

The Precious Blood

1 Peter 1:18-21

Preface: The Causal Force

My opening sermon on the First Epistle of Peter was on verses thirteen through seventeen. And since I Don't wish to give the same sermon over again I merely wish to bring to our attention the fact that everything Peter had written up to verse thirteen had been sufficient for him to start verse thirteen with the word "therefore" which essentially means 'for which cause.' Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reckoned that what he had written prior to verse thirteen would be a causal force in the life of these Christians and Christians everywhere throughout history to seek to live a holy life.

It Doesn't Work

During a stint in one of the various seminaries I've attended there was an emphasis on the idea of spiritual formation; i.e., the development of our spirits. Inevitably when this type of topic comes up the idea of asceticism (the practice of rigid self-denial) surfaces. One of the texts we were required to read was a book called *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by a man named Dallas Willard. They actually had the author come and speak to us. He stood before the class and gave an explanation of his view of spiritual things that went something like this (I'm paraphrasing): "In our Christian community we tell people what Jesus did for them at the cross of Calvary. Then we put before them that therefore, in an act of gratitude, they should seek to live a holy life." What I have written so far is a paraphrase but I'll never forget how he finished this portion of his talk. He finished by making the pronouncement, "The only problem is that it doesn't work."

At that point he began to discuss the disciplines and forms of asceticism that he believed would work. Similar things that we read in another popular Christian book of a similar title(that was required reading at another seminary I attended), *The Celebration of Discipline*. He spoke of fasting, vows of silence, retreats, meditation, input denial, etc. All these things were more or less monastic vows.

God's Role In My Performance

First of all I am not sure just how righteous Christians have to be before whatever method they are using would be considered successful. Secondly, the idea that I have to, through a series of disciplines, work myself up to a level of enthusiasm, energy, or whatever else you want to call it, that will finally yield in me what God seeks to yield in me seems to be inconsistent with what the scriptures teach regarding God's role in my performance as a human being. When we look in the Old Testament and read about the New Covenant it tells us God's role in our Christian life. Ezekiel 36 records this,

"For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle

clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*” (Ezekiel 36:24-27).

Imputed And Imparted

It was brought to my attention at Bible study Wednesday night that I have not (at least not as often as I thought I did) brought forth from the pulpit the idea of imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. Both of these are aspects of God’s covenant promise and both are given by the grace of God. The imputed righteousness of God is seen in verses 25-26. Essentially this means that Jesus credits His righteousness to our account before the Father. He sprinkles clean water on us, He cleanses us from filthiness, He gives us a new heart and a new spirit and He takes out our heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh. The imparted righteousness is found in verse 27 where we are told that He will cause us to walk in His statutes, keep His judgments and do them.

Genuine Gospel, Genuine Salvation, Changed Life

The genuine gospel preached which results in the genuine salvation of a person will result in the changed behavior of the saved person. And I would submit that if a person finds no change in their life whatsoever, no desire to do good or walk in righteousness, they’ve got much bigger problems than they might have otherwise thought. They have either not heard the genuine gospel or they have heard it and turned a deaf ear to it. This is in no way to preach perfectionism (we all sin and will until the day we die) but it is to preach against heresy and hypocrisy.

Greatest Motivator

It seems that Peter has been seeking to remove the dross from their understanding of their faith. I believe he does this realizing that a Spirit given pure understanding of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ is the greatest motivator for Christian living. It is in the light of this that we seek to take up the attitude of Christ and imitate His selfless love and moral purity. With our eyes focused upon Christ and His sacrificial love for us, we spur one another on to love and good deeds. With what we have studied during the past six sermons as his groundwork Peter writes,

¹³ Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” ¹⁷ And if you call on the Father, who without

partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear;

Reminding The Troops

I won't go into detail on these verses since I did so before. In short, it is a call to be holy. This present call to holiness lasts for only five verses before Peter goes back to laying theological groundwork. It is almost as if he doesn't want the interval of time we use thinking about our own behavior to last too long before he brings our minds back to the power of our salvation. The way a commander in the armed forces might continue to remind his troops of the women and children back home who they're fighting to defend, Peter reminds us of the passion and payment for our souls.

II. Redemption

So after telling us to live a holy life for five verses, in verse eighteen, he goes back to the foundations of our faith. Drawing our attention to redemption, Peter writes,

"...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,*¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19).

Trash

Redemption is a Biblical concept we should seek to understand. It means 'to release on receipt of ransom.' In our modern vernacular we usually use it in reference to trash. Cans or bottles that have been used and discarded are collected from trash cans by the apostles and prophets of the redemption center. To most people these discarded articles are merely trash but for some reason the redemption center finds them to be of value and is actually willing to pay for them. After purchasing them they refine them and make them like new but that is a sermon for another day. Suffice it to say for now, the act of redemption is the act of payment and purchase.

Too High A Price

Peter tells his readers that they were not purchased with corruptible things. And just in case they thought Peter was writing about things of no earthly value he mentions silver and gold - metals that are precious in the eyes of all. The price for being purchased from aimless conduct is too high for any man to calculate, let alone pay. Things are not right in the cosmos my friends. Corruption, decay, sin and death seem to be the destiny of all things. And try as we might, it is a fruitless endeavor to use corruption to end corruption. There is no point in using a filthy sponge to clean a filthy plate. And men who think they can find redemption anywhere in fallen in humanity will remain in fallen humanity. As Calvin stated, Peter wrote this, **"...that we might know that the whole life of man, until he is converted to Christ, is a ruinous labyrinth of wanderings."**

The Statutes Of Your Fathers

And how sad it is when our very ancestors, and in this case likely religious ancestors, prescribe the way of damnation. It is no wonder that Ezekiel, speaking as a prophet of God, cried out, **“But I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols” (Ezekiel 20:18).** Also Jesus said, **“Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Luke 12:53).**

Only One Method

Any system of thinking, any way of life or attempt at genuine redemption that is void of the precious blood of Jesus is not redemption at all. It doesn't matter who is delivering the message; friend or foe, mother or father, teacher or mentor -- there is only one method by which man may be redeemed, it is by the precious blood of Christ. For even though He was humanity, He was not fallen humanity but a sacrificial lamb without blemish and without spot.

III. The Oldest Religion

“He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:20).

Proclaimed In Eden, Ordained Before The World

It has often been said that there are religions older than Christianity. This short-sighted statement obviously comes from those who view the Christian faith as starting a mere 2000 years ago. The Christian faith was indeed proclaimed in Eden to the first people on earth and even before then Christ was foreordained to become part of His own creation in what came to be known among who study such things in detail as the magnificent condescension.

The Reserve Chute

Christianity is not a religion that was created in history. Nor was it wasn't an after thought on the part of God to somehow deal with sinful man. For some reason, perhaps not fully understood by men God determined, prior to the fall, that there would be a fall and that He would provide the remedy for that fall. God had ordained that the first parachute wouldn't open (Adam) in order for the reserve parachute (Christ) to be fully opened. The first parachute, being man, could never be as glorious as the second, being the manifestation of God in the full expression of His redeeming, sacrificial love as revealed in the life of Christ and the pronouncement of the gospel.

IV. Impossible Faith

Peter writes that Jesus was manifest in these last times (likely a reference to the end of the Old Covenant) for you

“...who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21).

Calvin’s Notion Of Impossible Faith

Peter teaches us that it is through Christ that we have belief in God. I would like to finish this section presenting a notion from John Calvin (I will use my own words but for the sake of avoiding plagiarism the notion comes from Calvin¹.) The notion presented by Calvin is that, since God is incomprehensible, apart from Christ belief in God is impossible, let alone faith and hope in God.

Empire State Buildings

If I were to ask you to imagine the Empire State Building you might be able to grasp it in your mind’s eye. If I were to ask you to imagine ten Empire State Buildings you still might pull it off. What if I challenged you with one hundred, one million, one billion, one trillion, etc. I am pretty sure that I would lose you at some point. But our lack of ability to grasp a trillion Empire State Buildings merely scrapes the surface when compared to our lack of ability to grasp God (unless you have an abbreviated version of God promoted by some man-made image, then of course it wouldn’t be God).

1. He Is Big, We Are Small

So the first reason that it is impossible to believe in God apart from Christ is due to His divine glory in contrast to the littleness of our capacity. Calvin therefore states, **“Hence all knowledge of God without Christ is a vast abyss which immediately swallows up all our thoughts.”**² It is not without reason that Paul tells us, in Colossians 1:15 that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God.” God accommodated the littleness of our capacity by presenting Himself in the form of a man.

2. He Is Holy, We Are Sinful

The second reason it is impossible to believe in God apart from Christ (assuming belief is being a faith that unites us to God) is due to the nature of God and the nature of man. God being holy and man being sinful. So the God whom we cannot comprehend apart from Christ would consume like a piece of rice paper in a furnace apart from Christ.

¹ Calvin’s Commentary on 1 Peter, pp. 53, 54.

² Calvin’s Commentary on 1 Peter, pp. 53.

Christ Alone

So belief, or faith, in God apart from Christ is impossible based upon God's incomprehensibility and His holiness. It is Christ alone who can reveal God to us in any comprehensible manner and Christ alone, being holy, who can tranquilize our consciences that we may dare come in confidence before Him.

V. The Resurrection

Peter doesn't stop there but brings to our thoughts the resurrection. God, from eternity past determined to love His children and would secure that relationship through the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus. Apart from the victory of Jesus at Calvary, God would remain in heaven and man on earth and ultimately hell.

Penetrating Heaven

Herein lies another argument against naked faith in God apart from Christ. Genuine faith (as opposed to the faith of demons) penetrates into heaven and finds the favor of a loving Father. Seeking to saunter into heaven apart from the free gift of Christ's righteousness is illogical and unthinkable unless our view of God is small and less than holy. It is by Christ, Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:12 that we have confidence of access. The author of Hebrews tells us in 4:15,16 that it is by our High Priest that we come with confidence to the throne of grace. In chapter 6:19,20 the author of Hebrews goes on to say hope is the anchor of the soul whereby we enter behind the veil of heaven itself but not without Christ going before us.

Faith, Our Victory

Faith, John tells us (1 John 5:4) is our victory against the world. And what good is faith unless it has as its object He who is worthy of our trust and able to deliver. It is Christ and Christ alone who is able and who is worthy and should receive honor. It is in the light of this thought that Calvin finished his comments on this verse with these words,

“As, then, our salvation depends on the resurrection of Christ and his supreme power, faith and hope find here what can support them. For, except he had by rising again triumphed over death, and held now the highest sovereignty, to protect us by his power, what would become of us, exposed to so great a power as that of our enemies, and to such violent attacks? Let us, therefore, learn to what mark we ought to direct our aim, so that we may really believe in God.