

July 27, 2010

...Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. (Psalm 105:4)

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If Guilt Pursue Thee with Its Cry

- 1 If guilt pursue thee with its cry,
And would to prison hale;
To Jesus Christ, the Surety, fly,
And he will give in bail.
- 2 If hope, that used thy soul to cheer,
Now leaves thee dark as night,
And neither sun nor stars appear,
Yet wait for morning light.
- 3 Still look to Christ with longing eyes,
Though both begin to fail;
Still follow with thy feeble cries,
For mercy will prevail.
- 4 What if he drops no gracious smile,
Or bid thee leave his door?
Yet still knock on, and wait awhile;
He must relieve the poor.
- 5 He tarries oft till men are faint,
And comes at evening late;
He hears and will relieve complaint:
'Tis ours to pray and wait.

John Berridge 1716 - 1793

●t&dw

Quote of the Week. Bishop J.C. Ryle 1816- 1900

“Let us learn not to expect too much from anybody or anything in this fallen world. One great secret of unhappiness is the habit of indulging in exaggerated expectations. From money, from marriage, from business, from houses, from children, from worldly honors, from political success—people are constantly expecting what they never find—and the great majority die disappointed. Happy is he who has learned to say at all times, ‘My soul, waits only upon God—my expectation is from Him’ (Psalm 62:5).”

From his article “Without Clouds”.

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Feature Article:

Christian Counseling.

And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Romans 15:14

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete in him...Colos 2:8-10

As a young preacher, a wise and seasoned “master in Zion” admonished me to do most of my counseling from the pulpit. Though I didn’t quite understand (or even agree) at that time, I sensed there was a spiritual gravity behind what he said. As I observed the *Christian Counseling* movement emerge through the late 80’s and 90’s, his admonition began to become clearer to me.

On the one hand, there were the pop-psychology fans who redressed psychobabble in “Christian” garb, thinking that they could sanctify it by adding the name of Jesus, and sprinkling it with some Bible verses. Today, it has blossomed into a full blown *self esteem cultic*, complete with a psychoanalysis of every Bible character, and all the ingredients needed to make you wise unto a *healthy self image*.

In reaction, many conservatives (especially among the reformed) aggressively sought to reframe the issue on thoroughly Biblical grounds. The cause of every problem is sin, and the solution is always identifying, confessing and repenting. In so doing many a Christian is left with the perspective (and I hear it all the time) that personal disobedience to the Law of God is the root of all problems, but conformity to the Law brings blessing. (Job’s friends, anyone?) It is not uncommon to hear Christians admonishing one another by quoting the blessings and cursings of *Deuteronomy 27 & 28*. But if we place Christians on a *performance based relationship* with God, do we not reveal a gross failure to understand the very foundation and dynamics of the *New Covenant*?

Now, many will hasten to say, “Are not issues of sin and repentance an integral part of the Christian life?” Absolutely! But the question must be, “Does the *New Covenant* deal with the sin issue by pointing us to conformity to the *law of commandments*, or by pointing us to Christ?” The former demands *self-willed* repentance and obedience (supposedly now enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit); the latter demands our drawing near to, and communing with, the living Person of Christ by the effectual work of the *indwelling* Spirit. Beholding the glory of Him we are thereby being changed (2 *Corinth 3:18*). Salvation itself must begin by the grace of God shining into our hearts to give us the knowledge of *the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 *Corinth 4:6*). This is the *Holy Spirit’s* work in the washing of regeneration and

the renewing of the heart (*Titus 3:5*). Having begun in the Spirit are we now to be made perfect by the flesh? (*Gal 3:3*).

More to the point of my old mentor's admonition, the work of "Christian counseling" often displaces the Spirit empowered proclamation and teaching of the Truth, *which alone transforms and sets men free*. People love to heap to *themselves* teachers, as they refuse to receive sound doctrine through the Word preached (*2 Tim 4:1-4*). Even if they give ear service to the preaching, when it comes to the *real* problems of life, they feel they must seek "professional" help. (Ouch!)

I am certainly not seeking to deter anyone from seeking pastoral counseling. But our first counsel should be that individuals need to do the first things first. Are they faithfully attending to worship and the preaching and teaching of the Word (*2Tim 4:1-4; Heb 10:25*)? Have they made their calling and election sure (*2Peter 1:10*)? Much "Christian" counseling is really about trying to make the dead look and act like the living; all personal counseling must begin with the gospel. If there is no evidence of the Spirit, then that should be the only issue addressed. If the individual shows no genuine interest in Christ, then the servant of God must not waste time casting pearls before swine (*Mat 7:6*).

As we do engage one another, we must do so in meekness and love with the truths of Christ, in prayerful hope that **God, peradventure, will grant them repentance unto the acknowledging of the truth.** (*2Tim 2:24-26*). For the New Covenant Christian, that truth must always emanate from, center in, and point to Christ. Morality, apart from the transforming reality of Christ is an empty shell. **Nothing** that the counselee needs - peace of mind, healing of the heart, purpose of life, deliverance from sin, and so on, - will be ultimately found in just a systematic application of the black and white of scripture - no matter how good and right that sounds, nor how great the *temporal fruit* may appear. Such fruit may easily be confused with the "work of the Spirit," or at least with the "success" of the counseling.

Many people find temporal encouragement and "relief" by having someone to unload on; or by the fact that someone seems to show some concern for them (even if they are paying for it). There is also a "security and strength" many find in hearing and embracing a logical, wise sounding concept or theory that helps them make sense of their problems; indeed, by that very impetus many have embraced Christianity without any regenerating work of the Spirit.

In dealing with problems that involve third parties, the counselee is "admonished" concerning the best way to manipulate individuals or situations to accomplish the *counselee's* desired outcome. Even if the desired outcome is biblically right, "tough love" is often code-speak for getting (coercing) people to do what will make *my* life easier. **The learning of unconditional, sacrificing love is seldom seen as God's purpose in difficult relationships; it is the individual's temporal "happiness" that**

is all important.

Thank God that there are even non-Christians who, by common grace, seek to alleviate the suffering of others, and by whom some measure of relief does come into this present world. But Christians have the Truth that can truly set man free. Love dictates that we seek to be instruments of that truth. But let us never pollute that soul-saving balm with the *elixirs of Egypt*, or displace it with the *bandages of Babylon*. To the true counselors of peace there is joy (*Pr 12:20*). May there be great joy in Zion! ● ejr3

Walking with Jesus... a devotional minute.

Do You Swear to Tell the Truth?

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than this comes of evil. Matt 5:33-37

In the traditional interpretation of this verse, we have a perfect example of theological tradition supplanting the plain teaching of the Word of God. Jesus' meaning is clear: Don't swear by an oath to try to "bolster" the veracity of your word, or as a supposed act of commitment to God. Such oaths have dragged God's name through the gutter of human dishonesty, and through the swamp of many good intentions.

The problem is, however, that oaths were sanctioned under the Mosaic Law, and *Covenant Theology* demands that the Old Testament "moral law" remains intact. Therefore, Jesus can never contradict the law; hence, this verse *cannot* say what it obviously *does* say. As a result swearing an oath in a court of law, for example, is deemed necessary, and obligatory to Christians. The reality is, as a former police chaplain who has had to testify in court on a number of occasions, I have never had a judge refuse my testimony when I have simply stated, "I will tell the truth."

Jesus' words are serious, as James clearly insists ("above all" *James 5:12*). Yet it is so common for Christians to force friends or spouses to "swear before God", or to "swear on a stack of Bibles" to verify the "truth" of their words. Let us hear the Word of our Lord: ***Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No.' For whatever is more than this comes of evil.***

● ejr3

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