

November 1, 2011 (11/1/11 - All Saints Day)

THE LIVING & THE DEAD

Dear Friends & Family,

(10/8) This past week, one of my sisters & I attended the funeral of a long-time family friend. He was the father of a family of 8 children. We had six. We would have had nine but my mother had three miscarriages. We were best friends in our neighborhood decades ago. We children were always mixed with each other, playing army, football, bikes, etc. Last evening I even copied some old 8mm home movies my dad took of our two families to share with them. We moved off of their street in South Jersey 47 years ago this past June. A week, the other day, though I had not seen these dear friends in decades, it seemed as if we just left their street the day before. There was no time-gap, it seemed, between us. There was laughter, kisses, & tender affection between us. Yet, I couldn't help but ponder as I was at the funeral, burial, & meal gathering afterwards, that almost all of them seemed to still be in the same religious, traditional, life-style that our family was bound in too many years ago. The days events proceeded from a somber ceremony for the dead & gathering around the gravesite, to a meal/party afterwards where many, well, had a bit too many! This same lifestyle was the usual for the next neighborhood we lived in as well. The gang I hung out with in our new neighborhood, so as I know, is still living outside of Christ yet bound to a religious tradition that offers little hope, preaching a gospel of works. They have a form of godliness, but their lives seem to show no interest, evidence, or fruit of any kind of relationship with God. It was a chilling realization to sense the hand & mercy of God upon our family, when, apart from His apprehending me in a convent decades ago, & shortly thereafter some of my siblings, we would surely have still been in this same lost plight as our dear friends whose funeral we attended. Peter called it the vain traditions of your fathers (I Pet.1:18). This surely evinced & confirmed to me once again given that our being in Christ had nothing to do with us (I Cor. 1:30), that You have not chosen us but I have chosen you (Jn.15:13). This realization brings such a depth of holy fear, love, & gratitude that is impossible to articulate. And that is why the Lord chose us, His people, before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:4) to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph.1:6).

WEDDING BELL BOOS>WEDDING BELL BLUES

(10/12) In late September I went to FL to perform the wedding ceremony of my oldest of four sisters, whom I am very close to & very much like. She had been a widow for over seven years. Her fiancé, however, a widower himself about a year & a half, had been having reservations [hence, the boos] about it for months. He even called me in the midst of my annual jr. camp to discuss it. Well, three days before the ceremony, I received a call from my sister, who was very distraught. A red flag had surfaced the previous evening between them. A meeting was called the next day, where the bride, groom, his brother, & I attended. After two hours several red flags had popped up, mostly in my sister & me. I was praying during the meeting that the Lord would speak through the couple themselves what I was definitely hearing, seeing, & sensing, i.e., there was no way this couple was ready to get married in two days! The meeting did close with the wedding canceled. Needless to say, it was very awkward. When the groom & his brother left the house, my sister, of course, went into an emotional roller coaster & tailspin for hours. God was faithful to give her His peace even before we went into that meeting. In her spirit, she was deeply relieved, though, of course, her heart's desire was to be married. All five of her children, as well as her siblings & father were relieved. Many whom I spoke with late

concerning it said it was far better that the marriage was canceled before the wedding than after it! For my sisters sake, the next day or so I sat at my dads computer & typed twenty-two reasons that I observed from my interaction with them that at the very least, the wedding should be postponed for at least a year. I told to read these facts when the clouds of emotion & grief were swirling around her. Ministering to my sister so intensely during this time, I could not help but think of my beloved wife Kim who has done so for me so many times in the past. She has stood outside my dark clouds of emotion & confusion & spoke the truth into them. Early the next week, my sisters former fiancé made a 2nd attempt to make it happen. This resulted in another over two-hour meeting. I was so very in awe of our Lord & so very proud of my sister, who held her ground, holding to what she knew were the facts, despite the huge disappointment & pain she was going through. I felt the need to postpone my flight an extra two days to be there for her longer. When I arrived back home to DE, I felt as if I had been at one of my camps! I was drained & spent, but it was such a divine appointment.

B4 OR AFTER DEATH?

Not long ago, I was lying in bed mourning once again over personal sin; deeply imbedded sin; sin that I cannot seem to beat, no matter how much or how long I try; sin that seems to be 2nd nature to me; sin that just seems to be automatic; sin that has been with me for ages, it seems. At such times, I've often resorted to the thought: Well, Lord, it looks like this wont be gone until after I die. [I will say that I once heard John MacArthur assert that one of the greatest blessings of death is that the Christian will never sin again! Wow! gave me a whole new perception & appreciation for going home to be with the Lord!]. This time, however, while lying there, pondering & mourning before the Lord in my heart re: these things, I believe He spoke to heart: Why are you waiting until after you die physically? You already have died to this sin, through Me. Walk in it. Wow. That is the challenge of Romans 6, to walk in what has already happened to us through Christ. The 2nd death mentioned in Romans is also essential to understanding & hence achieving this victory over sins that so easily beset us. I'm not speaking of the 2nd death as in the Lake of Fire in Revelation, but the death that seems immeasurably harder to die than death to sin: death to The Law! Trying to die to that which bound us which was good, a.k.a., The Law, is much harder to do than dying to that which bound us which is evil, a.k.a., sin. Yet, due to the weakness of our fallen human nature, if we strive to obey the Law to obtain God's acceptance, we only sin more! (Rom.7:8). Through the body of Christ, we died to the Law as well as to sin that we might be joined to Another (7:4). Its so funny: I'm terrified to let the Law go, fearing I'll sin even more! I'm afraid I'll become an Antinomian [those against-law]. I liken my fear to do so to Tarzan, when he was first learning to swing from vines. Surely, on his first attempt, he had to wonder if the next vine hanging down that he was staking all of his weight [& life!] on would support him! Yet, all the Law can do in this situation is to arouse, incite, & stir up sin in us! The key is why the Lord Himself ordained & effected death to His Own law through His crucified body only that we might be joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. You will sin less by firmly embracing Him in faith, & walking in His Spirit, than you ever could by your feeble, zealous pursuit of legal obedience. The Scriptures declare that by doing so you will bear fruit for God. May He help me understand more fully & appropriate it! Something deep inside tells me that if we as Gods people really grasped this, our lives would be radically changed! Thank our God, that in our letting go of the entangling vine of the Law, the next one we reach out for is The True Vine! Till hold us! HE will hold us!

LITTLE CHILDREN--LIGHT DOCTRINE

Some of you may recall my opening article in last month's newsletter, a.k.a., Little Children > Heavy Doctrine. It is uncanny that I should receive the email below [edited] from a dear friend also involved in children's ministry. I will let it speak for itself, but just say I can now see even more clearly why our Lord has had us inculcate doctrines into children & teens at camp that many adults never hear. Dear Guerty, I'm writing this email from a national Children's Ministry conference which I've brought 3 others from my team to. Would you please cover me in prayer? I faced a situation today which shook me to my core, and has caused a new grief to rock me. I was excited today to have the opportunity to go to a workshop to learn more about spiritual development and faith development in children. The presenter is a professor at [a very prominent Christian college in the U.S.] in Children's Spiritual Development. Well, she shared good information, and I was excited when she taught that we've neglected the Holy Spirit in our ministries, and need to get out of the way and let Him lead. Then she went on to warn that she would anger some with her next statement that we are too hung up on original sin!!! WHAT? She said we don't want to do the altar call, we shouldn't teach beginning in Genesis because the first thing we do is make kids feel bad because we are telling them that they are bad, separated from God! I COULD NOT BELIEVE MY EARS! My heart ached, & it took supernatural strength to remain composed. I swallowed the tears that were welling up within me. There was only one other person who with me began to question the biblical basis of these statements. After quoting scripture challenging that thinking, they still suggested that children are born into God's family and don't need a "salvation moment" also was saying that we spend too much time pounding the Bible into their heads! She said we should teach concepts not scripture!!! Needless to say, I left and did not return for subsequent workshops by her since they were designed to teach attendees how to implement these ideas in ministry. God have mercy.

A WORD OF CLARIFICATION"

"On the 2nd evening, the sermon was one we adults rarely hear: that we cannot do one thing to increase or decrease the level & intensity of the love of God for His people, that God is FOR you. But, it was repeatedly asserted, it only applies to those who believe!

[Note: this emboldened quote from last month's newsletter may have caused some confusion & may have been misleading, as if God only loves His people. God forbid! While the love He has for His people is dramatically different from that which He feels for the lost, I would not constantly entreat Him for open ministry doors to preach the gospel of grace if I was not constrained by His love for sinners to do so! The context of that assertion above, which was preached at camp by a dear friend of mine, was to encourage those campers who belonged to Christ that He would never leave them nor forsake them, no matter what they were struggling with. I followed this sermon this next night warning the campers that God's love is not "unconditional" to the lost. If they choose to remain unrepentant & die in their sin, then they will face His terrible wrath. I told them that for the One Who said, Come unto Me to have to say to the lost on Judgment Day, Depart from Me, those individuals to whom He will utter these dreadful words must needs be incredibly evil for The Lover of Sinners & of our Souls to do so!

I hope this clarifies things for any of you who might have wondered.]

So, we press on, we pray on for more open doors to preach Jesus' gospel, the world's only hope.

Kim & I sincerely thank you for reading this, & for any support you might send our way, whether prayer, encouragement, or gifts to continue the ministry.

Gratefully,

Michael and Kim