

Melva's Corner



You Can Change!

August 6, 2007

Central Truth: The Holy Spirit supplies power for you to live as a spiritual giant.

I have found that most defeated, frustrated, fruitless believers want to change, but they do not know what to do. I have a message of hope and help for them and for you: You can change from living a defeated, fruitless life. You can experience the full and abundant life God has promised to all of His children through Jesus Christ.

As a Christian if you make a wrong turn and find yourself defeated and frustrated, you do not just need to be told you are traveling in the wrong direction, you need someone to help you get turned around. In this message, I want to show you how you can get turned around.

The Bible, God's Holy, inspired Word, provides this guidance. Paul wrote:

"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone." (II Timothy 3:16,17,TLB).

The Bible not only instructs you, but it can show where you have turned in the wrong direction, give you assistance in making your course correction, and then train you to continue in the right way.

To understand the problem of misguided, unfruitful Christians, it is important to know what the Word says about the problem. It reveals that there are three kinds of people in the world: the natural person, the spiritual man, and the worldly believer. Let me share briefly the characteristics of these types of people.

1. The Natural Person

Before you became a Christian, you were what the Scripture calls a "natural" person:

You were living under Satan's dominance, and your fleshly nature - directed by Satan - was "on the throne," controlling your life. Christ was outside of your life, knocking at the door, wanting to liberate you from Satan's dominance by bringing you His love, forgiveness, and eternal life.

The natural person considers things of the Spirit of God as foolishness. Paul writes:

"The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14, NKJ).

Relying entirely on your own resources, you were spiritually dead to God and separated from Him because of sin.

Then you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ:

2. The Spiritual Man

At your invitation, Christ entered your life and took the throne to guide you and strengthen you to live for Him. At that moment, His Holy Spirit indwelt you, gave you new birth, sealed you for heaven, and baptized you into the body of believers. With Christ (Spirit) on the throne, you are "filled" (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual man understands the things of God. The apostle Paul records:

"The spiritual man has insight into everything, and that bothers and baffles the man of the world, who can't understand him at all. How could he? For certainly he has never been one to know the Lord's thoughts, or to discuss them with him, or to move the hands of God by prayer. But, strange as it seems, we Christians actually do have within us a portion of the very thoughts and mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:15,16, TLB).

The act of staying "filled" with the Spirit is the act of deliberately keeping Christ on the throne of your life. He will

not demand control against your will. If, despite His guidance and warning, you wish to yield to the influence of your flesh and wrest control away from Him for a period of overt or covert sin, He will sorrowfully step down. When you are in this state of unconfessed sin, God's Word describes you as one who is "worldly" or "carnal".

3. The Worldly Christian

There is a vast difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. The Scripture clearly teaches in II Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Also, "Anyone who says he is a Christian should live as Christ did" (I John 2:6, TLB). But often, as Paul writes in I Corinthians 3, the worldly Christian acts like the non-believer, and it is very difficult to tell the difference between them.

The worldly Christian is one who has received Christ but who also has allowed his sinful nature to reclaim the throne through sin. God still has possession of this person, and Christ is still in his life, but the individual has fallen into sin in one or more areas of his life. Not yielded to God, the worldly believer is in a period of stunted spiritual growth because he is not confessing and repenting of his sins, and Satan has succeeded in influencing and controlling him through the flesh.

Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth:

"Dear brothers, I have been talking to you as though you were still just babies in the Christian life, who are not following the Lord, but your own desires; I cannot talk to you as I would to healthy Christians, who are filled with the Spirit. I have had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't digest anything stronger. And even now you still have to be fed on milk. For you are still only baby Christians, controlled by your own desires, not God's...In fact, you are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord at all" (I Corinthians 3:1-3, TLB).

The worldly or carnal Christian certainly experiences the conviction of the Holy Spirit and will not continue in his sins indefinitely; otherwise, he is possibly not a Christian at all. But defeated and fruitless, he depends on self-effort and energy to live the Christian life instead of drawing on the supernatural,

inexhaustible resources of the Holy Spirit. Grasping self-interest in one hand and groping for God's blessing with the other, this person fails again and again to live the Christian life in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit.

The state of carnality, or unconfessed sin, is a miserable existence. Yet, sadly, this is where millions of Christians rest today - back on the throne of their lives - and they often don't realize that they are in this fleshly category. One man told me he had heard his pastor talk about worldly Christians all of his life, but he always thought his pastor meant somebody else. It surprised and shocked him to discover that he was a worldly Christian.

Paul knew what it meant to be worldly. In Romans chapter seven he records:

"The law is good, then, and the trouble is not there but with me, because I am sold into slavery with Sin as my owner.

I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to - what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking. But I can't help myself, because I'm no longer doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things.

I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can't make myself do right. I want to but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't; and when I try not do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I am doing what I don't want to, it is plain where the trouble is; sin still has me in its evil grasp" (Romans 7:14-20, TLB).

Does this passage of Scripture describe your present relationship with God?

In Detroit, Michigan, an elderly couple was taken to the hospital, suffering from malnutrition and starvation. When police began to search through their rubbish-cluttered home, they discovered \$40,000 in cash hidden away among their belongings. They had long since forgotten that they possessed such wealth.

In a similar manner, the worldly Christian lives in spiritual poverty. Professing to believe in God, he acts as though God doesn't exist or is unwilling to help. He fails to understand the significance of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Christ not only paid the price for his sins, but actually broke the power of sin in his life.

Paul understood the anguish and frustration of attempting to live the Christian life in the energy of self-effort. He records:

"It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin.

So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in. Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature?" (Romans 7:21-24, TLB).

Have you ever asked, "Who will free me from my ugly self, my failures and defeats?" There is good news! Look at Paul's answer:

"Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free" (Romans 7:25, TLB).

A pastor walked over to talk to me after I had presented a message on how to experience God's love and forgiveness. He was filled with hatred and resentment toward the lay leaders of his previous church because he felt they had done him great harm and had even tried to destroy his ministry.

The pastor had now realized that in his attempts to get even he had turned into a mean, critical, worldly Christian. He had come to the point of either getting right with God or getting out of the pastorate. As he put it, "This cancerous worldliness is destroying my life and ministry."

As we prayed together to claim the love and forgiveness of God, his tears of repentance were followed by tears of joy. Several days later he went to visit the church leaders whom he

had hated before, and when he told them that he loved them and asked them to forgive him, the leaders responded with joy and Christian love. This dear pastor returned to his second church with a heart burning with love and zeal for our Lord.

A woman from another church came to see me one day, greatly distressed because her church was splitting.

"Half of our members are going to move out and start another church," she said.

This distressed me, too, because I cannot think of anything more tragic than for a body of Christians to be divided.

As we talked, the woman discovered and admitted that she was a worldly Christian. I explained to her how God had made provision for her to be a spiritual person. She did not need to continue to live as a worldly, carnal Christian. Finally, we prayed. She asked forgiveness for her sins and invited God to fill and control her life by the Holy Spirit. As we rejoiced together over what God had done, she said, "You know, there won't be any problems in my church now. You see, I'm the one who has been causing all the trouble."

Unfortunately, the acid of worldliness doesn't just burn into churches. It also dissolves marriages, homes, families, and jobs. You may have felt its affect in your life as relationships with loved ones have deteriorated and friends have become mere acquaintances.

You can discover the same freedom Paul found. And you can enjoy the victory he wrote about in Romans chapter 8:

"So there is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit - and this power is mine through Christ Jesus - has freed me from the vicious circle of sin and death.

We aren't saved from sin's grasp by knowing the commandments of God, because we can't and don't keep them, but God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours - except that ours are sinful - and destroyed sin's control over us by giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins. So now we can obey God's laws if we

follow after the Holy Spirit and no longer obey the old evil nature within us” (Romans 8:1-4, TLB).

The Holy Spirit supplies power for you to live as a spiritual person. For years I had sought God with all of my heart. I tried all kinds of self-imposed discipline, including days of fasting and prayer, begging God for His power. The more I tried, the more frustrated I became. Then one day, as I was studying this passage in the book of Romans, I read a verse that changed my perspective:

“The old sinful nature within us is against God. It never did obey God's laws and it never will” (Romans 8:7, TLB).

What a relief to discover that I could never be able to live the Christian life through my own efforts. I must trust Christ to live His resurrection life through me. He alone could empower me to live as I should. You see, the Christian life is a supernatural life and only Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can enable you to live it.

Self-imposed religious disciplines lead only to defeat and frustration. The Holy Spirit liberates you from the vicious power of sin and death. Only the power of the Holy Spirit gives victory!

By faith you can experience God's love and forgiveness and live as a spiritual person. Faith, not your own effort, pleases God.

You must place your faith, weak or strong, in an object worth trusting. The object of a Christian's faith is the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy, inspired Word. Only Jesus has the power to deliver you from a worldly life to a relationship of great joy and fruitful blessings.

You must place your faith in a trustworthy God and His Word. The better you get to know God, the more you will trust Him. And the more you trust Him, the more you will experience His selfless love and limitless power.

Scriptural References:

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realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone." (II Timothy 3:16,17,TLB).