

Death and Life - Hidden Dangers

by Stella Paterson

In recent days, the attention of the peoples of the earth has been captured by the much publicized "flu pandemic." The powers that be would have us believe we must be vaccinated to "protect" us from possible death, resulting from this "swine flu."

The purpose of this article is not to say whether or not there truly is a pandemic, or whether or not we must be vaccinated. The topic we explore, here, brings to light some Biblical truths about something far more deadly than either the "flu pandemic" or the dubious "vaccinations."

Death and life

God forbade man's partaking of the fruit of the *tree of knowledge of good and evil*, yet man disobeyed and came into that knowledge. The result was his eviction from the Garden of Eden and separation from the Creator, or *death*, as God had warned. In his resultant state of *mortal flesh*, man continued this independence from God, and to this day that deadly knowledge has a firm grip in the lives of every person. It is that "natural" inclination in us to perform according to our *knowledge of good and evil*. The apostle Paul called it "the flesh lusting against the Spirit." (Galatians 5:17)

If the knowledge of good and evil brought such devastation to man, and Jesus had to suffer horrendous cruelty when He came in the *likeness of sinful flesh* to reconcile us to the Father, why does man continue on in oblivion to the message of the Cross?

Jesus came to restore Life to man through trust in Him and His sacrifice of flesh. Until we receive His Life through the new birth, we remain dead in our sinful state and our trust is in the knowledge of good and evil. But when we receive His Life, we must *continue* to trust in Him. That is faith!--*entrusting our spiritual wellbeing to Christ*.

A revealing parallel

Let us look closely at the present-day hype over a "flu pandemic," and the "need" to be vaccinated against it. There is much concern, based on science, that the vaccine will be deadlier than the flu itself.

The Lord has shown me a spiritual parallel that provides the basis for what He wants to teach us here.

If we consider the methodology used by "churches" today, with their attempts to "win the lost" and keep the flock "serving God," we might see a similarity to the

threat of pandemic. The people must "do" certain things; they must be "involved in church life" if they want to be sure of a place in heaven. If they miss church, they become fearful of losing their salvation; as if it depends upon what they do.

Modern-day Pharisees, entrenched in legalism, see the threat of lost salvation as their "pandemic." Their "vaccination" to protect them from such loss is just as deadly as the *pandemic* they fear. They have become lulled into slumber by the deadly tradition of years and years of mindless *doing*. They are in darkness, and unable to see that they cannot save themselves through deeds of the flesh. *Without faith* [relying upon Christ for salvation] *it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God.* (Hebrews 11:6) The remainder of the verse tells us that when we come to God, we must believe He (not self) is God, and that He *is a rewarder of them that seek after* [Greek: 'crave'] *Him.* Did Jesus not say, "*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18:8 EMTV) When He comes, will we be found *relying upon Him for salvation* [in 'faith'] and *entrusting our spiritual wellbeing to Him* ['believing']? Or will we be blind to the death that comes through *the knowledge of good and evil* and the accompanying efforts of *self*, with minds stupefied by the ever-spreading "slime" of what Jesus called "leaven of the Pharisees?"

Leaven

These are the words of our dear Savior. Read them very carefully.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that shall not be unveiled, and nothing secret that shall not be made known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in behind closed doors shall be proclaimed on the housetops. And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing further they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who after He kills, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! Luke 12:1b-5 EMTV

Leaven grows and spreads, somewhat like a fungus would, and is difficult to impede. Jesus said the *leaven of the Pharisees* was "hypocrisy." The Greek definition of *hypocrisy* is "acting under a feigned part; that is, (figuratively) deceit."

What could be more deceitful than *playing church*, believing we are pleasing God through lives lived according to *the knowledge of good and evil*? What could be more deceitful than "disciplining" new believers to live by church rules, rather than pointing them to Jesus, encouraging them to surrender to His Life?

Jesus said, "*But whoso shall cause one of these little ones [new believers] which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea.*"

(Matthew 18:6) We are to come to Jesus "as little children" who find it easy to trust. But when someone causes one of *these little ones* to turn from trusting in Jesus, to trust in self, He has zero tolerance. Luke recorded Jesus' words this way:

It is impossible for offenses not to come, but woe to the one through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were around his neck, and he be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Luke 17:1-2 EMTV

We must never forget how much God hates the *knowledge of good and evil*, for that very knowledge made man into a self-reliant creature. Yet, He loved the world *so much* that He sent His only Son to die, making a way for mortal man to receive Life--His life. Then, through His death and our following Him by way of the Cross, He enables us, by His Spirit, to be ". . . *ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive.*" (2 Corinthians 3:6 EMTV)

Faith

Abraham is known as the "father of faith." Paul said Abraham "*believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*" (Romans 4:3) Abraham believed God's word was sure, and that He would make him the "father of many nations." He further believed God would either provide a sacrificial lamb or raise his son from the dead, if he obeyed and took Isaac up a mountain to lay this beloved, promised son on a sacrificial altar and slay him. What amazing trust in God Abraham had! We too must come to the place where we trust Him that much. The day may soon come when we could be called upon to exercise that kind of faith.

Jesus' death and resurrection provided a New Covenant whereby His Spirit is the Keeper of the faith, if we may use that term. Jesus is the *Author and Finisher* [Greek: 'chief Leader and Consummator'] of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2) The last part of the verse says, "*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

When Jesus went to take His rightful place at the right hand of the Father, He sent us His Spirit to lead us into all truth. When we come to Him, repenting of *self*, He places His Spirit in us. This is the new birth! We pass from death to Life; as new creatures in Christ, the old passes away and all things become new. How dare we insult the Spirit of Grace by turning to trust in that corrupt knowledge that led to death in the first place! He died once, to free us from the hold of that former *death*. And, as the writer of Hebrews told us, "*For if we sin wilfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for*

sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26-27)

There are dire consequences for one who turns from trusting in Christ. We must continue on, growing in increased trust in Him for our spiritual wellbeing. *"Wherefore let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on unto perfection; not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God. (Hebrews 6:1) "Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22) The evil conscience is rooted in the knowledge of good and evil, which produces dead works. Once we turn to Christ, we must never turn back, as we read here: "But my righteous one shall live by faith: and if he shrink back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."* (Hebrews 10:38-39)

A deadly "gospel"

We spoke earlier of the *leaven of the Pharisees*. Jesus said the leaven was *hypocrisy*, or as the Greek definition shows, it is "acting a feigned part." Modern-day Pharisees are devoid of the Life of Jesus; they believe they are pleasing God through adherence to perceived rules and religious precepts. They become almost feverish in their zeal to keep "church life" going, with the firm belief that as long as they are busy "doing the work of God" they are in right relationship to Him.

There is spiritual famine in places considered to be the "house of God." A building is not God's house. The Bible makes that very clear, yet countless throngs of people meet in buildings to "worship God," as though that is the only place He can be found. And when someone chooses not to continue "fellowshipping" with them, they either shun the person, or they chase after them to bring them back "into the fold."

Such activity, done in the name of God, is an insult against the Holy Spirit, who is the only One who can bring anyone into the true fold of the true Shepherd. Yes, there may have been a time long ago when some of these, who are steeped in the deceptive *leaven*, "received Christ as Savior" but they never truly came to know Him. They may have been victims of false teaching, like that which they are now subjecting others to. Peter described the false ministers and the results of their "ministry" with these words:

For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. **While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.** For if after they have

escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. **For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.** But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. 2 Peter 2:18-22

That last verse brings to mind the words Jesus spoke to the Laodiceans. *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. Therefore, since you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth."* (Revelation 3:15-16 EMTV)

As the time draws nearer to the return of Christ, His true Bride will be busy, surrendering herself to His purifying presence, so that her garment will be without spot or wrinkle.

At the same time, the false bride will be busier than ever, blindly wrapped up in the bondage of ritualism and the "worship" of a "god" created in their own imaginations. They think he is the true and living God but He doesn't even know them, and He will tell them so, when they cry out to Him, "But Lord, Lord, we did all these things in your Name!"

Preparation for battle

One of the most difficult things the true Bride of Christ will encounter, is the persecution from the false bride. Satan's religious spirits will have the pseudo believers so deceived into thinking **they** are the "righteous" ones that they will speak evil of the called out ones who have followed Jesus and died to the flesh. The very thing true believers have died to is the stronghold of the enemy in those still entrenched in self and flesh.

The "feel good" effects of religious spirits keep the pseudo Christians strong in the belief that their "worship" and the manifestations in their meetings are of the Holy Spirit; when, in reality, they are lying signs and wonders. They believe the "word" that is preached is according to truth because it is ear-pleasing, but Paul described such, in these words to Timothy: *"But the Spirit speaks expressly, that in later times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron . . ."* (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

With flesh being the door through which Satan walks, all those who strive in the flesh to do the "right" Christian things open themselves up to the demonic "helpers" waiting and eager to become the spiritual power in their lives. Satan came to kill and destroy, and the battle will increase between the demonic-laden

pseudo Christians, and those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. The true believers will be strong in the power of His might, and to them the near "visibility" of the demonic will be sickening. Grief and heartbreak will well up inside, as the separation of sheep and goats becomes more and more apparent. I doubt that we will ever cease to be shocked at what we "see."

But what of our own walk with the Lord? Are we dead to self and alive in Him? Have we surrendered all?

Walking by the Spirit

We must get rid of the idea that not "doing" certain things is pleasing to the Father, and will ensure us a place with Jesus for eternity. Whether consciously abstaining or purposely acting out the "good" we assume is "Christian," both are simply works done in the flesh. Paul said, "*I say then: Walk by the Spirit, and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these things oppose each other, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*" (Galatians 5:16-17)

This is where the definition of *faith* comes into play, and is crucial for us to keep in mind at all times. Again; *faith* is *relying upon Christ for salvation and entrusting our spiritual wellbeing to Him*. In reality, walking by the Spirit is walking in faith because our reliance is on Him, rather than self.

In verse 18, Paul said "*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*" This leads us to where he said, "*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*" (Galatians 3:23) The 22nd verse shows how *Scripture has confined all under sin*, which means not only the Jews, who had the Law, were sinners through disobedience. Gentiles were also "lumped" together with Jews in the category of "sinners." This was *so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to [all] those who believe.*

We know from Paul's writings, how difficult it was for the Jews to grasp the fact they no longer needed to be under the Law. Sadly, the majority of those who name the Name of Christ, calling themselves "Christians," feel the need to obey some kind of law to prove their "righteousness." They have missed the point that Jesus is our Righteousness. It all boils down to one thing; they are walking in the flesh.

Paul listed a number of things to illustrate how flesh manifests. I believe he was saying, "Look, you people; if you persist in walking in the flesh, this is the kind of company you keep." Then he told them this:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies,

wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they which practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
Galatians 5:19-21

If we think we can make one iota of difference to our "righteousness" by abstaining from any of those things, we are wrong. If we see them as a list of "sins" that damn us by doing them, we are wrong. They are all manifestations of flesh, and flesh is the problem; it is unregenerate and self-driven according to the knowledge of good and evil--and blatantly antichrist! So also is every single thing we consciously do in an effort to please God, for ***without faith it is impossible to please Him.***

Death to self

This thing called "death to self" is hopefully something we grow in day by day, and hour by hour.

After Paul wrote of the works of the flesh, he said "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, temperance--against [Greek: 'according to'] such things there is no law.*" (Galatians 5:22-23)

There is no "law" by which "we" live, performing these things. They are **fruit** of the Holy Spirit. Only He produces those things. The secret is in surrender to His working in us. We must die to self!

How do we die to self? It can't be something we do--otherwise it would be a work of the flesh. Only Jesus, by His Holy Spirit, can do the work of regeneration which is "spiritual rebirth," according to the Greek. Paul told the Colossians, ". . . *as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been rooted and built up in Him and being established in the faith. . .*" (Colossians 2:6-7 EMTV)

To *walk in Him*, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. The fruit of His Spirit is produced in us, and most often not evident to our selves. The fruit manifests in our relationships with others. He loves through us, when we cannot; He gives joy unspeakable; He gives peace that passes understanding; He performs longsuffering in us when we are provoked to the limit; He shows kindness where we couldn't on our own; He causes goodness to emanate from us; He keeps us faithful to Christ and to others; He shows gentleness in and through us, and He keeps us "in control" when *self* would fail at such.

As we walk in this life, the Holy Spirit will make us a blessing to another, but we won't even know it. We don't need to know it! It is enough just to walk in Him, and to know His rich presence. We are to be His branches, simply trusting in His Life

to flow through us. He did say we can do nothing without Him! Why would we turn our back on such an admonition and go it alone?

Faith in Christ is our only hope. Jesus said that when we *believe* on Him, out of our *belly shall flow rivers of living water*. (John 7:38) He was speaking of the soon coming of the Holy Spirit to baptize (wash) us, filling us so full there would be no room for flesh. His Life would flow like a river from His newly renovated dwelling-place, making us witnesses unto Him. He didn't say "witnesses **for**" Him; He said the Spirit's life in us would point others to Christ, and His Life in us.

God wants only one thing from us--our faith in Him. He needs it; He must have it, if He is to do in and through us what is needful. All we must do is say, "Lord take me; make me yours--whatever it takes." Let Him have His way. Don't look to the right or left. Just make seeking Him the first priority. He will do the rest. Then we will know true Rest, no matter what comes our way. And when He comes, we will be found among the faithful.

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