

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Solely by Grace
Solo Christo Solely by Christ
Sola Fide Solely by Faith

MAY 1976
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NOTHING BUT THE GOSPEL

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Present Truth

Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Editor: Robert D. Brinsmead
Publishing Editor: Norman Jarnes

Publishers: A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia.* God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the *sole ground* of our salvation.
2. *Solo Christo.* Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the *sole basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.
3. *Sola fide.* The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the *sole means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.
4. *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

Present Truth is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

The *Present Truth* ministry is made possible through contributions from those who are likewise dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith. Your contributions are appreciated. All gifts are tax deductible in the U.S.A.

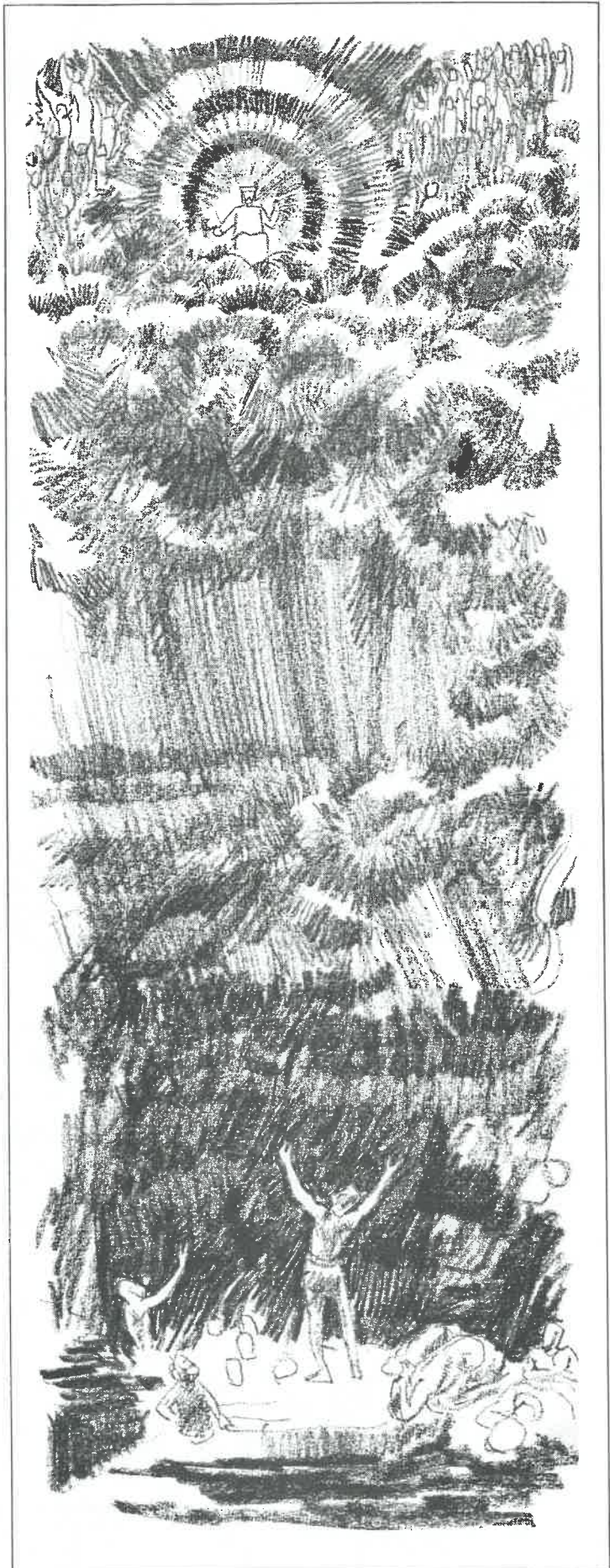
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Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
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California 92028.

"The Old Testament"

Sir / Your February, 1976, issue on "The Old Testament" is enough to clue me in that, although you are aware of dispensationalists, you do not agree with us. I've been born again for almost 40 years, studying very closely the Word of God, and I'll stick with Darby and Scofield, thank you! Dispensationalism is the only way to dovetail all of Scripture to make sense. We are told to rightly divide the Word of truth. Anything else is confusion. God has a plan for Israel, and He has a plan for the church. Let's not mash them up like a lot of leftovers.

Mrs. Stewart MacClements
New Hampshire

Sir / Your February issue of *Present Truth* on "The Old Testament" meant a great deal to me because it underscored the *one* story of the Bible. It is interesting to note that the New Testament writers, following the example of the Old Testament prophets, interpreted the gospel in the light of the exodus. The New Testament message is, "What God has done in the past He has done again." The apostle Paul, speaking of the Rock in the wilderness from which the people drank, says, "That Rock was Christ." 1 Cor. 10:1-5. Mark shows how Jesus entered the water and was driven into the wilderness for 40 days to be tested. Israel failed; Jesus did not fail! One could go on and list the wilderness feedings of the manna versus the feeding of the 5,000, the signs and miracles, etc. I only mention this to say that your February issue helps us see the total picture and enables us to understand why the early church was accused of "turning the world upside-down." Thank you for a timely topic.

Gordon Damsteegt
Reformed Church of Holland
Minister
Nebraska

Sir / George Eldon Ladd's material on "The Nature of Man and the Old Tes-

tament" in your February issue was especially revealing and biblically sound.

Ronald D. Walton
Minister
New Hampshire

Sir / God bless you for having the courage to delve into Old Testament realism.

P.J. Albrecht
Virginia

Sir / Your issue on "The Old Testament" was particularly great, though I would add that I find most of what you print to be useful and particularly timely! Keep up the good work.

Howard A. Fosser
Minister
Washington

Sir / I have little confidence in your magazine. I can sympathize with the reaction of Pentecostals so prevalent in your "Letters" section. It likely isn't an unfair assumption that you display as much bias and ignorance about their theology as you do toward dispensational theology.

While I am not in agreement with what I consider to be some extreme views of dispensationalism, I consider it a serious matter to categorically label dispensational theology as "popular error." I regret that your magazine may be prejudicing numbers of uninformed Christians against a hermeneutic principle and system of theology that exemplifies more consistency and unity than any other approach to the Scriptures, including your recent article on "The Kingdom of God" (*Present Truth*, Feb., 1976).

It's time some of your staff spent more time on just presenting truth as they see it and less time on attacking, misrepresenting and provoking.

Mrs. K.R. Hedrick
Virginia

Sir / I have read your February issue of *Present Truth* and am rejoicing in its

truth. How much we Christians need to see and realize that the Old Testament is absolutely basic to the understanding of the New! For both are the two halves of the *one* great message to *one* great people, Israel. How happy it makes me to know that I, a Gentile, am one of Israel's multitude through Jesus Christ, the great King of kings—the King of the kingdom He came to establish!

I am a fugitive from dispensational teaching, and I praise God for the deliverance. You are doing the Christian community a great service in putting both Testaments in their proper perspective and showing that all the promises in the Old are fulfilled in the New.

Walter R. Wulschleger
Kentucky

Sir / The articles in your issue on "The Old Testament," affirming the total fulfillment by Jesus Christ of all Old Testament prophecies, are the most important and edifying that I have ever read in anything other than the Word itself. A full apprehension by the church of this glorious gospel would bring back the life and power of the New Testament era.

Roger Moore
California

Helpful

Sir / Even though I am a dispensationalist and reject your system of eschatology, I have found many articles in *Present Truth* to be helpful, especially in a day when so many are promoting religious subjectivism.

George W. Zeller
Connecticut

Views Changed

Sir / I am very impressed with *Present Truth*. In fact, my views have changed since I have made its acquaintance. I had been a dispensationalist all my life—or at least until I began to search for myself.

James Murray
Florida

Gospel Test

Sir / Your magazine came to me about two years ago from a friend who asked me to read it and give her my opinion. I expected it to be another "new" false teaching publication, and I read it looking for error. Imagine my surprise when it directed my attention to the Saviour and His death at Calvary on every page! It has enlightened me in more ways than I can tell you, and I now see dangers in my own evangelical circle that needed to be brought to my attention. Today I test every article I read and every speaker I hear with the question, "Is the gospel central in this message?" Thank you for providing a much needed warning to one who might easily have fallen into the subjectivism with which evangelical churches are saturated today.

Mrs. Douglas E. Wagner
New Jersey

"Johnny-one-note"

Sir / After reading your magazine, one has to recall the story about a boy who knew one note and played it constantly to the boredom of his listeners. *Present Truth* seems to know one doctrine, and only one doctrine. The Johnny-one-note" emphasis so evident in the magazine leaves the trained Bible scholar strangely empty. Any casual reader of the inspired Volume would realize that justification by faith is not the only truth revealed therein! In fact, justification by faith is merely the beginning of a life in Christ and not the end of all divine purpose for His creatures who know redemption by the precious blood of Jesus.

E. Finkenbiner
Baptist Minister
Ohio

Doctrinal Hub

Sir / You are making a great contribution to biblical and historical truth in our day. Your writings on Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, Catholicism, dispensationalism, subjectivism, antichrist, sanctification, and the great doctrine of justification by faith, by which all -isms are to be judged, have been very helpful and enlightening.

Your main emphasis on justification by faith in Christ, who provided a righteousness outside of us which is imputed to us because of His death, is the hub into which the doctrinal spokes in the wheel of Christianity are anchored. To alter, modify or pervert this doctrine is like taking the hub out of the wheel. This has been done in the realm of

Christendom. *Present Truth* is putting the hub back into the wheel.

Carl Loy
Baptist Minister
Kentucky

Bad News

Sir / I believe you to be in error in many ways. I am personally more interested in the Person of Jesus than in the concept of justification by faith. Your narrowness and negativity seem to be reactionary bad news instead of good news.

Gerald D. Iwerks
Illinois

Narrow-minded

Sir / I believe that the doctrine of justification by faith is one of many emphases needed in the church today. However, I doubt that your narrow-minded partisanship is any service to our Lord or His church. Sir, if I had to choose between your logically airtight but redemptionally impotent dogmatic system and that of Rome, mixing as it admittedly does a great deal of biblical truth with a certain amount of unwarranted superstition, I would not hesitate to trust my soul's fate to Rome.

R. Wayne Kleinsteuber
Student Minister
Canada

New Understanding

Sir / Your presentation of justification by faith has clarified my thinking so much that it is no exaggeration to say that a completely new understanding has come to me. I thank God for your presentation.

Alan Woodland
Anglican Minister
England

Disastrous Trends

Sir / I consider *Present Truth* to be a check on the disastrous trends of the churches. Never has a doctrine been so thoroughly buried in a lot of "churchianity" as has been the truth of justification by faith. I feel that your magnifying of this great central doctrine of all doctrines comes just before Protestantism slips over the brink of subjectivism.

Habakkuk declares, "The just shall live by . . . faith." Paul quotes him to guide New Testament Christianity to freedom. Martin Luther quoted Paul to spark the Protestant Reformation. And I join you in declaring that this great truth must be proclaimed again. Oh, how much religious bondage this truth believed would rid the world of! God has

always dealt with man in this gift of His own righteousness. He did so with Adam, with Habakkuk, Paul, the Reformers, and us who seek after righteousness. Talk about subjectivism! My heart leaps up, released, when I subject myself to God's righteousness.

Ola Forbes, Jr.
North Carolina

Why So Few?

Sir / Why do so few preachers preach justification—especially when the Reformation was so successful because of that doctrine? Perhaps ministers assume that we laymen know these things. Yet I've been a Christian for years now and have read some 65 to 70 Christian books on evangelism, prayer, Bible study, Christian biography, etc., and could not give someone an accurate definition of justification, sanctification, and other such terms.

Kurt L. Linde
New York

Rare

Sir / With the amount of reading that I do as a minister, rarely have I come into contact with such a clear and forceful presentation of the truth as I have found in your publication. I find you easy to learn from, interact with, and take issue with.

Ken Blue
Minister
Canada

Fuel!

Sir / Let the chips fall where they will. Even chips are fuel!

Donall E. Tornell
Minnesota

Learning

Sir / I must say that I have learned more about what Christianity is really all about in the year I've been reading *Present Truth* than in all the previous years of study. Thank you for stating what the issues really are in the Christian's life.

Carl R. Smith
Texas

Questions Answered

Sir / The quality of *Present Truth* surpasses any other Christian magazine I have ever read. I am indeed grateful for the way that it has answered, in a few issues, so many questions that I had accumulated during regular Bible reading in my 13 years as a Christian.

Lorne Mac Burnie
Canada

Editorial Introduction

The old Lutherans of the sixteenth century used to say that the proper distinction between the law and the gospel was the brilliant light of the Reformation. Luther said that any man who could properly distinguish law and gospel should be put at the head of the table and called a real doctor of theology even if he had never been to school.

Let us not fool ourselves into thinking we always make this proper distinction or that we easily distinguish the preaching of law from the preaching of gospel. Both must be proclaimed, but do we grasp as clearly as did the Reformers that they must not be “brewed and stewed together”? How many evangelicals today understand that preaching about Christ’s work *in us* (sanctification) is the preaching of the law? How many understand that to preach that it is Christ’s coming into our hearts which saves us is really preaching salvation by law?

I hope our subscribers will read my friend Paxton’s article, “What Is the Gospel?” with care. Otherwise, it might be safer not to read it at all. Paxton has the habit of saying some shocking things—deliberately. Once he wrote in this magazine that it is not the new birth which saves us! Some people immediately cried, “Heresy! Heresy! This man is doing away with the doctrine of the new birth!” I am even tempted to think that some objectors knew better. Paxton had wounded them in a sensitive spot, and rather than to acknowledge that they had been guilty of perverting the gospel, it was more palatable to cover up by saying, “He is denying the importance of the new birth.” Of course, the importance of the new birth was not in question.

Well, Paxton is quite unrepentant, and, like old Jeremiah, he has come back and added some words about what is the gospel and what is not the gospel. Before anyone starts shouting, “Paxton, much learning doth make thee mad,” please read his article carefully and hear him out.

R.D.B.



Both law and gospel must be proclaimed, but do we grasp as clearly as did the Reformers that they must not be “brewed and stewed together”?

How many understand that to preach that it is Christ’s coming into our hearts which saves us is really preaching salvation by law?

What Is the Gospel?

Geoffrey J. Paxton

Some questions appear almost rude. To ask, "What is the gospel?" is like asking, "Who is Jesus Christ?" or, "What is the Bible really about?" Just about everyone in the church takes it for granted that he knows what the gospel is, and therefore to raise such a fundamental question may be as irritating as asking people if they can still repeat the alphabet. Yet if we are unclear on the meaning of the gospel, we have to call into question all that we are doing.

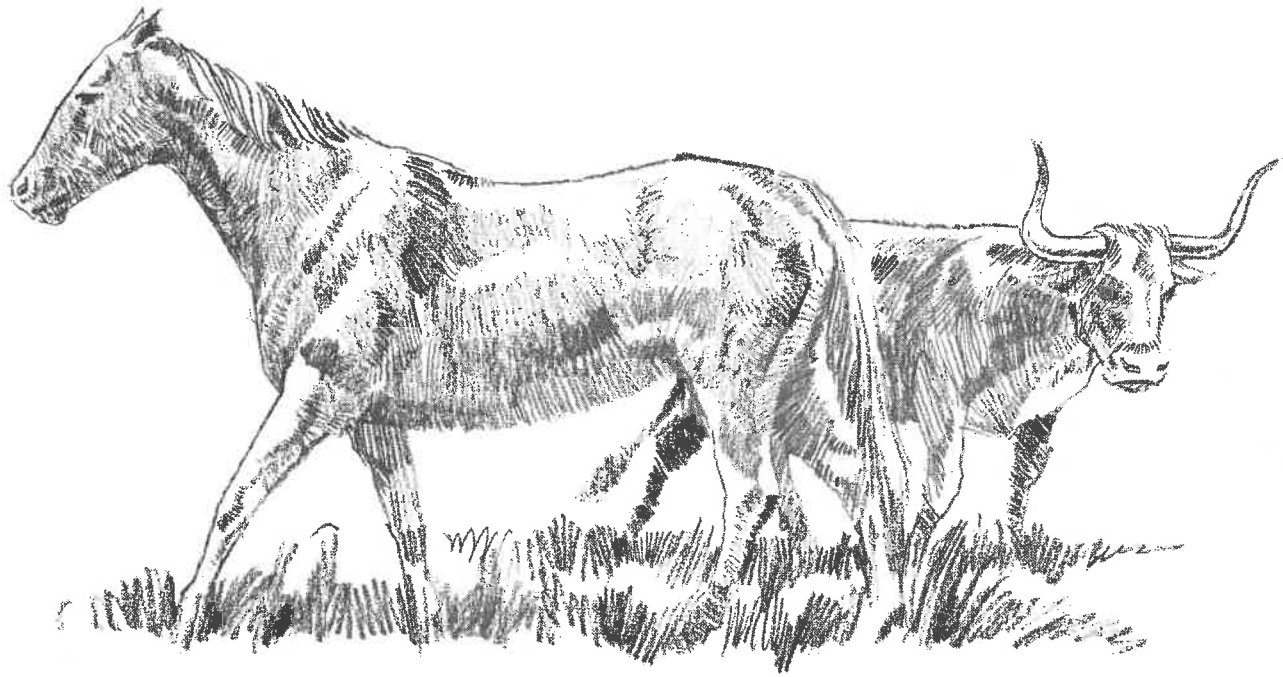
There is a great risk involved in posing this question afresh. We may discover we have been wrong! That *is* a great risk. The human heart has never found it easy to admit error, and today is no exception. To raise our question and to seek to answer it is to expose ourselves to the possibility that we have been mistaken on the most fundamental point of Christianity.

Let us humble ourselves before God and take the risk.

Geoffrey J. Paxton is an Anglican clergyman and president of the Queensland Bible Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

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The Essential Elements of the Gospel

There are characteristics which belong to one thing, but which also belong to other things. For example, a horse has four legs, but so does a cow. Such characteristics will not help us to discover the *essential* nature of a thing. To discover the essential nature of a thing is to define that thing; and to define that thing, we must discover the characteristics which belong to that thing and not to any other thing.

It is the same with defining the gospel. We have to arrive at those characteristics which are peculiar to it and to nothing else. To give characteristics which belong to the gospel *and* to other things will be to *describe* the gospel but not to *define* it. For this reason we have used the term “*essential* elements” in the preceding heading. Let us now see what these essential elements of the gospel are.

1. The Gospel Concerns Jesus Christ

The sum and substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus Christ involved in the gospel. He *is* the gospel. This is important, for it distinguishes Jesus Christ from the other Members of the Trinity and from the believer.

We say that we distinguish Jesus Christ from other Members of the Trinity. There is a very real sense in which we may say, “The gospel is Jesus Christ,” but in which we cannot say, “The gospel is the Father,” or,

“The gospel is the Spirit.” While the Father and the Spirit are obviously involved in the gospel, the Father is not the gospel and the Holy Spirit is not the gospel. The gospel is about the doing (life) and dying (death) of Jesus Christ. It is not about the life and death of the Father or the Spirit. While the Father is glorified in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel itself is not Father-centered. Nor is it Spirit-centered.

Hence, to expound the gospel, we may proclaim who Jesus Christ is and what He has done, what the Father has done in and through Jesus Christ, or what Jesus Christ has done in and by the power of the Spirit. Always, Jesus Christ is central when we are preaching the gospel. What is said of the Father and the Spirit in the gospel is said from the disclosure of such in Jesus Christ.

We say that we distinguish Jesus Christ from the believer. Just as the gospel is not about the Father or the Spirit (in the way we have explained), so the gospel is not about the believer. The gospel is about Jesus Christ.

Though some do not wish to speak of the believer as being involved in the gospel, it may be possible to speak of the believer as being involved in that he is represented in the gospel. He is represented in the gospel by his Substitute, Jesus Christ. The believer lives and dies *in Jesus Christ*.

Thus, to expound the gospel, we may proclaim who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. We may even proclaim who the believer is (son of God) and what he has done (rendered perfect obedience to God) so long as we proclaim that this was done *in and through Jesus Christ*. Just as what is said about the Father and the

Heresy is to attribute to the Father what was done by the Son (crucified and risen again), to attribute to the Spirit what was done by the Son, or to attribute to the believer what was done by the Son.

Spirit in the gospel is said from the central standpoint of Jesus Christ, so what is said about the believer in the gospel must always be spoken of from the central standpoint of Jesus Christ. The believer must be spoken of in the gospel in terms of what Jesus Christ has done.

Heresy (at this point) is to make the Father central, the Spirit central, or the believer central. Let us put this another way. Heresy is to attribute to the Father what was done by the Son (crucified and risen again), to attribute to the Spirit what was done by the Son, or to attribute to the believer what was done by the Son.

We may become heretical and preach a false gospel in another way. Though we speak of the believer's living and dying in Jesus, we must always be careful to note that he in no way helps the Son do His saving work. How could he? The believer was not present except by representation. What was done in the gospel was done for him by his Substitute. He was present only in his Substitute.

Let us look at this in another way. The Father was present in the Son, and all believers were present in the Son. But the Father was actually present. Jesus Christ was not a Substitute for the Father (i.e., on earth instead of the Father), but He was the Substitute for believers (living and dying in the stead of believers). Though the gospel is what Jesus Christ has done (lived and died), the Father aided the Son by His Spirit, whereas no believer aided the Son in the work of the gospel.

The gospel is about Jesus Christ—not about the Father as such, or the Spirit as such, or the believer.

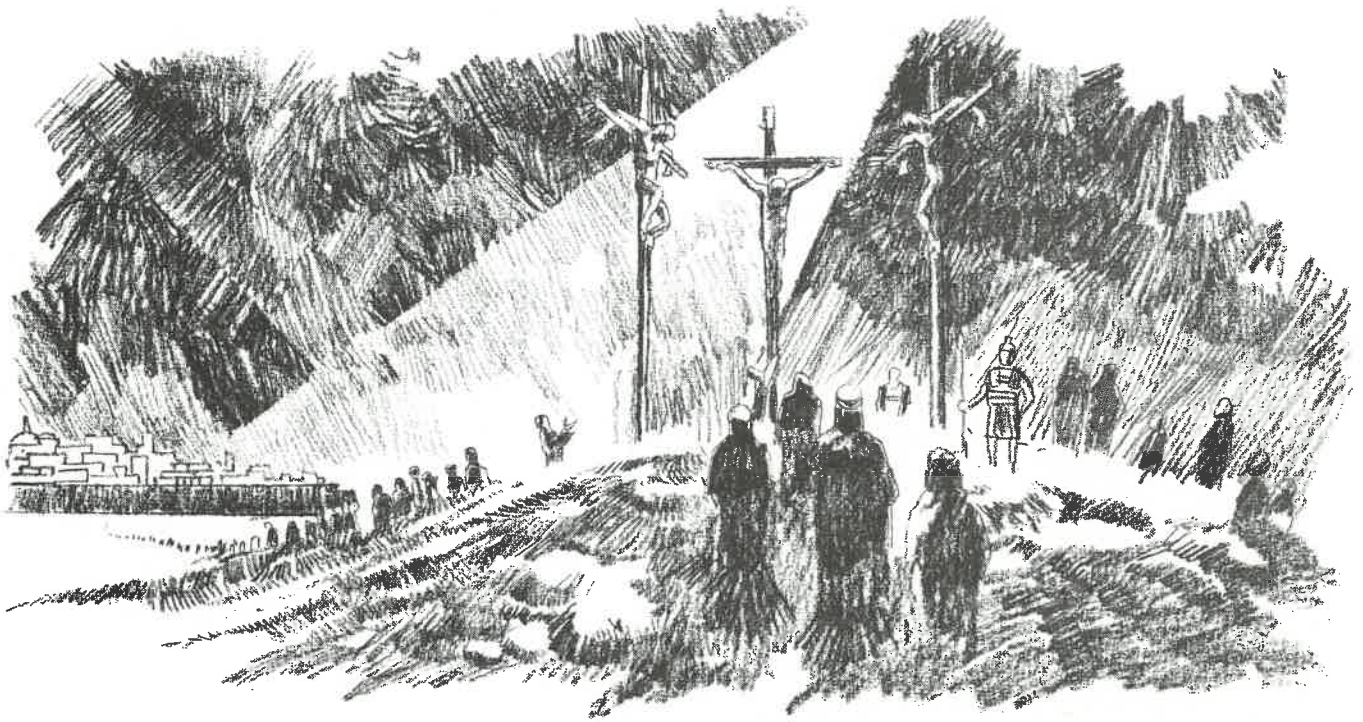
2. The Gospel Concerns a Past, Historical Event

Each of the three words *past*, *historical* and *event* are of vital significance for understanding what the gospel is. The gospel of the apostles was something that had happened. They all looked back upon it. They did not point to anything in the present as gospel, and they did not point to anything in the future as gospel. Notice, we are not saying that they did not point to anything in either present or future. We are simply saying that they did not point to anything in present or future *as gospel*. Unless we are looking back and pointing to something that happened in the past, we are not preaching the gospel. The "past-ness" of the gospel is one of its essential aspects.

The gospel was not a vision. It was not a dream. The gospel was a historical happening. It happened in history. Within a certain degree of accuracy, it may be dated.

The historical nature of the gospel—its *past*, historical nature—has certain important consequences:

First, you cannot *exhort* the gospel. You cannot exhort a past, historical work. You can only declare it, proclaim it, and publish it abroad. Exhortation is good (because it is biblical) and needed, but it is not the gospel and is not included in the gospel. Notice, we are not saying that it is not included in a sermon wherein the gospel is preached. We are simply saying that if it is included in a "gospel sermon," it must not be a part of the gospel.



The gospel cannot be experienced.

You cannot exhort the gospel. You cannot exhort a past, historical work. You can only declare it, proclaim it, and publish it abroad.

Second, not only can you not exhort the gospel, but also the gospel cannot be experienced. Yes, you have read correctly! *The gospel cannot be experienced.* We have several reasons for saying this:

a. The gospel is about a *unique* experience. A unique experience is that which cannot (by virtue of definition) be repeated. If the believer could experience the gospel, then he would repeat the experience; and if he could repeat the experience, then the gospel would not be about a unique experience.

b. The gospel is *perfect*. Since the Fall, there is no perfection on earth either before or after the gospel. If the believer could experience the gospel, he would experience the perfect; and if he could experience the perfect, he would not need the gospel.

c. All historians know that you cannot experience a past, historical event. You may identify with it as much as you are able, but you cannot experience it.

d. The gospel concerns the *substitutionary* work of Christ. If the believer could experience the gospel, it would cease to be substitutionary. The gospel is what God has done in Christ *in my stead*. If I could experience this, it would not be in my stead.

3. We *believe* the gospel. Believing the gospel is hoping in something that is *not seen*. Faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1); but who hopes for that which he already has (Rom. 8:24)?

We repeat, The gospel cannot be experienced. We certainly do experience its benefits, or the Holy Spirit. But as we have seen, the Holy Spirit is not the gospel. The Holy Spirit given to the believer is the *fruit* of the gospel. So also are faith, hope, joy, peace as a subjec-

tive state, and holiness as a state of the believer. They are all fruits of the gospel. We must not confuse the root (the gospel) and the fruit (see Col. 1:5, 6).

The gospel is a past, historical event. This has stupendous consequences for the church and the world. The gospel is the past, historical Christ event.

3. The Gospel Concerns the Perfect Work of God in Jesus Christ for Us

As we have stated, there is no imperfection in the gospel. It is the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ for us. There are two important aspects of this:

First, the gospel concerns the *perfect* work of God in Jesus Christ. Unless we are preaching a work of perfection in Jesus Christ, we are not preaching the gospel. The gospel admits of no development. Anything that does admit of development (the Christian life of sanctification, etc.) cannot, by virtue of definition, be the gospel. For instance, faith is good, but it is not perfect. Repentance is good and necessary, but none of us repents as he ought to. Holy living is good, and no man will see the Lord without it; but our holy living is far from perfect. None of these things can qualify, therefore, as the gospel.

Nothing that is happening in the believer can be called the gospel.

The second important aspect to notice is that the gospel is the perfect work of God *in Jesus Christ*. Even if the believer were perfect, the gospel would not be about him. It concerns Jesus Christ as the place of God's perfect work. Nothing that is happening in the believer can be called the gospel. It may be called the fruit of the gospel, but not the gospel itself. If this is so (and it is so), then the medium and the message (of the gospel) are quite distinct. Only concerning Jesus Christ can it be said that the Medium is the message.

4. The Gospel Is the Power of God for Salvation (Rom. 1:16)

We must be clear about what is being said here. We are not saying that the gospel *leads to* power. Paul tells us that the gospel *is* the power of God for salvation. The power of God is the gospel. The gospel and the power of God are identical. This is why we include this point under "essential elements"—i.e., elements essential to the nature of the gospel.

There are many aspects of this point that we could develop, but we shall focus on an area which needs clarification, judging by much literature in the Christian world. Paul says that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Usually we take such a



statement to mean only that if the gospel is believed initially, then salvation will follow. In other words, we think that such a statement (i.e., that the gospel is the power of God) refers almost exclusively, if not exclusively, to the salvation of the unbeliever.

But it must be highlighted that Paul's statement is also greatly applicable to the *believer*. The gospel saves the unbeliever *when* he believes, but it also saves the believer as he believes. It is the power of God for the salvation of the believer. Let us isolate certain consequences of this truth.

First, the gospel is that by which the believer is saved by God at the beginning, middle and end of the Christian walk. There is never a point in the Christian's life when the gospel is not saving him. He must therefore look to the gospel at every point in his walk with God.

Second, we trust that we have made it clear that the gospel and sanctification are quite distinct realities. The gospel does not equal, nor does it include, sanctification. If it did, we could not assert our previous three points. Sanctification is the chief work of the Spirit which takes place in the experience of the believer. This work is not yet perfect. Since the gospel and sanctification are not identical, we cannot say that sanctification is that by which God saves us. The *gospel* is the power of God unto salvation.

Now let us make ourselves quite clear. We are not suggesting for one moment that sanctification is unimportant. We are ever prepared to say that no man will be found pleasing in God's sight without it. But what we are saying is that true sanctification will always



Christian, from *Pilgrim's Progress*.

be the product of the gospel (Col. 1:5, 6). Only what is produced in our lives as a direct result of the gospel is true sanctification. Sanctification needs the gospel for its source and power. The satanic error is to turn sanctification into the gospel. When this happens, the power of Christian witness is seen to reside in a holy life. But we must realize that sanctification is itself the result and effect of the power of God in the gospel.

Not only does sanctification need the gospel as its powerful source, but sanctification needs the gospel as its constant protection. A sanctification which is cut loose from the gospel is as dangerous as a gospel that does not produce any sanctification. Perhaps it is more dangerous. We say "more dangerous" because a gospel without any sanctification is easy enough to spot. However, a gospel-less sanctification may be more difficult to detect, especially in an age which thinks that the gospel and sanctification are identical.

If sanctification is allowed, *in whole or in part*, to become the gospel, then we have a sanctification apart from the gospel. To make sanctification to equal the gospel, or to make the gospel to include sanctification, is to posit a sanctification *without* the gospel.

Third, sanctification needs the gospel as *its final protection*. All who are saved at the end will be saved by the same means as at the beginning. Our sanctification will be no more capable of saving us at the end than it was at the beginning. As far as saving us is concerned, the only thing our sanctification adds to the gospel is our imperfection! So much for those who see final salvation to be based on our sanctification.

"What the church needs today is more sanctification!" This is a common cry heard today. It is unfortunate, however, that the cry so often signifies an elevating of sanctification to the status and role of the gospel.

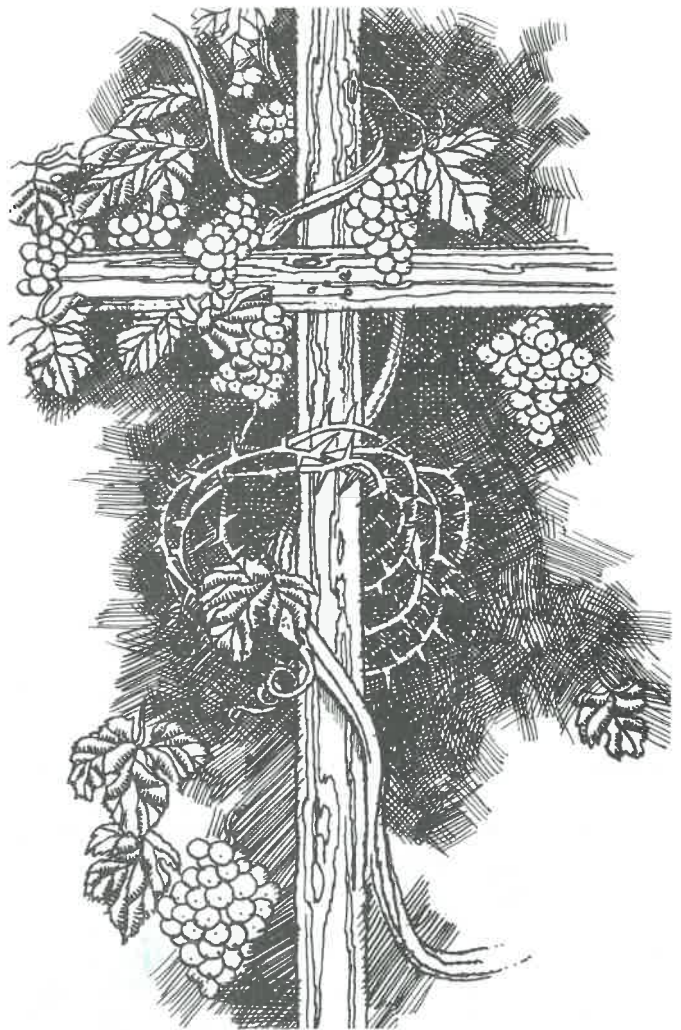
If the gospel is that which produces real sanctification (and who wants any other sort?) and the church needs more real sanctification, then the church needs more gospel. The gospel is the power of God for (the producing of) sanctification.

Let us summarize what we have said thus far. We have attempted to state what the gospel essentially is. That is to say, we have attempted to state what makes it the gospel and nothing else.

1. The gospel is about Jesus Christ and no other Person. In a real sense it is not even about any other Person in the Godhead, and certainly not about any other human person such as the believer.

2. The gospel is a past, historical event. It is past and not present or future. It is a historical event and not existential experience. Unless we are preaching a past, historical event, we are not preaching the gospel.

3. The gospel is the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ. All that is perfect is not the gospel, and all that



A sanctification which is cut loose from the gospel is as dangerous as a gospel that does not produce any sanctification.

is imperfect is not the gospel. The gospel is the perfect work of God *in* Jesus Christ.

4. The gospel is the power of God for salvation—for the salvation even of the believer. Our sanctification is dependent upon the gospel as its source, protection, and final covering before the great judgment throne of God. We must always resist the isolation of sanctification from the gospel at any point in the Christian walk. Also, those who identify the gospel and sanctification and those who wish to include sanctification as a part of the gospel end up divorcing sanctification from the gospel. It is indeed tragic that so often the cry, "Sanctification! More sanctification!" means, "Away with the gospel! Away with the gospel!"

This Gospel and Other Gospels

We now want to simply make explicit what is implicit in our previous section. We have positively stated four essential, definite features of the gospel. In the light of what we have already laid down, we must now say what cannot be the gospel.

1. Election, Divorced From Jesus Christ, Cannot Be the Gospel

Not long ago, following an address on the four preceding points of this article, a woman confessed to me that she had been talking to her aged aunt about her need of salvation and that she was speaking to her aunt about whether or not she believed in election. The substance of the woman's evangelistic message was a philosophical concept of the predestinating activity of God. But election which is not grounded in the Christ event cannot qualify as gospel! A doctrine of election which takes as its starting point a philosophical concept instead of the gospel makes the Father the center and not Christ. A doctrine of election apart from Christ is inimical to sanctification and not its powerful source.

2. "TULIP" Cannot Qualify as the Gospel

"TULIP" stands for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. Leaving aside the correctness or otherwise of "TULIP," what we are concerned about is the way in which many Reformed folk use "TULIP." Some give the impression that "TULIP" equals the gospel. Some speak of "TULIP" as though it were the thing that we have to offer to the world. But "TULIP" contains things which cannot qualify as gospel. As an example, the letter "P" at the end of "TULIP" stands for the perseverance of the saints. The perseverance of the saints cannot qualify as gospel. The four elements that we have stated make it impossible for perseverance to qualify as the gospel. We need to beware lest we offer a system of doctrine—as good as it might be—as the gospel. We need to be careful that we do not derive our security from an intellectually watertight system rather than from the great work of God in Jesus Christ on our behalf.

3. "New Birth-ism" Cannot Qualify as the Gospel

Those who preach "Ye must be born again" as the gospel are preaching a false gospel. To begin with, the

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new birth (which is biblical) is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a reality which takes place now and, by the grace of God, will take place in the future. The new birth is not the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ and is not said to be the power of God unto salvation. Yet much preaching puts the new birth in the place of Jesus Christ. It is a great fallacy to present the new birth as the gospel.

It was the error of Rome to treat regeneration as the gospel. All too many evangelicals have fallen into the same trap. How many times do we hear the gospel presented as, "Jesus will come into your heart," or a sermon climaxing with, "Ask Jesus into your heart"? It is not the coming of Jesus into the heart that is the gospel, but the coming of Jesus into the world on behalf of sinful men.

Focusing on the human heart is not focusing on Jesus Christ. It is not preaching a past, historical event. It is not preaching the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ. And it is not preaching the power of God for salvation. Those who focus on the heart are not preaching that which is the powerful source of sanctification, but that which is inimical to true salvation.

4. The Second Coming Cannot Qualify as the Gospel

Just as the new birth is biblical, so the second coming of Jesus Christ is biblical. However, just as the new birth is not the gospel, so the second coming of the Master is not the gospel. The gospel is a past, historical event, whereas the second coming is the future event of the Son. Just as there are many who are heart-centered, here-and-now-centered, so there are those whose gospel is the message of the eschaton (last things).

There are many who believe that what the church needs is a new heart experience if revival is to come. There are also those who believe that the secret of revival is to preach eschatology. Hence, the heart and the future become centers of preaching. *What God has done in Christ* is subordinated to *what God will do in the believer's heart*, and *what God has done in the past* is subordinated to *what God will do in the future*. When this is done, a false gospel is preached, and sanctification and eschatology are robbed of their biblical nature.

5. The Baptism of the Spirit Cannot Qualify as the Gospel

The preoccupation of neo-Pentecostalism cannot qualify as the gospel, let alone as the "full gospel." The preoccupation of neo-Pentecostalism is with the Spirit and not with Jesus Christ, with a present experience or a possible future experience and not with a past, historical event. The preoccupation of neo-Pente-

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The preoccupation of neo-Pentecostalism is not with the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ, but with the exciting work of God in the heart of the believer.

Anything which we exhort or experience cannot qualify as the gospel.

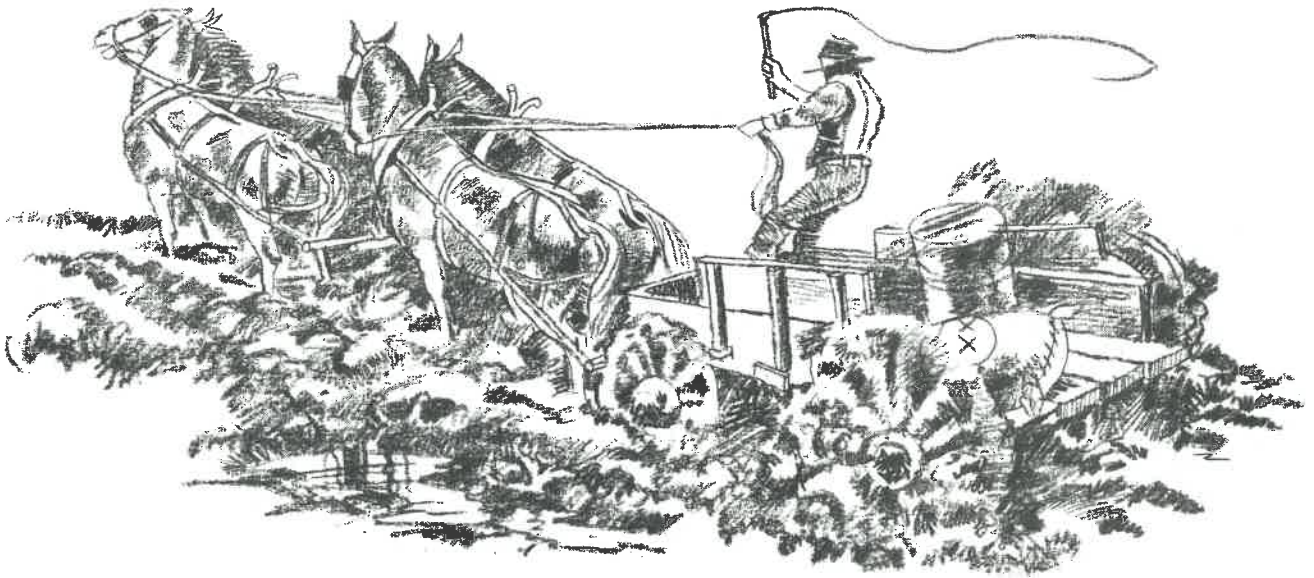
costalism is not with the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ, but with the exciting work of God in the heart of the believer. Further, what Pentecostals regard as the demonstration of the power of God is a poor substitute for what Paul calls the power of God—namely, the gospel. For all who wish to see, it is clear that neo-Pentecostals are excited about that which is far inferior to that which excited Paul and the other New Testament writers.

6. Anything Which We Exhort or Experience Cannot Qualify as the Gospel

We have seen in the first section of this article that the gospel is a past, historical event. As such, it cannot be exhorted or experienced. Anything which we exhort or experience cannot qualify as the gospel. Now, we are not saying that we should not exhort or that we should not experience. All we are saying is that when we do

exhort and when we do experience, *it is not the gospel.*

There are many, as we have seen, who believe that the revival of the church is to be found in more sanctification, a deeper experience of God. Such people forget that the greatest motivating power of God is the gospel (Rom. 1:16). The way to get the people of God sanctified is to motivate them to good works; and the way to motivate them to good works is to preach the gospel as the alpha and the omega of right conduct. When we do exhort (and so we should), we must keep our sanctification from ever becoming our justification. Justification must always stand guard over sanctification. The perfect work of God must always stand guard over the good works of His children. The past, historical event of God must always stand guard over the present and future activity of men. The doorposts of human works must always be touched with the blood of Christ for the angels to pass over us—yea, even on the last day.



The Real Issue Before the Church

Robert D. Brinsmead

The people of God have become bogged down and preoccupied with a program of getting the victory over sin, living the victorious Spirit-filled life, developing radiant Christian personalities, and following all sorts of sanctification techniques.

Answering a Serious Question

There is no question but that in view of the imminence of Christ's second coming and the attendant events of the last days, the church is called to radical holiness. Yet even in this earnest and well-meaning pursuit after holiness, the people of God have become bogged down and preoccupied with a program of getting the victory over sin, living the victorious Spirit-filled life, developing radiant Christian personalities, and following all sorts of sanctification techniques.

Recently a seminary professor, who accepts the holiness teaching of the total eradication of all sin before Jesus comes, wrote to our *Present Truth* office. He fears that our emphasis on justification by faith belittles the power of Christ to really make His people perfect in readiness for the great eschatological events that lie just ahead. So he said:

The Christ . . . I worship is one powerful and concerned enough to prepare a people who, through the power of His indwelling presence, can actually stop sinning. Your Christ seems unable to do this and unwilling even to try.

This brother raises a question which is a real issue in some sections of the church. I want to treat the objection, as well as this brother in Christ, with utmost respect. He represents many of God's people who want

to take both sin and the power of the gospel seriously. It ill becomes some of us to throw stones at the Christian perfectionist while we treat the call to Bible holiness so lightly.

In taking up this question of Christ's ability to solve the sin problem, I want to get past all such arguments as the meaning of justification, regeneration, imputation, sanctification, impartation, perfection, etc.—and deal with the heart of this “holiness” octopus.

The supreme question is, “Do we really *believe* the gospel?” According to St. John, this one crucial question divides the whole world into those who believe and those who believe not.

The Sin Problem—Solved or Unsolved?

Our professor friend obviously feels that the One he calls “my Christ” is superior to the One whom he assumes is our weakling Christ. Yet what appears to be the strength of the holiness argument is really its weakness. Our friend has completely misunderstood the gospel upon which we take our stand. The Christ of the New Testament is One who has already dealt with sin (Heb. 1:3; 9:26). Having utterly defeated “all the powers ranged against us, He exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in His final glorious triumphant act!” Col. 2:15, Phillips.

Some feel that the cross merely inspires us to deal with sin. But we believe the New Testament message that the cross actually dealt with and solved the sin problem. We no longer live in the Old Testament era, which could only look forward, saying, “Behold, the days come. . . .” How can we believe the gospel while we continue to look forward, expecting that Christ and His people will one day solve the sin problem?

The professor's Christ is One who can and will one day deal with the sin problem. We would not be so unkind as to suggest that we really have a different Christ. We just want to share with him the good news that his Christ has done exceedingly above anything he has ever asked or thought.

Here is the crux of the matter: The New Testament everywhere presents the gospel as the good news of what God *has done* in the Christ event. All the glorious promises of the Old Testament—the promise of victory over death and evil, judgment and deliverance, the coming of the kingdom of God and the new created order, and even every promise of God's mighty eschatological salvation—all were fulfilled in the Christ event (2 Cor. 1:20; Acts 13:32, 33). To confess anything less is to confess that Jesus is not God's Messiah.

The New Testament declares that the long-expected kingdom (rule) of God has arrived in Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15). It declares that in Him the old aeon has passed away and the new aeon and the new creation have come to light. Therefore all who are now in Christ by faith

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"... David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.
1 Sam. 17:48.

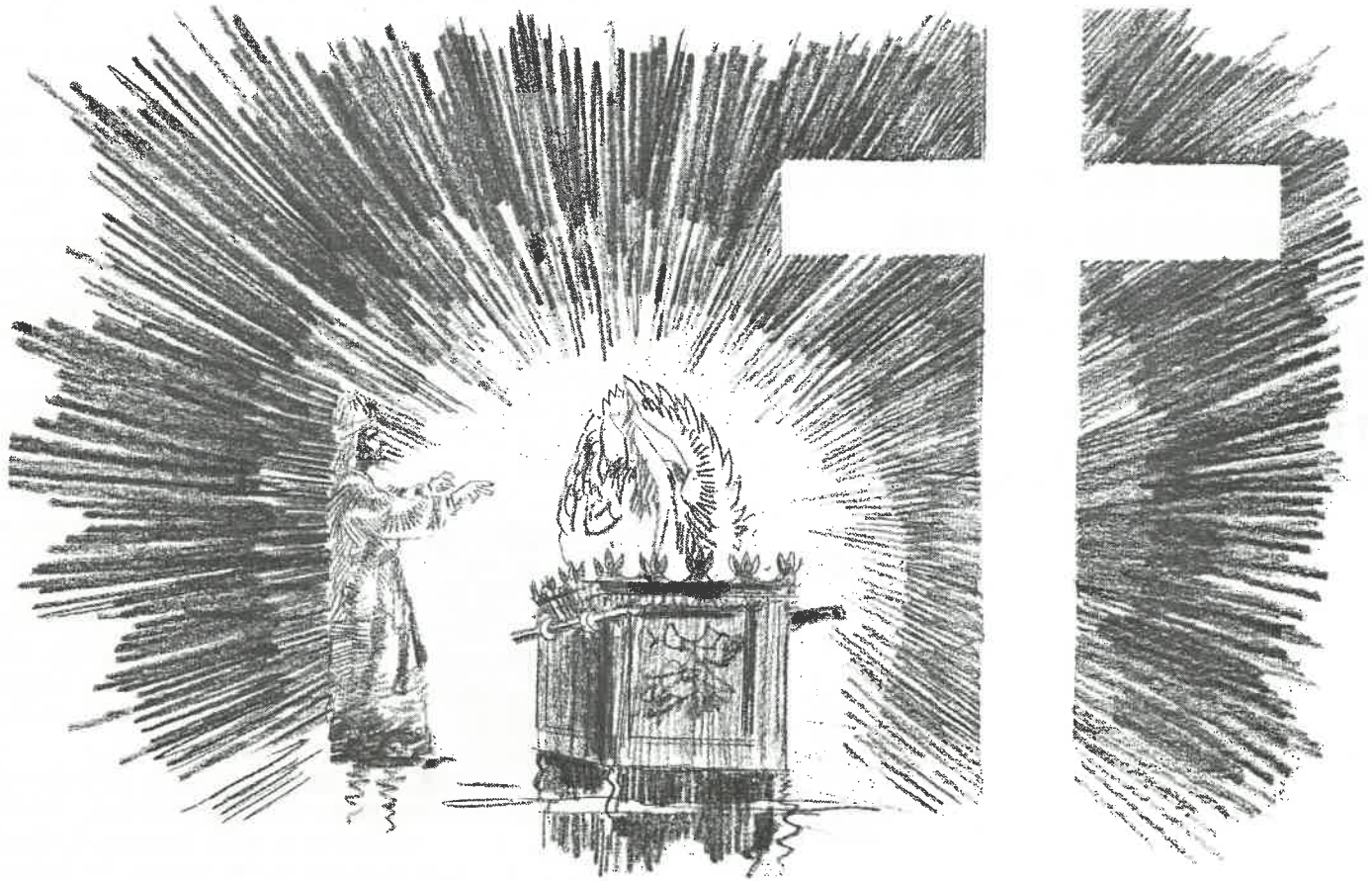
are already part of the new order (2 Cor. 5:17), and they are already translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:12). To be sure, believers still wait for the final manifestation of the kingdom at the consummation, when they will embrace their inheritance by sight. But the gospel declares that the kingdom has already arrived in Jesus, and we by faith are already part of this new creation.

If there is anything better than this gospel which will more effectively kill the love of the world in our hearts, we would like to know what it is. As Luther said, if we would only believe this gospel and constantly affirm it in our hearts, we would utterly despise all the pomp and vainglory that this world has to offer.

Again, the New Testament echoes the marvelous news that Satan has been utterly defeated and cast down (John 12:31, 32; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:10). He is a vanquished foe, for our David has single-handedly overcome this Goliath who terrified us night and day. Even the last enemy, "the king of terrors" (Job 18:14)—that is to say, death itself—*has been* abolished by Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus Jesus says, "... whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." John 11:26. This gospel is seen and grasped only by faith, for Christians appear to go down into the pit as others. To the believer, however, death is a harmless serpent whose fangs have been drawn out, a mere painted death, for in Christ he has already triumphed over it and is raised far above its power (Eph. 1:18-23; 2:1-6). If there is anything better than this gospel that will give us more boldness in the face of death, we would like to know what it is.

And what of sin? Is it not quite obvious that if Christ has abolished death, which results from sin, He must have made an utter end of sin? Indeed He did! In the fullness of time God's Messiah appeared "to finish the transgression, and to make an *end* of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity." Dan. 9:24. In the gospel the righteousness of God (an Old Testament expression meaning the righteous judgment of God) is revealed (Rom. 1:16, 17). In the year A.D. 31 God arraigned the whole guilty world—Gentile and Jew—to give account at His righteous judgment seat. There all were found guilty and judged worthy of death (cf. Rom. 1:18-3:20). God Himself stood at the side of the accused, and in the Person of Christ He stood with them and for them. Thanks be to God's unspeakable mercy and Christ's unfathomable love, One stood at that tribunal as the representative Man—the Man who stood before the bar of justice as every man, bearing the sins of every man. Here this representative Man—the Man who was there as you and me—was judged and found worthy of death, yet not on account of His own sins, but those of the whole world, which He was in Person. Here was "the judgment of this world." John 12:31.

When God set forth Christ to be a propitiation for our sins (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2), He really dealt with



our sins. Our sins were punished in Christ and put away by Christ. Then in Jesus' resurrection God caused His acquitting verdict to be proclaimed openly, declaring that those who believe are justified—that is, they stand innocent and free from sin in the eyes of the Judge. It is therefore not possible for God to find any sin in the man who confesses with his mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believes in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead.

According to the writer of Hebrews, Christ purged our sins before He sat down at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3). Calvary not only enables God to do something with sin, but Calvary *did* something with sin. The death of Christ was God's judicial atonement whereby sin was both judged and purged by Him. As the high priest of old sprinkled the blood on the *hilasterion* (the lid of the ark, the mercy seat) and made full satisfaction for the claims of the law, so Christ on Calvary made *hilaskesthai* (Heb. 2:17, Greek). That is to say, He actually became our Mercy Seat whereby the claims of the law have been fully satisfied in respect to all our sins. ". . . once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Heb. 9:26. ". . . by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Heb. 10:14. This means that the whole community of believers has already been per-

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fectured in Christ. Or as Paul distinctly states, "You have been brought to perfection in Him." Col. 2:10. The words of the prophet are therefore fulfilled, ". . . the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found. . . ." Jer. 50:20.

Then, if we go to the witness of the apostle John, we find that eternal life, the very life of the age to come, has come to us in Jesus Christ. The Lord declares, "He that heareth My words, and believeth on Him that sent Me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John 5:24.

God has already judged and acquitted the world in Jesus Christ. He has already purged, put away sin, and perfected humanity in His redemptive act in Jesus. And He has already given us eternal life in His Son.

To believe is to be savingly in Christ and to be therefore included in the victory. But faith cannot do anything to bring into existence what God has already brought into existence.

Thus does the New Testament everywhere proclaim the significance of Christ's triumphant cry, "It is finished!" John 19:30. God has already judged and acquitted the world in Jesus Christ. He has already purged, put away sin, and perfected humanity in His redemptive act in Jesus. And He has already given us eternal life in His Son. Therefore the message of the New Testament is, ". . . all things are ready. . . ." Matt. 22:4. All who believe are pure and righteous before God. That is, in God's estimation—which is the only estimation that matters—they are free from sin, judged righteous, pure, perfect, and they sit at His own right hand in heavenly places.

We must further insist that this work of God has gloriously triumphed whether man believes it or not. Man's unbelief cannot make of none effect the faith of God (Rom. 3:3; cf. Is. 49:5). Humanity has already been rescued and made the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ as surely as this representative Man is at God's right hand. We say this because some people talk as if Calvary has accomplished nothing unless they bring their marvelous power of choice or exercise of faith into it—as if it is all darkness and lifeless until that human contribution sparks everything to life and saving efficacy.

Of course, God gives us the privilege of believing in what He has done. The gospel calls us to say, "Amen. That is the truth." To believe is to be savingly *in Christ* and to be therefore included in the victory. To believe not is to call God and His apostles liars and to turn down "the birthright." But faith cannot do anything to bring into existence what God has already brought into existence.

No wonder the gospel prophet commands us to tell Zion the good news "that her warfare *is* accomplished." Is. 40:2. What unrestrained joy there is in the message which declares:

I have [past tense] blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I *have* redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein. . . .—Is. 44:22, 23.

As for the sinful human nature, the gospel also proclaims that this has been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). "If one died for all, then all are dead." 2 Cor. 5:14. When Paul told the Colossians, "For ye are dead [ye died] . . ." (Col. 3:3), it was not because they were supersaints who had finally mastered the technique of self-crucifixion. The real problem in the Colossian church was that they were trying by some program to crucify the sinful nature—but their efforts were absolutely useless (cf. Col. 2:20-23). Their victory-life piety was an expression of unbelief in the reality of the gospel. They were, in fact, guilty of hypocritically



lying to one another (as all false holiness makes people do). They were judgmental and unforgiving to others (as all legalists are—cf. Col. 3:9, 10). Paul did not tell them that they ought to be “dead,” nor did he tell them how to become “dead,” but he set before these poor, fumbling, sinful believers the gospel that they *had* died. Only on that basis could he appeal to them, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth. . . .” Col. 3:5. One has to believe that he *is* a son of God through Jesus Christ before he can act like a son of God. In the same way, we have to be persuaded that we *have* died to sin before we can act as those who are alive from the dead.

The Call to the Life of Faith

The gospel calls us to a life of faith. On the basis of what has been done, we are to believe that we are

already part of the new creation, even though we will not see it until Jesus comes. By faith we are to see that death is conquered when death stares us in the face. Because of the flesh, faith is not without trial. We may have to confess that death is conquered while we say goodbye to our dearest on earth. We are called to believe that we are righteous with God when, as Luther said, we cannot feel ourselves to be righteous, or feel but very little. “Thou must not feel, but believe thou art righteous. . . . Unless thou dost believe that thou art righteous, thou doest great injury against Christ. . . . Thou canst not deny that thou art righteous.” Thus does the great Reformer strengthen the feeble knees of the trembling believer!

God has made our humanity pure and righteous in Jesus Christ, and therefore everyone who believes is truly righteous with God. This is righteousness by faith. God will not, cannot find any sin in any man who believes this gospel. But this life of faith is not without

severe trial. It is the man who lives nearest to God who knows only too well that the viper of sin still lives in his own bosom. The more holy his life, the more sensitively he feels the power of indwelling sin and realizes that even his most pious works do not escape the taint of inbred corruption. At times he is severely tempted to doubt that he has a righteousness which is valid with God. Yet God sends His Spirit to sustain the Christian's faith and nerve him so that in the midst of conflict his *remaining* sin does not become *reigning* sin. In this way does God marvelously cause indwelling sin to be a great blessing to the believer. It not only keeps his faith fastened upon that "alien righteousness of Christ," but it causes him to "groan" in earnest anticipation of "the hope of righteousness" at Christ's return (Rom. 8:23; Gal. 5:5). This tension between *having* (faith) and *not having* (hope) must not be dissolved until the advent, for life is not fulfilled in the historical process.

But as Luther warned, there are some souls who are in too great haste to become pure and sinless saints in their existential situation. They are not content with the righteousness of faith. They want an existential salvation in which they know and feel no sin at all. When they find that God does not cooperate with their excessive zeal, they are in danger of sinking down in discouragement. The flesh wants to live by a "righteousness of sight," and it verily appears to the flesh that a God who does not exterminate this indwelling sin is a weak God or an unwilling God; or the believer is caused to needlessly berate himself for not having enough faith.

To be sure, every believer must always confess his sinnerhood (Ps. 143:7; 1 John 1:8). The fact that he must continue to do this is not due to either a lack of power on God's part or a lack of faith on his part. The thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, is not removed by the prayer of faith. God says to him, as He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. 12:9.

That a believer in the midst of his sinfulness of nature can be pure and righteous before God is more an exhibition of God's power and grace and wisdom than the final transformation from mortal sinfulness to immortal sinlessness. The latter is the exercise of creative power, which is wonderful indeed; but the former is by the power of the cross. It is where sin abounds that grace does much more abound (Rom. 5:20). Wonderful indeed is the power that can utterly exterminate this viper of indwelling sin by one little word in God's good time, but far more wonderful is the power that can keep us precious and pleasing in the sight of infinite holiness in the midst of our human imperfection.

To feel no sin or distress about our wretchedness and then to have faith that we are righteous before God is not the faith of apostles and saints. But to be conscious of how far we fall short of God's glory, even

in our most pious tasks, yet to be confident that we are righteous with God because of Jesus Christ—that is *real faith*. It was in the midst of present weakness, suffering and groaning in the daily conflict with his sinful human nature (Rom. 7:14-25; 8:1-23) that Paul could yet look up and cry, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" (Rom. 8:34, 35)—and we could add, or any time of trouble to come, or our own imperfection? Nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate the *believer* from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38, 39). Let it be settled, therefore, that so long as a man believes the gospel, he is righteous. Just as no good work can justify the believer, but faith, so no sin can damn him, but unbelief. I am fully aware that this gospel cannot be preached without being suspected of antinomianism, but we have to take that risk. This gospel, however, is not a soft pillow on which hypocrites can rest their heads, nor is it any comfort for those who want to take sin lightly. The faith of which we have been speaking cannot exist where there is any wicked intention to sin, nor will it ever lead its possessor to exercise sin. It will do more to kill the love of evil in the heart and to promote holiness than all the spiritual techniques that men can invent.

In Jesus Christ, God has made man upright. It is better to live by faith in that than to seek out many inventions. These ingenious inventions on how to live the victorious life are poor substitutes for believing the gospel. They do not cure sin, but they actually stir it into life, regardless of much pious-sounding talk. If sanctification is not built on faith in the gospel, it is only an expression of unbelief. It is for this reason that so much victory-life piety is not a conquest over sin, but the perpetuation of it. What else could it be when it is unbelief in the gospel? We must not entertain the idea that Christ sits at God's right hand waiting for His people to believe that He can vanquish sin. He has already done it. Christ is Lord! That is the ring of the New Testament. Time does not tarry for Christ to deal with sin, not even for Him to carry out a mopping-up operation against the enemy. It tarries solely because He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), but that sinners may have opportunity to repent and believe what He has done. We can have no higher work or greater privilege than was given to those despised publicans who "justified God" (Luke 7:29), not through some rare spiritual feat, but simply by repentance and faith.

The New Testament's greatest question, therefore, is simply this: "Who hath believed our report?" Isa. 53:1; Rom. 10:16. For those who do comes the assurance, "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not [under any circumstances] be ashamed." Rom. 10:11.

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