

“Christ: Our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification & Redemption”

(1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:30)

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ who is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. Amen. Our life as the people of God – our spiritual and physical life; our whole life – comes from God. He has gifted you with life because He is love. That’s what love does: it extends and blesses life. The Lord of life who is love; loves you and extends life to you. That’s how much He loves you; and the fact that you are alive right now proves it! He gives you life and there is nothing else that compares with having life...we wouldn’t trade it for all the gold and diamonds in the world! But St. Paul in our epistle text this morning traces this amazing gift of life from God as having its basis in four things. And if you are going to truly be knowledgeable and thankful for what the Lord has given to you, you should know about these four things that form the pillars of your life and love! Without these, there is no life, there is no love. And that’s putting it mildly.

St. Paul teaches that your life from God is “in Christ Jesus” who has become your source of life and you know it and experience it in that the Lord Jesus gives you these four things: 1) His wisdom poured out from His Word, 2) the acquittal that you are freed from sin and death and now holy and righteous in the eyes of God, 3) the holiness that follows for us who live in the Holy One Jesus, and 4) full salvation from sin and death...you are now in a place, a status, a condition, a sphere that means you are safe not just for a while, but for eternity! “This happens, because of the righteousness of another, namely, of Christ” (Ap V 184, TLSB 1948).

Paul had to address these things because he was writing to Christians in a big city in Greece that was not unlike the big cities in the United States. The society there had a different view of what life was all about; it had a different view of what people should love and be devoted to. They had a different set of pillars for life and love. The world’s replacements to God’s truth were clearly seen in that culture as they are seen in ours today: 1) wisdom not from God’s Word, but from philosophy (“love of wisdom”) so that where wisdom was really found was through the “the debater of this age” (verse 20); 2) and as for being in a secure position and status, that was not known through God’s righteousness, but through status in the world itself...want to feel good about who you are? Then it’s all about your place in this world...says – of course – the world! For example, some Greeks had a good status via their pedigree; their “noble birth” (v 26); 3) and taking solace in God’s holiness was not to be admired; after-all you might be seen as a prude while missing out on the incredible pleasures of depravity...the world, however, not associating these things in a negative context, but in the context of power and success; and 4) and as for that which is lasting: it was the world itself in its Greek atomic foundations that was lasting, therefore hold to the “things that are” (v 28): the truly substantial things; the things of this world!

In contrast to this view, however, St. Paul states in verse 23, “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” That is we must expect there to be great disparity between these two systems. Indeed, God’s ways appear foolish to those who do not understand them. So the Lord spoke through Isaiah the prophet: ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”*** (Is 55:8)

There are times when we might have great reservations, doubts and overall incredulity that someone else might actually know what they were doing...you might have considered them foolish, naïve, unaware (or maybe a little unstable), but then they demonstrated that they knew exactly what they were doing and the end result was surprisingly effective. We shake our heads: “I didn’t see that coming,” or “I didn’t think that would work,” or simply, “I thought they were wrong.” People question God and His Word...and think their way is better. This is the great sin of our time as we build our towers of babel.

This of course is our common experience while growing up as we considered the view and teaching of our parents. How many times did we say, “I don’t think they get it!”? They are too old or unaware. They’re wrong, but something can seem so wrong, but be totally right, and how often did this prove true about our parents? ***“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.”*** (Proverbs 1:8-9)

Ever wonder how people viewed Noah? The Scriptures do not reveal the public’s perception towards him, but what would you have thought? There must have been some who thought he was crazy. Or consider Job’s friends. They could not comprehend Job’s situation and insisted that Job’s suffering was on account of his own wrongdoing. They had no idea what they were talking about.

But these are examples of how so often we think we know, but do not. How often do we question God and His Word? Constantly! The wisdom of this age is perpetually put over the wisdom of God. This past week there was a flood of reactions and debate regarding sexuality and choice; and in some cases, it raised the ire of the world against the faith. The “wisdom” of the world has been thoroughly applied to the issue.

One of the reasons I enjoy listening to ESPN radio is because it provides a slight escape for me to get away from the “intensive” issues of life just for a little while. Let’s talk sports and chill! In all honesty, I personally believe that – for the most part – sports are a sign of God’s mercy to help relieve us from the other stressors of life (though even sports can start to go the other way). But the other day instead of talking sports, the ESPN commentators were thoroughly giving their opinions about Ben Carson (the retired neurosurgeon who has entered politics) who said that sexual orientation is a choice (so much for sports!). The way that their commentary expanded was extraordinary. Callers were calling into the show as I was driving to

a Communion Call when a Christian called in and simply stated that while he was not in complete alignment with Carson about sexual orientation, that he nevertheless did “not agree” with certain orientations.

One of the ESPN commentators had a severe reaction to this. His question was simply, “How can we speak of ‘agreeing’ or ‘disagreeing’ with what someone *is*?” To their point, let me provide this example of what the ESPN commentator was trying to say: it is like someone saying to someone else, “I don’t agree with the fact that you’re short,” or “I don’t agree with the fact that you’re over 40,” or “I don’t agree with the fact that you’re Mexican or Chinese.” And then the ESPN commentator took it one step further: if someone has such a position as this, then they are “spreading hate” in the world. The ESPN deduction: many who claim to follow Jesus Christ are spreading hate. Now I know that I’m only talking about a radio show one day on ESPN, but let us be warned because this is the fundamental idea that is behind the deterioration of religious liberty: when people begin to believe that the Christian faith is a form of “hatred” then watch out!

Right now our high school Bible Study is discussing logical fallacies often used against the faith, and the whole point of our study is to ensure that one has a thorough understanding of the issue at hand and to see how that issue can be misrepresented in a variety of ways. The entire “debate” on ESPN was most unfortunate and they should have stayed on analyzing the Laker’s (even in the midst of this dismal and sad season for the purple and gold).

You might recall if you were in attendance last Sunday, however, that we spoke of the difference between sin (singular) and sins (plural). Well, we do indeed make choices for things that are against the will and Word of God all of the time. However, it does not follow that these choices do *not* extend from our core being (though this is not to say that God’s creation is no longer good, it is, but what has impacted its core is not). Sin impacts our entire being: body, mind and spirit. On account of this, as Christians we probably waste a lot of energy getting upset about those in the scientific community claiming the discovery – for example – of genetic causes for all kinds of things: including the predisposition for alcohol or even for example the predisposition for anger. I am not assuming that these possibilities are true or false, but what I am saying is let’s say that it is absolutely scientifically proven that these things *are* true, then what would this do to the doctrine of original sin? Answer: nothing at all (in fact some theologians might argue that such a discovery would further *substantiate* the doctrine, though I personally warn any theologian from using science to verify biblical revelation...that’s a slippery slope even if – at the time – they seem to be in alignment). Be that as it may, original sin teaches that sin has come into the world and as a result, our entire being has been impacted. We do not commit violations against God’s will and Word purely out of choice, but we make those choices on account of what we *are*: sinners. And no, the ESPN analysts did not mention any of these things!

In other words look at these two statements and try to determine which one is wrong and which one is correct from a biblical perspective (the question being asked after sin came into the world, Genesis 3):

“People choose to commit sins because they are sinful (by condition).”

OR

“People are sinful (by condition) because they choose to commit sins.”

Jesus put it this way (note what I’ve highlighted): “For **out of the heart** come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.” (Matthew 15:19-20a)

What came first the chicken or the egg? Well if the chicken is the internal core heart of man, then the heart of man came first and if the “egg[s]” are the sins we commit in thought, word, and deed (what we do and do not do), then the sins follow.

The other problem, however, that has arisen on account of man’s wisdom instead of following God’s wisdom is that even in the Church we take a false step since there is such a thing as what is true and what is false to assume that our call is to embrace an “us vs. them” viewpoint. This is wrong. First of all, none of us have down any moral issue – much less our sexuality – where it needs to be in full alignment with the will and Word of God. We must remind ourselves that sin has different manifestations; it “comes out” and is “expressed” in a variety of ways, but it is still there. From this perspective, I am no different than any other sinner. And if this is what we truly believe then the “us vs. them” mentality must die. There is no room for it in the Lord’s Church.

As St. Paul clearly says: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:15)

So this is the great irony: the world in its wisdom wants to say that the Christian faith is divisive and spreads hatred; but the truth is that – properly understood – the Christian knows from God’s revelation and Word that true faith brings unity and inclusiveness (we are all in the same boat having the condition of sin) but we also confess that God sent His Son for all people and for all sin (again we are still in the same boat but now in receiving grace). Jesus died for you and He died for all you know regardless of what they do or how they live or their various quote “orientations” unquote.

When I speak to a person with a different orientation I am speaking to a fellow human being that Jesus loves. My goal is not to differentiate based on “orientations” (we should not be dragged into the world’s terminology even as I address this issue). That person – whoever he or she is standing in front of me – has a cross on their forehead (thanks to Pamela Hansen – member of our congregation -- for bringing this illustration to Bible Study last Thursday night) and is God’s call to me to love. So our goal is not to see an “orientation” as if the person was a Martian, but to see a neighbor for whom Jesus died and rose and someone I am called to love as Jesus (Matt. 25)...a fellow human being on planet earth! To both of us...to me and to that other person the Lord examines our heart, our being, our core...and sheds light on what we are to confess. I have all kinds of “orientations” that are inconsistent with God’s will and Word and others by God’s grace that are right on, and regardless of what I might claim as being my reason for the ones I need to confess – genetics, personal taste, personal preference, habit, choice, or “just the way I am,” etc. – I am called to repent from anything that is not in alignment with God’s will and God’s Word.

But this simply takes us to the next challenge: God’s Word. And we must not be surprised: so many view the Word itself as foolishness. And in our core being -- where sin has invaded -- that means that we also to some degree consider portions of the Word of God to be foolish. Oh, believe me, it’s not the politically correct thing to say in Church right! It’s supposed to be everyone else who has a problem with the Word of God, not *me*!

But if this is how the Word incarnate (Jesus) was construed (being rejected and resisted even by his closest followers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century), then why would it surprise us that the Word – in Scripture and in Sacrament – would not also suffer the same assault? Jesus the pure Word was “a stumbling block” to Jews and folly/foolishness to Gentiles (v 23). For heaven’s sake, His own disciples misunderstood time and time again! Many Jews had a mental picture of Messiah-Christ as a mighty King, so: “Hate to tell you this, but being dragged off to be crucified isn’t exactly padding your resume. It’s really not all that impressive. You were supposed to conquer not *be* conquered.” The word “stumbling block” in the original is *skandalon*...it’s where we get our English word “scandal”...it is a cause for offense. From the world’s perspective He didn’t meet the criteria for King. He failed and the claim that He is the King is frankly offensive to the world. The world – which relishes man’s version of strength and power – views faith in this Jesus therefore as a sign of weakness...a crutch for weak people.

The “things that are” are those things truly recognized by the world as substantial, the “keys” to success, the substantive things, the things that truly impact the world, the things of greatness in the eyes of the world; actual things that make a difference in the world today. The possibility of a new NFL stadium in Carson...that’s among the things that are...now *that* would be something! Imagine all the revenue that would be raised?! This wisdom and strength of the world says, “Those who say that money can’t make you happy, have never had a lot of it!” Christians are weak-minded people who make excuses for not succeeding. Christians keep

other people weak by blaming sin for failure and Christians keep others weak by saying that we must depend on God. But – says the world – even the teaching of “God” (especially a personal God) is a human construct intended to give the Church as an institution control of other people. It is as Marx said, “the opium of the masses.”

But Christian, St. Paul wasn’t buying any of this baloney and neither should you (it’s all smoke from the so-called “wisdom” of the world). St. Paul wasn’t buying the “opium” of the world’s propaganda and neither should you. The wisdom of the Scriptures reign supreme -- and this is why (along with the Lord’s providential preservation of His Word) -- the Holy Bible remains the all-time best seller in the history of the planet! Truth doesn’t fade away, but the only way we discover this wisdom is through Christ who authored the Scriptures. Christ spoke through Solomon centuries ago, ***“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”*** (Eccl 5:10)

“Andrew Carnegie became one of the wealthiest men in the world when his steel company, the forerunner of U.S. Steel, became the most profitable business enterprise in the world. Early on in his success, at only age thirty-three, Carnegie took a ruthless evaluation of his own heart and produced a ‘note to self’ memorandum:

*Man must have an idol – the amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately therefore should I be careful to choose the life which will be the most elevating in character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery. I will resign business at Thirty five, but during the ensuing two years, I wish to spend the afternoons in securing instruction, and in reading systematically.*

...[t]he candor and self-knowledge in this note is remarkable...Nevertheless, despite his insight into his own heart, Carnegie obviously did not ‘resign business’ two years later, and many of the very character-degrading effects he feared worked themselves out in his life...Andrew Carnegie knew that money was an idol in his heart, but he didn’t know how to root it out. It can’t be removed, only replaced. It must be supplanted by the one who, though rich, became poor, so that we might truly be rich.” (Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*. New York: Dutton. 2009. 69-71)

And here Timothy Keller’s words are just absolutely true because he is simply returning to Scripture, the Word of God. So we struggle with all of our orientations, with all of our pride, and with all of our idols, and no matter how hard we try to fix ourselves we fail, “because [these problems] can’t be removed, only replaced.”

But here we've come full circle, because what the Word of God is presenting to you Christian isn't a "fix it" plan or the "17 steps to success" plan, but it is a revealing; a making known; and a declaring that your life and love is intensively the work of God. He doesn't do some of it and then wait for you to complete it; He doesn't do most of it and wait for you to top it off, but according to His Word, He is gracious to give you life and love entirely through Jesus. These words in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians are intended for us to view Christ as our everything. When I was a teenager there was a love song by Andy Gibb (younger brother of the Bee-Gees) entitled, "I Just Want To Be Your Everything" (I would sing it to you, but that would cause you pain, so never mind). But the idea behind that title "I Just Want To Be Your Everything" is troublesome for any romantic relationship. It may have had a certain appeal to someone head over heels for another, but what a disastrous idea...imagine trying to play God for another person? It doesn't work! But the words do apply to One. Jesus says in effect, "I AM your everything" and we sing the hymn for example, "Christ the Life of All the Living!"...and He is. He is our wisdom, He is our righteousness, He is our sanctification, and He is our redemption.

He speaks to you today as your great prophet, teaching you His wisdom; inculcating His Word into your heart and into your mind so that the Word of Christ permeates your thoughts more and more. This is the common experience of growing in faith. You become full of God's Word and as a result, you become full of God's wisdom. But I'm not just describing a quantitative thing, but a qualitative thing. This particular wisdom; this particular knowledge gives peace; it fills your heart with what is consistent with life: the cancelling of guilt; the covering of shame; and the calming of fear...knowing why you're right with God. It is on account of Christ!

And in this wisdom you are led to what is most important to know: His righteousness. Through His suffering and death for you; He has dealt with your sins; His blood covers your condemnation; His life is now yours; His perfect robe of righteousness is put on you; you now wear royal clothes; your pedigree is from Jesus' righteousness for you. And in this righteousness, you are given all the gifts of the Kingdom of God. God considers you differently now...not on account of you, but on account of Christ! As you now wear the garments of Jesus (and there's no doubt that you wear them because they were put on you at baptism!), what is His is yours. The Holy Spirit is His, so now the Holy Spirit is yours. The Holy Spirit – through the Word and Sacraments of Jesus – leads you to live in the active life of Jesus who is your holiness and who is now your life.

In spite of any inconsistent orientations you still battle, in Christ you are now also holy and yes, you serve Him by serving your neighbor...that is, you share His love. This *is* sanctification in action. And finally, Jesus is your new status. He is your redemption. You've now crossed over from death to life (John 5:24), you now live in the realm of real life, lasting life, eternal life, overflowing life, life that is with the Lord of Life leading you every single day. What a great place to be!

I once met a woman in L.A., I visited her to share the Gospel with her. As I began to share, she interrupted, she wanted me to know that she wasn't "one of those Jesus' freaks." Ouch! I went on to share anyway, but I think of her to this day since that conversation in the summer of '88. It's one of those characterizations, those false labels, those false conclusions that the world offers to put upon your faith...in this case, it isn't an intelligent position against the truth, but a "to the man" attack. If you believe that Jesus is your everything; your all in all; then you're a freak. I've had many years to think about that. She was in fact calling me a freak, but I still love her and I must say that at the end of the day, I don't mind the insult. But why not?

Because on His way to His saving cross and then upon that saving cross, the Lord Jesus Christ was ridiculed and mocked because He put upon Himself everything from my life – and your life – that is worthy of criticism or ridicule: "You mean you're dying for that freak Espinosa? You are actually going to do this for that weak Mueller? You mean you're going to suffer and give your life for those foolish people at Saint Paul's Irvine?" And they spat on Him; they mocked Him; they killed Him. And He took it, so that what was considered to be a scandal would be shown to be the truth: Messiah died and because He was and is Messiah, He also rose; so that what is considered foolish: the teachings of a Jewish man who died in his early-30's as cursed and guilty would turn out to be the teachings of a man whose words cannot die...they just won't go away...thank God because they are the source of your life; they are your assurance of God's love...they are your guarantee that Jesus is your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, and your redemption. Thank God! Praise God! Amen!