

***Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God. (Psa 50:23)***

There is an almost constant discussion throughout Scripture, specifically in the New Testament about our conversation. Lately I have been considering specifically how Peter calls us to have our conversation “in Christ”:

1Pe 3:16 *“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your **good conversation in Christ.**”*

I intend to explore the idea that our conversation can and should be specifically modeled by studying Christ’s. I have found this work productive because so many expositors discuss this as a generic “living according to the Gospel”, frequently short on practical exposition. This generic approach can make it difficult to understand what this really means, and in my estimation deserves true practical application derived not just from reason, but from Scriptural examples. Christ’s conversation provides a number of such representative examples and studying these provides detail, not just concepts to ponder. If the Spirit guides me thus, I hope to turn this into a series of sermons.

Before we start to examine a specific event, we have to look at the foundation of this study. If you’re looking to emulate Christ’s life, your source material matters. How we look at Scripture and what authority we acknowledge in it is a crucial part of our service as well as our study. We quote this passage regularly, and it has to drive our behavior here:

2Ti 3:16-17 *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

We have to take these verses completely at face value. Without that, we don’t have anything to really go on that establishes authority and provides security of God’s promises. Without this being treated by us as an absolute truth without fail or falter, our religion is no better than any other human system of worship. This is really important and can be hard to keep a proper perspective on when we read Scripture that puts us in a bind, when we’re convicted by the words we read. This is an assault point Satan has used since the beginning, and it is a finely sharpened weapon at this point to call into question the veracity of Scripture. Just this last week Yvette Flunder, a dyke United Church of Christ preacher and Bishop in the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (an organization she founded to get other cardboard Christian churches to lie to fags and dykes about their sin) said some of the most blasphemous and vexing things I’ve maybe ever heard. She said:

*“This a very dangerous thing that I’m about to say now... a bit dangerous. I’m of the opinion that we need a Third Testament. Because the Bible has become problematic. ‘Slaves obey your masters as you do the Lord’- It’s a text. ‘Let the women keep silent in the churches and if they have any questions let them ask their husbands at home.’ Now I’m a believer. My whole heart, I trust God with my whole heart. I wake up in the morning talking to God and God talking to me. But I am completely frustrated with the ways in which the text speaks to the kind of vitriolic God that makes those kinds of things. And people will say, ‘well, it’s in the book.’ And I said, then we need to pull that page out. And they said, well, you can’t do it. It’s the Word of God. I said, no, it’s words about God. Come on now. But is it the Word of God? No. It is not the Word of God. The New Testament is NOT the word of God.”*

I have to respect the fact that she is more honest than most with what she believes and is willing to confess. The majority of so-called Christians operate and think precisely as she does even while claiming to follow His word.

Now, you might be thinking I must have a pretty low opinion of everyone if I think any of these servants could get to a point in thinking and behavior where we treat this blessed Word with such disdain and hatred. To be clear, I don’t think that anyone in this house is caught up in this level twisted of thinking. This is “abomination of desolation” kind of language here. But we aren’t immune from forgetting this truth. Consider this language from one of our trusted friends in the panoply of reformation expositors we frequently refer to. He says:

*“I cannot conclude without taking notice of the illustration which the subject of discourse gives, of what Tertullian calls “the adorable fulness of the Holy Scriptures.” They are indeed full, full to an overflow, of the mind and spirit of Christ, of light and love, of truth and grace. All that man needs to know in reference to his relations to God and eternity, to make him wise, and good, and happy, is to be found there. There is no question respecting the Divine character and government, the solution of which is necessary to human duty or happiness, which is not there satisfactorily settled; and, amid the immense variety of circumstances in which a human being may be placed, there is not one situation to which there is not to be found their appropriate warning, direction, or consolation. The fulness of the Holy Scriptures, as a practical directory, must often have struck with wonder and awe, as well as gratitude and delight, the intelligent Christian. When the ear of his mind is opened to discipline, the Holy Spirit, bringing to remembrance his own oracles, makes him often in the hour of perplexity, in a way which astonishes himself, hear as it were, a word behind him, “This is the way, walk in it.” Not merely are there to be found in them wide-reaching principles of duty, which admit of easy application to an endless number and variety of particular cases, but there are, comparatively, few combinations of circumstances, even the most extraordinary, in which the diligent, humble, pious student of the Scriptures, will not find himself furnished there with information and directions, as suited even to the minute*

*peculiarities, or it may be, as he is apt to think it, the absolute singularities of his case, as writers.”*

That’s John Brown of Edinburgh in his exposition of First Peter. How could I compare these two arguments, you might ask? These are nothing alike! To put Brown’s words on the same page as this filthy enemy of Christianity is insulting. And perhaps in any other context, that might be an accurate assessment of the situation. However, Brown’s words draw into sharp focus the very point I want to get so clearly across to everyone.

There is no room for doubt, dismissal or denial on the matter of Scripture. When Brown says

*“...but there are, **comparatively, few combinations of circumstances**, even the most extraordinary, in which the diligent, humble, pious student of the Scriptures, will not find himself furnished there with information and directions”*

He brings all three into play. I’m going to say this again, in the matter of Scripture and its veracity, there is no room for doubt, dismissal or denial. This is not a matter of debate. It is not a sliding scale or a matter of faith-driven understanding. This is fundamental in the most fundamental of ways. Either our God has communicated to us His perfect unchangeable will or He hasn’t. It’s like being a little bit pregnant. There’s no such thing – you either are or are not. The Scriptures are holy by virtue of their being separated from every other work of literature because they are not a work of literature. Human hands did not create these words, and if you don’t fully and thoroughly believe that, how can you believe and promote any of the words contained in the book?

Let me be clear what my problem is with Brown’s position. There are **zero** combinations of circumstances where God has not furnished mankind with information and direction. This is not hyperbole or exaggeration, my dearest friends. This is not nit-picking. Brown admits Scripture tells us everything about God, but then it might not cover all of our unique snowflake situations. WHAT!?!? I don’t pretend to understand his motivation for this waffling position, but he waffles, plain and simple. There is no room for capitulation on this. If you don’t have this firmly in your grasp, you are going to stumble.

Here is the truth we have to grapple with and submit ourselves to. We might, in a moment of sin, feel like there is some circumstance that God has not addressed in the sacred word, but that is only you putting on blinders to clear yourself of that guilt you feel. Put another way, if you can’t find where in the Word your circumstance is addressed – and I do not say this lightly or accusingly – it is either because you do not know it well enough to find where it is addressed or you are choosing to ignore it.

These doubts and the questioning of the veracity of God's words are a prime weapon Satan has used from the beginning, and as his time grows short, I do not doubt we are going to see assaults like that of this Flunder woman become more and more mainstream and consume an increasing amount of the public discourse. We have to stand firm despite these attacks and not make even small concessions – this is God's word, the immutable expression of His will. This is a simple proposition in theory, but in execution it requires us to stay faithful and continue to proclaim His word as true before all men.

He testified of Scriptural truth Himself, and if you are claiming to follow Him, His testimony should be of the utmost validity

*Joh 5:37-39 "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The conversation of Christ that we are exhorted by Peter to emulate is impossible to understand if Scripture is not completely true. If the volume of the book remains open or Christ's followers question its validity, it is pliable and can mean anything, and that turns it into a myth like that of the Egyptians, Norse, Greeks and Romans. If these words are not His and not true, He is not faithful, and is instead on par with men, like those gods who are fashioned after mankind.

Our God is not like these other gods, though, and He left us a testament of His will and providence, He made known the commandments to keep. He did not leave us to figure out what He desired of us or what His standards were. He didn't keep them a mystery that only a few could understand. He sent His Spirit to have them committed to paper, leaving us numerous examples of how to have our "conversation in Christ".

Some commentators make out that this "in Christ" is complicated to understand. I don't agree. If you put some sort of superstitious aura around this like catholics tend to do with everything, you end up making this far more complicated than it is. We seek to have our conversation "in Christ" the same way we seek to "walk in faith" or have our "faith in Christ". To have our conversation in Christ is simply to work at modeling our lives to match His. It means looking to the examples left us in Scripture and doing all we can to behave as He did; not trying to imitate or make a mockery of His divine behaviors, there are things He did we obviously can't do, but as the Son of Man, He did many things we can study and work to repeat.

Consider when He says:

Joh 12:27 *“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.”*

He came into the world as a man and suffered in a way that no man can suffer. Carefully and fully consider this point. The wrath of God is so justly perfect and so fully offended by sin that men cannot suffer enough throughout all eternity to fully pay the price due. The folly of purgatory shines through when you soberly think about this. A punishment so severe it never stops:

Mar 9:43-49 *“And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, **into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, **into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes **to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.”*

The offense of sin is so egregious that a never-ending punishment cannot clear the books. The worm of conscience forever gnaws at the sinner (not the sin) and never dies. There is no respite from it – no narcotics, no alcohol, no deviance that silences it. There is no distraction that can hush up that voice reminding you, convicting you of all the things you did in defiance of God your entire life. Reminding you over and over and over of the warnings you were given and the reminders that came from God’s faithful servants who were your peers in life.

Worse than that (and why it is mentioned more times) is the fully deserved Divine punishment sent directly by the hand of God in the form of fire. This is the same fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and struck down Aaron’s sons. It has an utterly destructive appetite. In this application, however, it doesn’t destroy, it salts. It salts? Yes, it salts. Like salt on meat, it preserves. The physical properties of this fire are genuinely strange to us, but this is the reality. This fire is physically tormenting and at the same time preserving its targets to be able to continue burning them throughout all eternity. Nothing will ever put it out. The fire “is not quenched” which suggests that it perhaps **could** be quenched, but God has determined **not** to quench it; since this is His fire, He controls it and these who are tormented by it will understand that. They are with absolute finality cut off from access to His mercy so part of their anguish is to know they will not be relieved.

Now, wrap your brain around this. If that horrific and terrifying suffering that does not stop from the moment of death throughout an endless eternity is not enough to satisfy the justice of God for any one man, what must it have taken in suffering to satisfy the

justice of the Living God for ***all of God's elect***? Remember, this is not deserved punishment on the part of Christ, He is paying the required debt for all His sheep. God's wrath is complete and perfect, offended by sin and disobedience. His holiness is so complete that sins thoroughly offend it. There is nothing in the flesh of men that can pay that perfect price.

The suffering required to pay that price is what troubled His soul, and yet He **still** came to the hour to endure it, clearly submitting "...but for this cause came I unto this hour". The suffering He endured was more than those deeply disturbing physical details Jon read us a few weeks ago. Christ suffered that separation from God represented by the darkness that covered the land:

*Mat 27:45-46 "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

This forsaking is incomprehensible in the human state. Men have been separated from God since the fall. There is no true frame of reference for us to have an experimental reality of how this feels. It is all wrapped up in the simple truth that there was no other way to accomplish the salvation of men (any men) and satisfy the righteous justice of God **except** this way. There is no quantity of punishment in body, soul and spirit that created man can suffer which will satisfy the perfect state of offense God has toward our race. It required this combination of a sinless man and the Son of God who knew what it meant to be in God's presence, and His willingness to suffer that separation that our unity might be restored. In created man, only Adam and Jesus had this experience.

But I want to go back to consider more carefully Christ's behavior under the weight of His troubled spirit. It's worth reading each of these accounts fully, I think:

*Luk 22:41-44 "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."*

*Mar 14:32-39 "And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all*

*things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.”*

*Mat 26:36-44 “Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.”*

Christ’s behavior is rich with example. He is heavy in spirit and sorrowful knowing what awaits Him, and He doesn’t hide that fact, but the text doesn’t give us any sense that this heaviness created in Him any sort of fretfulness. Finding ourselves in a place of sorrow is not something that should surprise us from time to time in this life, our Master experienced the same. Realize that this is not a nervous or anxious energy, it is sorrow for what He knows is coming not only in His own sufferings but what is to come for His closest friends who will witness it all, and the deep distress it will cause them. There is no carrying on about the problem, looking for fleshly solutions. He knows the solution is to open Himself to the Father in prayer, so He does that and only that. He is focused in His meditation and singular in His behavior.

His prayer is direct but not demanding. So should our prayers be. Our Father knows what we need but is pleased when we commit to that sacrifice and thereby confess our submission to His will. There is an interesting element to this that has always intrigued me – He knew the design of salvation was perfect and complete, yet here He is asking for a reprieve from the horrible experience if there is a reprieve to be had. He does so in a humble way, submitting to the Sovereign will of the Father. His prayer very well conforms to this passage and sets for us a perfect example:

*Psa 19:14 “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”*

He doesn't ask for a reprieve according to a specific design; He isn't asking for anything other than relief, if it can be had in the design of the Father. Sometimes we get too wrapped up in the need to pray specifically. Expositors seem to get really focused around this idea that our prayers should always be filled with exacting specification. I don't agree. When your spirit is in heaviness, words of exacting specificity are not always going to come. It's a weakness of this frame that we are not always eloquent and do not always have thoughts that can be expressed. Even the Spirit does not always frame things in words:

*Rom 8:26 "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."*

I would also argue this prayer is adequately specific in that it asks for the one thing sought – relief. We don't have to lay out an entire plan before God. I submit to you that in most experiences we should not be laying out a plan as this example shows. I believe the example here is to ask for our will to come into conformity with God's. Let us be pleased and content with what He provides us in answer, and seek nothing more.

Obedience is not driven by an answer nor its immediate reception. It is so easy to fall into a downward spiral with the "He didn't answer my prayer" line of reasoning. That, my friends is the flesh. He answers. You might not like the answer, but an answer is provided, and "as thou wilt" should be our refrain. We don't have the full picture in front of us. What we do, with certainty know, is that every thing that unfolds in this human experiment is rolling forward to His holy, righteous and perfect conclusion. Whatever role we have at any moment in time as His vessels should be satisfactory and pleasing to us. Christ clearly demonstrates that coming out of this prayer session.

Regard how He repeats His prayer not in a rote fashion, but in a way that should reveal the sincerity and absolute desire of His heart in this moment. There is no resignation or impatience here put on display. He uses the same words, it says. Always with an eye toward the glory of the Father being put on display, His majesty the focal point, the absolute accomplishment of His Will, not man's. When a thing weighs heavy on us, it is no cause of offense or wearying to the Lord for us to take it to Him multiple times, provided we are truly seeking His glory, and truly submitting to His ways and will.

He fell on His face, a position not required for prayer to be effectual, but a posture we perhaps would do well to find ourself in more often as we make supplication to God. It shows our recognition of God's presence in all places at all times, and our submission to Him as our Sovereign.

May the peace and faith of Christ grow in your hearts and God bless you all.