

The Pastor's Pen

“Take heart, timid soul. He has loved you too much to cease loving you.” ~ François Fénelon

It has been said that the Gospel rightly preached “*brings comfort to the afflicted and affliction to the comfortable.*” This is true, and this statement is a double edged sword. On the one hand, many within evangelical churches in America can verbalize the right answers, but have little personal knowledge of the Answer Giver. The Christianity of such folks reflect the consumerism of American culture, and I am definitely familiar with the problem of “Consumer Christianity.” However, I have also encountered another problem – both in my own 34 years as a believer, and in 25 years as a pastor. And, for this week’s Pastor’s Pen, this “other problem” is going to be our focus.

Well, what is it? I’m so glad you asked (even if you didn’t realize you asked). When we genuinely embrace Jesus and begin to recklessly pursue Him, we begin to understand at a deeper and deeper level that our God is Holy, Holy, Holy – it’s just Who He Is. Now, that *sounds like* a wonderful thing to begin to understand – and indeed it is. However, as we begin to see the Living God more *as He truly is*, something else automatically happens. We begin to see ourselves more *as we truly are*.

Now, theoretically, we might think that gazing on the LORD as He is would be “neat.” However, if we study Scripture (and if we check the pulse of our own experience), we discover that the descriptor “neat” *never* pops into the mind of any sinful person clearly understanding the nature of *the God Who Is*. So, what emotion most commonly accompanies this sort of vision? *Despair*. Why? The *utter holiness* of God’s nature serves as a mirror that ruthlessly exposes the *utter wretchedness* of our nature.

One thing I can say with genuine honesty is that for over 34 years I have been pursuing Jesus as my Greatest Treasure. Don’t misunderstand what I’m saying here – *by no means* have I pursued Him as *perfectly* or as *consistently* as I wish. I am not saying that...I am saying *genuinely*.

Another thing that I can say with complete honesty after the last 34 years is – *I feel like a greater sinner now than before I came to faith in Jesus!* So, am I *actually* more sinful now than before I was converted? *No*, but the reason I *feel* this way is because the more I grow to know what my Lord *is truly like*, the more I discover how *unlike* Him *I truly am*. As I walk with God through this life, I learn at an ever deeper level *how great a sinner I truly am...and have always been*.

Next question – *what* happens when *this* happens? Well, without the reality of the Gospel gripping our hearts, when we begin to see God in His utter holiness it unrelentingly *drives us to despair and hopelessness*. Seeing God’s holiness apart from the Gospel is like telling a homeless beggar that his whose life is forfeit if he cannot retire the entire 38 trillion-dollar national debt of the United States. Without the assurance of the Gospel, understanding the reality of God’s holiness can *only ever ruthlessly strip us of all hope*.

So, here's my question to you this week – Christian, are *you* in this kind of deep despair? I am speaking to you who *genuinely loves* the Lord. I’m talking to you who *genuinely trusts in Jesus* as your Redeemer. I’m talking to you who is *genuinely seeking to follow Jesus*. And, I am talking to you who is (best you know how) seeking the Kingdom of God first and not your own little kingdom. Yes – *you*. Do *you* know the despair of your own wretchedness slapping you in the face so painfully that you can’t escape it? If the answer that that question is yes, then I have some good news for you today. To those of us who intimately know *this place of despair*, François Fénelon’s quote is much like ice-cold water to a parched man dying of thirst in the desert. “*Take heart, timid soul*” – when the Lord died for you – was all of your sin not future? “*Take heart, timid soul*” – did Jesus not know your sin before you knew your sin? “*Take heart, timid soul*” – do you not yet realize that your Creator already knows all about you? “*Take heart, timid soul*” – what is it that you fear could surprise the One Who already knows all?

“*Take heart, timid soul. He has loved you too much to cease loving you.*” Let’s marinate on that one for a little while this week.

Your brother in Christ,

Heath