

New Hope Sermon Meeting the Requirements

This week I want to direct our thinking to both a doctrinal and a practical issue: Meeting the requirements.

As many of you know, Alex Zhou and I have resumed our work on our book *Thinking Outside the Box*. We are grateful to everyone in the last three years who has given input and illustrations for our chapters. And the book is progressing nicely. (More about that and the content as we get nearer to our publishing deadline.) But the life lesson I have learned in this process this week is about meeting the requirements.

Marti Shaver, from our New Hope church, is a professional editor. This is her main job; she works for Baker Publishing Company. They send her drafts of future books and her job is to critique them and do the editing necessary to ready them for publication. Knowing her expertise, I have asked her to be our professional editor, and discovered there were a number of editing standards I have failed to comply with correctly. Many of our academicians will sympathize with this issue from their own paper-writing at the grad level! I was not meeting publishing standards in how we set up our block quotes, how I cited scripture, how I wrote the ellipsis etc. (I expect more will be revealed when we get the final draft returned from her!) But the bottom line is that I was not meeting the requirements for excellence in several technical areas.

Y E T . . .

I will come back to this issue, but it brought to mind this same issue from a doctrinal perspective. Have you settled in your mind your relationship to God's holy Law? Are you meeting the requirements? In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus addressed this issue:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them.^{[a] 18} I^[b] tell you the truth,^[c] until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter^[d] will pass from the law until everything takes place.¹⁹ So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others^[e] to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law^[f] and the Pharisees,^[g] you will never enter the kingdom of heaven! (Passion Translation)

James picks up the same theme in his epistle. James 2:8-11:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"^[a] you are doing right.⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.¹¹ For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery,"^[b] also said, "You shall not murder."^[c] If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. (Passion translation)

Popular religious cultures worldwide say that if you are doing good deeds, God will accept you into His heaven. For many religions, those deeds are rather clearly specified. But this thinking is contradicted by God's real standard. Romans 3:23. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." James adds that if you "keep the whole law but stumble in one point you are guilty of breaking all of it." Our righteousness must exceed that of the most scrupulous religious devotees. Meeting the requirements . . .

However, when Jesus came, He fulfilled all the requirements of the Law perfectly. He then paid the price for every human's guilt and shame on the cross so that those who believe in Him can be given His righteousness and thus meet God's standard of holiness. That's the good news of the gospel for all peoples – secular and religious.

How does this doctrinal understanding and my book writing come together? Here's how I have made the connection. . .

The analogy isn't perfect because Marti is not doing our work for us in getting our book up to publishing requirements. (She'll be glad to know we understand that!) But she has supplied the guidelines and professional expertise we lack so we are able to fix all these areas before submitting the book to publishers. She has brought to our attention what is

required to meet the requirements of excellence in book writing. Like the Law does in the Bible, she has shown us our shortcomings. (That is her job, and I'm grateful.)

But the gospel says that the Spirit not only convicts people of sin but points to Christ's atoning work on the Cross so if we believe Him, we can have His life and forgiveness and righteousness. He can fix us and do the work to present us "faultless before the throne of grace with great joy" (Jude 24).

Not only God's joy but our own as well. I believe a heart of praise flows genuinely up to God every day when we realize our total inadequacy to meet God's requirements by our good behavior, and understand God's mercy and grace. He is the one who grants forgiveness and new life and hope. He is the One who works in us to will and do of His good pleasure (Phil.2:13). He is the One who rejoices over every believer with loud singing. Listen to Zephaniah3:16-17:

For the LORD your God is living among you.

He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.^[a]

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.

God is the One who calls those of us who have rusted in Christ His beloved sons and daughters. We get to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Every time voices in your head whisper that you are not good enough, you are not worthy of God's blessings, you are not precious to God, you continually fail to meet His standards, resist those thoughts with these truths of God's mercy and grace poured out for you.

Thanks to Marti and a number of co-editing friends, Alex and I will be able to meet the requirements of book publishing. Thanks to our Lord Jesus, we are covered with Christ's righteousness and can come boldly as family into the throne of grace; we can raise up holy hands in worship,; we can praise God every day for the outpouring of His grace and peace on us. Through Christ we have met His requirements and now can live in obedience to His Spirit to bring joy to His heart.

So many songs of response come to mind:

Chris Tomlin's Amazing Grace "My chains are gone, I've been set free, my God, my Savior ransomed me, and like a flood His mercy reigns, unending love, amazing grace."

Jesus Paid it All- "all to Him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow" ...

Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness -"my beauty are, my glorious dress, mid flaming worlds in these Arrayed, bold shall I lift up my head: ...

Wonderful Grace of Jesus -"wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus, deeper than the mighty rolling sea, wonderful grace, all sufficient for me; greater than the scope of my transgressions, greater far than all my sin and shame; O magnify the precious name of Jesus, praise His name!

I could Sing of Your love forever- Over the mountains and the sea Your river runs with love for me, and I will open up my heart and let the Healer set me free. I'm happy to be in the truth and I will daily lift my hands, for I will always sing of your love come down...I could sing of Your love forever....

Amen. Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 7 10 20