

Don't be a white cat

Rev. John Belden

We have stray cats that hang around our house. One of them is solid white. This particular cat has proved useful recently. We really thought he was white. My children even called him "the white cat." He looked white compared to other cats.

Then one day it snowed. And guess what? The white cat wasn't white anymore. My wife looked out the window and saw the cat against the backdrop of the pure fallen snow. She called our children and said, "Come and see. The white cat isn't really white. He's yellow!" She was right. Against the pure white snow, the cat didn't look white anymore. He hadn't changed; his background had.

My wife used this opportunity to teach our children about sinful human nature. We tend to think of ourselves as being pretty good. Most of us have never murdered anyone or robbed a bank. When we look around at the "really bad" people, we see ourselves the same way my family saw the white cat.

But when the pure snow of God's holy law falls upon our consciences, it provides a backdrop for our words, thoughts, and deeds. Then we realize we're not so white. As Paul said, "I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet" (Rom. 7:7). He thought he was doing pretty well until he was confronted with the spiritual nature of God's law.

Like Paul, it is not easy for us to see that we are bad. The root cause of this is pride. Proverbs 30:12-13 makes this clear. "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness." What deceives filthy people into thinking they are so pure? Their pride, "oh how lofty are their eyes" (v.13).

Since the Fall, the human heart has been naturally proud. You know how hard it is to get people in your life to see their sin. Even from childhood we don't like hearing the truth about ourselves.

Our pride deceives us by comparing us to people worse than ourselves. This is exactly what the Pharisee did in Jesus' parable. "God, I thank you that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11).

The sad thing is that people who are too proud to admit they are bad are generally those least likely to believe that salvation is free. They're not comfortable with pure grace. It puts them completely on the receiving end. They like to think they're not quite that helpless. They don't like seeing themselves as spiritual beggars needing a free handout.

But if we are as bad as the Bible says we are, salvation has to be free. We have to be mere receivers. Our sin makes us charity cases with absolutely nothing to give God. This is why salvation is a free gift, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works" (Eph. 2:8-9).

If you think you will be able to stand before God in your own goodness, remember the white cat. When God places you against the backdrop of His perfect heart-searching law, you will see what my family saw so clearly on that snowy day. The cat really isn't white. At the judgment, many people will find out the hard way that God looks at us much closer than we look at ourselves. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts" (Prov. 21:2).

So don't be a white cat. Realize you are sinful now. Be like David and admit it: "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3). Then ask God to wash you with the blood of Christ and make you "whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7).

Trust in Christ for a perfect righteousness. When the law fell around Him, He was still white. Clothed in His righteousness, you also will be pure white at the judgment of God.

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