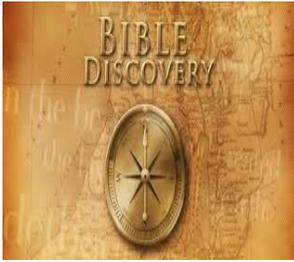


8 June 2014

Titus 2:11-15

Lonked, Linged or Zealous for Jesus



“Why should we as Christians pursue the respectable and dignified life described Biblically – meaning thousands of years ago - in our present, enlightened age?”

As Christians, we'd all agree we must turn from sin; but why endorse a mundane, outdated form of respectability? Should we not bow more fittingly to the state of the culture we live in? Wasn't that a key to Paul's thinking? Didn't he understand what people expected culturally and recognize they should live in harmony with their neighbour? Didn't Paul understand our nature – *doesn't God!*

Actually it may surprise you that to be a Christian in the areas where Paul ministered and instructed others, such as Titus to minister also, was *the antithesis of culture* – in fact many times you were ostracized, outcast and marginalized at best, and at others outright persecuted for your beliefs. No, you don't become a Christian to be popular. You become a Christian because you give your heart to the Lord, recognize His sacrifice for you and surrender to Him.

God demonstrating His power, His work, and His creative skill all poured into our lives enabling us to live godly lives!

Contrary to living as those about them lived, Paul instructed believers to live a new life. The theological basis for this new life that Paul establishes places the believer's life into an entirely different category resting solely on the appearance of the Grace of God revealed through His Son [vs. 11]. This may sound like a frustrating necessity to those of you who figure you've got your life all figured out; it may be a relief to those of you who've been trying to get your life together under your own steam. Paul once again reminds us salvation is received through God's wonderful grace, not our works. God is demonstrating that His power, His work, His creative skill are all poured into our lives enabling us to live godly lives not only for Him, but with Him!

But the help associated with God's grace is more than God demonstrating His power; it's salvation from sin and sin's extensive, destructive results. "Salvation" as an adjective in the Greek describes something intrinsic to grace: God's grace is not simply beneficial in purpose; it means to redeem (buy back) that upon which it is bestowed. Paul's logic begins with the event of Christ's incarnation and earthly ministry and then gets right to the point. Christ appeared to "teach" us to live a new life. We might say that "*really living*" or "*the key to how to live*" is God's curriculum for teaching us to live well. In this respect, God through His grace has given us His Son following a long line of teachers. Rather than interpreters of the Word, we now have the Word - the Living Word - to teach us how to live. Because we are to learn from God rather than from the culture as it may be around us at any particular time, Paul describes what is best described as a Christian counterpart to virtue in such a way that it's placed on an entirely different level.

Part of the earliest gospel message was the call to repent –At the calling of the first disciples, Jesus said, "*The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*" [Mark 1:15]. To repent means "to change your mind" - to leave behind the old way, a godless way, and to consciously turn to follow God. Paul's message here uses a different word from Mark but in essence is saying the same thing calling the believer to, as the NIV interprets, just say "No" demonstrating we're to take a final stand against the world. Paul's letter to Titus makes it clear pursuit of the new life, and subsequently a life lived in fellowship with Christ while yet here below, is actually contingent upon this decision. That's why baptism is so important! So what are we

Just say "NO" to the world!

to deny if we are to pursue this new life? It is the way, the direction, of this world. First, Ungodliness, a general reference to all that is against God; then worldly passions referring to the selfish, sinful impulses which express themselves through our body wanting to give us licence to pursue whatever "feels good". Together these two expressions summarize the old life, the life natural to the inhabitants of this world before they acknowledge knowing God. But the presence of Jesus in our lives demands that the old way be abandoned. A conscious choice of denial must be made seeking a Christian life and its motive through service in Christ and away from the world. It is the first step, an essential step, in this new life.

If the goal of every believer is the living of a new life, then after the old way has been abandoned, what then? If Christianity ended there, it would consist of a life of avoidance – and sadly often does for many. Our life would be a divine "***Thou shalt not***" with a whole list of mundane, boring attributes attributed to a life missed rather than a life lived! But the focus in this passage is actually on "living," therefore a far more appropriate and positive summary would be "***Thou shalt.***"

Paul demonstrates to us that Christian lives while founded on precepts and belief, must be visible; he emphasizes Christian conduct should be observable. That's why our new life is described as *self-controlled & upright* rather than *self-centered & uptight*. "**Self-control**" exercised over the impulses and sensual desires

common to human life; "uprightness" as a more general description of observable "rightness" in all aspects of a life lived in Christ. Yet if only these two terms were used to describe the qualities of the new life, one might get the idea that Christianity was about acting a certain way, putting on an acceptable performance, while still relying on our own power and abilities. That is a recipe guaranteed to leave us zonked or zinged. That's why Paul takes us further showing us we must totally surrender to Christ & allow true spirituality to permeate through God's Holy Spirit to the innermost part of our being. Paul uses the word "*Godly*", as a description of such a life, bringing together faith *in* and knowledge *of* God with our visible outworking in life. It is Paul's way of describing genuine Christianity. Consequently, the life to be lived as a result of Christ's entrance into human history in general, and our lives in particular, is not only characterized by mere respectability but much more importantly, is born of the knowledge of and total surrender to God. Rather than a surface application going through tiring motions to the benefit of the world around us, it all begins deep inside, wells up through the infilling of God's Holy Spirit and pours out, overflowing for all to see.

That means for you & me today, the new life introduced by Christ pertains to this present time. Christianity's neither something unattainable nor only available to life outside of this world once we've reached glory. Our walk with Christ focuses our attention on the now. Salvation may not be complete until the return of Christ – um, yes Jesus is still working on me (*and I assume on you as well*); but our salvation makes possible a new quality of life *in this present age*. With Christian possibility comes Christian responsibility to live fully engaged in this world yet not of the world.

Having said that, while it is true genuine spirituality's not foreign to our life in this present age, it's not wholly at home in it either. Salvation has begun, but the struggle with sin (*and therefore imperfection*) hinders those who've been saved by God's grace from experiencing it to the full. It means an important aspect of this new life is the forward look to the culmination in Christ's return. This is not to be confused with "living in the future" or "living for tomorrow"; rather it's an acknowledgment that Christian hope is ultimately beyond this world. It's recognition through the words of the old gospel song, "*this world is not my home, I'm just a passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue...*" It's living today **fully in Christ**, and looking for the fulfilled future which is promised.

God, through His grace, demonstrated in Christ's self-sacrifice, established a people for His own possession who've been set free from sin's bondage and purified, so that they're able to pursue a manifestly new manner of life. **Are we living such a lifestyle?** Even as we are blessed, eating and being satisfied, thirsting and being given our fill to drink, settling down in fine houses, seeing our gold and silver increase, do we remember God

Christian Living: Its Motive



Life in Christ!

**Paul describes New Life as
Self-controlled & Upright
NOT
Self-centered & Uptight!**

and choose to live for Him? That is a lifestyle – the lifestyle – the observable condition which in turn desperately needs to become contagious to our sickened world. Do we love enough to reach out sharing with them this new life we've found? Do we consider, as God does, their present condition terminal, seek to rescue the perishing?

Years ago I was told if we're unable to learn from history, we're doomed to repeat it. When I see our present culture and look back on the fall of the Roman Empire, I can't help but see striking, and alarming, similarities. **Consider...**

Top five reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire

- 1) **Rapid increase of divorce, with the undermining of the sanctity of the home, redefining "family", which is the basis of society.**
- 2) **Higher and higher taxes; the spending of money for feasts and celebrations.**
- 3) **The mad craze for pleasure, sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.**
- 4) **The building of gigantic armaments yet relying on mercenaries rather than defending themselves, failing to recognize the real enemy was within; the decadence of the people.**
- 5) **The decay of true religion; faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, becoming impotent to guide it.**

I pray this list will serve to remind us of the duty given us by our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us live our lives in such an observable way that we create a reaction in those around us allowing us then to *teach* them about the love God showed in His Son Jesus – the sinless Lamb of God who came to earth to die for them, to set them free from sin, and to place them on the narrow road which leads to eternal life. Let us encourage & rebuke those within our fold so we may grow steadily upward together with Christ communicating not only this practical teaching of our faith, but also Paul's lessons for living a pure, untainted life.

- **Encourage** through a positive example of the Christian life for edification of those around us.
- **Rebuke**, rather than being negative, implies that Paul's teaching is also designed for discipline (the same word as "disciple") calling for us to get first ourselves and then also other wayward believers, and indeed all about us, back on track – **snatched from the fire** – away from the effects of false teaching deceptively delivered by the great deceiver, so that all may enjoy the fullness of God's wonderful grace. God truly desires that none should perish and He has sent us to tell the Good News and bring them to the cross so they too can meet the Saviour.

The two are like guardrails along the upward road of life. Encouragement and discipleship are both required in our daily lives to give us the zeal to follow Jesus. **Are we on that road?** Have we stepped onto the path that leads to eternal life and have we embraced the wonderful truth of God's grace?

As we're reminded of that first Pentecost where God poured out His Holy Spirit to equip the saints to stand against Satan who roams the earth like a roaring lion seeking those he can destroy, *to stand* for our Lord's work and the proclamation many years ago, I believe it fitting for us to be challenged, to be called to task, on not only living proper Christian lives but seeking to draw all to God through His grace which we receive through His Son. From a worldly view, we may be proclaimed *zonked* or *zinged* to the point of no recovery, but in the heart of our Heavenly Father we'll be accepted as having a holy zeal for His Son Jesus.



Are we on that road?

Ready? Set? – Let's Go!