

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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YOUR CHOICE

THEREFORE DO NOT LET SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY ... BUT PRESENT YOURSELVES TO GOD AS THOSE ALIVE FROM THE DEAD, AND YOUR MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TO GOD (ROMANS 6:12-13).

SIN IS A TASKMASTER WHICH DEMANDS SERVICE FROM ITS SUBJECTS. YOU ARE DEAD TO SIN, BUT YOU STILL HAVE THE CAPACITY TO SERVE IT BY PUTTING YOUR BODY AT SIN'S DISPOSAL. IT'S UP TO YOU TO CHOOSE WHETHER YOU'RE GOING TO LET YOUR BODY BE USED FOR SIN OR FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. SATAN WHO IS AT THE ROOT OF ALL SIN, WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ANYONE WHO USES THEIR BODY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO COMMIT A SEXUAL SIN AND NOT USE YOUR BODY, AND SIN WILL REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY.

TO FURTHER ILLUSTRATE, SUPPOSE YOUR PASTOR ASKS TO USE YOUR CAR TO DELIVER FOOD ITEMS TO THE NEEDY, AND A PROSTITUTE ASKS TO USE IT TO HER JOINT. ITS YOUR CAR AND YOU CAN CHOOSE TO LEND IT HOWEVER YOU WANT, FOR GOOD OR FOR EVIL. WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE? THERE SHOULD BE NO QUESTION! YOUR BODY IS ALSO YOURS TO USE TO SERVE EITHER GOD OR SIN AND SATAN, BUT THE CHOICE IS UP TO YOU.

THAT'S WHY PAUL WROTE SO INSISTENTLY: "I URGE YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP" (ROMANS 12:1). BECAUSE OF CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER SIN, YOU ARE COMPLETELY FREE TO CHOOSE NOT TO GIVE YOURSELF TO OBEY SIN AS YOUR MASTER. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY NOT TO LET SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY.

DENYING SELF

IF ANYONE WISHES TO COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF (MATTHEW 16:24). A PRIMARY REASON WHY WE STRUGGLE TO FULFIL CHRIST'S GREAT COMMISSION IS BECAUSE WE ARE GUILTY OF A GREAT OMISSION: WE FAIL TO DENY OURSELVES. DENYING YOURSELF IS NOT THE SAME AS SELF-DENIAL.

STUDENTS, ATHLETES AND CULT MEMBERS PRACTICE SELF-DENIAL, RESTRICTING THEMSELVES FROM SUBSTANCES AND ACTIVITIES WHICH KEEP THEM FROM REACHING THEIR GOALS. BUT THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF SELF-DENIAL IS SELF-GLORIFICATION. THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF DENYING SELF IS TO GLORIFY GOD.

JESUS WAS TALKING ABOUT DENYING YOURSELF IN THE ESSENTIAL BATTLE OF LIFE: THE SCRAMBLE FOR THE THRONE, THE STRUGGLE OVER WHO IS GOING TO BE GOD. JESUS DOESN'T ENTER INTO THE BATTLE; HE'S ALREADY WON IT. HE OCCUPIES THE THRONE AND GRACIOUSLY OFFERS TO SHARE IT WITH US. BUT WE WANT TO BE KING IN OUR LIVES BY OURSELVES.

UNTIL WE DENY OURSELVES THAT WHICH WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE OURS - THE ROLE OF BEING GOD IN OUR LIVES - WE WILL NEVER BE AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES OR GOD, AND WE WILL NEVER BE FREE.

YOU WERE NOT DESIGNED TO FUNCTION INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD, NOR WAS YOUR SOUL DESIGNED TO FUNCTION AS MASTER. YOU WILL EITHER SERVE GOD AND HIS KINGDOM OR SATAN AND HIS KINGDOM. SELF-SEEKING, SELF SERVING, SELF-JUSTIFYING, SELF-GLORIFYING, SELF-CENTRED AND SELF-CONFIDENT LIVING IS IN ACTUALITY

LIVING AND SERVING THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL. ON THE OTHER HAND, DENYING YOURSELF IS NOT SELF-MORTIFICATION. GOD IS NOT TRYING TO ANNIHILATE YOU; HE IS TRYING TO RESTORE YOU. WHEN YOU DENY YOURSELF, YOU INVITE GOD TO TAKE THE THRONE OF YOUR LIFE, TO OCCUPY WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY HIS, SO THAT YOU MAY FUNCTION AS A PERSON WHO IS SPIRITUALLY ALIVE IN CHRIST. DENYING YOURSELF IS ESSENTIAL TO SPIRITUAL FREEDOM.

CREATING OUR OWN LIGHT

BEHOLD, ALL YOU WHO KINDLE A FIRE, WHO ENCIRCLE YOURSELVES WITH FIREBRANDS, WALK IN THE LIGHT OF YOUR FIRE AND AMONG THE BRANDS YOU HAVE SET ABLAZE. THIS YOU WILL HAVE FROM MY HAND; AND YOU WILL LIE DOWN IN TORMENT (IS. 50:11).

WHEN YOUR WAY SUDDENLY GETS DARK, DON'T LIGHT YOUR OWN FIRE. OUR NATURAL TENDENCY WHEN WE DON'T SEE LIFE GOD'S WAY IS TO DO IT OUR WAY. RESIST THE URGE TO CREATE YOUR OWN LIGHT. IN ISAIAH 50:11, GOD IS NOT TALKING ABOUT THE FIRE OF JUDGEMENT; HE 'S TALKING ABOUT FIRE THAT CREATES LIGHT. WHEN WE TRY TO FIND OUR WAY OUT OF THE DARKNESS BY OUR OWN DEVICES INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR GOD'S LIGHT, GOD WILL ALLOW IT, BUT MISERY WILL FOLLOW.

LET ME ILLUSTRATE. GOD CALLED ABRAHAM OUT OF HIS FATHER LAND INTO THE PROMISED LAND. IN GENESIS 12, A COVENANT WAS MADE IN WHICH GOD PROMISED ABRAHAM THAT HIS DESCENDANTS WOULD BE MORE NUMEROUS THAN THE SANDS OF THE SEA OR THE STARS IN THE SKY. ABRAHAM LIVED HIS LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THAT PROMISE, THEN GOD TURNED OUT THE LIGHT. SO MANY YEARS PASSED THAT HIS WIFE SARAH COULD NO LONGER BEAR A CHILD BY NATURAL MEANS. GOD'S GUIDANCE HAD BEEN SO CLEAR BEFORE, BUT NOW IT LOOKED LIKE ABRAHAM WOULD HAVE TO ASSIST GOD IN ITS FULFILMENT.

WHO COULD BLAME ABRAHAM FOR CREATING HIS OWN LIGHT? SARAH SUPPLIED THE MATCH BY OFFERING HER HANDMAIDEN TO ABRAHAM. OUT OF THAT UNION CAME THE ARAB NATION WHICH HAS BEEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE JEWISH NATION EVER SINCE. ABRAHAM CREATED HIS OWN LIGHT. GOD ALLOWED IT, AND MISERY FOLLOWED.

WE MAY NOT HAVE TO WAIT AS LONG AS ABRAHAM DID, BUT OUR DARKNESS MAY LAST FOR WEEKS, MONTHS, AND POSSIBLY FOR SOME EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE, EVEN YEARS. BUT GOD IS IN CONTROL AND HE KNOWS EXACTLY HOW TO HELP US HE CAN PULL US THROUGH.

WHEN YOUR FAITH IS STRETCHED TO ITS LIMIT AND YOU ARE ABOUT TO BREAK, HE WILL PULL YOU THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE AND YOU WILL NEVER GO BACK TO THE SHAPE YOU WERE IN BEFORE.

SECURITY IN ETERNITY

THE LORD IS MY ROCK AND MY FORTRESS AND MY DELIVERER, MY GOD, MY ROCK, IN WHOM I TAKE REFUGE; MY SHIELD AND THE HORN OF MY SALVATION, MY STRONGHOLD (PS. 18:2). THE KEY TO EXPERIENCING SECURITY IN YOUR LIFE IS TO DEPEND ON THINGS THAT ARE ETERNAL, NOT TEMPORAL. CHRISTIANS OFTEN FEEL INSECURE BECAUSE THEY ARE DEPENDING ON TEMPORAL THINGS THEY HAVE NO RIGHT OR ABILITY TO CONTROL.

FOR EXAMPLE, SOME PEOPLE RELY ON THEIR MONEY FOR MATERIAL SECURITY INSTEAD OF RELYING ON GOD'S PROMISE TO SUPPLY ALL OUR NEEDS. THE SAFEST PLACE TO KEEP MONEY A FEW YEARS AGO WAS A SAVINGS AND LOAN INSTITUTION. BUT MANY HAVE FAILED AND THE SECURITY PEOPLE HAD PLACED IN THEM WAS SHATTERED.

ONLY ETERNAL INVESTMENTS ARE SECURE. I BELIEVE GOD IS SHAKING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD. NATURAL DISASTERS ARE ON THE INCREASE, KINGDOMS ARE BEING TOPPLED, POLITICAL BOUNDARIES ARE BEING REDRAWN, AND ANARCHY REIGNS IN MANY POOR COUNTRIES. SCRIPTURE WARNS US THAT SUCH CONDITIONS WOULD PRECEDE THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST (MATT. 24).

THIS SHOULDN'T ALARM US; WE SHOULD BE EXCITED. CHRIST'S RETURN WILL BE THE DAY OF THE CHURCH FOR THOSE WHO HAVE STORED UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN (MATT 6:19-21). SECURITY ONLY COMES FROM RELATING TO THAT WHICH IS ANCHORED IN ETERNITY. JESUS SAID THAT WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE AND THAT NO ONE CAN SNATCH US OUT OF HIS HAND (JHN 10:27-29). PAUL DECLARED THAT NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST (ROM 8:35-39) AND THAT WE ARE SEALED IN HIM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (EPH 1:13-14). HOW MUCH MORE SECURE CAN YOU GET THAN THAT?

WHEN YOUR ULTIMATE TRUST IS IN TEMPORAL VALUES, POSITION AND RELATIONSHIPS, YOU ARE ALWAYS SUBJECT TO INSECURITY BECAUSE THESE THINGS ARE SUBJECT TO FAILURE AND CAN BE LOST. THE GREATEST SENSE OF SECURITY YOU CAN EXPERIENCE IS THE BY PRODUCT OF TAKING A FIRM GRIP ON VALUES AND RELATIONSHIPS WHICH WILL ENDURE AS LONG AS GOD HIMSELF.

FOLLOWING HIM

IF ANYONE WISHES TO COME AFTER ME, LET HIM... FOLLOW ME (MATT. 16:24). SEEKING TO OVERCOME SELF BY SELF-EFFORT IS A HOPELESS STRUGGLE. SELF WILL NEVER CAST OUT SELF, BECAUSE AN INDEPENDENT SELF MOTIVATED BY THE FLESH STILL WANTS TO BE GOD. WE MUST FOLLOW CHRIST BY BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT DOWN THE PATH OF DEATH TO SELF RULE. AS PAUL WROTE: "WE WHO LIVE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING DELIVERED OVER TO DEATH FOR JESUS' SAKE, THAT THE LIFE OF JESUS ALSO MAY BE MANIFESTED IN OUR MORTAL FLESH" (2 COR. 4:11).

THIS MAY SOUND LIKE A DISMAL PATH TO WALK, BUT I ASSURE YOU THAT IT IS NOT. IT IS A TREMENDOUS EXPERIENCE TO BE KNOWN BY THE SHEPHERD AND TO FOLLOW HIM AS OBEDIENT, DEPENDENT SHEEP (JHN 10:27). THE FACT THAT WE ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD, EVEN WHEN IT RESULTS IN THE DEATH TO SELF-RULE, IS OUR ASSURANCE OF SONSHIP (ROM 8:14). WE WERE NOT DESIGNED TO FUNCTION INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. ONLY WHEN WE ARE DEPENDENT ON HIM AND INTENT ON FOLLOWING CHRIST ARE WE COMPLETE AND FREE TO PROVE THAT THE WILL OF GOD IS GOOD, ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT ROM 12:2 SELF-RULE IS MOTIVATED BY SELF-INTEREST AND SUPPORTED ONLY BY SELF CENTRED RESOURCES. WHEN WE COME TO THE END OF OUR RESOURCES, WE DISCOVER GOD'S RESOURCES. GOD WILL LET US DO OUR THING AND PATIENTLY WAIT UNTIL SELF-INTEREST AND SELF-RULE LEAVE US SPIRITUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY BANKRUPT.

WE CAN TURN TO GOD ANYTIME WE WEARY OF TRYING TO RUN OUR OWN LIVES INDEPENDENTLY OF HIM. HE DOESN'T FORCE HIMSELF ON US; HE JUST SIMPLY SAYS, "IF ANYONE WISHES TO COME AFTER ME, LET HIM ...FOLLOW ME." ARE YOU WILLING TO FORSAKE SELF-RULE AND FOLLOW HIM?

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

LET EVERYONE BE QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO ANGER; FOR THE ANGER OF MAN DOES NOT ACHIEVE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (JAM 1:19-20). ANOTHER UNHEALTHY WAY TO RESPOND TO EMOTIONS IS TO THOUGHTLESSLY LET IT ALL HANG OUT, TO TELL ANYBODY AND EVERYBODY EXACTLY HOW YOU FEEL.

THE APOSTLE PETER IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF INDISCRIMINATE EXPRESSION. HE HAD NO PROBLEM TELLING ANYONE WHAT WAS ON HIS MIND OR HOW HE FELT. PETER'S IMPULSIVE NATURE GOT HIM INTO TROUBLE MORE THAN ONCE. IN ONE SETTING, HE WAS THE SPOKESPERSON FOR GOD, AND JESUS SAID TO HIM, "BLESSED ARE YOU SIMON BARJONA, BECAUSE FLESH AND BLOOD DID NOT REVEAL THIS TO YOU, BUT MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN" (MATT. 16:17). THEN MOMENTS LATER HE SPOKE FOR SATAN, AND JESUS HAD TO REBUKE HIM: "GET BEHIND ME, SATAN!" (VS 22-23). IT WAS PETER WHO MISSED THE POINT ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION BY SUGGESTING THAT THEY BUILD THREE TABERNACLES TO HONOUR MOSES, ELIJAH AND THE MASTER. AND IT WAS PETER WHO PROMISED TO FOLLOW JESUS ANYWHERE, EVEN TO THE DEATH, THE SWEARING ONLY HOURS LATER THAT HE NEVER KNEW HIM.

THE FACT THAT PETER BECAME A LEADER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS EVIDENCE OF THE POWERFUL TRANSFORMATION EFFECTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

INDISCRIMINATE EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONS MAY BE SOMEWHAT HEALTHY FOR YOU, BUT IT MAY BE UNHEALTHY FOR OTHERS. "I'M GLAD I GOT THAT OFF MY CHEST," YOU MAY SAY AFTER AN EMOTIONAL OUTBURST. BUT IN THE PROCESS YOU JUST DESTROYED YOUR WIFE, HUSBAND, CHILDREN OR FRIEND. PAUL ADMONISHED: "BE ANGRY, AND YET DO NOT SIN" (EPH. 4:26). IF YOU WISH TO BE ANGRY AND NOT SIN, THEN BE ANGRY THE WAY CHRIST WAS: BE ANGRY AT SIN. HE TURNED OVER THE TABLES, NOT THE MONEY CHANGERS.

SUCCESS IN GOD'S EYES

BE CAREFUL TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THE LAW WHICH MOSES MY SERVANT COMMANDED YOU... THEN YOU WILL HAVE SUCCESS" (JOS. 1:7-8). A HELPFUL PERSPECTIVE OF SUCCESS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS SEEN IN JOSHUA'S EXPERIENCE OF LEADING ISRAEL INTO THE PROMISED LAND.

GOD SAID TO HIM: "BE STRONG AND VERY COURAGEOUS; BE CAREFUL TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THE LAW WHICH MOSES MY SERVANT COMMANDED YOU; DO NOT TURN FROM IT TO THE RIGHT OR TO THE LEFT, SO THAT YOU MAY HAVE SUCCESS WHEREVER YOU GO. THIS BOOK OF THE LAW SHALL NOT DEPART FROM YOUR MOUTH, BUT YOU SHALL MEDITATE ON IT DAY AND NIGHT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE CAREFUL TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT IS WRITTEN IN IT; FOR THEN YOU WILL MAKE YOUR WAY PROSPEROUS, AND THEN YOU WILL HAVE GOOD SUCCESS" (JOS. 1:7-8).

WAS JOSHUA'S SUCCESS DEPENDENT ON OTHER PEOPLE OR CIRCUMSTANCES? ABSOLUTELY NOT. SUCCESS HINGED ENTIRELY ON HIS OBEDIENCE. IF JOSHUA BELIEVED WHAT GOD SAID AND DID WHAT GOD TOLD HIM TO DO, HE WOULD SUCCEED. SOUNDS SIMPLE ENOUGH, BUT GOD IMMEDIATELY PUT JOSHUA TO THE TEST BY GIVING HIM A RATHER UNUSUAL BATTLE PLAN FOR CONQUERING JERICHO. MARCHING AROUND THE CITY FOR SEVEN DAYS, THEN BLOWING A HORN, WASN'T EXACTLY AN APPROVED MILITARY TACTIC IN JOSHUA'S DAY! BUT JOSHUA'S SUCCESS WAS CONDITIONAL ON OBEYING GOD REGARDLESS OF HOW FOOLISH HIS PLAN SEEMED.

AS JOSHUA 6 RECORDS, JOSHUA'S SUCCESS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE BATTLE AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH OBEDIENCE. THAT SHOULD BE YOUR PATTERN TOO. ACCEPT GOD'S GOAL FOR YOUR LIFE AND FOLLOW IT OBEDIENTLY. DON'T TAKE THIS TRUTH LIGHTLY. YOU CAN BE SUCCESSFUL IN BUSINESS WITHOUT COMPROMISING GOD'S WILL. REMEMBER: YOU CAN BE A FAILURE IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD AND A SUCCESS IN THE EYES OF GOD - AND VICE VERSA.

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