

Pastoral Emphasis in Teaching

THE NATURE OF GOD

God is glorious (Exodus 15:11; Psalm 145:5). His glory consists in the overwhelming and overflowing beauty which stems from the sum total of all His attributes working together in perfect harmony. God is perfect in His holiness (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:3; I Peter 1:16), justice (Psalm 99:4; Luke 19:7-8; Hebrews 6:10), wisdom (Romans 11:33; I Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:10), power (Isaiah 44:24; Job 9:12; Jeremiah 32:17), grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:6-7; 2:4, 7-9; Romans 3:24), and love (I John 4:7-8, 16; Romans 5:18; John 3:16)

THE MOTIVE OF GOD

God not only is glorious, He loves His glory with infinite intensity (Isaiah 48:9-11) and therein lies His righteousness (Romans 9:14,15; Exodus 33:18,19). For God to be righteous, He must love what is best; therefore His ultimate loyalty must be to the maintenance and manifestation of His own glory. In other words, all that God does, He does for His own name's sake (Ezekiel 36:20-23). God created humanity for His glory (Isaiah 43:7,21); God redeems sinners for the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:5-6, 12, 14; Romans 3:26; 15:7); God empowers Christians to live for His glory, both individually (I Corinthians 10:31; I Peter 4:11) and corporately (Ephesians 3:10); and God's ultimate goal for His people is that they might see and enjoy His glory forever (John 17:24). His ultimate will or plan for history is that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge and the glory of God as the waters cover the sea" (Hebrews 2:14,cf. Numbers 14:21). But God's unswerving zeal for His own glory does not mean that God is unconcerned about man's welfare. No, God's mercy and grace toward undeserving sinners is the apex of His glory (Romans 9:22-23). And the greatest possible good for man is to see God face to face, just as He is (I Corinthians 13:12; I John 3:2) and to behold the beauty of the Lord (Psalm 27:4). In fact, God's absolute faithfulness to His own glory manifests itself in God's absolute faithfulness to His covenant promises (His glory is at stake in whether He keeps His word or not) and thus it becomes the ultimate ground of our assurance (Psalm 143:1, 11; Daniel 9:14-19).

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The God of the Bible is the creator of the whole visible and invisible universe and He is the sovereign ruler of it. From all eternity, He freely and unchangeably, in His most holy wisdom, ordained whatsoever comes to pass. To use the words of Paul, God does "all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11), having sovereign control of all events from the events of rulers and nations (Daniel 4:25, 32, 34-35) to the flight of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29). In particular, God's sovereignty is worked out in the area of salvation. To ensure that the salvation of sinners abounds to the praise of God's glory, God saves His people by grace alone apart from works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The sovereignty of God's grace is seen in God's unconditional election of His people out of the mass of sinful humanity for salvation (Romans 8:29, 9:6-23; Ephesians 1:4), the glorious atonement of Christ which actually accomplishes the salvation of God's people (I Peter 3:18), the irresistible grace of God's effectual call (Romans 8:30; I Peter 2:9) and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26ff; John 3:4; Titus 3:5) which enable and move a person to respond to the gospel of Christ in saving faith, and God's persevering in grace with his saints (I Peter 1:5; Jude 1; John 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6) so that His people will in fact persevere to the end and be saved.

THE PRIORITY OF WORSHIP

Worship stands at the top of the pyramid. The ultimate end for which God created man is to see God's glory and worship Him fully. Worship is the motive and the goal of all our deeds of love done to fellow believers (nurture) or to unbelievers (outreach). Seeing and being captivated by the glory of God makes us long to align ourselves with God's purposes of love. And the goal of our loving others is to build believers and unbelievers alike into people with greater and greater capacities and desires to praise the glory of God's grace.

THE COMBINATION OF HEAD, HEART AND HANDS

In the Christian life, emotions are crucial, thinking is crucial and action is crucial. God is not honored by either an unfeeling, joyless, loveless intellectualism or by an unthinking, uncritical emotionalism. All are needed: minds that are gripped by the truth of God acquired through the serious and rigorous study of Scripture, hands that long to serve as Christ was the perfect servant and hearts that are on fire with intense emotions of love for God and His glory, awe of His majestic holiness, gratitude for His mercy, and fear of His wrath. In the final analysis, what God wants most is our hearts. That was the problem with the Pharisees—they honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him (Matthew 15:8). One of Jesus' most chilling threats was to professing believers who had no emotions toward God. They were neither hot nor cold they were lukewarm. And Jesus promised to spit them out of His mouth (Revelation 3:15-16). But the way God longs to reach our hearts is through our minds. It is through the truth of Scripture that we become transformed people through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). This truth comes through the discipline of careful reading of the text (Ephesians 3:4) seeking to find the author's intended meaning. The role of the Holy Spirit is not to add anything to the text but to make the heart of the reader humble so that he or she will welcome and embrace the truth (1 Corinthians 2:14).

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

Faith is essential in the human heart if we are to glorify God. God is shown to be glorious when we trust Him, especially in suffering. Faith is seeing and savoring the glory of God in Christ crucified, risen, and reigning for the good of His people (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). This "savoring" means receiving in Christ the superior satisfaction of His promises based on His finished work of atonement (Philippians 3:7-9). Faith is the soul's embrace of all that God is and promises to be for us in Christ (Hebrews 11:1). It honors God by being confident that God will keep His promises to those who set their hope on Him (Romans 4:20-21). Thus faith is future-oriented while resting firmly on the past work of Christ on the Cross and in the resurrection. Faith glorifies God because it magnifies His power, wisdom, grace and faithfulness to work for us the good that we cannot do for ourselves. Therefore, saving faith is of such a dynamic quality that it inevitably produces "the work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11), that is, works of love. Saving faith inevitably "works through love" (Galatians 5:6). Faith without works is not saving faith (James 2:14). But that obedience is never an act that merits or earns God's favor. God's favor is based on the imputed righteousness of Christ which is ours by virtue of faith alone, that is apart from any other basis or means (Romans 3:28; Romans 4:4-5). Nevertheless, the faith that justifies is never alone in him that believes (Westminster Confession, 11.2). Justifying faith, which is a gift from God (2 Timothy 2:25; Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 2:8-10), is so satisfied in all that God promises to be for us in Christ on the basis of His finished work on the cross that it breaks the power of sin's inferior promises. Thus, justifying faith inevitably sanctifies, that is, sets us on a life of gradual transformation into the likeness of Christ (Acts 26:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). This obedience to Christ is an "obedience of faith." We trust Him that His promises are true and superior to all that sin has to offer, and from this trust the power of sin is broken. This kind of obedience, while not perfect in this life, is necessary for final salvation. There is a holiness without which we will not see the Lord (Hebrews 2:14; Galatians

5:21). But this necessity is not the necessity of a basis or a means of justification. The basis of justification is the finished work of Christ and His imputed righteousness. The means is faith alone. But the obedience that flows from faith is the evidence of the genuineness of the faith and therefore is "necessary" in the sense that if it is not produced in the end, the faith is shown to be "dead" or "vain," as James says, and not saving faith. So we must be careful here to guard three things vigilantly: 1) the complete sufficiency of the work of Christ as the sole ground or basis of our right standing with God; 2) faith alone as the sole means or instrument of the righteousness of Christ being imputed to our account; and 3) the subsequent and consequent obedience that is the necessary evidence that this faith in this work of Christ and all that it purchased for us (Romans 8:32) is real.

We recommend that if you are interested in understanding this indispensable role of the "obedience of faith," you read John Piper's book, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in FUTURE GRACE*. The aim of this book is to show how the faith that justifies also necessarily sanctifies, which is what the Westminster Confession says that it does: "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is not dead faith, but worketh by love."

GOD'S GLORY

The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. Because God's mercy to His people is the apex of His glory, enjoying the benefits of that mercy in faith honors and glorifies God. The faith that glorifies God is a happy, hearty trust. Therefore, joy in God is essential to honoring God (as C.S. Lewis states, "Joy in God is a Christian duty"). If faith earnestly believes that "God rewards those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6) and if obedience flows from faith, then all obedience must be a pursuit of God's reward and of joy in God. This follows the example of Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2; cf. the example of Moses in Hebrews 11:25-26). All people instinctively long to be happy and filled with joy. The Christian is the one who by the grace of God has discovered that God is the only source of satisfying and enduring joy. Thus God is honored as the only one who can fully meet our needs. In the wisdom of God, the glory of God and the eternal joy and well-being of His people always coincide. Therefore, to pursue one is to pursue the other.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

The biblical doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints has two parts: (1) God will so work with His people in His grace that they will inevitably persevere to the end and be saved (I Peter 1:5; Jude 1; John 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6). Thus no true child of God, born of the Holy Spirit, will ever be lost (Romans 8:29-30). True believers are eternally secure because God has ordained that they be eternally secure and so will work as to bring it to pass. (2) It is equally true, however, that no person will be saved without persevering to the end. In order to be saved, believers must persevere to the end in faith and obedience (Mark 13:13; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14; 12:14). Future and final perseverance is the ultimate test of past participation in Christ. Those who make some kind of beginning in the Christian faith but do not continue give evidence that they never really had saving faith (I John 2:19; Hebrews 3:14; 6:4-9). The means God uses to bring about our perseverance are His magnificent promises (II Peter 1:3-4) which will be ours if we persevere, and His terrifying warnings which will come true if we fall away (Hebrews 10:26ff). God causes His people to persevere by giving them a deep longing for His promises and a healthy fear of His threats through His Spirit and through the exhortation, admonition, and encouragement of His people (Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:23-24). Thus, in a very real sense, eternal security is a community project, which is a big part of why getting involved and connected to small groups is so crucial for the people the church.