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The Gospel According to Matthew

You Must be Born Again (Part 2)

April 28, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 15:10-20

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 36:22-38

Mat 15:10-20 And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: (11) it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." (12) Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (13) He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (14) Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (15) But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." (16) And

he said, "Are you also still without understanding? (17) Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? (18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (20) These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

We want to continue this morning thinking further about Jesus' statement to Nicodemus, *you must be born again*. And we are doing so because this central, crucial, heart of the gospel is being widely denied today in many many churches and so-called "Christian" ministries. Let me give you just a couple of examples. The first comes from Dr. George Simon's blog. Many of you are familiar with Simon. We recommend a couple of his books as a matter of fact (In Sheep's Clothing for instance) at the blog because he does such a good job

teaching about the tactics of sociopaths.

But when it comes to the real solution to evil, Simon misses the gospel of Christ completely. Listen to him:

We've been talking about the "10 commandments" of sound character development. They represent the crucial life lessons we need to embrace and master to be psychologically and spiritually healthy. And they're far more than a list of dos and don'ts. Rather, they're a set of practices that can propel us toward a more boundless, abundant life. Moreover, they all work together. They represent a kind of cooperative dance of growth. Each builds upon the other.

To be sound in both spirit and character you have to know your worth. And you have to know whence it derives. (See also: Cultivating Healthy Self-Worth.) It also helps to step outside yourself and see the bigger picture of existence. (See: Outgrowing Natural Egocentricity.) Knowing how interconnected everything and everyone is gives you a broader perspective. And seeing things accurately, without bias or self-deception helps clear your

personal growth pathway. (See: Character Requires Revering Truth.)

The Next Commandment

Next week we'll begin discussing the 6th "commandment" of character. That commandment has to do with mastery over our impulses and how to achieve it. The series on this commandment will serve as a prelude to discussing perhaps the touchiest subject of all: our human free will.

You can read more about all the commandments in Character Disturbance. But I'll be spending a good deal of time both of the upcoming commandments, because of their importance. To refresh, here's the 6th commandment:

Be ***mindful. Think*** before you act. Be master of your impulses.

Psychology's official manual of mental illnesses lists a cluster of "impulse control disorders." Sadly, far too many folks these days lack internal controls. They act on impulse, without thinking things through. Sometimes, they act first and think later, experiencing after-the-fact regret. Of course, by then it's too late. Sometimes they simply act unthinkingly with no regret.

That's because they lack a sound conscience. T

These days, we have medicines that can help a person exercise better impulse control. But there's simply no substitute for sound character. And to develop that we have to cultivate *mindfulness*.

And then you have this kind of thing from a pastor back in West Virginia names Chris Moles who has jumped into the domestic abuser "ministry" ring and made quite the hit in the conference circles:

"With the goal of godliness in mind, it is essential that abusive men be introduced to a biblical theology that directly confronts their past attitudes and actions."

And

"Christian pastors and churches must develop, instruct, and help the abusive man apply a working theology that produces change in his heart and mind."

[Chris Moles, The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men who Use Control and Violence in the Home]

Well, Christ, you can call your program "Gospel Solutions" all you

want – what you are teaching is not the gospel. This is works of the law and it is a denial of the total depravity of the sinner. This is nothing less than self-reformation, and a denial of the centrality of the cross, the new birth by faith alone in Christ alone.

For Moles, you see, and for so many others, the cure to sin is in the brain. It must be re-wired. The sinner's thinking must be changed and the way to change it is to introduce new paradigms of thinking to him. But when the Bible speaks of the new birth, it does not begin in the mind – it goes to the heart, the seat of a person's affections. That is to say, the problem is not just what a sinner thinks, it is with what he *loves*. And what he loves is sin. Who he hates is God and the Law of God. Any so called "success" in changing the sinner by teaching him and getting him to behave differently is only an outward change, another coat of whitewash over the stinking, rotting tomb of his heart.

That is the condition we were once in, but God, being rich in mercy, chose us and gave us faith and repentance, killed the old man with Christ and raised us up as new creations. There is no other way to be saved. There is no other way to be a Christian, than this dying and being resurrected a new man. It is entirely God's doing and

leaves no room for any of our works or any of our boasting.

The New Birth in the Old Testament

Let’s go back to the Old Testament this morning and look at some key Scriptures that Nicodemus and his fellow Jews should have known about. Of course what happened is that the “traditions of the rabbis” pre-empted these Scriptures, twisting them so that they were said to teach something man could accept. Nicodemus was blinded to the truth.

We begin with this classic passage which we read last week:

Jer 31:31-34 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for

they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Now, let’s do a compare and contrast in chart form here – the chart is in your handout and for those of you following online it is in the PDF you can obtain at sermonaudio.com/crc –

OLD covenant	NEW covenant
Written on stone	Not like Old Covenant, written on the heart
Went after false gods, not His people	God will be their God, they will be God’s people
Had to be constantly told to know the Lord	Everyone in this covenant will know the Lord
Forgiveness not obtained	Forgiveness accomplished
Breakable	Unbreakable
Made with the earthly nation Israel	Made with the true Israel, the church (see Hebrews 8)

Now lest someone say (as dispensational theologians would insist) – “But the Lord is talking about the Jews here. Not the church” – let’s go to the New Testament and see how it interprets and applies Jeremiah’s prophecy:

Heb 8:1-13 Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, (2) a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. (3) For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. (4) Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. (5) They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

(6) But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

[And now the Apostle quotes our text from Jeremiah 31]-

(7) For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. (8) For he finds fault with them when he says: **"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the**

house of Israel and with the house of Judah, (9) not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. (10) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (11) And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (12) For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

(13) In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

And continuing into chapter 9 because at this point people may still be saying "but Jeremiah said that this New Covenant would be made with Israel, with the Jews. It is wrong to apply it to the church." Well, chapter 9 shoots that objection down quite plainly -

Heb 9:1-28 Now even the first

covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. (2) For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. (3) Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, (4) having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. (5) Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. (6) These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, (7) but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

(8) By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (9) (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, (10) but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until

the time of reformation.

(11) But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) (12) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (13) For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, (14) how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (15) Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

(16) For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. (17) For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. (18) Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without

blood. (19) For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, (20) saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." (21) And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. (22) Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. (23) Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

(24) For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. (25) Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, (26) for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (27) And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes

judgment, (28) so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

It is plain and obvious here that the New Covenant which Jeremiah spoke of is the New Covenant in Christ for all who "eagerly await Him." Believers in other words. And this is seen over and over again in, for example, the book of Acts and in Galatians and Romans where it is made plain that there is a new Israel, which is really not new but is the true Israel of God that He always set out to save and to be His people. The elect, in other words. And that is what Jeremiah meant when he said the Lord would make a new covenant with the "house of Israel and the house of Judah." The church, you see.

Gal 6:15-16 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (16) And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

This is why for so many years and all the time I was at Multnomah (a dispensational school) that the truth was, the Bible was still quite confusing to me. So many texts made no sense to me unless they were re-interpreted to

fit into the dispensational grid in which as John MacArthur says, “when the Bible says Israel it always means Israel – the Jews.” Follow his system and it is no wonder that you will need his MacArthur Study Bible with notes in order to re-interpret the plain meaning of Scriptures.

No, Jeremiah is speaking of Christ’s true church and he calls it the house of Israel and the house of Judah because everyone in the true church becomes, by being joined to Christ by faith and new birth, a child, an heir *of Abraham*. YOU, Christian, are a true Jew:

Rom 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

I am going to have to leave off here for now, but we will plan to continue at this point next Lord’s Day to think more about this New Covenant:

- What does this all mean for our concept of what the true church is?
- In what ways is the nature of the New Covenant being denied either in doctrine or in practice in local churches today?

- In what ways does this explain the corrupt nature of so many churches today and why evil so often is welcome in them?
- Just exactly who *is a Christian* anyway?

We leave off this morning then with this reminder:

You must be born again or you are not part of the true Israel, you have no inheritance in Christ, and Christ does not know you.