

APPENDIX TWENTY-NINE

The Practical Implications Of The New Testament Gospel

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The more I behold Christ's perfect embodiment of infinite love and truth exemplified in His every motive, thought, look word, and deed, the more my conscience would be vexed did I not also believe that His personal righteousness is imputed every moment to this foolish, erring, weak, stumbling believer. John 13:10; 17:6; 1:9. Similarly, the more I perceive of the depths of the sacred law which demand of me all that Christ was and did in His humanity, the more I would despair did not Scripture assure me that all who have surrendered their lives to the Saviour are "accepted in the beloved," "complete in Him," "cleansed from all unrighteousness," and without "condemnation" or "separation." Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10; 1 John 1:9; Rom. 8:1, 33-39.

Despite the fact that we strive to fulfil every known duty we remain "unprofitable servants," righteous only by faith in the merits of Christ "for we all make many mistakes" and must daily pray "forgive us our trespasses." James 3:2; Matt. 6:12; Rom. 3:20-26. In other words, the good news assures me that if I have given myself to Christ I am perfectly His child, though not a perfect child. Heb. 12:5-7; John 13:1. While I am a sinner in myself all my days, in Christ I have perfect righteousness, for "this man [Jesus] receiveth sinners," and God is One who justifieth the ungodly who believe. Matt. 7:11; Luke 13:3; Rom. 5:4.

While at every advance step in my Christian experience my penitence will deepen, and I will make the apostle's confession my own, "I know that in me ... there dwelleth no good thing," and my prayers will urgently ascend that the Saviour might heal the disorders of my sin-sick soul, simultaneously I will rejoice that Christ is made unto me righteousness, sanctification, wisdom, and redemption, and that I can never be lost while I trust in His merits. 1 Cor. 1:31; Heb. 13:7; Rev. 8:1-4; Zech. 3:1-5; Matt. 18:21, 22.

Furthermore, while sin remains in me and ever easily besets me, it shall not reign, for once I learn that my standing before God is determined by divine grace "regardless of my success in keeping the law" [Rom 3:28 NEB], then sin ceases to have dominion over me. Rom. 6:14. The tenor of my life is heavenward, despite manifold inconsistencies and failures. Being now united with Christ by faith, the fruit of righteousness is spontaneous. Rom. 7:4. For it is not possible for me to accept Christ's death without also accepting His resurrection life. Rom. 6:1-12.

Paul declares that the two typical objections to the true gospel are invalid for the believer. I cannot accept the work of the second member of the Godhead and reject that of the third. Rom. 3:31; 6:1-3. God gives His gifts with two hands, and justifies no man whom He does not proceed to sanctify. **Thus there will be no separation between justification and sanctification in my experience, but there will be distinction, for the first is complete and perfect, but the latter being the work of a lifetime is neither complete nor perfect.** Compare Heb. 1:3; John 19:30; Col. 2:11-15 with 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:17; 1 John 1:8.

Thus in every place where Paul mentions "the righteousness which is of faith" he means not sanctification, but that justification which is based on the finished atonement. Justification means a declaring righteous, never making righteous in the sense of infusion of character. Rom. 1:6, 17; 3:21, 22; 4:11, 13; 9:30 to 10:1-13; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 5:4; 3:24; 5:17, 18. For justification is both instantaneous and one hundred per cent, but it is not so with character development. The imputation of righteousness in justification is not a legal fiction, for when Christ died as the representative of the race, then "all died," 2 Cor. 5:14, and when

He rose, all rose. Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6. God declares me not subjectively righteous but forensically so. Justification has to do with my standing, not my state.

Believing this good news that my acceptance with Christ is conditional on His perfection and not mine, I am free to work for others without feeling hypocritical concerning my own inadequacies and failures. Only this gospel offers a message for others which will inspire faith, hope, and love, thus bringing that quality of life which all perfectionism strives in vain to accomplish. Is not this the approach of the New Testament, which while sketching the many infirmities of the early believers, encourages them to fight the fight of faith with the assurance of an ultimate abundant entrance into heaven?

The New Testament offers many verbal pictures of the Gospel which characterize the new age ushered in by the cross of Christ. These figures include ransom, reconciliation, atonement, justification, etc. The reality always transcends the figure, and the forensic understanding of justification does not imply that acceptance with God is merely a bookkeeping transaction. The gift of the indwelling Spirit and the event of regeneration ever accompany saving faith. But the forensic metaphor is valuable as enabling those aware of their pollution of soul to depend upon a perfect righteousness which was wrought out 2000 years ago and offered today as a free gift immediately available to all who will accept it. Isa. 6:5-7. This outward and upward look accomplishes a thousand-fold more than all sanctified spiritual navel-watching could, for it lays the glory of man in the dust and does for him what he could never do for himself. The Spirit of holiness does not speak of Himself but testifies of Christ alone and His righteousness, and so should we.

This everlasting gospel, the faith once-for-all given to the saints, is the theme which has inspired all revivals, and should ever prevail in Christian preaching, swallowing up all other themes, for it is the third angel's message in verity, and the last hope for a hopeless world. Jude 3; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6; 1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 15:3 RSV. Far from being a newfangled heresy, it is the very gospel foretold in Gen. 3:15, and cherished by prophets, apostles, martyrs, reformers, and the greatest evangelists of all ages.

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