

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

15. On the Design of the Gospel

What a dreadful change sin has made in man! His heart, once the abode of peace and every heavenly disposition, is now the cage of every unclean and hateful bird; a den of wild beasts; a nest of vipers; a loathsome sepulcher.

How is the gold become dim—how is the fine gold changed! In this deplorable condition grace finds us, and from this state of wretchedness grace redeems us!

The glorious design of the Gospel is to throw a luster around the Godhead, by affording a display to all intelligent beings of those infinite perfections, which harmonize at the cross of Christ; and by this sacred union of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, to restore fallen man to the favor and image of his Creator.

Holiness is the glory and happiness of man. When he lost his holiness, he lost his happiness. Through the atoning blood of Jesus, we obtain the removal of our guilt; and by the power of the divine Spirit, the renewal of our nature. Being thus made holy, we become once more happy. A great spiritual change is effected—no less than a new creation; for if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature.

This, then, is the will of God, even our sanctification. Hence we find that the Gospel is designed to reveal to us, yes, to put us in possession of, the richest blessings: pardon of sin; justification of our person, by faith in Jesus; the renovation of our souls; adoption into the family of God; peace with God; access to God; union with Christ; communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, through him; victory over sin, Satan, and the world; consolation in trouble, light in darkness, life in death, assurance of future glory, and fruition of bliss in the world to come.

How little is the genuine nature and design of Christianity considered by the generality of professing Christians! How inadequately is its power felt, and its sweetness enjoyed, even by those who sustain the character of believers in Jesus! We live lamentably below our privileges. Oh! that a spirit of revival may be felt among us! "Lord, revive your work in the midst of our days. Revive it in my heart!"

Christ is the salvation of all his dear, believing people; they look to no other; they love no other; or, if they love others, it is Christ in them who is the chief object of their affection.

It is, therefore, evident, that the great design of God in the Gospel is to form a people unto himself, who shall show forth his praise; a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Here I behold a way of access opened to poor perishing sinners, through faith in the atonement of Jesus. "Lord, give me faith in your dear Son. Enable me to cast my soul without reserve upon your covenanted mercies in Christ Jesus. In him alone is eternal life. In him alone are treasured up grace, mercy, and peace. He that has the Son, has life; for this is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Oh for a heart to believe unto righteousness! Blessed Lord, this heart you only can bestow. You know my wickedness and wretchedness; my frailties and follies; my helplessness and total alienation of heart from you. You know from what height of happiness I am fallen through original sin, and into what depth of misery I am plunged through willful transgression. But, Oh sovereign love! Oh matchless grace! you have pitied me; you have sent your Son, your only Son, to save me. You have assured me that all who believe in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Yet, in the midst of all this profusion of mercy; examine yourself, Oh my soul, whether you be in the faith."

Have I ever yet believed unto life? Have I that faith which is given to all the children of God, called by the apostle "the faith of God's elect,"—a faith "according to godliness,"—a faith which "works by love,"—which "purifies the heart,"—which "overcomes the world,"—which "substantiates and evidences things not seen?" Jesus has said, "by their fruits you shall know them." "A tree is known by its fruits." Here, then, is an unerring standard, a sure criterion of judging; for men do not gather grapes from thorns bushes, nor figs of thistles.

What, then, are the fruits which I am daily bringing forth? What is the general tenor of my thoughts? If sinful thoughts arise, do I cherish them? Am I fond of retaining them? Or, have I obtained the mastery over my imaginations, so as to be able almost instantly to suppress them, when contrary to purity and holiness? Do I find delight in secret retirement, meditation, reading the Scriptures, and prayer? Am I careful with my words? Do I love to discourse about the things of God, in such a manner as to render my conversation profitable? Is Jesus, that endearing name, often upon my tongue; not from mere profession, or religious parade, but from a heart-felt love to him? What is the nature of my actions? Do they spring from a lively faith, that by them my faith may be known, as a tree by its fruits? Am I careful "to maintain good works," knowing that, if a child of God, I am created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that I should walk in them?

By some people, this train of self-examination may be termed legal; but where these evidences of grace in the soul are lacking, all pretension to Gospel liberty is a device, a delusion of Satan. John has declared, "If we ask any thing according to the will of God, he hears us:" therefore, it follows as a consequence, that if we are not sanctified, it is because we do not in sincerity ask this blessing from our heavenly Father. We are not only to

ask, as it respects the subject-matter of our prayers, what is agreeable to the will of God; but, to obtain the blessing, we must also ask in that spirit which he requires, and which he alone can impart. We must ask in faith; then comes the blessing: "whatever you ask in my name, believing," said the divine Redeemer, "you shall receive".

We have here the reason why so few are saved. Either they do not pray at all; or, if they pray, they do not ask in faith. Hence, the whole guilt lies upon the unbeliever. He has no desire to be sanctified, being destitute of true faith; and so his prayers are formal, heartless, and unanswered. But Oh! when we duly contemplate the grand design of the Gospel, what an encouragement is held out to the awakened sinner, who is crying out, "what must I do to be saved?" What an encouragement to know that God wills his salvation; and that if he ask according to the will of God, he shall assuredly obtain his request! He listens to this declaration of love: "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved;" and relying, through grace, on the merits of his Savior, and making mention of his righteousness only, he supplicates at the mercy-seat for pardon and purity, for peace and perseverance, and obtains all the riches of the everlasting covenant, to the praise and glory of God.

However disputants may marshal one part of divine truth against another, the glorious doctrines of the Gospel, like stones in a well built edifice, are firmly united together. No created power can separate them. Men may disagree in sentiment, but they cannot destroy the unity of truth. The word of the Lord endures forever.

The Gospel of Christ, like the rivers in Eden, branches itself out into many fertilizing streams. Each truth makes glad the city of God, the church of the Most High. This sacred river shall continue to flow, with progressive increase of blessedness, until the whole earth shall be filled with spiritual beauty and gladness, through the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

When the rosy streaks of morning
Flit across the darkened cloud:
When the growing splendors brighten
O'er the midnight's sable shroud;
Then we know the sun, advancing,
Will diffuse the genial ray,
Until its beam, profusely pouring,
Form the bright, the perfect day.
Thus the waiting saints, beholding,
Midst the shades of mental night,
Streaks of light, divinely shining,
flail with joy the rapturous sight.
Now they know their Lord is coming;
Jesus's praise they sweetly sing;
Hail! they cry, oh Son of glory,
Rise with healing on your wing.
Nations wrapped in awful darkness,
See the glorious light appear;
Deserts wild and barren places
All the charms of Eden wear.
Truth, and love, and hope concord
Bless the desolated earth;
Sighs, and tears, and bitter anguish
Yield to joy and scared mirth.
Hasten on this happy period,
Shine, blessed Savior, from above,
Until each nation be your portion,
Fruit of your redeeming love!