

The Wednesday Word, March 14, 2012: Cleansed By The Blood - Part 4

“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” – 1 John 1:7

Notice whose blood it is that cleanses. It is the Son's blood. And who is His Son? He is God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16). This is our confidence. Christ Jesus was not merely a well meaning man---a well meaning man could not cleanse our sin. God alone can do that (Mark 2:7). It is the blood of the sinless, innocent, righteous man who is God over all, blessed forever (Rom 9:5) that cleanses us.

Calvary is powerful because it was there that God's blood purchased us (Acts 20:28). That blood was precious, saving blood and not the blood of a mere man, it was the blood of the God/Man. Here's the dilemma, our sins required eternal death, but God could not die. So in his infinite wisdom and grace, God became one of us. Men can die! As a man, therefore, Christ offered Himself as the sinner's sinless and perfect substitute and as God He supplied the infinite authority and capacity necessary to powerfully cleanse and purchase us. This is something that faith can rest upon. Our sin was great, but greater still was the atonement made for it. And what gave the atonement it's authority and might? It was none other that the One who hung there on that wretched cross, the God Man, fully God yet fully man, dying in total triumph over every one of His and our enemies.

Now based upon that good news, here's even more good news for you-- you have not committed any sin so great or so heinous that Christ cannot forgive and cleanse you. No sin is too immense or too difficult for God to cleanse. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. However, there are Christians reading this who are dying with guilt when they don't have to. Why don't they have to? Here's the answer, --the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin.

One night in a church service a young woman responded to God's call and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour. The young woman had had a very rough past, involving drugs, and prostitution but Christ saved her and the change in her was evident. As time went on she became a faithful member of the church and eventually became involved in the ministry, teaching young children. It was not very long until this faithful young woman had caught the eye and heart of the pastor's son. Their relationship grew until, eventually, they began to make wedding plans. This is when the problems began. Unfortunately, about one half of the church thought that a woman with a past such as hers was unsuitable for a pastor's son.

The church began to argue and fight about the matter. Telephone wires were burning hot! So the church decided to have a meeting. As the people made their arguments the tensions increased and the meeting was getting completely out of hand. The young woman became very upset about all the things being brought up about her past. As she began to cry the pastor's son stood. He could not bear the pain all this was causing his young bride to be. He began to speak and his statement was this:

"My fiancée's past is not what is on trial here. What you are questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away all sin. Tonight you have put the blood of Jesus on trial. So, tell me church, does it wash away all sin or not?"

Many members of the church began to weep as they realized that they had been slandering the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. They repented of their unbelief in the blood as the Spirit of God applied the truth that there is no sin too great for the blood of Jesus.

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word March 28, 2012: Cleansed By the Blood: Part 5

2000 years ago Pilate, stood before the crowd, washed his hands and declared "I am innocent of the blood of this just man." But was he? In fact, were any of us?

One of the marks of growing in grace is our seeing our part in the heinous crime of executing the Son of God. It was our vile sin that put him on the cross. We, therefore, have our share of guilt in the dark events that culminated that day at Calvary.

That's the bad news! Now for some good news --even though we don't deserve it, the believer's crimes against God have been cancelled and all charges against us have been dropped. This is pure and righteous grace. Christ died for our sins as the willing and chosen substitute for His people. He has taken responsibility for us. His blood cleanses us from all sin.

It is the blood that assures us of both our guilt and acquittal. Our guilt is assured because, at the cross, our substitute died in our place. That we needed a substitute to die for us proves our guilt. However, our acquittal is equally assured because, at the cross, this same substitute poured out His precious blood and declared us not guilty. Faith sees and rests upon this. As the hymn writer said,

"My faith has found a resting place
Not in device or creed
I'll trust the ever-living one
His wounds for me shall plead.
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died
And that He died for me"

In the Old Testament the shedding of blood for sin was always done as a sacrifice. So it is that Christ Jesus poured out His own blood in one magnificent sacrificial offering in order that we would go free. There are now no possible charges that can be made against us.

Just think of how the blood of Christ changes things. For example, the blood makes all priests redundant for priests cannot cleanse sin, ---only the blood of Christ can do that. Furthermore, the blood makes all our striving and performing to earn the forgiveness of God entirely un-necessary. It is the blood of Jesus, not our performance, that cleanses us from all sin. Because of the blood we learn that our personal obedience does not bring us to God. While it is true that the wages of

sin is death (Rom 6:23), nowhere does the Bible tell us that the wages of our obedience is eternal life.

As we walk in the gospel we grow in our understanding of that one great sacrifice of Calvary and our part in executing the Son of God. Furthermore, it is equally through the same gospel that we learn about our sin being entirely gone.

Continual exposure to the gospel teaches us both our depravity and God's glorious grace. It is the gospel, applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit that teaches us to shun and turn from our sins. We once were separated from God by our sins, but we are now separated unto Him by the shed blood of Jesus. The blood has cleansed us from the defilement of sin and has set us apart unto God to serve, love and worship Him. This is why the blood of Christ is so precious. It has separated us from the world of sin, legalism and dead works and has brought us into the Holy of Holies where He sustains and renews us continually.

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, April 4, 2012: The Blood, The Meeting Place

Ephesians 2:13: "But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ."

There is nothing in the entire universe that reveals God's holy wrath against sin more than the blood of Christ. That the sinless, spotless Lamb of God had to offer Himself as our substitute shows us the horror of our sin. Yet it is this same blood that has become the meeting place between unholy sinners and the all-holy God (1 Peter 1:19). As sin reigned unto death, even so grace now reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5: 21). This is good news! The law proclaimed that the wages of sin is death, but the gospel blood now proclaims that the wages have been paid. Under which proclamation do you live?

In spite of the fact that there are those who slight and scorn it, the Father is well satisfied with the blood. Believers, therefore, dare not minimize its importance. God is unchangeable especially when it comes to the importance of the blood for the simple reason that the honour of His Son is bound up in it. The blood of the gospel is God's own blood (Acts 20:28). It was the blood of He who was and is the brightness of Yahweh's glory and the express image of His person (Hebrews 1:3). It is impossible, therefore, that God can overlook any affront or indifference to the blood? It is, also, equally impossible that true believers can permanently tire of hearing of and talking about the blood.

In Exodus 12, God told Moses that every household should take a Lamb and keep it in the house. For four days the lamb lived with the family. I'm sure the children loved playing with that little creature and I'm sure there was many a time that the family noticed the little animal's perfection and beauty. But perfect as the lamb was, that lamb could not deliver them until its blood was

poured out and applied. Likewise, beautiful as the Lord's life was, it alone could save no one. Christ Jesus, the Lamb, had to hang upon the cross and die for "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb 9:22).

If, as a believer, you are still plagued with guilt, the Holy Spirit would have you to, behold the Lamb and see His shed blood. Look continually at the finished work and behold Christ crucified. His work for you has been successfully accomplished.

As believers, we, all of us, need to continually look by faith to Christ our Mercy Seat. His sacred, sinless blood was poured out for us. The Father recognizes and accepts the preciousness, power and effectiveness of that one great sacrifice of His beloved Son. It has removed our sin! Christ Jesus, therefore, is now the appointed meeting place with the Father. His blood brings us near. In Him and in Him alone, God the Holy One meets with us through the blood ----and only through the blood (Col 1:20).

There is salvation to the uttermost in Christ alone. Be assured that in the blood of the perfect Lamb there is a perfect payment that has perfectly satisfied the Father. In that same blood there is perfect grace and that perfectly satisfies us. It is in the blood of the cross that mercy and truth meet and because of it the believing sinner finds peace for the heart and conscience.

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word April 11, 2012: The (Almost) Forgotten Story of John Harper of the Titanic

I grew up with stories of the Titanic. My Grandmother and Uncles had seen the great ship sail out of Belfast Lough at the beginning of her doomed maiden voyage. One of the many stories I heard about was that of Dr. John Harper. He's almost forgotten now. However, John Harper was a fearless Scottish Baptist pastor and evangelist, who accompanied by his 6-year-old daughter and niece set sail on the Titanic. He was on his way to America to preach the gospel. Prior to this, Harper had successfully pastored churches in both Glasgow and London. He had also preached the gospel in various parts of England and Scotland and had indeed preached several times in East Belfast near where the Titanic was being built.

The Titanic was no run of the mill ship. It was "a floating hotel, a small town at sea." Some people said she was unsinkable.

On Sunday the 14th of April, 1912, the day when death struck, the weather was fine, the sea calm. Harper attended the church service for the passengers. His niece tells that later that afternoon she saw her Uncle speaking individually to people about their souls. It seems he was in the habit of seeking out the lost sheep wherever he went.

As for the ship, no one suspected the approaching danger, but the infamous iceberg struck all the same. When the collision happened Harper immediately ensured that his daughter and niece were placed in one of the lifeboats. At first, the ship's authorities said that there was no pressing danger. After all the Titanic was unsinkable. In spite of these reports, Harper knew that the Titanic was doomed and having ensured the safety of his loved ones began immediately to announce that not only should the women and children get into the lifeboats, but also the unsaved. Harper, then moved up and down the decks stopping people and asking them were they saved. If not, he urged them to sue for mercy and believe and trust in the Christ who had died for sinners. Thankfully he had never read the literature of some of the modern preachers who disdain such a direct approach.

At this point he assembled those he could and earnestly prayed for their salvation praying that God would grant them repentance and faith. We don't know how many hearts the Lord opened, but this we know, as the ship sank, Harper jumped with others into the icy waters and began swimming around urging any who would listen to repent and believe the gospel.

On that fateful night when over 1500 people died, John Harper was seen swimming frantically from person to person preaching Christ. He swam up to one young man who had climbed up on a piece of debris and between breaths asked, "Are you saved?" The young man replied that he was not. Harper having urged him to repent and believe then took off his life jacket and threw it to the man saying, "Here then, since you are not saved you need this more than I do..." And then swam away to other people.

Only seven people were plucked from the icy water that night to join the survivors in the lifeboats. The young man was one of them. Four years later, at a survivors meeting, in Hamilton, Ontario, this same young man stood up and in tears testified of how that, in the icy waters, John Harper had pointed him to Christ. The young man testified of how Harper had then tried to swim back to help other people. However, because of the intense cold, he had grown too weak to swim. According to the young man, Harper's last words, called out before going under were, "Believe on the Name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."

John Harper and daughter Nan

Harper, has had little to no mention from Hollywood in its re-telling of the events of that awful April night. But I suppose that's to be expected. However, unknown as he is, Harper is a gospel hero. He held to the sufficiency of Christ alone for salvation and quite literally preached it till his dying breath. He preached the Christ of the cross to the doomed passengers. Perhaps they listened, perhaps not. But one thing for sure, Harper didn't give them a message of, "You can have a better life now." Nor did he urge his hearers to take Communion or any sacrament or in fact to do anything other than receive that which had already been accomplished. He unashamedly preached Christ crucified as the sinner's only hope. May the Lord inspire and empower us to do the same.

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, April 18, 2012: The Man Who Prayed in Reverse!

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me I am a sinful man O Lord” Luke 5:8

It was only when the big fisherman, Simon Peter, was confronted with the awesome power and majesty of Christ that he began to see the extent of his wretched sinfulness. But look at his strange response to this awful discovery---he asked the Lord to depart. He's the man who prayed in reverse. He prayed backwards!

What a strange gospel it would be if our sin caused the Lord to depart. It was our sin which brought Him here in the first place. Do we now think that our sin will drive Him away? Have we gone so far from the gospel that we imagine there is a throne of grace from which we must run and hide? Or do we imagine that we must clean and reform our ways before we are fit to approach the Master? Does our sin, like Peter's, make us want to avoid the Lord Christ? Unfortunately, this is often the case.

Instead of praying “Depart from me,” Peter should have prayed, “Lord come to me and let me come to you for I am a sinful man. I need you Lord. I'm a sinner, please forgive me, heal my conscience, remove my guilt and strengthen me.”

It is by learning to embrace the grace and mercy which is in Christ that the gospel believer becomes a prayer warrior. The gospel believer knows that his sin is so awful and God is so holy that there is nothing but the blood of Christ which can open the way to heaven. The gospel believer knows something of the power and authority of the blood. He knows that there is nothing but the blood which can bring Him to the throne (Ephesians 2:13; Hebrews 10:19). The gospel believer can, therefore, confidently agree that the best place for him is with the Saviour of Sinners and not away from Him!

But in spite of knowing these wonderful gospel truths, our sin, like that of Adam's, tends to make us want to hide. Unfortunately, there's much truth in Shakespeare's line, “Conscience does make cowards of us all.” Sometimes we are too afraid to go to the throne of grace. We know we deserve, not favour, but frowns and we wonder how we can, as sinful people, go to God with boldness?

So how we do it? How do we go there? Here's the answer.

As justified believers we walk by faith. Faith sees that we have a great High Priest sitting, not on a throne of wrath and fury, but on a throne of grace. Faith then sees the Saviour of sinners on that very throne welcoming us. Faith sees that in our nature, and as our personal representative, the Royal High Priest lived a holy and sinless life. Faith sees that He was crucified and killed, yet faith also sees that He rose again, ascended and sat down on His throne in Heaven. Faith holds out it's hand and receives welcoming grace, mercy and cleansing. Faith brings us boldly to the throne of grace and not away from it.

Faith also sees that we are, not only invited to the throne of grace, but are actually commanded to come to it. Faith gives us confidence to go there for faith sees that Christ Himself is our confidence. In Him we find, not man's mercy, but God's.

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, April 25, 21012: The Not So Doubting Thomas!

John 20:28; "And Thomas answered and said unto him, "My Lord and my God."

Poor old Thomas! He is forever known as the doubter. Although Thomas did not remain in doubt about the resurrection of Jesus, 'Doubting Thomas' is the name by which he is remembered. Perhaps it reflects on how little mercy there is in the church for those of us who fall.

But, in my opinion, there's a good case for remembering Thomas not as 'Doubting Thomas' but as 'Believing Thomas' for here, in this verse, he gives a grand and clear confession of his faith. Here he declares Jesus to be both Lord and God ---a declaration which has both strengthened and enriched the faith of believers throughout the generations!

Some foolish people have tried to argue that Thomas wasn't actually making a confession of faith, but was calling out in surprised astonishment. Well imagine that! Apart from charging Thomas with profanity they expose the desperation and barrenness of their thinking. Such thinking is so sorry that it should be laughed at rather than refuted. Thomas, far from swearing, indeed made a grand confession of faith as he declared the words, "My Lord and my God." What he literally said was "Jesus, you are the Lord of me and the God of me."

Was Thomas mistaken about the identity of Jesus? Let's ask Jesus. Let's see how He responds to this confession. Surely, if Jesus is merely a good man and not God, He will rebuke His erring disciple. After all, no good and upright man would allow himself to be called God! So how does Jesus respond?

Here's what happened.

'Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'. (Jn 20:29)

In other words, Christ declares Thomas to be a true believer. That's hardly a rebuke!

True believers, therefore, we conclude, hold to the truth of the Deity of Christ. Matthew Henry writes,

"We must believe his deity-that he is God; not a man made God, but God made man. The author and head of our holy religion has the wisdom, power, sovereignty, and unchangeableness of God, which was necessary, because he was to be not only the founder of it, but the foundation of it for

its constant support, and the fountain of life for its supply'. (Matthew Henry Commentaries).

It is essential, therefore, as followers of Christ, that we take a stand for who He is. It is not enough to glibly say, "O I believe Jesus is the Son of God, but he's not God." If that is your position you cannot be considered a Christian. You can be a church member, a deacon, a Sunday School teacher but you are not a Christian. You have rejected the Christ of Heaven.

Everyone who names the name of Christ must settle this question of Christ's Deity for himself. The Devil has tried for years to undermine belief in our Master's Deity and it becomes all who name the name of Christ to defy the Father of Lies and to refute his falsehoods.

In conclusion, notice how Thomas made his great confession publicly. Henry again comments,

'He made an open profession of this, before those that had been the witnesses of his unbelieving doubts. He says it to Christ, and, to complete the sense, we must read it, 'Thou art my Lord and my God'; or, speaking to his brethren, 'This is my Lord and my God'. Do we accept Christ as our Lord God? We must go to him, and tell him so, ---and tell others so" (Matthew Henry Commentaries)

And that's the Gospel Truth

Today's Wednesday Word is a short excerpt from my upcoming eBook, "What's All This Nonsense About Jesus Being God."

The Wednesday Word, May 16, 2012: The Divine/Human Saviour

Some people really hate the truth that the man Jesus Christ was also God. In Matthew 8:24 we discover Christ sleeping. "Wait a minute," say His enemies, "this really proves that He was not God for," they say, "the God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." But, these would be troublers of the faith, fail to grasp that this scripture, and others like it, are there to establish His true humanity, not His Deity. The same man who was hungry was the God who fed the five thousand. The same one who on the cross was parched with thirst, as God stands up and cries, "If any one thirst let him come unto Me and drink." The same man who was tired and slept, as God issues the invitation to the weary and heavy laden to come unto Him and rest! So if He is not God we are left with a man who gets hungry yet claims to be the bread of life: a man who gets thirsty yet tells us to come to him and drink and a man who gets weary yet tells us to come to him and rest. If these are not the words of God, this man Jesus is nuts! The only way to make sense of Jesus is to receive that He is both God and man!

It was necessary that Christ should be a man for we needed someone to represent us. We needed a human being to live in our place. Why? Because all of us have sinned and have fallen short of God's holy standard----- that's why! When God came to earth, He came as one of us. He divested Himself of His glory, veiled his Deity and became our substitute in His birth, life, death and resurrection. It was a real man who lived for us; it was a real man who died in our place, and it is

one of us, a real man, who now intercedes for us in Heaven.

We needed a life of perfect righteousness to present to God, and our flawed efforts did not make the grade. That's one of the principal reasons why Christ came. He came as our substitute, the substitute man. If He were not a man, truly a man, then there is no gospel, no redemption and no salvation. It was man who had sinned and man who was guilty; therefore, it had to be one of us, a human representative who would take the punishment on our behalf. But more than that, we needed a representative, a human being to stand in our place and produce a perfect, flawless righteousness that could be reckoned as ours. An angel could not represent us or become our substitute in life and death. The representative had to be one of us, otherwise there is no good news. For there to be any gospel at all, Christ Jesus had to be one of our race, a human, descended from Adam.

Adam, the first human being, as the head and representative of humanity, brought condemnation upon us all. Christ Jesus, in order to become the Last Adam, had to be totally human; He had to be one of us. We had to be rescued by one of our own! But where would God find such a human? Where would He find someone untainted with Adam's sin? His eyes ran throughout the whole world, and his verdict was, "There is none righteous no not one, there's none that doeth good, there's none that understand, there's none that seeks God" (Romans 3:10-11), "their whole head is sick" (Isaiah 1:5) and "their heart is divided" (Hosea 10:2). Man had been so totally ruined by sin and had fallen so far short of God's glory that no qualified redeemer could be found. A qualified redeemer, by law, had to be a near kinsman therefore, since no perfect, sinless man could be found, God came here Himself, assumed a true and genuine human nature, became one of the human family, and yet remained God.

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word May 30, 2012: "When Necessary Use Words" ---?

Francis of Assisi has been attributed with the quote, "Preach the gospel always and when necessary use words." Whether or not he actually said this is a matter of uncertainty, but that matters not. What matters is that this anti - gospel statement is often heralded by 'enlightened' evangelicals, so called, to justify their lack of evangelistic endeavour. They maintain that all we have to do is to live out the Christian life. If we do this, they insist, people will notice how god-like we are and will then convert.

When it comes to this subject, urban legends abound. The heretic, Charles Finney, who in spite of his distorted and twisted denial of the doctrine of forensic Justification is still popular in many quarters, was supposedly so holy that one day, he walked into a factory and just stood there. According to this fable, what happened next was that every worker in the factory came under conviction of sin, stopped working and cried out for mercy.

"Well," you say, "don't you believe that story?"
No I don't!

“Well why not?” you ask.

I’ll tell you why not. I don’t believe it, because it’s not true.

“But how do you know it’s not true?” you inquire.

I know it’s not true for the simple reason, that when weighed by and measured against the gospel it turns out to be false.

Let me explain. Where, for example, do we read in the gospels that Christ walked into places and, just by standing there, converted all the people? Yet, Christ Jesus was pure, holy and sinless. He was God manifest in the flesh. It doesn’t get purer than that! However, His purity and holiness converted no one in the imaginary Finney manner.

Also, Jesus grew up in a home where His brothers and sisters did not believe in Him. His spotless, holy life, evidently, did nothing to move the unbelievers in His family towards salvation. In fact, there is no evidence that His brothers James and Jude got converted until after the resurrection. So much for the theory that our good, good lives will be the source of converting people.

Now, lest I am misunderstood, I of course believe that we should aim, by the gracious power of the Spirit, to lead lives worthy of the gospel. Our lives should bring glory to the Father (Matthew 5:16), should become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1); should be such that no evil thing can be spoken of us (Titus 2:7-8); and should adorn the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10), but, God forbid that we should think that this is the way to get people saved.

For people to get saved, the gospel must be told. In spite of what St. Francis, or whomever said, words are always necessary. The use of words is the New Testament pattern.

Consider the following scriptures:

Acts 8:25; And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Acts 15:7; --- God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

Eph 1:13; In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation;

Col 1:5; For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

Heb 4:2; For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them;

1 Peter 1:25.-- And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Words are necessary for the gospel, because the gospel is a past historical event. We can’t live in a way that effectively communicates events of history. We, of course, can reflect the benefits of

the gospel in our life style, but this is not the same as actually preaching the gospel. Besides that, the gospel is not about our experience. It's about the unique, never to be repeated, experience of the God/Man and with all due apologies to St. Francis, it is impossible, therefore, to declare it without words.

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, June 13, 2012: Jesus is Jehovah Jireh

I often hear preachers proclaim that Jesus, Jehovah Jireh will provide all our material needs. I have no problem with this statement for I can personally testify of being in full time ministry since the 1980s, without salary. Jehovah Jireh has provided every need and will, by grace, continue to provide.

But, when this name Jehovah Jireh was first brought to our attention, it didn't have to do with finances, but, rather, with substitutionary sacrifice. The designation of Jehovah the provider is first found in Genesis 22, and it concerns the faithful provision of a substitute for Isaac. Do you remember the story? The Lord had told His friend Abraham to take his beloved son Isaac and sacrifice him on an altar. Old Abraham, I'm sure was confused by this command and, if so, he had every right to be for, after all, the Lord had given him Isaac as a child of promise.

Nevertheless, in obedience, the great man rose up early, took Isaac and journeyed to Mount Moriah. Remember how, as they climbed the mountain, Isaac turned to his father asking, "Where is the lamb?" and Abraham responded, "The Lord will provide Himself a lamb." Abraham knew that God would provide; he knew that God would see to it. He knew, by faith, that the Lord was Jehovah Jireh, the one who would provide a substitute for his boy. And indeed, God did provide a substitute and the place was then called Jehovah Jireh, 'the Lord has provided'.

This compelling story is laced with gospel undertones. Notice that Abraham did not pray for a Lamb. He knew that God had seen the situation and that He would provide. Similarly, we didn't have to pray that God would send Christ to die for us. God knew and saw our need and, from eternity, had already prepared the Lamb for the cross.

The wood, carried by Isaac, pointed towards Christ carrying the cross up Mount Calvary. Isaac lying down on the wood without a fight, represented the Lord Jesus, submitting, in obedience, to the death of the cross. Abraham's knife foreshadowed Jehovah's awful blade of justice falling upon Christ!

Then consider the Ram! The ram was caught by the horns in a thick, dense undergrowth comprised of interwoven thorny briars. Being that horns are a picture of strength, we see that Christ's mighty power submitted itself to the thorny and entangled hands of evil men, (see Micah 7:3). Thorns are also a by-product of the curse and the ram being imprisoned by them points towards Christ being made a curse for us (see Galatians 3:13). Notice, also, how the ram's head was entangled in the briars; this pictured how Christ's lovely head would be crowned with thorns.

That there are so many gospel pictures in this story, draws our attention to the fact that the greatest provision God has ever made was when He gave His Son to be the wrath offering for our sins.

The God who is all-holy had demanded the sacrifice of Isaac. Isaac, like the rest of us, was a sinner and, therefore, deserved to die! That's a painful reality, but true! When Isaac asked the famous question, "Where is the lamb", he didn't realize that the full answer to that question would not come for well over a thousand years. The answer would have to wait until the time when a hairy prophet stood upright on the banks of Jordan, pointed to the Lord Jesus and declared, "Behold the Lamb of God." It is as if he said, "This is the lamb about whom Isaac inquired and of whom Abraham prophesied!"

Jesus is the Lamb of God's preparation. Jesus is Jehovah Jireh, the lamb of provision: Jesus, in Himself, is the provision for the sins of His people. He and only He is uniquely qualified for the title of, Jehovah-Jireh, the LORD our Provider!

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, June 20, 2012: "Call His Name Jesus."

"---thou shalt call His name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21.

This remarkable verse is both a promise and a prophesy. It is a prophesy because it was inseparably linked with His future work of saving His people. It is also a promise for all of us who are so ruined that we know we cannot save ourselves. Listen again as the angel says, "He shall save." What a thrilling promise! He's not going to try to save or make his best effort to save ... no, He SHALL save. Listen to me, since He saves, it makes abundant sense to abandon all our silly efforts to save ourselves!

Right here, in this verse we also see great instruction on Christ's deity. Notice how His parents were to "Call his name Jesus." This name is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Yahweh, our Saviour."

Of course, the name Jesus was a common name in those days. Obviously people who bore that name were not the LORD incarnate. Obviously, for example, General Joshua of Old Testament fame was not God manifest in the flesh. But when we read of the naming of Jesus we are confronted immediately by the truth that Jesus is Yahweh.

So what's the difference? Why is Jesus God, but Joshua a mere man? Good question!

To answer it, let's look at the text and ask why it is that Jesus is Yahweh the Saviour. The reason is, "He shall save his people from their sins!" Now let me remind you, salvation is the work of Yahweh alone (Isaiah 45:22). And, since Jesus accomplished salvation, we must conclude that, by doing so, He declared His true identity and demonstrated that He is Yahweh the Saviour!

Let's put it this way, since it is the unique function of Yahweh to save His people, and since the Lord Jesus has this same characteristic function, we must conclude that Christ and Yahweh are one and the same! Jesus is God! If, however, Jesus does not save His people, He is not Yahweh.

So what about those other children who were called Jesus or Joshua in those days? Were they also Jehovah in human flesh? No! They were called 'Jesus' by their parents. The difference between them and the Master was that Jesus was named by the Father. It was by God's direct instructions that Christ was to be named Jesus.

Often in Scripture, when God names someone He identifies them as who they really are. Consider this, God has called (named) all believers sons of God (1 John 3:1). The reason we are called this is that we are actually and really Sons of God.

Again, we see that God changed the name of Jacob, whose name meant 'supplanter', to Israel, which means 'one who rules with God'. This is who he actually had become, and God, therefore, called him accordingly.

When God named a person, His naming of them decreed what they were and what they would do. Thus, the Master was named Jesus. In effect, the angel said, "Call him Yahweh Saves, for He is the one who shall save His people from their sins."

In conclusion, this child would be not merely "Yahweh a Saviour" for He is much more; He is "Yahweh our Saviour", the one through whom our sins and iniquities have been taken away. So remember, every time we call on this wonderful name of Jesus, we are affirming our belief that He is the mighty God!

If we don't believe that He is God, we should not call Him Jesus.

And that's the Gospel Truth

For a fuller treatment of this subject visit Sermon Audio at:

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=617121837137> for my sermon "The Amazing Names of Jesus" Part 1

The Wednesday Word, June 27, 2012: "Why Call Him Lord?"

To say that someone is 'LORD', is to admit that they are the one in charge. Jesus continually demonstrated His Lordship and sovereignty over all things, thus proving, continually, that He was the one in control of everything. He was the Lord of nature who with a single word calmed a storm. He was the Lord over death who by His word raised the dead. He was Lord over Satan who by a word cast out demons. This kind of sovereignty is God's domain! Is it any wonder then

that Jesus gave an uninterrupted demonstration that He was the Lord?

The Greek word for Lord is 'Kurios': it means 'Supreme Authority'. This is the word that was continually used to translate the Tetragrammaton (a four-letter Hebrew name) which stood for the name of Yahweh in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). The early Christians, knowing the usage of this word Kurios, refused, therefore, to swear an oath of allegiance to the Roman Emperor. And what was the oath? They were required to declare, "Cesar is the Kurios" which meant, "Cesar is the Lord." Along with the oath they were also required to burn incense to the Emperor's image. The Roman state saw this as an affirmation of political loyalty, but the Christians saw it quite differently. They saw this as an idolatrous act that betrayed Christ. In their enlightened understanding, there was only one Kurios --- Jesus! There could be only one supreme authority. Since there is no authority higher than that which is supreme, the Christians knew that to declare the Emperor the Kurios would be to declare him to be God. They, therefore, refused to do so and paid for their actions with their lives.

There are those who point out that the term 'kurios' could have been used of anyone in a position of authority. It could, in fact, refer to anyone who was a leader, a property owner, a head of household, a slave owner, and even a husband could be called "Lord". This is true, but when the apostles used the term Lord they were declaring Jesus to be much more than a leader, property owner or head of a household; they were declaring Him to be God. The early Christians weren't killed for refusing to declare Caesar as being the head of his household, they were killed for refusing to call the Emperor God. Jesus was their God, there was room for no other.

The apostles urged their listeners to call upon the name of the Lord, the mighty God, the sovereign, supreme authority. In Romans 10:9, Paul declared:

"if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus... you shall be saved."

Then in Romans 10:13, Paul backs up this declaration by quoting from the Old Testament:

"For whoever will call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered (saved)" (Joel 2:32).

It is remarkable to note that when Joel 2:32 is quoted in both Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13, the "LORD" in question is identified as Jesus. This is all the more significant when we remember that the Jewish faith had always insisted that the people should call upon the name of Yahweh ("Psalm 17:6; Psalm 116:4; Lamentations 3:55).

But when we reach the pages of the New Testament, we see Jewish Christians insisting that people should no longer call on Yahweh, the Old Testament name of God, but now they must call only on the name of Jesus: Their conviction concerning Jesus was, "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" Acts 4:12.

The early Christians were persuaded that to call Jesus Lord was to call him Yahweh. This being so, we should inform the cults that, in reality, they cannot make the confession, "Jesus is Lord" because these three words are a confession of Christ's supreme deity!

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, July 4, 2012: Saved by Someone Else!

There are some church folk whom I've met who think that simply by doing religious things they can avoid divine displeasure and secure God's favour (Luke 18:10-12). Are you like that? Do you secretly hope that if you can just do enough for God you will somehow find forgiveness before you die? Listen to me, I've got some terrible news for you; you are worshiping a God of human devising!

I'm serious, and no, I'm not picking on you for I know that, at times, we can all be guilty of creating our own acceptance system before God. That's why we need the gospel; it continually clears the cobwebs of legalistic thinking out of our brains.

In the gospel, we don't end with acceptance before God, we start with it! We begin our Christian life with full acceptance in Christ as we are embraced by perfect grace and acquittal (Romans 5:1). In the gospel, we are accepted by God, not because of our obedience, but because of the obedience of someone else (Romans 5:19). We are accepted, not because of our performance, but accepted only through the performance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acceptance with God is one of the central benefits of the gospel (Ephesians 1:6). Let's face it; there can be no acceptable worship unless there are first acceptable worshippers. But, notice how we reverse things. When not instructed by the gospel, we think that, by performing religious acts and doing religious things like going to Church, we can somehow find acceptance before God. This is legalism, it's our default mode. However, the gospel truth is this, we must first be accepted and then, and only then, are we qualified to acceptably worship. Acceptable worship comes only from accepted worshippers.

Man made religion also presents forgiveness as the end result of our efforts. But, again, this is not the gospel. The gospel secures our forgiveness from the very start. False religions are all essentially alike---they are like the same cat with different whiskers --- they teach that we should make sincere efforts to secure God's forgiveness. But, the truth is, our forgiveness has already been secured by the good works of another --- the Lord Jesus. It is in Christ and in Christ alone that we have full divine favour and forgiveness! And it is by faith alone that we take hold of these wonderfully gracious gospel benefits.

Knowing this love of God, we can now enjoy being saved. We, as believers, are already fully loved, accepted and welcomed, by the Father, apart from our performance. This is good news! We don't have to earn God's smile of love for we already have it and have had it, in Christ, from before time. And in case you doubt this love, look at the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus! It's in Him that we see love's full disclosure. See Him, hanging of on the cross, "Bearing shame and scoffing rude." It is in Jesus alone that we see the matchless grace of God towards us. When there was nothing we could do to save ourselves, He willingly became our substitute, and both lived and died in our place (Isaiah 53)!

We are saved by someone else; this is good news.

And that's the Gospel Truth!

The Wednesday Word, July 11, 2012: Saved by Faith!

I've often had people talk to me about their lack of faith. They fret and say things like, "I wish I had more faith to believe for I'm not happy with the amount of faith I have." Or, "I wish my faith was stronger, it just seems to be so weak."

Listen to me; it is not smart to go around believing in our own faith or lack of it ---- we should never look to faith to save us. Our faith is not our saviour---Jesus alone saves (Titus 2:13; Acts 4:12)!

We are never commanded to put faith in faith, instead we are called to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to look to Christ crucified alone to save us (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:2). He is the righteous one who died for the unrighteous (1 Peter 3:18). Faith did not die for us. Faith was not wounded for our transgressions. Faith was not bruised for our iniquities. The Lord did not lay on faith the iniquities of us all for there never was a time when faith was nailed to the cross. Faith therefore, cannot be our Saviour.

Faith itself saves no one, but by faith we look to the crucified and risen Christ—the living, triumphant One who does save. He has conquered death. He alone has paid for us with His precious blood. He has ransomed and redeemed us. He alone saves! Where is it that the Bible teaches us to look to our faith as our Saviour? Nowhere! But here's what it does say; ----"Look unto me and be ye saved ---for I am God and there is none else" (Isaiah 44:22) or to 'New Testamentize' it, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

The truth is, if you were convinced that you had a strong faith, you might become a menace to yourselves and others. You might end up as a self-righteous, priggish pest! And besides being a nuisance, you would find yourself on dangerous ground! Why? Because you may be so satisfied with your faith that you would conclude yourself to be saved! And here's the danger, your confidence would have shifted to something other than Christ alone! Your trust would be in your faith and not the Lord Jesus!

What treacherous ground to rest upon.

"But that's flawed thinking", you say, "The faith I have is a gift from God!" This is true--- faith is a precious gift (Ephesians 2:8), but let me caution you, if you look to something other than Christ alone, you have departed from the Gospel (Galatians 5:4)! If you are resting on your faith rather than resting on Christ alone, you are on a foundation of quicksand! Again, let me stress, if you look at your faith and find peace by doing so, you are deluded, you are not in the gospel. Wake up before it is too late. Do not rest until you are resting on Christ alone (Hebrews 4:11). We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone, but not saved by faith alone in faith alone! Listen to this

old hymn from John Newton:

The Blood which, as a priest, He bears
For sinners is His own;
The incense of His prayers and tears
Perfume the holy throne.

In Him my weary soul has rest,
Though I am weak and vile;
I read my name upon His breast
And see the Father smile

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, July 18, 2012: The Gospel and Faith

We are saved totally, finally and entirely by an event that happened outside of us in history --- the doing, dying and rising again of Christ. Yet, we are called to receive the benefits of this event by faith alone (Romans 5:1). It is faith alone that connects us with the saving righteousness that is Christ. However, although, faith says amen to God, we cannot overstate that it is not faith in and of itself which saves. It is not the right kind of faith we need, but faith in the right Saviour. As John Murray said, "Though, your faith is as weak as a single strand of a spider's web, if it is faith in Christ, it is saving faith; because it is not faith that saves, it is not even faith in Christ that saves, it is Christ who saves."

Gospel faith takes a hold of the salvation which was accomplished at the cross of Calvary 2000 years ago and brings us into union with the Saviour, the risen Christ. If, however, we confuse our faith in the gospel with the gospel itself, we have changed and destroyed the Good News. We have replaced grace with works for now we believe in our act of faith rather than resting on Christ alone.

God looks at believers and reckons us, because of Christ, as having fulfilled all His righteous requirements, although we have not fulfilled any (Colossians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:19). This is good news for the weary! Why so? It's good news for this reason --- working to obtain God's favour leaves us exhausted and drained.

God's verdict concerning us is that we are righteous (Rom 3:21-22). But, you say, this is impossible. I wouldn't say that! To say that it is impossible for Christ to justify sinners is to have an exceptionally low opinion of Christ as a substitute. Is there no power or merit in His death? This, however, is not how the Father sees it! He looks at the life and death of His sinless Son and is thrilled with all His accomplishments (Matt 3:17; Luke 9:35). He is well pleased. In fact, the Father is so thrilled and satisfied with the finished work of Jesus that He has, because of it, accounted and reckoned all His people as legally righteous in His sight (Romans 9:30).

Faith takes a hold of this truth! That is why Romans 4:3 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Literally, faith was counted to Abraham 'in order to', righteousness. Abraham believed + nothing. Concerning salvation, he was a believer, not an achiever; there were no works involved with this! The Lord told Abraham to look at the star filled sky and count, then promised, "So shall thy seed be." And Abraham believed in the LORD; and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:5-6).

The word "believe" in Hebrew is the word "Aman" from which we get the word "Amen." It is a term of agreement. When someone says something and we add our amen to their statement, we are declaring our agreement; we are declaring that we believe the truth of what has been said. God gave Abraham a magnificent promise and Abraham literally amened the Lord. That's faith!

Since repetition is the price of learning we must say again that faith is not the ground of justification, it is simply the channel through which justification is received. Faith does not declare us 'not guilty'--that is God's declaration. But faith takes a hold of the Father's verdict and lets us know that the verdict belongs to us! This old verse was written by someone with faith:

"So near, so very near to God, I cannot nearer be;
For in the Person of His Son, I am as near as He;
"So dear, so very dear to God, More dear I cannot be;
The love wherewith He loves the Son, Such is His love to me."

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, July 25, 2012: In Us and For Us—What's the Difference?

If ever we are to be established in the gospel, we must learn not to confuse the work of God for us with the work of God in us! The work of God for us is the work which God has accomplished, completed and perfected in the doing, dying and rising again of Christ (Romans 3:25-26). It is this magnificent work which is the object of our faith. This work is finished. The second great work is the work of God in us (Philippians 2:13)! This is the continuing unfinished work of the Holy Spirit. It is sad to observe the endless mischief that has been unleashed on poorly taught Christians who confuse these two works. They fail to grasp that it is Christ's finished work for us which has secured our acquittal. They seem painfully unaware that no amount of the moving of the Spirit in our experience can improve upon Christ's experience on our behalf!

Looking at our experience and resting on it as our acceptance before the Father is a terrible mistake. James Buchanan tells us,

"There is, perhaps, no more subtle or plausible error, on the subject of Justification, than that which makes it to rest on the indwelling presence, and the gracious work, of the Holy Spirit in the heart."

Yet there are many who insist that they have had a thrilling experience when they were born again

or filled with the Spirit. They tell us that because of these experiences they now know that they have been accepted by God. This is so very lethal! To put confidence and hope of heaven in the fact that something has happened within us is to rest on a quagmire. It is a fatal error.

Our righteousness is in Christ alone; This exalted Christ who, at this moment, is applying the benefits of His redemption is our resting place. This means that the work of the Spirit, vital though it is, can never be our righteousness. By the Spirit, God gives us faith to look outside ourselves to the Saviour who is already enthroned in cosmic authority and majesty. Horatius Bonar says, and I paraphrase, "Faith, is the great identifier since it identifies us with the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the great grasper in that it grasps all that is in the Lord Jesus Christ! Faith is the great acceptor in that it accepts the righteousness of Christ as the only hope of salvation."

It is Christ and His work for us, done on our behalf, that saves us. Faith understands this. Concerning faith, let me again paraphrase Bonar: he says, "Faith is really nothing but our consenting to be saved by someone else." That's great!

As the Spirit works faith into our hearts we receive the glorious truth of the work done for us, apart from and outside of us 2000 years ago. He, the Spirit, generates faith under the hearing of the gospel and causes us to look to the all-sufficiency of Jesus and His finished work, outside of us, to save us. Faith causes us to see that God is just, and yet the justifier of all those who believe in Jesus (Romans 3:26); the penalty of sin has been taken away (1 John 8-10), the curse of the broken law removed (Galatians 3:13), justice satisfied (John 19:30), and Satan defeated (Colossians 2:15).

It is no wonder then that gospel driven believers are thrilled with the Lord Jesus. We delight in Him for He alone is our hope and salvation. Faith has freed us from the bondage of having to look to our experience or our performance to find peace with God. Faith has taught us that all our hope is in Christ and His finished work, not in the work He is doing within us by His Spirit.

And that's the Gospel Truth!

The Wednesday Word, Aug. 8, 2012: Don't Get Confused!

Here's another gospel foundation which we need to continually build into our thinking --although we are saved by faith, faith is not our Saviour. There are those who erroneously teach that God looks at us and, if He sees faith, He declares us not guilty. This error, although taught by many, is a distorted, defiling of the gospel.

Believing that we are given eternal life because God looks and sees our faith, is to entirely miss the truth of the gospel. It is like the sick man who drives to the doctor, gets cured and then believes that his car healed him. Valuable as the car was in that it brought him to the doctor, it merely connected him with the healer. No right thinking person could conclude that a car had healed them. Likewise, faith connects us with our Great Physician, the Lord Jesus; faith brings us to Him,

but faith, like the car, is neither our healer nor our Saviour!

In His masterpiece, 'The Everlasting Righteousness', Horatius Bonar writes,

“The bringer of the sacrifice into the tabernacle was to lay his hand upon the head of the sheep or the bullock; otherwise the offering would not have been accepted for him. But the laying on of his hand was not the same as the victim on which it was laid. The serpent-bitten Israelite was to look at the uplifted serpent of brass in order to be healed. But his looking was not the brazen serpent. We may say it was his looking that healed him, just as the Lord said, “Thy faith hath saved thee”; but this is figurative language. It was not his act of looking that healed him, but the object to which he looked.”

Likewise, faith is not our righteousness: it merely knits us to the righteous One, and makes us partakers of His righteousness.

So, let's say it again, faith is not our Saviour. It was not faith that was born as the representative of its people. It was not faith that fulfilled all righteousness; it was not faith that walked the weary road to Calvary; it was not faith that was executed in our place; it was not faith that bore our sins in its own body on the tree; it was not faith that poured out purchasing, redeeming blood. It was not faith that died and rose again for our sins so let's be careful not confuse faith with its object—the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:16; Romans 5:19).

The object of our faith is Christ alone. He is our spiritual physician, and it is faith and faith alone which unites us to Him. Continuing with the car analogy, let's say that we refuse to travel to Christ by faith and choose rather to capture His saving righteousness by taking church sacraments and performing good works. We would be like a man, travelling in the wrong direction, not this time in a car, but with the car strapped to his back. He's on the way to no towns and very few villages, --- and so are we if we look to religion or inward qualities to get us into right standing with God!

However, no church sacrament can save us for sacraments and ordinances cannot produce the perfect, completed righteousness required by God. The righteousness we need is the one which exists in Christ alone; it alone is the righteousness which presents us faultless before the throne of grace. But how do we make it ours? Is it by doing good, churchy things? No, the righteousness which saves us becomes ours by faith alone (Romans 4:22-25).

We do not obtain right standing before God because of our faith, but rather because of the doing, dying and rising again of our substitute and representative, Jesus Christ. His doing, dying and rising again is freely imputed to us and received by faith alone.

And that's the Gospel Truth!

The Wednesday Word, Aug. 15, 2012: His Part/My Part?

When I was much younger, I used to think that there were two parts to salvation, God's part and

mine. I was saved by grace---that was God's part, through faith---that was my part. I had failed to read Ephesians 2:8 with anything other than my humanistic glasses and was, therefore, unconsciously determined that God should not have the entire glory for salvation. But, through His kindness, the Lord eventually showed me the absolute absence of all saving goodness within me. My understanding increased, and faith graciously identified me with the complete saving right and ability of the Lord Jesus.

It is so crucial to learn that faith does not contribute to our salvation as there is no contribution needed. How, after all, can faith or anything else for that matter, improve on or add to an already perfect, finished work? Faith of course is necessary in that it accepts the finished, completed work which was accomplished 2000 years ago. Faith makes it our own. But, faith cannot augment or add to that work since that work is already done.

I had to learn that, in the gospel, there is no dividing or sharing the work between ourselves and the Lord Jesus. The entire work of redemption and reconciliation is His from first to last.

Here's where some people get confused in their understanding. They readily agree that they are saved by grace, but they don't realise that the concept of grace presupposes unworthiness. They don't seem to see that, if any of us was worthy of salvation, in any manner, salvation could not be by grace. They don't see that, if salvation required any degree of worthiness on our part, it would then come to us as a reward.

Saving grace, however, is given exclusively to the unworthy and the undeserving. If we contribute anything to our salvation, no matter how small, grace ceases to be grace.

In a nutshell,----

We are saved entirely by grace or not at all.

Grace is undeserved and unearned or not at all.

We look for grace, clothed only in our unworthiness or not at all.

The scripture asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (see 1 Corinthians 4:7). What an excellent question! Faith is a free gift (Philippians 1:29)---we received that!. Repentance is a free gift (Acts 5:31)---we received that! Righteousness is a free gift (Romans 5:17-18) --- we received that! God is the giver, we are the receivers. So let's ask it again, "What do you have that you didn't receive?" The answer is NOTHING! It delights the Father to save us by His free and extravagant grace from beginning to end. Boasting is, therefore, excluded (Romans 3:27). If we have received grace, it is not because we gave anything to deserve it --- and that includes faith (John 6:65)! If we believe that faith is our part and not God's, then we have made ourselves co-providers of salvation. But this cannot be possible, for the scripture is abundantly clear that we are saved by grace alone.

We read in Psalms 115:1, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." Salvation by grace honours that verse! Faith will cause us to see the absurdity of trying to compete with God and will cause us to receive freely and willingly His gracious salvation. Faith identifies us with His doing and dying as if it were our very own.

Salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). If we were to try to add our puny efforts to Christ's already finished salvation, it would be like Able trying to add a daisy to his already acceptable offering of the substitute Lamb.

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, Aug. 22, 2012: Needed, Perfection!

I

The righteousness which is needed to save us must be perfect. Indeed, God will accept nothing less than perfection (Hebrews 7:19). So either we have to be perfect in and of ourselves, or we need to be presented to God in the person of someone who actually is perfect.

This is another reason why our faith can never be our Saviour for our faith is not yet perfect. I don't know any believer who claims to have perfect faith. Doubtless our faith is growing; but, for that very reason, it cannot be considered perfect! It still has a long way to go! Here's the truth of the matter, since that which is imperfect cannot justify, an imperfect faith can in no way be counted as a perfect righteousness.

Faith cannot and will not rival the person of Christ for our justification. Saving faith, as it were, knows that Jesus is already perfect! He is "the Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). "He did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22). "He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), "In Him was no sin" (1 John 3:5). He was blameless in his actions, irreproachable in His motives, flawless in his thinking and sinlessly pure in all things. He is perfect!

One of the wonderful things about faith is that, although it is imperfect, it can still connect us with the perfection of Jesus. Faith looks at Jesus and sees His perfect love, perfect obedience, perfect faith, perfect worship, perfect prayer life, perfect grace, perfect truth, perfect righteousness and makes these things our own (1 Corinthians 1:30)! Faith sees that our sins have been purged perfectly. Faith sees that, right this moment, Jesus is seated in cosmic majesty because His work of purging our sins is entirely finished and perfect (Hebrews 10:12,14).

Faith knows that our acceptance before God does not rest in any quality in us but in a quality outside of us—Christ Himself. His doing and dying is counted as ours. He and His work are perfect and even though we are not, we stand complete in Him clothed with the very righteousness of heaven.

It is good news indeed that our faith does not need to be perfect in order to take hold of the perfect salvation which is in Christ alone. The truth is, if a perfect faith were required, then everyone would be lost. An imperfect faith is no shelter from the wrath of God. Don't look to your faith to be your saviour and don't worry about your faith being weak. Even a weak faith touches the perfect One, the Lord Jesus!

If you are looking to your faith and experience to find your security, you are on a fool's errand. Security is not found in your faith or in any experience, however genuine or thrilling. New

Testament faith is faith in Christ alone. Our security is not in us but in Him.

If a perfect faith were needed for our righteousness, the slightest flaw in our faith would be fatal. We would be damned! But God, in His glorious grace, has asked for and provided us with a perfect righteousness, the Lord Jesus Himself (Romans 3:21-22). The Father is well pleased with the Lord Jesus and His work on our behalf, and nowhere asks for or expects a perfect faith from us. This is good news for now we are free from having to endlessly stress over our level of faith.

All of us have crises of faith from time to time. In our worst moments, we may doubt our salvation and doubt our faith but that's a whole lot different than doubting the perfections of our Saviour. Doubt our salvation? ---Yes. Doubt our Saviour?--Never! Even in our weakest moments the weakest of faith will connect us to the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus. We may be praying, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24), but, even then, we are joined to the Perfect One!

And that's the Gospel Truth!

The Wednesday Word, Aug. 29, 2012: The Gospel and Faith

We are saved totally, finally and entirely by an event that happened outside of us in history --- the doing, dying and rising again of Christ. Yet, we are called to receive the benefits of this event by faith alone (Romans 5:1). It is faith alone that connects us with the saving righteousness that is Christ. However, although, faith says amen to God, we cannot overstate that it is not faith in and of itself which saves. It is not the right kind of faith we need, but faith in the right Saviour. As John Murray said, "Though, your faith is as weak as a single strand of a spider's web, if it is faith in Christ, it is saving faith; because it is not faith that saves, it is not even faith in Christ that saves, it is Christ who saves."

Gospel faith takes a hold of the salvation which was accomplished at the cross of Calvary 2000 years ago and brings us into union with the Saviour, the risen Christ. If, however, we confuse our faith in the gospel with the gospel itself, we have changed and destroyed the Good News. We have replaced grace with works for now we believe in our act of faith rather than resting on Christ alone.

God looks at believers and reckons us, because of Christ, as having fulfilled all His righteous requirements, although we have not fulfilled any (Colossians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:19). This is good news for the weary! Why so? It's good news for this reason --- working to obtain God's favour leaves us exhausted and drained.

God's verdict concerning us is that we are righteous (Rom 3:21-22). But, you say, this is impossible. I wouldn't say that! To say that it is impossible for Christ to justify sinners is to have an exceptionally low opinion of Christ as a substitute. Is there no power or merit in His death? This, however, is not how the Father sees it! He looks at the life and death of His sinless

Son and is thrilled with all His accomplishments (Matt 3:17; Luke 9:35). He is well pleased. In fact, the Father is so thrilled and satisfied with the finished work of Jesus that He has, because of it, accounted and reckoned all His people as legally righteous in His sight (Romans 9:30).

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The word "believe" in Hebrew is the word "Aman" from which we get the word "Amen." It is a term of agreement. When someone says something and we add our amen to their statement, we are declaring our agreement; we are declaring that we believe the truth of what has been said. God gave Abraham a magnificent promise and Abraham literally amen-ed the Lord. That's faith!

Since repetition is the price of learning we must say again that faith is not the ground of justification, it is simply the channel through which justification is received. Faith does not declare us 'not guilty'--that is God's declaration. But faith takes a hold of the Father's verdict and lets us know that the verdict belongs to us! This old verse was written by someone with faith;

"So near, so very near to God, I cannot nearer be;
For in the Person of His Son, I am as near as He;
"So dear, so very dear to God, More dear I cannot be;
The love wherewith He loves the Son, Such is His love to me."

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, September 5, 2012: Faith the Great Acceptor

Our greatest need is for a sin-bearer (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23). Faith accepts this. However, if we are caught in the trap of looking to the quantity or quality of our faith to save us, we have no Saviour. Why? Because faith, no matter how pure and strong, is not the sin-bearer. Faith is unsuited for that department since it is neither qualified to remove guilt nor able to make an offering that turns away the wrath of God. No matter how intense and sincere our faith, it cannot pay the penalty of our sin. Faith cannot satisfy God's just and righteous demands; it cannot legally remove the accusing guilt of sin. Indeed, faith cannot provide, in itself, the righteousness by which we can stand before the Father. We are sinners, not partial sinners, but, by nature, ruined sinners (Ephesians 2:1). We, therefore, need Christ Jesus the all-sufficient One, to be our Rescuer and Saviour.

So where does faith come in? Listen to the ancient message that is never out of date. Faith brings us to Christ and sees in Him the perfect wrath offering (Romans 3:25), the perfect payment (Acts 20:28), the perfect cleansing (Revelation 19:8) and the perfect righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

But faith, in itself, has no merit and no virtue.

Again we need to stress that faith is neither Christ nor His substitutionary life and death. Although it is utterly impossible to be saved without faith, faith is neither the blood, nor the final sacrifice for sin. Faith is not the mercy-seat. Faith does not work, but accepts the work which was done for us 2000 years ago. Faith does not wash us; instead it leads us to the fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1). By faith we can sing that,

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel’s veins
And sinners plunged beneath the flood
Lose all their guilty stains.”

Faith always brings us outside ourselves to receive the worthiness of the Lord Jesus, but faith has no worthiness of its own. Gospel faith is not faith in feelings. In fact, to rely on feelings is just another way of relying on self. Since feelings are internal actions, relying on them is just another form of salvation by works! Faith, on the other hand, reaches out and knits us to Jesus, our infinitely worthy Saviour (Psalm 18:3; Hebrews 3:3; Revelation 4:11) and in so doing, presents us perfect in the perfection of Christ (Hebrews 5:7).

As He sees us in the perfections of His Son, the Father continually accepts us as being legally perfect. Faith accepts this and sees Christ alone as our hope. Faith accepts and rests on the fact that Christ has done everything required of us and has done it to perfection (Deuteronomy 32:4). Faith sees that The Lord Jesus has worked perfectly, prayed perfectly, worshiped perfectly and believed perfectly on our behalf. By faith, we accept this perfection as accomplished on our behalf and we now make a perfect approach to the Father, in the name of Jesus, clothed in Christ alone. Although we are a people zealous for good works (Titus 2:14), we know that the Father is more pleased with our resting in the doing, dying and rising again of Christ than with all our attempts at personal obedience.

And that’s the Gospel Truth!

The Wednesday Word, Sept. 12, 2012: Faith Needed--But Not As Our Foundation

We need faith, but faith is not the foundation of our salvation, instead it brings us to the true foundation and keeps us there “grounded and settled” (Colossians 1:23). Even though the gospel is an accomplished fact, it is easy for the best of us to be moved away from its hope. It is not that we go about believing in false gospels, but we invariably want to throw a little bit of our own performance into the mix. The gospel centred believer knows that, by nature, he is a subjectivist who easily strays from the Finished Work. That’s why he delights to continually hear the pure gospel for it alone stops him from gravitating to his default mode of Law and moralistic thinking.

Though faith is not the gospel, it is an essential gift in that it receives the gospel as the heart of God’s eternal truth. Faith considers Calvary and assures us that the wrath which should have justly consumed us has fallen upon our Substitute (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Faith in Christ alone, therefore,

rescues us from the bondage of having to perform to gain God's pleasure. In Christ alone, faith sees the smile of the Father upon us.

Though faith is not our righteousness it fastens us to the righteousness of Christ and sees, as old Solomon Stoddard saw, that Christ's righteousness makes it safe for us to appear in heaven. Indeed, the only safe way to heaven is to trust in the doing, dying and rising again of Christ. Faith fully grasps that our acceptance before God is in Christ alone and not in our faith. Faith in faith saves no one. Gospel faith knows this!

Furthermore, faith grasps that our eternal standing in the ages to come depends, not upon anything in us, but upon the unchanging righteousness of Christ alone. When we are not grounded and established in the gospel, we easily make the mistake of looking within ourselves to determine whether or not we have certain feelings. Unfortunately, if we find the correct feelings, we then content ourselves that our faith is strong and that we are thus eternity bound. Conversely, alarm bells ring when we can't find those feelings because we then assume that our destiny is in doubt. When we live like this, we are unsettled and confused. We have not yet understood that anything subjective, whether it is the work of the Spirit in us or our feelings and experiences, can ever qualify as the object of our faith. They are not the gospel! Acquittal before God comes only through the person and work of the Lord Jesus. He alone is the sinner's plea for, "He that believeth on him is not condemned" (John 3:18).

It is essential to be established in the gospel for many reasons, not least of which is to defend ourselves against the spiritual attacks of Satan. Have you ever had one of those? Have you ever heard that accusing voice say, "You are not righteous enough"? --- what answer do you give? Here's the answer of the gospel focused believer. He says to the enemy, "You are right, I am not righteous enough in myself, but Jesus Himself is my righteousness, and I can't improve on that."

Then the enemy says, "But you are not holy enough," The gospel believer says, "You are right again on that one, but Christ alone is my sanctification, and I can't improve on that!"

When the enemy says, "You don't qualify for blessings on your life for your life doesn't deserve any," the gospel rooted believer says, " You are also right again, but Jesus is my qualification for blessings. He has lived and died in my place, and I can't improve on that!"

This is how, by faith, we wage the good fight (Ephesians 6:16). Faith always takes us outside of ourselves, plants us firmly in the Finished Work and causes us to see life through gospel lenses.

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, Sept. 19, 2012: What Does Faith See?

Since repetition is the price of learning, let's say it again, we are saved by faith alone, but faith is not our Saviour. Christ alone fills that slot. Faith sees and grasps this. However, this is not the only

truth that faith comprehends. For example, faith sees that Christ, in His perfect righteousness, lived as our substitute. Faith sees him unswervingly obeying His Father in our place. We could not keep God's requirements, but faith sees that Christ kept them perfectly. As gospel driven believers, we know that we have never flawlessly obeyed God. In fact, when we see the intense purity of God's will and the extent of our matching impurity, faith sees that Christ's perfect obedience, in His doing and dying, is our only hope. In short, faith sees that what Jesus did, He did as if He were us---- He that believeth on him is not condemned (John 3:18).

As gospel purposed believers, we must keep hammering home, to ourselves, the truth that, for salvation, we are not called to have faith about anything that is in us, even that worked into us by the Holy Spirit. But, why not? It's simple! The faith that takes a hold of salvation looks outside of us to the risen, exalted Christ. Faith sees that He has taken our curse (Galatians 3:13). Faith also sees Him as the man who took our sorrows and was acquainted with our grief (Isaiah 53:3). Faith sees Him nailed to the cross, pouring out His blood for us. Faith agrees that by one offering, at the cross, Jesus perfected us forever (Hebrews 10:14)! Faith grasps that the Father will never find any blemish in Christ's perfect righteousness. Faith sees Christ now raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and interceding for us. This is what it is to believe!

Since Christ was both condemned and separated in our stead, faith sees that, in Christ, there is neither condemnation nor separation from the Father (Romans 8:1, Romans 8:38-39). Faith further sees that the absence of condemnation and separation does not depend on our walk before God. Faith sees that it all depends on Christ's performance, in His doing, dying and rising again. Under the law, we were both condemned and separated but now, in Christ, both condemnation and separation from the Father have been done away.

At the cross, Christ was both condemned by and separated from the Father in our place. Faith sees this and enables us to now live our lives, not running away from God, but, rather, running towards Him and embracing His embrace.

At a religious gathering some time ago, a woman stood and testified about her supposed salvation saying, "I thank God I'm saved; yes indeed, I'm saved up to the present date!" Neither faith, nor the Word, caused her to conclude such nonsense. What a lamentable way to live one's life! The poor soul had, evidently, no clue about the gospel. Would, for her sake, she had been taught by a gospel preacher like Spurgeon who said, concerning the impossibility of a justified person ever being condemned,

"Oh, for an overpowering faith that shall get the victory over doubts and fears, and make us enjoy the liberty with which Christ makes men free! You that believe in Christ, go to your beds this night and say, "If I die in my bed, I cannot be condemned!" Should you wake the next morning, go into the world and say, "I am not condemned!" When the devil howls at you, tell him, "You may accuse, but I am not condemned!" And if sometimes your sins rise, say, "I know you, but you are all gone forever. I am not condemned! "

And that's the Gospel Truth.

The Wednesday Word, Oct. 3, 2012: Beware of Wayward Teachers!

The ministry of the Holy Spirit will never lead us away from the cross; it led us there in the beginning and will continue to do so until we see Jesus face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). At no time in the believer's life do we cease to need the gospel.

However, some wayward teachers in this day and age suggest that we should go beyond the cross and leave it behind. (2 Peter 2:17-22). "The cross," they say "has done all it can do for us." They declare, "It is, of course, right and correct to come under the shadow of the cross in the beginning of our Christian lives, but now," they insist, "we need to move on to deeper things." They maintain that to continue in the gospel of the crucified Christ is to remain but an immature, spiritual baby (2 Peter 2:18).

But, what is the cross? It is not a literal piece of wood from antiquity; rather, it is the central issue with God. The cross has been planned from eternity (Revelation 13:8), and, as such, we dare not remove it from being our core doctrine and delight. To leave the cross would be to leave the eternal purpose and counsel of God. To leave Christ Crucified as the core of our thinking would be to turn our back on the Lamb that was slain (Philippians 3:18). Yet, this is exactly what we do when we follow these 'modern men', these apostles of the 'New Thing that God is Speaking Now.' If we follow them, we replace Christ Jesus with novelties and fads which masquerade themselves as Christian truth.

"But, Christ crucified is only for beginners and we must move on from it," they insist. They, however, mistakenly assume that the preaching of Christ crucified means that we endlessly talk about the crown of thorns and the nails! No! It's bigger than that. The doing, dying and rising of the Lord Jesus is a comprehensive event which cannot be divided. We cannot, for example, separate Christ's sinless life from the cross--- they are vitally connected; one establishes the other. Furthermore, no part of this event, this gospel, shall ever become redundant or obsolete.

Concerning this truth, Horatius Bonar says,

I am always at the manger, and yet I know that mere incarnation cannot save; always at Gethsemane, and yet I believe that its agony was not the finished work; always at the cross, with my face toward it and my eye on the crucified One, and yet I am persuaded that the sacrifice there was completed once for all; always looking into the grave, though I rejoice that it is empty and that "He is not here, but is risen"; always resting (with the angel) on the stone that was rolled away, and handling the grave-clothes, and realizing a risen Christ, no indeed, an ascended and interceding Lord; yet on no pretext whatever leaving any part of my Lord's life or death behind me, but unceasingly keeping up my connection with Him, as born, living, dying, buried, and rising again, and drawing out from each part some new blessing every day and hour."

There is no leaving of the gospel. The Holy Spirit keeps unfolding it in deeper and deeper ways. Beware, therefore, of preachers who are not centred on Christ crucified. In much the same way that a blind hog gets the occasional acorn, they can occasionally say helpful things, but the gospel

is not the driving force of their preaching. Avoid them; they have no message. Although, their sermons are well packaged and smoothly delivered, they lack New Testament authentication since they are not centred in Christ Crucified. They will mention Christ, but, even then, it is usually “Christ in you” who gets central billing. They have no passion for the person and the objective, finished work of Christ. In their preaching, Christ will always take second place to the believer. The believers needs will be central to their message, and if we have no needs, they will be kind enough to contrive some for us.

It is intriguing to note that, in scripture, we read of true and false prophets, wise and foolish virgins, faithful and unfaithful stewards, true and false apostles, but one thing we never read of is true and false sheep. Sheep are sheep, called by God (Isaiah 42:6), held by God (Isaiah 41:10), prayed for by God (Hebrews 7:25) and sealed by God (Ephesians 4:30). And here’s a distinguishing mark of the sheep, ----- they will not follow a stranger (John 10:5). They love their crucified and exalted shepherd. They will not fall prey to the wayward teacher who would lead them away from their Master.

And that’s the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, Oct. 10, 2012: Cancelling the Simplicity of Christ!

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

False teachers will always try to take us away from the gospel. They offer formulas for successful Christian lives, but, although they tip their hats to Jesus, He is neither the centre nor the circumference of their message. “If you do this” they boast, “then God will do thus and so for you.” “Do and you’ll get” is their theme. But this is legalism ‘pure and undefiled’! Gospel faith, however, is the opposite of this. Faith, real faith, will cause us to give up our exhausting and ineffectual efforts to do or feel something good in order to coax God to bless us (Ephesians 2:8).

We often, unfortunately, stray from the gospel and feel that we need to make an extra special effort at godliness so that we can squeeze more acceptance from our Heavenly Father. We sometimes think that, if only we spent more time in Bible reading, prayer and witnessing then the Father would undoubtedly smile upon us. But to think in this manner is the very opposite of faith. It is serious unbelief. True faith always rests upon Christ alone to gain us full approval, acceptance and blessing before God. We were crucified with Christ and are already, from God’s standpoint, seated in heavenly places in Him (Ephesians 2:6). Even though we look forward to Heaven there is a real sense in which we are already there. The Father looks at us and sees us in Christ, the God/Man and clothed with His beauty.

Then, there’s the religionist. Like the false teacher, the religious, self-satisfied man always tries to get away from the simplicity of Christ. But, before we condemn and judge him, we ought to take a close, hard look at ourselves. Stupid as it may seem, we often trust in our own performance more

than in Christ's (Galatians 6:3).

Furthermore, we would rather trust, not only our own performance, but also our own experience than trust in Christ's experience on our behalf. In doing so, we leave the gospel and fall headlong into works religion (Galatians 5:4). Remember this, the religious person doesn't mind adding the cross to his belief system, --- it becomes, as it were, one of his many collectable trinkets ---- but in making the cross something additional, he cancels its simplicity and reduces it to nothing. The cross, for him, is just something that he adds to, but the truth is, to add any kind of plus to the cross is to make it nonplussed.

Here are the facts; the Lord Jesus saves completely or not at all. We can never, therefore, divide the work of salvation between ourselves and Him. It is not our performance plus Christ's doing, dying and rising from the grave which gives favour with God (Galatians 2:21), it is Christ alone who saves. Faith grasps this magnificent truth. Faith adds nothing to the cross for faith sees the fullness and sufficiency of the work done there and brings us to rest on Christ alone (2 Corinthians 3:4-5). To paraphrase Horatius Bonar, "We do not come to Calvary to add anything, we come, by faith, to see and hear something. At Calvary, faith sees the glorious truth that all things have already been sufficiently and completely accomplished, and it also hears the 'It is Finished' of Christ Jesus the Sin-bearer (John 19:30). Faith, having caused us to see and hear, then causes us to say a hearty Amen."

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, Oct. 17, 2012: God's Verdict – It's not Pretty!

"God knows us. He knows what we are, but He also knows what He meant us to be, and there's a vast difference!" Horatius Bonar

Consider this, since God is love (1 John 4:8), we can be assured that He is too loving to say anything needlessly harsh about us; but, since God is the God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4), we can also be sure that, when He is describing us, He isn't telling us any lies!

So what does the God of Truth say about all of us? Now this may surprise you, He says that, in and of ourselves, we are entirely rotten (Isaiah 1:6)! This is not God being harsh --- He's too wonderfully kind to be harsh --- these are just the facts as God sees them. God looks at us and says that we are all ruined. OK those are not His actual words, but here's what He says about us, "There is none righteous, no, not one" that there is "none that does good" and there is "none that seeks after God" (Romans 3:10 and following verses).

God loves us enough to be honest with us! In love, He declared man to be a lost stray (Psalm 58:3); a rebel (Hosea 7:14) and a hater of God (Matthew 6:24; Romans 1:30)." Man is neither an occasional nor partial sinner, but recklessly sins with heart and soul! If it were not for grace, those of us who are saved, would perish. How quickly we forget the pit from which we have been dug

(Psalm 40:2)!

According to God, man is so lost that there is nothing he can do to compensate for his lostness. He, by nature, is against God and, worse still, he is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) and already condemned (John 3:18). Man's condition is so lost that, unless Christ intervenes, he will perish eternally. Man is under "the curse of the law" (Daniel 9:11); and no, it is not a rare person who has fallen, but the entire race! In Adam, all have sinned, and, in Adam, all have died (Romans 5:12); all have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6) and all have come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

This is dreadful news, but people deceive themselves into denying this distressing report. In their deception they insist that they are good enough for heaven (Luke 18:11) and, in doing so, they enter into an un-winable debate with God, displaying grave disregard and disagreement with His scriptures. But no matter, in spite of man's opinions on the subject, God still says all are guilty and worthy of death and hell. God has made it clear, "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record which God gave of his Son" (1 John 5:10). The unsaved man refuses to worship and love God with all His strength, but even if he tried to (which he won't) he is incapable of doing so. He demonstrates, therefore, that he is indeed thoroughly guilty. God's verdict of man, therefore, to any rightly thinking person, is vindicated.

Not only does the unsaved man not love God with all his heart, he has no love for Him whatsoever. He loves His own will and agenda rather than God's. He will not submit to the One who is sustaining his life and lending Him breath.

It is pointless for man to try to argue the point of his own goodness or to plead "not guilty," unless he can show that he has always loved God with everything. If he can truly say this, he is in decent shape, he has never sinned and does not need acquittal through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. He has no need for the gospel, the blood and the Saviour. But, if he cannot say that he has loved God with all, "his mouth is stopped," and he is "guilty before God" (Romans 3:19).

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, Oct. 31, 2012: The Great Sin of the Self-Righteous, Self-Centred Man.

The great sin of the self-righteous, self-centred man is not his pride; it is his unbelief. In His unbelief, he refuses to rest on the Father's gift of the Son (John 3:18; 1 John 5:10; 1 Corinthians 16:22). This is his most heinous crime, carrying with it a more concentrated condemnation than all his other sins combined.

Jesus taught, "When he (the Spirit) is come he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment --- because they believe not on me" (John 16:8-9). Notice how the Master says that the Spirit will convince the world of sin because they do not keep the Ten Commandments." Woops! Did I just say that? It must have been me for it certainly was not the teaching of the

Master. According to Jesus, the first sin that the Holy Spirit convicts us of is, not that we are lawbreakers, but that we do not believe on Him. The Spirit's priority is to reprove the world of the great sin of not resting on Christ alone. In other words, the essence of sin is not what we do but what we believe.

Here are the facts; not trusting in and resting on the Lord Jesus is the chief sin and root of all lawlessness. A lawless man is not resting on Christ alone. He may talk a good talk and attend church meetings, but if he is not trusting on Christ alone, he is in rebellion. Out of this sin of rebellious unbelief flow all his other sins. Immorality is a sin, and at its root is unbelief. The reason people commit various acts of evil, adultery, murder and theft etc is ultimately because they do not believe. A man who continuously lives in wilful sin such as adultery or fornication may claim to be a Christian but is not as he has not repented and rested on Christ.

The Holy Spirit also reproves of righteousness. He literally brings to light the uselessness of the world's righteousness. Notice, it's not unrighteousness that the Holy Spirit exposes (in this verse), but righteousness. The worldly, religious man thinks that he is righteous, but God strongly disagrees with Him (Romans 3:10 ff). Nowhere is this more clearly seen than at the cross. It was self-righteous, unbelieving, upstanding men who murdered the Lord Jesus. In their deceived and deluded minds, they thought they were acting righteously. In their self-righteous estimation, they were convinced that Jesus was wrong about both His doctrine and His identity. But after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended, the Spirit was sent to declare otherwise. In the light of the cross, self satisfied, religious, prideful man was shown to be guilty. The cross, therefore, is God's settled verdict on the awful, sinful mass of filth that constituted man's righteousness (Isaiah 64:6). If ever the self-righteous are to be saved, the Spirit of God must show them that they need an entirely new righteousness---the righteousness of Christ Himself.

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit also convinces the world of judgment --- not of their future judgment although, of course, that is coming to all Christ rejecters, but of judgment "because the prince of this world has been judged" (John 16:11). At the cross, Satan's grip over us was destroyed. Satan has been judged, and all who believe in Christ Jesus are now free from his bondage. This is good news.

We are saved not only by grace but by power. May the Lord cause us to see how worthy of condemnation, bondage and ruin we are. May He enable us to be thrilled by His lavish, powerful grace (Luke 7:47b). Grace means that God has loved us for no other reason than that He has loved us! He who is all purity has loved us at our worst. Our guilt was met by His justice. Our well earned wrath was intercepted by the Lord Jesus who rescued, ransomed, redeemed and reconciled us. That's grace!

And that's the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, Nov. 12, 2012 - Approaching God

No matter how many religious things we do, whether it's praying, giving or abstaining from

worldliness, we cannot find, in any of them, qualifications by which we can approach the Father. Religious activity provides no resting place in which to discover the smile of God.

If sin were a simple thing like a disease, then perhaps religious observations might be useful in mending the gulf between man and the Almighty. But sin is much worse than any disease. The unsaved sinner is not merely 'sin-sick', he is 'sin-dead' (Ephesians 2:1). Worse still, he is under the righteous condemnation of inflexible justice (John 3:18). God, the unchangeable judge, has an unalterable hatred of sin and has warned about His coming wrath against the unsaved sinner (Matthew 23:33).

Unbelieving, self-righteous, religious people make the grave mistake of trying to present their character to God as the basis of approaching Him. Approaching God, however, has nothing whatsoever to do with our character. God says that our goodness, as a qualification, is an illusion and that there is no goodness in us that entitles us to or recommends us for His acceptance (Job 15:14-16). Ouch!

Unfortunately, there are many professing believers who think that, if they tell others about Jesus, study the Bible and are extremely earnest, then they are qualified to find a welcome from the Father. But, this makes zero sense! They started out with grace and are now trying to approach God through their performance (works)! Perhaps, their problem is even more serious. Perhaps they didn't even start their "Christian life" with grace at all. Perhaps they began with works, the work of doing something---something like asking Jesus into their heart to get saved. What a treacherous foundation this has become for many. It's easy, therefore, for such a person to think that there is something he must continue to do to earn the welcome of God.

So let's start at the beginning and ask, "How does a guilty sinner approach God in the first place?" "Well, we pray," says someone. That's fair enough, but how can we actually approach God? After all, His explicit testimony against all of us is, "You are unfit to approach me in your own merit" (Psalm 53:2-3). To imagine that we can pray ourselves out of unfitness and into spiritual fitness is ridiculous. Unbeliever and believer alike must learn that our religious efforts can never be the basis of our approach to God. No amount of praying, working or feeling, can satisfy the righteousness of God, or open the door to the presence of the Holy One.

So then, "How does a sinful man approach God and find acceptance before Him?" (Job 25:4). No appeal can be made to God based on our personal character, goodness, or religious performances (Romans 3:10 ff makes that clear). In that case, since God is not sufficiently impressed with our puny efforts, or with us, what then are we to do?

The good news is that we are not left to work this matter out for ourselves for God has already done something about this problem. He has already settled the dilemma of how to approach Him. In fact, it was settled 2000 years ago in the doing, dying and rising again of Christ. This is why Jesus claimed to be the Way to the Father and the Door into heaven (John 10:9). And this is why we read that we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," Hebrews 10:19.

It only remains for us to, by faith alone, to continually receive what He has done. It is on the basis

of Christ and His shed blood that we have our first and our continual welcome in Heaven (Hebrews 10:22, Ephesians 3:12).

Wherewith shall we approach the Lord,
And bow before his Throne?
By trusting in His faithful word,
And pleading Christ alone.

The blood, the righteousness and love
Of Jesus we will plead
He lives within the veil above,
For us to intercede”

To approach God, we come to Him as needy and broken, dependent entirely on the person, work, name and grace of Christ Jesus our Saviour, Surety, Shepherd and Substitute.

And that’s the Gospel Truth

The Wednesday Word, Dec. 4, 2012: Overcoming by the Blood!

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” (Revelation 12:11).

Satan knows that if he can cause us to be occupied more with our failures rather than with the gospel, he can destroy our effectiveness. The Lord, however, wants us to know that those old sins, those sins that cast long shadows, those specific, shameful, embarrassing sins that loom up in our memories to condemn us are all done away with through the blood of Christ. It is crucial that we grasp this truth and let it soak into our thinking. We must continually remember that God has dealt graciously and justly with all of our failures through the blood of Jesus Christ.

But, how do we make this knowledge work practically? Let’s say you are a believer in Jesus Christ, but you have just sinned. You disobeyed a clear command in God’s Word. Maybe it was anger or lust or swearing or stealing or whatever. The Holy Spirit immediately convicts you of sin. So, you repent and confess to God and appropriate His cleansing (1 John 1:9). So far so good!

But, then the enemy comes and whispers, “A fine Christian you are! Do you really think your sins are forgiven? Ha! You’re not even saved! You’re guilty my friend, and you know it. Forget all of this nonsense about being saved by grace!”

How do you answer him? It would seem that he is right. You claim to be a Christian and yet you deliberately and knowingly sinned against God. There is only one way to answer the devil when he accuses you in this way: you say, “You’re right, Satan, I did sin. But my salvation does not rest on my sinless performance, but rather on the sinless performance of the Lord Jesus who shed His

sinless blood for me. I'm trusting in His shed blood, and if His blood isn't adequate to acquit me, I am doomed. So the Lord rebuke you, Satan!" (Zechariah 3:1-5).

Now notice what our text says about overcoming the devil, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb!" Did they overcome by ceaseless incantations? No! Was it by the casting out of demons? No! Someone asks, "But what formula did they use to overcome?" None! Did they overcome by binding and loosing? No! They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, the sacrificial Lamb. They overcame him because their sins had been taken away by the Lamb. They overcame because they believed that no accusation made against them would prosper. Indeed, no accusation against the saints of any generation can stand before the throne of God because all Satan's accusations against us fall on deaf ears in heaven. That's the power of the blood!

The blood of the Lamb is sufficient for our victory over Satan. Throughout the ages, the blood of Christ, the sacrificial lamb, has been the refuge and fortress to which believers have fled. By faith, we know and claim that the blood of Christ is entirely effective. It's like this, either the Lord Jesus put away sin, or He did not. If He did not, how will it ever be put away? If He did, then Believers are in the clear.

By the way, when the enemy attacks us and accuses us, we shouldn't take it personally. The attack is not against us. It's against the Lord Jesus and His honour. The Devil always loves to attack the integrity and effectiveness of the blood as he insinuate that the Cross has not done enough for us. How he delights to cast aspersions on the Lord Jesus. How he delights to try to get believers to lose confidence in the blood of the Lamb.

However, the blood of the Lord Jesus, is the conquering weapon. Had He not poured out His soul unto death, had He not been numbered with the transgressors we should have had no weapon with which to overcome the evil one.

And that's the Gospel Truth!

Thanks to each one of you who through your prayers and your financial gifts have made it possible for us to remain in the ministry this year. Bless you all!

The Wednesday Word, Dec. 19, 2012: Good News from Bethlehem!

Bethlehem means, "The House of bread." What a prominent place it has in Scripture. It was in Bethlehem that Jacob buried Rachel and in Bethlehem that Ruth and Boaz both met and lived. King David, came from Bethlehem, and it was on the hills around Bethlehem that the lambs destined for Temple sacrifice were born and raised. But of greatest significance, it was at Bethlehem that, Christ, the true, sacrificial Lamb came into this world.

Mind you, on the day that our Saviour was born, Bethlehem was not a terribly impressive place. There was no Palace or no Temple. There was only an inn for travellers journeying between

Hebron and Jerusalem and when God incarnate was born, He wasn't even given a room. This shows us something of the humility of God. It also shows us that, in His human experience, God began life as a reject. This must mean that He feels and knows our pain when we feel like rejected outcasts. (John 1:12).

And think about it, the people who welcomed him on His arrival were outcasts too. They were shepherds, members of the lowest echelon of society. According to Jewish society, shepherds were nothing more than a bunch of rogues and robbers. They weren't even allowed past the Outer Court of the Temple. Yet Jesus identifies with these nobodies, these men who didn't even have a name (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

It is when we become nobodies that we become candidates for the grace of God. We can be too big for God to use, but we can never too small.

Then we have the Wise Men. We don't know how many there were. Tradition say three, but the Bible is silent on the matter (Matthew 2:1). One thing we do know, however, is that they were foreigners and would, therefore, have been considered unclean in society's eyes. Unclean? Yes indeed, but they were welcome to worship the Saviour.

You may feel unclean, maybe your life is not what it should be. You have failed. Let me urge you to take your sin to the blood and be cleansed. Go to Christ Jesus and tell Him of your uncleanness. He will cleanse you.

O that we would be like the Wise Men. If we were, we would worship Christ the Lord.

He is God manifest in the flesh.

He is the first begotten from the dead.

He is the Alpha and Omega.

He is the circumference of human history.

He is the incarnation of Yahweh's purposes.

He is God's self-revelation.

He is the word of the Father now in flesh appearing.

Yet here he lies in Bethlehem. In a feeding trough for cattle. But think about it, on Him, all the hopes of God are resting. God will save no one without this child. God's hope rests upon this child and not only so, man's hope rests on Him also for no man can come to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). In Him, God and man meet. In Him, man sees God and God sees man.

The good news for Bethlehem is that our God has come for us. He has stepped down from His exalted throne and come down to earth on His 33 year journey to seek and to save that which was lost. At Bethlehem, God was manifest in the flesh (John 1:14). The inaccessible God became accessible, the unapproachable God became approachable, the unseen God becomes visible, and the incomprehensible God becomes comprehensible.

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