

**February 1, 2011**

**"Wedding Bell Flus, or How to Ruin Friends & Influenza People"**

Dear *Friends & Family*,

(1/27) Earlier this month I was in FL to perform a wedding for one of our nephews & his fiancée'. The wedding was beautiful & the presence & enabling grace of our Lord was there. I had seen insights in my preparation Eph. 5:22ff re: the husband & wife I had never seen before & as I wrote in last month's newsletter, was put awe by it. It had to do with the "oneness" of the husband & wife that Paul said actually reflects the oneness union, & identification of Jesus with His Bride, where He will be eternally united with them in a mysterious, spiritual way, reflected by the one flesh that a husband & wife become upon entering into marriage. Prior to the wedding, as usual I was working out 3+ times a week & also did a lot of walking & praying while in FL before the wedding to try to keep both my spirit & body "in shape". While sitting in the back pew about an hour & a half before the ceremony listening to worship music & praying, I coughed. It struck me how "deep" the cough was, as I had not been coughing at all up to that point. The coughs began to be more frequent as the day progressed. While at the reception, one of the groomsmen who happened to pastor a very small church approached me & asked if I'd be interested in preaching at his church the following morning, as he didn't have time to prepare yet, being a full-time chiropractor & pastoring part-time, plus being involved in wedding. I told him I'd be honored & would love to. By the next morning I was beginning to feel quite badly in spite of that, I began scrounging around my dad's house looking for object lessons to illustrate my sermon, typically do, as I did not have any with me. My brother gave me some cold & sinus medicine & that did help me sit through worship at the church to save my strength. When it came time to preach, I felt the Spirit of the Lord "surge up" in me, & I felt like a teenager, preaching for about 40 minutes re: Jesus being our propitiation: God's sacrifice to turn His wrath away from His people. It was humbling to hear a friend of my sister's who was at the service report to her that I was a "powerhouse" in the Lord. Yes, quite humbling, as I've often said I'm one of the weakest Christians I know, coupled with the fact re: how very sick I was! We all know Whose power it was, don't we, Beloved? By Sunday evening, I was down for the count. The rest of my family went to meet at one of my favorite restaurants in the area, but I knew there was no way I could sit through long. By the next day, I was seeing double. This lasted for five days! I could barely walk, had throbbing ears, body aches, fever, & "stomach symptoms" too! I cannot thank our Lord enough for a physician assistant in DE who prescribed medicine for me, & also for one of my kid sisters, a.k.a., "Colette", who happens to be Christian, & a *nurse* ! She waited on me hand & foot all week. I would have been lost without her. I had to cancel my flight for two reasons: 1. I was too sick to travel 2. Inclement weather in the Philadelphia area. When the day of my rescheduled flight arrived, I still felt horrible, but decided, along with the help of Colette, to "make a run for the border", so to speak! I had to procure wheelchair service at both airports. Being athletic for most of my life, this was humbling & quite depressing, to be honest. Oh, what a relief to be home again, where Kim picked up Colette's nursing duties! One last note: this flu, through various & numerous symptoms, swept through many at the wedding. It took down the bride, the father of the bride, my brother, & the groomsman/pastor who asked me to preach (he emailed me while down there that he was "in bed dying"! ) to name a few?! One thing that marveled me re: this malady was how a microscopic microbe/organism, etc. smaller than the eye could see could take down a 175+ lb. man & render him virtually helpless! There is a sermon there! I was deeply grateful to the Lord that I had His strength to perform both wedding & preach the following day. For those who prayed for me—THANKS!

## "IF YOU WEAKEN THE SIN, YOU CHEAPEN THE GRACE"

For the past few years, I have endeavored to conduct a continuous "read-through-the-Bible" discipline for the rest of my life. I wish I had decided to do so decades ago. While working through the **Minor Prophets** recently, as with the rest of the biblical books, I often have a commentary or two that I consult to enhance my understanding while doing so. One of them had an interesting insight re: the prophets. The author cited that most likely the prophets received their messages from the Lord while moving among the people. They would see, hear, & experience often through persecution the spiritual state of God's people while doing so. In recent communications with some of my relatives, along with the usual observations I make via church, the internet, books, etc., I once again saw the absolutely *dire* need for God's people to come to an accurate & biblical depiction of the inherent sinfulness of man. You may think, "Michael, why the sense of urgency? All Christians know that they're sinners saved by grace". True. But oh, how varied their understanding is, as with most of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith! All Christians believe in grace sovereignty, but, oh, to what degrees they differ re: their understanding & "limits" to such issues! Having a proper & *biblical* understanding of human depravity is so very crucial to truly understanding grace, salvation & the need for God's sovereignty operating in these areas. Virtually every time I encounter a Christian who either doesn't believe or realize that it was God Who chose them before the foundation of the world (Eph.1 according to *His* purpose (Rom.8:28), & that if He hadn't done so, they would have never chosen Him, they inevitably believe so because of a faulty/lacking understanding of the human condition because of sin. Once proper theology of sin is ascertained, & hence, sin's resultant condition of human inability to do anything that pleases God, one realizes that it could not be any other way! The N.T. constantly, repeatedly, & emphatically depicts man as utterly hostile to & warring against the desires of God (Gal.5:17). It indicts him as being dead in trespasses & sins (Eph.2:1), hostile to God in his thoughts (Col.1:21), having nothing in himself in his pre-Christian sinful state that is good (Rom.7:18; Jn.6:63), or that can please God (Rom.8:8). It asserts that man, in his fallen state, only exercises his will in three ways: toward the ways of the world, the desires of Satan, & toward the sinful desires & thoughts of his own fallen nature (Eph.2:2,3). If Christians, who have the Holy Spirit's power inside & have been set free from Satan's power & kingdom (Col.1:13) *still* need God to work in them to *will & to do* of His good pleasure, what does that say about the fallen will of sinful unbelieving men? Paul further indicts the human race in Rom. 3, declaring that no one understands God nor His ways nor seeks after God (vs.11), & then emphatically reasserts this indictment: "No, not even one". His understanding is darkened (Rom.1:22; Eph.4:18), his thinking is foolish, his will is bent towards his sinful nature & its result desires. Because of this, Paul said that fallen men do not & cannot accept & receive the things of God's Spirit because he considers these precious, sacred, soul-saving truths *foolish!* (I Cor.2:14). This is why, as stated above, that people who are not Christians *cannot* please God (Rom.8:8). They have nothing in them that can do so. This is why Jesus said that no one has the ability nor the desire to come to Him, unless the Father enables & draws them to Him (Jn.6:44,65). Jesus said that He was The One Who decided whom to reveal the Father to (Mt.11:27). Many are repulsed by this thought, but the Savior Himself declared it. It is much easier to understand & swallow when one remembers the Scriptures cited above re: man's helpless condition. Until God changes **the heart**, men do not want Him! It is impossible to put loving, saving faith in His Son, as there is nothing in them that can do so! Before conversion, men only possess a hostile nature to God. Before conversion, we are His enemies (Rom.5:10). Hence, when commanded to repent of sin which they love & are slaves to (Rom.7:14) & put their loving trust in the Person & work of the Lord Jesus Christ, they find it impossible unless the Father has mercy! No one in hell will be then crying out to God that they now want to

love & trust in Him. Jesus clearly revealed to us the state & condition of those in hell: all the rich man in Luk 16 was concerned about was his torment & suffering & keeping his relatives from suffering the same fate, *not* that he had all of his life offended the only living God, Whose "nature & Name is Love", penned by the hymn-writer Charles Wesley in the 18th century. In Revelation, when the Lord is pouring out His justly-deserved judgments upon His enemies, they don't cry out to be forgiven & express deep remorse for having offended Him. Rather, they blaspheme & curse Him to His face! *This* is the actual state & condition of the fields "white unto harvest" that Jesus spoke about. "Then why, Michael, does it seem that so very many people are religious & spiritual?" There are three basic reasons for this: 1. Despite his fallen, sinful, & depraved nature, man is still made in the image of God. Despite being dead in sin & being severely flawed, man cannot help but be religious & spiritual in some way. 2. Martin Luther said that the greatest tendency i man is to try to do & be things to get God to accept him, i.e., to justify himself. This is why all other religions are "works/good deeds" *based*. However, as with the Jews in N.T. times (& today!), as well as with "relig-iot masses, if you try to present to them the gospel of grace, they often reject & even exude hostility to it. [Not that the rich young ruler (Mk.10), most of Jesus' "disciples" after His Bread Of Life discourse (Jn.6), the ador crowd during the Triumphal Entry (Lk.21), & all of those who had the "rocky & thorny" soils in their hearts (Mk.4), ALL left Him when faced with *the* truth!] The thought of having "Someone Else" procure their neede righteousness for them damages their pride. "They rather do it themselves!" However, by doing so, they resist, insult, & offend God, Who went to great lengths & pains to provide His Own righteousness for them. Man is helplessly curious & infatuated with the "other-ness" & mystery of spirituality. The unseen & unknow have intrigued him for millennia. However, when brought the truth of the gospel, spiritual people, like religious people, typically reject it. They want "God", "religion", & "spirituality" on *their* terms, in *their* image. IF we find them receptive & open to the gospel, i.e., "white unto harvest", it is only because Father is teaching, enabling, & drawing them (Jn.6:44,45,65; Mt.11:27). Now, after having elaborated on th above, one other thing we must realize & remember: until one grasps his or her own inherent condition du to sin, he or she never truly understands God's love as it is presented in the Scriptures. What makes His love for us so unfathomable is that He loves us in our hostile, God-hating estate! God truly does love *His enemies*! When we present the gospel to His enemies, we must re-member that we have absolutely no pov in ourselves to convert sinners. Our task is to pursue Christ-likeness & to present the unadulterated truth c the gospel. It is up to our Father to do the rest. May we "rest" in Him being responsible to do the rest!

This month commences our **12th year** of serving the Lord in this itinerant ministry. It is a very deep ache & longing that I constantly feel to be faithful to Him, the work, & those whom He uses to support it. May it ev be so.

Sincerely,

Michael & Kim