



Christ Lives!

by Mark Brunner

***“Spiritual Mechanics!”*** (Titus 3:1-8)

***We are born of the world and can't ourselves escape the inevitable fixing necessary for us to be repaired from it. That requires an expert possessed of expert tools.***

I'm pretty handy with a wrench and a crowbar. Over the years I've found that many things may be accomplished with the right amount of torque and the necessary persistence of leverage. If you have ever removed an old exhaust system from a car, you know what I mean. It takes a willingness to risk the result and a whole lot of elbow grease to make it happen. Unfortunately, however universal a wrench and a crowbar might be, they aren't always the right, tool for every automotive project. There are times when the application of brute force just isn't the ticket.

Here's a story: A number of years ago I was driving home from work and I heard a terrible grinding sound from under my car. I pulled over to inspect the engine but could find nothing wrong. However, upon further driving, the noise became even louder. Later that evening I put the car on the ramps and discovered lubricant leaking from the gearbox. My heart sank and I put my wrench and crowbar away. This was a job for a real mechanic as it obviously involved the intricate gears, small pins and bearings in the gearbox. I had the car towed to an old time mechanic who had worked on the car before. After the

initial bulwark was done and the gearbox lay open, he put away the big tools, and rolled his big red toolbox under the car. As he opened the first drawer I could see, neatly laid out in rows, intricate little tweezers and picks. I'll never forget the next few hours. Despite the fact that his hands bore numerous nicks and scars of countless repairs, he worked deftly, gently pulling away worn gaskets no bigger than a thumbnail and popping out bearings and seals with surgical skill. I walked away with a new appreciation for the "fine" art of auto mechanics and the realization that certain auto repair jobs required the expert hands of a skilled mechanic with the right tools at his beck and call.

When it comes to our rebirth as Christians, our spiritual repair, so to speak, there is also no substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit. We are born of the world and can't by ourselves escape the inevitable fixing that is necessary for us to be repaired from it. That requires an expert possessed of expert tools. Oh we can tinker and dabble in maintaining an overall good life, but when it comes to the intricate repairs that are necessary to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, that's where our tinkering can only lead to major spiritual repair bills. I guess when it comes to our rebirth as Christians, there is no substitute for the expert care and specialized tools possessed of God's Holy Spirit. We walk away refreshed, renewed and daily repaired. It's something that we just can't do on our own. We need the expert in spiritual repair, that greatest of all spiritual mechanics, the Holy Spirit of God.

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

*“Holier Than Thou!”* (John 3: 31-36)

*When you and I behold the risen Christ, the one in whom all righteousness is perfected, can we but help seeing the transformation in ourselves?*

“Oh she's just a 'holier than thou' sort. You know, she thinks that she's just a little bit better than everyone else.” How often have you heard that said? Because envy is a very real source of satisfaction in our sinful society, you're going to hear it frequently. Certainly when someone is acting haughty, proud, and vain, they deserve our scorn. Nevertheless, when someone simply acts in a

charitable way and evokes this sort of jealousy, the criticism and scorn can be quite hurtful. Is there a time, however, when such criticism, fairly given, ought not to rankle us at all? I mean, should you and I be living the type of lives that set us apart from those who do not know Jesus Christ? If we are, would it not be highly likely that at some juncture we will hear this criticism and receive it with gratefulness, even satisfaction?

Clark Tanner writes: “Years ago I sold used cars and worked with a lovely young woman named Sheri. She had recently lost 50 pounds. So when she pulled out a photograph of a very overweight woman and handed it to me, I didn’t recognize that I was looking at her. ‘Who’s this?’ I asked. And she said, ‘That’s me about 6 months ago.’ Several months later she asked me if I’d go with her to shop for clothes. She had no one else to ask so I went. I noticed, however, that everything she tried on was too large. So I said as much. Oh, no. She couldn’t do that. She was too fat she said. It was months later that she came into the dealership beaming! ‘Clark, guess what? I’m skinny!’ She said, ‘I walked past the hall mirror this morning and when I looked up I saw this stranger looking back at me; then all of a sudden I realized, I’m thin! It’s the first time I’ve seen myself thin!’ That weekend I went shopping with her again, and she bought a whole new wardrobe of clothes that fit her. And she acted differently. She walked with a more erect posture. She approached her customers with more confidence. Her mind had been renewed as to how she thought about herself and saw herself.” (Clark Tanner)

When you and I behold the risen Christ, the one in whom all righteousness is perfected, can we but help seeing the transformation in ourselves? When God scattered the seeds of His Holy Word in our hearts and the Holy Spirit went to work reclaiming and transforming our hearts for Christ, we ceased to be the person we had always envisioned ourselves to be. We are made holy in Christ and that makes us distinctly righteous in God’s sight. It’s impossible to live lives that don’t set us apart from the many who don’t know Jesus. When we look into the mirror of God’s Word we don’t see ourselves, we see Jesus. We’re not the same person any more. We are holy, righteous and that will always set us apart from mortal man. If that makes us “holier than thou” it really isn’t a bad thing after all, is it?

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

*“Just Say Thanks!”* (John 3: 31-36)

*We should never question God's sincerity. When faced with opening his gifts, we need not waste time looking for the right words or wondering if it's really ours.*

Over the course of my lifetime I've received a lot of gifts. But, the ones that really stick in memory are those that were unexpected, unanticipated. As a 12-year-old, I received my first BB gun. It was a Winchester model, side-loader with a real wood stock. No one else on my block owned a gun like that. It was special; not only because it stood out from the others; but because I had no idea I was going to get it in the first place. When I opened that Winchester box the rush of excitement was unparalleled. The satisfaction was complete, as the gift had won the moment completely and totally. Nevertheless, after the excitement had worn down a bit, though I held the gun in my hands and the tag said it was mine, the first words from my mouth were: "Is it mine?" It was just that unbelievable to me.

Here's a story from Jeff Strite: A preacher stood in the pulpit one morning holding up a poinsettia plant and said: "Whoever wants this beautiful Christmas poinsettia may have it. All you have to do is take it." Everyone just stared. Finally a mother timidly raised her hand and said, "I'll take it." "Great!" said the preacher, "It's yours." But to his astonishment, she nudged her son—"Go get it for me." "No," said the preacher. "If you want this gift you must get it yourself." She shook her head, not willing to risk embarrassment. He waited again. No one moved. Suddenly a woman stood up and quickly strode to the altar and picked up the plant. "I'll take it," she said. As she returned to her seat, the preacher launched into his text: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." "The gift of God is eternal life! It's free." When the service was over, the woman who claimed the poinsettia came to the platform and held out her hand in which was a crumpled \$10 Bill. 'Here!' she held out her hand. 'This flower is too pretty to just take

home for free. I couldn't do that with a clear conscience." "So much for sermon illustrations," he sighed. (Jeff Strite, Sermoncentral.com)

When we're born again, the gift of salvation is instantaneous. There's no anticipation because God didn't promise to give it to us eventually. One moment we were in the dark, lost and condemned; the next we were walking in the light, forever free with the blessing of eternal life. That's what it means to be born again. Its instantaneous transformation—the kind of gift that has the greatest satisfaction. It's free. It happens without waiting. Even though, like my BB Gun or than poinsettia, it's certainly a shocker and we might be tempted to say, "Can this really be," we need never question God's sincerity in the giving. When faced with opening a gift like that, we need not waste time looking for the right words or, worse yet, wondering if it's really ours. There is only one required response: "Thank you Lord!"

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

*“Aliens!”* (1 Peter 1:1-9)

*Although we look and sound like everyone else, we have something they don't have; we have the power of the living Christ within us.*

Years ago a movie came out that had America talking: The Day the Earth Stood Still! It was at the height of a flying saucer scare. Starring Michael Renny as the alien who lands his saucer-shaped spacecraft in the heart of downtown Manhattan, the movie stirred the hearts and imaginations of millions. Renny had come to earth to warn its citizens that our constant wars were becoming a threat in the galaxy. To demonstrate his sincerity he caused all commerce and industry to a halt for 24 hours until we "woke up and changed our ways." What was so compelling was Renny himself. He looked like us and talked like us. Nonetheless, he was an alien; an alien when killed that could be brought back to life. That's what made the movie so compelling; the thought that people like us but different, more powerful and advanced, were out there. In a sense, the fascination resided in the fancy that perhaps, someday we would also become

like them. Perhaps it's not such a farfetched thought. The Bible tells us that you and I are made a new creation in Jesus. We look like everyone else but do we possess some sort of power, like Renny, that sets us apart?

Here's a story: London businessman Lindsay Clegg told the story of a warehouse property he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and thrown trash around the interior. As he showed a prospective buyer the property, Clegg took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage. "Forget about the repairs," the buyer said. "When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site." When we become God's, the old life is over (2 Cor. 5:17). He makes all things new. All he wants is the site and the permission to build. (Ian L. Wilson, Sermonillustrations.com)

I guess, like Renny, we are very, very different from those who don't know Christ. Through baptism and the working of faith in our hearts, God has destroyed the old creation in favor of a very new one. Although we look and sound like everyone else, we have something they don't have; we have the power of the living Christ within us. We are able to literally, spiritually, move mountains with that faith, performing feats of "mysterious" courage, perseverance, and love that are alien to an unbeliever. This indeed sets us apart from all other creation for God has deemed that you and I be totally reconstructed with the ability to live, like Renny, even after death has touched us. What a remarkable movie that would make—the day the earth will really stand still when all the "aliens" are reunited in heaven with their Heavenly Father; aliens no more!

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

***“I Like This Look!”*** (1 Peter 1: 1-9)

***Jesus' death became the surgery that removed the ugly sin that had scared***

*our lives. It was a total makeover, we no longer looked like the sinners we had once been.*

Did you ever wish that there was something about yourself cosmetically that you could change? Perhaps it's a tuck here or there. Maybe there is something you would like removed; in some cases it might be something you would like to have enhanced. It is, in a very real sense, a demonstration of our own individuality and the eternal search on our part for something better, more befitting the "real person" locked within. We deserve to look better and feel better and there is only one person who can make that happen, us! Change, real change, the kind that affects us within as well as without, may not be so easy to achieve alone.

Here's a story. "Danny was born with no ears. All his life, Danny endured ridicule and rejection because of his deformity. But he learned to live with it. When Danny was in high school, his doctor told him of a new procedure that made it possible to transplant ears from one person to another. That meant Danny could get new ears if someone who was compatible to him ever donated theirs. But Danny soon found that donor ears were extremely scarce. He graduated from high school with honors and was accepted at a major university thousands of miles away. One day he got a phone call from his father. 'Go to the hospital tomorrow, Danny. A donor has been found.' The very next day Danny checked into the university hospital. A few hours later, Danny had new ears. For the first time in his life, he wasn't ashamed of the way he looked. A few weeks later, Danny received another phone call from his father. 'Son, your mother is very ill,' his father said. 'She may not live through the night.' Danny was on the first plane home. When he arrived, his father gave him the sad news that his mother had died. Together they went to the funeral home, where Danny was able to see his mother for the last time. He leaned over to kiss her cheek. Brushing her hair back from her face, he noticed that she had no ears. It was a mother's incredible love that provided Danny with new ears. (Guy Doud, Sermoncentral.com)

Real change, change that makes a difference, changes us on the inside as well as the outside. New ears gave Danny not only a new look but also a new life. But, it took a loving sacrifice on the part of his mother to give him that life. When Jesus died on the cross His death became the surgery that removed the

ugly sin that had scared our lives. It was a total makeover, we no longer looked like the sinners we had once been. But it was His resurrection on Easter morning that breathed life into our “new look.” We became a new creation inside and outside. That creation came with a very steep price—His disfigurement for our makeover. His death for our new life. He did it willingly for our sakes that we might be able to look into the mirror every day and say, “I like this Christian look. I think I’ll keep it!”

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*