

The Invincible Gospel & the Modern Evangelical Lie

by Richard M. Bennett

Richard M. Bennett's sermon emphasizes the invincible nature of the Gospel and critiques modern evangelical misconceptions about salvation.

Scripture: Proverbs 9:10

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Gods Righteousness"

Description

Richard M. Bennett preaches on the importance of understanding the true Gospel, which solely concerns Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, emphasizing that salvation is an historic fact and not about human efforts. He delves into the knowledge of the Holy, highlighting the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom and the necessity to comprehend God's holiness. Bennett explains the concept of justification as God's gift to believers based on Christ's finished work on the cross, emphasizing that justification is God's righteous judgment, declaring believers guiltless and righteous in Christ. He stresses the centrality of God's righteousness in the Gospel, revealing that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Transcript

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" Ephesians 4:14-15

Introduction: I had great difficulties as a Catholic priest in listening to evangelists in my fourteen years of searching for the Gospel. Christian radio programs continually told me the amount of things I had to do to accept Jesus into my heart. Christian tracts likewise told me the amount of dedication or commitment I needed in order to make a decision for Christ. After an agonizing search in the face of being told what I must do to be saved, I discovered that the first thing that must be understood biblically about the Gospel is that it is "concerning Jesus Christ our Lord", in the words of Paul in Romans 1:3. While the Gospel is proclaimed to all, it is not about us or about anything that happens in us. It solely concerns what Jesus Christ did and His death and resurrection. I found out, too, that the Gospel is an historic fact. Biblical faith is not concerned with recommending techniques, whether mystical or ethical, whereby salvation may be obtained for that is the burden of all false religion. Rather the Bible proclaims the fact that God has in concrete historical fact saved all His people from destruction. The Gospel "by which ye are saved" (I

Corinthians 15:1-4) is the finished and complete work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The God before Whom We are Saved: What seems to be totally missing from modern evangelical circles is "the knowledge of the Holy". "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10) Knowledge of the Holy is defined by the Bible as knowledge of Who God is in Himself as the All Holy One. Unless it is proclaimed, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all", how would anyone begin to see the evil of sin? In the Scripture words a person must ask, "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy." With the Apostle Peter one must rightly come to fear the Lord God's command, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Unless a person understands something of God's attributes and that He is All Holy, there is no reason to desire the perfect righteousness of Christ in salvation. Thus, Scripture asks the question, "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

The Author: God Just and Justifier: In the Bible justification is God's gift to the believer, which is imputed to him based on Christ's finished work on the cross. Quite simply, justification is God's righteous judgment of the believer, declaring him both guiltless in regard to sin, and righteous in regard to his moral standing in Christ before the Holy God. This judgment by God is legally possible because of the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ Jesus in the place of the believer.

Justification is first and foremost God's legal judgment of the believer. "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Justification is God's righteous judgment to demonstrate in the words of Romans 3:26, that He is "just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." This righteous judgment of God is the center of the apostolic preaching of the good news in the Bible.

It is a righteous judgment freely given by God: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:21-26) Purpose of the Gospel: to reveal God's righteousness: That the righteousness of God without the law is manifested is the purpose of the Gospel.

What is declared is not human works righteousness of any kind, but rather it is God's righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ that is revealed. The Gospel is the demonstration in concrete historical fact of the righteous judgment of God. Before His all Holy nature, sin had to be punished and true righteousness established. This has been accomplished in the faithful obedience of the Lord Christ Jesus and His propitiatory sacrifice. Christ's faithfulness is proclaimed in v. 22, "even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ.

When the Bible declares that justification is God's gift to the believer, it also shows in few words what this justification is. Justification is found in and of Christ. It is the demonstration of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, even unto death. Such perfect rectitude is of God, and from God, "even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ" (v. 22). The great news is that this absolute righteousness is "unto all and upon all them that believe." "Theos" in the Greek text can be rightly translated both "of God", and "from

God".

As one reads "of God" it can be understood in both senses. It is Christ's faithfulness, as "of Him", and the believer's as "from Him". Legally what is shown is identification with the Lord Jesus Christ. God has provided Christ's righteousness to sinners who believe. There are several passages in which faithfulness of the Lord is mentioned. In each case, the name of Jesus Christ is in the genitive case indicating that faithfulness a character quality which He possesses. Galatians 2:16 is an example of this usage, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ."

Knowing that the law must be fulfilled for God to declare a person righteous, the faithfulness of Christ must be also understood as applying specifically to this context. Because imputed righteousness is so unfamiliar to many Evangelicals, there are grievous errors in translation in most modern texts, and like two drunks, the wrong gospel and wrong translations hold each other up. While the KJV can be understood as "faithfulness", it still leaves much to be desired.

The human condition: bad record, bad heart: According to verse 23, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", every person under the law has fallen short of the glory of God and thereby is possessed both of a bad heart because of sin nature and a bad record because of personal sin. The good news is stated in v. 24, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." A person's right standing before God is in Christ's redemption which is freely given, as it is outside anything a person can do for himself. "Being justified" means that since there remains nothing for man in himself being smitten by the just judgment of God but to perish, he is to be justified freely through God's provision in Christ. There is perhaps no passage in the whole Scripture which illustrates in such a striking manner the efficacy of God's righteousness as this one does. It shows that God's grace is the efficient cause, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This shows being justified freely by his grace is through Christ Jesus' payment and nothing from the believer, lest one might imagine a kind of "half grace", and should be bold enough to attempt to add his own merit to God's grace.

Predicament of those receiving the Gospel: "dead in trespasses and sins": The redemption has as its object the reconciliation of man with God. Ephesians 2:1 states clearly the moral condition of a person before conversion, "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Colossians 2:13 also states the moral condition clearly, "And you, being dead in your sins...." Because of Adam's sin mankind is born spiritually dead. God himself graciously provides the believer's rectitude. God's gracious free gift is the very core of the good news of the Gospel. "By grace" means the Gospel has to do first and foremost with who God is in His Holy and Righteous nature. The Gospel demonstrates that because of who God is, He alone justifies the one who believes. Verse 26 states, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." The final cause of justification is the glory of the Divine Justice and Goodness.

Riches of God's grace: work's righteousness excluded: Herein is the love of God shown through his Son, Jesus Christ, in that this gift of righteousness, which cost Christ Jesus his life, is a finished work and is freely given. For to whom does God owe anything? And who can meet his standards under the law? So who can bargain with God or with Christ Jesus, that he should even think of offering God anything in exchange for God's righteous judgment of himself? To make such a natural and ridiculous offer would be to attempt bribery of the highest order. Again and again the Bible states, as in the above text, that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer freely by God, or by God's grace alone. It is in Christ alone that one has right standing before the All Holy God "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the

forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:7) Biblical justification, therefore, is perfect and a finished work of God. "It is God that justifieth." Justification is God's work alone to show His righteousness and the fact that He alone saves. Once God has justified any person, He views that person "in Christ", for God, having forgiven the sinner, reckons to his account Christ's righteousness. Thus justification is by faith alone "without the deeds of the law."

The Gospel: not a process: The type of witnessing that states, "If you will do this and that or take these steps, then God will save you," is a false gospel, a return to the lie of Satan which implies that God can be manipulated. The Gospel does not do this. It declares historical facts: God has acted already in Christ to accomplish the reconciliation that is the Gospel. Rather than offering possibility thinking, what every person is commanded to believe on is objective and complete fact. God has redeemed all of His own (Isaiah 44:22, Romans 5:18, II Corinthians 5:14-21).

Two main points of receiving the Gospel: Biblically, receiving the Gospel has two main points. First, all men are commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus. Second, while the faith to believe is a free gift of God, yet without God's grace, no person can believe. The Lord put the command to believe in a nutshell when He said, "if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Likewise, Paul and Silas declared "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The central importance of faith was given by the Lord in the words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." In a word the Lord summarizes the situation, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The Lord Jesus Christ states clearly the reason for this, "He that believeth on Him [Christ] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:18-19) The highest expression of the loving kindness of God is grace. The term denotes the very nature of the graciousness of God. Therefore the Scripture insist, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us, through Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Salvation does not proceed from anything in the one witnessed to, but rather it issues forth from the sheer mercy of God. The contrast between His grace and human merit is clearly marked out in the plainest of words, "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." The plan which God has devised for saving people is by faith, in order that His justification of them might be by grace alone, that His promise and faithfulness be firmly manifested, and they, therefore, perfect and secure. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed...."

Biblical tension between the two points: The Biblical tension between these two points that every person is commanded to believe, but without God's grace, a person cannot believe must be clearly evident in witnessing to unbelievers. This tension is expressed in some texts, for example, "Jesus answered and said unto them, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.'" One of the clearest examples is in John 1:12-13, "But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Both aspects are also give in the preaching of the Apostle Paul, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." The design of the Lord in these and other verses is to show that man cannot be justified by

his works, to hedge up the temptation of Satan that one can be saved by his or her own righteousness. God's promise of grace is the result. "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." In witnessing it must be made clear to the lost is that in the words of Scripture each person must himself or herself, "Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord" (Lamentations 2:19) "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Presenting the Gospel the way the Bible does: Biblically believing on Christ, trusting on Him, or coming to Him has an essential negative side that is often not mentioned in present day tracts and witnessing. In the Bible, however, it is often first and is always a big part of the message. The Lord Jesus Christ's message is, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (Mark 1:15) He came to "call sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32) and He insisted that "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3-5). The risen Lord teaches in His word "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." (Luke 24:47) Peter proclaims, "Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out!" (Acts 3:19) Everywhere Paul went he preached, "repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20), "testifying to both Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21) Repentance is so essential to saving faith that if repentance is neglected, a person does not have saving faith. Conviction of sin is the first work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the lost (John 16:8). Without conviction of sin, a person does not have salvation. "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Repentance is always part of trusting on Christ because Christ came not to save a person in his sins but from his sins. "[God] now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30).

Non-Biblical Terminology: men's words: In the light of the biblical truth examined here, it is necessary to analyze what is generally given as the gospel in our times. The following words and phrases which are often used in modern Evangelical circles are biblically wrong. These expressions can lead an unsaved person to think that some specific behavior on his part is necessary for him to be saved. When these phrases are used, even saved people may mistakenly teach error when witnessing to lost people.

"Accept Jesus into your heart." is one of the most used sentences in modern Evangelical circles. This humanistic concept is not biblical. Basically it is the second lie of Satan. The biblical concept of justification is that by it the believer is made accepted in Christ. The whole theme of Ephesians Chapter 1 is summarized in verse 6, "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." The terminology, "accept Jesus into your heart" is backwards.

It assumes wrongly that the person himself makes the choice to accept Jesus into his human heart and that he initiates the action which will save him. When the believer does abide in Christ by faith and in love keeps His commandments, Christ does dwell in that person's cleansed human heart. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." (John. 15:4) The whole process of sanctification ("Christ in you, the hope of glory" Colossians 1:27) depends first on a person being positionally in Him, clothed with His righteousness.

It is unscriptural to think that salvation begins by Christ first coming into the sinful heart of a man. The dead and ungodly person can be made acceptable to God only as he is "in Christ", as was seen in Ephesians 1:6. Then, and only then, does Christ come to sanctify the one already saved. The verses below are often wrongly used to evangelize. Rather these words are addressed to believers alone, "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man

hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." (Revelation 3:14, 20-21) "Give Jesus control of your life to be saved" is another well known unbiblical approach. This teaching is in error because the Sovereign God of the universe controls His creation. He is the One "Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." (Ephesians 1:11) Nothing any person might think of to give God in exchange for salvation is acceptable before God. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us..." (Titus 3:5) Jesus Christ Himself was the only sacrifice for sin acceptable to the Holy God, and that sin offering was accomplished completely at the cross.

The sacrifice for sin is finished. A person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by a promise of "controlled behavior". Controlled behavior is a process following on salvation rather than the initiating cause of salvation.

"Give your life to Jesus (to be saved.):": This teaching is error for several reasons. First, eternal life is a free gift. (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 5:15-18, 6:23) A person does not "give" anything for a free gift. This free gift is given to a person by God when He places that person in Christ Jesus. With the gift of salvation also comes the gift of faith to believe that this is what God has done. (See also John 5:24-25.) Sin is what separates a man from God (Romans 3:23). Second, such phrases as "give your life to Jesus" wrongly presume that a person has something worthy of God to give. Spiritually dead people cannot give anything that will save them from their sins. Because man is dead in sin, Christ Jesus gave His life for the sins of His people (Galatians 1:4). There is no Bible verse that says or teaches that a lost, spiritually dead person "gives" anything, not even his life, in order to be saved. When a lost person is taught to "give his life to Jesus" to be saved, he may think that he has to give his service, time, works, money, etc., to be saved. This may lead the lost person into a works gospel, which can never save. Getting saved is not a "trade-in" by which a person gives something to Jesus to be saved. A person is saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone--and nothing else. See Eph. 2:8-9. Repentance is also God given and not a human "trade-in" item, "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31)

Summary: Biblical methodology is an important part of the Lord's truth. The Lord's own method of evangelizing was essentially by asking questions, and by proclaiming the need to repent and believe. Likewise, the Apostles proclaimed the the Lord's commandment to believe. There are no invitation systems in the Scripture. Such a method, flagrantly setting aside the sovereignty of Holy God, presupposes that man has within himself the power to accept or reject salvation as he so wishes.

The biblical method is to ask questions, as did the Lord Himself. Using the actual words of the Bible, one presents the holiness of God, and God's holiness and goodness in declaring the righteousness of Christ to be the covering of each person He saves. One shows that the Lord Jesus Christ's saving work is factual and complete. Clearly one must make it known that all are commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this, one must repent of all his or her own efforts to establish his or her own righteousness and cry out to God for His free gift of grace.

The central point of God saving the ungodly is that He does so by imputing the righteousness of Christ to the one who believes. This is the theme of Romans Chapter Four and is summarized wonderfully in verse five, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." The reason why God imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer is to show who He is.

"To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:26) Unless modern Evangelicals return to this clear Biblical understanding in their witnessing, it will become easier and easier for them to promote an inner process or technique like unto Rome's.

Coming to Christ is initiated by the Father Who draws each individual (John 6:44) and has given each one to Christ (John 6:37). Salvation is accomplished by God's grace alone. It is His free gift through faith alone. (Ephesians 2:8-9). Coming to Christ is having eternal life now, which life will be fully glorified in heaven. In witnessing, to talk about "getting to heaven" not only changes the focus from who God is to man's fulfillment, but it also fails to make clear that through the precious faith that is ours now as believers, we already have eternal life.

Rather than talking about getting to heaven, those who have been saved are to proclaim to the lost, "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) And what is written likewise must be proclaimed by those saved, whether in the supermarket or on the telephone, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

Two extremely great offenses to God and His Gospel are: 1) the attempt to negate His power by so-called free decisions of the unsaved, and: 2) the unbiblical idea that justification, which is an act of God, is located in the believer's heart rather than in Christ alone and in the heavenlies. When full credit is given to God and His grace, when His word, which is powerful, is used, He saves the sinner; and the one through whom the word has been given is humbled by a demonstration of the might and mercy of Holy God. Both people benefit, to the glory of God. All is as stated in Ephesians 1:6, "To the praise of the glory of His grace." "

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