

We Believe – Week #8

Christian Living: Eph. 2:8-10

INTRODUCTION:

The Christian message has been commonly misunderstood in two equally dangerous directions. On the one hand, the legalists believe that being a Christian is a matter of obeying the law. We are made right with God by what we do, whether that is conceived in terms of observing the Torah of Moses received on Mt. Sinai or conforming to the standards of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But the gospel message assumes that we have all broken the law and can now do nothing to save ourselves. "By the works of the law no one will be justified," Paul writes (Gal. 2:16), for "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). Our salvation does not depend on how we have lived (cf. Titus 3:4), but on Christ's life given for us. Paul's hope is not in his own righteousness that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ (Phil. 3:9). In union with Christ, our sins are forgiven, our guilty consciences are washed clean and the righteousness of Christ is now ours—all apart from our good works (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

On the other hand, some, seeing that our salvation is not a matter of how we live, conclude that how we live doesn't matter. From the ditch of legalism these people lurch to the opposite ditch of license. In the book of Jude we read of certain "godless people" who, having infiltrated the church, "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (Jude 4), and people have been following in their miry footsteps ever since.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses this very issue. After setting forth the depth and breadth of human sin and the even greater power of God's grace in the first five chapters, contending that where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Rom. 5:20), Paul raises the question that ought to be in the minds of his readers: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Rom. 6:1).³⁶⁷ In other words, can we be indifferent to the moral character of our lives? Paul's answer is an emphatic No!

By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Rom. 6:2-4).

Paul is pointing us to the secure path that avoids the pitfalls on both sides. For the Christian, grace and godliness coexist, for both are found in our union with Christ. Using the outward sign of baptism as a symbol of that Spirit-forged union, Paul declares that believers now have a new identity. We have died with Christ, who has atoned for our sin, and we have been raised with him to live a new life. Therefore, in our Statement we affirm that God's justifying grace must not be separated from his sanctifying power and purpose.¹

Article #8 - "We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed."

¹ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 234-236). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

GETTING STARTED – As you begin your group time, take time to answer this question together, “What is the purpose of the Christian life?”

IN THE WORD – Let’s dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God’s Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God’s Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God’s Word. Remember, we believe that God’s Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. What is core to this article of faith? That is, what is something that, if you took it away or changed it, it would significantly alter the article of faith about Christian Living?
2. What is clarified for you in this article of faith about Christian Living?
3. What is confusing for you in this article of faith? Take time as a group to chat through and offer perspectives on the things that are confusing. The beauty of a group is that often, when we study together, we help sharpen and clarify what is confusing for one another.
4. How does this article on Christian Living apply to my everyday life? That is, how does it change my outlook and approach to my Monday-Saturday life?
5. When I think about the two ditches proposed above (legalism and license), which one do I tend towards? What corrective steps or safeguards do I need to take or implement in my spiritual life to avoid that particular ditch?