

BECOMING ACCUSTOMED TO AN INCOMPLETE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL (continued)

Romans 6:15-18 - "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? [17] But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

This is a series of teachings on how the loss of spiritual joy happens. And last Sunday we began with the very first cause, making an inadequate start in the Christian life. The authentic Christian entry point is a combination of *mind*, *heart*, and *will*. And last week we started drilling down into the kind of *understanding* - the kind of *deep knowing* that must undergird Christian conversion.

Let me talk a little bit more about some common misunderstandings that can keep people from *beginning* the Christian life properly:

- a) **Some people think of the gospel merely as a message of forgiveness** - And they certainly need forgiveness. They feel badly about certain things. The gospel comes and says "you can be forgiven" - "you can be made clean" - and they want to be clean inside.

So they say a few words of apology to Jesus, take their forgiveness and assume that's all there is to the gospel. They have what they wanted. They aren't thinking about Jesus' Lordship or dying to self. All they wanted was forgiveness. And they will be miserable and unstable all the way down the road in what they think is a genuine Christian life.

- b) **Some people think of the gospel only as a message of morality** - They want to do more good with their lives. They are tired of their own wickedness. They are looking for life on a higher, improved level. They hear of the *golden rule*, or the *Sermon on the mount*. And they imagine how wonderful this world would be if everyone could live like that.

But this has very little to do with genuine Christian conversion. And that's the primary understanding he has of the gospel when he responds to Jesus he will be miserable in his experience of Christianity because he will never live up to all of those ethical codes and standards. And he will soon feel like a hypocrite. He will wonder why his resolve to *keep* to his new standards will blow so hot and cold so quickly.

- c) **Some people are just attracted to things mystical or religious** - They like steeples and stained windows. They are moved by organs and choirs. They are easily moved by talk of God and love and peace.

They love to be with their friends at the church. They enjoy the warmth of nice friendships because the world and the workplace are so cold and uncaring. They like the candles at Christmas and the dramas at Easter.

They assume that because they *enjoy the atmosphere of religion* that they *embrace the Lordship of Jesus*. And they will always be miserable in the Christian life because life isn't always serene and pretty. Not everything is inspiring. They will soon discover what all those wonderful friends in the church are really like. And they'll want to quit that church to find another one.

Let me wrap up this first point. Paul wants people to *know* certain things for sure when they *begin* the Christian life. It's a mistake to approach the Christian life short on sound understanding of Biblical truth. This is why Jesus never rushed people into following Him. There is *urgency* but not *rush*. Paul answers questions. Jesus reminds of the cost. Everything is laid out.

Paul says there's a form of teaching - a pattern of doctrine - **2 Timothy 1:13** - "Follow the *pattern of the sound words* that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." This is a wonderful verse. Paul says there is verbal truth. That's why he emphasizes not just sound *thoughts* but "*sound words*." There is measurable *content* to the truth we must embrace. It is *this* and not *that*. Words explain and limit meaning. There's a *pattern* to Christian truth claims. He means there's a specific *shape* and *form*.

And Paul tells Timothy to make sure the people in his church have a good grasp on the *whole shape and terrain* - the whole *content* of what they need to know to grow in Christ in a life-long discipline of learning and practice.

There is no possibility of transformation without the mind as the starting place. The Bible says so: **Romans 12:1-2** - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

- 2) **THE TRUTH MUST BE EMBRACED IN THE HEART** - This is a hard point to really put into words. There's a radical, passionate element in true conversion and discipleship. It was intended to be consuming. True, it begins with *knowing* in the mind. But it's not the knowing of a fact, like the average temperature on the far side of Venus. It's the knowing of delight like the knowing of the taste of chocolate or the knowing of the embrace of your loved one. This knowing isn't *less* than understanding, but is infinitely *more* than an intellectual process.

I've been thinking a lot about this in terms of my own little heart. I find the last verse in the book of Ephesians almost haunting at times: **Ephesians 6:24** - "Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible."

The last part of the verse describes the condition of the first part. Grace *dwells* in the heart where people love the *Lord Jesus Christ*. Consider what this verse means. It means when people exhort us to put aside other things so we won't be diverted from giving all the attention we can to Jesus Christ, they aren't giving us a job. They're trying to open up our lives to grace. When they caution us about the idols of our age they're not trying to *lessen* our joy. They're trying to *deepen* it.

I can still remember the day I read these searching words from "**The True Christian's Love for the Unseen Christ**" by Thomas Vincent: "Jesus knows if He has their love, their desires will be chiefly after Him. Their delights will be chiefly in Him; their hopes and expectations will be chiefly in Him; their hatred, fear, grief, anger, will be carried forth chiefly unto sin as it is offensive to Him. He knows that love will engage and employ for Him all the powers and faculties of their souls; their thoughts will be brought into captivity and obedience unto Him; their understandings will be employed in seeking and finding out His truths; their memories will be receptacles to retain them; their consciences will be ready to accuse and excuse as His faithful deputies; their wills will choose and refuse, according to His direction and revealed pleasure...If they have much love for Him, they will not think much of denying themselves, taking up His cross, and following Him wherever He leads them."

- 3) **THE WILL MUST BE FIRMLY DEVOTED TO OBEDIENCE AT ALL COST** - But I hope you can see by now that this is not just a matter of human work and effort. The *order* of these three terms is important. This is a person whose *mind* has fully grasped the message of grace

through the redemption in Christ's atoning death. His *heart* has come to fully love the presence of the risen Christ through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Now, the *will* is engaged to follow Jesus in glad obedience of love.

Notice the unusual way Paul words his teaching in **Romans 6:17** - "**But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed....**"

Normally, we would say, "**the standard of teaching that was committed to you.**" But Paul says, "**....you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed....**"

Paul is laboring to make sure that these readers understand that the mind is vitally important in the Christian life. **But he is not just writing about some intellectual grasp of truth.** Possessing information isn't enough. He's not pressing us about our *understanding* of the truth. He's talking about our *commitment* to the truth. True enough, the mind must grasp the content of the truth. There is no beginning apart from this. And true enough, our souls cannot remain *cold* toward the truth we know. But it's still not enough just to be emotionally stirred and moved.

That's why Paul writes about the "**standard of truth**"(17). Other translations used the equivalent word, "**pattern.**" Literally the word is a "**too-pos**" of teaching. What English word do you think we get from that word "**too-pos?**" To **type** - the "**impression made by a blow.**" That's it exactly. The life is taken up by that **standard** or **form** of teaching. The whole idea is a life **indented** by the truth it knows. The life is **impacted** and **marked** by it. The life takes the imprint of the type, the shape of the form, the same cut as the pattern.

In fact, quite strikingly, the closest model Paul can find for the present reign of Christ in the life is the past domination of sin in these Roman believers - **Romans 6:17** - "**But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed...**"

Conversion is a matter of mind, heart, and will. No wonder Paul calls the entire church to examine themselves when they come to the Lord's Table. Nothing marks the start of life in Christ like the cross and the embracing of the new covenant in Christ's blood. So we aren't just examining ourselves for horrendous betrayals in wickedness. We're looking into our heart to make sure we've actually begun life in Christ on Biblical terms.

Mind, heart, and will. That's where the joy is.