

1. If God Works and Declares, Then it is Done and Final
 - a. First, we must remember that the gospel is not advice about how we can make ourselves good
 - i. The gospel is an announcement from God (the gospel of God), of what He has done to solve our deepest need: reconciliation with Him
 - b. Therefore, God chose that all kinds of people (the nations) should hear and believe the gospel.
 - i. Peter begins by telling the Jewish believers something which they already knew
 1. Note that “you yourselves know”
 - ii. The impetus and the work of the gospel is all of God, and it begins with His choice
 1. Peter is emphasizing God’s work in the inclusion of the Gentiles as God’s own work
 2. The Almighty Maker, the Infinite One, the Holy and Righteous One has chosen to do something, and the issue at stake in the gospel is the issue of God’s sovereign choice, not human tradition, human expectation, or human cultural expression
 3. The question must be asked, then, if God has done something, who are we to say that it is different?
 - a. To oppose the will of the infinite and omnipotent God is surely a lost cause
 - iii. God chose the nations to hear and believe the word of the gospel
 1. Two purposes of God’s choice:
 - a. To hear the gospel
 - b. To believe the gospel
 2. Peter personally attests to his role in the beginning of this by saying, “from my mouth” the Gentiles heard and believed
 - a. Appealing to Cornelius and the vision from the Lord
 - b. Remember that the vision which he had, and to which he refers here, was of “unclean” animals which God “declared clean”
 - i. Acts 10:11-15, interpreted in Acts 11:8-9
 - ii. This issue of cleanness of the Gentiles is what is being questioned again
 - iii. How is a person made clean for friendship with the Holy God?
 1. The burden of our performance of the Law?
 2. The gift of the Lord Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law?
 3. The word of the gospel is not both
 - c. Then God testified to His choice of the nations by giving them the Holy Spirit.
 - i. God testified!
 1. If the testimony of man is adequate in a court of law, then of what value is the testimony of God?
 2. Peter is adding cause upon cause for the full inclusion of the Gentiles through grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone, apart from the Law
 - a. First, God’s choice, as evidenced by the vision in Acts 10-11 and Peter’s preaching, their hearing and believing the gospel
 3. God testified, and He is the heart-knower (compound noun)
 - a. This word seems to have become a Christian word, created in the early Church to describe God’s sovereign ability to see and know the true heart of a man
 - i. Acts 1:24 is the only other usage
 - ii. If God testifies that their hearts are cleansed, then they are surely cleansed! Who are you to argue with God?
 - ii. The manner by which he testified to their hearts’ cleansing is by giving them the Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit is the evidence of God's testimony of a heart cleansed before Him and made suitable for His presence
 2. It is the sign of reconciliation, granted by God's mercy
 - iii. This gift of the Holy Spirit came in the same portion and manner in which the Jewish believers, the "clean" ones, of whom God also testified at Pentecost
 1. This is why it was important that the household of Cornelius spoke in tongues and prophesied – equitable evidence of Joel's prophecy fulfilled in the nations
 2. So that there could be no distinction between Jew and Gentile in Christ Jesus
 - d. All this to say that God does not discriminate between those who have lived according to the moral standards of His law and those who have not!
 - i. "us" and "them" are indistinguishable in the eyes of God
 1. What matters is a heart cleansed by faith in Jesus
 - ii. This is evidenced in that God cleansed their hearts
 1. GOD CLEANSED them – they are already clean!
 - a. You don't cleanse yourself! – God does it according to His great mercy
 2. How are their hearts cleansed?
 - a. BY FAITH ALONE, not by our works
 - i. Dependence
 - ii. It must be noted that there is a need for cleansing, which is assumed here.
 1. The gospel is not that everybody is already clean, but can live more fully
 2. All of humanity is hell-bent in arrogant defiance of God, waging war against Him and His reign
 - a. As such, they are under the wrath of God, doomed to destruction at His hands if they will not turn and depend upon Him for mercy
 - b. Faith is humble dependence upon the "gift of the Lord Jesus" to satisfy for the offense against the holy, pure, righteous, God
 - i. We are wrong and He is right.
 - ii. We are worthy of destruction because of our sin, and He alone is worthy of honor and praise because He alone is holy, right, true, and good.
 - iii. Mercy is a gift, not a right.
3. How do we *functionally* deal with cleansing before God?
 - a. Like the Roman Catholic church, sometimes we add "clean laws" or acts of penance, or the sacraments, as means of "cleaning ourselves up"
 - b. We have evangelical penances and sacraments, too
 - i. Feeling really bad, I mean grovelingly bad
 1. How do you know that your groveling is deep enough?
 - ii. Feeling really good, I mean spinning around like a sugared-up toddler, good
 1. What if you don't feel like celebrating?
 - iii. Reading the Bible as a penance
 1. Take two John 3:16's and call me in the morning
 - iv. Pouring ourselves out in church ministry
 1. Trying to make up for our deep and hidden sins of the heart
4. Anything which we do in an attempt to *require* or *convince* God to cleanse us is a useless burden
 - a. It also detracts from the honor of Christ, who alone cleanses us through faith alone

- b. Then we usually judge others who don't do the penances that we think must be done
 - i. We discriminate when God does not
 - ii. All are cleanse by faith in Jesus alone, according to the "word of the gospel" which we heard and believed
- 5. We do this to try and appease our conscience by our own declaration, rather than by the declaration of God

"No one can move from conviction to pardon simply by examining one's own conscience or by the force of will or by limited human reasoning. Pardon is exclusively an act of grace offered and revealed by the incomparably holy and merciful One who pardons.

My own word of pardon to myself is always finally self-contrived, hence insufficient, artificial, shallow, and ungrounded. Pardon must be based upon the valid pardoning agent. This can only be the eternal One who is infinitely just, holy, and merciful. Only this One can be full of grace without ceasing to be full of truth."— Thomas Oden

2. What are the Responses to God's Work?

- a. By Faith: That is, by Yoking Ourselves to Something Else, i.e. dependence upon another
- b. We all yoke ourselves to something, to some means by which we believe, having been yoked, or united to, will cleanse us and bring us into peace with God
 - i. This yoke is a union, a dependence upon another
 - ii. Either we unite ourselves to the Law, our moral performance, as the means of God's smile
 - iii. Or, we unite ourselves to Christ, to His moral performance, as the means of God's smile
- c. The Heavy Yoke of Moral Performance:
 - i. You test God by adding burdens
 - ii. Peter boldly asks "why?!"
 - 1. It doesn't make sense to add burdens to anyone, because the gospel begins with removing all the burdens and obstacles of sin and guilt and judgment of God
 - iii. These works to cleanse are "a yoke upon the necks"
 - 1. That is, they are a burden of work, not the liberty of God's choice, God's testimony, and God's inclusion of all through faith
 - a. And Peter acknowledges that they never worked!!
 - b. Our fathers and we could not bear up under it. It crushed us!!
 - 2. These penances are a yoke because you never know if done enough of them, or done them well enough, to be OK
 - a. Have I prayed enough? Deeply enough? Correctly?
 - b. Have I read enough chapters? Have I read them with the right heart? Have I read them with enough engagement?
 - c. Have I cried enough tears? Have I felt bad enough about my sins?
 - d. Have I laughed loudly enough? Long enough? Often enough? Is my joy genuine and real?
 - 3. Do you see the burden? You will never know that you are clean if your cleansing is dependent upon your performance!
 - iv. These demands are a testing of God
 - 1. That is, they are questioning His choice, His testimony, and His inclusion.
 - 2. Not only questioning them, but doubting their goodness – it is a direct attack on the righteousness of God – a test you don't want to ask God to prove!!
 - v. Interestingly, Peter refers to "you" who test God

1. He differentiates between those who are demanding these penances and those who believe the gospel of God's grace
 2. There were two views present, and one of them was not the gospel, and Peter calls them out as distinctly different
 - a. In the letter they write (v23ff), "that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls,"
 - b. In opposition to this, the letter goes to great lengths to confirm the Gentiles as "brothers" – "Elder brothers...to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, Cilicia..."
- d. The Light Yoke of Christ Jesus:
- i. We believe that we are all saved according to the same manner: through the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - ii. "grace" or "gift" is oppositional to the Lord Jesus Christ
 1. That is, Jesus is the gift
 2. We are "saved" by the gift of the person of Jesus Christ
 - a. by God's choice
 - b. John 3:16
 3. The Jews were raised under the whole Law, and they strove to please God through it
 - a. Yet, even here, Peter says that they, the Jewish ones, were saved "by the gift of the Lord Jesus", not by their adherence to the Law
 - b. The logic follows that if they are not saved by their adherence to the Law, but through the gift of the Lord Jesus, by faith, then surely the Gentiles are not saved by their "lesser" or "shorter" adherence to the Law
 - iii. "Grace" and "yoke" are compared to indicate the distinctive difference of the gospel as something which liberates rather than burdens
 1. Matthew 11:25-12:8
 - a. The sovereignty of God and His grace to the humble
 - b. The Yoke of Christ is light
 - c. The Test of the Yoke: Christ is Lord of the Sabbath
 - iv. The Gospel is the good news of deep soul rest in Christ Jesus alone, received by faith, without striving to perform and earn God's cleansing
3. How Do We Get This Freedom of the Light Yoke of Christ?
- a. We all tend to strive to prove ourselves worthy, important, to be somebody
 - i. Religious do it through "good works of righteousness" by trying to meet God's standards, i.e. "I am a good person because I am right, kind, loving, obedient, go to church, fight for truth, not sexually immoral..."
 - ii. Secular do it through "good works or 'positive ethics'", i.e. "I am a good person because I am tolerant, compassionate, nice, considerate of the environment, non-judgmental..."
 - iii. Either way, we are striving under a heavy yoke because our dependence is upon *our* works and *our* righteousness
 1. BURDENED!!
 - b. Being yoked to Jesus, by faith, means that you rest from trusting in your striving because *you find that God finds utter satisfaction in His striving!*
 - i. There is nothing left for you to do by which you must build your reputation, prove your mettle, or determine your worth.
 1. He knows your wicked desires and actions, and He weds Himself to you as His delightful Bride!!
 2. You don't have to make up for your sins before He weds Himself to you
 - ii. "Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give rest to you."
 1. Only through Me will you find true rest, the deeper rest of the soul and the inner rest like the weaned child on his mother's chest.

2. Apart from His satisfactory works, you will always be striving under your own, and even if you are content with works occasionally...there's always tomorrow looming over you.
 3. But Jesus does all things well and He calls you to come to Him for your rest, to trust in Him, to make Him the center of your life so that all your works are complete in Him, and you will find the ceasing of striving.
4. How can Jesus do this?
- a. On the cross you see Him burdened, as one unclean in the fiery presence of the Holy God, crying out under a crushing burden - yours
 - b. Why was Jesus crying out restlessly?
 - i. Isa 57:20-21 - But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. ²¹ There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."
 - ii. 2 Cor 5:21 – God made Him to be sin who knew no sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him
 - c. Jesus was experiencing eternal burden, the weight of our sin and wickedness, so that when He died He was able to say, "It is finished!"
 - i. You are clean because He became unclean for you
 - ii. You are saved because He was condemned for you
 - iii. You are beloved because He bore the hatred of God for you
 1. Jesus lived the life that you should have lived and died the death that you should have died, so that when God looks upon you who believe in Jesus and entrust yourself to His completed works
 - iv. Everything necessary for the satisfaction of the most exacting conscience, God's, was completed and fulfilled and finished by Jesus upon that Cross
 1. THAT is FREEDOM, not burden!
 - d. To be a Christian is:
 - i. Not to try hard to be like Jesus, or to move the religious line over to be more perfectly aligned with Scripture but to *believe* and say, "I rest not on my works, but on His! God, accepts me not because of my works, but because of His, not my record but His record!"
 - ii. And everything necessary that you've got to do and be is finished for all of eternity! The only eyes that matter look upon you, united to Christ by faith alone, and say, "This is my beloved child in whom my soul delights."