

You Can't Change What You Don't Confront

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Scripture: Galatians 5:16-26 (CEV)

“¹⁶ If you are guided by the Spirit, you won't obey your selfish desires.

¹⁷ The Spirit and your desires are enemies of each other. They are always fighting each other and keeping you from doing what you feel you should.

¹⁸ But if you obey the Spirit, the Law of Moses has no control over you.

¹⁹ People's desires make them give in to immoral ways, filthy thoughts, and shameful deeds.

²⁰ They worship idols, practice witchcraft, hate others, and are hard to get along with. People become jealous, angry, and selfish. They not only argue and cause trouble, but they are

²¹ envious. They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well. I told you before, and I am telling you again: No one who does these things will share in the blessings of God's kingdom.

²² God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful,

²³ gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways.

²⁴ And because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires.

²⁵ God's Spirit has given us life, and so we should follow the Spirit.

²⁶ But don't be conceited or make others jealous by claiming to be better than they are.”

Introduction

The story goes that during the riots in Palestine in the middle thirties a village near Haifa was condemned to collective punishment by having its sheep and cattle sequestered by the Government.

The inhabitants however were permitted to redeem their possessions at a fixed price. Among them was an orphan shepherd boy, whose six or eight sheep and goats were all he had in the world for life and work.

Somehow, he obtained the money for their redemption. He went to the big enclosure where the animals were penned, offering his money to the sergeant in charge.

The sergeant told him he was welcome to his animals but ridiculed the idea that he could pick out his “little flock” from among the confiscated hundreds. The little shepherd thought differently because he knew better; and giving his own “call”, for he had his shepherd’s pipe with him, “his own” separated from the rest of the animals and trotted out after him.

Body

As we live this life, we face many challenges. We still sin. At the same time, as we continuously try to do things better and we grow tired. We find ourselves in a struggle that does not seem to let up. We find ourselves in need of a breakthrough – a victory that will bring some relief.

It might seem logical that victory would come as you fight it but fighting for victory – in your own power – is the surest way to experience defeat. The sheep did not fight for victory, nor did they confront their captor. The shepherd, however, confronted the sheep’s captor.

“The flesh” is the technique we use to try and meet our needs, independent of Jesus. To walk after the flesh simply means to live a lifestyle that does not rely on Christ as its source.

Have you spent some time reflecting over what is the source of your lifestyle? This is such an easy question to over-spiritualize, but the truth of the matter is simply that the fruit is connected to the root. This morning’s Scripture points out two lifestyles:

1. A life characterized by immorality, unclean thoughts, shameful deeds, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, selfishness and so forth.
2. A life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

One avoidable result of a flesh-orientated lifestyle is that your spiritual life will always be a type of up and down; feeling close and feeling far; feeling energized and feeling drained; swinging

between the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, you get the idea. A flesh orientated lifestyle is characterized firstly by inconsistency and secondly feelings instead of facts.

Let's expand briefly on that last statement. When our feelings are in charge, we aim for what feels good, possible hopping from an emotional high to another emotional high. But this "emotional high" style also can lead to you falling flat on your face because an emotional high cannot be upheld.

When the Holy Spirit brings something to mind that needs to change, it is anything but an emotional high. There is firstly a deep sense of conviction and secondly an overwhelming need for Jesus.

An emotional high after Sunday church is inadequate to sustain the journey of progressive sanctification and the demands of life.

Emotions are unreliable because they change in relation to a fact. Facts don't change.

With this in mind, if we don't properly understand how the flesh operates in our life, our whole perspective on walking in victory will be distorted because we will want to feel victorious, instead of knowing that the victory is secure.

I have, over the years, encountered people who feel far from God. When we start to explore that narrative, this distance is "felt," usually because of unresolved sin or a cooling down in their spiritual disciplines. Some said that God is close when He feels close.

The truth is that God is never closer to us or further from us at any point. We may feel far from God, but Jesus is always within us, having promised never to leave us.

Many Christians today are exhausted because they understand the Christian life to be primarily a life of service for God, which is not true. The Christian life is primarily a life of intimacy with God. Living or walking in the flesh interrupts this intimacy.

Therefore, a Christian who lives or walks according to the flesh will often find his spiritual experience to be high voltage some of the time and a drained battery at other times. However, a Christian doesn't experience victory over sins by keeping himself charged up for Jesus. Christ

Himself is our power over sin. We belong to Him; we have to focus on Him and we have to be found in Him.

A guaranteed way to be defeated by the flesh is to confront, in our own power, the sins that you want to avoid and, in this manner, try and gain victory over them. This is like going on a diet and focusing on the foods to avoid instead of focusing on the foods that will be beneficial.

An attitude will lead to sin if that attitude is not adjusted to God's truth. God's purpose is that the focus of our whole life is on Him. Our minds are to be continuously focused on Jesus. When our minds are fixed on Jesus, we will experience a quality of life characterized by the peace of God. *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Galatians 5:16).

The key to overcoming the flesh is walking in the Spirit. The heart of walking in the Spirit is allowing the Spirit of Christ to do the walking through us. It is the life of Christ within us that gives us victory. When we choose to rest in His life, we experience victory.

I mentioned last week that when Christians don't abide to abide in Jesus, they declare independence. This declaration will eventually give birth to specific sins, which are the fruit of abiding in self.

We can therefore take no credit when we triumph over the flesh since the victory has been given to us by God. We experience victory in the Christian life as we receive God's gift in faith.

It might seem logical that victory would come by a fight but fighting for victory is the surest way to experience defeat. God has determined to give victory to those who will receive it by faith in His Son.

Our efforts can not only never play any part in our victory over the power of sin, but they can and do effectively prevent such victory.

Because of an understanding of truth, I have learned to recognize that struggle as a red flag. God doesn't intend for us to struggle for victory. He expects us to be in Him.

Conclusion

Yes, you can technically confront something that the Holy Spirit brings to mind, but it does not

mean that you can change it or stand in victory over it. It's about how and in whose strength this confrontation happens.

The little boy's flock had no claim to victory. Their only claims were to listen for his call and then move toward him. You can't change what you refuse to confront is, upon reflection, a statement that bears truth and a warning.

It is indeed impossible to struggle and rest at the same time.

It is a truth that without confrontation, there is acceptance of matters.

It is a warning that confrontation in our own power will lead to failure.

Therefore, a power higher than our own is needed to bring about change.

Change indeed happens when we focus on Jesus, to whom the victory belongs.

It is true that as we rest in Him, we enjoy the victory of His life.