

# **Certain Of What We Do Not See**

**God's Way To Spiritual Freedom**

*Mike and Sue Dowgiewicz*

**The Influence Of Your Sin Nature**

*"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*



**DVD Video Series**

**Freedom In Jesus Series  
(Part 1)**

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## Certain Of What You Do Not See, #8 The Influence Of Your Sin Nature

We've already recognized that the dark side of the unseen world is filled with demonic forces.

These servants of Satan assail followers of Jesus with schemes and strategies designed to destroy our relationship with our Lord and with one another.

As if that weren't enough, unclean spirits operate in conjunction with two other forces to hinder your relationships.

The Bible refers to these other two sources of temptation as "the world" and "the flesh". So these three areas — the world, the flesh, and the devil — try to thwart your ability to wholeheartedly follow Jesus and to experience the freedom He promises.

Think of the WORLD in terms of Mental Enticement. Words, images, and feelings intrude into your mind every day trying to seduce you away from obedient trust in our Lord Jesus.

The arena of our FLESH can be thought of in terms of Human Frailty. In other words, our flesh represents the weaknesses to which we're prone due to our sin nature.

If you resist the power and intervention our Lord offers you through His Holy Spirit, your sin nature will rebel against God's ways. When you satisfy the cravings of your flesh by disregarding the boundaries of God's Word, you're at odds with Him.

This struggle between your flesh and your spirit doesn't mean you've lost your

way on your life journey with Jesus!

It exposes the reality that you need diligent alertness to keep your heart right before Jesus, and cooperate with the Holy Spirit within you!

As an example for us in our daily determination to press on with clean hands and pure heart, the apostle Paul candidly reveals his own struggles.

"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the WILLING is present in me, but the DOING of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but SIN which dwells in me" (Romans 7:18-20).

As we've already discussed in previous segments of this series, the third area of spiritual assault besides the world, and our sin nature, is Satan's realm. The arena of direct demonic attack doesn't shut down just because you become a follower of Jesus. In fact, the onslaught intensifies.

It's crucial, if we want to have true fellowship with our heavenly Father, and with anyone else for that matter, that we personally experience victory in these arenas of the world's enticements, our fleshly tendencies, and the devil's schemes. Once we gain victory, we need to be able to hold onto it. And then, we need to minister the means of that victory to others.

This is our purpose in this *Freedom In Jesus* series. So we don't have any misunderstanding of our goal, let's define the nature of our spiritual victory.

In Jesus our Conquering Lord, you're fully able to walk in union with Him, experience our Lord in your daily life, and obey ONLY the voice of His Spirit within you. That's how you can live in union with Jesus in wholehearted love and trust.

If you want to CONTINUE to walk in this kind of victory, you need GOD'S perspective on the world, the flesh, and the devil as the Bible depicts them.

We want to alert you about these three areas, and how they cooperate together to take followers of Jesus captive and bring defeat into your life.

### **The Flesh, Our Sin Nature**

Before we study the allure of the world and why we're vulnerable to its seductive power, we need to understand our own human frailty.

When the Bible uses the word "flesh" in regard to humanity, it isn't describing our skin. The most significant meaning of the Greek word for flesh has to do with the corruptible condition of our carnal nature.

Our innate carnality reveals the part of us that's morally inadequate. We're prone, and sometimes even driven, to rebel against God's commands. Our perspective, understanding, and responses are hostile to His will and plan for our lives.

Man's sin nature is another of the INVISIBLE factors in the unseen world. It's not some place in your brain to which you can point and say, "There's my sin nature!" But we know from the Bible AND from human experience that there IS a propensity within us that draws us to sin.

God's Word makes clear that our sin nature is inherited from our first father, Adam.

"Just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to ALL men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

When you were conceived, you received your spirit from God, and your soul and body from your parents. Along with your soul — your mind, will, and emotions — came your sin nature.

Our sin nature operates by enticing our five senses to sin against God. James warns us of the deadly progression sin takes:

"Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:14,15).

(**Explore:** Newsletter: 2003-12 "Develop Christ-likeness—Destroy the Curse of Eve")

Let's use the deception of Eve in Genesis as an example of how our sin nature entices us to react against God.

Satan deceives Eve by intriguing her mind with arrogant lies and her eyes with greedy desire:

"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be LIKE God, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the tree was GOOD for food, and that it was a DELIGHT to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one WISE, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave

also to her husband with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:5,6).

Can you see how Eve's senses were enticed? The fruit was

- good for food,
- a delight to her eyes,
- desirable to make one wise.

These seem like very positive motivations that would compel ANY of us to grab the fruit. And I'm sure some of you may have thought, "Too bad that forbidden tree was so enticing. God should have made it UGLY."

But as with all of our Lord's commands, God had a wonderful reason for forbidding the couple to eat from that tree. Through their disobedience in willfully taking the fruit, they came to know the one thing our caring Lord didn't want them to know — EVIL. And, that knowledge of evil would bring death upon mankind. That's why God warned them, "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die."

I think you understand why their disobedience was so foul to our HOLY God. He created this man and woman so that He could enjoy intimate fellowship with them in the Garden. In His purity and holiness, our Father didn't WANT them to know evil.

But He also created them with the free will to choose for themselves whether to obey out of love, or to disobey out of rebellion. And, like Satan who deceived them, they chose rebellion.

Deceit and rebellion go hand-in-hand. For example, maybe Adam and Eve, like

so many Christians today, believe that they can sin because there "really are no consequences to their sins."

Perhaps in the back of their minds they were beguiled by the same lie that deceives so many today: that God is so kind, He'll overlook when I violate His commands.

Tragically, that illusion would be quickly dispelled for Adam and Eve! Not only did they get thrown out of the garden, death came to all mankind through their disobedience, and OUR SIN NATURE became the heritage we all receive at conception.

**(Explore: *God's Instruments For War: "Introduction"*)**

We can only imagine the discord that must have been a constant companion for Adam and Eve in their relationship after they were banished from the Garden.

Day by day they had to suffer the consequences of their decision to defy God's command and break intimacy with Him.

That GENERATIONAL aspect of our sin nature being passed along was tragically repeated in Adam and Eve's firstborn son, Cain. The sin nature he inherited from his parents fanned hatred and jealousy into flame against his righteous brother.

Out of the evil crouched in Cain's heart came the first murder. God even warned Cain he must RESIST the enticement to give way to evil, and overcome its sharp claws:

"...sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it".

Both our first parents and their first-born son reveal to us the motive of our own sin nature: To entice us into rebelling against God's commands. When we too give way to sin's enticement, fellowship with our Lord is broken as well.

The entire Bible demonstrates our innate frailty when faced with sin's bait. The Older Testament recounts in detail the sin nature even of those who've been chosen to be God's people.

Think about the paradox concerning the Day of Atonement. Even though our loving God accepted an animal sacrifice to pay the penalty of His people's sins each year, that didn't stop them from sinning. Rather than gratefully living with obedient trust in God, they grew even more detestable in following their sin nature. God finally had to drive them out of the land He'd promised them.

In essence, because of willfully giving in to their sin nature, the Israelites were banished just like Adam and Eve.

And, this unresolved slavery to sin continued right up to the coming of Jesus.

Paul sums up the battle we as followers of Jesus confront daily between our yearning to obey the Holy Spirit, and our propensity to give in to our inherited sin nature.

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:16,17).

Paul reminds us all of how we can have victory over the battle with our sin nature. "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Corinthians 15:57).

You may have memorized the commands of God backward and forward, but KNOWING is not obeying!

Our sin nature sees to it that in our own strength, we're POWERLESS to walk in a way that pleases our Lord. But our Father's not dismayed by our weakness. As with any parent who sees their child earnestly trying, they'll lovingly do all they can to help that child.

First, consider what great love our Father has shown us to deliver His own Son as a sin offering to reconcile us with His holy and righteous self!

"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was WEAKENED BY THE SINFUL NATURE, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a SIN OFFERING. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW might be fully met in us, who do not LIVE according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3,4).

So not only does our loving Father accept the penalty for our sin by accepting the sacrifice of His Son. He also places His Spirit in each person who trusts in Jesus. And, it's the Spirit who enables us to overcome our sin nature.

If you want greater insight into other factors that contribute to your victory, we encourage you to watch and discuss

our video series, *Jesus In Your Home*, especially the segments on the *Gospel of the Covenant*, and the working of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Severity of Sin**

It's heart-breaking that so many who call themselves "Christian" openly sin and never repent. Satan's deception has convinced them that there's no consequence to their sin, so there's no need to confess their sins and turn from them. (1 Timothy 4:1,2). Many preachers in Christendom falsely teach that God's forgiveness means that they don't HAVE to turn away from their sins and live God's way.

We want to encourage you to trust God's Word even if it means discarding man's deception! The Bible warns us for our GOOD that if we continue sinning and DON'T repent, we become more deeply entrapped in our sin.

Both Jesus and then Paul made sure there was no doubt about the reality of SINFUL ENSLAVEMENT when you choose to abide in defiance of God's commands:

"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34).

"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which LEADS to death, or to obedience, which LEADS to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16).

When children of God continue to give in to their sin nature, they become so RESPONSIVE to sin that the writer to the Hebrews warns,

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they FALL AWAY, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (Hebrews 6:4-6)

The Newer Testament writers all agree that people CAN choose to leave the path to the narrow gate. That's why they offer so many warnings against giving in to our sinful nature.

Listen to Peter's admonition as if he were speaking to YOU:

"...I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to ABSTAIN from sinful desires, which WAR against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

The coming of Jesus didn't end the battle that rages inside of each of us who follows Him.

Our Lord calls us to stay REPENTANT and confess our sins, and to keep pressing on through the skirmishes along the way until we see Jesus face to face.

His sacrifice on the cross paid the penalty we fully deserve for our sin. And, His resurrection and ascension made it possible for us to experience freedom and victory through His indwelling Spirit.

But just remember, if you're a follower of Jesus, realize there's a battle raging:

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that

nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” (Romans 8:5).

Don't be surprised or frustrated about the continuing battle going on inside you. You AREN'T a slave to sin any more if the Holy Spirit's within you, so you don't HAVE to give way to that old nature's call! But you must fight and resist. You don't HAVE to yield to sin's desires any longer!

Many of us DO get tired of fighting this battle! And many think that, because they're Christians, the battle should be less! That's a pleasant thought, but as we've shown, the Bible tells us otherwise.

Just so there won't be any doubt, Paul delineates indicators of the symptoms of our sinful nature:

“The ACTS of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like” (Galatians 5:19,20)

### **Our Personal Responsibilities In Light Of Our Sin Nature**

The Scripture writers understood that salvation was found at the END of our earthly pilgrimage when our name is proclaimed before the hosts of heaven.

That's why they so heartily encourage believers how important it is to RESIST their sinful nature, and yield to the Holy Spirit.

That's also why Paul speaks with such intensity to the followers of Jesus in Galatia:

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7,8).

Scriptural warnings are just as appropriate for us today who yearn for eternal life in Jesus and are determined to finish the race.

No one ever overcomes their sinful nature by their own strength.

When we understand the true Gospel as a pilgrimage that LEADS TO salvation, we become much more aware of how critically we need the indwelling Holy Spirit.

(**Explore:** Newsletter 2001/04 “The Awesome Preeminence of Jesus”)

HE'S the One Who enables us to resist and live in conformity to Jesus. Each day the indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to focus on Jesus, rather than on fear that we'll give way to our sin nature.

“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not THINK about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14).

So, what ARE our responsibilities to God in light of the reality of our sin nature?

First, we need to face the fact that our sin nature IS an active force that's working AGAINST our human frailty.

And second, we who follow Jesus ARE capable of sinning IF we give way to that sin nature.

And, finally we need to be honest with ourselves. Yes, our gracious Father has equipped us with spiritual weapons to prevail over sin. But the caveat is that we don't let ourselves be deceived into thinking that sin isn't all that big a deal to God.

But it is! Or why else would the Son of God become man and pay the penalty for our sins on the cross? Yes, the penalty has been paid, but you must recognize your sins, and confess them.

"If we claim to be WITHOUT sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have NOT sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8-10).

When we confess our sins to our Lord, we're agreeing with Him that we've violated God's commands. Repentance calls us to TURN AWAY from that sin, AND to turn toward God for the Holy Spirit to help us live HIS way.

Be careful if you're in a congregation where religious leaders are so bent on what's called "church growth" that they no longer confront people about sin.

The Bible declares that the unrepentant must be cast from our midst (Matthew 18:15-20). We're even to turn the unrepentant over to Satan for the destruction of their sin nature (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Let me ask you three questions:

- Are you currently fellowshipping with unrepentant people who are NOT in fellowship with our Father?

- Has anyone been removed from your faith community for sin they refused to repent of?

- How would the leadership of your faith community recognize that there are unrepentant people among you?

We want to encourage you to make sure you are not in fellowship based on sin. False teachers today, influenced by the spirit of lawlessness, have duped many into living under the control of their sin nature without fear of consequence.

### **Confronting The Spirit of Lawlessness: A Personal Testimony**

While I was counseling church leaders during our time at the retreat center, I watched with great sadness how lawlessness was gaining ground among so many clergy.

In 1985 I asked a leader in one of the major denominations, "Give me one word that describes your clergy." His immediate reply was "adultery." He told me that over 50% of the clergy in his denomination were involved in adultery.

Let me assure you, no adulterous person is going to uphold the Word of God in his preaching. Instead, he'll make himself entertaining, but never bring conviction on the listener. He'll look for worldly ways to make sure people keep attending. He wants people to feel just as comfortable in their sin as he is.

I had a firsthand encounter with a spirit of lawlessness that almost cost me my life. You might be appalled by the nature of what I'll be sharing. But it reveals the depth of depravity that the spirit of lawlessness can work in the lives of those who believe they're followers of Jesus.

One of the more popular clergymen in New England — I'll call him Bill — came to see me at the retreat center for a two-day personal retreat. I don't remember all that we talked about. But I do remember that after he left, the Holy Spirit revealed to me, "Bill has been lying to you the whole time he was here. You can't see him again unless he's with all his elders."

Months went by, and Bill would call now and then to tell me how he really wanted me to meet the leadership team at his church.

One night while I was asleep I felt a hand on my shoulder: "Wake up and turn on your computer. I want to dictate a letter to you." I knew it was the Lord speaking because of the experience I'd had years before when His Spirit had come into my stateroom on the ship.

The letter was to Bill. And the essence of the dictation was that Bill would die of cancer if he didn't repent. There was no mention of any specific sin, however.

I kept the letter for several days. I don't mind saying I was a little nervous about sending it to Bill. He was a very influential clergyman in our region. And later I found out that he belonged to a large group of clergy involved with what was called "the shepherding movement." I'd seen how some of the men in this group had destroyed the ministry of those who got on the wrong side of them.

One morning after holding onto the letter, the Lord told me to show the letter to my friend, "Ken", who pastored a church in the same town as Bill.

I took the letter to Ken, and after reading it he said, "I believe God wants me to sign this letter as well." I replied, "But there's no mention of any specific sin that he's committed. Ken answered, "I still believe God wants me to sign it."

Ken then took me to meet four other clergymen in the same town. They each read the letter, and each sensed the Holy Spirit's prompting to sign it. We mailed the letter to Bill, requesting a meeting with him and his elders.

The day after these men signed the letter, each one received a phone call from someone who was currently in their respective congregation, but who'd once been in Bill's. Each caller requested an immediate meeting with the pastor they'd contacted.

One man in Ken's congregation came to him and said, "I was Bill's treasurer for many years, and God has convicted me that I need to tell someone about the embezzlement he's been doing with the church funds."

The other four pastors all met with people who'd been privy to sinful situations while they'd been in Bill's congregation. It seemed that Bill had regularly set up small retreats for a few men at a time from the congregation. On these retreats, the men would sit nude in a hot tub with Bill's daughters, whom Bill then offered up for immoral behavior with them.

Each pastor had been contacted "out of the blue" by a former member of Bill's congregation, and the reports were increasingly vile!

Bill contacted us a day or two later and

we met with him and his elders. The five pastors each presented the accusations that had been revealed to them. Bill and the elders all agreed that what the men presented was true. Then Bill gave a reply that was right out of the mouth of the spirit of lawlessness: "What you've said is all true, but my conscience isn't convicting me that I've done anything wrong."

About a week later, Bill asked if we could meet with some of the clergy who were part of his shepherding movement leaders. I didn't know much about the whole movement.

A few days before the meeting, a major Christian magazine published an exposé on the lives some of these clergy had damaged through misuse of authority.

Back to Bill. We were scheduled to meet at a restaurant at 7AM in the town where both Bill and Ken pastored. I had to drive about an hour to get there. Just outside the town, a flatbed trailer truck carrying immense concrete blocks was entering the highway. As the truck rounded a curve, one of these huge blocks fell off the truck and hit my passenger side door as I swerved to avoid it!

I pulled off the highway to assess the damage. As I looked the door over, I heard a demonic voice sneer, "If you go to this meeting, you'll be dead by sunset." I remember answering, "Then I'll die completing God's will!"

I finally arrived at the restaurant. The pastors who'd signed the letter were seated on one side of a long table, and about 10 or 12 men from Bill's shepherding group were on the other.

One of Bill's friends began in anger, "Who are you to challenge a MAN OF GOD? Bill told us that you've been falsely accusing him." Now, Ken and I and the other 4 men had agreed that we wouldn't tell anyone else about the sins Bill and his elders had acknowledged. So our situation looked defenseless.

As I prayed, the Holy Spirit prompted, "Say to each man only what I tell you." The Holy Spirit began speaking through me to the first man on the left opposite me : "You have no right to be at this table. You've been committing adultery with your secretary." For one man after another on the other side of that table, the Holy Spirit revealed specific unconfessed sins.

When every one of those men had had a specific unconfessed sin revealed, they looked sheepishly at each other, got up and left the restaurant without a word.

A month later Bill came down with liver cancer. Ken went to see him shortly before Bill died, but there was no repentance. The spirit of lawlessness kept him deceived until the end.

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We've developed the *Jesus In Your Home* and *Freedom In Jesus* series so that your life will be available for our Father's purposes — to bear fruit that lasts, and to bring Him glory.

Knowing, and LIVING the truth as God wants it understood by you is your ONLY PATH to spiritual freedom.

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).