

CHAPTER TWO

THE RIGHT FOCUS: JESUS CHRIST

“...Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12: 1(b)-2

The author of the book of Hebrews exhorts us to fix our eyes on Jesus as we run the Christian race with perseverance. Clearly, our focus ought to be on Him alone. Why must this be so?

In the scriptures, we are told that Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith. He is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him. There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. He is the one mediator between God and men. Jesus Christ, though totally sinless, suffered on our behalf and paid the penalty of our sin, which is death and separation from God. He did this to satisfy the righteous demands of the holiness and justice of God His Father. He was the perfect sacrifice.

GOD'S GRACE IS NEEDED ALL THE WAY

As the author of our faith, scriptures reveal that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Our faith begins with Him. By faith, we are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

A righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. The apostle Paul put it clearly: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Ephesians 2: 8-9) We have been saved by grace through faith. Our salvation begins by grace and the whole process of salvation continues to see faith and grace still in operation (Romans 5: 2). God's grace is required throughout the whole outworking and process of salvation (Philippians 1: 6). In other words, grace is required for forgiveness of sin as well as for sanctification.

It is not surprising then that Jesus Christ is not just the author of our faith, but He is also the perfecter of our faith. Jesus has risen from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He intercedes for us from His throne of grace; He is our advocate who speaks to the Father in our defence. He sent the Holy Spirit to us to enable us to be transformed into His likeness. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide, our comforter, our counselor who leads us into all truth. He glorifies the Lord Jesus by taking what is from Jesus and makes it known to us. We see therefore

how the Lord Jesus Christ is truly the author and perfecter of our faith. Unless we fix our eyes on Him from beginning to end, we cannot hope to run the race with perseverance until the end. If we turn our eyes away from Him and focus on something else or somebody else, we are in deep trouble. Our eyes must be fixed on Him and the right focus is none other than Jesus Christ.

REMAINING (ABIDING) IN HIM

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

John 15: 5-6

These are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. They confirm the absolute need to remain or abide in Him in order to be spiritually fruitful and alive. Fixing our eyes on Him and focusing on Him would ensure that we remain in Him. If we lose our focus on Him and our eyes wander away, we are in real danger of not remaining in Him. However, if we fix our eyes on Him and focus on Him, we would be in the centre of God's will and we will not go wrong. All that is good in God's eyes and purpose will be fulfilled if God's people learn to keep focusing on Him all the way. On the other hand, if we turn our focus away from Him and no longer abide and remain in Him, then the Lord's statements sound out very clearly: "*apart from me,*

you can do nothing". All our spiritual activities and endeavours would amount to nothing if we fail to remain in Him.

LOSING THE FOCUS ON HIM

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Galatians 3: 2-5

The Apostle Paul was deeply concerned for the Galatian Christians. They began by believing and by faith, but turned away from faith and sought to attain their Christian goal by human effort and observing the law. They had turned their eyes away from fixing on Jesus and focusing on Him, and they had instead turned to the flesh to perfect their faith.

So great was Paul's burden for them that he exclaimed: "*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you*" (Galatians 4:19). The Galatian Christians, by not fixing their eyes on Jesus,

had in fact turned to another gospel. They were listening to the false Jewish teachers who told them that besides believing the gospel, they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. The false teachers were preaching a different gospel. They were adding circumcision as a prerequisite to being saved. Superficially, it may seem not to be so serious – after all, they were not rejecting the gospel per se – all they were requesting was that the believers should be circumcised as well. But, in reality, this was and is a very serious error. They were in fact saying that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not adequate to secure salvation for the people of God. Something else was needed – circumcision.

The Apostle Paul described such a development in very strong terms: *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”* (Galatians 1:8).

NO OTHER GOSPEL

We must not forget the seriousness of turning to another gospel. In today’s context, it may not be a case for circumcision; it may be a subtle insistence on the need to add certain church traditions; it may take the form of certain rules and culture; it may be a call to be loyal to a particular leader and his teachings; it may be insistence on some special spiritual knowledge or experience. Whatever it is, any addition to the original gospel of Christ is a turning to another gospel and Paul’s warnings should sound out loud and clear to us! Notice how we can begin well

with grace and faith and yet, somehow along the way, we slowly abandon grace and faith although we may insist that we still abide by such principles. Hence, invariably, when we start abandoning grace and faith, our eyes are no longer fixed on Jesus and our focus has already shifted.

Conversely, we may not add on to the gospel but instead, we may take away truths from the gospel of Christ, demanding certain terms that make the gospel less than what it ought to be. This is equally serious! In the same vein, we are no longer fixing our eyes on Jesus and the focus has definitely shifted. We must not add on to the gospel or take away from the gospel of Jesus Christ! Paul's warnings underscore the serious consequences of preaching another gospel.

The scriptures make it very clear: we need to keep fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith all the way in the Christian race until we reach the finishing line. We cannot afford to shift our focus away from Him.

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