

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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DON'T BELIEVE IT

DO NOT TURN TO MEDIUMS OR SPIRITISTS; DO NOT SEEK THEM OUT TO BE DEFILED BY THEM (LEV 19:31). WHERE DO MEDIUMS AND SPIRITISTS GET THEIR "AMAZING" INFORMATION AND INSIGHTS? MANY OF THEM ARE DEMONIC CHANNELERS, BUT MUCH OF WHAT IS CALLED "SPIRITISM" AND "PSYCHIC PHENOMENA" IS NO MORE THAN CLEVER ILLUSION. THESE SO-CALLED SPIRITISTS GIVE WHAT IS REFERRED TO AS "COLD READINGS." YOU GO TO THEM FOR ADVICE OR DIRECTION, AND THEY ASK YOU A FEW SIMPLE, LEADING QUESTIONS. BASED ON THE INFORMATION YOU GIVE, THEY MAKE GENERAL OBSERVATIONS WHICH ARE PROBABLY TRUE OF MOST PEOPLE IN YOUR SITUATION. BUT YOU'RE SO IMPRESSED WITH THE ACCURACY OF THEIR "REVELATIONS" THAT YOU START TIPPING THEM OFF TO ALL KINDS OF DETAILS WHICH THEY CAN FABRICATE INTO THEIR "READING". THIS IS NOT DEMONIC; IT'S JUST MENTAL AND VERBAL SLEIGHT-OF-HAND.

BUT THE MEDIUMS AND SPIRITISTS THAT GOD WARNED AGAINST IN LEVITICUS AND DEUTERONOMY WERE NOT PSYCHICS, BUT PEOPLE WHO POSSESSED AND PASSED ON KNOWLEDGE WHICH DIDN'T COME THROUGH NATURAL CHANNELS OF PERCEPTION. THESE PEOPLE HAVE OPENED THEMSELVES UP TO THE SPIRIT WORLD AND HAVE BECOME CHANNELS OF KNOWLEDGE FROM SATAN. THE PSYCHIC WITH HIS CLEVER READINGS IS ONLY INTERESTED IN BILKING YOU OF YOUR MONEY. BUT THE FALSE KNOWLEDGE AND DIRECTION WHICH COMES FROM SATAN THROUGH A MEDIUM IS INTENDED TO BILK YOU OF YOUR SPIRITUAL VITALITY AND FREEDOM.

THERE'S BIG MONEY IN PSYCHIC, AND A LOT OF MAGICIANS ARE RAKING IT IN. MANY PEOPLE CRAVE TO KNOW SOMETHING EXTRA ABOUT THEIR LIVES AND THEIR FUTURE, AND THEY WILL PAY HANDSOMELY IF THEY THINK YOU CAN GIVE THEM THE INSIDE INFORMATION THEY DESIRE. WHEN A PSYCHIC CLAIMS TO HAVE CONTACTED THE DEAD, DON'T BELIEVE IT. WHEN A PSYCHOLOGIST CLAIMS TO HAVE REGRESSED A CLIENT BACK TO A FORMER EXISTENCE THROUGH HYPNOSIS, DON'T BELIEVE IT. WHEN A NEW AGE MEDIUM PURPORTS TO CHANNEL A PERSON FROM THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT, REALISE THAT IT IS NOTHING MORE THAN A FAMILIAR SPIRIT OR THE FRAUDULENT WORK OF A PSYCHIC. JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.

THE ULTIMATE REALITY

HOPE IS NOT WISHFUL THINKING. HOPE IS THE PRESENT ASSURANCE OF SOME FUTURE GOOD: *"NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN" (HEB 11:1).* BIBLICAL FAITH IS NOT A PREFERENCE FOR WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE, BUT A CONVICTION THAT WHAT IS UNSEEN IS REAL. BIBLICAL FAITH ENABLES US TO SEE THE REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD WE PRESENTLY LIVE IN, WITH THE ASSURANCE OF HEAVEN. ONLY WITH THAT KIND OF FAITH CAN WE SAY WITH PAUL, *"FOR I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US" (ROM 8:18).* ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, THE INVISIBLE WORLD IS MORE REAL THAN THE VISIBLE WORLD (HEB 11:3). THE ULTIMATE REALITY IS SPIRITUAL, NOT PHYSICAL. GOD IS A SPIRIT. EVERY PHYSICAL THING WE SEE IS ONLY TEMPORAL AND PASSING AWAY (2 COR 4:18).

WHEN JESUS APPEARED TO THE FRIGHTENED BAND OF DISCIPLES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, HE SHOWED THEM BOTH HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE.

LATER THE DISCIPLES INFORMED THOMAS OF WHAT THEY HAD SEEN, BUT HE RESPONDED, *"UNLESS I SHALL SEE IN HIS HANDS THE IMPRINT OF THE NAILS, AND PUT MY FINGER INTO THE PLACE OF THE NAILS, AND PUT MY HAND INTO HIS SIDE, I WILL NOT BELIEVE" (JHN 20:25).* THOMAS WAS DETERMINED TO WALK BY SIGHT, NOT BY FAITH. THE ONLY THING THAT WAS REAL TO THOMAS WAS WHAT HE COULD SEE. EIGHT DAYS LATER JESUS APPEARED AGAIN AND SAID TO THOMAS, *"REACH HERE YOUR FINGER, AND SEE MY HANDS; AND REACH HERE YOUR HAND, AND PUT IT INTO MY SIDE; AND BE NOT UNBELIEVING, BUT BELIEVING" (JHN 20:27).* THOMAS RESPONDED, *"MY LORD AND MY GOD!" (V. 28).*

THEN JESUS BLESSED THOSE OF US WHO BELIEVE WITHOUT SEEING: *"BLESSED ARE THEY WHO DID NOT SEE, AND YET BELIEVED (V. 29).* THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH IS NOT THE TANGIBLE REALITY OF THIS PHYSICAL WORLD. THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH IS THE INVISIBLE GOD AND HIS REVEALED WORD.

FIVE HINDRANCES

ONE WHO LOOKS INTENTLY AT THE PERFECT LAW... NOT HAVING BECOME A FORGETFUL HEARER BUT AN EFFECTUAL DOER, THIS MAN SHALL BE BLESSED IN WHAT HE DOES (JAMES 1:25). WHILE GOD HAS GIVEN US AN INFALLIBLE GUIDE TO LIFE - HIS WORD - THE TRUTH HE WANTS US TO FOLLOW FOR OUR FREEDOM CAN BE OBSCURED BY OUR BIAS AND SELFISH INDULGENCE. IN THE 20TH CENTURY WESTERN CHURCH, I SEE AT LEAST FIVE MAJOR HINDRANCES WHICH AFFECT OUR UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF THE WORD OF GOD.

FIRST, THERE IS A TENDENCY TO MAKE DOCTRINE AN END IN ITSELF. CHRISTIAN MATURITY IS NOT UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE BIBLE BUT A CHARACTER. IF WHAT WE COME TO ACCEPT AS TRUTH DOESN'T AFFECT OUR LOVE FOR GOD AND MAN, SOMETHING IS RADICALLY WRONG (1 TIM 1:5). *"KNOWLEDGE MAKES ARROGANT, BUT LOVE EDIFIES" (1 COR. 8:1).*

SECOND, WE CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT GOD FROM SCRIPTURE AND NOT KNOW HIM AT ALL. BEFORE HIS CONVERSION, PAUL KNEW THE LAW, BUT HE DIDN'T RECOGNISE GOD IN CHRIST WHEN HE WAS HIM. WE ARE NOT ASKED TO FALL IN LOVE WITH DOCTRINE. WE ARE ASKED TO FALL IN LOVE WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THIRD, WE OFTEN ENCOURAGE MEMORISING SCRIPTURE INSTEAD OF THINKING SCRIPTURALLY. OUR MODEL SHOULD BE, *"THE WORD BECAME FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US" (JHN 1:14).* WE ARE TO INCARNATE THE WORD OF GOD. WE ARE TO HAVE OUR LIVES TRANSFORMED BY IT, AND OUR MINDS RENEWED BY IT.

FOURTH, WE OFTEN HEAR THE WORD AND THEN DON'T DO IT. THE WILL OF GOD IS THWARTED BY EDUCATING PEOPLE BEYOND THEIR OBEDIENCE. JESUS TAUGHT: *"IF YOU KNOW THESE THINGS, YOU ARE BLESSED IF YOU DO THEM" (JHN 13:17).*

FIFTH, LIKE THE PHARISEES, WE TEND TO NEGLECT THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD AND HOLD TO THE TRADITIONS OF MEN (MARK 7:8). I BELIEVE THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF AFFECTING OUR CHURCHES TODAY. MANY SEMINARY GRADUATES ARE CALLED AS "NEW WINE" (ZEALOUS TO SERVE GOD ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH OF HIS WORD) TO "OLD WINE-SKIN" CHURCHES (ROOTED IN THE TRADITIONS OF MEN), AND THE RESULTS ARE DISASTROUS FOR BOTH. MAY THE LORD RENEW US BY HIS WORD THAT WE MAY GROW IN OUR LOVE FOR HIM, NOT JUST THE TRUTH ABOUT HIM.

THE WAY OF ESCAPE

NO TEMPTATION HAS OVERTAKEN YOU BUT SUCH AS IS COMMON TO MAN; AND GOD IS FAITHFUL, WHO WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO BE TEMPTED BEYOND WHAT YOU ARE ABLE, BUT WITH THE TEMPTATION WILL PROVIDE THE WAY OF ESCAPE ALSO, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO ENDURE IT (1 COR 10:13).

EVERY TEMPTATION IS FIRST A THOUGHT INTRODUCED TO YOUR MIND BY YOUR OWN CARNALITY OR BY THE TEMPTER HIMSELF. IF YOU RUMINATE ON THAT THOUGHT AND CONSIDER IT AN OPTION, YOU WILL EVENTUALLY ACT ON IT, AND THAT'S SIN.

THE FIRST STEP FOR ESCAPING TEMPTATION IS TO APPREHEND EVERY THOUGHT AS SOON AS IT STEPS THROUGH THE DOORWAY OF YOUR MIND. ONCE YOU HAVE HALTED A PENETRATING THOUGHT, THE NEXT STEP IS TO EVALUATE IT ON THE BASIS OF PAUL'S EIGHTFOLD CRITERION FOR WHAT WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT IN PHIL 4:8. ASK YOURSELF, "DOES THIS THOUGHT LINE UP WITH GOD'S TRUTH? IS IT SUGGESTING THAT I DO SOMETHING HONOURABLE? RIGHT? PURE? IS THIS THOUGHT BECOMES ACTION, WILL THE OUTCOME BE LOVELY AND CONTRIBUTE TO EXCELLENCE IN MY LIFE? WILL OTHER BELIEVERS APPROVE OF MY ACTIONS? IS IT SOMETHING FOR WHICH I CAN PRAISE GOD?"

IF THE ANSWER TO ANY OF THOSE QUESTIONS IS NO, DISMISS THAT THOUGHT IMMEDIATELY. DON'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE TO DO WITH IT. IF IT KEEPS COMING BACK, KEEP SAYING NO. WHEN YOU LEARN TO RESPOND TO TEMPTING THOUGHTS BY STOPPING THEM AT THE DOOR OF YOUR MIND, EVALUATING THEM ON THE BASIS OF GOD'S WORD, AND DISMISSING THOSE WHICH FAIL THE TEST, YOU HAVE FOUND THE WAY OF ESCAPE THAT GOD'S WORD PROMISES.

IN CONTRAST, IF A THOUGHT ENTERS YOUR MIND AND IT PASSES THE PHIL 4:8 TEST OF TRUTH, HONOUR, RIGHTEOUSNESS, ETC., "LET YOUR MIND DWELL ON THESE THINGS" (V. 8) AND "PRACTICE THESE THINGS" (V. 9). "AND THE GOD OF PEACE SHALL BE WITH YOU" (V. 9), WHICH IS AN INFINITELY BETTER RESULT THAN THE PAIN AND TURMOIL WHICH FOLLOWS WHEN WE YIELD TO TEMPTING THOUGHTS AND BECOME INVOLVED IN SINFUL BEHAVIOUR.

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

IN HIM YOU HAVE BEEN MADE COMPLETE (COL 2:10). COLOSSIANS 2:6-10 REVEALS THREE LEVELS IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST. IF WE ARE GOING TO PRESENT EVERY BELIEVER COMPLETE IN CHRIST (1:28), OUR DISCIPLESHIP MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING ORDER.

LEVEL ONE ENSURES THAT OUR IDENTITY IS FIRMLY ROOTED IN HIM. THIS ENTAILS LEADING INDIVIDUALS TO CHRIST AND DIRECTING THEM TO THEIR SCRIPTURAL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION; GUIDING THEM TO A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND WHO THEY ARE IN CHRIST; HELPING THEM SEE THE WAYS THEY ARE STILL PLAYING GOD OR REBELLING AGAINST GOD'S AUTHORITY; BREAKING DOWN THEIR DEFENCES AGAINST REJECTION BY ACCEPTING AND AFFIRMING THEM.

LEVEL TWO DEALS WITH THE ISSUE OF MATURITY IN CHRIST, WHICH PAUL ALLUDED TO AS *"BEING BUILT UP IN HIM"* (V. 7). THE SECOND LEVEL OF DISCIPLESHIP IS TO ACCEPT GOD'S GOAL OF SANCTIFICATION AND GROW IN CHRISTLIKENESS. THIS ENTAILS HELPING PEOPLE LEARN TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT AND BY FAITH; HELPING THEM GET OFF THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER BY FOCUSING THEIR THOUGHTS ON GOD INSTEAD OF THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES; ENCOURAGING THEM TO DEVELOP SELF-CONTROL; CHALLENGING THEM TO RESOLVE PERSONAL PROBLEMS BY FORGIVING OTHERS AND SEEKING FORGIVENESS.

LEVEL THREE REFLECTS THE ISSUE OF OUR DAILY WALK IN CHRIST, WHICH IS POSSIBLE WHEN OUR IDENTITY AND MATURITY ARE IN CHRIST. THE THIRD LEVEL OF DISCIPLESHIP IS TO HELP BELIEVERS LIVE RESPONSIBLY IN CHRIST IN THEIR HOMES, ON THEIR JOBS, AND IN SOCIETY. THE EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN WALK INVOLVES THE PROPER EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, TALENTS, AND INTELLECT IN SERVING OTHERS AND BEING A POSITIVE WITNESS IN THE WORLD.

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THE EQUATION FOR WHOLENESS

THOSE WHO WANT TO GET RICH FALL INTO TEMPTATION AND A SNARE AND MANY FOOLISH AND HARMFUL DESIRES WHICH PLUNGE MEN INTO RUIN AND DESTRUCTION (1 TIMOTHY 6:9).

SOMEONE EXPRESSES A FALSE BELIEF IN SIMPLE EQUATIONS WE TEND TO ACCEPT. HE SAYS WE MISTAKENLY THINK THAT GOOD APPEARANCE PLUS THE ADMIRATION IT BRINGS EQUALS A WHOLE PERSON. OR WE FEEL THAT STAR PERFORMANCE PLUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS EQUALS A WHOLE PERSON. NOT SO. HE SAYS: TRY AS WE MIGHT BY OUR APPEARANCE, PERFORMANCE, OR SOCIAL STATUS TO FIND SELF-VERIFICATION FOR A SENSE OF BEING SOMEBODY, WE WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED.

WHATEVER PINNACLE OF SELF-IDENTITY WE ACHIEVE SOON CRUMBLES UNDER THE PRESSURE OF HOSTILE REJECTION OR CRITICISM, INTROSPECTION OR GUILT, FEAR OR ANXIETY. WE CANNOT DO ANYTHING TO QUALIFY FOR THE BY-PRODUCT OF BEING LOVED UNCONDITIONALLY AND VOLUNTARILY. IF THESE EQUATIONS COULD WORK FOR ANYONE, THEY WOULD HAVE WORKED FOR KING SOLOMON. HE WAS THE KING OF ISRAEL DURING THE GREATEST YEARS IN HER HISTORY. IF A MEANINGFUL LIFE IS THE RESULT OF APPEARANCE, ADMIRATION, PERFORMANCE, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, STATUS, OR RECOGNITION, SOLOMON WOULD HAVE BEEN THE MOST TOGETHER MAN WHO EVER LIVED. BUT GOD ALSO GAVE THE KING AN EXTRA DOSE OF WISDOM TO INTERPRET HIS ACHIEVEMENTS.

WHAT WAS HIS COMMENTARY ON IT ALL? "MEANINGLESS! MEANINGLESS!...UTTERLY MEANINGLESS! EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS (ECC. 1:2). TAKE THE ADVICE OF THE WISE KING: ALL THE STUFF AND STATUS YOU CAN ACQUIRE DON'T ADD UP TO PERSONAL WHOLENESS. MILLIONS OF PEOPLE CLIMB THOSE LADDERS TO SUCCESS, ONLY TO DISCOVER WHEN THEY REACH THE TOP THAT THEY ARE LEANING AGAINST THE WRONG WALL! THE ONLY IDENTITY EQUATION THAT WORKS IN GOD'S KINGDOM IS YOU PLUS CHRIST EQUALS WHOLENESS AND MEANING.

RELATIONSHIPS FIRST

OWE NOTHING TO ANYONE EXCEPT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER; FOR HE WHO LOVE HIS NEIGHBOUR HAS FULFILLED THE LAW (ROM. 13:8). MANY PEOPLE DEMONSTRATE THAT THEIR NEED TO WIN WHEN TRYING TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS WITH OTHERS IS GREATER THAN THEIR REGARD FOR RELATIONSHIPS. WHY IS WINNING SO IMPORTANT TO US? WHY MUST WE ALWAYS BE RIGHT? THE PERSON WHO IS DRIVEN TO WIN, TO BE RIGHT, OR TO BE FIRST IS INSECURE. INSECURE PEOPLE ARE DRIVEN TO PERFORM. SECURITY COMES FROM RELATIONSHIPS, NOT ACHIEVEMENTS. A SECURE PERSON IS A PERSON WHO IS COMFORTABLE WITH HIMSELF AND OTHERS. IT IS EASY TO COMMUNICATE WITH A SECURE PERSON, BUT YOU OFTEN END UP CLASHING WITH A DRIVEN PERSON.

WOULD YOU RATHER BE A LOVER OR AN ACHIEVER? WHICH WOULD YOU PREFER YOUR SPOUSE, CHILDREN, CO-WORKERS AND FRIENDS TO BE? RELATIONSHIPS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ACHIEVEMENTS TO GOD. JESUS DECLARED THAT THE TWO GREATEST COMMANDMENTS ARE TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE PEOPLE (MATT 22:36-40). THE PURPOSE OF THE WORD OF GOD IS TO GOVERN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD AND MAN. IF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN LIFE DON'T ENHANCE OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD, OUR SPOUSE AND CHILDREN, AND OTHERS, THEN WE ARE NOT FULFILLING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.

IS THERE EVER A TIME WHEN WE NEED TO ASSERT OURSELVES IN CONFLICTS? YES, WE NEED TO STAND OUR GROUND ON MORAL ISSUES. BUT WE NEVER HAVE THE RIGHT TO VIOLATE THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IN DOING SO. IF WHAT YOU DO CAN'T BE DONE IN LOVE AND SELF-CONTROL, THEN MAYBE IT'S BETTER LEFT UNDONE. AND REMEMBER: YOUR AUTHORITY DOES NOT INCREASE WITH THE VOLUME OF YOUR VOICE. WHEN YOU RESORT TO SHOUTING IN CONFLICT, YOU ARE REACTING IN THE FLESH. YOU HAVE LOST CONTROL OF THE ONLY PERSON YOU CAN CONTROL: YOURSELF. ANYONE WHO ACCOMPLISHES SOMETHING AT THE EXPENSE OF PEOPLE OR ELEVATES TASKS OVER RELATIONSHIPS WILL SOW THE SEEDS OF THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE AROUND THEM. GOVERNMENTS, INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS EXIST FOR THE CAUSE AND NEEDS OF PEOPLE. THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN, NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH. HOW EASY IT IS TO TURN OUR PRIORITIES UPSIDE DOWN.