

When God invites us to dinner

1 Peter 1:2

Introduction

Suppose at the water cooler at work Monday morning someone says to you, guess who I had dinner with this past weekend? And the answer is someone like Billy Graham (the famous evangelist) or Bill Clinton (the famous former president) or Bill Gates (the famous billionaire businessman) or Bill Russell (the famous basketball star). Then you reply, Guess who I dined with yesterday? And you say, God--the infinite, almighty, incomprehensible, unchanging, most holy and merciful. In fact, you explain, we celebrated His love for me! And they think you're joking. But you're not.

This morning we are coming to dine with Jesus the Son, who is present by His Spirit, and to celebrate His love for His bride.

If there was ever a religion that seemed to promise too much, it is Christianity. We are promised table fellowship with God, here at the Lord's Table. It's almost too good to be true, it's unfathomable to most of us, since God too often feels far away and distant.

But the truth is, the Lord's Supper represents what we long for in our heart of hearts, to have peace in the universe, to celebrate all that is good and right, to be complete and whole, to be one with God, to bask in the presence of perfection and ultimate beauty, to be accepted, loved, valued, welcomed.

But how can a holy God bring us to dinner? How can pure love accept the unlovely? The problem of God is, you can't live without Him, He's the source of life, but you can't live with Him, He's much too pure.

Peter tells us how God can bring us near- and it's safe- in the second verse of this epistle.

1. The accomplishment of salvation: the sprinkling of Jesus' blood

The idea of sprinkling speaks to your need of a clean conscience.

God is made us in his image so that when we violate his laws or do what breaks the moral order he has established in this world, we are troubled. We sense we are in the wrong. Our conscience speaks to us, troubles us, provokes us.

Some people try to silence their conscience, but that merely sends their anxiety deep.

But it's a good thing to be ill at ease in this moral universe, unless of course you're perfect, because perfection is what God built us for and perfection is what we all need to stand in the presence of God. God's nature is moral perfection and that's all he can stand in His presence; the nature of sin is, it's so poisonous and contrary to God's nature, that with just one blotch of sin we have no hope of eternal life. God must punish us away from his presence. That fact should horrify an informed, tender conscience.

The conscience then begs to be put at ease, silenced, for cleansing.

Unfortunately, we naturally have wrong ideas about answering the conscience.

Many of us think doing enough good things and less bad things will silence it.

Others think adding religion to our efforts will satisfy it.

Still others simply lower the standards to appease the conscience.

And these may be working for you- at least for now.

The problem is, sin stains the conscience, the guilt of lawbreaking permeates us indelibly like a tattoo on the heart, on the inner man.

How does anyone wash away the stain of sin? You can pour the water of good efforts all your life and it will never touch the stain of sin on your heart. We need cleansing from outside ourselves which goes deep to the heart.

As Prov. 20:9 asks, *Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?'*

If Ps130:3, *If you should mark sins, O Lord, who could stand?*

Paul, Rom. 3:19-20: *Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those under the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world become accountable to God; because by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin."*

Paul is saying that standards of right and wrong (the law) can't make us right, they can only point out where we are wrong and miss the mark.

Peter answers our greatest fear, to be given what we deserve, by casting one eye at Mt Sinai and one eye on Mount Calvary (the cross).

Once God delivered his people from Egypt, he gathered them to himself at Mt Sinai to enter into covenant with them. The mountain shook with his presence. On an altar with twelve pillars sacrifices were offered. The people would have instantly recalled the Passover lambs they were commanded to offer on the eve before the exodus. Half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar. As Moses read the words of the covenant the people promised to obey. Then Moses sprinkled the blood on the people.

God established a pattern, a system of sacrifices for all the people, such that they were constantly reminded of the need to bring God sacrifices. This went on for hundreds and hundreds of years, all the while the people recognizing, what his sacrificial animal got, I deserved. The soul that sins shall die. The life of a person is in their blood. I owe God my blood for my sins, yet He is showing through animal sacrifices that somehow another will pay for my life.

So we understand why, when Jesus came, John the Baptist announced Him as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*

Jesus makes the final offering of blood, sinless human blood, this time sufficient to cleanse once and for all time any of those who trust in it. So we have been purchased by His blood.

Heb.10:19-22 explains the implications:

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with

sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The gospel promise silences the conscience. It is enough, because the Gospel promises that Jesus' blood and righteousness are sufficient for God's presence. Nothing else could!

2. The application of salvation: the sanctifying work of the Spirit

If Jesus accomplished our salvation in space and time, how does the benefit of it become ours? Did Jesus automatically save everyone the instant he died? No, the work of Jesus must be applied to us by His Spirit.

The key word here is *sanctify*. It means to set apart.

We understand this perfectly well in our culture. The Declaration of Independence is a precious document to America, so it is set apart and kept secure. A judge in a courtroom enjoys a status apart, such that when he enters the room all rise. In his role he is no ordinary person.

To be set apart by the Spirit indicates two important aspects of the Christian life.

First, the Spirit sets us apart at the start of our Christian life by calling us to faith through the word of the gospel.

John 16:8 says the Spirit's job is *to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment*. He turns on the light in our conscience or hearts to show us we aren't nearly as good as we naturally think, we don't come close to meeting God's righteous standards, and we deserve judgment. That's a gift of God.

WCF.SC. Q.31: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered in the gospel.

This is what God promised through the prophet Ezekiel (36:26-27).

Think of a baby at birth being set apart from the mother's womb. Now that it's born, it is its own entity. We are born anew by the Spirit, given a new heart. This is called definitive sanctification.

Second, once we are created new in Christ, we begin to grow. The work of the Spirit sanctifying us is His gracious work causing us to be increasingly less attached to our sins and this world, and increasingly conformed to the character of Christ. (Progressive sanctification) A little boy stood before a huge slab of marble, on which a sculptor was working. He asked him what he was sculpting. A horse. How do you do that? I chip away from the marble everything that is not horse. Likewise, the Spirit is chipping away everything that is not Jesus.

What are some of the evidences of a new heart?

Your perspective on God changes. From He exists to make me happy, we tend to look at God through the keyhole of our own self-interest, thus conforming to him to our whims and wishes, but by the Spirit we see God as utterly wonderful and desirable, a person worthy of praise and devotion.

You become aware of your motives, namely pride. You are driven by self-interest, protection, advancement, reliance.

Your desires change. Thus your confidence in God's grace grows, because you see that the work is his not yours. You would never pull this off. If I have a passion to worship, be generous, sacrifice, die to self, God must be the author of that.

3. The goal of salvation: that you may obey Jesus Christ

If sprinkling points to our need for a clean conscience, and sanctifying work of Spirit our new for a new heart set apart for God's dwelling, then this phrase points to our need for a new authority in our lives.

Humanly, our level of obedience never rises above what we deem sensible or beneficial to us. That's why many of us speed. We can't submit to something so simple as a speed limit, it doesn't suit us at the time.

What is ruling your heart? To whom will you bend your will? If you live for yourself you will never rise beyond your desires and passions, you can never be radically changed.

The good news is Jesus sets us free from the tyranny of self-rule and for the freedom of faithfulness to Him. True happiness is found in conformity to God's will.

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed appearing of the glory of our great God and savior, Christ Jesus; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself a people for his own possession.

Jesus said, *if you love me you will obey me.*

God has not set us apart to continue to wallow in our passions, but to live in the full liberty of the sons of God.

What to do with failures?

Keep coming to dinner. Jesus always shows up. He paid for your seat here. He's more interested in your company than you are.