

Denying the Power

by Stella Paterson
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Recently we have been talking about the power struggle between flesh and Spirit. This struggle has been going on for thousands of years, especially since the time of Abraham's sons Ishmael and Isaac. But the "struggle" we must address is the one that is within each and every one of us.

Is this "struggle" something we can overlook, and not seriously consider the consequences? Exactly what are we talking about? What consequences must we take into consideration? I can assure you it is a matter of life and death, as we will soon see.

To many, the phrase "denying the power" will have a familiar ring to it. That is because it is found in the Bible. It could be said that this one phrase ranks high on a list of most important ones. Right now, we need to see it as THE most important one. Having said that, let us examine how easily we can become caught up in "denying the power."

The struggle

We made reference in a recent article to the "struggle" between Jacob and Esau while still in the womb of their mother Rebekah. Jacob, as we know, became Israel who, as a nation, struggled against the LORD God who was their Protector and Deliverer. The Old Testament documents the life of Israel and God's unflinching love toward them and His mercy upon them.

It was God's mercy and love that ultimately gave to Israel the Law of Moses, as it is commonly referred to. The Law not only exposed the sinfulness of "self" which Israel so readily exhibited, but it pointed the way to a coming Messiah who would free them from the bondage of the Law and from sinful SELF. Rather than their having to obey the Law in the strength of self, they could now receive the Life their Messiah died to give them. He came in the "likeness of sinful flesh" to be the final sacrifice for sin. Under the Law, the Jews were required to make a sacrifice for sin by shedding the blood of specified animals. But Messiah put an end to that by shedding His own blood once and for all.

Israel, for the most part, rejected the Messiah. And to this day they continue to struggle in their flesh, continuing under the Law, believing their Messiah is yet to come. Although countless Jews have come to receive Him, the others have not; they still struggle for their rights as a nation, not recognizing that their true Inheritance is Jesus Christ, the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Why are we going over all this? The reason is that there is a parallel we will soon see as we move on here.

Holiness

Upon reading the books of the Law of Moses, we could come to the conclusion that the Law was given to reveal the holiness of God. The book of Leviticus gives the detailed account of the Law of Moses, with instructions for Israel in their daily lives and their relationships with one another. The declaration "I am the LORD God" can be found almost 50 times throughout the book. One example is, "*For I am the LORD your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy: . . . For I am the LORD that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.*" (Leviticus 11:44a, 45) A few more references are:

Leviticus 19:2 - Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, You shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

Leviticus 20:7 - Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 20:26 - And you shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that you should be mine.

Not only was Israel to acknowledge the LORD God as "God", they were reminded repeatedly of His Holiness, and His desire for them to be holy. The problem was that it was impossible for them to be holy in their own strength, and the standard of holiness found in the Law was completely unattainable, which is a good thing. That is where the foretelling of Messiah came in. Only He could make them holy by being their holiness!

Of the many that can be found, here are two more examples from the books of the prophets of the LORD God declaring His holiness and His plan for Israel to be holy:

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD your God which teaches you to profit, which leads you by the way that you should go. (Isaiah 48:17)

So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. (Ezekiel 39:7)

The requirement of holiness in God's people was not exclusive to Israel; we non-Jews must also be holy. But it is not possible for us to be holy without our Helper, the Holy Spirit. He is not only God's Spirit; He is the HOLY SPIRIT, or *Holiness personified*.

Do we hear what is being said here? The work of Grace accomplished by the Holy Spirit produces holy new creatures. How many of us would dare to say "I am holy."? It would seem unthinkable to utter such words in the presence of another, lest that person see us as some kind of puffed-up spiritual prig. In reality, if we are truly born again by the Holy Spirit we would be denying His work in us by feigning such (false) humility, as though it were all up to us and that WE are able to make ourselves holy. A true new creature in Christ Jesus, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, has no need to tell anyone he is holy - it is the Holy One who is seen. Being a new creature means the old man is dead and New Life lives through him. He should not be conscious of his "holiness" because any fruit of the Spirit is there to be seen and experienced by others as testament to the power and presence of God.

Denying the power

How do we deny the power?

First, let's read the passage where the phrase is found. For clarity, I've inserted Greek meanings for some translated words.

This know also, that in the last days strength-sapping dangerous times shall come. For men shall be fond of self, fond of money, boasters, haughty, foulmouthed, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, hard hearted, trucebreakers, false accusers, without self-control, savage, hostile to virtue, betraying others, heady, inflated with self-conceit, being fond of pleasure rather than lovers of God; **having the appearance of godliness, but denying [Greek: 'rejecting'] the power** thereof: from such turn away. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

How often do we "assign" this passage to someone other than ourselves? If we prayerfully consider every word, examining our life to see if any of those words apply to us, we may be surprised at what the Holy Spirit reveals to us.

Let's dig a little deeper and learn what it is the Lord wants us to hear with our spiritual ears.

We have written so much about flesh and the knowledge of good and evil, but the Lord continues to shed light on His Word and the relevance of those two things throughout the New Testament truths. We know that man was reduced to a creature of mortal flesh through the knowledge of good and evil. We know that *mortal flesh* means *death*, and that is why Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh to bring life to all who come to put their trust in Him.

If the knowledge of good and evil resulted in the first man's eviction from the Garden of Eden and the presence of God, do we even dare consider such

knowledge to be less evil today? Yet, how many professing Christians operate in the flesh which gains its "strength" from the knowledge of good and evil?

How many "Christians" govern their lives by New Testament "laws"? Yes, the New Testament is the most wonderful guide to life in the Spirit. But, must we use it in a legalistic manner; not only to "be religious" in our own strength, but to legislate morality in others? We *deny the power* when we go about obeying "laws" in the New Testament, and bringing others under "laws" that we have self-righteously put before them to "make them holy." In reality we are rejecting Jesus by continuing in "self" as though WE can "do" righteousness better than He can BE Righteousness in and through us. Worse yet, we bring others into bondage to the knowledge of good and evil. Not only are we continuing in the flesh, but we are condemning others to death, which is what it really boils down to.

The appearance of godliness

Any one of us has the ability to *appear* godly. We may fool a lot of people with our abstinence from "worldly" things. But what does God think of us? How many of us have heard someone say, "I don't do that; I'm a Christian."? Do you hear how pompous and self-righteous that sounds? What does it say to the hearer? Do they hear a message of condemnation, telling them how sinful they are, while the holier-than-thou "Christian" is so much better? Is it any wonder Jesus spoke so harshly to the religious, while showing compassion on the sinners?

Paul addressed the issue of offending others when he wrote to those at Rome. The 14th chapter has a potent message, and one which may prove to be offensive to the "most religious" among us. Let's look in at what the Apostle is saying.

Paul begins by telling them to receive one who is weak in the faith. You see, some had no problem eating meat, which under the Law was not considered "lawful." Others who were weaker in the faith would eat only vegetables. Because believers were not under the Law, but were free in Christ, what they ate had no bearing on their relationship with Jesus. As each one grew in their trust in the Lord to be their salvation, knowing that it wasn't what they did or did not do, they more easily grasped how they were free from bondage which was under the Law.

With that in mind, Paul taught that those who were more secure in their relationship, and knew the freedom that was theirs, were to be considerate of the newer believers, and not risk offending them or causing them to judge by "eating meat" in their presence. The consideration was always to be given to the "weaker" in the faith. Those strong in faith were to be disciples of others, pointing them to greater trust in the Lord who came to redeem them from the Law.

Toward the end of the chapter Paul puts it this way: "*It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby your brother may stumble, or is offended, or is made weak.*" He then tells them if they have faith in the Lord, and doing such things were not forbidden, they were to do it alone before their God. Paul continues with the admonition that if a person does not condemn himself, or feel guilty, in eating meat or drinking wine, "happy is he." But, if he wavers in his faith, thinking maybe it is wrong; he is not "eating of faith." And here is the "punch line," as found in the English Majority Text Version: "*But he who doubts, if he eats, has been condemned, because it is not of faith; and **everything which is not of faith is sin.***" (Romans 14:23) This takes us to the meaning of "sin" to which Paul referred.

"Sin" is unbelief

Whatever the popular belief as to what "sin" is, Jesus made it clear in this passage, where He said,

And when He [Holy Spirit] comes, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: **of sin, because they do not believe in Me**; of righteousness (Holy Spirit IS our Righteousness), because I am going to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (John 16:8-11 EMTV)

Ever since the Cross of Jesus Christ, a "sinner" is one who has not entrusted his/her well-being to Christ, having come to trust in Him as eternal Life. Another passage where this is made clear can be found in the book of Hebrews. The 11th chapter is the wonderful account of those who lived with faith in God. Immediately following it we find this:

So therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every impediment, and **the sin which so easily ensnares us**, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the **Author and Perfecter of our faith**, 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. (Hebrews 12:1-2 EMTV)

The sin that "so easily ensnares" is the sin of unbelief. We must "look to" Jesus who is the *Author and Perfecter of our faith*. It is far too easy to become ensnared in habitual trust in our own performance to "be" righteous. The point of this article is that we might fully grasp the danger inherent in our failure to let Christ be our Life, in every way, every day. This does not apply only to our "selves," but for the sakes of those souls whom God brings across our path.

In the articles on the "Gospel," we covered in depth the issue of sin, flesh, the knowledge of good and evil, and Life and death. Lest anyone get the idea I am

minimizing "sin," let me assure you I am as aware as anyone of the evil in the world, in the "church" and in the abundant "store" of *self*. But what we need to understand is that Jesus came to bring Life to those who come to Him. When His Life dwells in us, and we remain in surrender to His Spirit (who is Life), the fruit of the Spirit comes forth.

We cannot replace evil with good by asking for forgiveness for "our sins." We cannot replace death with Life by asking for forgiveness for "our sins." We cannot operate in the knowledge of good and evil, being "righteous" through deeds of our flesh, and expect to spend eternity with Jesus.

The New Testament speaks more about faith and belief than it does about sin. That should tell us something. With 456 references to faith/belief, it is more than double the number of references to sin. The word "repent/repentance" is found 58 times. The phrase "forgive sin(s)" occurs only 23 times. Do we see where the Lord's emphasis is when it comes to eternal life and salvation?

Power of God

In Moses' day, the people much preferred that Moses approach the LORD God at Mount Sinai. They were fearful of coming near to His Holiness. And when Moses came back down the mountain, after being in the presence of God, the people even feared coming near to Moses. As Exodus 34:30 tells us, "*And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.*" Do we not believe God is the same today, and that His presence is just as powerful? Do we not understand that **He** will draw others to Himself if we would only die to "self" and let Him live in us freely?

When WE draw nigh to a Holy God, His Holiness exposes our unholiness, just as the Law was intended to expose Israel's unholiness; their sin. The Law could not make them holy; it was merely a "shadow" of what would be fulfilled in Messiah's death and resurrection. He would become their Holiness. New Testament "laws" can no more make us holy than could the Law of Moses make Israel holy.

If we are going to obediently *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*, it can be done only through surrender to the Holy Spirit's work of grace in us. As Paul said, the "flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." The Spirit Who dwells in us will convict of anything that is against holiness. What is needful is for us to turn from (repent) the inclination to operate according to the flesh and stay attuned to the Spirit's voice.

Oswald Chambers made an interesting and thought-provoking statement when he said, "*No man knows what sin is until he is born again. Sin is what Jesus Christ faced on Calvary. The evidence that I am delivered from sin is that I know the real nature of sin in me.*" When the Light of Life comes to dwell in us, He

sheds light on what is there; the sinfulness of "self" is exposed and, grieving, we cry out in surrender to the Spirit's purifying power. If we have not reached a place where we are utterly sickened at the "sight" of self, we have to question if we are truly born again.

Works of the devil destroyed

When our focus is on sin as a deed, we overlook the real sin which is self. If sin were only a deed, forgiveness would suffice. But the real sin is "self" which must go the way of the cross and be crucified so that real Life can dwell within. We know that "self" came to prominence through the knowledge of good and evil, which was according to the devil's plan when he tricked Eve. John tells us this:

He who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God appeared, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who has been born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:8-9 EMTV)

That which "self" produces is sin, whether under the guise of "righteousness" or through actual evil deeds. The writer of Hebrews tells of the destruction of the devil's works in this passage:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (Hebrews 2:14-15a)

What a powerful truth! The devil "had" the power of death, but now the Life of Jesus is far greater. Death could not keep Jesus in the grave, and spiritual death cannot keep us. The Life of Jesus frees us from the clutches of death, which is the flesh-life. But we, like Paul, must "die daily" so that we walk by the Spirit and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

The mind of Christ

Where does the knowledge of good and evil dwell? It dwells in the mind. But there is hope! God's Word speaks of renewing the mind. (Romans 12:2) Paul also told the Philippians, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . .*" then he said how Jesus, being equal with God, came as a servant with "no reputation" and *was made in the likeness of men*. Now look at this next part:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Rather than having the mind of the flesh with its knowledge of good and evil, we are to have the mind that was in Christ Jesus and be obedient to the death of the cross. And THAT is the message Paul was portraying!

Are we speaking life or death?

Please pay close attention to this. In our life as a believer, are we speaking life or death to those we desire to "win" to Christ? There is a difference that is so easily missed in our zeal for God. An insidious evil lurks on every side, and we need the mind of Christ if we are to escape the entrapment of such evil. Not only is it possible for us to become entrapped, but the souls of others will be affected - maybe eternally.

We spoke earlier of New Testament "laws." If this is how we view the new Covenant, we are sadly mistaken. For example, do we think we are "being a good Christian" when we abstain from certain things? Do we feel we must "set an example" for others by "acting" in a "holy" manner? Such things have a nice "ring" to them, but so did the Law of Moses. Could that Law produce righteousness?

Paul addressed this question in his message to those at Rome. He said, "*Therefore by works of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.* (Romans 3:20 EMTV) There are some who say that the Ten Commandments are a standard whereby a person knows he is a sinner and must ask forgiveness. Of course, we know that forgiveness can never make a new creature in Christ Jesus. Only when we come to Him by grace and through faith (trust in Him) can we receive His Life. By the same token, after we are born anew by the Spirit we cannot maintain our righteousness through adherence to perceived laws found in the New Testament. Romans 3:21-26 are all one sentence, including the phrase "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" which is most often taken out of context and used in "gospel" messages. The very last part of the sentence is found in the 26th verse, which is this: "*for a demonstration of His righteousness in the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*"

Every one of us has sinned [Greek: 'missed the mark'] and fallen short of the glory of God. Only His presence can change that! No amount of effort on our part can make one iota of difference. If that is the case, why do so many insist on using the New Testament Scriptures as "laws" by which to live, and by which to tell others how to live? Do we not know that Jesus is sufficient for all things, and that only His Life residing in us can make us fit for the Kingdom? Do we think we can make another person "holy" by having them change their behavior in accordance with our "pet" N.T. laws? If we point out the "sinfulness" of a person, do we feel nice and comfortable in our flesh? What does it do to the other person? Does it cause them to cry out for Christ to become their Life? Or does it

make them cower in guilt and condemnation, then ask forgiveness so as to please the one who has "witnessed" to them?

Just before Jesus was taken up to the Father, He told his disciples what would be the result of their being filled with the Holy Spirit. He said, "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8 EMTV) With the exception of the EMTV and KJV, most other versions changed the phrase "witnesses unto me" to read "my witnesses." Is it any wonder we have the idea we are to "witness for" Him? The truth is that the Holy Spirit's presence will make us witnesses whose lives point **to** Christ. Oh, if only we could grasp what it means to be dead to the flesh so that He can have the pre-eminence! If only we could know the power of His Life, working through us, to draw others to Himself.

Circumcising the brethren

If we believe we must use the New Testament as "law" to "help" others be holy, we could not be more wrong. In fact, in Galatians 6:13, Paul the Apostle said, "*For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.*"

What are we getting at? For example, do we find ourselves falling into the habit of telling others they must do, or not do, according to our misconstrued ideas that the New Testament is full of "rules?" There is great need for every one of us to seek the face of God for revelation as to how He intends His Word to be received and used. We must avoid the temptation that is birthed in flesh to "counsel" others to "do, do, do, do, do!" As is obvious, such abominable behavior is based entirely in the "knowledge of good and evil"; it can produce only death to the hearers. Jesus is the only One who gives Life, and it can only come by His Spirit's work. As Paul said, "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision (keeping law) availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision (not keeping law), but a new creature.*" (Galatians 6:15)

Will we judge ourselves and surrender to the *Holy Spirit of Grace* so that we do not *deny the power*? Or will we have to go through a time of painful dealings to bring us to the place where we can be counted in that number that makes up the pure and spotless Bride of Christ? May we all come to the place where *absolute surrender* is the one thing we desire above all else. And may the cry of our heart be "More of you, Lord! Take me, use me, break me, mold me, purify me; for I long for your presence to saturate every part of my being. Forgive me for trying to do what only You can do."

One final sobering thought. With the definition of faith/belief being "reliance upon Christ for salvation" and "entrusting our spiritual well-being to Him," our dependence is on the Holy Spirit. This leaves us with a chilling definition for

unbelief - "reliance upon self and our knowledge of good and evil, and entrusting our spiritual well-being to works of the flesh." *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8b EMTV)*

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, stay sober, put your hope fully in the grace brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves after the former lusts, as you did in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all manner of life, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:13-16 EMTV)

God willing, soon we will be sharing some amazing testimonies of the power of God at work to changes lives.

Comments:

"I believe there is a problem with Christians having a 'Yo Yo' religion. They condemn people with their ideal of how a person should live, and when they are faced with the truth of their own sinfulness, they preach this rush to God to ask for forgiveness; and all of a sudden they are back on track. . . It seems to be that some people trust another 'spirit' whose power in their lives is dependent on **their** holiness, instead of our lives being dependent on the Holy Spirit and His power."
- Indiana, USA

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