eternal life. Before justifying faith, all repentance is legal, natural conscience sorrow, called the sorrow of the world that works death (2 Cor. 7:10). Godly repentance includes sorrow over things that natural conscience knows to be sin, but it goes much further than natural conscience can go. Godly repentance, which flows from justifying faith, is a **RADICAL CHANGE OF MIND AND HEARTFELT SORROW CONCERNING FORMER IDOLATRY AND DEAD WORKS.** A justified sinner is ashamed that all his former thoughts concerning salvation dishonored every attribute of God's redemptive character, cast shame and reproach upon the true Christ and His whole work of redemption, and actually opposed God's promise. He knows NOW that formerly there was no fear of God before his eyes and that he worshipped a god who could not save. He knows NOW that he supported a counterfeit gospel and that, while he was in that state, all his efforts at religion and morality were no more than self-righteous attempts to deny God's grace. It was all dead works and fruit unto death.

C. Again, faith is the only means of salvation, because faith alone can attain God's goal. God has purposed to glorify Himself in our hearts. He has determined that all His elect will rejoice in the perfections of His redemptive character actively engaged and revealed in salvation. This cannot be accomplished apart from our minds being illuminated by His testimony.

The "righteousness of God" is REVEALED. God alone reveals things that we cannot know by natural conscience nor by nature and human reasoning. God has revealed His righteousness, not to be rejected, but to be freely received. It is revealed "from faith to faith," i.e., it is revealed to faith in order to be believed. The very righteousness of God is revealed from objective faith, which is the Gospel, to subjective faith, which is the operation of the Spirit of God in the sinner. Before there can be any subjective faith, there must first be objective faith (Rom. 10:17).

"As it is written"--This teaches us that faith rests on the testimony of Scripture, God's revealed word. God-given faith has respect only unto God's revealed testimony. Faith is God's testimony heard,

understood, received and relied upon in opposition to all outward and inward circumstances, feelings and obstacles. BY FAITH WE UNDERSTAND HOW GOD IS GLORIFIED IN THE SALVATION OF SINNERS CONDITIONED ON CHRIST ALONE. BY FAITH WE UNDERSTAND HOW GOD CAN BE JUST TO JUSTIFY SINNERS BASED UPON THE BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST ALONE.

"The just shall live by faith"--Those who actually possess the righteousness of Christ by imputation, thus, received by faith, are in an unchangeable state of justification before God. They live now and shall reign with Christ forever in Heaven.

A CONTINUAL REMINDER

2 PETER 1:12-15

by Pastor Bill Parker

We who are called of God as ministers of the gospel and as ambassadors of Christ must continually preach the Gospel. The Gospel is to be our main message, and it should permeate all that we preach. We must continually preach the ground of salvation, Christ and His righteousness imputed, as it is the heart of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-22). Gospel preachers are called ministers of reconciliation who preach the word of reconciliation. The only ground of reconciliation between God and sinners is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ -- the entire merit of His whole work of mediation on behalf of God's elect (2 Cor. 5:20-21). Paul said that he preached Christ and Him crucified. This means many things to many people. Paul meant that he continually preached all of salvation conditioned on Christ alone, based on His righteousness alone, and all obedience of believers as motivated by this great truth. Are there other things? YES, but all truth is to be preached in the clear light of the Gospel, wherein the righteousness of God is revealed. Why?

FIRST, most who, at least, give mental agreement to this one ground will agree that we must preach this to the lost. What is the great problem of the religions of man. They motivate sinners, in some way or some form, to trying to establish a righteousness of their own. By nature, sinners know nothing of grace, of a righteousness imputed as the only ground of salvation. By nature, all we know is "do and live; disobey and die." The Gospel must be preached out so as to distinguish the true and living God from an idol, the true Christ from a counterfeit, so that sinners might not remain deceived. The Gospel must define the only ground of salvation, the imputed righteousness of Christ, so as to exclude anything and everything that sinners plead by nature in seeking to remove God's wrath and gain God's favor. As long as any sinner continues to seek after and expect salvation or any part of it based on anything other than the imputed righteousness of Christ, they will remain lost.

The goal of the Gospel as towards the lost sinner is to call them to faith towards God and repentance from dead works. God will save no sinner apart from faith. But faith is opposed to works as it believes and rests in a righteousness imputed. Faith expects God to save us and glorify us based upon the righteousness of Christ, with no consideration of or contribution from our efforts at obedience. (1) FAITH BELIEVES GOD'S PROMISE OF SALVATION CONDITIONED ON CHRIST ALONE, BECAUSE FAITH KNOWS THE GOD WHO MADE THE PROMISE. (2) FAITH RECEIVES THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST AS THE ONLY GROUND OF SALVATION, BECAUSE IT KNOWS AND LOVES CHRIST WHO ESTABLISHED THIS GROUND.

Receiving Christ by faith always produces Godly repentance, repentance unto life or repentance that evidences spiritual and eternal life. Before justifying faith all repentance is legal, natural conscience sorrow, called the sorrow of the world which works death. This legal repentance always leads sinners to trying to establish their own righteousness for relief. The Gospel removes the cloak of self-righteousness and exposes all efforts at worship and morality before justifying faith as fruit unto death. Preaching this Gospel, then, is necessary to bring sinners to saving faith and true repentance, to salvation.

SECOND, we must constantly preach it to the saved. This is what the Apostle Peter told his hearers in 2 Peter 1:12-15. His desire, His last wishes, was that they be a people who are marked and identified by this great message of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ. Peter wanted them to be established with this truth. So he told them that it was not a burden to him to remind them continually of this and to motivate them to diligent obedience, perseverance, and courage in the faith of Christ with this truth. Why is it necessary for Gospel preachers to preach this specific truth continually to those who are saved.

I. IT IS NECESSARY TO DISTINGUISH GOD'S PEOPLE AND THEIR WORKS FROM THE WORLD AND ITS WORKS (Matthew 5:13-16).

The command of Christ in Matthew 5 and in the Great Commission is for His disciples to spread this great message of salvation conditioned on Him alone and based on His righteousness alone throughout the world. It is by this message that God's people are distinguished and identified as being separate from the world. If we lose that distinction, then we are no more than salt that has lost its savor. This would reveal that we were never saved at all. The "light" in Matthew 5:16 is not the works of believers. IT IS THE GOSPEL OF ETERNAL SALVATION AND FINAL GLORY BASED ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST FREELY IMPUTED AND RECEIVED BY FAITH. This light shines on the works of believers and reveals these works to be "good works" (John 3:21; Eph. 2:10).

The Gospel reveals the obedience of believers to be good works, not because these works measure up to the standard of God's holy law. Our works after salvation still fall short of the law's requirement. That is why we must continually cry, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24). This is why a true believer constantly sees his need of Christ, His blood and righteousness. We must continually confess the sinfulness of our best efforts as to the ground of salvation and our continual need of cleansing and forgiveness in Christ (Phil. 3:9). The Gospel reveals that the works of believers are good not because they sanctify us or make us holier. Our works after salvation are not good enough to do this. We who believe the Gospel must see ourselves as already complete in Christ (Col. 2:9-10) -- completely pardoned and forgiven of all sin; completely fit and qualified for the presence and fellowship of God; and completely entitled to the whole inheritance of grace, all based on the righteousness of Christ.

The Gospel reveals the obedience of believers to be good works as they are: (1) performed by one who is in a justified state (justified by the grace of God in Christ), (2) the fruit of justifying faith (not seeking salvation or any part of it based on such works, but in light of having obtained all of salvation in Christ), and (3) the product of God's grace in our lives and evidences of His power and goodness (John 3:21). In other words, the works of believers are acceptable to God as they are motivated, not legally, but by grace and thanksgiving as summed up in the absolute certainty of eternal salvation and final glory based on the righteousness of Christ. Believers are to be obedient, dedicated people, going about seeking to do good. But as we go about seeking to do good, we must let our light shine so as to testify to the world that we expect no salvation or blessing from God based on our good works. We expect salvation and eternal life from God based on the obedience and death of Christ our Lord and Savior. If sinners see and believe this by the power of God, then they will glorify God and not men.

This same light exposes the works and efforts of unbelievers to be "fruit unto death," "evil deeds," and "dead works" (Rom. 7:4, John 3:19-20; Heb. 9:14). Until this specific light shines in the preaching of the doctrines of Christ, the doctrines of grace, the Gospel, men and women by nature do not know that such deeds are evil. They are deceived by sin (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:11). The Gospel reveals in the light of Christ and Him crucified, His blood, and His righteousness as the only ground upon which God can justify the ungodly, that all of man's efforts to establish a righteousness of His own is nothing but "dung" (Phil. 3:7-10) and can only leave a sinner in a state of condemnation (Rom. 10:1-3). The Gospel reveals the works of unbelievers to be evil, not because these works are necessarily immoral and insincere. It reveals them to be evil as they are: (1) performed by one who is a condemned, guilty state (and in that state a sinner's person and works are accursed), (2) done in unbelief (and without faith it is impossible to please God), and (3) the fruit and effect of self-righteousness. In other words, apart from a saving knowledge of the righteousness of Christ as the only ground of salvation, our motive can only be legal, thinking that salvation or some part of it is conditioned on us.

It is by this light that we are enabled to identify and distinguish God's people and have fellowship with them, and by which we are enabled to identify and distinguish the world and avoid fellowship with them

(Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 John 3:13-14; 2 John 9-11). As the writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers to become skillful in the "word of righteousness" in order to "good and evil" (Heb. 5:13-14), we must continually preach the Gospel to the saved. God's people are commanded to speak peace where sinners believe THIS GOSPEL and give evidence of believing it. God's people are forbidden to speak peace where sinners do not believe THIS GOSPEL and give no evidence of believing it.

II. IT IS NECESSARY FOR WORSHIP(John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3).

When believers meet together to hear the Word of God preached, to pray, to sing, to fellowship, our main goal is to worship God. True worship is the reasonable response of a redeemed, regenerated, converted sinner, to God the Father, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit. What is true worship? It is attributing unto God all those qualities of character revealed in our salvation based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. Some say that it is adequate simply to say, "through Christ," "in Christ," or "by Christ." We know that Christ alone is the center of our worship, and God the Father is the ultimate object of our worship. We cannot worship the Father except through the Son. But this does not mean Christ absolutely considered, or some mystical view of Christ. It is Christ our Great High Priest who satisfied law and justice on our behalf, and who enabled the Father to be just to justify the ungodly. We see God's redemptive glory revealed, not in Christ absolutely considered, but in Christ who satisfied law and justice and brought in the only righteousness which is the ground of our salvation and our worship.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16 - Prayer is an act of worship, and it based upon our Great High Priest and what He has accomplished that we come to worship. Christ's righteousness reveals the Father, because it is here that we see every attribute of the Father engaged on our behalf, honored and magnified so that we might come to Him, the Judge of all, and fully expect His favor based upon that righteousness alone. Christ's righteousness reveals the Son, because it is here we see Christ's glorified and exalted as our Mediator. It is here He comes to have the preeminence in our hearts. Without this, there is no worship, and we need to be reminded of this every time we meet together. We might compare it to God's glory in the Temple under the Old Covenant. Whenever they met to worship, it was always around the mercy-seat, based solely upon God's merit, goodness and mercy. When we meet together to worship, it should always be around our mercy-seat, Christ, based upon His merits, according to God's promise of salvation and final glory conditioned on Him alone.

III. IT IS NECESSARY TO BE ESTABLISHED WITH GRACE (Heb. 13:9).

The Holy Spirit's goal in our lives is to establish our hearts with grace, and the preaching of Christ and His righteousness is the only truth that will do that. The less believers hear this message and the less they are settled and skillful in it, the more they are apt to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. The more we see of Christ and our complete standing in Him, the more we will see the absolute certainty of our final glory based on His righteousness alone. Looking at ourselves, we cannot be established with grace. We must always cry, "O wretched man that I am." Our motto is "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes not iniquity," knowing we have a righteousness that answers the demands of God's law and justice. Our motto is "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ." This is our comfort, assurance, and confidence. We must always beware of seeking to be established or seeking assurance of our salvation based upon things which God has excluded. Our minds are so affected by remaining sin and self-righteousness that we must be continually reminded that our final glory is sure and certain, not based on our efforts, and notwithstanding circumstances and outward appearance, but based solely upon the imputed righteousness of Christ. This forms the basis of true Christian obedience, character and conduct, and of the whole Christian life. Many claim that once we are saved we begin a race. This is true, but we need to know that this race is a race of grace, not legalism. We are to run the race being assured that we will finish not based on our running but based on the fact that our Great High Priest, our Substitute and Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, has already completed the race and has assured us of victory.

IV. IT IS NECESSARY FOR MOTIVATION TO PERSEVERE AND OBEY.

The Gospel, wherein the mercy of God is revealed, is the main tool which God the Holy Spirit uses to motivate believers to persevere, obey, and perform good works (Rom. 12:1). All exhortations to obedience and morality and good works are to be motivated by this great Gospel truth of the certainty of our final glory based on the righteousness of Christ imputed. Even false preachers promote morality and works. What is the difference between a believer's morality and works and the false religionist's? It is the motivation revealed in this Gospel. Again, this is how we let our light shine, and this is how we are motivated to be ashamed when we sin. But it is ashamedness without fear of punishment which would set us trying to establish a righteousness of our own. This is how we are motivated to worship and obey God, but it is acceptable worship and obedience. Again, it is not because of any merit in the worship and obedience. We are still unprofitable servants in our own works. Again, it is acceptable for three reasons: (1) because it is performed by a justified sinner; (2) it is the fruit of justifying faith; and (3) it is motivated by the certainty of final glory conditioned on Christ, to the praise of the glory of God's grace. Sometimes, because of the Scripture which we are dealing with at the time, we emphasize this truth more. Sometimes, not as much. But we must always make sure, when we are preaching obedience in any area, that our hearers understand that no obedience forms any part of the ground of our salvation and final glory. If we do not preach the Gospel while we are dealing in other areas of obedience, our sermons only become moral or psychological pep talks and not exhortations of grace.

V. IT IS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF OUR SPIRITUAL WARFARE.

The Gospel is the main weapon in spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:4-5; Gal. 5:17). The main issue in the warfare of the flesh and the Spirit which exists in every believer. This warfare is something in which the natural man by natural conscience does not and cannot participate. This is the warfare of justified sinners, and it mainly involves the Spirit of liberty in opposition to the spirit of bondage and legalism. The natural man does not have the Spirit of liberty. He only has the spirit of self-righteousness and legalism. Any obedience that is not motivated by that absolute certainty of salvation conditioned on Christ alone is legalism. But every true believer has remaining self-righteousness which constantly opposes the Spirit of grace and liberty. For this reason we must be diligent to make use of the means which God has given us to establish our hearts with grace, and that we may grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

This spiritual warfare does not exclude morality versus immorality because even true believers are subject to the passions of remaining sin. But immorality versus morality does not identify this warfare. The natural man by natural conscience conviction has these struggles. So even though it does not identify this warfare, it is included because we do not cease this conflict when God saves us. We are called on and commanded constantly to bring our character and conduct into conformity to Christ and not to fulfill our sinful desires. We are to fight these sinful passions with every fiber of our being and seek to be moral in thought, word and deed. But we are to fight those sinful passions in a different way, not by legal or mercenary motives seeking to remove God's wrath or to gain or maintain God's favor. So, the main issue in this warfare is the Spirit of liberty versus the spirit of bondage. The fact that we have these unlawful desires does not mean that we should doubt our salvation, nor be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

That principle of bondage, of legalism and self-righteousness, constantly seeks to draw our minds to thinking that somehow, some way or in some degree, our salvation, our sanctification, our relationship with God, our fitness for heaven, is dependent upon or determined by our works and efforts at obedience. We desire never to have any thoughts of legalism ever again, even in temporal things, but this principle is still so powerful that we cannot attain that desire perfectly. Thank God that this self-righteous principle does not dominate our thinking and motives, and that it cannot overcome us, but it still influences us.

Why not? It is because of the principle of grace and liberty which constantly seeks to draw our minds towards God in Christ, knowing that our salvation, sanctification, our relationship with God and our fitness for heaven, is totally dependent upon and determined by Christ and His righteousness alone imputed and received by faith. This principle of grace and liberty works by the Gospel and its particulars and implications to establish our hearts with grace. (Gal. 5:1)

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