

Pastor's Corner – 12-2-2017

The Experience of Righteousness by Faith

This week the Pastor's Corner is borrowed (ok, straight up stolen) from the 2018 devotional book published by Pacific Press and authored by Jack Blanco. One of the entries stood out to me and I thought I'd pass it along (and maybe entice you to pick up a copy of the book yourself!).

"There is no salvation without repentance, which is godly sorrow for sin committed. It has no merit in it but prepares the heart for the acceptance of Christ as the only Savior from sin. The law makes the sinner's guilt plain to him, and the only comfort and hope is found in looking to the cross of Calvary.

God requires the entire surrender of the heart before justification can take place; and in order for us to retain God's justification, there must be continued obedience through and active, living faith that's motivated by love. Without the grace of Christ, man is in a hopeless situation. It is through grace that we are brought into fellowship with Christ, and faith presents Christ's perfect obedience in our place. We need to remember that God loves us as much as He loves His own Son.

Many think that they must climb to heaven by themselves. If by our own effort we could take one step on heaven's ladder, then the words of Christ would not be true. We need Him—He is our Savior. And when we accept Him as such, good works will appear as the fruitful evidence that Christ's example is our way of life."

A few points stick out to me. First is the idea that salvation requires repentance. I think this is something that we may tend to skip over, especially when we focus on talking a lot about grace. Don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of grace. The only reason we have any hope is because of grace. But God's grace and forgiveness have to be accepted and a huge part of that acceptance is repenting of the things that separate us from God.

I also really like the point that Blanco makes that repentance has no salvific merit in and of itself, but it does prepare the heart to accept Christ. What a great explanation! When we confess and repent of our sins it changes something inside of us so that we are more open to the regenerating influence of Christ.

I've seen this kind of thing happen in my own life during the occasional argument between my wife and I. If we are both locked in a mindset where we are trying to defend our position (or attack the others') then we don't make much progress. Things can escalate and eventually one of us (probably me) will say something stupid. What I have discovered though, is that if one of us admits (confesses) that we are being stubborn and stupid, that admission can reset the conversation. The simple act of confessing can shift us from having an argument to having a productive conversation.

There's something that happens internally when we realize we are wrong, are humble enough to admit it, and then confess our errors out loud. As Blanco observes this, "prepares the heart for the acceptance of Christ."

I also like the way that Blanco marries faith and works which are held together by love. If we want to remain in a state of justification, love for God will motivate us to live for him. Love will compel us to honor him and obey him. Love is more than just a feeling and when we forget that the gospel can get watered down. Sometimes we might be tempted to look inside ourselves and say, "I have warm fuzzy feelings towards God" and then conclude that that is love and that that is enough. But love involves action as well.

Again I can point to marriage as a good example. Anyone who has been married a while knows that the feelings of love change over time. You also know that love expresses itself in actions. If you say you love your spouse but constantly say things that tear them down, or have behaviors that push them away, is that really love? You may feel affection for your spouse but your actions don't communicate it.

It's the same way with God. If we actually do love him that love will be reflected in our decisions, words, and actions.

If you're interested in picking up the 2018 daily devotionals (they come in a 2 book set, one by Blanco and another by Ellen White) give the Adventist Book Center a call (or google it). If you struggle to make time for God every day, a daily devotional is a great way to start up again.

Happy Sabbath,
Pastor Tyler