

The Whole Gospel

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from beginning to end, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Romans 1:16-17

Many of us who profess to be Christians practice only part of the gospel: Christ’s atonement for the forgiveness of sins. We know faith in Christ and His atoning death on the cross is the only basis for our salvation. However, we don’t know (or don’t practice) that faith in Christ’s death on the cross is also the only basis for our Christian living. The result is we believe our sins are forgiven by faith but we don’t know how to live the Christian life by faith. We trust Jesus as Savior and hope one day to go to heaven but, in between, we struggle to live as Christians by the best of our ability.

What is this Christian life that Jesus intended us to live? Jesus described it as a life of discipleship. As His disciples, Jesus commands us to deny ourselves and give up everything (Luke 9:23; 14:33). We are called to love just as He loves (John 13:34) and be holy just as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15). The more we read the Bible, we will realize forgiveness of sins is a gift (at Christ’s expense) but discipleship will cost our entire life. We cannot genuinely profess to be Christians if we are not truly Christ’s disciples. Jesus said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say (Luke 6:46)?”

How can we live this life of spiritual purity, self-sacrifice and selfless love? The answer is we cannot. Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5).” It is impossible to follow Christ and truly obey His commands if we rely on our own morality and ability. But God has provided the way through His Son’s death on the cross. When Jesus died, He took our sin nature upon Himself so that our sinful nature died with Him (Romans 6:6). “God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians

5:21).” We might call this a divine heart transplant by which God exchanged our terminally sin-sick heart with His Son’s divine heart. Since our sinful nature is now dead and gone, we can live the Christian life by faith in Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

Jesus has already borne our old sinful nature on His cross but He also said, “Whoever does not bear *his* own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27).” A similar verse is found in Matthew 10:38: “Anyone who does not take *his* cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.” In the next verse (Matthew 10:39), Jesus then explains how we can bear our own cross: “Whoever finds his *life* will lose it, and whoever loses his *life* for My sake will find it.” The Greek word used here for “life” is *psyche*, which means soul-life. Therefore, we bear our cross and prove we are His disciples by yielding our soul-life to Christ. God has made us spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). When we were born again, our old sinful nature died and our spirit became one with Christ’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17). Our soul, however, is our natural personality - the sum of our individuality and the source of our natural temperament and talent. Because we retain our free will, our soul does not automatically come under Christ’s Sovereignty. However, once we know that we have died with Christ, we are capable of truly submitting to Christ’s authority so that God can transform and restore our soul (Psalm 19:7; Romans 12:1-2). God doesn’t want to destroy our soul; He meant our soul to be a useful instrument just like our body. But now that we are in Christ, the important question we must face is, “Will we live by the power of His Spirit or the power of our soul?”

Each of us is endowed with soul-power. This is what we can accomplish by our natural personality. Until God has trained us by His Spirit, we will rely on our natural ability to do Christ’s work and bear His fruit. Yet the power of our personality cannot reproduce Christ’s life. Only Christ’s Spirit in us can reproduce His life (John 6:63). When God shows us that we have

died with Christ and we see the futility of our soul-power to bear His fruit, we will learn not to trust our natural zeal and ability to do God’s work (Philippians 3:3). We may be born again but if we continue to live by the soul, we will quench and grieve the Holy Spirit in us. A brother in Christ once said if we live by the body, we become like beasts and if we live by the soul, we become rebels to God. The Bible says if we are led by the Spirit, we are sons of God but if we continue to be ruled by the soul, we are hostile to God (Romans 8:12). How can we know the difference between the Spirit and the soul so we can live under the sovereignty of the Spirit? Again, the answer is we cannot. Once again, we must ask Jesus to do in us what we cannot do ourselves. As we fix our eyes on Jesus who is Light, we have light (John 8:12) and the Spirit can show us when we act from out of our soul instead of being led by the Spirit (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Until we know we have died and our life is hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3), our soul’s driving need is for self-identity, self-preservation and self-fulfillment. Our self-identity may be as a Christian teacher, worker or minister. Since our self-esteem depends on our self-identity, fulfilling our soul-life becomes our aim. Tragically, much of what is done in Jesus’ name is to satisfy this soulish drive for identity rather than finding our identity in Christ. The key to laying down our soul-life is to know the truth that we have already died and our sinful nature has been completely removed (Colossians 2:11). A dead man does not need an identity. If we know we have died in Christ, we are freed from soulish ambition (Galatians 6:14). We are then capable of dying daily to our soul-life so that Christ’s life may be revealed in us to others (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). This is the whole gospel of God (Acts 20:27).

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.” John 12:24-25