

THE GOSPEL IN LESSON 7

Tonight is the seventh message in our series, *The Gospel in the Twelve Steps*. When I taught on step 6, I suggested that at this point in the program, we transition from healing to growing – we move from the emergency room, to intensive care, and now we move to a rehab facility so that we can get stronger. Hopefully this is good news for those just entering the program. You'll always be in recovery as long as you are human, but you can move from crisis to growth as you work this program.

And when I taught on step 6, I suggested this Gospel principle; **Jesus gives us his character**. We were entirely ready to have our character defects removed, and so we looked at how Christ gives us his character, through his example and by the power of his spirit at work in us. We are new creations in Christ, growing in Christ-likeness.

But we have a sin nature that remains at war within us, and as I said, will remain there until we get to heaven. So tonight's focus is not on the character of Christ that he is giving us; it is on what he does to remove our shortcomings.

(We ask God in step 7 to remove **all** our shortcomings. This is a legitimate prayer request, but some shortcomings will remain. If you really want them all removed, you'll have to wait until you're dead. It's good to recognize you have shortcomings – that you are a sinner. And it's good that you ask God to do something you can't – remove those shortcomings. Just understand they won't **all** go away in this lifetime.)

So the Gospel principle tonight is: ***Christ removes our guilt and shame.*** He gives us his character, and **he removes our guilt and shame.**

This comes directly from the Scripture verse that ties to step 7: 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness.”

This is such good news – we are forgiven and purified. We are declared “not guilty,” our debt has been paid by Christ on the Cross and our shortcomings, our “unrighteousness,” is removed. Jesus removes the penalty and the power of sin.

I could say it like this: **Jesus is your power-washer.** “Why do I need a power-washer?” you ask. “That sounds like it may hurt.” Well, yeah – you asked him to remove all your shortcomings. The forgiveness Jesus offers is simply a gift we choose to accept – we accept our “not guilty” verdict. But purification may involve a little pain and effort, and here’s why:

The Stain of Sin Runs Deep

Man was created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) – Adam and Eve. But the image of God was forever affected when sin entered the world. Life in a sinful world, lived by sinful people, would never be as it was in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had a son named Seth, and in Gen 5:3 it says that Seth was made in Adam’s image, and so we believe that we have inherited our sin nature from Adam just as his son Seth did.

The image of God is still there, in us as it was in Adam. But that image has been forever marred, scarred and covered over by our sin. We are covered in

the shame and guilt of our actions, and that stain runs deep – it is not easy to remove. Hence, we need a power-washer.

So how do we get so dirty, stained and marred? In the context of our verse, it's because we walk in the darkness:

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

To walk in the darkness is to be clueless. Without light, we don't know where we're going; we bump into people and places that make us dirty and stained and we have no idea how to find our way out of the darkness. This is step 1: We were powerless to control our behavior and our lives had become unmanageable.

We love the darkness. It's in the darkness that we can do whatever we want. We don't have to work at relationships in the darkness. We're free to isolate there, drink there, hide there. When we're walking in darkness, claiming, or pretending to know the way, pretending to have fellowship with God and his people, we lie, as John says, and the stain only gets deeper.

If we're clueless in the dark, we're enlightened in the light. We can equate light with knowledge. When we walk in the light, we know God, who is light,

and we know ourselves accurately, as sinners redeemed by the blood of God's Son. And we can equate light with purity, because God is light, and in him is "no darkness at all." But until we see the light, we stumble in darkness, getting dirtier and dirtier and more and more stained. This is the human condition.

Recovery begins with an acknowledgement of this. You are all here because at one point, even right now, you realize and admit that your lives are out of control. You now no longer love darkness. You're tired of stumbling around, not knowing where you're going. You want to find a way out. Be encouraged – it's hard to admit this, but there's no other way to get clean. You have to realize that you're stuck in a dark place, and the only way to get better is to be able to see the stain in the light.

Jesus' Love Runs Deeper

The mystery of God's grace is that he sees you in the darkness. David knew this when he wrote these words in Psalm 139:

- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

He sees you in the darkness. He sees all the stain – the shame of and guilt accumulated by walking in darkness – and he sees the image of God underneath the stain. Romans 5:8: "While we were still sinners (while we were wandering in the darkness), Christ died for us." John 1:5: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Jesus sees you in the darkness, and shines some light into your life.

This is step 2: we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Healing from Christ starts with hope in Christ.

So you take some steps into the light, and you begin to see clearly.

You see God for who he is: He is holy and pure – in him “there is no darkness at all.” He is faithful – you can count on his faithfulness (even when you can’t count on your own, or the faithfulness of others – an important point). He is just. He is righteous, and he is about the business of purifying us from all unrighteousness. He is so serious about this that he is willing to sacrifice his own son to accomplish it. Verse 7: It is the blood of Christ that cleanses us. You now see this truth clearly as you walk in the light.

And, you see yourself clearly. You are not a victim. You are not an addict. You are not sexually dysfunctional. You are not anxious. You are not obsessive, and you do not have a bad body image. No! You are a child of God, in need of power washing!

Yes, your addiction has left a deep stain. So have certain sexual behavior, and anxiety and over-or-under eating. But you are dearly loved, and you see this love when you walk in the light.

And you see the right kind of fellowship in the light. V. 7: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (all our shortcomings).” Notice this: It’s in the context of community, fellowship that we are purified and cleansed. You

can't be a Christian alone and you can't be in recovery alone. Do you have a sponsor?

You see all of this because Christ's love for you is much greater than the darkness you find yourself in. Paul says this in Colossians 1: ¹³ He (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Walk in the Light – Get Clean

As we see the word "walk" in this passage, we should think of lifestyle. Our life in the light is much different than our life in the darkness. Men love the darkness, the Bible says, but we now love the light, because Jesus is light.

But in the light we see our shortcomings. We don't want to be defined by them any longer, and so we ask God to remove them. In the light we see much more clearly the depth of our sin – just how deep the stain is.

We use the analogy of peeling the layers of the onion. So Paul often says he peeled away the first layer, which was his alcoholism, only to find other layers to peel – lust, pride, etc.

There is more to our stain than the sin that brought us here. We may use drugs to medicate or escape. We may use food to allow us the feeling of control. We may get anxious or angry about a difficult situation or a difficult person.

But as we walk in the light, live in the light, we see more. We medicate because we've been hurt. We escape because we're entitled to have fun. We control, because most of our lives are out of control. We get angry or anxious because we are afraid and or we feel deep shame.

Do you see now why you need the power washing of Jesus? The stain is deep, and not easily removed. Power washers are capable of directing thousands of pounds of pressure on a very small target. You can dial up or dial down the pressure set point. So, some of us can get clean with less pressure applied, and some of us need a thousand psi. That will hurt.

But in step 7, we are saying, “OK, I’m ready to have these shortcomings removed.” It’s part of walking in the light. Plus, you have Jesus doing the work. I wouldn’t trust too many men here with a power washer directed at me – it just would not go well. But, the text tells us, God is faithful and just, to cleanse us from all sin.

He cleanses us with the blood of Christ. The image of a power washer spraying blood under pressure sounds anything but cleansing, but remember how it was in the OT. Sacrifices were a regular part of what the priest did to make atonement for the sins of the people. We think of the ceremony, the beautiful robes, but there was a lot of blood – sin is very messy. And the blood of Christ has the amazing property of making us white as snow:

Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;

The cleansing or purification process may hurt at times, but as the song says, it “hurts so good.” It is good because you are walking in the light, and it is so much better than stumbling in the darkness.

And remember that this new lifestyle of walking in the light does not mean that we are in front of Jesus’ power washer 24/7. We have fellowship in the

light as well. This is evidently a big deal to John – the fellowship that he speaks of is equal with the cleansing of the blood of Christ. “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all unrighteousness.” Again – we are meant to live in community. We are meant to live in a community where Jesus’ light shines; where there is honesty and transparency; where there is accountability; most importantly, where there is love, and not judgment. Our shortcomings are removed most effectively in this type of community.

Cry Out in the Darkness

Confession vs. deceit: Can we agree that walking in the light is so much better than stumbling around in the darkness, and that the power-washing of our character defects may not be easy, but it does hurt so good?

Then we must also understand that if we’re serious about God removing all our shortcomings, this lifestyle of walking in the light includes confession. We talked a lot about confession when we covered steps 4 and 5. We made a record of our sin in step 4, knowing that once we confessed it to God, that he would not keep that record: “If you O Lord kept a record of sin, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. (Ps 130).”

But the Christian life is about progress and not perfection, meaning we will again stumble in the darkness. Our sin nature will cause us to wander out of the light back into the shadows. It is a guarantee that we will do something we regret, perhaps tomorrow! But, “if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and to purify us from all unrighteousness.”

This is why the “fellowship” John speaks of is so important.

Confessing to ourselves is cheap grace and not effective. But confessing to a brother or sister that God has placed in your life is humbling, and it is when we are humbled that God lifts us up (James 4:10). It’s another example of a purification process, a Jesus power-washing, that “hurts so good.” If you don’t believe me, ask anyone here who has been a part of this fellowship for a long time. It’s walking in the light, and it’s all good, because God is light.

So this is the Gospel: If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness. He has purchased our forgiveness with the blood of his Son. You have received a gift you did not deserve. Accept it, believe it and enjoy it. You’ve been reconciled to the Father, and now you walk with him in the light.

And, because God is faithful, and because righteousness is so important to him, he will purify you from all unrighteousness. You will be cleansed. Your shortcomings will be removed. The power washing may be uncomfortable, but you can trust God with the process. We humbly ask God to remove all our shortcomings, and God says, “It will be my pleasure.”