

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW

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Sermons

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Getting a Right View of the Law	3
2.	Getting a Right View of the Wrath of God	8
3.	Getting a Right View of the Trinity Part I	15
4.	Getting a Right View of the Trinity Part II	22
5.	Getting a Right View of the Christian Life – Part I	30
6.	Getting a Right View of the Christian Life – Part II	36
7.	Getting a Right View of the Christian Life – Part III	44
8.	Getting a Right View of the Gospel Part I	49
9.	Getting a Right View of the Gospel Part II	56
10.	(<i>*Getting a Right View of Marriage Part I is not in print</i>)	
11.	Getting a Right View of Marriage Part II	64

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE LAW

1/5/19

Series: Sermons Not for Sissies (1)

Matthew 5:17-20

On this first Sunday of the new year I'm introducing a new sermon series, and I'm calling it *Sermons Not for Sissies*. Today I want to deal with *Christ and the Law*. Here before us in the Sermon on the Mount we have one of the most in-depth expositions of the Law of God to be found in the entire New Testament. Here our Lord begins to set forth His understanding of the Law, contrasting it with the understanding of the scribes and the Pharisees.

Now, there's a lot of confusion about the place of law in the life of the believer and the unbeliever. There are many cults, and some Christian denominations that see the law as complimenting salvation, or adding to it. Consider the Seventh Day Adventist movement as one example. They believe that salvation is duly constituted in a believer by accepting Christ and by keeping the Sabbath. And then of course there's the counter cultural Christian Church of Christ movement, with its anti-Reformation theology. They actually teach Baptismal Regeneration. You can accept Christ, but you're not saved until you're baptized. And if the Pastor takes a disliking to you, or people in fellowship pressure the Pastor, he might seek to curry favor with them by denying you your baptism, and hence your salvation.

Please note the following:

1) The law of God does not justify.

There are many who believe that they are acceptable with God because they keep the 10 Commandments and live by the Sermon on the Mount. Thus they see the law as something that justifies; and that my friends is straight from the pit and smells like smoke. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 2:16 ... "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." Paul himself says in Romans chapter 3:20, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in the sight of God." But many people, choosing to believe their own made-up religious notions decide otherwise. Do you realize the Apostle Paul himself, before his Damascus road experience, believed that he also was justified before God because he kept the law perfectly? He tells us this about himself in Philippians 3, wherein he speaks of the vanity of his life before Christ ... circumcised on the eighth day ... of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as to the law – of the Pharisees; as to zeal – a persecutor of the church ... and as to righteousness under the law – blameless. If ever there was a misguided boast this was it. You see before God this was no righteousness at all, and what Paul later came to see, after he was knocked off his high horse on the Damascus road, is that he was truly the foremost of sinners.

2) Secondly, there are those who dismiss the law all together.

They say it has no relevance in the Christian life, and Joe Average Gentile even says – and what an argument this is – 'God made a covenant with Israel, and then much later he gave the

law at Mt. Sinai. But Gentiles who are not in a covenant with God are not under the law, and never have been, so the law doesn't apply to them, so there is no basis on which God can condemn the world.' It sounds like a reasoned argument, but it is heretical theology. The whole world stands guilty before God. Paul argues in Romans that no man is without excuse. In the Garden of Eden when Adam fell he had the true knowledge of God, and initially all humanity, but that true knowledge was diffused through sin. Yet in the hearts of men God's law, though unwritten, was at work within every bosom, stealing is wrong, murder is wrong, not to mention a host of other sins which violate the law of conscience. God created man with a sense of what is moral and right; and though later it was codified with the commandments and the giving of the law, still mankind had an intrinsic sense of God and His holy demands. The law does certainly have a claim on the unsaved, and conscience condemns the unsaved gentile when he commits murder or theft etc. Thirdly there are Christians who say that the law has no claim upon them because its been supplanted by the greatness of the gospel.

I almost came out of my seat a few years ago when I was sitting pretty close to the front of the Ligonier conference which is held every year in Orlando Florida. Dr. Sproul related a story of being in New York City participating in a conference on the holiness of God. He said it was one of those special times of preaching and then after it was over, he was invited to a home for a wonderful meal and a time of prayer. The entire leadership team gathered for this festive time. And all things were bright and beautiful until they gathered in the formal living room to pray for the remaining events of the conference, and that's when it happened. There were about 20 people there when suddenly someone turned off the lights and a voice said, "Let us all kneel down." And they began to pray to their dead relatives, calling upon them to appear. Dr. Sproul wondered how people with a Reformed orientation towards the faith could be involved in such a thing.

After this went on for a few moments Dr. Sproul jumped to his feet and said, "Turn the lights on; you need to explain yourselves here." They said, well we are in the spirit now. And Dr. Sproul, without any equivocation said, "Do you realize that what you're doing would have gotten you the death penalty in the Old Testament? You're consorting with the dead, this is occultism, spiritism, and this is heartily condemned in the Old Testament; this is so offensive to God that He promised that He would punish the whole nation if it went unchecked." This was not met with a spirit of meekness and gladness! With a firm retort, their leader said "We know that Dr. Sproul, but that's Old Testament.", and then he added this caveat, "We are free from that kind of law because we're in Christ."

Dr. Sproul was not about to be outgunned, theologically speaking, and this is what he said, his words exactly. "Sir what do you think has taken place in the history of redemption that would make something that was formerly so repugnant to God, now pleasing in His sight?" Said Dr. Sproul in reflection upon that night, "Their wrong beliefs were the essence of antinomianism." Now hear this carefully, simply because we're in Christ does not exempt us from the law. Many Christians indeed as an entire theological camp would say rather defiantly that they believe in the commandments of Jesus in the New Testament, though they reject the

application of the Old Testament law to their lives today, and do you know that's the exact meaning of antinomianism.

3) Fourthly consider now the functions or the duty of the law.

The law doesn't justify us as we noted in Romans 3:20; in fact, Paul says again in that same verse that "Through the law comes the knowledge of sin." It's even worse than that, and here's one of the functions of the law, it not only makes us aware of our sinfulness, it brings sin alive within us. In Romans chapter 7 Paul beautifully illustrates this; without reading the verses, in vs. 7 ff he says that he never had a problem with his coveting because he didn't recognize it as such, but as soon as the law said, "Thou shalt not covet", sin seizing the opportunity through the commandment enlivened that orientation, producing within him all kinds of covetousness. His eyes were opened to see his sin orientation towards covetousness by the law; and he found himself really wanting to do what the law told him not to do. So he says sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, deceived him; and it rose up and killed him. In other words, there was a time when he was living happily ever after, then came the knowledge of the law, and the things it would forbid suddenly became the things he wanted to do. And he did them.

- 4) **Fifthly, the law provides no power to keep it.** Now listen to this argument. There are many fine evangelical believers that will say, I know the law doesn't save us, but it does help to sanctify us. Not in the least bit! The law has no power whatsoever to help us do anything. It only quickens the conscience to show us how we're not keeping it, and hence it condemns us. In the law of God, we have the revelation of God's character; the Lord helps us to understand His being, His personhood.

Paul tells us in Galatians 3 that the law was like a tutor, and that God uses the law to bring us to Christ so that we can be truly justified by believing on His finished work. In other words, the law is like a schoolmaster, it shows us our corruption and it leads us to see our need for Christ. And do you know that's how the Reformers and the Puritan Divines preached. They would hold up the high standards of the law and show people that they were falling short, and then they would offer Christ as the one who kept the law perfectly, and that His righteousness could be theirs by faith alone. There's no greater example of this than Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon *Sinners in The Hands of An Angry God*. In that great sermon Edwards takes Romans chapter 5:10 where all unregenerate men are shown to be enemies of God, and enemies in 5 different ways. He reveals the helplessness of their situation before God as an enemy, and that the only recourse is to be found in Jesus Christ. In this way the law is a school master, a tutor ... it shows us the way out of condemnation for there is no condemnation in Jesus Christ.

You see the law exposes our sin and our need for the Savior, but we do error if we think that after we come to Christ the law no longer has any bearing upon us. We may sing "Free from the law oh blessed condition, I can sin all I want and still have remission", but that's blasphemous. Even Paul says, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound, or do we sin more and more in order to get more grace – certainly not!" (Romans 6:1-2)

- 5) **Sixthly, but listen to this, not only does the law expose our sin, quickening and enlivening sin within us, and then functioning as a schoolmaster driving us to the cross, the law also reveals to us what is pleasing in God's sight.** The Psalmist wrote, "Oh how I love your law." (Psalm 119:97) If we love God we must love His law. Jesus said, in John 14:15, "If you love me keep my commandments."

With all of this in mind, let's look at our Lord's words here in the Sermon on the Mount. And here we see what a really majestic teacher Christ was, (Matthew 5:17) **"Do not think I came to destroy the law or the prophets, I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."** This is interesting, the Greek word for law normally is *nomos*, in which we get our word 'antinomianism', but the word Jesus uses here in the beginning of vs. 17 is not *nomos*, but *nomizo*, which means to think, or to suppose. A simple translation of that would be, 'do not say', 'do not think', but this word *nomizo* is much more demonstrative. It means – do not even think about it. And here it conveys the force of what Jesus is saying in vs. 17, 'do not even let your mind go there', or, 'do not let this kind of thinking ever enter your mind', or don't you ever entertain for one minute that I came to destroy the law'. The Greek for destroy here in this verse is connected with demolishing a building. Jesus is saying here, 'Don't think for a millisecond that I came to tear down the law.'

One of the reasons why Jesus came was to fulfill the law of God; to meet its every demand; and He obeyed it at every point, and He fulfills the teachings of the prophets by perfectly embodying all future predictions that they made. Any notions or ideas that Jesus has now fulfilled the law and that it has no claims on us must be guarded against. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the law, not destroy it. Paul says in Romans 7:12, the law is holy, the commandment is holy, righteous, and good, Paul even says in Romans 7:22, "I delight in the law of God", and Jesus kept that law perfectly.

Notice now what He says in verse 18, "For assuredly I say to you, till Heaven and earth pass away not one jot, or one tittle, will by any means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." Notice here when Jesus says, for assuredly, He's saying this is true, so let it be. And here He is declaring the eternity of the law, that Heaven and earth will pass away, but the law right down to the smallest letter will endure; the whole creation may be removed, but not one jot or tittle will be removed until everything is fulfilled. By the way when He speaks of jot and tittle, the smallest letter is a Hebrew letter that is the size of a comma, and sometimes it can be omitted without loss of meaning. Sort of like our silent 'e'. The NIV renders vs. 18 as follows, "For truly I tell you until Heaven and earth disappear not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished." Note the phrase, "Not the least stroke of a pen." — this refers to a small shift of a pen that differentiates two similar letters much as our 'c' and 'e' differ in only one crossing stroke. In other words, this is accentuating the utter sanctity of what we might regard as the least important thing in the law. This is how God views the law. He calls us to view it in this way, this elevated lofty idea. Where do we get off despising it, or dismissing it?

In vs. 19 Jesus reveals that if we break or dismiss the slightest point of the law, or teach others to do so, we will be called least in God's Kingdom. Notice in vs. 20 Jesus says, "For I say

to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those guys were utterly scrupulous in their attempt to keep every part of the law. When they paid their tithe, they paid it right down to the mint and anise and cumin. If they found an extra piece of mint on the floor, they would tithe a portion of it. We might say it like this, they were neurotically driven to conform their lives outwardly to every aspect of the law- a commendable zealousness, but it made them think that they were justified before God.

How does our righteousness go beyond the righteousness of the Pharisees? I want to answer this by telling you a story. Close your Bibles. I didn't know it at the time, but Scott came over one day last winter, he was working on a project in my house, God bless him; we had to make a run to Home Depot, so we stopped at Steak and Shake and I'm afraid that I surrendered to temptation; a Butter Finger Milkshake. I'm telling you it was an emotional experience, now the next day I had to be out again and I got to thinking about that Butter Finger Milk Shake, and the most uncanny thing happened, my car took over and it turned right in there, pretty soon my legs were walking me over to the table where I sat the previous day. I had a little Bible in my hands and placed my order for another Butter Finger Milk Shake.

As I read my Bible, I noticed that across the room were two men, older men like myself, but they did look older than me. This one guy kept staring at me so finally he got up and he walked over. "I see you're reading the Bible. Let me ask you something buddy, do you keep the Sabbath?" I answered, "I know all about you SDA people, you Seventh Day Adventists, and unlike you who claim to keep the Sabbath, I keep it perfectly." And with that he reared up and said, "On what basis would you say such a thing?" I answered, "Because, unlike you, I know the Christ of the Bible, and because of His perfect obedience of the law, which was imputed to me, He perfectly kept the Sabbath. Therefore, through faith in Christ, I keep the Sabbath perfectly; achieving by faith what you try to do in the flesh." And then I said, salvation is by grace alone, by faith alone, by Christ alone." Then I held up my milk shake smiling and said, "Want a sip?"

I told you this sermon series is not for sissies. Here ends the lesson.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW FOR THE WRATH OF GOD

1/12/19

Series: Sermons Not for Sissies (2)

Exodus 32:1-6 ESV

Several days ago, I posted the following on Facebook:

“Ever wonder why your church, your Pastor, doesn’t take on topics like the wrath of God, election, sin, or repentance, and why continually you feel only diapered and burped by every sermon and told, ‘Now, now, it will get better’? Here’s your answer; you are sitting under a false prophet! Yep, they are still with us! A person that I’ve known for a while, and we’re not really close, responded on messenger to me privately, “Pastor Ed, sadly you’re dangerous. Topics like the wrath of God are no longer appropriate for the modern pulpit. Don’t you know anything about church growth? There are certain things you have to dial back. I haven’t been to HillSide but I bet it’s a small church.”

Ouch! And you know what? A topic like the wrath of God is certainly a non-seeker-sensitive topic.

The wrath of God as a theological motif for preaching in the modern church has more or less gone the way of “high button shoes and pilgrim hats.” I suspect if Jonathan Edwards lived in this post-modern age, instead of preaching on sinners in the hands of an angry God he might preach on, ‘Coddled Christians in the hands of a soothing celestial therapist.’ Many images are used to describe God, but the image of a wrathful God is fast disappearing in the modern church.

Hear me carefully; while Christian faith is grace based, we can easily fall to the idea of a squishy, soft, all-loving, all-providing, gift-giving, grandpa-in-the-sky kind of God who just isn’t capable of anything other than love. For a long time, this has been the God of liberal Protestant Christianity; but a terrible seduction has occurred in the greater church, and the God of many evangelicals, in terms of His being, has been dialed back. A lot of Biblical truths about God’s nature have been blunted, so that He’s not as hard on sin as He once was, nor as judgment oriented. This is so frightening. It is entirely possible to so emphasize the love, the grace, and the mercy of God to the utter neglect, even denial, that we serve a just God who can be wrathful, that we actually become idolaters.

I’ve told the story before but it bears repeating. I was there when it happened. Dr. Sproul was the guest speaker for the National Association of Evangelicals’ National Conference in Orlando. It was 1987, I was on the front pew, and that was the very year that Sproul relocated his Ligonier Ministry from Ligonier Pennsylvania to Orlando. He was stunning in his appearance. Thick hair, slim, beautiful tan, and like Jimmy Swaggert, with a red Bible in his hand, he unloaded pacing from one side of the platform to the next, working the Greek, the Hebrew, and the Latin, drawing such profound insights that you felt like a piling being driven

into the ocean floor. It was a magnificent presentation. The Spirit was so heavy upon his proclamation that people could not get out of their pews. Some even fell over into the floor.

Afterwards, when Sproul stepped down to the floor, people started gathering around him wanting autographs, asking questions; and that's when it happened. Maybe there were 50 to 60 people around Sproul when suddenly from the back there was a squeaky voice; a lady in her 80s, frail but very animated said, "Dr. Sproul, my God would never send anyone to hell, he is not a wrathful angry God." I can still hear that voice.

I assumed that Dr. Sproul would have taken a very pastoral approach as in, 'Come now and let us reason together'; the pat on the hand, kind of now, now diaper and burp job as it were, but that's not what happened. Said Sproul, "Madame if that's what you believe, then you are an idolater, because that is not the God of the Bible.

I'm afraid the old lady is not alone in her sentiments. There are many people who do not want to hear about the wrath of God. Obviously the unsaved don't, but even so-called Christians prefer to avoid the subject. Yet everywhere in the scriptures we are told that God is wrathful. Of course, there are those who are quick to say, and they've been in my churches from day one, "I don't like that God of the Old Testament; He is full of wrath and judgment. I chose the God of the New Testament.' Haven't such people ever looked at the cross? What did they think was happening there? God poured out His wrath on His own Son, it was Jesus who took our sin onto Himself so that the savage wrath of God would not be something we would experience.

I want to say three big things about the wrath of God.

I

FIRST THE WRATH OF GOD IS REAL

You know the Bible says God is angry with the unrighteous every day. Nahum the prophet testifies that, "A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; the Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries and He reserves wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." John the Baptist spoke of the coming Messiah as one who would appear with a winnowing fork in His hands ... He would gather His wheat into the barn, but would burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. And even Jesus says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but He who does not obey the Son ... now get this ... the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:16)

Jesus Himself reveals, Matthew 8:12, that the sons of the Kingdom, the unbelieving Jews that were standing before Him, would be cast into outer darkness and put in that place where there is eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth. Throughout the Bible we find that the judgment of God falling upon men as it did in the days of Noah. Divine judgment and wrath fell upon Lot's wife. Judgement and wrath came to the household of Eli, and to his wayward sons, profligate priests. In Leviticus chapter 10 the two sons of Levi, Nadab and Abihu, who were also priests, and the Bible says they offered unauthorized fire; they changed the order of worship and failed to have regard for the holiness of God, and the wrath of God broke out against them. Thus we read in vs. 2, "and fire came out from the Lord and consumed them", and they died.

In numbers chapter 11, the people in their wilderness wandering are found complaining in the hearing of the Lord of their misfortunes. It's unimaginable! With an outstretched arm and miraculous signs and wonders, God had brought His people out of Egypt and now the people were complaining. We read, "His anger was kindled and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some on the outlying parts of the camp." Yet the people lamented, "Oh that we had meat to eat", conveniently forgetting the tyranny in which they had lived; they threw it up in God's face that in Egypt they had fish and cucumbers, melons and leeks, onions and garlic. Then they disparaged the manna that fell from Heaven. In Numbers 11:10 the anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and God sent quail in super abundance so they would have to eat it not just one day or two days, or five days or ten days, or twenty days; but for a whole month, Numbers 11:20, "until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and dared to weep before my benevolent hand saying, 'Why did we come out of Egypt.'"

When David numbered Israel, he sinned against the Lord, revealing that his trust was in horses and chariots, and God's wrath broke out against him. In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, we learn that Ananias and Saphira deliberately misrepresented themselves to the congregation leading people to believe that they were far more benevolent than what they were; and in that sin, which was against the body of Christ, God in His wrath killed them.

Right in the book of Nahum, in chapter 1:6 we read, "Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the heat of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by the power of His judgments." Paul in Romans chapter 1, speaking to a pagan culture, people for whom Christ died – people that needed to be saved, which was the business of Paul's life, nevertheless, declares that the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

I want to raise this question, is God still wrathful, in the unfolding of the millennia did He evolve or change, did God become more enlightened? One of God's attributes is immutability. He is unchanging. The answer to the question is 'no'.

Even in the book of Revelation as God is bringing all things to an end; God coming against all of mankind for her terrible persecution of the church, we read, "Then the kings of the earth and the great ones, the generals, the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and the rocks, 'fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'" "The wrath of the Lamb", the Lamb is Jesus, and here He is seen pouring out His wrath on unrepentant mankind. The Bible says God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. His perfectly righteous character has to judge sin.

II

NOT ONLY IS GOD'S WRATH REAL, BUT GOD'S WRATH IS NEVER CAPRICIOUS

God's wrath is never capricious. Our wrath is often capricious. God's anger, when described in the Bible, uses the word *orge*, which is a settled determined indignation. His wrath is always a constant unrelenting wrath that's poured out from Heaven.

Our wrath is not like that. Our wrath is like a thermostat, it's temporal, momentary and emotional. We get ticked, we get out of sorts and fly off the handle. The Greek word is *thumos* from which we get our word thermostat. Human wrath goes up and down. We say of certain people that they are volatile. God's wrath is not like ours.

There are many other words used to describe God's wrath; *hara*, is used 91 times in the Bible, it means a burning fury and it's translated as such in Genesis 18:30. Another Hebrew word is *haron*, that is used 41 times, meaning a burning, fierce wrath. Another Hebrew word used for wrath and anger is found in Deuteronomy 1:34, and it means bitter. It suggests that wrath is so utterly incomparable in all of its dimensions that we not only can experience it, we can taste it. Another Hebrew word for wrath *zaan*, it means a kind of indignation that makes one foam at the mouth, this rendering is found in Psalms 7:11, and it's used more than 20 times in the Old Testament.

When I think about the wrath of God, a God who in His wrath can throw both body and soul into hell, I'm left with a sense of utter dismay that multiplied millions are not falling on their knees and begging for mercy and salvation. The Bible speaks of the mystery of iniquity, of man's incomparable corruption, his rebellion, that he's dead in trespasses and sins, and tragically has no fear of God before his eyes.

Here is Satan's biggest lie, and it may be one that someone is believing who's hearing this. You keep telling yourself that you're the grand exception. You may not believe in God. You may have recreated God in your own image, and in your theology, you have neutered God so He's only a loving God, and you give the matter no other thought, or credence, or credibility. You may be thinking, 'The wrath of God is a subject of theological primitives. If there is a God, He isn't like that. I'm doing just fine, and I won't spend a moment, not even a millisecond, thinking that any of that is true.' – yet that very condition bears witness to the truth of scripture that one has believed Satan's lie, and that one dead in trespasses and sins, and that there's no fear of God before the eyes of such people and they are lost; and the reason such people need to be saved my friend is that they need to be saved from God and His wrath. Such people seem to be impervious to the scripture regarding the wrath of God.

III

NOT ONLY IS GOD'S WRATH REAL AND NOT CAPRICIOUS, SADLY A WRATHLESS RELIGION IS GROWING IN THE CHURCH

Take your Bibles and turn to the morning lesson of Exodus 32. The children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt. The armies of Pharaoh pursued them at the Red Sea, and on that day, God fought for Israel. He told the people; "The Egyptians you see this day you will never see again." And the sea parted, Israel walked through on dry land, then the waters closed down on Pharaoh's pursuing army and they were destroyed. Israel was God's young bride, and He fought

for her. He brought her to Sinai and gave her the law; He disclosed Himself and all were in fear and trembling.

By the time we get to Exodus chapter 32, Moses had been tucked away in Mt. Sinai with God. We read, chapter 31:18, God gave to Moses, after they had finished speaking, the two tablets of the testimony, written with the very finger of God. But Moses delayed in coming down to the camp, and the people clamored against Moses that He had abandoned them; and so they turned to Aaron and said, “Make us gods that will go before us, as for this Moses ...” Did you hear the disdain in that, “as for this Moses”?

May I add, this Moses who walked away from his comfortable life in Midian, put himself at risk and fought with Pharaoh for the release of his people, and bore with them, this Moses who had carried them in his heart, who had interceded for them, shepherded them, laid down his life for them. And now is summarily dealt with in this condescending way ... this Moses fellow, we don't know what has become of him. Aaron then said to the people, ‘give me your rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters’. He then took that gold from their hands and he fashioned it with a graving tool (remember later when he was brought up short by Moses and ordered to explain himself, he said, ‘I took this gold and threw it in the fire and out came this calf’ – the first official ‘full of bull’ story of the Bible.

Thus, Aaron fashioned the golden calf and said, “These are your gods that brought you out of the land of Egypt”. Then Aaron, God's High Priest, built an altar before the golden calf and declared there would be a feast the next day. He actually offered burnt offerings to this ‘bull’ calf.

In all false religions the holiness of God is never emphasized, so we read, “The people sat down to eat, they drank and rose up to play, which bespeaks of revelry, moral looseness, profound expressions of sensuality in the camp. Moses' time with the Lord was interrupted. God told Moses the people have corrupted themselves, that they had made a golden calf and were worshipping it. God's wrath began to burn hot against his people. So Moses turned and went down the mountain. (Exodus 32:15) He was carrying the two tablets that were written on both sides; and Moses, as he came to the camp and saw the calf and the people dancing, his anger burned hot and he threw the tablets out of his hand, they were broken at the foot of the mountain. He took that calf, burned it, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the people to drink it. The people had committed a great sin and divine wrath was unleashed upon them.

Let me tell you about the religion that comes with the golden calf. This is a religion without retribution, and that's the beauty of the golden calf religion. The golden calf would in no way act against sin. This golden calf could not act in just ways, punish for disobedience, it could not be wrathful, it would not hold people accountable. It did not demand to be feared. It called no one to holiness. More importantly, the religion of the golden calf would not intrude upon one's life. It would not call people to judgment. This golden calf religion was non offensive. Compatible with carnal longings of human flesh. It was not off-putting. This was a religion designed by men, and practiced by men, which put God at their disposal, and on their terms. The

calf religion revealed a god who would leave people alone, never interfere, never hurt them, wound them, judge them, or call them to accountability. There are many people whose god is like that. Their religion is a lot of bull, but it's their religion. You see the golden calf religion gives one a god who is never wrathful, and there are many who embrace it.

Last Sunday I was driving from the luncheon I had had with the saints over to Cedar Village to visit Dr. Rodney Dukes, and I was listening to the public broadcasting station; they were interviewing the Senior Pastor of the famous Foundry Methodist Church in Washington D. C. with their Senior Pastor the Rev. Ginger E. Gaines Cirelli. I've been there many times, though I've only worshipped there on one occasion; however, it's been at least 20 years since I have stepped into that magnificent facility. Historically it's been a church where some of the most preeminent and powerful people worship; it's right up there with the church of the Presidents.

I was listening to this Senior Pastor, this woman, discussing her own personal heartbreak over the approved split in the great United Methodist denomination; and in that discussion, filled with the most insidious false humility I've ever heard, she lamented the conservative side of that denomination which touted a God who judged and who was wrathful.

The whole discussion was so distressing to me as I came up Mason Montgomery Rd. that I had to pull into the Bob Evans parking lot and just sit there. I thought to myself, I want to buy that Pastor a gift; I want to find a model in miniature, like a child's toy, of a golden calf and mail it to her because her religion is devoid of the wrath of God.

Jesus Christ died on Calvary's Cross propitiating God's wrath directed at us. But Jesus became our sin substitute and He absorbed the wrath of God that we richly deserved.

The wrath of God means that if we are without a sin covering, namely the blood of Jesus, we are under wrath. But the Bible declares that you and I have not been appointed unto wrath, but rather God would have all men to be saved. In wrath He remembers mercy, and He's made a way for us to experience His grace rather than His judgment, and that is faith in Jesus Christ.

Close your Bibles. They say that we have a hidden child within, and mine is very much alive, sometimes I think I'm a big kid at heart. I love going to Disney World. A few years ago, back in July of 2010, in a USA Today newspaper I came across the following article while having coffee at Panera Bread. Apparently in Disney World they have 46,000 parking places. every day on those grounds well over 100 people forget where they parked and cannot find their cars. But not to fear – leave it to Disney to think of everything. They have a cast of trained professional perky parking attendants. (Who, by the way, are also trained in conflict resolution; I kid you not.) They use a number of high-tech devices to help folks relocate their cars. The parking lots are all named after Disney characters – Chip 'n Dale, Pluto, Micky, Goofy, etc. But what got my attention however, is the lot that people lose their cars in more than any other – and that is the lot called, 'Dopey'.

Theologically speaking, there are a lot of people parked in Dopey, especially as it relates to the subject of the wrath of God. But let me say for Christians who don't like this subject, it makes the New Testament a very difficult book, and if we dismiss the wrath of God, then we are

denying the character of Christ and making God a liar; because Jesus had more to say about the wrath of God, judgment and hell, than anything else in all of scripture.

My friend ... my friend, you need to get out of ... Dopey.

Here ends the lesson.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE TRINITY

Part I

Getting the Right View (3)

1/19/20

Scripture: John 1:3, Colossians 1:16-17; Genesis 1:2

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Modalistic Monarchianism, Arius, Heretics, Oneness Pentecostal, Council of Nicaea, Nestorian, Praxes, Triune, Triunity, Tritheism, Sabellius, TD Jakes, Council of Constantinople – all rolled into one sermon. That will address the subject of the Trinity, and it's going to be a page turner.

Do you know that I've had professors who have said to me that this is an inhouse doctrine and should never be taken to the streets? Consider the following quote which sort of captures the mindset of many believers.

“Many Christians rarely give much thought to the importance of God's being as revealed in the Trinity. Sometimes it seems that a ‘one-person God’ is enough to satisfy us – whether that one person is Father, or Son, or Holy Spirit. Thinking of God as triune simply complicates matters, or so it would seem, since the doctrine of the Trinity is surely the most speculative and the least practical of all Christian Doctrines – is it not?

Speculative – for how can God be 3-in-one? And impractical, since it makes no real difference in day-to-day Christian living.” But then the author writes, “Impractical? Rather than being impractical the doctrine of the Trinity is the most practical truth of all – for what can be more practical than knowing God in Jesus Christ through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. For this is surely eternal life of which Jesus spoke: ‘And this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.’”

Imagine you move into a new neighborhood, and it's the home of your dreams, apparently there's a great church within walking distance. Just a few days after you move in a neighbor comes down and invites your whole family to join he and his wife to walk over to the services on Sunday.

It was longer than usual and very different, but the kids loved it, and you and your wife have been out of church for nearly a decade so you start attending. About three months into your attendance there, you're now into the Sunday school thing. As a lesson is being taught you have an 'aha' moment, so you raise your hand and say, 'Right in this one verse you see the operation of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.' You're beaming, but there's a scowl on every face, and one person says, in a rather excoriating tone, 'We don't believe in the Trinity here.' You say, 'This is a mega church, it's a Bible church, are you kidding me? All Christians believe in the Trinity.' The teacher says, 'Well after the service we'll talk about this. You haven't been through our new membership classes anyway.'

And so, following Sunday school, the teacher and one other layman help you to understand that they are a church in the 'Jesus only' tradition. Following that discussion, you collect your children and your wife, informing them we will not stay for worship, nor will we ever be going back, and there will be no discussion. Later that afternoon. You and your wife have a full discussion about it. Concluding, 'Next time we find a church we're going to find out what it believes first.'

Do you realize beloved that worldwide there are 24 million people involved in what is called Oneness Pentecostalism? In America one out of every four are also involved in this movement which is sometimes referred to as the 'Jesus Only Movement' – a movement that rejects the Trinity, and the Triunity of the Godhead.

One of the leading lights of this movement is TD Jakes. About 7 years ago Jakes, in a internationally televised theological interview admitted that he was beginning to see this as an error and confessed that he had been raised in the movement himself. He asked for prayer, because as a leader a lot was at stake, because the multiplied thousands that attend his church, buy his books and see his movies would potentially bail out. That was 7 years ago.

Now there are people who will say, 'You preachers always fighting about theological issues. I can't stand theologians that want to fight over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.' What is the significance, can a person truly be saved and not believe in the Trinity? When I got saved, I didn't know anything about the Trinity. I'd been raised in church all my life. I couldn't find Genesis from maps, and if I tried to read the Bible, invariably I'd start in about the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Proctor and Gambleites; and that would do it.

Like so many when I came to Christ, I only knew I needed Him as my Savior, I needed to be forgiven of sin, I saw the need in my life of the Lord Jesus. So to the question, can a person be saved without believing in the Trinity? Yes. But there is a more important question and it is this, can a person be saved without the operation of the Trinity effectuating that? And the Answer is no.

In every conversion, if it is truly genuine conversion, all three members of the Trinity are radically involved. From the scriptures we learn that the operation of the Trinity alone affects salvation, and that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in their perfect unity are all involved in the saving of one soul. The holiness of God is revealed in His perfect wrath; and we see our corruption in light of God's perfect holiness. But then we turn to Christ

for mercy, who died for sinners, and calling upon Him God the Holy Spirit applies the finished work of Christ on the cross to our hearts, taking what our Lord has said and done enabling us to appropriate it all by faith and thus come to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Let me say it plainly, you can be saved without believing in the Trinity, but you cannot be truly saved without the operation of the Trinity, namely God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit being fully involved in your conversion. Here is one of the foundational convictions of the faith once delivered unto the saints.

Yet, this entire oneness Pentecostal movement, this Jesus only movement, is alive and well, and it is simply an old heresy formally put to bed on two occasions by the church which has reared its ugly head. I need to say something here very carefully, no one here would want to go to a medical doctor who never had a course in gross anatomy. Obviously, that would be foundational to the study of medicine, and in a similar way those who shape souls and who stand behind the sacred desk have hopefully taken time to get acquainted with church history and have had some training in systematic theology. If anyone in the Oneness Pentecostal Movement, or Jesus Only Movement could have been informed of what I'm about to share they would never have gotten involved with it.

The Oneness Pentecostal, or Jesus Only Movement initially was an ancient heresy that was put to bed on two occasions. First at the council of Nicaea in 325 AD, and then at the council of Constantinople in 391 AD. It actually started with a man named Arius who claimed that Jesus was a created being, and hence as a created being did not have deity; and that it was Jesus who created the Holy Spirit, who was not a person. This is the belief system of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Arius was deemed a complete heretic, and his ideas were summarily declared to be heretical.

But there was another man named Sabellius. We don't have any of his writings today, but he had two disciples who carried his water bottle as it were; a man named Praxeas and another named Noteus; they taught that God is only one, but that he does manifest in three different modes. In the Old Testament God manifests as the Father; then in the incarnation this same God manifested as the Son; and after the resurrection on the day of Pentecost the same God manifested as the Holy Spirit. Instead of teaching one God in three persons they taught on one God in three modes.

The idea is like that of superman who keeps changing his outfits, but in this case, he keeps changing his hats rather quickly. This is called modalism. One God who sometimes is God the Father, and other times the mode is that of God the Son, and at other times He is God as Holy Spirit, but He can only be one of those at a time. Now with that view, try to explain the inauguration of Jesus Christ at His Baptism when God the Father spoke from Heaven to God His Son, and that the Holy Spirit came down upon the Son.

For clarity's sake let me define the word Trinity. The word itself is not found in scripture, but it gathers up a concept that is found all over the scriptures, namely the Trinity of God. The Trinity historically has been defined as one God existing in three different distinct persons, who

are one in essence, equal in deity, with all sharing the same attributes, including eternity and immutability.

This is very different from one God who reveals Himself in three different modes, which is the belief of those in Oneness Pentecostal or in the Jesus Only Movement, for they deny that there are three persons in the Godhead. The Bible emphatically states that there is only one true God. In the Shema, which is recited every Sabbath in Jewish Synagogues, all quote from Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Some cite that as an evidence against the Trinity. But the truth is, while God is one in perfect unity there are nevertheless three distinct persons, i.e. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and all of the distinctive attributes of deity which are ascribed to God in scripture, are all without exception ascribed to Jesus Christ, and all of the divine attributes ascribed to God the Father, and to God the Son, are ascribed to God the Holy Spirit; attributes like omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, immutability, holiness, sinless perfection, perfect love – all in the Godhead share these attributes. Hence the deity of the Holy Spirit is unquestionable.

Understand in the scriptures that the Father is called God. (I Corinthians 8:6) Jesus recognized the Father as God; and secondly, the Son is called God in Hebrews 1:8; and in Romans 9:5 Paul refers to Christ as God overall, forever praised. When Thomas saw the resurrected Christ he declared, “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28) Moreover, Jesus claimed and revealed that He had omniscience, i.e. all knowingness, in Matthew 9:4; omnipotence, all power, in Matthew 28:18; and that He had omnipresence, i.e. everywhere presence, Matthew 28:20. And those are attributes that are only indicative of God.

Jesus Himself declared, “Before Abraham was born, I am.” A clear reference to His eternity. And He also affirmed His own equality with God when He said, “I and my Father are one.” (John 10:30) The Holy Spirit is also called God; and this is revealed in the tragic sin of Ananias and Saphira, who were rebuked for lying to the Holy Spirit, and in the same sentence they were told that in doing so they have lied to God.

This is not an easy doctrine. But it is a very important doctrine. Among the world’s great religions, Christianity is the only one that embraces the doctrine of three divine persons in one Godhead. You need to understand that the church had to fight very hard in order to pull this doctrine out of the scriptures, and to make it a matter of orthodoxy. The doctrine of the Trinity arose from the need for Christians to distinguish Jesus from God, yet to identify Him with God. It was the early church father, Tertullian, around 160-220 AD, a North African apologist and theologian, who was the very first to use the term ‘Trinity’, and so he began the formulation of this doctrine.

The Bible says God makes the wrath of men to praise Him. While Christianity spread very rapidly from the first century to 250 AD, at the same time the one “who goes about like a roaring lion” began to savage the church; and thus, so-called pseudo gospels began to emerge which contained distortions of the true gospel, and which either dulled or blunted certain distinctive doctrinal truths. Many of those writings struck at the issue of Christ’s identity. Satan loves to attack what theologians call, ‘our Christology’. Satan has no problem with people believing in

Jesus as long as it's not the one who came as God the Son, the incarnate in human flesh, who died for the sins of the world and rose on the third day.

Hence heretical ideas were to be found in these writings, and there were also brilliant zealous men neither informed by the sound teaching of that age, nor truly led of the Holy Spirit, who began to teach that the Trinity, or any such ideas were not at all a part of sound doctrine. For example, tritheism, namely that there are three Gods, became an idea that was popular among many Christian followers for a while. As noted, Arius, by denying the deity of Christ and claiming that He was a created being who then created the Holy Spirit, helped to destroy the doctrine of the Trinity. The point is the church had to fight hard for her doctrine. Yet scandal of scandals, it doesn't seem to matter much to us modern evangelicals.

Just before the Lifeway Bookstores all shut down, indeed about four months prior to that announcement, I went over one Monday morning, one of my real delights as a Pastor. I would look at new Bibles and new books, review new materials; but on this day I was really taken back. As you walked in a huge bookshelf was right in front of us featuring all the books and materials of prominent Pastors and teachers in this Oneness Pentecostal or Jesus Only Movement. And of course, no one is as prolific as TD Jakes with his devotional books, novels, DVD teaching series and movies, and all the books he writes about the Christian life.

It rose up within me, and I didn't want to go there, so I went to the back and began to look at Bibles, but I couldn't quite get the victory, and it was not something for which I was supposed to get the victory. I went right up to the manager that I've known for years, and in an appropriate Pastoral way shared my deep concern. Calling her by name I said, "My heart is hurt, and my spirit grieved, that you even carry the writings of such people. You would not carry the writings of leading Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses, yet you carry the writings of those who deny the Trinity." It was forthright, spoken with conviction so as not provoke anger. To which she said, "Pastor Ed, do you regard people that disagree with you as heretics?" I was utterly undaunted, "Have you no understanding of orthodox Christianity; are you ignorant of the church's struggle in the early centuries to preserve the 'faith once delivered unto the saints'? Are you telling me that belief in the Trinity is not an essential article of the Holy Christian Faith?" She had no such understanding of the history of doctrinal development, but why let ignorance ever stand in the way? Right? She blurted out, "Pastor, it doesn't matter." These are her exact words, "The Fact is Dr. Bonniwell, writers of these books in that tradition are helping a lot of people!"

Beloved welcome to the church in the 21st century. Doctrine is out and pragmatic theism is in. Who God is no longer matters in His being and Godhead, but rather what matters is what we can find to help us. Isn't that despicable? Dr. Phil can help us and he has good advice, of course he's not a theologian; but to disseminate intentionally for the sake of profit, a book or books touting heretical ideas which deny the Trinity and the nature of the Godhead in the name of self help is not just inexcusable, it is blasphemous. Observing the recalcitrance, I laid the books I was holding down, walked out of the store and never returned.

Four months later every Lifeway Bookstore in the nation shut down, and now they are only online. I felt so strongly about this I actually wrote a letter to the President of the Southern

Baptist Convention, after all they own that bookstore chain. Admittedly, it made me feel good, I have no idea if it put anything in motion or not, but what is interesting is that this very year at the Southern Baptist Convention a motion was made, and an article passed, that mandated the suspension of the selling of any books from the Jesus Only Oneness Pentecostal Movement; so those books are no longer carried by the online Lifeway Christian Bookstore.

Can I ask you something? Jesus Christ saved you, you're a believer, but do you love Him enough to stand up for His truth? I see people all the time that say they're Christians, but they're fundamentally embarrassed at the idea of defending or arguing for the faith. This is blunt and harsh, but so be it, maybe you spent 20 or 30 years chasing after the world, but you don't know squat about the holy Christian faith. When are you going to get serious, hunker down and learn something? Do issues like the Trinity really matter to you? My friend get yourself under a teaching priest, or get under the teaching ministry of men like R. C. Sproul with all the DVD teachings they provide, and then, "study to show yourself approved unto God" ... Will you not stand up for Christ's truth since this Christ saved your very soul?

They were precious and I loved them a lot. They had been with me four years, and they wanted their 6-year-old son baptized. "Pastor we have a special request, would you baptize our son only in the name of Jesus?" I'm not in a slow learning group, and I suddenly realized their tradition. Being very Pastorly I said, "What makes baptism efficacious is not the mode, I can do a baptism by immersion, sprinkling, pouring, or even hosing one down, but what makes it efficacious is that it's done in the name of God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, which is the Trinitarian formula; and that alone validates baptism." They didn't take that hands down, and I really thought I would lose them from the church. I asked them to read some materials and to investigate for themselves what historic orthodoxy had to say about the members of the Godhead. It's to their everlasting credit that they took me up on the challenge, and about four years later this 10-year-old boy was baptized in the name of the Trinity. Even as Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." And so they acquiesced.

There's more to be taught on this subject, but close your Bibles, and let me point something out. The Christian life is nothing more than fellowship with God the Trinity. Trinitarian spirituality is the only truly evangelical spirituality that exists under the Sun. Every morning I watch my dear wife jump out of bed, grab her coffee, and the very first thing she does is her morning devotions. Do you realize that in our quiet time we cry out to God the Father, and we experience Him with His complete holiness, and we feel the awe of Him and His perfect holiness makes us feel our sin? We then look unto Jesus who loves us and who shed His blood for our sin, and we ask the Holy Spirit to make His forgiveness real to our hearts and to apply the work of Christ to our hearts to bring home to our lives all that God has said in His Word. Being made aware of God's eternal love, and the Son's work of redemption, and the Spirit creating an ability within us to receive His grace on purpose – all means that when we engage the Lord in our morning devotions, we are trafficking in Trinitarian spirituality, and that is the only true evangelical spirituality that exists before a Holy God.

You think about that tomorrow morning as you begin your morning devotions.

Here ends the lesson. Amen.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE TRINITY

Part II

Getting a Right View (4)

1/26/20

Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV)

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

In the sermon on the mount Jesus commends those who have a hunger and thirst for righteousness, indeed He says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”. In other words, blessed are those who want to know everything they can know about the nature of God, the work of redemption, and the great treasures found in God’s Word. A real Christian wants to understand, therefore, doctrines like the doctrine of the Trinity.

Can we really talk? Here’s something that wounds my heart; ‘Well Pastor, our church is for deep Christians. Joe Average Pagan can’t come in here and understand much what you’re preaching, but for those of us that are mature, we are eating it up.’ Now that’s a backhanded compliment. And I beg to differ. We don’t have to dummy down the gospel to bring people to Christ or to fill up our pews. When the Bible is truly preached, and the doctrines of Christ exalted, God is more likely to convert sinners than by any other means. I really believe with all of my heart that as people listen to this teaching today on the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ can call them into saving faith. Therefore today, Part II on Getting a Right View of the Trinity.

It happened about 3 weeks ago; I never hurt, or lack, for antidotal sermon material. I walked into Bob Evans in Kenwood at 2 in the afternoon; had a hankering for a nice hot bowl of vegetable soup. Hardly anyone was in there, I had a book and was planning to take 30 minutes to decompress, when suddenly this guy, maybe 50 years old, walked in. Big and burly, with an obnoxious testosterone voice, loud. He placed his order for water and lemon before he ever sat down. Comes over and sits right down beside me, turns and says, “What do you do for a living?” I said, “Well, I traffic in mysteries.” “What the hell kind of job is that?”, he asked. I told him I was a preacher, that I preach the Bible, and that there are mysteries in the Bible. He said, “Yep I read the Bible once. That stuff doesn’t work for me, I got my own religion.” It turned into a long bowl of soup, and there was no decompressing.

There’s lots of mystery bound up in the doctrine of the Trinity. Simply because something transcends human reason does not make it necessarily contradictory to true and ultimate reason. We can apprehend God’s goodness; yet at the same time, we cannot fully apprehend God’s

goodness. From a creaturely perspective, God's Trinitarian being should not be considered irrational, but *suprarational*; while it transcends reason, it is not irrational. I've often said that if we could understand with our finite minds the totality of God in His essence and being, we would not worship Him. In our corruption we would never bow the knee to a God that we could completely figure out or fully comprehend.

God is not a man such as we are. When we think about God, we tend to describe Him using anthropomorphic terms, we tend to see Him as a man. The Bible speaks of the arm of the Lord, and the face of God, or the ears and eyes of the Lord. Sometimes those imageries, again, cause us to describe Him in anthropomorphic terms; and yet He created us in a theomorphic way. In other words, we see God as a man, and He sees us in a God way, as sharers in His holiness, and as partakers in the divine nature – that's what's meant by theomorphic. We're created in His image, imbedded within us are microcosmic reflections of realities within our own bosom, that we were made for God and that He exists. There's something deep within the human bosom that keeps reminding us that God is, that God exists, that He's transcendent, up there, yet imminent and near. In our corruption that knowledge is obscured, obfuscated; yet like a haunting specter within, the notion lives within us that God might just be out there.

Natural revelation is what we can glean from nature and the cosmos about God. But divine, special, or intentional revelation is what is given to us in the sacred pages of the Bible, and it tells us wonderful things, mysterious things, and challenging things; and the doctrine of the Trinity is challenging, and to some degree shrouded in mystery, in that we can understand it, but we cannot fully comprehend. Admittedly, the Trinity as a doctrine is challenging; and it is shrouded in mystery. While we can understand some of it, we cannot fully comprehend the Trinity in all of its intricacies. When I say it's a mystery, I'm not using that in the English sense of that word, but rather in the Greek sense of the word which is *mysterion*, meaning something revealed. The Trinity is revealed in scripture, yet at the same time there are things about the Trinity that have not been revealed. Let me say quickly however, that if we reject the doctrine of the Trinity, then we are functioning idolaters, because the God of the Bible is triune.

Let's review what we said last time.

- 1) The Oneness Pentecostal Movement, or Jesus Only Movement, is rooted in a terrible heresy initially birthed by a man named Arius; and another early church heretic named Sabellius. Arius declared that Jesus was a created being in eternity past and therefore without total deity, and that He then created the Holy Spirit, not another being but a force. The church put that heresy to bed at the Nicæan Council 325 AD. And then came along a man named Sabellius; he began to teach that there's only one God who expresses Himself in three different modes, meaning sometimes He's the Father, and then sometimes He's the Son, and then sometimes He's the Holy Spirit; but He cannot be all three at once. This terrible heresy, at one time, almost took over all of Christendom but was put to bed by the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. The Oneness Pentecostal Movement and Jesus Only Movement is simply an expression of Sabellianism back from the dead.

- 2) Secondly, we raised the question, can a person be saved and not believe in the Trinity? When most of us got saved we didn't have any sense of orthodoxy, but the most important question is, can a person be saved without the operation of the Trinity, i.e. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit being involved? The answer is no. No one can truly be saved apart from the work of all three persons of the Trinity bringing that person into saving faith so that they are regenerated, given the gift of faith, enabled to see their need for Christ and believe upon Jesus Christ. Being born again is a work that requires God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and we looked at that in the scriptures last time.
- 3) And then thirdly, we noted the clear distinction between what is called Modalism, as an expression of the Godhead, vs. Trinity. Modalism says that there is one God who expresses Himself in three modes. The Trinitarian theology says that there is only one God existing in three different distinct persons who are one in essence, equal in deity, all sharing the same attributes, including eternality and immutability. The Modalistic understanding of God could never explain the inauguration, or Baptism, of Jesus where we see, when He came up from the waters, God the Father speaking to God the Son, and then God the Holy Spirit descending upon God the Son. God would have to be changing hats pretty quickly in order to pull that off. And yet there are so many other verses that reveal the Trinity. For example, Ephesians 2:18, "For through Him, that is Christ, we both have access in one spirit, or God the Holy Spirit, to God the Father." Now I'm not proof texting here, because there are dozens of verses that could be pointed to, to support this great truth.
- 4) Also last time, we pointed out that Christians are often accused of worshipping three different Gods, which is Tritheism; but Christianity is monotheistic. We believe there's only one God. Deuteronomy 6, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." That's quoted in every synagogue every Sabbath. In God's essence and perfect oneness, there are three different persons, and they're all the same in terms of their attributes, perfect oneness, and eternal work.

The word Trinity is not in the Bible, but there are many theological concepts that are given names, and these concepts are certainly in the scriptures. For example, the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ is sometimes referred to by Lutheran scholars and certain Reformed scholars as the *Doctrine of Forensic Righteousness*, or the *Doctrine of Alien Righteousness*. Forensic is not in the Bible. The word alien is in the Bible, as in "the alien and sojourner among us", but it is never used to describe a righteousness that comes from anything in this world. The alien righteousness is external, born of Christ's obedience to the law, which is subsequently imputed to us and justifies us. The point is there are words that we use to describe the Biblical works of God that are found in the Bible.

The Doctrine of the Trinity arose from the need for Christians to distinguish Jesus from God, yet to identify Him with God. It was the early church father Tertullian, 160-220 AD, a North African apologist and theologian, who was the very first to use the term Trinity as he began to formulate this doctrine he saw in the Word of God.

- 5) And then also we said that a better word for Trinity is triunity. Of course that's not a word that's in the Bible either, but I frankly prefer it over the use of the word Trinity. Triunity speaks of the 3 in 1 God. Three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who live in complete oneness, perfect unity and in essence, all sharing eternity immutability, with all having the exact same attributes.
- 6) Next, we also said that Trinitarian spirituality is the only true spirituality under the sun. That is because of the utter indivisibility of the Godhead. When you and I sit down and have our morning devotions, our quiet time, we find ourselves being engaged by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in one way or another. We sense our sin because God is perfectly holy. We come to Jesus for forgiveness. It's the Holy Spirit who makes Christ's presence real, and causes the Son's forgiveness to be realized in our hearts. That is Trinitarian Spirituality.

Now let's just dig in and get to some new stuff. I want to begin by introducing 2 important concepts.

First of all, there is the *Doctrine of The Works of The Trinity*. (*Opra trinitatis*) The second doctrine is referred to as *The Appropriations of The Person of The Trinity*. (*appropriations personae*)

This all sounds obscure and complex, but these are very beautiful doctrines and they open up for us, in a wonderful way, what it means to know God, and they really help us to enjoy fellowship with God. Let's look at the first one, the doctrine of the works of the Trinity, *Opra trinitatis*. This doctrine declares that the external works of the trinity are indivisible, *Opra trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. This is another way of saying that when God acts, He always acts as God the Trinity. Here's the point, Wherever God is working, all three members of the Trinity are working. The Father is the creator, yet He makes all things through His Son, "without whom was not anything made that was made"; and yet, in the moment of creation, Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters of the deep, like a divine executive, superintending the bringing forth of order out of formless, empty, darkness and disorder.

Consider the incarnation itself; the Father sent the Son; the Son came and was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. **Here's the truth, the Godhead cannot be divided.** One never goes out while the other two stay home. The Son never goes and does His thing without God the Father and God the Holy Spirit being present.

The second big doctrinal idea is called *The Doctrine of The Appropriations*, which underscores the diversity of role and function among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This

doctrine teaches that each person expresses His specific personhood both internally (in relation to the other persons) and externally (in relation to the cosmos, and especially mankind).

A discerning eye to the scriptures reveals distinctive functions that are ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But in each of those activities the entire Godhead is present. God the Father sent the Son, and the Son suffered and died on the cross, not God the Father. And it is the Holy Spirit who helps sinners to see that Christ died in their place. So there is diversity of role and function within the Godhead; yet always all three are present when any work is being done.

How on earth does this relate to our personal journey of faith? Think back; you remember three weeks ago, a month ago, or maybe just two days ago, suddenly you felt overwhelmed and had such an intimate experience of God that you didn't know who to call on first, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; and maybe you felt the Holy Spirit infusing you with total love, taking the promises of God and making them real in your life? That was the function of the Spirit; yet the total Godhead was there. Beloved you are never engaged by only one third of God. You never just get God dealing with you, just the Son dealing with you, or just the Holy Spirit, you get all three; the total attention of Heaven when you're His child by faith in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes in our extremities, or fears, we just cry out to God, or we cry out to Jesus, or we may speak directly to the Holy Spirit, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with doing that as long as we know the Godhead is indivisible, that you never get one without the other, yet each one has a different function in our lives. We can't always discern that, but that my friends is always the truth. Let me just set before you some quick brief insights.

Sometimes it's helpful to teach what something is not in order to know what it is. So let me give you a little list as to what the Trinity is not.

- 1) **The Trinity is not three Gods.** There's a name for that, it's Tritheism. Tritheism teaches the existence of three distinct Gods. Christians are monotheists, that is we believe in one God, and in the oneness of the Godhead there exists the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who are equal in nature, distinct in person, and subordinate in duties.
- 2) **The Trinity is not three manifestations of God.** The Trinity is not three different manifestations of the same God. Just as one man might be a husband, then a father, and a brother all at the same time; God Himself is God when He wants to be God, then changes into His Jesus Christ outfit, and/or, comes out in a third outfit as the Holy Spirit. But there would be a real problem with Jesus Christ on the cross calling out to His Father, because with that rubric he'd have to have been crying out to Himself.
- 3) **Thirdly, the Trinity does not teach that the Father created the Son or the Holy Spirit.** Coming back to Arius, he taught that only the Father was eternally God from the beginning; that Jesus was a created, and hence a lesser being and that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son at a later time. But because Christ and the Holy Spirit were created beings, they could not possess the divine attributes. Now watch this, the Bible does not

teach the creation of the Son or the Holy Spirit, but recognizes the work of both in the creation of all things. Just listen to these verses, John 1:3, “All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.” And the reference was made in the context to Jesus Christ. Then in Colossians 1:16, “For by Him (by Christ) all things were created in Heaven and on earth.” And then in Genesis 1:2, we’re told God created the Heavens and the earth, and that the earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep and the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, was hovering over the face of the waters.

- 4) **Fourthly, the Trinity does not teach that Christ or the Holy Spirit was a power, or attribute of God.** The deity of Christ was not manifested as an influence of God. John tells us in his prologue that in the beginning was the Word, logos, and the Word was God, and then in the incarnation he declares the Word was made flesh and we beheld His glory and wherever the shekinah glory is present, God is present, which is John’s way of saying that God was present fully in Christ in the incarnation.

Note the following observations, and here I want to change the word Trinity to *triunity*, meaning the same thing.

- 1) **First, we see triunity in creation, and we’ll see it right in Genesis chapter 1.** In the Beginning God, or Elohim, created the Heavens and the earth. According to I Corinthians 8:6, God the Father from whom all things came, planned and decreed creation. Acts 17: 24 ff, God the Father is the sovereign architect of creation, but it was God the Son who executed God’s decree by doing the work of creation. We just read it, John 1:3, “through Him all things were made, without Him nothing was made that has been made”. And we see the Holy Spirit active in creation, He is found hovering over the face of the deep. The Hebrew word ‘hovering’ is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 of an eagle fluttering over its young in a supervising or protecting role, and so in creation the Holy Spirit was there insuring. The safe and secure development of God the Father and God the Son without interference.
- 2) **Secondly, we see the triunity in the incarnation.** Jesus is described in John 1:14 as the one and only who came from the Father. And Matthew tells us that the Spirit of God came upon Jesus at His baptism. Peter tells us at the home of Cornelius God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary he said, “You will conceive a child by the Holy Spirit.” (Luke 1:35)
- 3) **Moreover, we see triunity in salvation.** That is the operation of the Trinity in every salvation. According to I Peter 1:2 all who come into saving faith are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And that happens through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in order that one may be obedient to Jesus Christ having fellowship with Him through the shed blood of the Savior. And of course, the Holy Spirit plays a very significant role in the convicting of unbelievers as to their own sin and

unrighteousness, and the fact that they are headed towards judgment unless they repent. (John 16:8)

- 4) **Moreover, we see triunity in revelation.** The Bible teaches that God is the source of all divine revelation, as we read in II Timothy 3:16, all scripture is inspired by God, yet God the Son is the subject of God's revelation; thus Jesus told the Emmaus disciples that the scriptures all bear witness to Him. And it's by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit on the sacred scriptures that divine revelation is understood, indeed that the men that wrote the scriptures, and thus who spoke from God, were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Regarding the Spirit, Jesus told the apostles, "He will guide you into all truth" "He will speak only what He hears from the Father", and "He will tell you what is yet to come." "He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you."
- 5) **Moreover, we see triunity in prayer.** Christian prayer involves requesting the Father on the basis of the Son's merits, influence, and reputation. Prayer starts with God; the ascended Christ intercedes for us, and at the same time, the Holy Spirit within prays through us and intercedes with groans that words cannot express.
- 6) **And we see triunity in the security of the believer.** (John 10:29) Jesus says those that have come to Him in saving faith, for eternal life, that His Father had given those people to Him and that those individuals could not be snatched out of the Father's hand. Then we read in Philippians 1:6, "I'm sure of this, that He who began a good work in you, i.e. the work of salvation, will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Then in Ephesians chapter 1, Paul says when you've heard the gospel, believed in Him, you are then sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit. 'Sealed', meaning to certify one's acceptance by God, that is the utter certainty of the application of Christ's salvation to one's life. We see triunity, i.e. the operation of the trinity when we come into saving faith. Saving faith is what God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit do in us so that we become born again.

Close your Bibles. From the very day that I preached my first sermon at Duke University as a lowly associate, until this very hour, I do something that most 'died in the wool', Reformed, Calvinistic Pastors and theologians never do – I often make the sign of the cross, and I know that many have probably felt ... 'How Romanish of you.' But I do that for a reason, because that's my way of signaling Heaven that the God that I serve is indivisible and cannot be separated one person from the other, that each has diversity of role and function; in other words, when I make the sign of the cross, I'm acknowledging that my faith is in the true God, the triune God, the Trinitarian God, the one God in three persons, that I worship with all of my might and my soul, spirit and mind. There's only one way to end this service ... we're going to sing The Doxology, and pay attention to the words.

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;*

*Praise Him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

In the name of God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Pastor Ed makes the sign of the cross.)

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

PART I

The Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/2/20

Getting a Right View (5)

II Peter 1:3-11

Our series continues, “Getting a Right View”. Today I want to gather my thoughts up under the following title, “Getting a Right View of the Christian Life.” Now why is that important? Listen very carefully, a faulty understanding of the Christian Life always leads to a defaulting walk with the Lord. When we hold wrong and erring views and ideas about the Christian Life, that is things that are not quite consistent with the scriptures, nor indicative of Christ’s heart; then we’re holding on to things that simply will not work. For too many people their journey of faith is one of duty and not delight, of struggle and stress, so that they derive no real pleasure or joy from being a Christian. What I want to do today, and next Sunday, is try to help all of us get greater clarity on what it means to be a Christian, and how we live this Christian Life.

First However, One Important Side Road

A person cannot live a Christian life unless they are Christians. The Bible carefully describes for us how we are to come into saving faith. We must realize our lost condition, and that the primary thing that we need to be saved from is the wrath of God. The Bible says God is angry with the wicked every day, and apart from Christ, “Our sins have separated between us our God so that He will not hear.” Paul says in Romans, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The unsaved man clings to his own self-righteousness, tells himself that he is a good person, and often believes that through good works he can endear himself to God and be saved. That’s the religion of many, but it’s not the religion of the Bible. We must come to Christ confessing our sin and our need for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says whoever comes to Him He will not cast out, and that “Whosoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” We must come to God through Christ. For Jesus tells us that no one can come to the Father unless they come through Him. The Bible says, whoever finds Christ, finds life; and that He came to give us an abundant life.

Give your heart to Christ today. I’m not asking you to make a decision, because there’s far more to it. I’m asking you to make a commitment. Put no confidence in the flesh, cast yourself on the mercies of Christ, and “call upon the Lord while He is near”; for “whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” If you invite Him into your life, and it’s genuine, you will be left with a heart-hunger to read your Bible, to get baptized, to join a church, and begin to grow in the things of the Lord. The Christian life requires the Holy Spirit working within us; and so many people, because they go to church, or try to be good, aspire to live the Christian life, but they cannot, because Christ is not their Savior. At this very moment you can come to Christ my

friend in saving faith. Don't put it off; "Today when you hear His voice harden not your heart." This is the seminal moment in your life. Believe and be saved!

Now I want to address everything else to believers.

If you're going to get the right view of the Christian life, then —

- 1) **You must learn to safeguard your walk.** Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 2. In the context, God reflects on His initial honeymoon period with His Bride, the Israelites, when He initially brought them out of Egyptian bondage. It's like God has a picture album sitting on His lap, and he's looking at pictures and remembering. You'll notice He says in Jeremiah 2:2, "I remember the devotion of your youth, and the love you had for me." Are you truly devoted to the Lord? Is He first in your life as He once was?

Many evangelical Christians are not even devoted to what the Bible might call 'first things.' George Barna, the great Christian pollster, says that right now in the evangelical Bible believing church, 1/3 of the church worships irregularly. Here I quote Barna, "Everyone must miss a service occasionally, but when a person is in a church for 2 services and gone 4; or worships for 3 services and is gone 6 (unless there is special circumstances) then that represents a life that will be best characterized by defeat." Our walk needs to be characterized by devotion and commitment to Christ. Moreover, we must make sure our love for Christ doesn't wain. It's very difficult to look at our journey of faith and honestly recognize spiritual declension.

For too many, to quote the Lord Jesus in speaking of the Laodicean church, "They are neither hot nor cold." Beloved lukewarm Christianity won't cut it. an old country preacher once said, too many are just trying to get to Heaven, and they ought to be trying to get to the heart of God. Just the other night I came to this amazing insight, genuine redemption is best evidenced by romance. Real salvation is best evidenced by a heart that's in love with Jesus Christ.

- 2) **Moreover, a right view of the Christian Life means we're willing to submit, yield and surrender to the wisdom of God and His leading.** Jeremiah chapter 2 and vs. 2b God remembers here how His young bride followed Him in the wilderness. The desert doesn't make for a very nice bridal suite, but it's amazing what you're bind to when you're really in love. A robust, yielded, surrendered, relationship to Christ puts Him center place in our life, and that changes our values, what we are about and where we want to invest our life. In the Christian life we follow the Lord; we gladly allow Him to govern us, lead us.
- 3) **Thirdly, the Christian life is to be characterized by a pursuit of the will of God.** Now listen very carefully, if you want to know the will of God for your life, begin by being obedient to the revealed will of God that's in the scriptures. Here's what some

people do. There's a Christian trying to make a decision about schooling and training, they ask themselves, 'Do I go to this school or that institution?' But their life hardly conforms to what God says in His Word. They are in financial disobedience to the revealed will of God in the scriptures. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, and we're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. The Bible says this is God's will for us, but here's a person not doing that, yet they're seek the will of God for their life, that won't work. Enough said.

4) The Christian life requires that we identify all nonsense and replace it with God sense. Let me identify some of the nonsense that people often take to heart.

- a. *Christians are under the wrath of God.* A true Christian is never under the wrath of God. On the cross Jesus took the wrath that we deserved. That is, He propitiated our sin, taking God's anger unto Himself. Now get this distinction, the wrath of God has as its goal - justice, divine chastening has as its goal - correction. As Christians we do dumb things on dumb days, and sometimes we get chastened and disciplined by the Lord, but the view is towards correction and conformity to Christ. God is angry with the wicked every day, according to the Bible, but not the righteousness.
- b. *You don't have to die sick.* I had a colleague that believed that for a long time, and then he finally came and repented. We are in a fallen world saints, death runs in your family, and it runs in my family.
- c. *A third kind of nonsense is that God wants you rich.* Some people are going to be rich and some people are going to be poor. God's not concerned about our pocketbook He's just concerned that we are good stewards about what we have, and that we're available to Him.
- d. *Prominent ministry counts more than private ministry.* That's nonsense. There are people floating around in this city, hopping from church to church, trying to find the ministry that's going to give them a big platform so they can become a somebody. God's not after giving anyone a big platform, but He wants us to partake of His great heart. He wants us to bloom where we are planted; He says, "Don't despise the day of small beginning".
- e. *Fifthly, there is the nonsense of the false doctrine of causality.* There are two examples of this in the scriptures. The disciples came upon a man born blind, and they said to Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" You see they were fishing for a cause and effect. Jesus said, "Neither", but rather that the blindness was for the glory of God. In other words, it gave the Lord Jesus an opportunity to show off His amazing power and grace in the plight of such a sad person.

There was also the collapse of the tower of Siloam; according to Luke 13:4, 18 people were killed; and there were those who felt that that tragedy happened to those 18 people because somehow, they were more wicked than others. Cause and effect, but Jesus says that is wrong-headed thinking. In this world bad things happen to good people, not to mention bad people, and we must all be prepared to meet our God. If we're going to live the Christian life successfully, then we have to understand life on this side of eternity. Many things will happen that are inexplicable; but please, please watch out for the Christian who always claims that he knows what God is doing in everyone's life and why.

One night I walked into Bob Evans; it was a cold wintry evening and it had been a long day; as I sat looking into my wife's face, I heard an all too familiar voice, and there he was, sitting at a big round table across from me with his brood. He started out with me many years ago, but then became crazy. He jumped up, pulled over a chair and said, "Pastor Ed, I was just thinking about you the other day, and God's given me a word for you. You see the reason this has happened to you is because" ... and I held up my hand. "Stop it!" It was about the most severe rebuke I've given to any one, (my wife kicked me under the table).

Calling him by name I said, "I think you're crazy and not sound. I don't see you as living an obedient Christian life. I think you live in a 'Neverland'. You don't sit under a teaching priest, and I don't think you're living or walking out an obedient life, and the last thing I'm going to take from you is any kind of counsel. You are self-deluded and you don't know how dangerous you are. I don't need you to connect any dots about my life." Beloved that sounds terrible to some, but the evangelical landscape is strewn with flakes, people that are flat out-to-lunch. It's a fool's errand to try to get guidance from a disobedient Christian and think you're going to wind up on the victory side. Enough said.

- f. *Here's another form of nonsense, a compulsiveness that you have to go and do something for the Lord.* And you heard it here, "God is more concerned about your being than your doing." If you feel this inward compulsion that you have to go and do something for God, it's probably not of God. Compulsions are born of neurosis, and that's a far cry from the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It's wonderful to serve the Lord, and Paul says that when we're saved, we're His workmanship created for good works. Good works don't save, but they are the product of being saved. But again, understand this; God is more concerned with our being than our doing. Christ being daily formed in you is more important than anything you could ever do for the Lord Jesus.

I'm about to tell you the saddest story that I've ever experienced. A person came and said to me a few years back. I love your good teaching Pastor, but I don't

need to come and be filled up like this every Sunday. I need to get out there and start doing ministry. I said, “Well do both sister.” “No”, she said. I reasoned with her for over an hour and I’d known his person for a long, long time. I said, “Let me understand this, you’re going to stop coming to this church, stop hanging out at church, and go give yourself to ministry?” She said, “Yes, that’s right!” I said, “Well, not even Paul behaved that way. Paul established churches, went to church, and was always going in the synagogues. What would you think if you ran into someone with my kind of credentials and I said that I was always out doing ministry, but would not be involved in a local church, would not worship God, helping to build up the body of Christ? And being instructed systematically in God’s Holy Word, wouldn’t that be disobedience?”

She absolutely would not hear of it. So she disappeared from the fellowship, and then life happened to me, and about three months later I heard that the term ‘gall of bitterness’ doesn’t even begin to describe her condition. She’s done with all of it, isn’t going anywhere, and is absolutely shipwrecked; foolishness and nonsense. I’m just amazed how quickly laypeople gravitate to nonsense. People in darkness are stupid, and they do dumb things on dumb days, but people in Christ, with our discernment, are supposed to be able to identify nonsense and identify God sense. In the Christian life we’re called to think. Friend, if you have a stupid button, don’t press it. It needs to be rendered inoperable.

Close your Bibles. This Christian life was meant to be lived with the wonderful love of Christ reigning supremely in our lives. At my last church there was a couple that I was very close to. She struggled with cancer for 12 years, yet she was never ravaged. She was a theological buddy. She was so quickened when I went back to the Reformation and the Magisterial Reformers. But then it got bad, and she breathed her last breath on a day when I was following a hearse about to do a funeral for a man named Dell Newton. I got the phone call before I ever got out of the car.

So I left the cemetery after the service and drove directly there. He opened the door and gave me a hug, he said, “Ed, she’s up there in bed, go on up.” I went up the stairs, he’d put a chair beside her. There she was with mouth open, lifeless, gone from this life to the far country. I sat down and took her hand, gave thanks for all the encouragement she’d given me and all the love, all the joy that we had psalming about the things of Jesus Christ. I loved him too, and I went there a lot. But then came all the ugliness, he was one of the five, and it was truly horrible. I remember in my extreme anguish saying to the Father, “I’m committing my cause to you Lord Jesus. I ministered there 33 years and they know the kind of man that I am.”

We started this church, and about 2 years ago, I got a call from Debbie Coburn, she said this man would like to meet with you, and I said yes. I got his phone number and called him. It was a beautiful time of catching up. He wrote a book about his wife when she died, and I wrote one of the big chapters. So I went down to a restaurant and met him. He was outside waiting for me and he fell into my arms and gave me a big hug; I wasn’t expecting that.

We went inside, ordered, and started talking. Then suddenly he put his arm up on the table, put his head down, and held out his hand as if to shake my hand then he said, “Pastor will you forgive me, please forgive me. Please, please forgive me.” I got up out of that booth, sat right beside him, at age 68, and held this 78-year-old man in my arms, and he wept like a baby.

We continued to meet, and did a few social things together, and then one day I was driving I went past his house, and he was in the yard. I turned the car around, and when I got out, he saw me and he ran and jumped into my arms. He said he was going to get married again, told me he had a minister in mind, but he didn’t know if he would do it, and then he winked at me. I said, “Absolutely, wouldn’t miss it for anything.”

My friend, the Christian life is a life where we let God own our hearts, and if God doesn’t own your heart this morning, then you should come right down and kneel on this floor, spread eagle if you have to, and not move until God owns your heart lock, stock, and barrel.

What is the Christian life? It’s a life where Jesus Christ, in the fullness of His supremacy, governs us right down to our shoelaces.

Here ends the lesson.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Part II

The Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/9/20

Getting a Right View (6)

Romans 16:1-2; Habakkuk 3:17-19

Today, Getting A Right View of The Christian Life, and here is why it is important.

A faulty understanding of the Christian life will invariably lead to a defaulting Christian faith. Spiritual shipwreck, leanness of soul, disappointment with God, are only a few of the unholy fruits that come upon believers when they do not understand how to live the Christian life.

The Bible uses a number of metaphors for the Christian life, i.e. we're likened to soldiers who have to endure hardship. The Christian life is likened to an athletic contest wherein we compete for a crown, it is referred to as a 'race of faith', and the most demonstrative metaphor for the Christian life is that it is likened to a walk. (Ephesians 4:1, 17, 5:2, 8, 12; Philippians 3:17; Colossians 1:10, 2:6, 4:5; II John 1:6).

Little to no emphasis today is placed on the influence of a dedicated Christian life. Our life should make others hungry for Christ. We speak of living an incarnational life, i. e. "Christ in you the hope of glory". We should live an invitational life. That is, a life that invites others to consider their own personal surrender to Jesus Christ. The truth is we are the only Bible that some people will ever read. We have to be "living epistles". Your life and mine should be like a 'living marquis', advertising our glorious Christ and what He's done in us. The fruit of His indwelling should issue in peace, humility, altruism and graciousness, with a distinctive absence of judgmentalism, or a critical toxic spirit.

When people experience us, they should have no sense that we're trying to use them for our benefit, or that we are trying to get something from them. That's how the world works. We as believers are cut from a different cloth. We are gentle and self-effacing; we prefer others to ourselves we are to be genuinely interested in other people. That kind of unconditional love turns heads, and it is incredibly refreshing. Being a warm approachable person, speaking beautiful and wonderful words of life with a demeanor that reveals the wonderful love of Jesus, still matters before Heaven.

For years I had a plaque in my study which said ... "*Preach the Gospel, and if necessary, use words*" ... We are to live a life that preaches, but of course we should also be willing to share our gospel and know how to do it. In fact, as I mentioned last time from Jeremiah chapter 2, in the opening verses we find God delighting in His people during their initial honeymoon period when He brought them out of captivity. God delights in us when we offer a cup of cold water to others

in His name; He delights in our servanthood, our intercessions for others, and our worship of Him. He delights in us when we study His Word, encourage one another, and when we submit our will to His despite our questions and uncertainties. When we chose and delight in His presence, despite our conundrums, preferring His presence to the answers we want; then beloved, God delights in us.

The point is that as we live the Christian life, God's work in us should be on display. That happens best when we simply are in love with Jesus Christ. Hear this very carefully, genuine redemption is always evidenced by genuine romance. In other words, redeemed people truly love the Lord.

It's possible that you are a mess and you would be the first to say, 'Pastor, I'm not a together person, I've got loose ends and make messes, and a string of broken relationships in my journey of faith. I've been an on again off again person, jumping from church to church, my spouse and I are having difficulties, and I'm just so unhappy in my work, so what should I do?' Here's how God fixes that problem. You get alone, and get down on your knees and you pour it out to God. Bring those messes to the cross. Not many people are into repentance these days, but heartfelt repentance, born of humility and brokenness will really change things. Then, after you have done that, just open your heart to those that you need to repent to, and God will bless you for that and begin to align your life with what the scriptures enjoin upon you. Begin to walk in humility and ask God to clean up your messes and deal with your loose ends. You will be amazed how quickly the Lord will work in your life making it wonderfully attractive. The Bible says we are to walk with the Lord in the light of His Word.

Now to help us along in that journey, consider the following.

- 1) **To live the Christian life, we must cultivate joy.** A few days ago, I placed the following on Facebook.

"If someone had an opportunity to steal your joy, do you think they would really want to take it?"

That's something to think about is it not? Sometimes to look into the face of other Christians is enough to make us want to run away; their countenance, their demeanor, and everything about them forecasts an unpleasant experience that's about to get into your face.

I've said it often; some people wouldn't have a life if they didn't have a problem. You see when we're always complaining and bitter, and always hitting sour notes in the things we say, it puts people off. There are a lot of people who do not wear very well; that can become so engrained in us, and can become such a pattern that we stop being aware of it. The Bible says that we are to rejoice in the Lord. So how is your praise life? "A merry heart doeth good like medicine", says the writer of Proverbs. Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice."

My friend you can change. Why do you live a gloomy, cynical, despairing Christian life when you've been united to Jesus Christ by faith? The old hymn writer has said, "Trust

and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus". You can cultivate joy by finding things in Christ which bring joy to your heart. He is a God who is plenteous in mercy, so rejoice in that. He is a God that does His best work in our extremities, so rejoice in that. He's a God of second chances, and even more so – rejoice in that. There's radical forgiveness in God, so rejoice in that. There's no circumstance too difficult for Him, so rejoice in that. Start looking at the Word in this way, and joy will become preeminent in your life.

- 2) **Be willing to be spent.** When was the last time you said, 'Father, I'm yours to be spent?' Do you know that life is going to use us up? So it's important to be spent on the right things. In the great kenosis passage in the book of Philippians we're told that 'Christ emptied Himself', that is, laid down His prerogatives, all of His rights, He has left us a great example. When we lose our life for His sake, Jesus says we find it. Being available to God and refusing to partial out little bits of our life here, there, and yonder, to others, and just being able to go offer ourselves to those in need brings tremendous joy and fulfillment to our Christian journey.

We're so conscious of time and what we need to get done that we start getting anxious, the clock pushes us, and every week we feel like we're on overload; so you're wondering, how can I say to the Lord, "I'm yours to spend."? As long as you live, that will be the battle of your life. You have to choose between two kingdoms my friend, and, in all probability, it's a choice you should have made a long time ago.

The Bible says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all the other things will be added unto you." The truth is there's some projects around my house I should have gotten done when I first moved in, August 2017; but I gave that time to the Lord and there are no regrets. There's no magic here. Give yourself to God's business and things in your personal life may have to slide, but so what? In eternity you are never going to sit in a heap and lament that you didn't get a room painted, or the basement cleaned out, etc. etc.

- 3) **Deal with your weaknesses; identify your emotional crippings.** Are you a controller? I'm amazed the number of people that stop in HillSide and pretty soon they're demanding the whole church on their terms. I'm getting used to telling them, "Try the church down the street." Procrastination is another emotional crippling. Procrastinators always put off till tomorrow what could easily be done today. Hear this carefully. Patterns of procrastination will lead to clinical anxiety. You see what needs to be done and it begins to push us emotionally.

Moreover, we have to make excuses to others for things we promised that did not get done, and when we are anxious in trouble, it's going to manifest right in our demeanor and countenance. That can affect our moods and how others experience us. You can live on top of life rather than under it. Go home and pay your bills. Make a checklist and establish priorities for things you need to do, and do them. It might take a month, or half a year, but don't procrastinate.

Ask the Lord to show you areas of your life where you have an emotional crippling. It could be anger, your fuse is too short, you're always flying off the handle and increasingly you're yelling more and more. There's no hell on earth like coming home day after day and not knowing how the emotional furniture is going to be arranged.

You need to stop beating people up. Yours could have been a tortuous past, but you can get past that past. Take every damaged memory that you can think of and write it down, put it in your Bible and take it to the cross every day. You can also get Dr. David Seamand's book called, *"Healing for Damaged Feelings and Emotions"* and read it. It is so beautifully written you will feel if Dr. David Seamands is talking directly to you. My friend you need to know that all things are possible with Christ, and that He knows how to fix and restore us.

- 4) A Christian life whereby we derive real meaning is born of being generous.** Some believers are tighter than bark on a tree; you may have some kind of financial issue; you take it to them but find yourself being excoriated. You see, though they are very prudent, wise, and gifted with finances, and money has been a big focus for them; I know many Christian like this, they're good churchmen, but they're not generous, it's just not in their nature.

I have actually known people blessed of God, people who had a great deal of money, but when they really had to give it significantly, they would have to go to bed for two or three days because it would be so distressing for them.

I'm certainly not a wealthy man, but I've always aspired to be generous, and here's why. It was God's incredible generosity; how He lavished grace upon grace in my life that rerouted my destiny. Christ gives liberally, and He calls us to do the same thing. If someone needs your coat, give him two coats. If someone needs \$5 give them \$10, if someone needs food, then give them meals.

Do you know that Jesus Christ watches our generosity? Do you? Our Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount that if we even give a cup of cold water in His name that Heaven takes notice. When I go into Frisch's and my bill is \$10, I can't leave a 20% tip of just \$2 dollars, I have to make it \$3 or more. When you and I are generous with others, God delights in that. A generous life speaks very loudly.

Not long ago a person came to me and said, "I have a tremendous need, Pastor will you pray for me because I am clueless as to how this will happen, and it's threatening my livelihood?" So I prayed and God led me to a benefactor. That doesn't often happen, and it was the generosity of the benefactor, a beautiful Christian man, that helped to save the career of another brother.

There was a time in my life when I had more money than I have now. I gave 13% of my income faithfully as a tithe, and then I made offerings sometimes giving \$500 to one person, or buying clothes for another. Paying for a person to take a trip to see a loved one either on the west or east coast. The Bible says, “My God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.” Everything you give away will come back to you in one way or another. It sounds trite, but my friend you cannot out give God. Don’t go into that wise and prudent dance. With what measure you give, it will be measured back to you.

Years ago, a fairly wealthy man gave an incredible gift to our ministry. I met him out in the hall of a hospital; I was so grateful, and so I said to him, “Thank you.” Do you know what he said to me? It nearly bent me over with weeping, “That’s the easiest thing that I do.” That my friends, is a generous life. Every day Jesus Christ is generous with Ed Bonniwell, and He’s generous with you. Open your eyes and your heart, and behold His incomparable generosity.

- 5) **A fulfilling Christian life means that we don’t try to run anyone else’s life.** We are to mind our own business, and we’re not to be busy bodies. Sometimes our wisdom, as good as it is, needs to be kept to ourselves. We don’t truly know what’s best for anyone in the particulars of their life! It’s hard enough to figure that out for our own lives. When you interject yourself into another’s life, and you’re trying to direct their heart you are in God’s way. Will you think on that? That needs to be written down and meditated on.

Pray for people, love them, but don’t try to run anyone’s life. You can say, ‘How can I be helpful to you?’ Or, ‘Is there any way I can help?’ To come alongside of people in extremity, helping to bear their burden, is a good thing. However, never presuppose that you know what’s best for anyone, because my friend, you don’t know that. The heart of every person is off limits to us. Be a good friend; be supportive, don’t speak condemning language, and never make people feel that you will be disappointed with them if they don’t take your advice. Never withdraw love, or fellowship from people who don’t take our hints. Jesus Christ wants to lead them, so try to connect them with the Lord Himself.

- 6) **In order to live a good Christian life, know that all of your tomorrows will follow the decisions that you make today.** Most of us are moving at the speed of life. Slow down some. Hear this carefully; every decision you make adds weight to your life, and some decisions can lead to unexpected things that have to be done, causing you to exceed your load and weight bearing limit.

I made a decision to downsize in August of 2017 and moved from a 4000 sq. ft. home to a 1400 sq. ft. home, and it left me with a big struggle in terms of storage. I’ve had to relocate storage bins, and just recently purchased my own storage bin putting it in my back yard. A foundation had to be built, the storage bin had to be delivered, and other

storage bins had to be cleaned out; it's taken a log of time with tremendous effort and costs I didn't anticipate; and it never would have happened without the help of a very dear Christian brother.

Brethren take it to heart, the decisions you make today are going to affect, either negatively or positively, all of your tomorrows. And know this, a cute, "Now I lay me down to sleep" prayer about those decisions won't cut it.

When I was younger, I had a proclivity to shoot from the hip and make decisions on the fly, and it's the fast track to disaster. You want order in your life, predictability; and you wish to minimize mispending your time, energy, and money? Then my friend, make wise decisions. Always ask yourself what will the consequences be; what will have to be done as a consequence of that decision, what expenses will be incurred etc. etc.

- 7) **Finally, the Christian life doesn't work well for a lot of people because they do not understand the principle of derived authority.** The only way I ever have authority as a Pastor is that I'm under the authority of my Elders. If I want to take off and go to Naples, change the direction of this church, or have the need to get a raise; I must go to them. However, by submitting to their authority, God's authority rests upon me. I don't have to run around saying, 'I have authority from God, I'm His anointed, etc. etc.' Rather, I go about my ministry, and that authority gets evidenced in my role as a Pastor. Others see it and recognize it. Anytime a minister says, 'I'm under the authority of God, not under the authority of men, and never will be.'; then know you're dealing with a false prophet. False prophets will never put themselves under the authority of men.

Now listen to this and take it to heart, do you want to live your life as a Christian layman with the authority of God on your journey of faith? Then you also must enter in to the principle, or doctrine, of derived authority. You must be under the authority of the scriptures; if you are, it will be evidenced by a love for the body of Christ, embracing of community, loving the saints and washing their feet, heartfelt prayer for the lost, love for world missions, and being supportive of your Pastor.

You know what happens around here? People disappear for weeks on end, and then get a little bit miffed if you ask them where they've been, as if it's their business only. And that focuses the issue. When we were united to Christ in conversion, we were united to one another, and we're supposed to feel a sense of obligation to one another. When people love the body of Christ, and live with that sense of connection. God will bless it, and give them a sense of fulfillment and joy. In the book of Ephesian's Paul says, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." And we are to love the church like that; when we do, the Christian life takes on a wonderful newness.

When you go from one Sunday to the next, do you have any interaction with the people that you worship with? Too often our network of relationships are outside of the church.

We need to be involved with other believers because that's our family; and when we are, God delights in it.

Close your Bibles. It was 1976 and I had been out of seminary for 2 years. I was serving at the time at the Pitman United Methodist Church in Pitman, New Jersey. My wife was great with child, and someone gave us a trip to attend The School of Practical Christianity, with Dr. Norman Vincent Peale; a total of only 30 couples, or 60 people. It was held in Pawling, New York, which has to be one of the most beautiful areas of New York that I've ever seen. Our time with Dr. Peale was intimate and wonderful, and it culminated with a trip on Sunday to his worship service as his guest. I fell in love with the man. At that point in his life he and his wife were both up in years.

On Wednesday of that week we had some free time so we created a car caravan to see the beautiful countryside. We were five car loads when suddenly one of the cars went off the side and broke an axel. We held our own little conclave and decided that we would march up a big grassy mountain, i.e. a very high hill. We headed up towards a big mansion. I could only hope that German Shepherds weren't guarding it.

There were five of us that knocked on the door, and the big man that answered it appeared to be like Mr. Carson of Downton Abbey, very formally dressed. We stepped back, not wanting to appear threatening; we explained that we were attending the seminar with Dr. Peale and that one of our cars went into the ditch and broke an axel. Then we asked if he would call for help.

He invited us in and then sent a large man to collect our party for fear it would take at least 2 hours to get help, and we were all served tea and crumpets. I had never been in a home like that before. It certainly wasn't the size of the Biltmore in Ashville, but it was in that ilk. It was kind of gothic like that, and I wondered, 'Who on earth lives here, and are they gangsters?' ... lol.

I noticed that there was a lot of art, and all the pictures were signed LT. So finally, getting up enough courage I asked, "Sir, I notice all this art that's all signed LT. Who is LT?" "Oh", he said, "Lowell Thomas lives here. Today he's at the Army-Navy game". (Lowell Thomas was the voice of the movie news reels in WWII, a very famous War news correspondent, also a writer of books, etc. etc. Then this butler said, "Mr. Thomas would tell you he's not an artist, but he does love to 'dabble' in art.

I got to thinking about that word dabble. Too many Christians are dabblers and not disciples. They don't bring intentionality to their daily walk, and truth be known, they're not disciples. Rather they dabble at their discipleship.

Thus far you've listened to two big sermons on Getting a Right View of the Christian Life, and the final thing I want to leave you with is this thought. Don't be a dabbler; rather be intentional about your journey of faith, and your walk with Jesus Christ. Be consistent, bring focus to that journey. Take up your Bible, take up your cross, and follow after the Lord with all your heart, your strength, your might and everything you can muster. That will issue in an

abundant life, and you'll have a profound sense of His indwelling, His unctionizing, His anointing, and you'll be closer to the Lord than you've ever been before.

You think about that! Amen.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Part III

(A Synopsis)

The Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/16/20

Getting a Right View (7)

Hebrews 11:13-16

Today Part III, *Getting a Right View of the Christian Life*. Last time we noted in a cursory way, various metaphors for the Christian life. It is described as a race of faith, an athletic contest, a warfare, and also as a walk. Today I want us to focus on the metaphor of pilgrimage. The early believers saw themselves as pilgrims redeemed by Christ, making a pilgrimage or a sojourn through the challenges of this very brief life. Hebrews 13:11 says, “these all died in faith acknowledging that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” They had no enduring city, for they were looking for heavenly home, a better country, a city whose builder and designer is God.

There’s no better example than Abraham who is described as constantly “pitching his tents” but “building his altars”. That bespeaks of a pilgrim mindset. Notice the order. Because he only “pitched his tents” he was always passing through and moving about. Beloved this world is not our home, and that in a nutshell is a pilgrim mindset.

No one more demonstratively placed this pilgrim mentality into the DNA of evangelicals as did John Bunyan with the character Pilgrim (Christian) in his book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In this book the Christian life is focused as a pilgrimage, and the story forecasts the ups and downs of Christian living. Can we really talk? Many people become Christians and are never disciplined; hence they are clueless as to what to expect. They sit in a church for 30 years, and then comes the enemy with his ploys, stratagems, schemes, and devices; and the mischief perpetrated upon them is deemed unfair, and so they rail against God, and thus are shipwrecked. Where did they get the idea that such trials and tribulations would never be their experience?

Hear this carefully; ***a faulty understanding of the Christian life will invariably lead to a defaulting Christian faith.*** Spiritual shipwreck, leanness of soul, and disappointment with God, are only a few of the unholy truths that come upon believers when they do not understand how to live a Christian life. Bunyan’s burden was to fill in those blanks.

The book *Pilgrim’s Progress* is an allegory, and it is fascinating. By the way, John Bunyan, (1628– 1688), probably represents the least likely candidate for being a Christian convert! A vile man, and profligate; he was a complete brute; big, ignorant, insufferable and extremely physical! After a stint in the army under Cromwell he went back to his father’s business as a tinker, traveling the countryside fixing pots and pans.

Bunyan was utterly profane in his speech. One day, while playing a game of 'cat', (he was very athletic) he began to swear profusely. In his book, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he writes of that moment, "A voice did suddenly dart from Heaven into my soul, which said 'Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven, or have thy sins and go to Hell?'" It brought him up short and marked the beginning of his journey to the 'Celestial City'.

He married a very Godly woman who was very poor and she had a dowry of only two books. One by Arthur Dent called, "*The Plain Man's Way to Heaven*", and Lewis Bayly's, "*Practice of Piety*". He devoured those books, but as he assessed his own rotten soul, he could not imagine that a holy God could save him, for he was a most, "determined sinner". Then one day while reading Romans 5:20, ... "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound", he heard the voice of Christ in that passage. Suddenly his heart was overtaken by the King of glory, and a most pronounced machination from God was exercised upon his soul, extracting him from his union with Adam and supernaturally making him to be one with Jesus Christ.

Beloved, true grace never comes with a probationary period. His blood makes the foulest clean. Bunyan began to study the Word, and at the bidding of his Pastor it was announced that Bunyan would preach in a certain place. About 80 people gathered to hear him. When he opened the Word, God opened the hearts of over 30 people. It was announced that he would preach again and thousands came; and thus it was for all of his tenured ministry. The high and low alike of British culture came to hear the "pots and pans preacher". At one point he was placed in Bedford County Prison, and there he stayed for 12 years. As a non-conformist Pastor, he could have walked free at any time had he recanted his beliefs about scripture, as his understanding had been shaped by the Magisterial Reformers. Of course, he would not relent. He was needed at home as he had a blind daughter and a total of 12 children, but he would not renounce his beliefs. He took the pain of that circumstance and wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* to illustrate the challenges, sorrows, the sufferings, and the victories of the believer as they move through this world.

Pilgrim (Christian) starts out in the 'City of Destruction', which represents the world's system that is about to be blasted by God. He decides to make a pilgrimage to the 'Celestial City' where he can enjoy eternal life. In route he gets bogged down by doubts and fears, and has to deal with the 'Slough of Despond'. In this world, so devil filled, despair and disappointment are tremendous weapons used against us.

He then goes to the 'Village of Morality' and meets 'Mr. Worldly Wiseman'. He tells Christian (Pilgrim), Christianity is a sad business, and that he should settle down in the 'Village of Morality' where Christian can have a good life. He is warned that if he goes on, there will be abundant sorrows, life threatening moments, and it began to make sense until Christian was engaged by 'Mr. Evangelist' who berated Christian for listening to 'Mr. Worldly Wiseman.'

Christian then arrives at 'Wicked Gate', and he is allowed in by 'Mr. Goodwill', the gate keeper. It was a narrow gate that opened into a narrow way, and it would lead to the 'Celestial City'. Stepping lively, Christian, (Pilgrim) arrives at 'Interpreter's house'. It was a large place,

and here his eyes are opened to see the 'Ideal Pastor', and sinners doomed, locked in iron cages, he sees the devil himself.

He then comes to The Cross, and he's carrying a big burden, and upon seeing that Cross, the heavy burden rolled off his back and he was told that he was forgiven and cleansed! Then a scroll was given to him, and he was told it was his passport to Heaven. The scroll was his belief in Jesus Christ.

Leaving there he comes to 'Difficulty Hill' where he meets 'Mr. Formalist' and 'Mr. Hypocrisy'. These two men were constantly taking short cuts to all things spiritual, so the three of them proceeded to 'Difficulty Hill'. Then they came to a three-pronged fork in the road, Christian says, "take the path that goes straight", but the other two men did not listen to him. It was a very hard climb, when suddenly he meets two other pilgrims coming down 'Difficulty Hill'; 'Mr. Timorous' and 'Mr. Mistrust'. They had tried to scale the hill but had decided to give up. It was too steep and lions were up there. Just then Christian reached into his blouse to get his scroll, but it was not there; apparently in his sinful sleep it had fallen out of his blouse, so he had to retrace his steps to find it.

He had been careless about his salvation and had not safeguarded the relationship, symbolized by the scroll that would get him to the 'Celestial City'. Happily, he found it as he retraced his steps. He then arrives at 'Beautiful Place' and experiences rest, and it was a happy season. But again, he continues on and comes to the 'Valley of Humiliation' and got attacked by a man named 'Apollyon', a monster like creature. Here Christian fought for his life and managed to wound the creature, but it was an exhausting fight and terrible in all of its dimensions. It was spiritual warfare at its worst. Sometimes our warfare can be utterly brutal in this world.

From there Christian arrives at the 'Valley of the Shadow of Death', inhabited by howling hobgoblins and dreadful creatures. Then Christian finds himself walking close to the open mouth of hell, with noxious fumes and hideous voices sounding in his ear. It was an exquisite horror, but then suddenly he was helped by, 'All Prayer'. Prayer is how we overcome in this life. Then 'Mr. Faithful' joins him in that valley. Together they go on to the town of 'Vanity Fair'. 'Vanity Fair' is a town where all are only interested in commerce and money. Christian and 'Mr. Faithful' infuriated the merchandisers so they were placed in jail. Persecutions will surely come to us in this life; they may be subtle, and they may take the form of manipulations of men.

The town mayor, 'Mr. Old Beelzebub' has 'Faithful' then burned at the stake for his testimony. Christian, by the mercies of God, escapes, and then lands at 'Doubting Castle'; there meets 'Giant Despair'. At the same time, he is joined by 'Mr. Hopeful', and later by another guy named 'Vain Confidence', who at night falls into a pit and dies. The Christian life is to be lived cautiously and informed by wisdom. The cocky man is often the defeated man. Then they are met by a giant named 'Despair' and he throws Christian and his friend into 'Doubting Castle'. However, Christian says, "I have a key in my bosom called 'promise', and it will open any lock in 'Doubting Castle' and out they went. Arriving at 'Delectable Mountain'. There are places in life that are such a joy to dwell in.

From there they went on to 'Dark River', a most threatening; but they survived the crossing only to find themselves in a steep climb. After that struggle, in their tenacious faithfulness, given the vicissitudes they had suffered, they arrived at the 'Celestial City' and the gate opens. Pilgrim (Christian) entered in and finds the streets paved with gold, and many walking around with crowns of gold on their heads and golden harps in their hands. Christian has made his destination; he has entered what some have called 'The Saint's Everlasting Rest'. He arrived at the promised end of every authentic Christian journey! This world with devils filled, threw their fiery darts and whipped up contrary seas; however, Pilgrim was unrelenting, seeking that city whose builder and maker was God.

If that story tells us anything, it tells us that this pilgrim sod is fraught with struggle, disappointments, uncertainties, unholy surprises, and even devilish demonic attacks! This very day I learned of a terrible unfairness that has landed in the lap of a magnificent Christian man, and it's nothing short of a spiritual attack. But know this beloved the Celestial City can be reached if we abide faithful in Christ, and hold to an unswerving commitment to our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

The Bible says he who endures to the end shall be saved. Beloved, "this life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." If you're going to have a Right View of the Christian Life then remember Pilgrim's journey. This world will try to sour you, and bury you by 'Giant Despair'; it will try to lock you in 'Doubting Castle', seduce you by the town of 'Vanity Fair'. This world will persecute you and you will be brought very low at times. Watch out in this world for 'Mr. Worldly Wiseman', and don't be diminished in your faith by 'Mr. Timorous' or 'Mr. Mistrust'! Beloved the pilgrim way isn't an easy way, but no one arrives at the 'Celestial City' without trials from the enemy, and tests from God. "Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Don't bail out, don't rail against God. Don't play fast and loose with this calling. Know in your heart trials will come; and vexations. You will be buffeted often; the enemy keeps us from a smooth ride, the devil has a fly he can "put in your ointment". And when those things happen it's important not to come unhinged, but to abide faithful.

Now close your Bibles while I tell you a story. Two things; often it's the way of Christ with new converts that in their first year of walking in the new birth, God protects them as they take their initial steps of faith and begin to grow in the Lord. Secondly however, He begins to allow the enemy to attack, bringing trials and temptations. But in this way, we learn obedience; and when our faith is tested and we abide faithful, that's when we often grow the most.

I could not share this story for a very long time because I was legally prohibited from doing so for 25 years. One day coming home from class I walked into my dormitory room, and putting the key in the door there was my roommate and my German Professor with drug paraphernalia, smoking pot and doing drugs. I was taking German by this Professor, and had to have it in order to get into Princeton University and Seminary. After that brutal discovery, I noticed in days following that no matter how hard I worked in class he was giving me unfair grades. I called my father and we talked extensively. At Dad's bidding I went to the President of the University, and he called for an investigation and my roommate was expelled. The professor was disciplined, but not terminated, but the nightmare was made worse because they would not transfer me from

his class. Then I started failing German, he would do his best to humiliate me, and when I would take my tests, which I knew I was acing, I would be told it was an F or a D, and he wouldn't let me see it.

I returned to the President and I remember his insipid, sanctimonious diatribe. "Brother Ed you will find in this life that those who are the most mature are those that have suffered, and it appears that God is going to allow you to suffer in this season. It may be that you will have to wait another year before going to seminary." And I thought to myself, "How delightfully sanctimonious." I left there mad "as an old wet hen." I called my father, who wasn't open to paying for a fifth year of college in order for a University President to keep peace with his faculty. My Dad always had a way of achieving clarity rather quickly. My Dad, godly but strong (and a heavy combat veteran of WWII) said, "Go to the police."

The police chief was interested. I had noticed one day when I walked past the Professor's car, that when I looked down to the gear shift of his MG, that his drug paraphernalia was in the open. So, the chief said "Let's go find his car, and we did, and sure enough looking through the window there was the drug paraphernalia. It was parked on the University campus, so the University Police were called also. The chief, and other officers went to the office of the Professor, and knowing that this professor had done drugs with another student, he was immediately arrested. It was worse however; drugs were found at his house, and the University President fired this Professor. This German Professor's father had also been a Professor at that school, so there were deep loyalties, and I guess I was considered expendable. But happily, the University President apologized to me within a few days and I was transferred into another German class with a different Professor, whereupon I aced the class.

This was the first major test and trial that I underwent in my journey to the 'Celestial City'. I'm not sure I handled it all that well, and indeed I struggled as to why such a gross unfairness would completely destroy the joy of my entire senior year at college. I was 20 years of age and I'm sure I could have thought or said, "God you could have done better!" Yet, I didn't turn away, and I continued to worship, pray and walk with the Lord in the light of His Word during that horrific time, and God was faithful. Indeed, to use Bunyan's language, I was joined by 'Mr. Faithful' and encouraged along in my journey to the 'Celestial City'.

Since then there have been many such experiences. I've climbed 'Mt. Disappointment' and 'Humiliation Hill', and I've known the attacks of 'Mr. Apollyon', and I've been in seasons of spiritual warfare wherein I barely survived. But through it all I came out of it saying that I was "more than a conqueror through Him that loved me".

Going back to that initial major first trial which came to me about a year after I made my commitment to Christ, I discovered God's faithfulness, and low for these many years He has been faithful time and again. And moreover, I also discovered that I was a very good student of the German language, which is why I can now say ... *das end, das enden*.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE GOSPEL

Part I

The Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

2/23/20

Getting a Right View (8)

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Today I want to address this subject, *Getting A Right View of The Gospel*. The word gospel, in the Greek means good news, and the gospel has its own unique way of cutting into people's hearts. I remember reading about Peter Cartwright, a great evangelist to the lumber jacks of the great Northwest. A large and burly man, yet with some Bible training, He would stand on a felled tree stump as a makeshift pulpit, cup his hands and shout out, "Is there any good news? Thank God almighty I've got some good news!" The men would come running to him and he would preach the everlasting Gospel, and many would be saved.

What is so intriguing about the gospel is how the Spirit of God calls forth hope in those that hear it. Someone has rightly said that in the gospel, Christ will stick His head out and wink at you. Where this gospel is proclaimed, Christ is. The Word 'Gospel' in the evangelical church is not touted as it once was, and an even greater scandal is that few know how to present the gospel. Imagine someone comes to you and says, 'How do I get it? How do I become a Christian? Do you know how to go about presenting the gospel, and what constitutes the essence of the gospel?

It's unbelievable that a person could be in a Bible believing church 8 years, 25 or even 40 years and not know how to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Part II of this message we're going to learn just how to do that.

I like the movies, and I probably have seen more than I should have. One of my favorites is Rocky. There is one scene where Rocky is being beat to death. Saved by the bell, they are working on his face, when the bell rings for him to return to the ring, his coach, Burgess Meredith, says in his pirate-y voice, "Just remember this, Rocky, you're a dangerous person!" Beloved, anyone who is in Christ, who takes seriously their stewardship of this gospel, and who will dare to share it, will experience the approbation of Heaven and the fruit it brings forth in converted lives; but it will also make you a great threat to the powers of darkness. You and I are called to be dangerous before all principalities and powers.

So often we as Christians demure, and we think we're not good enough, holy enough, or righteousness enough to share the gospel. Who told you that? That will not cut it on the day we stand before the great assuage of God. The work Christ has done in you is the work He

wants to do in others. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, but who are you burdened for that's lost, and wouldn't it be nice if you were to dare to share this gospel with them?

You can do it; you can learn to do it. The best soul winners are people that are sold out to Jesus Christ. Are you afraid someone's going to ask you a question you can't answer? For all my own training I get questions that I can't answer. But we are to put to silence the foolishness of ignorant people, and we are to be able "to give a reason for the hope that is within us."

Beloved Paul says this gospel is the power of God; so powerful that it can make the vilest clean, deliver the reprobate, bring a person out of his silly religiosity into a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Who's going to save an addictive soul whose life is being vivisected every day? Jesus Christ will do it through your gospel.

Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. Paul speaks of the gospel of God, and he speaks of "My gospel". What is your gospel? Do you have a gospel? Does Christ matter enough to you to learn about this gospel and how to share it? For me the best evangelistic opportunities have come through friendship evangelism. Unbelievers that I befriend, then through life and words I do my best to invite them in to the heart of Christ by sharing the gospel. Sometimes people surrender immediately, and sometimes they will run from the Lord for a year or two, and do so with an edge, because they're under conviction.

I love what Charles Spurgeon, that prince of preachers, once said, "Our task is to turn the gospel loose on people. It's like turning a lion loose on them. This gospel goes where we can't; it knocks and beats on doors that are out of our reach. This gospel can wake people up in the middle of the night and speak to their hearts in such a powerful whisper, but it's much greater than our loudest shouts."

What amazes me is that in Christ we are caretakers of this gospel; we're in possession of it. It's not like this gospel only occasionally works, this gospel always works; and, through God, extends the effectual call, sending irresistible grace. But there is a problem, especially in the evangelical church. This word is hackneyed, some very wrong-headed ideas have become connected to the word gospel, and there's been a loss of interest and confidence in the gospel. In an age when we're not supposed to offend anyone, the gospel does offend. In getting people interested in the gospel, this age is like trying to get people excited about setting up the deck chairs on the Titanic.

So in preaching on the gospel, I've got a problem. There's an old story that comes out of the life of Vince Lombardi, the famous coach for many years of the Green Bay Packers. For years Green Bay was a great team, but on this one occasion they lost to an inferior team, and they lost in a very humiliating way. Lombardi was a man to be feared. So at the end of this embarrassing defeat, Lombardi walked into a very silent locker room carrying a football; walking in he stopped and spoke in a very loud voice. "Gentlemen tomorrow at practice we're going back to the basics." And with that, holding the football high above his head he said, "This is a football."

I sort of feel like Lombardi standing here behind the sacred desk looking into the faces of seasoned saints and daring to talk about something as familiar as the gospel. Yet nothing is of greater importance. The gospel of Jesus Christ answers the most important question of all, how can a person be made right with God; and all of it hinges on three incredible truths found in I Corinthians 15:3.

- 1) That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.
- 2) That Christ was buried.
- 3) That He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

When a person believes this terse Biblical declaration, God brings salvation to the human heart. These three insights represent the essence of the gospel. Our testimony, the story of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, may not gather up those three foundational truths. But if we're ever going to lead a person to Christ, or if anyone is ever to be truly saved, then they must believe on the finished work of Christ. That He died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, was buried, and raised on the third day, according to the scriptures. No one can truly be right with God, no one can truly be saved, no one can be born from above, no one can be changed from a carnal man to a spiritual man, or from a natural man to one born from above, unless they truly believe these essential truths as to Christ's saving activity.

Before I jump into the main points of this message, which might get shared next time, there are a few significant things that need to be stated which I believe are rather poignant. We will call these side roads.

Poignant Side Road # 1

The gospel of Jesus Christ broadens our life.

Take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter one. Many of us have lost our confidence in the gospel, as I've already stated, and we can get it back! Notice that right in chapter 1v1 Paul speaks of being separated or set apart for the gospel of God! When this word 'separated' is transliterated from the Greek into English, it sounds like, 'off horizon'. One of the great works that Christ does in us is that He moves us, 'off horizon' and enlarges our horizons. Paul's old life as a Pharisees, despite his Sanhedrin membership and academic credentials, nevertheless lived a small life - it was all about law and rules; he felt the need to 'out religious others'. And usually Paul didn't feel good about himself unless he could point to others that he was surpassing in such zeal.

But then came the Damascus road experience and the work of the gospel in him and the Lord Jesus Christ enlarged his horizon and gave him new horizons - to stand before Kings and Princes of the earth. Jesus Christ through the gospel changed Paul's life into size large! His life wasn't just about the gospel it was the gospel.

Poignant Side Road #2

This gospel is for everyone, the good, the bad, and the ugly; it's for the least likely and the most difficult and resistant.

Here's why I say this, and it has to do with the incomparable power of the gospel. Look at Roman's chapter 1:17.

But notice the power of this gospel - Romans 1v17 "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation". And beginning in v18, he says, "this gospel is for those that suppress the truth in unrighteousness" - and that is not a passive thing, but an active thing - a deliberate thing; willful sin in light of natural revelation.

In the creation itself God's eternal attributes are to be seen so people are without excuse, v20, so this gospel is for all such people.

It is also for the worst idolaters; it is for those that are the most perverted, those whom God has handed over to reprobation - - even such people can be saved.

Chapter 2 — this gospel saves religious people.

Chapter 3 — this gospel is now the grounds for our new standing in the Lord.

Chapter 4 — declares that even Abraham was a recipient of this gospel and was justified by the work of Christ in the gospel.

Chapter 5 — says this gospel brings peace with God, and exchanges the old life we once had in Adam with a new life found only in Christ.

Chapter 6 — reveals how the gospel makes us slaves to the gospel, and thus free indeed!

Chapter 7 — shows our struggle with sin and how the gospel enables us to prevail.

Chapter 8 — declares that this gospel makes us fellow heirs with Jesus Christ!

Chapter 9, 10, 11 — declares that this gospel will one day bring Israel into saving faith.

Chapter 12 — reveals how this gospel moves us to become living sacrifices, and doing it with gladness. This gospel calls us to be submissive to governmental power;

Chapter 14 — this gospel restrains us;

Chapter 15 — tells us that in this gospel hope springs eternal; and

Chapter 16 — this gospel is the basis of our personal connection with one another.

Poignant Side Road #3

The Gospel is here to stay, and will have a significant spot light in the last hour.

This gospel has eschatological implications - i.e. it will be around to the last hour. In Revelation 14 v6 all of history is ending; it's the final moments of judgement falling on the world, and look what happens; right up to the last moments the gospel of Christ is being offered to a world on the precipice of hell - God bidding all in rebellion to come into saving faith! To the last moments of human existence.

But turn to Matthew 24v14, "and this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come!" God is determined that every nation will be offered His gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ before divine judgement comes and the wrapping up of all human history and the return of the Lord.

Everything the New Testament has to say in terms of redemption and the salvation message is wrapped up in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The entire story of the Bible, the story of redemption, is contained in the gospel. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were all written that we might have greater clarity as to the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the message that unlocks the gates to Paradise; it's through the message of the gospel that we enter into the Kingdom of God. The Bible says that you and I are stewards over this gospel. In other words, we are caretakers for this gospel. We are to love it, speak it, proclaim it, share it, promote it; because through it, Jesus Christ is made known to the world.

Can we really talk? Just this week, I ran into a young Pastor who is not too far from here, he's got a church of about 150, and it's growing. I love young Pastors. I tried to draw him out and help him to know he was talking to a safe person. A seminary trained boy, he just seemed to be so authentic. He said, "I'm preaching twice a week, plus I'm doing a Bible study and it's killing me. Between those three preparations it's 30 hours a week. Plus, we're beginning to develop staff, and it seems like I'm in everything." He said he wasn't sleeping and wasn't getting proper family time; he felt that he was just racing all the time. I said, "Maybe I can help you with that preaching load. Simply take a book of the Bible, and go through it verse by verse, and just follow where it leads you. For example, take John chapter 1, get up and preach on the first 5 verses. The next week, get up, go to John chapter 1, pick it up with verse 6 and do the next 5 verses, sort of preaching the clock as it were."

His eyes widened; his countenance changed – he went to a look of offense. "I would never do that." He said. "I've got to be relevant. I have to find topics that will connect with people; and besides that, they're really not even there for the message, but rather for the music, and I have to meet people where they are." He stared at me. I smiled at him and said, "You have just helped

me to understand your view of scripture. Are you saying that the gospel is irrelevant?" That's when this conversation got creepy. He said, "I don't see it as the primary thing that needs to be touted from the pulpit."

Just stop and think on that for a moment. In the history of Christendom the early church fathers, the Magisterial Reformers, the Puritan Divines, the history of preaching in The Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening, the great moves of God as in the Hebrides Revival and all the revivals that have occurred on the North American Continent; no such mindset regarding the gospel was ever in play. What a seduction has overtaken the church in these last days!

I put something on Facebook a few weeks ago, and I want to read it to you. (I write these short terse little articles.)

"Bret Baer of Fox News recently said that Billy Graham preached the Bible and was incredibly successful, but the culture he ministered in is now gone." Maybe so, but it is not a barrier to the ageless gospel of Christ! Stadiums will soon be filled again for God will always maintain a witness to Himself.

In other words, what Bret Baer was saying, and what many people believe, is that the success of the gospel is subject to how conducive the culture is or isn't towards the things of God, and that is nonsense. But that kind of thinking is indicative of many people in the body of Christ. There is in this hour, a wholesale loss of confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know that it saved us, but we often wonder if it will save others. How often have we looked at a particular person and we didn't even try to share with them anything, or even pray for them, because we just assume, they were too difficult, too sinful, too vile and corrupted to be saved. And we're Bible believing Christians, but redemption's history is the story of the least likely becoming the great saints of Christendom.

There was no greater hellion than **St. Augustine**, but in a garden he heard a child singing, "*Tolle lege, tolle lege*", which is Latin for 'take up and read', he started reading Romans 13:13-14 and God got him. How about that neurotic little monk, Martin Luther? Most thought he was becoming insane, but he figured out the truth of Romans 1:16-17; and that insufferable monk found the gate of Paradise and brought the church out of her Babylonian captivity to Rome. Then there was **John Bunyan**, a walking abomination, the badest of the bad, a brute of a man, dumb and ignorant. But the gospel of Christ tamed his heart and turned him into one of England's greatest evangelists. **John Wesley**, the consummate religionist, a student of the Bible, yet blind to all of its truths. He held a chair of Greek Exegesis at Oxford, but could not find the way of salvation for himself. Satan is a religionist and he fosters religion without Christ, and that was Wesley's condition, and then came Aldersgate and his heart was strangely warmed, and he was given an assurance that Christ had taken away his sins, and he believed unto salvation. Then there was that blonde kid with blue eyes. He dreamed of baseball, his all-consuming passion. He was raised in a Christian home but he had another plan for his life, and then came a tent meeting, and a burly preacher, Mortdecai Hamm pointed at him and said you're lost, and you're empty, without Christ your life will be a vanity. Suddenly this kid was smitten

with the terrors of hell and the corruption of his own heart, his need for a Savior, and that night he received Christ, and with it, a call to preach – I’m talking about **Billy Graham**.

I’m amazed where the gospel goes; it hunts down people in funny places. In June of 1977 I landed at the Sicklerville United Methodist Church. I walked across the campus and witnessed to a long-haired social worker hippie, a pot smoking guy running a meals-on-wheels program out of the church’s old social hall. I led him to Christ. Two days later he was gone. One night in 2011 while having dinner, out of the blue a man called and it was this guy. He tracked me down and said I want to fill in the rest of the story. Two months later his wife became a Christian. They cleaned up their act. They both went off to Bible School and founded an evangelistic association. He said he went from the west coast to the east coast, from the Canadian border to the border with Mexico giving his testimony and preaching Christ, and telling how a blue-eyed blonde haired young Methodist preacher had dared to tell him about Christ. The gospel works, and it goes after all kinds of people. It works in the least likely hearts, and in the most non-conducive places.

I sat in a jail not long ago, ministering to a prisoner there. I told him, “You’re in one of God’s hot spots. You’ll be accused of jailhouse religion. But this is where Jesus Christ does His best work.”, and God has sure worked in that young man’s life. And that’s because, the darker the place, the less conducive the conditions, the more impossible the circumstance this is where the gospel gets its best traction, and you’re never going to know just what this gospel can do until you decide to take it out for a spin.

You think about that! Amen.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF THE GOSPEL

Part II

The Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

3/1/20

Getting a Right View (9)

Galatians 1:6-10

Today, “Getting a Right View of the Gospel Part II. All honest Pastors want their people to come to church and leave happy, and laughing the laughter of the redeemed. So, I hope what happens next doesn’t completely mitigate against that. Elementary School, High School, at the University and Seminary, it happened time and again. You walk into class and the teacher says, ‘Put away your books, take out a pen and a piece of paper, you’re having a pop quiz.’ I always hated that. But worse, you would have to exchange papers and your name would be on it, and someone else would grade it, and then that other person called out your grade; sometimes that could be so humiliating. Today I’m giving you a pop quiz, except you take it in your head ... write out in one sentence the meaning of the gospel.

You know I have a ministerial friend who at the outset of his sermon handed out a piece of paper and a pen and told people to answer the question I just asked, sign their name to it and exchange papers. Then he read an acceptable answer, and only 4 out of 121 people even came close to answering the question correctly. By the way he suffered a season of disfavor for doing that. But no one ever forgot that sermon.

So someone walks up to you and says, tell me succinctly, ‘What is the gospel?’ – How would you answer? Today we’re going to answer that question. To get us started turn to the book of Romans. I mentioned this last time in only a cursory way. Notice in Romans chapter 1:1 Paul speaks of himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, or slave, and that he walked in the office of an Apostle, having been separated, or set apart for the ‘gospel of God’. Paul was called by Jesus Christ to stand before Kings and Princes and preach the everlasting gospel. Notice here he speaks of the ‘gospel of God’, and by that phrase he does not mean the gospel about God, but rather the gospel that is the ‘possession’ of God. This is written in the genitive case, and so the phrase, ‘gospel of God’ means that this gospel belongs entirely to God. God initiated it and God composed it; it is God’s invention, and by His composition He has given us truth which He Himself owns.

We need to stop right here for a moment. **Given the fact that the gospel, in its entirety, is the possession of God, and He created it; means that we must never, never, never, never, never, ever mess with it.** It is not to be tinkered with, adjusted, or accommodated to culture, it is never to be softened, toned down, declawed or tamed. In this very hour this gospel belongs to God, and we are only stewards of it. This gospel is entirely owned, lock stock, and barrel, by the living God. It is His in its entirety. He determined the content of the gospel, the essence of the gospel, and we have to accept it as such, preach, proclaim it and share it for what it is.

In Martin Luther's last sermon, the man that we call the Father of the Protestant Reformation, the sermon he preached in February of 1546, He said that of all beings in the Universe the most impoverished teacher, and the teacher to be most pitied, is God Himself; because in Luther's day there were seemingly countless multitudes of clerics and ecclesiastics, philosophers and would be intellectuals, who tried to teach God that His gospel was far less than perfect, and that it needed to be improved. Oh, the height of human hubris! Poor God tried hard, but couldn't get the gospel right, and so now churchmen high and low, and I mean in our time, are now seeking to improve this gospel. But any so-called 'improvement' is a mutation, and it brings swift retribution.

Paul was sovereignly commissioned to invest his life in proclaiming that gospel. Paul speaks of the gospel of God, but he also speaks of it as the gospel of God's Son Jesus Christ. The gospel that we are to proclaim is the possession of Jesus, and Jesus Christ is the heart of the content of the gospel. This term gospel gets bandied about very loosely in today's church. I know many preachers who say they preach the gospel every Sunday, but listen to their sermons and there's very little gospel in what they are speaking forth. It's almost as if the word gospel now is used to describe a preacher's sermon in general, without respect to content. But the truth is one can certainly preach, and even use some scripture, and yet not be preaching the gospel.

This word 'gospel' comes from the Greek word, *euangelion*; it has the prefix, 'eu', which comes into English in a variety of words. We talk about euphonic, or euphonious, which refers to something that sounds good. Or we have the word eulogy, which means a good word pronounced or spoken about someone at a funeral service. The point is that the prefix, 'eu' refers to something good or pleasant. The word 'angelos', or 'angelion', is the word for 'message'. Angels are messengers, and an angelos is one who delivers a message. The word euangelion, means good news, or a good message, and it has a rich background in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the word gospel simply meant the announcement of a good message. If a doctor attended to a patient only to discover that the so-called diseased person was really not that ill, and the problem was really nothing that serious, then that was good news.

In ancient days when armies went out to war, those left behind would be anxiously awaiting the marathon runners to dash back from the battlefield, hopefully with a good report of victory. This is what Isaiah had in mind when he wrote, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. (Isaiah 52:7) By the way, the watchmen who kept a sharp eye looking for these marathon runners were well trained to tell by the way these runner's legs were churning, whether the news was good or bad. Well this is the concept of the gospel in a rudimentary sense.

Then we come to the New Testament and we find that the word gospel is used in three distinctive ways. First, we call Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, New Testament books – gospels; and in this sense it describes a particular form of literature. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the term gospel was not particularly linked to the person of Jesus, but with the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist for example, was introduced in Matthew's gospel as one who came preaching the gospel saying, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Or in Mark's gospel, we're told that Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God. (The reason that Matthew

would speak of the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven was that he was writing to Jews, and they felt constrained to pronounce the name of God.) So this is why John ‘the Presbyterian’ would often say, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”. Now when Jesus spoke of the gospel it always bespoke of the dramatic moment in history when the Kingdom of God broke into time and space in the form of the Messiah. The good news was that God, and His Kingdom was among them in the person of Jesus Christ.

Can we really talk? There is a form of Christianity wherein believers are waiting for the Kingdom of God to come upon the earth; yet the fullness of that Kingdom is present in Jesus Christ. Where Christ is, the Kingdom is. Christ in His fullness is the Kingdom of God, and the good news was the good news of the Kingdom.

By the time the epistles were written, especially the Pauline epistles, the term gospel had taken on a new shade of understanding. It had become the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this gospel had a clear content to it. At the heart of this gospel was the announcement of who Jesus was and what He had accomplished in His lifetime, in His atoning death and resurrection.

All of us have a testimony, and if we say to our neighbors something like, ‘Three years ago I became a Christian and I gave my heart to Jesus, then we are certainly bearing witness to Jesus and that’s a good thing, but if that’s as far as it goes, then we’re not telling them the gospel, because the gospel is not about us. The gospel is about Jesus – what He did, His perfect obedience to the law, a righteousness, which by the way, is imputed to us the moment we believe in Christ, not to mention the cleansing of His shed blood on the cross. The gospel speaks of His atoning death and His resurrection from the dead. These are the crucial elements, or the objective aspects of the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel, when duly preached, reveals how we can be brought into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

I’ve told you the story about a man named Bob Berglund, who is probably in Heaven now. He was the head of the department of preaching at Duke Divinity school, and he liked me a lot. I’d been at the University church about a month when it was announced I was going to preach, and he presupposed that I was scared. But he was wrong. Brother I was terrified! I was greeting people in the back of the church the Sunday before I was to preach, and in his big burly southern accent he said, “Brother Ed, I see you’re going to preach next Sunday. Don’t try to preach to the theologians, but rather find a text and preach to yourself.” - Which proved to be counsel worth a seminary education in my life – something I do to this very day.

We became friends, every Monday I’d go over to the Seminary at Duke University and I generally would hang out with Dr. John Rubin, Professor of Liturgics, and/or Dr. Berglund. We were having lunch one day and Dr. Berglund said to me, “You’re going to be preaching again in about 3 weeks. Are you planning on preaching the gospel?” And he qualified it for clarity’s sake, “Preaching on the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which must be believed in order to be saved.” I said yes; and I told him that the title of my message was simply called, “Understanding the Gospel.” He said to me, “Then gird your loins, Brother Ed, that just doesn’t get preached around here, but you preach it, and I’ll have your back.” So I got in the pulpit, in my 24-year-old wisdom, and I held forth. And by the end of that week I sure needed

his back. It created no small stir, and I think some were ready to send me back to Princeton. It's always amazed me how offensive the gospel can really be, this good news about Jesus Christ, but inherent in the gospel is the message that one is not ok, that one needs to repent and believe on Christ, and can be saved through the meritorious work of Jesus on the cross — and that's good news that some can do without, or so they think.

Listen very carefully, if I were on my deathbed, and I don't know who will be around me when that day comes, but if I had to make a final sentence before departing from this life, this is what I would say – “Make your calling and election sure”. ‘Make sure that you have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that you have complied with His mandates.’

Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Galatians. Turn to chapter 1, and in a moment, I'm going to begin reading in verse 6. Paul had poured himself out to the believers scattered throughout the churches of Galatia, but something had gone wrong; there had been a failure to apprehend the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and so he writes,

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are now turning to a different gospel – Not that there is one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from Heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again; if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

Do you understand what Paul is saying here – this gospel is to be valued, treasured, loved, guarded. Only the true gospel of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, truly transforms and connects us with the great heart of the eternal Christ. A truncated gospel is another gospel, a softened gospel is another gospel. A gospel that is light is another gospel. A gospel that denies the need for repentance is another gospel. The gospel that says that we're nice people and that Christ died to make us nicer, is another gospel. The gospel that says that we don't need to change is another gospel. The gospel that says you can believe on Jesus and not give up real sin, is another gospel. The gospel that endorses a sinful lifestyle is another gospel. The gospel that says you can be born from above or made acceptable with God by bypassing Jesus Christ is another gospel, and woe unto those who preach another gospel.

Telling people to simply accept Jesus is not an acceptable gospel invitation. To believe on Jesus and to have no idea of His life, that is, why He came; of His death, i.e. the cruelties and punishments that were inflicted upon Him in His passion, to know nothing of what He was accomplishing for us on the cross, to have no idea of the significance of the resurrection, and to simply tell people to believe on Jesus is not only not preaching the gospel, it means that the one doing so will be accursed. The curse here that Paul pronounces is a curse of final judgment on those who would do such a thing. This gospel is not our possession so that Christ becomes a ticket to the good life, to success and wealth. It has nothing to do with that.

This gospel is God's way of opening a new way in these last days, so that all men can be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Let me say some important things about the gospel.

- 1) **The Gospel of God is incarnational and undeniable.** By that I mean that the gospel is rooted in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who was with the Father before the world was wasing. And in His condescending grace, not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped, He set aside His divine prerogatives and came among us as the babe born in Bethlehem. He came to live the life we could not live, to die the death we deserved to die, and to raise in victory over the enemies we could not conquer, namely sin and death. It is the message of the gospel that all who believe on Christ will be born again, a message which Paul says is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.
- 2) **The Gospel of God is universal and personal.** The gospel is universal in scope; it is for all tribes, nations, and peoples, and it's a gospel that calls in to the darkness and issues of our lives. In I Timothy 1:15, Paul says ... "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost." Paul was a great Christ hater, a destroyer of the church. A man married to religion, and yet an enemy of God. There are many in our churches in the same condition; but Paul's unsettled heart, darkened and carnal, despite the religion of his forefathers was shattered when through the gospel his heart was open to understand his need for Jesus Christ. Here is an undeniable truth. Resisting the gospel does not dismantle its call, or His voice. Here is something that is absolutely impossible to do – no one can outrun the gospel; you cannot run away from the gospel. No one can silence the gospel. No one can dismantle the gospel.
- 3) **Thirdly, the gospel is indestructible and enduring.** We speak of the gospel program, and that the way to be saved is faith in Jesus, this plan of God to save the world by placing one's faith on Jesus Christ who died an atoning death so that all who would believe on Him would be saved, will continue as the only way of salvation until the Kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. It's my favorite verse in the book of Revelation. In chapter 14:6, as the world is ending and God is bringing down the curtain on all of human history; in the final fleeting moments, as multiplied millions are about to experience judgement and eternal reprobation, there is seen in the heavens, an angel flying, proclaiming the everlasting gospel. The book of Revelation bears witness that when Jesus the Lamb of God is seen in Heaven, He bears in His body yet the scars of redemption, the terrors of Calvary and the suffering therein.
- 4) **But not only is the gospel of God incarnational and undeniable, universal and personal, indestructible and unending, it remains also a convicting gospel and utterly efficacious.** Darkness within the human bosom cannot remain undisturbed when the gospel is proclaimed. On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached Jesus Christ, we're told of that multitude that they were pricked of their heart and said, "What must we do to be saved?" When the gospel is proclaimed it is efficacious, it's effective. A

preacher like myself can preach the gospel, yet that can be resisted. How often I have preached and watched people resist, but when God extends the effectual call, then that grace is irresistible, the most hardened heart gives way, the eyes of one's understanding is opened and they see that they stand condemned before a holy God.

- 5) **Fifthly, the gospel of God then is incarnational and undeniable, universal and personal, indestructible and unending, convicting and efficacious; but also, defensible and triumphant.** Beloved you and I as stewards of this gospel must defend this gospel. We must fight for the gospel in our lives. The devil and all the minions of hell with their enticements, seductions, deceptions, ploys stratagems, schemes and devices, will never stop in their unrelenting attacks and warfare against us. But you and I are to stand in this grace. It is the gospel of Christ that has brought life change and transformation. It is the gospel of Christ that has tucked us away in the heart of our redeemer so that we are shielded, protected, preserved, and made strong to prevail against the wiles of the devil. Through faith in the gospel we put on the whole armor of God; and it is the unsearchable riches that come to us from this gospel that causes Christ to be our chief delight, and we must fight for this gospel in our churches. In I Timothy 1:20 Paul speaks of two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander; men to be removed from the church and thus be handed over to Satan for they were enemies of the gospel. The gospel is to be defended and delighted in. Peter says we should be able to give a reason for the hope that is within us. We are called upon to put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
- 6) **The Gospel of God then is incarnational and undeniable, universal and personal, indestructible and unending, convicting and efficacious, defensible and triumphant, and finally, it is barrier resistant and foolishness exposing.** What do I mean barrier resistant? I simply mean that you can't keep the gospel out. A person can turn away, judge it all as religious nonsense; yet the gospel follows in their wake; like a specter in a haunted house, it's forever there, closing in, drawing the noose tighter and tighter. The gospel is the unrelenting voice of Jesus, seeking to penetrate the heart, forever crying out 'These things are so'. The gospel can carry on a warfare against the most hardened. The Holy Spirit is unrelenting in how he beats on the door of our hearts, holding up the gospel with all of its promise of reconciliation with God. This gospel will go where we can't, speak to hearts when those people are closed off to us. This gospel not only competes, but overcomes all other affections in the human heart; after all it's "the power of God unto salvation".

Moreover, this gospel is foolishness exposing. It's amazing how sophisticated things can sound then suddenly they sound stupid. For example, the pseudo scholar who basks in naturalistic evolutionary thought and philosophy; 'man, in every way and every day is getting better and better', and you wonder what world he's living in. Man is corrupted and fallen. It's stupid to believe that through the millennia man is improving; to the contrary he is corrupted, toxic, barbarous in his unregenerate nature, and self-absorbed. Indeed, man is an enemy of God in his will, his emotions, his mind, and intellect. Only a

nit-wit could really believe such foolishness, such nonsense about the nobility of the nature of man. Hasn't anyone read the *Lord of the Flies*. A culture of kids created their own community and nothing but savagery prevailed. The depravity, the sensuality, the vulgarity that often gets expressed by the human heart bears witness to the truthfulness of the gospel. Man is a rebel, a sinner, and his own soul is a repository of incredible wickedness.

The gospel is so great, it brings perspective. It shows us the truth about man and the nonsense he would hide behind, and the only sure way of redemption. The gospel separates truth from error and wisdom, instead of a darkened understanding. The person saturated in nonsense will not long remain there when the gospel is turned loose on them. Beloved an offended sinner that gets saved is better than a sinner wrapped in foolishness who is eternally lost. There are those who say, I'm a good person, but Jesus says there are none good but God, God's standard is perfection, and the gospel offers us Jesus Christ who can become our perfection, our perfect righteousness, if we will believe on Him. The Bible says it is God who justifies. This gospel tells us that there's a way back to God.

Close your Bibles. Way back in 1987 through a friend I was invited to lead a men's conference in New England. We met in Vermont at Dartmouth, and men came from all over New England. I took a stack of sermons and prayed that God would help me to get it together as I was to preach 3 times a day for 3 days. On Saturday night they asked me to specifically address men's issues. But the issue that I really developed the most was challenging each man to make their calling and election sure. In other words, to make sure that they had authentically responded to the gospel offer. I made it very clear that the gospel was the power of God, and that no one was too bad for the Lord. I gave the invitation and a lot of men came forward, and then I gave the invitation again and others came forward. I asked other men to come and gather around any men that they knew and pray for them.

Then I gave another invitation and this big burley guy with hair and beard that looked like Santa Claus came down the aisle, he stopped suddenly and looked right into my face, then got down on all fours and started crawling up to the platform. This guy was huge, he crawled up 3 or 4 steps into the Chancel area, put his arms around my legs, started weeping profusely and kissing my feet; he would not let go. A few other men came and gathered around us, and the man went from crying to nearly wailing, and all I could do was say over him, "Jesus do your work".

This went on for maybe 15 minutes. Then I was able to kneel down beside him and this is what he said ... "I've been a homosexual all my life, and I believe tonight I have been delivered and set free. For the first time I feel that I'm really saved and that Jesus Christ really loves me, for the first time in my life I know what the gospel is, and it's done something incredible within me." Suddenly there were 7 or 8 men all down on their knees, all hugging him and hugging one another, and they were even kissing one another.

Well beloved, that kind of confession just sort of took the lid off the can. Others down front began to confess; first this one and that one ... ‘I have not been a good husband’ ... ‘I’ve not been a faithful husband’ ... ‘I’ve neglected my children’ ... ‘I have a pornography addiction’ ... ‘I’ve had affairs’ ... ‘I have a gambling addiction’ ... ‘I’m a hypocrite’ ... ‘I need to fall back in love with my wife’ — things got really intense and really emotional, and all I could do was think, “Lord what on earth do I do now?” And the Lord said, “You’ve done enough thank you.” Then God said, “Behold what I’m doing, this is the gospel of God, this is what the gospel of Jesus Christ does when it is preached. Nobody wanted it to end. All were basking in the afterglow.

I was so tired. I thought someone would need to get a scoop shovel and scoop me up; and then suddenly these guys, these students from Dartmouth, started coming in; I guess they found out that this was some type of Christian Conference. I started praying with a student here and a student there; and there were those that believed on Christ.

Then they started worshipping, and guys wanted to give their testimony, and then other men started responding to those giving their testimony. We had started at 7:30 that night and it was 1:30 in the morning. I’m a Presbyterian soul. An hour and 15 minutes is plenty for me. This turned into something unbelievable, and the Lord kept saying to me, “Behold this is what the gospel of Jesus Christ can do.”

Because of that night some children got a new daddy, some wives got a new husband, some men were disconnected from debilitating sin and were made whole, because of the gospel that night there were men who for the first time had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a night, what a memory, and more importantly, **what a gospel we have!**

Amen.

GETTING A RIGHT VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Part II

The Rev. Dr. R. Edgar Bonniwell

Genesis 29:15-30

Today, Part II of *Getting a Right View of Marriage*. I want us to make some house calls and drop in at 1 Eden Place, checking out Adam and Eve on the aftermath of the fall. I want us to take a look at marital conflict between Moses and his wife, and make a brief stop at the home of Jacob and the woman who truly loved him, Leah. But first, I want us to go down a few important side roads that I didn't get to address last week because I ran out of time.

Side Road #1

One big side road relates to the issue of space. I had a man and a woman in my last church for whom I performed the marriage, each of them had previously lost their spouse, both were godly Christians. They seemed to have had a good courtship, and everything was promising. A little over a year after they were married, I got a call from her, "Pastor I'm really suffering. Initially I didn't know what to think about it, but now I will divorce him if he can't change."

That was pretty strong language. We met and she poured out her heart. "I am married to a human shadow. If I go to the kitchen he's right there, literally hip to hip, if I go outside to work at my garden he comes right out and kneels beside me, when I go up to take a shower he's hovering by the door. I'm not making this up; it's like I'm married to a creepy crawler. He wants to be with me every minute." I asked her, "Have you tried to talk with him about this? She said oh yes, but he's not changing. She said, I've even started being really direct and I've told him to join some clubs, make some male friends. I've told him to get out of the house and go shooting with you, all to no avail; I'm being suffocated." I said, "I'll meet with him."

Believe you me there's never been a sweeter man, therefore I spoke so gentle and kind, but I spoke forthrightly. Can you imagine how I felt, when after he listened to me so patiently, he said, "Absolutely not, I am to be with her at all times. This is one of my strong and unique ideas about marriage." I said, "Let me see if I can help you get your mind right, because your marriage is about to end.", and I gave him a Dutch Uncle speech. I said, "I'm going to hold you accountable because you are wounding your wife and she is getting angry, she is getting cold to you in every way." He tried his best, but he just couldn't get there. So I got him into clinical counseling.

Do you realize he struggled tremendous guilt when he wasn't right with her every minute? The clinician said there are abandonment issues here. His wife was instructed to speak forthrightly to him. While there was some slight improvement, he never got there. Then he became very ill, and when he had to be put into a home, the anxiety of separation pushed him right over the edge, he came apart at the middle emotionally speaking. How often she said to me, I would never have married him had I known he would be like this. That is a severe

example; the worst I've ever known, but in its broader applications, space is necessary in a healthy marriage.

Now let me illustrate something out of my own life. In my first marriage, my wife wasn't very interested in food. She was tiny and petite and would go out shopping, be out all day on a Saturday, when she would come home, I would say, "What did you have for lunch?" Often she would say, "I forgot.", but when she would cook, she'd want me right there in the kitchen on stand-by. I was to be like a scrub nurse to a surgeon ... dish ... fork ... butter ... paper towel ... Now I married Billie the artist, who brings all of that creativity right in the kitchen, who tells me that when she is there it becomes a, 'no man's land'. When she's cooking, she wouldn't care if I went to Texas for the day. She requires space.

You know what? We all do! Imagine me trying to write a sermon with Billie sitting in my small study ... I couldn't do it. We all need time to ourselves, and it's a wise spouse who selflessly encourages their spouse to take time for themselves. I think of Isaac, a passive man, digger of wells, but he was frequently found alone in the field meditating. He loved his young wife Rebekah. But I'm quite confident that he had continued his practice of being alone and being meditative certain parts of the day.

Side Road #2

Another area I want to address has to do with surprises. In the best of marriages there are always surprises. Some surprises in a marriage can be a high hurdle. Many challenging surprises could be avoided if we took a different approach to courtship and marriage. For example, in a Christian marriage, boy meets girl and boy is smitten because girl is beautiful to his eyes, and in a relentless pursuit he chases after her and wins her heart and they get married.

But that's not how it worked in the time of Jesus, first there was the engagement period. The couple would date, and if there was love and romance, in a sense that one wanted to share their life forever with this person, they would get engaged. Then came the betrothal. It would be announced publicly, and celebrated that Mr. Joseph is Miss Mary's husband, and that they are a couple. They would live together, but with supervision. There had to be sexual purity, and the betrothal was at least a period of three months. They would decorate their home, discuss how many children they wanted to have. All that togetherness would reveal one another's idiosyncrasies, or irritating habits. This was a period where they were to get to know one another emotionally, and during this period they were talking constantly with their Rabbi. Then if they could get past whatever issues, surprises, or struggles they might have with one another they would get married. I really wish we had a betrothal period in our modern day of courtship.

I hate to bring this up, but when I got engaged, with the permission of the elders I moved her into my home, and I moved out. During the day I would go there and work and have meals, then by 8 every night I was out of there. It was during that period that my eyes were opened to see things that I knew I could never live with. And even worse, I became badly frightened, when I called it off, I was nearly destroyed. But it was a decision that I never regretted for a millisecond. I know I hurt that person, and I've never wanted to hurt anyone, but that is what

happened, and it was something like this betrothal period that literally saved my life, and I've been encouraging it now with the handful of people that I have married since 2015.

Now brace yourselves, because surprises do come. I've always thought of myself as a simple man, and I try to market myself to Billie like that, but in her journey with me she will tell you that I'm complex. She will also tell you that I give her lots of freedom, that I serve her, honor and adore her, and I'm not moody. Moreover, she never anticipated a man verbose and wordy. She likes it that I'm a guy that cleans up after himself, and cleans the house; that I like to shop with her and am into women's fashions. But I live in my head, I'm very cerebral and rational, I'm reflective; and in the last 5 years I've become much more sanguine, not easily ruffled. In other words, I'm different. The word might be 'eccentric' in some places.

I'm used to dealing with a lot of differentness. In some ways that's the whole business and challenge of ministry, but there are surprises, and there's only one antidote, and that is a reliance on Christ to help us stretch, bear with one another; with a willingness to let things fester. You might even give your spouse permission to help you grow, so Billie would say to me, "Now when you do this, I would like you to be mindful of..." So a little instruction sometimes is a great deal of instruction. The point is, surprises need not lead to shipwreck, a severing or a tearing of that relationship.

Side roads are done, let's make some house calls.

First, let's drop into 1 Eden Place. Adam and Eve as a married couple are no longer living in Paradise. And now what we have are two sinners that are trying to make a life, and make a home for themselves. Adam is making a living by the sweat of his brow, and while they love each other there's a kind of conflict – Genesis 3:12, she has a desire to rule over her husband, and that same word is used by God to Cain that sin had a desire to rule over him. So she is opposing his priesthood, and he is seeking to rule and control her. And to a greater or lesser degree this is going on in every home.

I was asked not too long ago, "What's it really like for you over at the parsonage?" And I answered, "Like every other man I'm negotiating for all I'm worth." The centrality of Christ in a marriage is absolutely essential. So often it takes a deliberate act of the will in utter self-surrender in order to accommodate the other person. But my friend, it is in the losing of our life that we find it. To know that your spouse is in your corner, the safe harbor, someone that will understand, that will love us unconditionally, is to have a gift from Heaven. We can't live in the world and get beat up, and then come home and be beat up. We even have to be careful how we ventilate to our spouses; it's something we all do, but we need to be careful because it can make them feel like it's their fault. In the book of Proverbs, we read about the woman who tears down her own house with her own hands – now what does that mean? It means she satiates her home with hatefulness, with ill will, and may I add this; we're all Adam's kin, we all have wounds, and we tend to try to wound others given how we were wounded! Are you listening? It's so easy for a father whose dad was very hard on him for that father to turn around and be very hard on his own son.

Many years ago, I was driving James Robinson the evangelist around the city for three days. He was an illegitimate child and never had a daddy. It made him angry, but then he came to Christ in his mid-teen years, he would go forward in services, kneel at the altar rail and tell God to take all his anger. I remember we were parked and he was sharing, he said to me, "I've asked the Father to hasten the day when I will hear a daughter, or my little son, calling me daddy. I want to be a daddy the way Jesus has been a father and a daddy to me." And then he said it happened, and that he had children that loved him so much. We don't have to pass along our woundedness, our emotional crippings. There's a cross sufficient for all of our angers and terrible damaged memories. Christ knows how to preempt that stuff and then set us free with love as Christ loved us.

Now listen very carefully, Adam and Eve could have spent the rest of their life reproaching each other, blaming and shaming one another, and they did some of that – "Lord it was the woman that you gave to me; it was all her fault. She's the one that gave me the forbidden fruit to eat." And then of course Eve blamed the serpent; but they got past that and came to terms with their own sinfulness and selfishness, and decided that they would love and celebrate what they had together rather than make war on one another. And that right there is a formula for a good marriage.

Let's jump over to Goshen and drop in on Moses and his wife. Turn to Exodus chapter 4:24 ff. You recall that Moses had been raised by an Egyptian princess, Pharaoh's daughter, and had been advantaged by an elitist upbringing, the best of schools, he was certainly an ivy leaguer. And because his own mother, through God's providential interventions, was actually his wet nurse and au pair, Moses had a sense of his own identity. There came that day when he killed an Egyptian task master, defending one of his Hebrew countrymen, and then he had to flee for his life; Pharaoh had put a bounty on his head, so Moses fled to the land of Midian. He was brought to the household of Jethro who ultimately became Moses' father-in-law, he met Zipporah and they ultimately married.

Moses was a very cultured man, probably an exciting man to be with, and he settled down and lived there for 40 years. Then came the burning bush and his commission by God. And like every experience of God, it was transformative, and like the Apostle Paul, God called Moses to be obedient to a new Heavenly vision. You see God had seen the oppression and abuse of His people. So out from the burning bush God said, "I've seen the suffering of my people by reason of their task masters, and I've come down to deliver them." God called Moses that very day.

For 40 years he and his wife lived together in relative serenity and then at age 80 that's when Moses and his marriage got exciting; the exodus was on. God gave The Covenant, and the sign of that covenant was circumcision, and of course we lead by example. The religion of Yahweh was very new for Zipporah, so Moses has to circumcise his son, but Moses' wife laid down the law. Not many men want to deal with a hostile wife, and Moses halted, and the war was on, and no matter which translation you look at, at a minimum you can declare that God was really ticked at Moses for putting obedience to his wife above obedience to Himself. That's a hard place to be in, and it's a dangerous place to be in. So, Moses experiences God's wrath and our English Bibles state this as God trying to kill him.

Let's look at the text here, notice that Zipporah is the one who does the circumcising. Here's the story, Exodus 4:24-26; ⁴ *At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.* ²⁵ *Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!"* ²⁶ *So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.* She could not grasp the significance for this covenant sign that the Lord was creating a new people for Himself. Nor could she grasp that this was to be a sign of a deeper work of God in the human heart. She needed to be catechized, instructed and apparently Moses failed to be a good Priest at this point, and he got himself caught between the demands of God and the disapproval of his wife. So now Moses has a screaming infant and a wife that's fit to kill him. This was not a happy moment.

This Raises Two Issues. **# 1, a man's Priesthood in the home,** and **#2 How do we handle conflict in a marriage?**

#1 First of all, let me speak to the issue of Priesthood. For a married Christian man, God says you are a Priest in your home. God will hold you responsible for the spiritual direction of your home. If your kids are not nurtured in the love and knowledge of Jesus Christ, God will chasten you for it. If you are not a Priest over your wife, loving her as Christ loved the church, God will chasten you for it. If you, as a Christian man, have a big secret life and secret sin, and you have no heart to be a Priest in your family, God will chasten you for it. But now listen to this, when you take the leadership role encouraging your family in faithful church worship, when you pray over your wife, when you seek to model Christian virtues in your home, when you extend longsuffering love and kindness; and you yourself, as a man, do your best to live close to the heart of God, to love God's Word, and to love his Pastors, the Lord will bless you immensely, and will bless your home.

Years ago, I preached a sermon called, *Lost Priesthood Of Fathers*, and I had one man in particular who said, "My wife will not let me be a Priest in our home. I don't understand her spirituality, because as godly as she thinks she is, she's not very forgiving, and most of the time she's not very warm towards me, and she hardly will come under my spiritual leadership, so what do I do?" I said to him ... "If I tell you what to say to her will you say it?" He said yes. "Tell her this, 'I am the Priest of this home, and I will function as a Priest, and if you are in rebellion you will not be under the hedge of protection and blessing that God would otherwise bring to you through me.', and then you qualify it with these words; 'I will lay my life down for you, if I can be a better husband, tell me how. I need to be close to you, intimate with you, but if you push me away and despise the role that God has ordained for me in this house, then the Lord's quarrel will not be with me, but it will be with you.'"

Now let me tell you what happened in that home, it didn't change one thing in that woman's life, and then before she knew it, women in her Bible Study were upset with her, her relationships at work started to breakdown. Her kids became dismissive of her dominating leadership; she became more distressed and more angry, and all that anger got turned inward and she went right into depression and nearly had a breakdown. Her husband kept taking the responsibility as a Priest. Finally, she submitted to it, and their marriage took on a newness that it never had had.

Saints, I've seen the scenario many times in 50 years of marriage. To exercise your spiritual leadership might mean your wife shouting at you ... "You are a bloody husband to me." But in the long run God will honor it. A Priesthood is not Caesar-ship. You are the head of your family as a Pastor is the head of a church. Your derived authority is born of loving and serving your wife and children with charity, goodwill, and extraordinary kindness. A man that's willing to lose his life for the sake of his family, to put each one of them above himself, is the kind of Priesthood that God will honor.

#2 How do we handle conflict in a marriage? Often we resort to name calling or someone locks themselves in the bathroom, or worse yet someone leaves. But in a true Christian marriage, those options do not exist. If a Christian woman has a true Christian man, who lives out his faith, who loves his wife as Christ loved the church, then she needs to heed his priesthood, he may not always get it right, but it will always carry the approbation of God and he will get it right. In the heat of the moment most of us lose perspective and we always lose sight of the bigger issue, namely protecting our spouse and seeking what's best for them.

Finally, let's make a house call at 1445 Paddan-aram Street in upper Mesopotamia. Young Jacob had fled from his family, having stolen the birthright from his brother. His mother Rebekah warned Jacob of the murderous hate in his brother Esau's heart, and she counselled him to flee to her brother Laban in Haran. He did just that.

When Jacob met Laban's daughter Rachel, he apparently greeted her with a kiss, and wanted more. The Word says Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance, and Jacob noticed. It makes women nuts, but the man that married you did so because you are beautiful in his eyes. We are visual as men, we are superficial. With every girl I ever dated I was never moved to ask them if they were a good marksman, an excellent cook, housekeeper, decorator, or anything else. Most men want a substantive lady, but most men like a girly girl, a feminine woman who is an absolute looker; and when Jacob looked at Rachel, he saw that she was beautiful in form and appearance. She had that 'come here' look to be sure.

Rachel had a sister – Leah; the Word says her eyes were weak, meaning her eyes were soft, and this is often interpreted to mean that she was somewhat cross-eyed, or the eyes were not aligned properly. We've all met people like that, and it can put one off. There were no corrective glasses or surgery in that time period. Jacob served Laban 7 years for Rachel and on his wedding night Jacob apparently had one too many Jack Daniels. In the dark he snuggled in close, and in the morning, he found himself having been with Leah and not Rachel. And for the first time, Jacob whose name means deceiver, was deceived himself, and so he was married to Leah. A new deal was struck, and after a week Rachel became his wife, but then he had to serve 7 more years. During that time both women began to compete for his attentions. Initially Rachel was barren.

Now listen to this, Genesis 29:31, the Lord saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Like Polaroid pictures popping out of those old cameras, Leah pushed out Ruben, Simeon, and Levi. She became like a baby maker. The Word tells us God gave her children and favored her because her husband did not. Then Rachel gave Jacob her

servant Bilhah, she bore Jacob a son, Dan, then she bore him a second son Naphtali. Then Leah took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob. She bore Jacob a son named Gad, then she bore another son named Asher. Then Leah again conceived a fifth son and she called his name Issachar. Then Leah conceived again and brought forth a sixth son and called his name Zebulun, then she had a daughter named Dinah.

Ultimately Jacob had to flee Laban, but Jacob's heart always ran to Rachel. We come to Genesis chapter 35 and we find Rachel in a hard labor, a midwife said, "You have a son". Sadly, Rachel died in childbirth, but the little infant survived and was named Benjamin. The years that followed were really tough times for Jacob; he wrestled with God and was broken by the Lord. He had heartbreak and hard times because of the disobedience of his sons, but there was someone there loving him ... Leah was still his wife. From the day of Rachel's death, you never hear of Leah reproaching her husband or challenging him, but she was there filling up the empty places, loving a man who never really loved her as he should have. You might say, a man who used her, or pleased himself with her; but she was faithful, and stood by his side through all the terrible vicissitudes that fell to old Jacob between Genesis chapter 35 and Genesis chapter 49.

Then we read in Genesis 49:31, this took place at a field east of Mamre in the land of Canaan ... "There they buried Abraham and Sarah, his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah." Her name comes rolling off of the lips of Jacob, for so many years she was the quintessential godly woman; who lived and whose only purpose was to love, serve, and bless the husband of her dreams. I believe that Jacob finally came to understand what he had lost. And dear ones, that's the story in too many marriages. Right now is the time to love your spouse, because tomorrow you might just be under the covers alone.

You think about that! Amen.