

Simply Christ

Gospel Newsletter

Sharing the simplicity that is in Christ

The Church Where God Lives

In the mid-1980s, we were seeing a tremendous visitation of God's Spirit at our church in Houston Texas. One Sunday, a woman who had visited the church several times but we had not seen for several weeks, shared the following testimony. She said she had committed herself to live with and care for her elderly mother who was Episcopalian, and her mother insisted she take her to the Episcopal church each Sunday. Early that morning, she spoke to her mother, saying, "Mom, I know I promised to take you to your church while I live here and care for you, but please, just one last time, can I go to that church where God lives?" In all my years as a pastor, I have never heard anything more to be desired as a church than to be known as "that church where God lives." I also understand the importance of this being true today and not just forty years ago.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul describes why the adversaries of Christ were so incapable of stopping the early believers from shaking the world with the gospel of Christ. He gives his answer in the form of a question, asking, "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*" Romans 8:31. "*These things,*" Paul referred to, are the words he wrote

in the preceding verse, saying, *“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”* Romans 8:30.

Predestination in the Bible is not telling us “who” are chosen to be saved, but “what” the saved are chosen to be. Paul said, *“whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* Romans 8:29. From the beginning, God purposed that he would have a people in the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. They would not be sinful, but a people who walk as Christ walked upon this earth. To create this people, God gave his Son to take away our sin and make us to be new creatures. II Corinthians 5:17.

After Jesus Christ finished the work of redemption through His death and resurrection, He began to call people into His kingdom. On the day of Pentecost, he called three thousand. Then later five thousand. Then countless multitudes more. Many answered the call, but many others refused.

For those who answered the call, Paul says, *“whom he called, them he also justified.”* This speaks of the great redemption that transformed them from being an inherently sinful people into being the children of God and in the image of Christ. I know church theology presents justification as a work that only changes the way God sees you, but that is wrong! Justification by grace finds a sinner and makes them righteous in every way. Paul said, *“For as by one man's*

disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

Romans 5:19.

As great as this transformation in Christ is, if this was all that happened to the early believers they would have never shaken the world for Christ. Paul explains what changed everything when he wrote, *“and whom he justified, **them he also glorified.**”* This speaks of the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the believers. It is an explanation of what happened on the day of Pentecost and many more times in the days, months, and years that followed. When God glorified His people by sending His Spirit within and upon them, they did his mighty works and walked as a people such as the world had never seen.

I have no doubt that many churches today have good and sincere people in their congregations. I also know many churches where people speak in tongues and claim great spiritual gifts. You can find churches where the music will pump you up and make you shout, weep, and rejoice. Even still, there are churches where the ministers will captivate you with their wisdom and knowledge. What is increasingly difficult to find, however, are those churches who are like the bride of Christ the Apostle John saw descending from Heaven, *“having the glory of God”* Revelation 21:9-11. Where are the churches whose congregants walk and live with the presence of Almighty God upon them, and not just during service time? Where is the church God has glorified with the glory of His presence? Where is the church where God lives?

This is our great need. This is also God's great promise!