

Walking Well with God for a Lifetime

“How do we walk well with God?” If this were to be asked to a group of Christians I suspect that there would be an array of answers—reading scripture daily, being part of a Bible study, praying, confessing sins, memorizing scripture, sharing your faith, and being involved in a local church might be some responses. These are all great things to do and even wonderful blessings when done out of the right motives, however, they are not what will keep us walking well with God for a lifetime.

Believe it or not, you could be doing all these “Christian” things and might not even love God. You might be thinking, “That seems ridiculous! Why would anyone go through all the effort if their motive is not out of the pure love for God?” or “Are you saying I am not a Christian if I am doing these things and do not have the right motives?” No, I am not saying you are not a Christian, but I am saying that it is fully possible to do all the “right” things without Jesus being the focus. The following story from the article “Hearing the Music of the Gospel” will help explain my point:

Imagine yourself in a large house in which both those who are deaf and those who can hear are living together. They are all mixed together so you cannot tell by looking who can hear and who cannot. As you watch, you see a man sitting in a room listening to music. As he is listening to music on his iPod, he is tapping his foot rhythmically, snapping his fingers and his body is swaying. His whole body wants to respond to what his ears are receiving. He is obviously enjoying himself.

But now add a second person to this scene. One of the deaf persons opens the door and enters the room. He walks over to individuals listening to music and begins watching. He thinks to Himself,

“He sure seems to be enjoying himself, I think I’ll try that too.” So he sits down next to the first man and begins to imitate him. Awkwardly and haltingly at first, he tries to snap his fingers, tap his toes and move like the man next to him. After a little practice the deaf man slowly begins to snap and tap and sway in time with the first man just from watching and trying. Although he gets pretty good at keeping time, he eventually shrugs saying himself, “This isn’t much fun as I thought.”

A third person walks into the room and what does he see? Two people apparently doing the same thing. But is there a difference? Absolutely! All the difference in the world! The first man hears the music and all his actions are natural responses to the music that he hears! The deaf man is only imitating the outward actions!

There’s an important spiritual parallel here. The dance (outward actions) represents the Christian life, while the music represents the grace of the gospel. Though we have come to know Christ through grace, we are often like the deaf man in the story who tries to perform the dance without hearing the music. Our spiritual life is reduced to a series of dance steps—external behaviors and activities—devoid of God’s animating and transforming power. God’s desire is not to get us to do the dance but to get us to hear the music of the gospel, with the dance (godly actions, character, and activities) flowing naturally from it.

The term gospel literally means “good news.” In the New Testament, the gospel encompasses not only the forgiveness of sins but also everything else that God has done for us in Christ (adoption, reconciliation, justification, and so forth).

Through the above illustration, it is obvious that understanding the redemptive focus of scripture is key to hear the music of the gospel. Keith Johnson, who wrote, “Hearing the Music of the Gospel” says also in the article:

We all have a proclivity to perform—to act in ways we are expected to act in order to receive the affirmation we crave. We also, perhaps through years of schooling, have come to believe that what matters most is not the process of growth or learning but what we get for grades,

how well we perform on SATs, what we produce. Whatever the baggage, whatever its origins, it's there. And it can lead us to look to the Bible and see nothing more than a collection of ethical directives instructing us in how to live. But to read Scripture in this way is to reduce it to dance steps—the dos and don'ts of the Christian life—and to miss the melody entirely. To hear the music of the gospel, we need to understand how God intends his Word to function in our lives.”

The remainder of the article says that a great way to dig out the music of the gospel in scripture is to ask these two questions: “What does this [passage] reveal about my brokenness that requires the work of Christ?” and “How does this passage point me to Christ? The article also gives a good example in Matthew 4 in how to hear the music in scripture:

Matthew 4 records the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. If we read this passage simply asking, “What does this passage exhort me to do?” we will not hear the music of the gospel. We may instead reduce the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness to a lesson about how to avoid temptation. (“So when Satan asks if you would like to rule all the kingdoms of the world, remember to say no, like Jesus did.”) While this story does have implications for how we handle temptation, it is crucial that we consider how it points us to Christ.

Matthew is drawing a parallel between the experience of the people of Israel and that of Jesus. Both were led into the wilderness. Both were tested. But what happened when Israel was led into the wilderness? Israel failed. And what happened when Jesus was led into the wilderness? He remained faithful.

In what sense does this passage offer good news? Like Israel, we also are tempted. And like Israel, we also fail. We fail all the time, as a matter of fact. And so we need someone who can live a perfect life on our behalf. The great news of the gospel is that Jesus has done that. In this passage, therefore, Jesus is not primarily our example, showing us how to face temptation. He is our hero, who lived in perfect obedience and who credits us with his righteousness.

In a sermon on this passage, Jason Gibson sums this point up well:

If Jesus had failed in the desert we could not have been put right with God, for there would have been no perfect sacrifice to take away sin forever, and no perfect life to be credited to our account. In the Gospel God treats Jesus as if He had failed and treats us as if we had never failed. In the Gospel Jesus is punished as if He had disobeyed God, and we are declared to be perfect as if we had never disobeyed God! Matthew's Gospel is about just that—the Gospel! Which is about Jesus, God's final obedient Son. The wait for an obedient son is over. He has arrived. Jesus is the new and better Adam, the true Israel who has defeated the devil and won back for rebels the paradise lost. And this is the Gospel that is available to all of us who admit our weakness and inability to overcome Satan, and trust in what Jesus has done for us on our behalf.⁴

By asking how this passage points us to Christ, we begin to hear music we might otherwise have missed.

After reading the above excerpts, I hope you see that the gospel is what will keep you, sustain you, and motivate you to walk well with God! When we are “tuned” into the gospel our response is to desire to be in God's word, serve in ministry, memorize scripture, confess, share our faith, and be in fellowship. These “dance steps” were never meant to function as the end but they are given to us as gifts to be a means to enjoying God fully in Christ.

DISCUSSION:

How do we know if we are “tuned” into the music of the gospel?

What are some things that motivate us instead of Christ? Why?

How do we stay “tuned” into the grace of the gospel so that we can walk well with God for a lifetime?

Resources: Johnson, Keith E. (2008). *Hearing the Music of the Gospel*. Critical Concept Series.