

We ended last week by rejoicing in God's commitment as our God of forgiveness. He *promises* us forgiveness through blood, thereby demonstrating His willingness to pay the cost of forgiving sinners. He *accomplished* all that is needed to purchase that forgiveness by giving His Son to be our blood sacrifice for sin, and He *personally applies* the forgiveness that comes through Christ by *sending the Holy Spirit* to deliver forgiveness into every elect heart that believes. We can only conclude with thankful wonder *that* God has invested too much *not* to save us – and can therefore never permit His saving work in our lives to fail! As the hymn-writer says in *Trinity Hymnal* # 463 (v 2):

The work which his goodness began,
the arm of his strength will complete;
his promise is yea and amen,
and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
nor all things below or above,
can make him his purpose forgo,
or sever my soul from his love.

Monday: Read John 3:11-18

Into Christ

The focus in John 3 changes dramatically from Christ's stress *on the necessity of regeneration* (John 3:1-10) to *faith as the means by which we receive eternal life* (John 3:15-18). Repeatedly, responsibility "to believe" is stressed. But notice the crucial preposition that comes *after* this verb. It is not enough to believe, but John stresses that we must "believe *IN* Him" (John 3 vs. 15,16,18). Literally, this could be translated that we must believe *INTO* Him.

Faith not only rests upon Christ, but, according to the language of the New Testament, brings us "into" Christ. On some 50 occasions we read of believing "into" Him (**Jn 3:16**; Rm. 10:14; Gal 2:16; Phil. 1:2). Only when we get into Christ will His spiritual blessings be of practical benefit to us. How then do we get "into" Christ? The Bible replies, by faith. The significance of this is sometimes overlooked in our popular preaching

Occasionally, the New Testament speaks of becoming a Christian in terms of receiving Christ and thus getting Christ into our lives. But the emphasis is on the need to be taken out of ourselves and our sin, and to be "found in Christ." That gives union to Christ a very important practical dimension. It is not to be thought of primarily as a subjective experience which encourages us to look in and down. Rather it is something which lifts us up and out, drawing us on to the glorious liberty of the children of God. So in the allegory of the Vine and the branches (Jn 15:1ff) the chief need of the "branch" is to be grafted into the Vine to depend entirely upon its nourishment.

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, "*The Christian Life*," pg. 109, *Banner of Truth*

Meditate and Pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for your promise, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (John 15:9). Please teach us to abide in You, in your love, by believing "into" Christ, our head. Grow our faith to believe Christ "into" every relationship and quandary of our lives as we wait on Your actions. Amen.

Tues/Weds: Read John 3:11-18 & Hebrews 10:5-10**Witness of Heavenly Things**

How exciting that by faith we can have an access into fellowship with Jesus and into His power to give us new life by His Spirit! In other words, it is because the Holy Spirit works faith into our lives that we can receive Christ and all His benefits. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says (emphasis added):

Q. 30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, **by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.**

This dramatic linking of our lives to Christ's power to make us new is only possible because of the mighty foundation in God's covenant, undergirding Christ's saving work. We could not, in fact, have any benefit from Christ were it not for God's "condescension" to us in terms of covenant (Westminster Confession of Faith Ch. 7:1). This covenant, I believe, lies behind several important verses in John's Gospel when Jesus speaks of the joint-witness which He shares with His Father.

Christ describes His being sent to earth to reveal the plans which He and His Father had discussed in Heaven: "We speak of what we know and bear witness about what we have seen" (John 3:11).

Though this is also true of the Apostles and their witness to Christ's work, it pre-eminently describes Christ's witness to what goes on in Heaven. It is He and His Father who bear witness, and Christ comes down to earth only to speak of the plans which He and His Father laid in Heaven, as He declares: "I have much to say about you and much to judge, but the who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him...When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me." (John 8:26-28).

Many other verses stress the same thing, using the language of Christ under the tutelage of His Father, (emphasis added):

John 5:19-21:

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can **do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.** For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

Here we see Christ alongside His Father, forging the plan of Redemption. Just as the Father "delighted in the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:30-31) so the Son learned from the Father how He would ensure His Father's joy in saving those sons of men, when they fell!

This is what old theologians call, "the Covenant of Redemption," meaning the agreement by which, out of love for His Father, the Son committed to doing the Father's will by taking upon Himself a body to sacrifice (Hebrews 10:5-9). You see, Christ knew that His Father was not pleased, nor His Justice satisfied, by the mere sacrifice of animals (Hebrews 10:5-7), nor through any other good works of obedience of fallen man. So, He came in a body which the Father had prepared for Him (Hebrews

10:5) in order to do the Father's will (Hebrews 10:7) – a will that had been sealed from eternity, an agreement to provide Redemption for elect mankind.

Meditate and Pray: Why did the Son obey His Father's will even unto death? Why did He sweat blood, embrace the Cross and suffer the pains of hell and the curse of death? He did all this because He loved the Father and wanted to please Him by His obedience in our nature and by suffering the consequences of sin in our place.

This is what the Father exclaims at His Son's Baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17).

This is what Christ says about His Father's love: "The reason that the Father loves me is that I lay down my own life" (John 10:1)"

Ask the Lord to teach you about this love, using John 14:31: "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." (King James version) Jesus, you have done everything to provide in every circumstance and need. Increase our faith to believe!

Thursday: Read John 3:18-21

The Path of Blessing

Ponder this: the *secret* of Christ's perseverance in loving a world of sinners (John 3:16) when that world hated Him and refused to come into His light because of their evil deeds (John 3:18-20), is that He did this thankless work for the love of His Father, and not in order to be loved by men. As one scholar put it: "... in this, Christ, "the first doer of truth" came forward to reveal that *it was not His will He came to perform* – but that it was the Father's loving will to save sinners!"

Now add to your vision of God's "eternal counsel," (Ephesians 1:11) by which He and His Son planned our salvation. Multiply the wonder of this plan by realizing that *this plan also included the Holy Spirit*. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

Meditate and Pray: Thank you, loving Father, that is your will to redeem and recall us, and that we even can bring you pleasure as we stand in the light and admit truth freely.

Sing about this Holy Spirit, and the mighty salvation which He accomplished with the Father and the Son, using red *Trinity Hymnal* # 331:

1 Come, O come, thou quick'ning Spirit,
God from all eternity!
May thy power never fail us;
swell within us constantly.
Then shall truth and life and light
banish all the gloom of night.

2 Grant our hearts in fullest measure
wisdom, counsel, purity,
that we ever may be seeking
only that which pleaseth thee.
Let thy knowledge spread and grow,
working error's overthrow.

3 Show us, Lord, the path of blessing;
when we trespass on our way,
cast, O Lord, our sins behind thee
and be with us day by day.
Should we stray, O Lord, recall;
work repentance when we fall.

4 Holy Spirit, strong and mighty,
thou who makest all things new,
make thy work within us perfect
and the evil foe subdue.
Grant us weapons for the strife
and with vict'ry crown our life.

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read John 3:21

Faith Clearly Seen

How many narratives can you think of in Christ's ministry where the *recipients* of Christ's converting teaching or healing mercy *are compelled* to come forward to give glory to God for their healing?

For example, Jesus said to the woman with the issue of blood, "Your faith has healed you" (Mark 5:25-34). In that way, God was glorified in her healing, even though initially she was too frightened to step forward and acknowledge Christ's healing power.

What about blind Bartimaeus? Christ called him to arise and then healed him by pointing out that, "it was his faith that had made him well" (Mark 10:52).

These examples, as well as many others, give the living fulfillment of what Christ predicts will happen to all who by faith come into the light: They will, "come to the light, so that it might be clearly seen that their deeds have been carried out in God" (John 3:21, ESV). Let us savor other translations that elucidate what it means to have our works clearly recognized as "carried out in God."

But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds might be made manifest, that they are wrought according to God. (Geneva Bible)

But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (KJV)

But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God. (NASB)

But he that doth truth, cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, because they are done in God. (Douay-Rheims 1899)

But anybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God. (JB Phillips)

But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his works be showed, that they be done in God. (Wycliffe Bible)

Meditate and Pray: Now we have something to reflect on! Do you see how this long list of translations gradually turns our attention to the *clarity* of works of faith – that they are designed to clearly reveal and to make it plain that God has *authored each of those good works*?

We are ordained for good works (Ephesians 2:10)! God wants to make our lives living displays of His effectiveness at work through us! Sing about such good works, making this hymn your prayer that people will clearly see Christ in all you do:

1 May the mind of Christ my Savior
live in me from day to day,
by his love and pow'r controlling
all I do and say.

2 May the Word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his pow'r.

3 May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

4 May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self abasing,
this is victory.

5 May his beauty rest upon me
as I seek the lost to win,
and may they forget the channel,
seeing only him.