**Two Issues In The Church**

As members of today’s American evangelical church we have two areas where our thinking is fundamentally different than the Biblical record. To put it simply:

1. We are much more pure than we think we are.
2. We are much less able to live the Christian life than we think we are.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* First Issue \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

We all agree that the central theme of Christianity is the work of Christ on the cross, yet the vast majority of us fail to understand and to live in the good of what He purchased for us at so great a cost. We often repeat the biblical truth that we who have received Christ have all our sins forgiven, but quite frankly our behavior often fails to demonstrate that we actually believe that truth. We typically teach the notion that when a Christian sins, God turns His back on that person and does not return His gaze to that person until that person repents. We consistently teach that we move into and out of fellowship every time we sin. We usually add the idea that God gets mad at us and His anger burns until we confess our sin.

Consider the "Last Rites", a practice of the Catholic church, in which a priest is summoned to the death bed for one final confession before he passes on. It is believed that the last few sins of a deathly ill or injured person will keep them out of heaven unless those specific sins are forgiven, which, in the Catholic religion, requires the intervention of a priest to hear the confession. As protestants we reject the idea that sins can only be forgiven if they are confessed to a priest; however we are in essence teaching a very similar idea just without the priest. We teach our people that they are not pure before God and won't be until they confess those specific sins. We have created this notion of being in or out of fellowship, with a proper confession being the way back into fellowship. Let me present some reasons why I disagree with these teachings.

(1) When we are not filled with the Spirit and thus we are living in our own strength and our own wisdom we commit so many sins that to confess them all would take us ten years, and that's assuming we would remember them all.

(2) Either the work of Christ on the cross has cleansed us of all our sins or it hasn't. If His work was not sufficient then we are all hopelessly lost. The glorious truth, however, is that we have been completely and perfectly cleansed from all our sin. We have been made pure in Christ for all time and eternity. “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isa. 1:18 As Christians we have been declared by God to be as pure in Christ, as if we had never sinned. (Our state is actually even better than that because as He took our sin we received His righteousness, not just His innocence.) None of us know how long we will live on this earth and if we are indeed saved in Christ then we need not fear death, nor will we need to spend our last few moments here vainly attempting to remember our last few, (or many), sins and quickly confess them before we pass on. (Now I am not saying that confession is wrong. As Christians we often stumble or take a path out of God’s will, and when, by the work of His Spirit, we come to see the error of our ways, we ought to confess those sins in true repentance. I am simply seeking to remind all of us that our sin had no effect on our standing before God. God did not “get mad” at us. He is not ever disgusted with His children, even when He chastises us His love and our righteous standing before Him remain unchanged. God is love and love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and it never fails. God does not turn His back on His child, ever.)

(3) Consider the parable of the lost son. The young man was clearly wrong in his decision to leave home with his inheritance. He certainly committed many sins in his travels; yet when he came home prepared to confess all his sins he was interrupted by his loving father who hugged him and never asked a single question about his sins. Of these two, the father or the older brother; who do you think had a list in his mind of all the sins the younger brother had committed? Of the two, the father or the older brother, who do you think harbored a spirit of anger toward the younger brother? Of the two who do you think turned his back on the younger son? Of the two, who do you think was waiting on a full detailed confession? Of the two, which one was operating within an understanding that blessings from the father have to be earned? Is your image of God more like the father in the story or the older brother? Was the younger son "out of fellowship"? Clearly from his viewpoint he was; but what about the viewpoint of the father. Can you read that account and go away thinking that the father was angry at his son? The truth is that Christ took, in His body soul and spirit, **all** God's wrath against sin. God loves us. This whole notion of God turning His back on His children makes the sacrifice of Christ much less than sufficient. The Father turned His back on His Son, so that He would never need to turn His back on us.

To confess means to agree with. Clearly it is a good idea for us to confess our sins but we should do so with an understanding that the sin we are confessing has already been forgiven; and the Father to whom we are confessing is not mad at us or disgusted with us, but rather filled with love for us. He misses our love and He knows that we are hurting ourselves by sin. He woes and calls us back to a state where we looking only at him; and if necessary will send a famine to get our attention and cause us to remember what we left. His love always thinks the best. Our problem is that we have utterly failed to understand the width and depth of Christ's sacrifice for us.

In the back of our minds we think that presenting a picture of God as one who is angry with His children, will scare us into good behavior. This plan has two problems: (1) It doesn't work and, (2) it is contrary to scripture. The truth is that we are perfectly pure before God all the time. We are pure when we are obedient and pure when we are disobedient. Our standing before God never changes. Is there anything you can do to make God love you more? Is there anything you can do to make God love you less?

It is not an easy thing to come to realize how pure we have been made by the blood of Christ. We must draw near to Him and have our mind renewed. We must sit at His feet and learn from Him. Someone once said it this way: "You'll never know how pure you are in Christ until you draw close enough to God to see your reflection in His eyes."

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* Second Issue \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

In today’s church we have placed a tremendous emphasis on going to heaven when we die, but, in the past, not very much attention was being paid to living on the way to heaven. That was a huge problem, and to some degree it is still going on. However, most churches today do discuss the living out of the Christian life; but unfortunately not in a manner in line with scripture. I want to discuss how we normally teach the living of the Christian life.

The dominant teaching in today’s church is that if you explain to a Christian what he ought to do and then sufficiently motivate him, he will exhibit Godly behavior. This notion is totally contrary to scripture, and therefore it always fails. In churches all over America we find masses of young people who are brought up on this teaching. Those churches, out of a loving and sincere heart for God and for their kids, provide a large amount of activities and motivations for their young people and are usually able to keep most of the kids more or less in line during the high school years. However; when those young people go off to college or enter the work force they often find themselves totally unprepared to actually live out what has been drilled into them for years. We are losing our most precious resource, our young people, to the world in droves. This is a national tragedy that few people talk about until it happens to their child. Why is this happening? I believe it happens because we are teaching our people that they are able to live a life pleasing to God if they will just apply themselves diligently to the instructions given to them. Nowhere in the God’s word is that concept taught. It is of our own creation and is failing miserably. Our failure spreads to people of all ages.

As new people come into our churches we feed them this false teaching which gives them no power whatsoever in the outliving of the Christian life. They stay for a while, but soon they get tired of failing and their hearts shout out to them that something is wrong; and they leave in search of the truth. We have people leaving the through the back door faster than we can attract new people through the front door. WE ARE NOT FEEDING GOD’S PEOPLE.

The problem is that we have relegated Christ to be the heavenly door keeper but we’ve not understood His relevance to our lives on the way to heaven. We have almost totally disregarded the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. The theological fact that Christ dwells within each Christian’s heart is universally accepted, but we turn right around and ignore that fact as we attempt to motivate our people to get busy for Jesus. We have sayings like, “If He died for you the least you can do is live for Him.” There is good logic in that statement, but it ignores one vital fact: A Christian has no more ability to produce righteousness within himself after being saved than he had before he was converted. The power, all the power, lies solely and completely in Christ our Lord, who dwells within you but will not cause you to be conformed to His image without your permission. Our inability to perfectly order our behavior on our own is why He said, “For without me, you can do nothing.” Jn. 15:5 It is why the bible commands us to be filled with, (controlled by), the Spirit. We encourage our young people to wear a WWJD wrist band. What would Jesus do? We think that (1) we can figure out what He would do, and (2) we can perform those deeds if we will just try hard. What drivel. It is not just a satanic lie but the ultimate satanic lie, “You can be a God on your own.” However, Paul said, “… we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” IICor. 4:7 The WWJD phrase is a shortened version of a saying that has been around for a long time: What would Jesus do if He were here. But my bible tells me He is here. The bracelet is actually advertising the absence of Christ. It isn’t the young people’s fault it is our fault for so poorly teaching the bible.

Christ is in you and He desires to live His life through you, if you will simply confess your total inability to reproduce His life and yield to Him, to His indwelling presence. We need to depend on His life as much now, to live the Christian life, as we depended on His death years ago to become a Christian. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” God help us.