

Thinking Clearly
***“I Want to ... But Sometimes
I Don’t”***
June 11, 2017

Announcements – Video

Worship Songs – Come Thou Fount

**Worship Songs – It Is Well / The Saving
One**

Behind the Scenes – Video

**Video (Intro to Message) – “Identity: Dan
Stevens”**

Good morning everyone.

As Shannon said, we are continuing

in our series “Thinking Clearly” which began last week with a look at *three little lies* that can really mess up your life if you’re not aware of them and if you don’t take steps to knock them down whenever they show up in your thinking.

I’m not going back into all of that again this morning (if you missed last week’s service or you just want to review you can check out the message in the media section of our app and our website) but I do want to point out the connection between the biggest and most powerful of the three lies and what we’re going to talk about this morning.

That lie, we learned, is the *Identity Lie* which says “I am what I do ... what I have ... and what people think of me.”

It tells me (sometimes consciously but, most often, subconsciously) that who I am – fundamentally, as a person – is all about my accomplishments, my belongings and whatever approval I receive from others.

And that is why, according to this lie, I must never cease from performing, possessing and pleasing in order to be counted “worthy.” It’s why it seems to me that failure is fatal, loss is life-altering and disapproval feels like

death.

However, as we learned last week, if you are a Christian (if you believe in Jesus and you are following Him), that is most definitely *not* true for you. Not that what you do or have or what people think of you isn't important. It is.

But because of what Jesus has done for you on the Cross and in His Resurrection, and because of your trust in Him ...

- Regardless of what you do or don't do ...
- Regardless of what you have or don't have ...

- Regardless of whether the world around you applauds you or despises you ...

Your identity first and foremost is that you are a *beloved* son or daughter of the Heavenly Father in whom He is well-pleased (as both the Bible and the video we just saw puts it).

That's who you really are.

And you are called by God – actually, *invited* by God – to root your entire life – your hopes, your dreams, your perceptions, your worldview, your attitude, your behavior, *your everything* – in that reality.

Again, if you weren't here last week and this is a new idea for you, you should probably listen to that message.

However, as I said earlier, what I really want to do this morning is to address a very important question that eventually arises for a believer-in-Jesus who attempts to reject the Identity Lie and tries, instead, to live out of the truth. It goes like this:

“I do believe in Jesus. And I do believe that, in Him and because of Him, I really am dearly beloved of God. I do believe that He, above all

others in this world, truly treasures me. I matter to Him like I matter to no one else in this world.

“But the truth about me is that I don’t always think or act like someone who is ‘the beloved.’ Specifically ...

- I don’t always *perform* the good deeds that God desires
- I don’t always *possess* the love, joy, peace, patience, grace, mercy, courage that God desires for me to have in my life
- I don’t always live in a way that I know is *pleasing* to God. I want to ... but sometimes I don’t.

“So (and this is the question), what does that mean for my relationship with God? When I fail to perform, possess or please – when I *sin* (to put it in more biblical terms) – do I fall from grace? Am I no longer counted among The Beloved?”

If you're a serious believer in Jesus and attempting with any intensity at all to follow Him, I know that you have wondered about that because I have, too, along with countless other Christians since the first century.

The Good News?

Now, to answer this question, I'm going to reset my personal preaching calendar to 2013 and share with you again an odd-sounding Latin phrase that I first talked about in a mega-series called "Amazing Grace" ...

<Picture of Martin Luther>

... a phrase that repeatedly occurs in the writings of the great reformer Martin Luther – a Catholic priest who, five centuries ago, rocked the world of Christianity with his attempt to reform (among other things) the Catholic Church's understanding of *grace* –

specifically, how people receive the grace of God and even more specifically, how people are made right with God.

As we have talked about on countless occasions, every world religion or spiritual pathway including Christianity recognizes that ...

- Something is wrong with this world.
- And something is fundamentally flawed with human beings. We all fall short – in big ways and small – of what we’re supposed to be. The

Bible calls that flaw, that shortfall, “sin.”

And every religion or pathway *except for Christianity* tells its followers what they must do in order to make up for their failures. *Christianity says* (and this is what makes it unique among all religions and pathways) that it’s impossible for humans to do anything at all to atone for sin, so God did it for us. He came into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, lived a perfect life and then was executed on a Roman cross.

And on that cross something incredible happened (which we also

talked about last week).

Paul writes:

*God made Him who had
no sin to become sin for
us that in Him we might
become the
righteousness of God.*

*2 Corinthians
5:21 (NIV)*

God took our sin, laid it on Jesus and judged Him instead of us. He paid the price that we should pay so that we can be made right; so that we can be justified – declared innocent – of every sin big or small we’ve ever committed or will commit ... which is really, really

good news.

And God did this because God is a God of *grace*. Though we do not deserve it and cannot earn it God freely offers this salvation to us – that’s what grace is.

And all we need to do to receive that salvation is ... well, that’s where Luther comes in (and, eventually, that fancy Latin phrase).

Martin Luther never intended to be a priest. He was training to be a lawyer. But one day, he was caught in a thunderstorm and almost killed

by lightning. He took that as a sign of God's impending judgment on him, so he decided to become a monk in order to become holier and more acceptable to God.

Now, what's fascinating about this is that *Luther was already a Christian*. Luther already believed that Jesus had died on the cross to forgive his sin and was attempting to follow His teachings.

But he had a big problem that many Christians today also have: even though he knew that Jesus had graciously given His life to procure his salvation, *he himself was still a sinner*. He did not perform, possess

or please God in the way that he knew he should as one who was God's dearly beloved.

And he was terrified by that; he was demoralized by that because of what he understood "grace" to be.

I'm grossly oversimplifying this but Luther had been taught that God's grace - his acceptance and forgiveness for sin - had been made available to all through what Jesus did on the cross and in His resurrection. That's basic Christianity.

However, Luther had *also* been taught that this grace was stored in

Heaven as an infinite “treasury of merit” which was able to be periodically infused into the souls of believers through the sacraments and indulgences (which are special dispensations of grace authorized by a priest).

There’s a lot that could be said about this but I want to give you just four characteristics of this understanding of grace which I will call “sacramental” because that’s how, in this line of thinking, grace comes to us.ⁱ

- In the sacramental view, grace is received through participating in sacraments

(communion, penance, mass, fasting, marriage, last rites) and through special dispensations (like visiting a spiritual shrine.

- In this view, righteousness is “infused” into your soul as you freely receive sacraments and indulgences. Through this infusion, you are enabled to *become* righteous in reality.
- The more you do “works of righteousness” (or “good deeds”), the more you cooperate with grace, the more your justification – your righteous standing – before God

increases.

Correspondingly, if you don't cooperate – if you do works of evil – your justification decreases. Therefore, your standing before God at any moment in time is dependent on your behavior.

- Obviously, since no one reaches perfection in this life, further purging of whatever sin is left on your soul (assuming it is not a mortal sin) is required after death.

Therefore, even though it's not directly stated in the Bible,

Catholic theologians concluded that there must be a place called Purgatory where this happens. For most Christians, the best you can hope for is that your stay there is not very long.

Now, as I've said on many occasions, I'm not interested in denigrating Catholicism or Catholic theology. I'm only presenting this because I want you to understand the system under which Luther was raised and under which he became a priest, and why he was so terrified and demoralized by his failures.

No matter how often he received

communion or confessed his sins and did penance (and later he wrote that if any monk could have attained perfection through his dedication and practice, it was him) he knew it was still not enough. He knew he did not measure up to God's standard of perfect righteousness.

Luther's Great Discovery

So, what happened to Luther? What changed his life? Why, instead of leaving the priesthood in anger and hostility towards God, did he become, quite unexpectedly, the Father of the Reformation?

It happened because of a biblical truth bound up in that odd-sounding Latin phrase which Luther so frequently employed in his teaching and writing:

“Simul iustus et peccator.” <repeat>

Which means, when you break it down word-for-word ...

“Simul” from which we get the word “simultaneous.”

“iustus” which means “just” or “righteous.”

“et peccator” which means “and sinner.”

“Simul iustus et peccator” ...

“Simultaneously righteous and sinful.”

Luther’s anguish drove him to rediscover a biblical truth that, for many reasons, had long been lost: that we who believe in Jesus are not *becoming* more and more acceptable to God as we cooperate with grace and live more and more righteously.

Instead, we are *declared* completely righteous and acceptable at the moment we put our faith and trust in Jesus as our savior; at the moment we admit that we are a lost and hopeless sinner in need of a savior and believe that Jesus died

and rose again to pay for our sin.

In that moment, we are “born from above” – we become a new creation in Christ and the righteousness of God is imputed to us (or “credited to our account”) once and for all.

(picture) And that is what we are in His sight – completely righteous ... *even though we still continue to sin intentionally or unintentionally in our everyday life.*

Thus, we are “simul iustus et peccator” – 100% sinner and 100% saint at the exact same time ... which by the way, is exactly how the Apostle Paul – one of the greatest Christians to ever live –

described *himself* when he wrote to the first century believers in Rome.

In the 7th chapter of his letter, verse 18 and 19 we read ...

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I cannot do it. And [not only do] I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want!

*Romans 7:18-19
(NET)*

If you're a Christian, you know exactly what he's talking about. You know what's right but you don't do it. You know what's wrong and you

do it anyway.

Paul explains why that happens.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer me doing it but sin that lives in me. When I want to do good, evil is present with me.

*Romans 7:20-21
(NET)*

For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. But I see a different law in my members [my flesh] waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.

Romans 7:22-23
(NET)

*Wretched man that I
am! Who will rescue me
from this body of death?*

*Thanks be to God,
who delivers me
through Jesus Christ our
Lord! Romans 7:24-
25 (NET-NIV)*

What Paul is saying is that there are two equal and opposite natures at work in his life. In his “inner being” Paul is 100% saint, delighting in loving and obeying God. In his “members” – in his flesh, in his “body of death” – he is 100% sinner.

“Simul iustus et peccator” – that’s reality, Luther realized, not just for Paul but for every believer ... including himself.

Now, as to *how* he came to see this truth, that’s a longer story than we have time for. Let’s just say that with the New Testament having recently become available in the original Greek language, Luther was in the right place at the right time.

More important than that was the change that his discovery brought about in the way that many people in his day (and countless more since) came to understand grace;

that it is not temporarily infused through sacraments but is freely and completely given through faith.

It's hard to overstate how radical this shift was. In fact, I want to make a comparison chart to the one we saw earlier to illustrate.

Let's call this view "Free Grace."ⁱⁱ

- Unlike the sacramental view, where grace is received through sacraments and special dispensations, in the Free Grace view grace is received through faith – when we come to believe that Jesus is Lord and God raised him from the dead.

- Instead of righteousness being “infused” into your soul, the perfect righteousness of Jesus is imputed – or credited – to your account once and for all. You are legally declared “not guilty” for all sin past, present and future.
- Instead of an increasing or decreasing justification based on your cooperation with God, your justification is complete. Your standing before God at any moment in time is never dependent on your own “goodness.” It is always

dependent on the goodness of *Jesus*.

- Finally, instead of sin having to be purged from your soul in a place the Bible never warns us about, sin is simply gone when your flesh (your physical body) dies. All that is left of you is the 100% righteous, holy, justified saint whose perfect spirit lives with God in the place we call Heaven ...

... until the day when Jesus returns and raises up your flesh and renews, restores and regenerates it to sinless perfection on the renewed,

restored and regenerated earth
where you will live forever.

I think you can see that this is a
radical difference in understanding.
In fact, it was so radical that it got
Luther excommunicated!

And it's so radical that it has
brought freedom and relief and joy
to so many believers like Luther
because they have finally
understood just exactly what Jesus
has accomplished for them. For
them, the Good News of God's grace
really has become good news.

A Confused Hybrid

Unfortunately, however, my chart wouldn't be complete if I didn't also point out a third view.

After Luther staked out this radically biblical view on grace, other well-meaning Christians – *non-Catholic* Christians – felt like he had gone too far.

And they opted for a position that I'll call “*conditional* grace” – a confused hybrid of the sacramental and free grace positions.

And this position has many variations (which is one reason why there are so many Protestant denominations).

But, regardless of the flavor, the one common characteristic of all of them is that if you sin badly enough or you don't hold tightly enough to your faith or you don't confess and turn away from every sin (and hopefully you do know all of them), the penalty isn't *Purgatory* - it's Hell. You lose your salvation!

If you've been around North Heartland for a while, you're probably aware that we do not teach this view. But I want to take a few minutes to explain why, because I am so burdened by how it can absolutely ruin the joy of grace for anyone who believes it.

Besides the fact that the free grace position is *by far* the most supported position in the New Testament, the very idea of “conditional grace” is totally illogical.

Here’s why I say that: if I can’t do anything to *earn* forgiveness *before* I come to Jesus as my savior, how is it possible for me to do anything that *keeps* that forgiveness *afterwards*? If faith in Jesus is what *gets* me “in” then faith has to be what *keeps* me “in.”

... which is exactly what the Apostle Paul told the Galatians.

Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Galatians 3:3 (NLT)

It's impossible, Paul is saying. You can't do it. If God starts the process, God finishes it.

More importantly, the problem with conditional grace is that it doesn't take seriously the fact that, if you are a spiritually born-again believer in Jesus, there really are two natures at work in your life ... just like Paul said!

You really are “simul iustus et peccator” because, in that moment when we were born from above, the Holy Spirit made your dead-in-sin spirit alive which made you 100% righteous. And yet, because you are still alive in your flesh, your old sinful nature – the part of you that is opposed to God in every way – you are still 100% sinner.

And these two natures are going to do battle and sometimes the old sinful nature is going to win ... and win big. That’s what Paul was getting at in Romans 7 and it’s something he repeated in almost every letter he wrote.

For example, to the Galatian Christians he wrote:

The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

*Galatians 5:17
(NLT)*

Do you see that? You are not always free to do what your new nature wants. Sometimes, the sinful

nature wins.

And yet, in spite of this, immediately after describing his struggle in Romans 7 ...

Paul writes:

*There is now no
condemnation for those
who are in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:1

(NIV)

That is so important I'm going to ask you: would you read that aloud with me? Could we do that together?

There is now no

*condemnation for those
who are in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:1 (NIV)

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ who lose the battle against their sinful nature. The war has already been won by Jesus. Your flesh will die someday and your sinful nature will die with it ...

... which is why Paul could write in yet another of his letters ...

*I am certain that God,
who began the good
work within you, will
continue his work until
it is finally finished on
the day when Christ*

Jesus returns.

Philippians *1:6*
(NLT)

Living in Grace

So (and this takes us back to the original question), what does this mean for my relationship with God?

- When I fail to perform good deeds that God desires ...
- When I fail to possess the attitudes and character qualities that God desires for me to have ...
- When I fail to live in a way that I know is pleasing to God ...

When I *sin* – do I fall from grace?
Am I no longer counted among “The Beloved?”

Dear friends, I hope that by now the answer is crystal clear to you ...
ABSOLUTELY NOT!

In his letter to the Christ-followers at Rome, Paul wrote:

Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

Do you see that?

You, if you are a Christian (and who wouldn't want to be?) ... if you have come to the point where you believe that Jesus is who He says he is ... that He died for you and then rose again on the third day following and you have invited Him to be your savior and have chosen to follow Him, then *you have been made right* - past tense - and your 24/7 relationship status with God is *peace*.

Furthermore, Paul adds ...

*Because of our faith
(not because we
perform, possess or
please), Christ has
brought us into this*

place of undeserved privilege (that's exactly what grace is) where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. Romans 5:1-2 (NLT)

Confidence and joy and anticipation of a glorious future – when you truly understand what God has done for you that, instead of doubt and worry and fear, can be your attitude towards Him.

“Yes, but Rick, you don't understand. I really messed up this time. It's hard to be confident and joyful before God when I have this

feeling of letting Him down; when I've not lived the way I know that I should. What do I do with that?"

Let me give you two thoughts.

1. When you sin (or when you become conscious of your sinful nature) confess, repent and rejoice in what you have already received in Christ.

For example, when you realize that your attitude or behavior was wrong – even if it's the 999th time, just say, "Heavenly Father, that was wrong of me. I sinned. I know that's not how you want me to live."

That's what confessing and repenting is. (And, by the way, if

your sin was against another person, you need to confess and repent to them, too).

And then thank Him for the fact that in Christ and because of Christ you are “simul iustus et peccator” – 100% forgiven, holy, righteous, blessed, heaven-bound saint at the same time as you are 100% sinner.

“God, I am so thankful that Jesus atoned for that sin, I rejoice that I am forgiven in Him and I look forward with anticipation to the day when this flesh will finally be transformed.”

Confess, repent and rejoice.

Now, having said that, I need to explain something about confession that for many years caused me a great deal of consternation and confusion. And I've seen it do the same thing to countless other Christians I've known.

In spite of the fact that it is overwhelmingly clear that the grace of Jesus covers *all of our sin* (past, present, future – all the ones we're aware of plus the ones we're not aware of – and there are many), almost every Christian believes they need to confess individual sins and ask God to forgive that particular sin.

After all, isn't that what it says in 1 John 1:9?

*If we confess our sins,
he is faithful and just
and will forgive us our
sins and purify us from
all unrighteousness. 1
John 1:9 (NIV)*

... which, by logical extension, also means “if we *don't* confess, we *don't* get forgiveness.”

But if you read it in context, it's very clear that this one sentence is part of a longer descriptive passage that is intended to help us identify what a true believer in Jesus looks like – to help us know if we're really

saved. It is not meant to prescribe an action: “you’d better confess that sin if you want to be forgiven of it!”

And that’s obvious when you put this verse in its context, i.e. when you read the verse before it and the verse after it.

Here’s what the whole thing says:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from

all unrighteousness.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

*1 John 1:8-10
(NIV)*

It's kind of like a checklist. And the point John is making here is very simple.

The people who do not admit they are sinners – the people who claim that they never sin (and there are many) – *those people are deceived.* They are not true Christians.

But the ones who freely confess

that they *are* sinners – those who are aware of and admit the ways they fall short of God’s intention for their lives – those folks, John says, are the ones who are forgiven and purified from every last ounce of unrighteousness because – and this is very important – *God* is faithful and just, *even though they are not ...* which, again, is exactly what “grace” is.

So, bottom line on this: when you realize you’ve sinned, confess it to God because that’s what forgiven people do and because it reminds you of what God has already done. But be careful about mentally linking that confession with

forgiveness of that specific sin.

I say that from personal experience because, when you constantly ask for forgiveness, it leaves the door open to the lie that “there is a possibility that God just might decide *not to forgive* this time” – especially if it is some sin you keep falling into (like a bad temper, overeating, lust, etc).

But that is just not true. When a person is “in Christ” through faith, God will never say “OK, that’s it – I’ve had it. You’ve finally done it. No more forgiveness for you” ... because it’s already been done.

So, confess, repent and rejoice in the grace and forgiveness that is already yours in Christ.

Ok, one more thought about this and then we'll be finished.

2. Keep “fighting the good fight” to live out of the new identity God has given you in Christ.

It's instructive to note that in almost every letter Paul wrote to followers of Jesus, he followed the same format.

- Part 1: Here's what Christ did to save you and make you completely righteous in God's

sight.

- Part 2: Because of that, your old sinful nature is done for. It's going to pass away when you die, so consider yourself dead to it right now. Stop listening to it, stop obsessing over how bad it wants to behave and sometimes does behave.
- Part 3: Live out of the new nature God has given you.

For example, he wrote to the followers of Jesus at Ephesus:

Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life,

*which is corrupted by
lust and deception.*

*Instead, let the Spirit
renew your thoughts
and attitudes. Put on
your new nature,
created to be like God—
truly righteous and
holy. Ephesians 4:22-
24 (NLT)*

And you can tell by how Paul phrases it that this is a battle: “throw off your old sinful nature” because it keeps wanting to jump back on. It keeps wanting to control you. But throw it off – again and again and again – he says, and put on the new you, the new identity given to you when you first

believed.

Keep fighting the good fight to be that new person created in Christ to be like God – truly righteous and holy ... because, as we always say, we want to be more than just forgiven. We want to be transformed into the people God wants us to be.

And we'll look into that more deeply next Sunday (Father's Day) when we talk about becoming the truest expression of who God wants us to be.

But for now, I'm going to turn it over to our band for a few minutes,

then we have one more thing to talk about this morning.

Feature – “Good Fight”

CLOSING COMMENTS – Shannon

1. Fireworks promo
2. Offering at door

Endnotes

ⁱ See <http://theresurgence.com/2010/11/22/infusion-vs-imputation-a-nasty-case-of-spiritual-navel-gazing>,
<http://www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/imparted-or-imputed-righteousness/>,
http://www.reformationtheology.com/2009/11/roman_catholics_the_gospel_and.php,
http://www.understandingthebible.org/Augustine's_Mistake_and_Luther's_Rediscovery.htm

ⁱⁱ For a comparison of infused vs. imputed, see <http://neopuritan.wordpress.com/2009/12/09/imputed-righteousness-vs-infused-righteousness/>