

April 1, 2008

“CHRIST OUR **PASSOVER** HAS SHED HIS BLOOD FOR

US”

Dear Friends & Family,

{“MICHAEL’S ‘MANIFESTO’”}

(3/16: Palm Sunday) Today, in my humble opinion, my pastor preached the best sermon I’ve ever heard him give. Why? He kept bringing everything he said back to *the cross of Christ*! He was like a Roman archer, hitting his target (not to mention my heart!) with pinpoint accuracy. Point after point, his arrows hit the bulls’ eye of the centrality of **the cross**, the cross being the greatest demonstration of the holiness, justice, & love of God. He referred to daily cross bearing as a basic criterion of being a genuine disciple of Jesus, & as our greatest weapon in **warfare**, both against demons & personal sin. He preached it with his usual brokenness & passion. I was the first one to respond to the altar call, for more of **the cross**’ working in my life.

THE PRIMACY AND PRIORITY OF THE GOSPEL

The apostle Paul said, “Woe is me, if I do not preach the gospel” (I Cor.9:16). He describes what this gospel is in I Cor. 15:3,4. In doing so, his very first thought, revealed by his words, is “**Christ**”. This is the first word in both English & the original Greek. “**CHRIST**”. Jesus IS the gospel. It is about *Him*. The study of Jesus’ person is called “**Christology**”. Exalting Christ by preaching on Christology alone could take years—and, they would be years well spent. There is more, however. Paul’s 2nd word in his description of the gospel, again, in both languages, is “died”. The substitutionary atoning **death** of Christ is the **core** of the gospel. “Gospel”, meaning “good news”, would cease to be so, if all we preached is Christology. Christ is of not much value to us except that He would be our **JUDGE**, had He not died. In fact, He could only be **dangerous** to us had He not died for us. These two first words in this text, “Christ died”, echo Paul’s determinant resolve to know nothing except “Jesus Christ, & Him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2; my favorite Bible verse). Jesus’ death involves other subjects of theology encompassed in the gospel: **Justification** (how God-hating depraved sinners are made acceptable, righteous, & acquitted in His sight), **substitution** (God’s penal judgments for our sin being placed on His Son to satisfy His holy justice & wrath), **propitiation** (the appeasing of the wrath of God by the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son), **satisfaction** (Jesus’ work, both by His life, perfect obedience, & death, perfectly satisfying the just demands of God’s absolute perfection that lay upon us), **expiation** (the actual removal & obliteration of our sin, unlike in the Old Testament, where animal sacrifices only “covered” it), & **imputation** (the transferal of Adam’s sin to the human race, the charging of believers’ sins to Jesus, & the reckoning of Jesus’ righteousness to those same believers). John Piper, in his sermon, “Why Expository Preaching Is Especially Glorifying To God” (I listened to it the 1st two times mostly on my face. The only reason I didn’t do so the other two times was because I was driving!), declares that these precious doctrines are “begging to be expounded” to God’s people. He said God’s people are starving to death for these precious truths & don’t even know it!

“I WAS STARVING, AND DIDN’T EVEN KNOW IT!”

The next few words in the verse cited above are “for our sins”. “For”, involving Jesus’ substitution, “our” meaning the recipients of His great grace, **His Church**, and “sins”, which is a whole field of theological study on its own, namely, “**Hamartiology**”. Not to have a solid biblical grasp of sin & its resultant effect of human **inability**, is not to have a solid grasp of salvation either. A man’s theology of salvation by grace is directly proportionate to his understanding of human depravity. To the degree that one understands the human race’s dire sinful condition & resultant helplessness to either desire, much less procure a cure for his deep-seated inherent hostility towards God, it’s to that same degree that he truly comprehends **biblical grace**. Jesus’ **burial** (confirming His death & His humanity: He was not a “phantom” as some heresies expound), & His bodily **resurrection** (God’s *verification* that Jesus, His deity, His sacrifice & His Words are

true!) Paul cites next. Twice in this precious passage of Sacred Text, Paul asserts the basis of his doctrine as being “**according to the Scriptures**”. This is the word of God *written down*, or, as some theologians say it, “inscripturated”. The *written* Scriptures are the basis of God’s revealed will to man. Jesus quoted from the *written* Scriptures, that is, The Old Testament, although He kept in constant vital contact with His Heavenly Father. It was these same Scriptures that Jesus said could not be broken (Jn. 10:35), that Heaven & earth would pass away before they did (Mt.24:35), & that, to be ignorant of these sacred writings simultaneously implied being ignorant of the power of God (Mt.22:29). **“BACK TO THE BASICS”**

Sadly, for the **30+ years** I have been a Christian, I have *rarely* seen these precious **golden** foundation blocks of the gospel expounded to God’s people. Typically, after they have asked Jesus into their **heart**, they are led to being disciplined (if, at all!) in what I call the “mechanics” of the faith: prayer, fellowship, giving, church attendance, witnessing, etc. I would dare say that for most of The Church, the vast majority go to their eternal reward without having adored at Jesus’ feet courtesy of the study of these glorious truths.

If, by a miracle, the above doctrines have been expounded in The Church, “next in line”, as far as I can see, on our God’s “priority curricula” for His people, are: repentance from dead works, faith in God, teaching on baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, & eternal judgment” (Heb.6:1,2). The only authorization The Church of God has to move on from the above doctrines is if “God permits”. I must confess, Beloved, I just cannot fathom that our God has anytime recently given such permission to move on from these basics, given what I see too much of His Church is preoccupied with across our nation!

A VERY BIG “VOID” TO FILL

Tragically, for the vast majority (?) of Christians (including this writer growing up in the Lord), who have not been inculcated with the above awe-inspiring **meat** from God’s Word, there is an ENORMOUS VOID to fill in their newfound hunger for spiritual food. These doctrines were meant to fill God’s people with divine “food for thought” **for all eternity**. It is a sumptuous fare that, when feasted upon, there is very little else the Christian’s **heart** can desire or contain! In their absence, however, what I have witnessed in years gone by & presently, is an unhealthy preoccupation, overemphasis, & even obsession with peripheral biblical issues & doctrines. **Augustine** called them “non-essentials”, but I’m deeply concerned that for too many Christians nowadays, they have become their “**cake**” in place of the aforementioned doctrines, instead of their “icing” as our God intended. Many of them (though not all) are biblical, truth, & dare I say, even “near to the **heart** of **God**”. But, it is this writer’s firm conviction from personal study & experience that if we obsess over these “of secondary importance” doctrines, given I Cor. 15:, 3,4, do we not even grieve the **heart** of our Father, Whose utmost delight is in the Person & work of His Dearly Beloved Son, the “**Darling of Heaven**”, & of spreading His fame both near & far? **“POOR SUBSTITUTES”**

This list is not comprehensive, nor placed in order of the current priority they have been given in the Church in America (I cannot speak for the rest of the world). The list encompasses decades of “detours”: social gospels, civil-issues gospels, politics, patriotism, current events, “self-help”, “self-esteem”, & “how-to” gospels, “health & wealth” gospels, psychotherapeutic gospels, Christian “causes” & “movements”, Zionism, Israel in the Last Days, end times scenarios, the demonic & spiritual warfare, the prophetic (how I grieve that the massive **precious stones** of the written Word are often minimized & are left “**unearthed**” because of an over-obsession for the “latest word” from God (I am quick to acknowledge I have been *often* deeply blessed, strengthened, & given hope to go on through a specific word given to me, & I myself many times have given them to others!) & for “revival”, which I’m afraid for too many resembles the proverbial “**carrot** before the **donkey**”, who forever pursue but never attain! (And, may I say, that anyone who knows me to any extent, knows that one of my favorite activities in life is to lay before the Lord in His presence for long periods of time. BUT, those times must have their inception in **God’s Word!**). “Why, Michael?” Be-

cause our God has ordained us to have daily revival & refreshment in Him through the deep, deep fountains of His unfathomable **foundations** of His Word! Of course I long to see the moves of God. I'd be deeply concerned for any Christian who doesn't! **Church history** bears out the fact that most revivals have been preceded by the preaching of the above doctrines, beginning with "justification by faith". Closely connected with an inordinate obsession for revival is that of "signs, wonders, & miraculous manifestations". Again, there is no one in The Church who longs & aches more than me to have my preaching confirmed by the **power** of God. This is biblical & an absolute must in these **evil days**. I am again, referring to an "over-infatuation" with such, where the CONTENT of the message preached is overshadowed by an over-emphasis on the manifestations that are meant to confirm & give glory to it! Other emphases that can fill the enormous void described above are drama (again, anyone who knows me knows Guert has a "flare for the dramatic!), entertainment, excessive "morality" & "warning" preaching, which inevitably takes place when the doctrines above are not constantly taught & reaffirmed. "How so, Michael?" The "of first importance" truths of God's word cited in the first paragraph, when properly understood, actually *produce* godly living in the saints as their **hearts** respond to God's grace that was not only provided for them but also *applied* to them in their helpless & "dead in trespasses & sins" condition. **Worship** too, has been sadly overemphasized. As one who has either led worship on guitar or played drums on worship teams for years, it seems for decades now, that it has taken center stage at times above The One Who is its object! May I emphatically assert again, as I have in other newsletters, that worship is only as genuine, as authentic, & as "fragrant" to our God as the *doctrine & theology* that underlies & inspires it! Remember, Beloved, as one saint so wisely observed, "True worship is merely a **response** to grace"! For grace to be "responded to" in worship, it must first be faithfully expounded, propounded, & clearly understood by God's people! Otherwise, it has the danger of becoming anything from a "sing-a-long", rock concert, talent show, to a "hype festival"! *The more grace is understood, the less "effort" is needed by worship leaders & teams to "get God's people worshipping!"*

"IT'S ALL RELATIVE"

Sadly, Beloved, the list seems endless. All of these "vie for position" in the ears, eyes, **hearts** & minds of the American church, when the "of first importance" doctrines are not given their proper place. Meanwhile, the glorious doctrines of our Blessed Lord, both His Person & His work, are tragically too often neglected. It is *these doctrines*, when studied, when meditated upon, when taught & preached, that give God & His glory its rightful place among His people. The peripheral doctrines then, & ONLY then, **sparkle** in their *relative* glory to these much more glorious truths of God's Word, as it should be! Oh, may our Father help us, Brothers, to put things back in their proper place! May He cause us to "keep watch" not only for Him, but for anything that would seek to displace these glorious scriptural foundations of our faith. For Jesus' Name's sake, & for His glory, I am trusting it shall be so!

I humbly & respectfully submit this, for the glory of God, the primacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for

the supremacy of His Word, & for the welfare of **Jesus' Bride, His Church,**

Michael

Michael, Kim, & Caleb Guertin 3 Windsor Rd., Wilmington, DE 19809 (302) 764-0490 guerty@juno.com
Name: _____ Address: _____ Email: _____

[Please make all tax-deductible gifts payable to: **Elim Fellowship**, 1703 Dalton Rd, Lima, NY 14485. Thanks!]

[Michael is an ordained Elim Fellowship itinerant home missionary, endorsed by his local church. He supports his family & his ministry by faith.] ***VISIT OUR CAMP WEBSITE! : www.hopewellsummercamps.com**

Ministry/events for APRIL & those not listed those in last month's newsletter:

March 14: Glen Mills, PA: camp directors' mtg.

April 1: Hopewell Christian Fellowship, Elverson, PA: camp board mtg./Network pastors' mtg.

April 6: Living Word Fellowship, South Whitehall, PA: Sunday a.m. family service

April 13: Spring City Fellowship, Spring City, PA: Sunday a.m. family service//Caboose! Team reunion

April 17: New Covenant Church, Audubon, NJ: Elim area pastors' mtg.

April 25-27: 10th Pres. Church, Phila., PA: Conference on Reformed Theology: "The Blood of Christ"