

August 10, 2010

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

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Long My Imprisoned Spirit Lay

from “*And Can It Be that I Should Gain?*”

Charles Wesley

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

I know Whom I have Believed

Daniel Whittle

I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known;
Nor why unworthy - Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.

I know not how this saving faith
To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
Wrought peace within my heart.

I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through thro' the Word
Creating faith in Him.

But I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded
that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day.

•t&dw

Quote of the Week

“If all men were honest there would be no fine print.”

•ejr3

Feature Article:

Perfecting Holiness

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ...I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,” says the LORD Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 6:18 - 7:1

I recently toured an old house in Lancaster County, PA, which was built circa 1900. In it was a beautiful kitchen with an old wood/coal stove, and period artefacts. All of the door frames, trim and cabinets were made of oak - or were they? The tour guide revealed that it was common practice to impress the appearance of oak grain upon the soft smooth surface of *pine* boards. When properly conditioned and finished with oak stain, the impressions would collect more stain and the resulting “oak” grain would disguise the true identity of the pine. The kitchen really did look like it was trimmed and furnished with genuine oak wood. But, having been “let in on the secret”, closer examination revealed that the boards were indeed pine.

I have many times heard *2Corinthians 7:1* preached and taught either as though it were totally devoid of any context from the end of chapter six, or as though the only context from chapter six was the imperative, “*Come out from among them, and be separate.*” In other words, the *indicative* nature of *being the living temple of God* and *being sons and daughters of God* is totally ignored. The resulting impression is that the Christian's great responsibility is to vigorously subject himself to the press of legal obedience until the grain of righteousness is imprinted upon his demeanor and actions.

Now, “works religion” is the majority view in the world, so this approach to holiness comes as no surprise. *Oak-grained pine* is as abundant in the world as fool's gold. The tragedy is that many “children of oak” have been convinced to replace the beautiful and rich natural grain for a faux grain pressed upon their external life. In an effort to increase their own value, they become cheap imitations of *themselves!*

The acorn becomes a sapling, and by nature of its very creation, its *natural growth* produces a beautiful grain.

The enhanced variations in the grain are actually produced as it continues living (persevering) in an environment that is often hostile: *fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling the Creator's purpose* (Ps 148:8), refining and perfecting the oak until it is mature and strong: *that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified* (Isaiah 61:3).

But for all this to take place, there must be good seed rooted in good soil with sufficient water and nutrients. The sower is Christ:

He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom... (Mat 13:37-38).

The soil is Christ:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted ...in Him (Colos 2:7).

As the sap is the "life-blood" of the tree, producing and nurturing leaves and fruit, so the indwelling Christ, produces the fruit of righteousness by His Spirit. *Abiding in Him* (John 15:4), and led by His Spirit (Rom 8:14), we are being transformed into the same image (2Corinth 3:18). This is the heart of our *imperative*; this is the focus of our required effort. In the fear of the Lord - (i.e. the humble reverence, loving respect, and whelming awe invoked as we abide **in His presence**) - we are advanced in true holiness. *In this way we do strive to make our calling and election sure* (2Peter 1:10); we diligently examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (2Corinth 13:5); we strive to enter into the full assurance of His rest (Heb 4:3, 10-11). *Because* it is God who works in us both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure, we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13), being assured that every good tree bears good fruit (Matt 7:17-18) and that every plant, which the heavenly Father has not planted, shall be rooted up (Matt 15:13).

False oak may be very decorative, but under stress it still behaves like pine. Will your faith abide the tests of time - the storms and tempests of life, and the persecutions of the world against Christ? Do these things cause you to send your roots deeper into Christ and become stronger in Him? Or will you eventually warp and split? A good appearance, bolstered by right words, cannot replace the natural beauty and strength of the "real deal." ●ejr3

Walking with Jesus... a devotional minute.

Of Dogs and Swine

Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. Matt 7:6

Jesus' words are often direct and rather blunt. Calling individuals dogs and swine would seemed to be contrary to the meek and gentle nature of Christ we might normally expect. But the warning should not go unheeded. Continuing to try to engage individuals in spiritual conversation when there is no interest or evidence of the Spirit's working, is to waste your time and drag spiritual truth through the gutter. You might as well preach in a graveyard - except that *those* corpses, at least, will not turn on you.

It is interesting to follow the *gospel* presentations of Jesus and the Apostles. Whenever we are given the details, there was either some circumstantial encounter, or they sought out places where people were either worshipping, praying, or gathered to discuss religion and philosophy. They would then present some portion of truth. It was only when the individual or individuals showed interest, or responded with questioning, that they proceeded. Nicodemus *sought out* Jesus and questioned Him; the women at the well *asked* for His water and engaged Him in conversation; the Jews on the day of Pentecost were pricked in conscience and pleaded, "What must we do?"; the Ethiopian eunuch *asked* Steven for guidance in the scripture; Paul, trembling and astonished, asked, "Lord, what would you have me to do?"; Lydia was at prayer, and as the Lord opened her heart she attended to Paul's teaching; the Philippian jailor cried, "What must I do to be saved?" In every case, specific instruction concerning personal repentance and faith was not given until such responses were invoked.

Peter admonishes us, "...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man *who asks you* a reason for the hope that is in you..." As we "go forth bearing precious seed," let us not run ahead of the Spirit. To *prompt* people (much less pressure them) to make a response will only increase the occurrence of false professions, or needless arguments. We *should* take every opportunity to engage people with the truth. But without an *unprompted response* or *questioning interest* we must not cast pearls before swine. ●ejr3

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