

Rogate

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

Most protestants know that we are saved by the grace of God and not by works.

For this reason, we are always a little suspicious of anyone who would focus too much upon what we do.

And usually our suspicions turn out to be well-grounded.

We are told, that the better you do at keeping the ten commands, the more sure you are to be saved--or at least, the less time you will spend in purgatory.

We hear that Jesus came to save the whole world and all you have to do is to accept Him into your heart or be really sorry for your sins.

We hear preachers of success tell us that, if you only follow this or that set of Christian principles, you will be successful in life--make more money, gain recognition and acclaim, win more ball games.

Every time we hear such things, we are correct to note the spirit of false doctrine.

All of these teachings turn you inward--to focus on yourself--to find the source and confidence of your salvation, success, or Christainity in what you do.

Reacting against this, many people think that *any* encouragement toward good works is an affront to the Gospel.

When we insist that the 10 commands are for everybody, we are derided as moralists--who limit the freedom of other and strip them of authenticity.

We are accused of making Christianity exclusive and barring the gate of heaven to those people who can't help the way they are.

We are called legalists and goody-two shoes, school marms and hypocrites.

But now, comes James who tells us, *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.”*

What do we do with this? Those who teach salvation, success and assurance by good works, embrace James and think he is in their corner.

Others ignore him and treat him as though he is the only infallible writer who is wrong. The only inspired apostle who is uninspired.

We do not. For we have come to learn that the 10 commandments are neither the way of salvation, success and assurance, nor are they stifling and inauthentic.

Rather, they remain at one and the same time, *“the perfect law of liberty,”* that are themselves unable to free you.

They are what true freedom and joy look like, but not the way to get there.

Christian joy is to want what Jesus wants. To see and hear God’s word taught in it’s truth and purity at all places in all situations.

Christian joy is to see all people come to believe God’s Word and lead holy lives according to it here in time and thereafter in eternity.

Christian joy is to see God break and hinder every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature, which does not want you to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom of faith come.

This is what makes Christ joyful: so also this is what makes you joyful.

To know and hear the true Christian doctrine is not enough for you to have the fullness of Christian joy.

You also want to see it bear the fruit of faith and good works in your life.

Patience in suffering and love toward both friend and foe are these fruits.

These works will never come from yourself, therefore Jesus teaches you to pray for this Christian joy with the promise that it will be given.

Christ does not teach the lowest common denomination - minimum requirements.

Do not react to your sins and weaknesses by lowering the bar of Christian standards.

Neither respond by endless attempts to elevate yourself and achieve success.

Rather, He invites you to be maximalists not by your own striving but by prayer.

And, Jesus invites you to be like Him in every way imaginable.

Not only in His ultimate success and victory over death and the grave.

But also in His life of servanthood, humility, suffering and scorn. This is JOY!

Earthly joy, needs no prayer. It is sought in self-seeking and worldly pleasures. But it is an imperfect joy and will be swept away by death.

When you don’t pray for Christian joy but for earthly joy you may, indeed find success, money, acclaim and recognition. But you will never have joy.

Joy is only a gift from God and it comes down from the Father of Light who, alone, gives every good gift.

Unless Jesus commanded and invited you to pray for this joy, you would never do it and never think to ask for it.

It is counter-intuitive. It must be learned--not remembered.

And this is Christian joy: To be so thoroughly bound up in Christ that His entire life is yours.

For when Christ is in you and you in Christ, there is no more distinction.

And He does not pray for you as one distinct person prays for another person.

Rather, the Father Himself hears you because you are His beloved Son.

God, in His own peculiar--and yet powerful--ways has completely changed you.

By Baptizing you, God Himself has given you a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit so that you have now put on Christ as a garment.

By the power of His Holy Spirit, God comes to you today to cause you to believe and accept that your sins are forgiven, your lack of works fulfilled.

What you have not done to be like Christ, Jesus has done to make you His.

Therefore, the purity and undefiled life that you could never find or attain to apart from Him, He now gives you freely as a gift.

By the Holy Communion, Jesus comes with His body and blood into the very body and bloodstream of His Communicants.

Thus His life becomes your life, His tongue and His heart become yours.

And the joy that He has becomes your own joy.

His joy to die for you becomes your joy to die to yourself.

His joy to give you everything becomes your joy to give to your neighbor.

Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.