

April 8, 2018

What kind of people ought we to be?

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?"

II Peter 3:8-11

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Romans 12:1-2

If we believe that we are all sinners condemned under God's law of sin and death, living without hope, and if we believe that our God, in his great mercy, allowed his one and only Son to die in the horrors of the cross to redeem us from that condition, then this question has to become the only measure we apply to our own behavior. Every word and every action for the true believer must be filtered through this standard. What kind of people ought we to be?

Much of Jesus' preaching and teaching and most of what the authors of the New Testament write is focused on the answer to this one question: What kind of people ought we to be? There are, I think, a few basic assumptions that we must accept before we can begin to understand the Bible's answer to this question.

First, the answer applies only to us as individuals. My task, as a believer, is to develop my own response to God's great mercy, not to police yours. I am convinced that too many of us have forgotten Jesus' words, ***"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you...You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*** (Matthew 7:1-5)

And too, we forget, I think, Paul's command to the believers of Galatia, ***"Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load."*** (Galatians 6:4-5)

Second, In attempting to live a righteous life I am not earning my salvation. Seeking to live the life that God has called me to is my response to God's great mercy and sacrifice and the grace by which I am saved. As the Apostle Paul wrote, ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..."*** (Ephesians 2:8-10)

So, where should I begin my search to find the answer to this question for myself; for my own life? I am convinced that the starting point in our search is in our understanding of our own condition as those who have accepted the grace of God.

Paul often describes himself as he did when he wrote to the Galatian churches, ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** (Galatians 2:20-12) I must, I believe, constantly see myself as a rightfully condemned sinner rescued by the

grace of God through the death of his one and only Son. And so, *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."*

If we begin with our total submission to the direction of our Lord and Master, then we must continually put to death our own sinful natures. If we continue to live by our own sinful natures our lives will reflect our choice. Paul told the Galatians, *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like."*

When our Lord's Spirit is at work in us it also shows. *"For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* (Galatians 5:16-25) So, the first part of our answer to the question: What kind of people ought we to be?; is we ought to be a people who are striving to let go of our sinful natures and a people who are always seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit of God.

