

Get behind Me

Satan

Get behind Me satan

We face a constant struggle trying to live as Christians in this two faced world. The problem is the weaknesses of rebellious mankind in respect to the will of God. The '*man eats man*' way of the world can be hard to live with. We are under constant pressure to join in their way of life.

When we become Christians and commit ourselves to following Christ, we know we cannot go on living as the rest who reject God. But for many it only means tidying up our behaviour by getting rid of the obvious sinful weaknesses and come to church; as we begin to do Christian things, pleased we are not like the rest who deny Christ.

However Jesus requires total commitment. We know heaven calls but we still live in the world, so we have to face the need to choose where our attention is fixed, on the world or on heaven. Sometimes we don't realise there are many ideas and worldly justifications that we continue to hold onto because we haven't come to know the ways of God well enough.

In order to sort out the weeds from the flowers we should ask ourselves an important question. Are we focused on the way of the world and the thinking of men, or are we committed to seeking to live for God and His kingdom? Is God our first thought day and night, or is our energy and effort used to make our lives in the world more comfortable? We may claim to follow Christ, but would He say our lifestyle and ambitions agree with His?

If we lived in a country where a foreign power was in control, as was the case with the disciple Peter; or we live where a pagan religion is chosen by that power as the way to worship, and we were given the choice to join them and enjoy life or die by being crucified on a cross, would we choose a brutal and painful death, or cave in to the pressure of their world?

Peter's example of what not to do

'From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be

raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’ Matt 16:21-23

Peter didn't think Jesus should die on a cursed cross. He thought it impossible that his Lord would die like that; surely as the anointed of God, He couldn't be bought down by earthly men. However the Lord made it clear that Peter was thinking like a man of the world; for Jesus rebuked him by saying, “*get behind Me Satan.*” To think as the world thinks according to man's interests is to come under the influence of the ruler of the world, the prince of darkness, and as a result be an obstacle to the Lord in doing the will of God.

Jesus was saying to Peter that instead of being worldly minded he should have been looking to understand and live for the things of God. The things of God are concerned with the kingdom of God and God's rule and dominion over all things, things in heaven and things on

earth. Jesus had made it clear that His role as the anointed One in obedience to God was to die for the sins of men on the cursed cross.

Consequently, even now, as the followers of Christ we are to have His concerns for His kingdom if we are to walk with Him.

Where are our concerns?

Are our concerns invested with life in the world or for the kingdom of God? We need to consider the consequences if our minds are plagued by constant recurring worry and anxiety about earthly life. Instead of being concerned with what we will eat and drink, we need to acknowledge our God and Saviour has all authority in heaven and on earth, and join Him in concerns for the kingdom of God.

When Peter was with the Lord he was sure he was not weak like other men who lived for the world, so he pledged strongly that he would die with Christ if necessary rather than deny Him. (Matt 26:35) As we claim our relationship with Christ, where is our commitment when the pressure is on? Indeed, will we follow

through or will we fall apart like Peter even after his promise to be faithful?

When it came to the test, Peter denied Christ three times. (John 18:17-27) Peter was in fear of his life because he was under the influence of the world by being worldly minded, his concerns were for his own safety and he denied not only the kingdom of God but also Christ the King.

What does this have to do with us?

We are faced with the daily choices between remaining faithful to the kingdom of God, or the so called safety and comfort of the world. The kingdom of God requires daily self sacrifice (Rom 12:1) in deny ourselves and daily taking up our cross to follow Christ.

Luke 9:23-24

But for many the kingdom of God is the last thing on anyone's mind. In our daily battle with temptation, how often do you deny Christ by choosing the way of the world?

When Peter realised his own hypocrisy and treachery of denying Christ to save his own skin, he wept bitterly. Are we as quick as

Peter was to see our own hypocrisy and be broken hearted enough to weep bitterly?

The compassion and grace of Christ

Thankfully this failure is not the end of the story. The reality of Peter's broken heart and humility soon becomes evident while out fishing with his mates. The fishermen notice Jesus on the shore. Peter, stripped down to his pants while he rowed the fishing boat, put on his coat when he saw Jesus on the shore and instead of staying in the boat as they rowed to shore, he jumps into the water and swims to the Lord to get there faster.

Are we as eager to be reconciled to our Christ who we have denied by choosing the world?

On the beach Jesus had prepared a meal for those who have betrayed Him. In this betrayal, Peter was the example because all those fishermen were in the same boat of living for the world and denying their Lord.

Now, let us not forget that the one who has prepared the meal for those who denied Jesus is God.

Our God and saviour Jesus Christ was there on important business with a meal of reconciliation. He was there for what become known as the call to “*feed My sheep*”

Taking responsibility for feeding the children of God is indeed an important task for all believers, and especially for those called to be pastors and leaders.

However the Lord Jesus was interested in something much deeper than what we should do as disciples, He was interested in the heart of a man, which is important for reconciliation and the healing of souls.

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to

him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

John 21:15-17

On the surface we can see that Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him. "*do you love Me*"

Twice Peter says "*yes Lord; you know I love you*"

The last time Peter responded to Jesus' question he said "*Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.*"

When Peter said "*you know all things*" he was acknowledging there was something very important being considered here.

At the time of this meeting between the disciple and the Lord, the events of Christ' crucifixion and betrayal were burnt into the heart of Peter. He was very much aware of his weakness of faith and lack of loyalty to Christ. He was well aware of his weakness for worldly concerns. He now had no self confidence as he had before.

You might say Peter had a broken and contrite heart; exactly the place the Lord needed him to be if he was going to be of any help in the work of the kingdom of God.

To help us see what was really going on, we need to remember this gospel was written by John in the Greek of the day, and the English translation of this passage doesn't tell the full story of the heart of Christ touching the heart of Peter. The Greek words for love used here tell of mercy and compassion by our Lord who loves us more than His own life.

Consider a paraphrase of what really happened. When Jesus said to Peter, do you love Me? Peter understood the Lord to be saying, *do you love Me like I have loved you.* Here the word Jesus used for love is *agape*.

The word for love Peter used in responding was different. He was saying in effect '*you know I have brotherly affection for You.*' Peter used the word *phileo*, meaning love as a brother.

And again this question and answer reoccurs the same as at first. Jesus said to Peter, *do you*

love Me like I have loved you; again agape is used.

Because he knew what he was like after his denial of the Lord, Peter couldn't agree that he loved the way Christ demonstrated. Again Peter responds by saying you know *I have brotherly affection for You. phileo*

Then Jesus said the third time; *do you love Me like a brother, (phileo)* In this way Jesus responded to Peter's broken heart. He knew Peter had lost his self confidence. Therefore Jesus met Peter where he was. By doing this the Lord was showing mercy and compassion for the disciple He still loved unconditionally, (with *agape* love) and He was in a way saying, ok Peter let's begin here, I understand your concern.

And Peter recognising his Saviour's sovereignty and responds by saying "*you know all things.*" You know I am saying the love I have for you is the love I have for a brother because I can't trust myself to say I love you absolutely since I have just betrayed You three times.

In this way the Lord speaks to us

This encounter of the Lord with Peter is a message of encouragement and a challenge to Peter and us at the same time. First, when we realise we have not been true to our calling, and come to Christ with a humble and broken heart, the Lord will comfort and heal us. Second, being restored to fellowship with Christ means we can be the people He wants us to be and get on with doing what He has commanded.

In any case this passage cannot be used to justify unfaithfulness along the lines Peter showed before the Crucifixion. At the time of Christ's death the Spirit of God had not been given. However after Jesus had returned to the Father, the Spirit was given to His obedient disciples so they could be fearless witnesses to the Lord and saviour of the world.

If we want to see the difference between men given to worldly weakness with a mind set on the things of the world as Peter was in betrayal, and then a men living under the power of the Spirit of God which should be

our example, we go to the book of Acts and we see a transformed Peter.

'But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

Acts 2:14, 36

In the weakness of a humble heart we can see the power of God change a man from being a tool of Satan to be a champion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Acknowledging our weakness and surrendering to God means His power can work through us. We can indeed be the people of God who do the work of God. Natural man cannot please God because his mind is on things of the world with the ambitions and desires of men. Before the power of God comes to live in us we are a stumbling block to the Lord, to ourselves and to others.

If our thinking becomes like a natural man we should consider the words of Jesus to Peter.

“Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s. Matt 16: 23

The power to do only comes once we submit to the rule and dominion of God so we can have a change of mind by the power of God's Spirit.

Our natural way of thinking

At first Peter had a natural mindset in the ways of men, and we still have a problem with the natural mindset. Romans eight verse seven gives us a clear picture of the natural mind. *"The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so."* Rom 8:7

Before Peter was filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, he thought like a natural man according to the flesh of his human nature. He was filled with self confidence which faded away under pressure. After Pentecost he was able to have a change of mind by the power of the indwelling Spirit so he could set his mind on the things of God, and be a fearless

campaigner for His Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

After Pentecost Peter knew the difference between being earthly minded, and heavenly minded. *"Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."* Rom 8:5

We are responsible for the way we think

Our obligation is to disregard the demands of the flesh and the thinking of mere men, in other words, we must put off that which is familiar with earthly thinking which remains in us; *"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die."* Remember, Paul was writing these words to the Christians in the Church in Rome. He wasn't writing to the unsaved. His message was both a warning and an encouragement. *"But if by Spirit of God you are putting to death the deeds of the body, we will live."* Rom 8:13

Later in Romans chapter twelve we are told we need to take the responsibility for being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Rom 12:2

This renewal only takes place after we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

Rom 12:1

God our Father makes us responsible for getting involved in this change of mind very clear with these words "*Do not be conformed*" and "*be transformed*" both of these tasks are the same as having being given a command, do this.

The change of mind that we must work on is not going to happen automatically, we must be absolutely committed to pleasing God and growing in the knowledge of God. The half hearted person who wants to cruise along cannot please God.

We are reminded of our responsibility in Philippians chapter two. "*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear*

and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Phil 2:12-13

Just as in Peter, God is at work in us. The Spirit of God is God; He is working on behalf of our transformation so that we put on the life of Christ. *"For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son."*

Rom 8:29

With this in mind we must be warned, spiritual growth doesn't happen automatically, we are responsible for what we do, and we will be judged on what we have done. The change of mind God requires for our growth in Christ can only happen when we submit to the Spirit's authority and do as we are commanded. *"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."*

Rom 8:14

Evidence of conversion is being led by the Spirit. A failure to submit by approaching God with nothing so He can do everything in us means we are not going to be led. We are not going to be seen as children of light but of

darkness. We cannot approach God with our own agenda and our own understanding.

To fall back on the natural way of thinking is to deny our adoption as children of God. This is a deliberate denial of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross on our behalf. It means we remove ourselves from the power of the Spirit to keep us, and we make ourselves available to the prince of the world to become his means of working against God.

The rebuke to Peter is a reminder for us

Before Pentecost, Peter made himself a stumbling block for Christ; after Pentecost, Peter showed us how to live as a child in the Light of God, as a saint born of the Spirit of God.

Peter's rebuke from Jesus should confront us, and his good example of coming under the power of God shows us how we can live in fellowship with God by laying aside all our concerns for the world.

After Pentecost, Peter was empowered because he knew he had no power. Peter was able to be victorious because he surrendered

all to live for God. Peter was blessed with the love and power of God because he was committed to absolute obedience.

Like Peter we can have the power of God

With God's help Peter replaced the fear of men with fearless faith in Christ. He became a conqueror of evil because he relied on the power of the Spirit and not his self confidence. He was able to deny himself because he now relied on Christ who lived in him. This Peter, living as God requires of all His children is the example for us who wish to please God.

This power of God comes from His presence, He is with us continually. If we lack power to witness to Christ it isn't because God is on holiday. The truth is we will always lack power when we are worldly minded. We will lack power if we look at the waves instead of keeping our eyes on the Lord who created all things.

We will always lack power when we are disobedient. This is because the worldly minded and the disobedient heart cannot

posses the faith required to please God in all things. A lack of the power of the Spirit means the mindset of the natural man is still active and must be put to death. Col 3:5

We need the brokenness of Peter

If we please ourselves while we claim to take our salvation seriously, we should be weeping bitterly. The depth of our self deception is often revealed in the fact that we don't shed a single tear, at best we shrug the shoulder. Real endeavour to please God results in many tears when we see we have forsaken Him to satisfy the world and our flesh.

This lack of brokenness is called indifference. So we must remember Peter's words to the church. *"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first."* 2 Pet 2:20

The responsibility for working on our transformation is ours; we are commanded to carry out the life changing experience with

God's help. The Spirit of God empowers the process, but we are responsible to do the hard work of complying with the word of God.

The renewing our mind is ongoing

The command to be transformed means there are no days off, we are continually being transformed. The prince of darkness works everyday all day, seven days a week. The moment we take our eyes off the goal we need to achieve in Christ will be the moment we will think as the natural man, and then behave as if we are in opposition to God. We will not be led by the Spirit, but oppose the work of the Spirit.

Coasting along in our Christian life is not permissible if we really do want to please our God and Saviour. Coasting along will mean we are without power to will and to do what God is working in us. Taking time off is what the natural man desires; this is exactly what we must put to death by the power of the Spirit or we will be led astray, for we will not be looking to submit to the leading of the Spirit of God and come under His power.

If the Spirit is going to lead us into all truth, we have to believe all the scriptures to be the true word of God, so that no one can decide to interpret it according to the understanding of men.

We can live as Peter did before the Spirit of God was given and fail to witness to Christ our saviour by following Peter's example. Or we can live under the power of God so we can be holy and fearlessly carry out the command of Christ to make disciples, teaching them to obey all He has commanded.

The world looks to knowledge that fills the head only, this is the natural way of learning; this will not provide the transformed life of Christ. The heart of man must be transformed through self denial and absolute obedience to the word of God imparted by the Spirit in order to think correctly as God requires.

Holding anything back for ourselves from the naturally minded way of the past will mean we are not trusting in God to either provide what we think we want, or we are not trusting in God to raise us up to a new level of life so

that our separation from the world is complete and we live for the kingdom of God.

Either way, if we continue to walk in step with Satan when it pleases us we are in danger of hearing the Lord say: “*get behind Me Satan*” When we are being led by the Spirit we get on with following Christ and prove ourselves to be children of God.

All the while God's grace is there to cover our shortcomings when we are broken hearted.

We may feel like we are reluctant to say, “*Lord I love you as you love me*” but if we are sincerely repentant and broken hearted, we can know the Lord will encourage us to follow Him by pouring out His grace on us where we are, as far as we have come, and hear Him say. “*Feed My sheep*”

This is the blessings of God for those who are committed to seeking the things of God.

Abide in Christ

Living Water Resources

Come to the River

Contents compiled by

Robert C May

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cometotheriver@optusnet.com.au

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