

Who here has struggled with the task of being a good Christian?

I know I have... I longed to be told by God, "Well done my good and faithful servant." But it seemed I always fell short.

Some people try and give up.

Some people just "fake it until they make it."

Sometimes we set up rules for ourselves, rules made by society, by the church, and we know if we keep those rules strictly we can feel better about ourselves, like if we had attained some level of righteousness.

We see just that in our Gospel passage **MARK 7:1-23**. The Pharisees challenged Jesus for allowing the disciples to eat with defiled hands.

We must have sympathy for the Pharisees –

- Their charge was because the disciples ate without washing their hands first!
 - Every mom tells their children to wash their hands before they eat.
- Pharisees did not eat meat from the Market unless it had been washed – have you seen those markets in the Middle East?
- Washing of cups, pots, bronze kettles...
 - No man likes to wash the dishes... but we must admit it is the right thing to do! Husbands, wouldn't we be in trouble with our wives!

But the problem with the Pharisees isn't that they had good traditions of cleanliness, but that they confused cleanliness with Godliness. They felt that if you did not wash your hands... you no longer lived a righteous life, a life worthy of God. They believed that it was the cleanliness of the outside of a man that testified to his righteousness before God.

But Jesus corrects them.

Mark 7:15 "there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

And he makes it clear he does not mean bodily functions, but the issue of the human heart:

Mark 7:21-23 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

My Struggle

I struggled with this same delusion of the Pharisees even though I knew it is by God's grace that we are saved! ***Driving 55!***

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.

But I must be honest here. Although I knew I was saved by grace, and justified before God by Jesus' work on the cross... I immediately tried to make myself look more holy on the outside... I hoped beyond hope that nobody would notice my sin on the inside. I easily fell into the lie that when I looked good on the outside, when I looked good to others... I was right before God. But as soon as I found out that I failed - when someone would dare to point out my failings, I became enraged, overwhelmed with anger.

What is so common for those who trust in Christ, who believe in Grace, is to do one of two things: we either take Grace for granted by giving up a righteous life, or we try to earn God's grace like the Pharisees. The truth is both lifestyles are sinful. And both are futile.

In trying to earn God's favor and in taking His Grace for granted we thwart the sanctification that is being wrought within us.

So what are we to do?

So how can we live an authentic Christian Life? A Life where our character and behavior truly reflect the reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

We find our answer in...

James 1:18 *In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.*

Birth by the Word of Truth: Rebirth by the Gospel of Grace (Grace upon Grace).

For a purpose: so that we would become a kind of first fruits of all His creatures; to proclaim redemption to all creation!

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE HAS RESPONSIBILITIES

The True Christian (Who proclaims God's redemption)

1. ***Must Control his tongue: (1:19-21)*** How can we proclaim the Word of God if our mouths are always open and our ears closed with the anger of our favorite causes? When we do so we attempt to justify our self-righteous anger but only drown out the proclamation of the word of God.

Problems in Life and Church – Endless Dissentions.

Rather we must humble ourselves and accept the word of God planted in us! The Implanted Word, the Gospel of our Salvation. Implanted by the power of the Holy Spirit, that power that gives us new birth. That same Word of God that was spoken at the moment of creation that brought all things into being, that same Word, come down from Heaven, sent to redeem mankind, sent now to us to redeem us and change our hearts. We have the power of the creator within us!

2. ***Be Doers of the Word:*** If you believe the Gospel, then it must change your life and the way you behave. (**Verse 1:22**)

How can we behave contrary to our beliefs? James says it is like looking into a mirror and then going away and immediately forgetting what you look like.

But this is exactly what we do when we behave contrary to the Gospel.

If you say God loves the sinner but hates the sin... and yet you reject the sinners in your midst... if you believe that God is Love and yet fail to love the unlovely, fail to love the prostitutes and tax collectors of our times what good is your proclamation of faith?

Notice I am not giving a list of things to do...

Remember, While we were yet sinners Christ Died for us.

You may ask who are the unrighteous of our time? It can be easily answered: wayward youth, drug addicts, those who promote alternative lifestyles, and yes even in our day... prostitutes. If you fail to love them as Christ Loves them, as Christ Loves you... you are acting contrary to the Gospel.

These people are in bondage to their sin!

They need to hear the Gospel, that perfect law, that ***law of liberty.*** (**Verse 1:25**).

People who live in sin, are in bondage to sin. We need to think not about judging them, but how to liberate them from that bondage; to give them the good news of the Gospel, the Word of Truth, the Law of Liberty, and free their souls.

We also need to hear that implanted word that has the power to transform our souls, to transform our hearts, that Law of liberty that makes us persevere in our faith. For we often fail. We often need that same transforming Grace.

PCA GA Confession of Sin

Men who were sending missionaries all over the world, to preach the Gospel to every tribe tongue and nation, failed to act it out at home.

But there is hope for those who humble themselves, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls... and cleanse your heart of all unrighteousness.

Summary

James tells us that because of the Gospel, The Gospel of Grace, we need to control our tongues and live our lives in a way worthy of that Gospel of Grace. He then summarizes chapter one in a very clear way. (1:26-27).

So how can we live an authentic Christian Life? A Life where our character and behavior truly reflect the reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

In all things, rest upon the transforming power of the implanted word, welcome it with meekness, as it has the power to save your souls.