



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: JANUARY 2020 by Lee Shipp

JESUS IS THE END OF THE STRUGGLE

“For Christ is the end of the law FOR righteousness to everyone that believeth.” (Romans 10:4)

Earnest Jews struggle to be righteous. Living under the veil of Moses, the Law is paramount and not to be trifled with. The Law is to be observed and kept. However, as in the days of Moses, they are guilty, and they know it. The Law condemns them and it will never pardon the guilty. But still, these same law breakers work even harder as though their good deeds can tip the scales of justice and grant them clemency with God. Sadly, they only heap upon themselves more condemnation. Never did a Jew have the assurance he was right with God on the basis of the Law. Furthermore, the more he endeavored to fulfill the Law, the more he failed and the more removed he was from God and His grace.

It was into this state of need that the apostle came with his glorious message: “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” (Rom 10:4). Christ is the end of the struggle. The end is a phrase which means the point aimed at, the goal of the Law. In other words, only in Jesus can the Law’s ultimate demand and goal be fulfilled. As well, only in Jesus can we be delivered from the Law, and thus, escape the penalty for our sins and be reconciled to God. Therefore, in Christ the struggle for righteousness is over, it has reached its accomplished goal. There is righteousness in Christ apart from the Law; a righteousness that the Law demands, but only Jesus could give.

Yet many are still striving to prove their sincerity to God. They are adamant that there is something good in themselves by which they can please God; and they are determined to produce this good, and by it appease the wrath and displeasure of God.

But in Christ the struggle to find something good in oneself and thus, appease God’s wrath has ended – the believer can rest. By faith believers are welcomed to enter into God’s rest by the merits of Christ alone! The struggle is over. The Holy Ghost speaks by Paul,

[... T]he righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, say not in thine heart, ‘Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above.) Or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)’ But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart that is the word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:6-10)

In this passage Paul is referring to the struggle to be righteous as opposed to the rest we have in Christ. To be righteous you do not have to ascend into heaven. Meaning, you do not have to struggle to be heavenly so that you are worthy of heaven. To be righteous you do not have to descend into the deep, to bring up Christ again from the dead. Meaning, you do not have to endure significant tribulations and suffering to pay for your offenses against God. In yourself, you will never be holy enough. Furthermore, you could never suffer enough to attain to righteousness! But if you will believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead, if you will confess the Lord Jesus, you will be saved!

Sadly, multitudes who have confessed the person of Jesus live denying the work of Jesus. They cannot accept the fact that Jesus’ rest is sufficient, therefore, they

cannot rest! They deny the sufficiency of His atonement, not by confession, but by dead works. They cannot have peace until they have demonstrated progress and a formidable religious life that they have power over. “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” (Romans 10:3).

So, they continue to struggle with the flesh and the law rather than resting in grace. They expect some exhortation as to what they have to do in the way of witnessing, soul-winning, reaching others, improving on their spiritual worthiness and then, when they feel they have improved themselves and made themselves to behave in these religious feats, they can rest. These are those who worship God in the flesh. If their flesh performs well, behaves well, pursues holiness well, then they can offer that to God as worship. However, if they have fallen short of these measures then they are suffering from defeat and feel unworthy to offer to God worship.

To worship God in the spirit is to offer to God our living selves because of the mercy demonstrated to us through His perfect Son Jesus. It is to be in relationship with God because of Jesus. It is to serve God because of Jesus. It is never because we feel worthy, it is because we believe that God has accepted us in His beloved Son. Concerning the believer, there never comes a time when grace ends and self has to begin. This is why Paul’s only pursuit was to know Christ.

Paul wanted the righteousness of God which is by faith (Philippians 3). In the possession of Christ comes the possession of every grace and benefit of sonship. The pursuit was not to know repentance, revival, peace, or self-denial, it was to know Christ! The pursuit of knowing Jesus is repentance, revival, peace, and self-denial. Oh the futile struggles many have made to attain these blessings of grace. The excruciating surrenders zealous men have made: the strenuous prayers they prayed, the self-mortifications they have imposed, and the battles to make their sinful hearts

“TO WORSHIP GOD IN THE SPIRIT IS TO OFFER TO GOD OUR LIVING SELVES BECAUSE OF THE MERCY DEMONSTRATED TO US THROUGH HIS PERFECT SON JESUS.”

less sinful. But in coming to Jesus in helpless repentance, and confession of sin, the believer finds that Jesus has now become their peace, power, victory, and revival!

PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO HAVE REVIVAL

Today men still try to bring Jesus down from heaven or up from hell. Just consider the strenuous efforts made for revival. It is natural to think the way of revival is attained by repentance, humbling oneself, surrender, and sacrifice, but honestly, Jesus is not who is sought – revival is! All night prayer meetings are held for revival, not for Christ. Because we are so tired of the way sin and sinners are ruining our way of life, we want revival. Desperate for revival, we are determined to make great sacrifices of our comforts in hopes that God will be impressed, and be congenial, to help us now. We imagine, certainly God is impressed with our endeavors, our prayers, our fastings, and our sacrifices, therefore, He is obligated to give us our longed-for revival.

But is this how God wants us to relate to Him? No! God does not want us to have a relationship with Him that is based on debt – if we suffer and pay enough then God will reward us. Instead, God wants us to trust Him on the basis of faith, that it may be by grace and His promises will be surely granted! God is not a begrudging scrooge who measures your sacrifices and is placed in your debt, He is the benevolent Father, and gracious God, who has Himself paid the price, made the sacrifice, so the bounty of heaven may be had by anyone who would believe Him.

JESUS IS THE END OF THE STRUGGLE FOR GREATNESS

It is natural to think that the way of greatness is attained by strict training, spiritual discipline, and diligent study. We study the lives of great men and women of God. We work hard to emulate their lifestyle so we can have their power. We rise early in prayer because they did. We sacrifice comforts because they did. We read the books they read. We do our all in the pursuit of greatness, thinking this has to be faith!

But consider those individuals Christianity considers great. Why were they great? Why were they admired? Sure, they were disciplined! All who are great are disciplined.

Sure, they were staunch in their lifestyle. All who are great at anything are devoted, loyal, and faithful! Sure, they were studied and learned. All who are great in the Kingdom of God are skilled in the Word of righteousness! But what caused the devotion, the discipline, the hours of preparation? They were broken! They lost all hope that they could ever be great. There was nothing good in them and they knew it.

These men and women were great because they were broken of the desire for greatness! They became weak, and in their weakness God's power rested upon them. They resigned themselves to having nothing good within themselves and could only hope in the grace of God towards them. Read their stories and you will hear their confessions of failure. You will hear their cry for grace! Their testimony is one of realizing that only through Christ could they do anything. It was from this lowly place that greatness was born. They received the Holy Spirit in fullness, and with confidence in Him, they simply believed He was able.

JESUS IS THE END OF THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

It is natural to think the way to peace and joy is by neglecting the appetites of the flesh, by earnest religious endeavors and by willful separations from all that is dark and sinister – a voluntary humility. This may produce a religious man, but it will never produce a joyful Christian. You may have the peace of a monk, but you will not have the peace of Christ. Self-denial may make you religious, but it will not make you joyfully happy or holy.

JESUS IS THE END OF THE STRUGGLE WITH PEOPLE

It is natural to think the way of changing my circumstances is by some manner of self-exertion. Perhaps if I rule over people then I can control the outcomes of my life and the way others treat me. We may imagine, if we become a recluse then we can change the climate of suffering and abuse, or we may imagine, if we manipulate and intimidate others, as to get the advantage over them and control them, then it will be more difficult for them to get the advantage over us.

Some even suppose that if they will just serve and be kind then all will be well. They imagine that if they were to live serving others, spend their lives being good and caring, then people will be nice to them. In other words, if they live washing other's feet then they shall have their good graces. They may imagine that if they will humble themselves, and seek peace, then others will as well. Good luck with that! When Jesus washed Judas' feet, or even Peter's, it did not do much to change the betrayal that would ensue that night.

In all of our efforts to find rest, to be great, to have peace, without Jesus we shall end up with greater failure, endless strife, and little joy. There is nothing self can produce in the way of lasting holiness and contentment. There is no other rest for the human soul other than Jesus!

Even in exhausting our lives in an effort to live perfectly according to God's word, this strenuous task may not result in the desired outcomes a religious person may be expecting. If a person were to perfectly love everybody, do good to all men, and live holy and pure before God and man, this still will not produce the rest humans are desiring. There is no guarantee that if you bless those who curse you, they will stop cursing you! Your rest from their hostility may never occur. God may not allow us to achieve our expectations of greatness or revival, thus, we will have increased frustration and restlessness.

In all of your striving, what if you do not become great? In all of your striving, what if others do not repent of the way they treat you? In all of your striving, what if you do not get your desired experience: revival, peace, recognition?

Roy Hession makes an interesting comment,

Jesus says, I never promised you that if you repented, surrendered, and got right with Me, you would have an easy situation, great power, success in your service, or even revival. What I do promise you is that, if you will walk with Me and allow Me to show you sin as soon as it comes in, and cleanse you from it, you will have – Me. Make me your desired end and you will surely have that end and you shall be satisfied, lacking nothing that is in the will of God for you.

JESUS IS REST

Jesus is the end of the struggle! Jesus is also the "Way" to the rest! There is not a way to the "Way." Jesus is the "Door" and as you enter you are on the "Way." And when you come to the end of the "Way" you will find that it is still Jesus!

There is not some excruciating self-effort to get you to Jesus, He came to you! Jesus cried for the weary to come to him and he would give them rest. He did not say to the weary to read more, pray more, attend more, work more – but come!

Jesus is the "Way" to the Bible, as He is the "Way" to prayer. In being occupied with Jesus one will cry, "Teach me to pray!" Jesus is the "Way!" *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him"* (Col 2:6). There are not two messages, one for the unsaved and the other for the saved. Those who have entered through the door (which is Jesus) have entered the way. They are to remain occupied with Jesus.

A "Way" speaks of a walk, of an experience, something happening each moment. Some feel that prayer is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Others feel that bible study is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Others feel that fellowship is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Others feel that personal witnessing is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Others feel that attending church is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Others feel that discipline is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Others feel that missions is the most important thing. It becomes the way. Still others feel that loving and helping others is the most important thing. It becomes the way. But Jesus is the way. Being occupied with Him will produce a lifestyle that entails all of these important exercises, but it will be the result of grace not self.

Sin is our great problem and the cause of our lack of peace. No amount of prayer, bible study, fellowship, personal witness, church attendance, discipline, or helping others will take sin away. Only Jesus and His blood can wash away my sin and give me peace.

People who practice the exercises of religion, without being occupied with the grace of Jesus, will live a very disturbed life. They will either live exhausted, frustrated, or condemned by never having prayed enough, studied enough, fellowshiped enough, or witnessed enough. Thus, they will either become so frustrated over their failure to please God, or they will become corrupt with pride in thinking they have performed satisfactorily.

Seeking an approved spiritual life by works can be positively harmful! Most believe that if they pray, work, serve, and exercise discipline then they will be really living the full Christian life. And so they consider "these works" to be the way onward. Though all of these works will be the result of grace, it is important to stress that anyone striving for acceptance with God apart from grace will be completely condemned by God. The effort to live in "these works," apart from grace, will only produce a hard and barren religious life.

Jesus is the end of the law FOR righteousness! In other words, Jesus is the "Way" to the bible as He is the "Way" to prayer. Only Jesus is the way; to attempt to progress through any means other than Jesus (grace) is to fall into despair.

So, if grace teaches us that we are truly lacking in our prayer life, what do we do? Do we begin to be more fervent in prayer? No! We repent and agree with what the Holy Ghost is teaching us. Repent and admit our sin and by faith follow Christ back to prayer. Faith will always respond in agreement with God and then it will cause the believer to work out the salvation that God is working within!

Some may erroneously assume that in the "rest" of Christ we do nothing. What an insult to the Spirit of grace! Saving faith exposes itself to God and through love pursues fervently for the reward of Christ. In getting right with Him we do actually pray, and in dealing with us God invariably uses His Word. But this is God working in us by His Grace, not us working back to God.

All spiritual life is revitalized through our fellowship with Jesus. All true and God-honoring prayer, revival, discipline, love, witnessing, or any other religious virtue is the direct result of this one glorious truth – Christ in me is doing it! The religious man, who is trying to pull his spiritual life up by the "bootstraps" is invariably failing and faltering. He has not the rest that the Bible speaks of. He may believe he has rest, as did the Pharisees, but it is not the rest of Christ! But how sweet and beautiful is the rest given to those who have no other "Door" than Jesus, no other "Way" than Jesus, and no other righteousness than Jesus! The religious man, declaring his own goodness, will be declared unrighteous! The believing man, declaring his faith in Jesus, will be declared righteous! Hallelujah, thank you God for the rest given to us in Christ!

(c) Lee Shipp
Thursday, January 2, 2020