

Present Truth

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon emphasizes the significance of the cross in revealing 'grace and truth' and the distinct heavenly rule of life presented in the New Testament.

Scripture: John 3:6, John 13:34, Romans 5:5, Romans 8:17, Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 3:20, Philippians 4:5

Topics: "The Cross", "Christian Living"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer discusses the distinct revelation of 'grace and truth' brought by Jesus Christ through the cross, which surpasses the earthly kingdom revelations of the Old Testament. He emphasizes the new realities made possible by the cross, such as life through a new birth by the Spirit, a new standing as members of the body of Christ, a new sufficiency with the indwelling Spirit, a new service of witnessing to a completed sacrifice, a new rule of life under grace, a new purpose of transforming individuals into the image of Christ, and a new prospect of the imminent return of the Lord.

Transcript

AT least seven realities not seen by the Old Testament writers were brought into view and made possible through the cross. These, with all correlated truth, form the distinct revelation of "grace and truth" that "came by Jesus Christ" and "the New Testament in his blood." Peter writes of this body of Scripture as "present truth" (2 Pet. i. 12), doubtless from the fact that it sets forth the divine blessings and relationships which are obviously effective within the present age. These new unfoldings of "grace and truth," it will be seen, are in no way related to, or a part of, those earthly kingdom revelations which had been previously recorded by the sacred writers. Much is in contrast between these two bodies of truth; but it is even more important to see that a great difference lies in the fact that one treats of a celestial sphere of spiritual reality which is as much above the temporal, earthly covenants of the other as heaven is higher than the earth.

These new conditions flowing from, and made possible by, the cross are not a readjustment of defeated Old Testament purposes, or the merging of the old order into the new. What was purposed in the earthly kingdom is still following its own divine order and development to its own mighty consummation. Its present form is exactly what God intended it to be at this hour, and all this will lead as certainly to the fulfillment of every predicted manifestation in the earth. Christianity is totally opposite to Judaism and any mixture of the two must result in the loss of all that is vital in the present plan of Salvation. One made its

appeal to the limited resources of the natural man and conditioned his life on the earth: the other sets aside the natural man, secures a whole new creation in Christ Jesus, and counsels that new being in his pilgrim journey to his heavenly, home. Israel's kingdom revelation, dealing with the past or present, does not gather into itself the distinct relationships that form the elements of "present truth," which are for this age only. On the other hand, the kingdom realization awaits the return of the King. The prolonged dispersions of Israel among the nations, with the divine preservation of that people, is not only clearly anticipated in Scripture (Hos. iii. 4, 5; Lk. xxi. 24; Rom. xi. 25; Acts xv. 13-18; Lk. xix. 11-13), but is one of the most evident facts of history. With the Gentile world opposing the Jew, at times bent upon their extermination, behold them now! Although comparatively few in number, they are rapidly rising to the place of command among the peoples of earth in finance, in the professions, in science and the fine arts. What this augurs to the devout student of Jewish prophecy is obvious.

The new issues, growing out of the cross, which confront the Bible student are:

1. Life from God through a new birth by the Spirit.

What relation to God was accorded to Old Testament saints is not clearly revealed. Doubtless they were individually renewed by the Spirit as they came to believe in God for their personal salvation. Whatever may have been the result of their spiritual change, they knew nothing of a new life and sonship as it is set forth in the New Testament. Nicodemus, than whom the nation could then produce no better, and representing the very highest product of the "Jew's religion," needed to be told that even he "must be born again." So foreign was this to his knowledge of truth that he could only reply: "How can these things be?" Paul, who had lived "in all good conscience" within the revelations of the nation's faith, must be transformed into a new creature on the Damascus road. After this he ceased not to pray for like members of his own nation who had a "zeal for God" that they, too, might be saved. One passage upon this point may be sufficient:

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. iv. 4-7).

The new life by the Spirit is presented in the Scriptures as the fundamental and distinguishing fact of the Christian. Upwards of a hundred New Testament passages emphasize this truth. In these passages a "new creation," or species, is said to be formed by the mighty creative power of God (Eph. ii. 10). This newly created one is not of this earth, but is a citizen of heaven (Phil. iii. 20). He is a legitimate son of God by a legitimate birth through the Spirit (Jno. iii. 6); possessing the divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4), which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. iii. 23). Being properly a son of God, he is said to be an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ (Rom. viii. 17; Gal. iv. 7).

God alone is sufficient for the miracles that together produce a Christian, and the reasonableness of the way of salvation is seen in that it must be received as a gift and on the basis of trusting Him for its accomplishment. This fact of regeneration is the only present issue between God and an unsaved person. When this is accomplished the obviously desirable reformation in life and conduct will be outwardly manifested by the new inwrought divine nature and power.

How short the vision is which can see no farther than to strive for the reformation of an individual in matters of purpose and conduct, as desirable as such reformation may be, when the divine plan to produce a whole new being with its new heart, disposition and power is so plainly revealed! It is puerile to be obsessed with a by-product of the fact of eternal life. Certainly this is not an abstract issue: having passed from death unto life has been, and will be, the abiding miracle in the life of individuals of all generations from the cross of Christ until He comes again. As certainly, also, such efforts toward reformation cannot be justified from Scripture; for interpretations which would suggest conduct to be the primary issue between God and the unsaved cannot be found unless Israel's law is borrowed, or the humanly impossible walk of the regenerate is imposed upon the unregenerate.

2. A new standing.

It was never said of any Old Testament saint that he was "a member of the body of Christ," or that he was "accepted in the beloved;" but the New Testament saint is all this, and has been "made the righteousness of God in him" (Rom. iii. 21, 22; x. 3, 4; 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21; Eph. i. 6).

3. A new sufficiency.

As truly as the Christian is a new creature and a heavenly citizen, so every condition within the new life is supernatural. The human limitation has been perfectly anticipated and provided for in the fact that the all-sufficient Spirit indwells every saved person (Rom. v. 5; viii. 9; Jno. iii. 6; vii. 39; xiv. 16, 17; Gal. vi. 4; 1 Cor. vi. 19). This universal abiding presence of the Spirit in a saved person, providing nothing short of the sufficiency of God for the least of His children, is a vastly different relationship than had been known before (Jno. vii. 37-39).

4. A new service.

Service, in the Old Testament, consisted largely in going into the temple, or tabernacle, to offer a sacrifice for sin: in the New Testament it is going out to the uttermost parts of the earth to witness to a perfect sacrifice fully accomplished. The former had self with its personal needs in view: the latter has found rest for self, and from self, and moves out to others in the mighty empowering "gifts of the Spirit."

5. A new rule of life.

The Epistles of the New Testament present a distinct heavenly rule of life which is gracious in contrast to law. They instruct a heavenly citizen in his normal walk and life. Attempted obedience to these precepts will never make a heavenly citizen: they are rather set before him because he is already a heavenly citizen through the power of God. Therefore they do not carry a legal imperative; but are presented as "beseechings," and under the suggestive phrase, "as it becometh saints." The law was given to Israel alone and only when she had been redeemed out of Egypt. The law of Moses did not redeem Israel: it became her rule of life after she was redeemed. That redemption out of Egypt anticipates, in type, the blood redemption of the cross. So, also, a new governing rule of life is given to those who are looking back in saving faith to Calvary. Obedience to the new principle of life under grace would not save one. It only suggests the normal manner of life for those who have already become heavenly in being through the alone sufficient power of God. The new principle of life through grace is superhuman (Eph. iv. 1-3, 30; v. 18-22; 2 Cor. x. 4, 5; 1 Pet. ii. 9, etc.); but according to the purpose of God it is to be perfectly fulfilled by the power of the indwelling Spirit (Gal. v. 16; Rom. viii. 2). The law said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. xviii. 18; Mt. xix. 19; xxii. 39; Rom. xiii. 9; Gal. v. 14; Jas. ii. 8). Jesus said, "A new commandment I

give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you" (Jno. xiii. 34, 35; xv. 12, 13). There could not be a more impossible requirement than that we, of ourselves, should love as He has loved us; but such divine love is produced in us by the unhindered Spirit (Rom. v. 5; Gal. v. 22).

6. A new purpose.

Most evidently God is not now offering an earthly kingdom to any one nation; nor is He saving every individual of all nations. There is a process of selection going on (if it be held that God is now accomplishing His own will), and, while the Gospel might be preached to all, there is no evidence from history that all who have heard it have been saved, or teaching in the Scripture that all would be saved. God is seen to be dealing with individuals, both Jews and Gentiles, and in such a manner that each one thus dealt with is to be finally changed into the image of Christ, and collectively as His body and bride to be forever with Him.

7. A new prospect.

Centuries before the cross the King and His Messianic kingdom was rightfully expected by the nation to whom the manifestation of the King and the establishment of the kingdom had been promised, and this kingdom was still in view when the new revelation concerning the return of Christ was presented. While the promises to Israel are suffering prolonged delay, the heavenly bride is being called out, and unto her is given a new hope and prospect: "The Lord is at hand" (Phil. iv. 5).

In the light of these seven "present truth" realities we are enabled to recognize how great is the effect of the change from "the law which came by Moses" and "grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ." And when these changed, age-long conditions have run their course we are assured that there will be a return to the legal kingdom grounds and, the exaltation of that nation to whom pertain the covenants and promises.

The last two elements of "present truth" presented above will each in turn be the basis for a further study of kingdom truth.

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