

070311 A Matter of Life and Death 22/10 March 11, 2007GG
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Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 22, [Nu 10](#) March 11, 2007GG

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And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. ([Ro 8:10-11](#))

Our sinful human nature often manifests a sinful focus on the faults of others more than with self. If we sin, our culture looks the other way and even praises us so long as we can get away with it, but if someone whom we dislike sins, and the sin becomes public, we feel wholly justified in harsh judgments and condemnations of that person. Within the Christian community a similar focus often appears in a judgmental emphasis on others. If you happen to meet a Christian in a public place passing out tracts or otherwise trying to "witness" to strangers, do not be surprised if the professing Christian presumes that every person he/she meets is lost, but they have the way to help you get saved. In last week's chapter I quoted what has almost become a cliché in certain Christian circles; when in discussion with a person of a different belief, the judgmental Christian will arrogantly profess, "There is only one difference between you and me; my sins are forgiven, but yours are not."

This same "keep the focus on others" in judgment attitude also appears in more conservative theological circles under the guise of the professing Christian's claim of the profound insight by which he/she seems nearly obsessed with either giving other people assurance of their salvation—or as the case is more often— withholding that assurance and judging the person as not being saved at all. A study of assurance in the New Testament leaves one wondering where these self-appointed judges have any Biblical sense that they possess either such insight into the secrets of other men's hearts, as well as where they claim to find the Biblical authority to put themselves in this role. Scripture affirms that God gives us assurance in the gospel, and especially through the abundant evidences of Jesus' deity and resurrection. Scripture even indicates that as we live in obedience to the teachings of Scripture we may assure our hearts before God (Likely the experience of personal assurance is the point in this passage; [1Jo 3:18-19](#)), but it seems surprisingly quiet regarding one man standing in the seat of judgment and presuming to have the knowledge and/or ability to give or withhold assurance from others. To this increasingly arrogant and offensive practice I would direct those who presume the role to a simple passage of inspired Scripture, "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" ([Jas 4:12](#))

What is the Biblical criteria for our perception of our spiritual state—of whether we belong to God's family or not? Paul joins a long list of inspired writers in our study passage in his assessment of an internal criteria that exists between God and His own child, not some brand burned in the regenerate elect person's forehead for all to see externally. The single and decisive factor that determines a person's spiritual state is the indwelling Christ. Notice Paul's emphasis in our study verses, "*And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin....*" I may observe certain external evidences of God's grace in you, but the fact of the indwelling Holy Spirit is something I cannot know. That fact is known only to God and to you!

I do not in any way deny that regeneration alters a person's moral compass, and to some extent that incredible change will manifest itself in a person's behavior, but Scripture never makes certain external manifestations the basis for the final judgment. Isn't it intriguing that in Jesus' depiction of the final Day of Judgment even the elect will react with a question?

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? (Mt 25:37-39, KJV)

If the resurrected righteous on the Last Day ask such a question, should we not ponder the implications for us in the here-and-now?

...the Spirit is life because of righteousness. A single and predictable consequence of the indwelling Spirit of God is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only righteousness that shall enable a fallen sinner to hear the words of Jesus on that Day, “Come ye blessed...”

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Not only does Paul affirm the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ in everyone so touched by the indwelling Holy Spirit, he also affirms that person’s final destiny. Every person so touched by the Spirit of God shall hear the welcoming voice of the Savior on that Day. Every one so touched by grace shall also experience a transformation of their physical resurrected bodies that is in power and righteousness equivalent to the work of grace that God sent into the soul in regeneration.

The old Particular Baptist John Gill makes a strong point in his explanation of these verses.

These words are not to be understood as they are by some, of the continued work of sanctification in the heart by the Spirit of God; for regeneration, and not sanctification, is signified by quickening, which quickening occurs when the Spirit of God first takes up his dwelling in the soul; besides, the apostle had spoke of the life of the spirit or soul before; and they are mortal bodies, and not its mortal souls, which are said to be quickened, for these cannot mean the body of sin, or the remains of corruption, as they are said to be, and which are never quickened, nor never can be. To understand the words in such a sense, is not so agreeable to the resurrection of Christ here mentioned; whereas Christ's resurrection is often used as an argument of ours, which is designed here, where the apostle argues from the one to the other.⁶²

Gill’s point is as relevant in our time as when he wrote the words over two hundred years ago. Paul is not reasoning on our present behavioral sanctification and good works, but rather he is reminding the Romans, and us, of a future work that the indwelling Holy Spirit shall surely complete in us on resurrection day. Our literal bodily resurrection as God’s regenerate elect is as assured and certain as the historical fact of Jesus’ personal and literal bodily resurrection!

Let’s return to the point made at the beginning. Paul frames these verses in a highly personalized form. Paul repeatedly uses the personal second person pronoun “you” in these verses. He is reminding the Roman Christians of a bedrock truth, a truth that they need in the “here and now” of life. His premise for teaching these people becomes highly personal to them. He fills the role of minister, not judge and jury. His objective is to comfort them with the interlinked truths of the indwelling Holy Spirit and their final joyful resurrection to glory. He in no way presumes to take on the role of dispensing or withholding the blessing of assurance.

Scripture repeatedly teaches us that the preaching of the gospel must be accompanied by the affirmation of the Holy Spirit and His power, both in the man preaching and in the hearers. Without this power a message may be a good lecture, even a true moral lesson quite worthy of believing and practicing, but only when the Holy Spirit directs and seasons a man’s words with His power can we say that the gospel has truly been preached. The distinction between a moral lecture and a message in which the gospel was truly preached is not distinguished by the volume or mannerism in the voice of the preacher. Most of us have known people who truly believed that a man is “preaching” only if he chants his words with a certain rhythm or cadence, or in some other way spoke in an unnatural manner.

A man may “preach the gospel” in soft conversational tones, or he may need to speak quite loudly so as to be heard by a large gathering of people. He may speak with intense personal conviction and emotions, or he may speak with the quiet and assured tones of a gentle breeze. All of these things are peripheral to the preaching of the gospel. The power of God in the gospel is not controlled or orchestrated by the preacher or the hearers! When a man is truly blessed by God to “preach” the gospel with power from Him, the message transcends both the messenger and the audience. We cannot control or orchestrate this power. Nor can we imitate it!

What Paul is teaching in our lesson takes us to the heart of the gospel. The message of the gospel, affirmed with power by the indwelling Holy Spirit in both the preacher and the hearer, manifests power to convince fallen and sinful—but regenerate—people that they possess title to a family inheritance for all eternity with God. The gospel preached in power declares the family identity of the regenerate elect child with his/her heavenly family, but rest assured, it is the power of God in the gospel, not the personal judgment of the preacher, who conveys this assurance and conviction. That power is life-transforming because it reminds us, regardless of the trials of the moment, that we belong to the King, and that we have an eternal home waiting for us that cannot be taken from us. “What manner of men ought we to be....”

Elder Joe Holder