

June 8, 2010

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

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Exceptions Are the Rule.

I give you my heart, Lord; I give you my life;
I hold nothing back from you.
I'd cast away any treasure, Lord,
Except for one or two...

I'll give you the honor, the glory, the praise,
And ask nothing in return;
I'll cast every crown before you throne,
Except for a few I've earned.

Chorus

Exceptions are the rule, I know, Lord,
In my love for you;
While I seek to magnify your name
In everything I do -

I hold on to so many things,
And I know I'm such a fool
To cast away your perfect love
While exceptions are the rule.

I'll go anywhere, Lord, you tell me to go,
I'll keep goin' when the goin' gets tough;
Except for the one place you know I can't go -
Don't send me to Africa!

Yes, I'll serve you, my Lord, - I'll do anything,
I'll give, and I'll pray, and I'll teach;
Except for the one thing you know I can't do -
O Lord, don't call me to preach...

Chorus

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Quote of the Week. *from Saint Augustine*

“... There is a joy which is not granted to the wicked, but to those who worship Thee thankfully; whose joy Thou Thyself art. And the happy life is this - to rejoice unto Thee, in Thee, and for Thee; this [is what joy] is, and there is no other. But those who think there is another, follow after another joy, and that not the true one. Their will, however, is not turned away from th[is] shadow of joy”

from Confessions, Volume I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House reprint, 1980) Chapter XXII, p164.

Feature Article:

Play Ball!

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Romans 8:31-35

As a kid, I loved baseball. From the time I was five or six, my great-grandmother would take me to nearly every Saturday home game of the Baltimore Orioles. Everything, from the two hour plus drive (the four-lane to Baltimore wasn't built yet) to the wonderful home cooked meal when we returned to her Pennsylvania farmhouse, was part of my 'baseball' experience. This certainly stoked my anticipation (and impatience) for the attaining the grand old age of *eight* when I would be able to play 'little-league' ball. And that day finally came.

As our team took the field, excited parents would sit in the bleachers to cheer us on. For the most part the parents were there for the sheer joy of watching their kids play. But for one of my teammates, whom I will call "Johnny", this was to be anything but a "fun time." His older brother had just been drafted out of high school by a professional team; and Johnny's dad was determined to see his youngest son follow in his big brother's footsteps. If Johnny would drop the ball, which, under the pressure, he did fairly often, his dad would begin screaming profanities at him. One day, after missing a fly ball, a voice from the stands boomed (decorated with many colorful expletives), "Johnny! Get in the car! You make me sick!" (I must hold back the tears, even now after fifty years.) I loved baseball - Johnny hated it. The sole difference was our relationship with our fathers.

The singer-songwriter, Bob Bennett, has a song entitled "A Song About Baseball." He describes his experience playing little-league ball in terms of his father's unconditional love- "No matter how I played the game, he loved me." That was my experience. If I struck out, made a throwing error, or dropped the ball, Dad would clap his hands together and say, "It's OK, you'll do better next time." That made me love the game all the more. Often we would spend hours in the back yard playing "catch" and working on skills just because we loved it, and more importantly, because we loved each other! Neither of us were very demonstrative in express-

ing our feelings, but we each clearly understood that “the playing” *was* the demonstration of our love.

I think some Christians must think their heavenly Father is like Johnny’s. He is there expecting us to be perfect (like our big Brother!), and when we mess up he screams, “*Take the bench - you make me sick! When you have shed enough tears and done enough penance you can try again.*”

The quality of our Christian walk is entirely dependent upon our perceived relationship with God. While it is absolutely true that, for the unbeliever - for those without God, the wrath of God hangs over them. The requirements of “playing the game” will always bring failure and the Lord’s condemnation. But it must NEVER be so with the child of God. Our Big Brother has already taken to the field *in our name*. He has already batted a 1000, pitched a perfect game, and committed no errors in the process. That’s *our* record on the scorecard. We get to play for the sheer love of the game - and we do love the game! Our Father is cheering us on - win or lose; and with our perfect indwelling “Coach”, our game really *is* always improving. The failures don’t count, only the improvements.

As we contemplate the realities of the New Covenant, a new hermeneutic must, and will, frame our Biblical Theology. But that is all meaningless without the reality of the *New Covenant relationship we enter into with our Father*. Regeneration and indwelling must be more than theological truths, but must be the very heart - the mainspring - of our “practical” walk with Christ. In that walk, the *love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit* is the *a priori* ruler of our ethic. Faith works by love (Gal 5:6). Love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:10 et al). Love “does no harm” to others. This love is from the Father, and unto His glory.

It is very difficult for some, as it was for me, to let go of the legal framework of a performance-based relationship with God. After all, even the New Testament scriptures consistently cry out to us: *Be Holy! If you love me, keep my commandments! The unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God! The thought of foolishness is sin!* ...and so on. To be sure, as long as we are on a legal footing, New Testament law is much more demanding than was that of the old covenant. So we gain *nothing* by exchanging, or reformulating, laws. Until, by the witness of the *indwelling Spirit of Christ*, we are able to know the reality of this “mystery of Godliness” (which can *never* be grasped by the “natural man”) we shall

never discern between *law-keeping* and *love-walking*. All such talk will just be so much “double-talk” designed to lead men into lawlessness. And, in one form or another, we are sure to hear a Voice from the bleachers periodically saying, “*Get in the car! You make me sick!*”

But the ear anointed by the Holy Spirit hears the commands of Christ, indeed the whole *Word of God*, not as burdensome ‘rules’, but as the voice of a loving Shepherd saying, “Come, follow me!” The heart indwelt by divine love quickens as it hears the voice of the Bridegroom. The conscience free from the condemnation of the law is never crushed under guilt; but it *is* grieved at every failure of love.

Christian, do you see your Father as harsh and demanding? Fly to your heavenly blood-bought inheritance! Find the “*righteousness that exceeds*” as you walk in love. Play ball - He’s on your side! ●ejr3

Devotional Minute:

The Essence of Sin.

*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
Romans 3:23*

After demonstrating the absolute sinfulness of man, and insisting that the Law’s only power is to reveal sin and condemn sinners, Paul, in Romans 3:23, declares the true nature of sin, itself. It is *coming short of the glory of God*. That which is not like the glorious self-existent God in very nature, is sin. This should reveal the utter fantasy of any self-righteousness on our part. In Philippians 3:9, Paul declares *self-righteousness* to be the *only* righteousness gained through the law; and that, by nature, is a self-deception. The “rich young ruler” had deceived himself into actually believing he had kept the law. A proper understanding of sin, however, will cause us to apprehend the absolute necessity of Christ’s *imputed* righteousness, and the futility of going about to establish our own righteousness, *before or after* salvation. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. But, *in* Christ, our works precipitated by faith and love *do* glorify God, and are accepted by him through Jesus’ blood. ●ejr3

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