



LINKS PLAYERS DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Links Players

Law/Gospel

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:12)

A cheerful little invitation popped up in my email the other day, sent by the local golf club: “Want to get better at golf? If so, you will need to practice. Joining the Range Ball Plan is a great way to get better and hold yourself accountable to practice. If you are not currently on the range plan and wish to be, please contact the golf shop to sign up. Individual Plan: \$325/year. Family Plan: \$375/year.”

I smell a rat. I mean, there are a myriad of ways to approach the game of golf, right? Some folks work hard at it. They buy the Range Plan, and they put in the hours. They pore over the oodles of available YouTube instructional videos. In addition, these passengers on the Get-Better-At-Golf train regularly cough up a few shekels for the latest, greatest golf widget.

I’m sure you remember the commercial showing a guy on a subway platform swinging his closed umbrella like a nine iron - practicing until the train arrives, the doors open, and he embarks. The golden-throated narrator tells us something like, “This much we know: inside every golfer, there’s a better one.”

Provided we buy their widget. In Eden, Adam and Eve heard a similar pitch from a slippery fruit salesman.

As it turns out, in Law/Gospel terms, golf is pure Law. What you put in will be what you get out. Improvement requires effort. Your effort.

Not so, Christianity. Paul points out that God’s righteousness (the exact flavor of righteousness that we need for entry into the heavenly wedding feast, by the way) is “given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Given. Gift. Free. Gospel.

Elsewhere, Paul notes that the faith itself is a gift. This is tough for us to process since, in our experience of this fallen world, everything of value requires that we earn it. Skill at golf, for example. Or a sufficient retirement nest egg. Strong relationships. Physical fitness. The paycheck. Some of these prove to be unattainable despite our best and persistent efforts. Skill at golf comes immediately to mind for me.

It’s surely no accident that the mode of entry into Jesus’ kingdom is “rebirth.” How much credit can we take for our first birth, let alone our second? To what extent was either of them the result of our effort?

So, I'm pretty sure I won't be parting with \$325 for the annual range plan. I won't be hauling my elderly, semi-retired carcass out to the range so I can flail at a bucket of dimpled spheres in the hot sun next to some limber-back teenager grinning at me as he pounds 'em long and straight.

And I'm equally sure that the Conductor has plucked me off the platform and placed me aboard the Eternal Express. Freely. It is a gift, not a payment. At least not a payment that I've made.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the free gift of your grace to us.

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Peter Muller

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