

Lifebyte 66

The Hebraic Restoration: *Our Father's Plan to Restore the Spiritual Power of the Early Church*

Lesson 1: How "Christendom" Forsook Spiritual Power (Part 1)



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Introduction to this Series

We’ve written often about the Hebraic foundations which prepared the earliest followers of Jesus to be *relationally intimate* and *spiritually powerful*. So why are we addressing this vital topic again? Because so much of this essential scriptural foundation has been lost during the intervening centuries, especially as “following Jesus” morphed into institutionalized religious practice.

At the time of Jesus’ first coming there were what we refer to as two “streams of response” within Judaism. The *Judaizing Stream* had added burdensome rules to God’s good and righteous Law, focusing on a multitude of very specific behaviors but neglecting love for God that would have poured out onto others.

On the other hand, even for centuries *before* the coming of Jesus, the *Hebraic Stream* of Judaism had sought to relate to God with the love-grounded obedient trust of their ancestor Abraham. Motivated by love that serves without regard for self-interest, those of this stream recognized *God’s grace* to them in both His acceptance of substitutionary sacrifice for sin as well as His daily blessings.

Hebraic Stream people responded to the Kingdom Gospel of the long-anticipated Messiah Jesus and became His devoted followers. Their understanding was opened that to be **“born again”** was a *spirit* matter of the highest importance — forsaking any reliance on religious form or any dependence on self-righteousness through good works. Through repentance and trust in Jesus as the One Who took the punishment they deserved, they could be reconciled with their Father, and *their spirit* would be seated with Messiah in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6).

Living in a love-based, covenant relationship of obedient trust in their Savior and Lord meant that no religious intermediaries were needed to access Father God’s heart!

These ones who devotedly followed their resurrected Lord knew from the Hebrew Scriptures that God is *Spirit*, and that through *their spirit* they could come before Him as they lived by His Truth (John 4:24).

They’d been steeped in biblical precedent of how God had called out and sustained and rescued their spiritual ancestors out of His everlasting love for them. Being **spiritually attuned** caused them to expect that this loving God would interact with them as well — intervening according to His will and giving them *spiritual* guidance and power so that they might fulfill His Kingdom purposes (John 14:26). They weren’t surprised when the miraculous occurred; Jesus had already modeled that for them. From their heavenly Father’s perspective, the miraculous work that only the indwelling Spirit could do was *normal* for His Kingdom laborers!

The Book of Acts is our Lord’s testimony to us of what *our* lives should look like if we truly follow Him in Spirit and in truth. He has *set apart for holiness* those He has called out from the world’s ways, values and goals. If we live attuned to His Spirit to please Him, then we will actively seek out those who also want to lift up Jesus as their Lord and King.

As instruments in His Spirit’s hands, we will experience as they did His divine guidance and intervention, and even the miraculous if it will bring praise to His Name! Have no doubt. The promises of Jesus are a certainty for those who trust Him for His power to be at work in and through them by the indwelling Spirit of truth: **“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”** (John 14:12).

A few examples from the Book of Acts reveal the **total availability** that our Father is looking for in your life as you follow Jesus. Not every example will be represented in your life, since the Spirit works differently in each

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Jesus-follower (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Romans 12:6). But as one who trusts His promise to *do greater things* through you by His Spirit, you should be experiencing and manifesting *some* of His power in your daily life. And remember, the desire to *live uprightly* was already in the hearts of His early followers to pave the way for the Spirit's infilling:

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4).

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (Acts 2:44,45).

“Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk’” (Acts 3:6).

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (Acts 4:31,32).

“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:6).

“Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God’” (Acts 10:4).

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. For they heard them speaking in other languages and praising God” (Acts 10:44,46).

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:6,7).

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent’ (Acts 18:9).

“His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him” (Acts 28:8).

This brief sampling of passages reveals a common theme: these early followers of Christ experienced both *spiritual guidance* and *empowerment*. Key to their experience was their realization that God honors both *individual* and *communal righteousness* as He bestows His Spirit. Living in a culture in which *family connectedness* was vital, these early followers were already accustomed to gathering in one another's homes. Thus, the frequent scriptural use of collective relational terms such as brother and sister reflect a sense of family *spiritual responsibility* for one another.

These Jesus-followers were familiar with holding each other accountable when someone chose to willfully sin. God viewed them *collectively* to see if they loved each other enough to confront, admonish and correct. That's why they took seriously the distinctions made particularly in the Psalms and Proverbs between the wise and the foolish, the upright and the wicked. Companions profoundly influence how you live (Proverbs 13:20), and wickedness closes off the response of a holy God to them and to you!

- *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16);*

- *“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12);*

- *“The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, You make the way of the righteous smooth” (Isaiah 26:7).*

- *“The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases Him” (Proverbs 15:8).*

You'll discover through this series of Lifebytes on regaining the spiritual power of the early Church that God's guidance and power are given to those who are in His Kingdom and are doing the part for which He has empowered them.

If the spiritual power promised by Jesus and revealed to His own in the Bible *isn't* part of your spiritual walk, perhaps you've been seduced into **religious passivity**. That's why we need to review the nature of this seduction. Knowing the *root causes* to deceiving influences that you may still embrace can help you live free and empowered to fulfill His purpose for you in our Lord's ever-expanding Kingdom.

When we came back from Israel in 1994 with the Hebraic foundations, studies showed that there were 24,000 competing “Christian” denominations in the world. A recent survey by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary reveals it has now risen to **38,000 distinct denominations!**

In this series of Lifebytes we'll discuss the cause of this enormous expansion. Certainly tied into it is this dire warning that has *today* marked all over it: *“For there will come a time when men will not bear with healthy teaching. But according to their own lusts, they will heap up to themselves teachers who tickle their ears”* (2 Timothy 4:3, literal translation). Anything or anyone who refuses to compromise God's Word and standards is termed “intolerant” and “hateful” — just as was foretold (John 15:19).

The discipline of prayerfully pursuing biblical truth on a daily basis to feed on what the Spirit is saying and how He wants to use each person has fallen into disregard. The spiritually lethargic would rather be spoon-fed entertaining stories and false creeds by professional teachers. By avoiding conviction by the Holy Spirit, they can suppress guilt and appease their sin nature.

The Hebraic Restoration is *not* an endeavor to add to the number of denominations in the world. Rather, our Father is *seeking an end* to this hostile division that separates His sheep — it's the *opposite* of the holy unity Jesus spoke of for His followers (John 17:21).

If you embrace the scriptural facets of the Hebraic Restoration which our Father commanded us to share, you're asking for a responsibility to Him that will require the Spirit of Jesus in you to empower you through His grace! These truths are a *way of life* as you fully realize that our Lord came to establish *His Kingdom* on earth, with His own as His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). He did *not* start a religious system. That's the bitter fruit of man's endeavor!

This Lifebyte series is intended to help you reflect on your own life and determine whether you are an active, empowered servant in His Kingdom — one who *hears* their Master's voice and *responds* from a loving heart. Or, you may discover that you're mired among the complacent, selfishly hiding out in any one of the 38,000 demonically-inspired divisions within contemporary Christendom.

Let's pause for a moment so that you can consider and discuss with your family and faith community these questions:

- **In what ways is the power of the Holy Spirit experienced in your life, your family life, your collective faith community life? If such working of the Spirit is infrequent or even absent, do you have any idea *why* the spiritual power that was experienced by the first followers of Jesus is not present in your midst?**
- **Would you describe your faith community more as a religious system of meetings and activities, or as Spirit-fortified family actively purposing to serve Kingdom interests? If you answered the former, why are YOU still in it?**
- **Are your home and faith community deeply committed to communal righteousness? Are you grieved when tolerated sin among your family and faith family brings down the Name of Jesus?**
- **Does your faith community fulfill the purposes for fellowship lived out by the first followers of Jesus who had the expansion of our Lord's**

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Kingdom as their goal? Discuss the following facets of *authentic fellowship* and contrast them with what you and your faith family consider to be “fellowship”:

1. Spurred them on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony (1 Corinthians 10:31).
2. Spurred their growth in Christ-likeness (see Philippians 2:12).
3. Spurred them toward repentance and the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
4. Spurred them to reveal Jesus to the lost in their daily lives (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25).

In the course of daily life, it's all too easy to forget the reality of unseen demonic forces insidiously at work around us. We were recently reawakened to spiritual warfare through a DVD, “*An Unconventional War*”, produced by the Sentinel Group <<http://www.sentinelgroup.org/dvds.asp>>. The video focuses on the spiritual power we followers of Christ have in the battle against demonic forces.

This factual account begins with a group of schoolgirls who had been kidnapped and savagely abused by Ugandan guerrilla forces. For years the army had been fighting these rebels with no success.

Following the kidnapping, certain followers of Christ began to realize through prayer that they were fighting against demonic forces rather than human enemies. At one point the leader of the guerrilla forces even admitted that his actions were directed by eight demons who lived in him! Many who trusted Jesus began to pray against the demons, even going to the guerrilla leader's high places of demonic worship to weaken and overcome that principality. The result? The army began to experience success against the guerrillas.

When the President of Uganda understood the reality of the demonic forces he was up against, he asked some of the followers of Jesus to accompany his soldiers to the battlefield. Success after success occurred, and multitudes of guerrillas either surrendered or were driven out of the country. The girls were finally released, and the followers of Christ gained a valuable lesson in fighting the driving force behind atrocity. The power of God is released in the unseen realm when His people call out to Him and take action against their demonic enemy.

This DVD was a vivid reminder to us, and a lesson that we found would soon be hitting close to home. This past summer Mike began to suffer from intense headaches for which he could find no relief. Then came unrelenting intestinal bleeding for over a month. As we look back, we can see that these ailments started shortly after two events occurred: We began work on a new project, “*Parables For Today*”, and requests came in for our materials from several countries in Africa, and from Pakistan and India.

Not only were Mike's ailments devastatingly painful, they incapacitated him. Multiple visits to the Denver VA Hospital resulted in numerous medical tests, all inconclusive as to the cause. It was then that the Holy Spirit impressed on us to solicit prayer from all who were on our e-mail list. Within days of the request, Mike's bleeding stopped! His nearly-daily headaches diminished greatly. And, emails from around the world arrived with prophetic words and revelations disclosing that Mike's suffering was a result of *demonic attacks*.

Mike's sister reminded him that we'd been invading “enemy territory”: “You've been a little naive in forgetting that when you send material to people around the world, Satan reads return addresses!” Yes, we had been naive!

These events have reminded us how much we need the spiritual power our Lord has promised His own — powerful weapons of warfare that can often get overlooked in the course of busy lives. Just as we needed to be reminded, we want to use this series of Lifebytes to encourage and exhort you:

1. To call to your attention the spiritual forces in the heavenlies that oppose you (Ephesians 6:12);
2. To review with you the spiritual power available to our Father’s children through our Lord Jesus (Ephesians 3:20).

There are two questions about which you need to come to a conclusion for your own life in the Spirit.

1. Jesus promises that His own will do greater things than He did (John 14:12). Are you willing to appropriate, for His purpose and glory, the spiritual power and authority He promises to those who would fulfill their part in His Kingdom?
2. Are you willing to do your part in the spiritual battle to share the Hebraic foundations with others even as His Spirit helps you incorporate these into your life?

The strength of the Hebraic Restoration is found as followers of Jesus trust in His indwelling Spirit for guidance and the spiritual power needed to advance His Kingdom.

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you’” (Genesis 12:1).

Since our Father is revealing what He calls **“The Hebraic Restoration”**, we need some insight for our own lives that we can glean from our spiritual father, the first Hebrew, Abraham (Romans 4:16). The patriarch’s trust-grounded obedience was reflected in

not only his willingness to leave all that was familiar in order to obey God. He was even prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac at God’s command! It’s *that* obedient trust that was credited to him by God as *righteous* — and that’s the foundational life response for all who follow their Righteous King, Jesus. Therefore, **obedient trust** must become the hallmark of our lives, a willingness to *go anywhere* and *do anything* that His Spirit impresses on us and empowers us to do.

Abraham willingly obeyed because he *trusted* God. Ready willingness to obey illustrates the intensity of your trust in God even *before* He tells you to do anything!

- **Does ready willingness to obey God describe you? Ask those close to you in the faith to give you some feedback.**
- **Cite an example of when you knew God was calling you to do something you were reluctant to do. Did you overcome your initial heart disobedience? How?**

A ready willingness to obey our Lord authenticates being born again in His Spirit.

For at least 200 years before the coming of Jesus, the rabbis of the Hebraic Stream of Judaism had been teaching that a person needed to experience a spiritual rebirth. The Spirit of God had inspired them to teach that being “born from above” was a response to the Father’s invitation to *love Him and to obey Him*. This was a love from the whole heart, soul and strength that was evidenced by obedience to His commands (Deuteronomy 6:5; 11:1).

Conversion equaled rebirth, that is, being **“born again”** — moving from reliance on outward religious forms to an internal, intimate relationship with God. When you are born again, you have responded to God’s gracious invitation by putting your full trust and reliance in the Lord Jesus.

The Hebrew word for "faith", *emunah*, was understood to comprise far more than an intellectual belief. Biblical faith displays a profound trust in God. Trust is an emotional response from your heart that transforms your goals and desires through the Spirit's work in you. The call for such a dramatic change in nature is captured by Jesus in the parable of patching unshrunk cloth and the need for new wineskins (Matthew 9:16,17).

When you're born again, the Father and Jesus send the Holy Spirit to indwell you and counsel you so that you can perceive and live from God's perspective (John 15:26). Jesus-followers may forget this vital truth, so Paul firmly reminds us, ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"*** (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The presence of the Spirit of God in you is the sign that you now live in Covenant union with your Father and His Son, Jesus. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit you have unlimited access to spiritual guidance and empowerment — ***if you turn in obedient trust to the Spirit in you through your spirit.***

Even though the Spirit of God didn't indwell the patriarch, the obedient trust of Abraham epitomizes a way of life for us who *are* filled with that Spirit. That kind of trust translates into a ready willingness to obey God out of *love for Him.*

Again, when you have repented of your sin and turned to Father God for His forgiveness through the blood of Jesus on your behalf, you've entered into *Covenant union* with the Father and received the Holy Spirit as a seal of that relationship (Ephesians 1:13). At that time you also become a spiritual child of Abraham, a sojourner on earth able to be directed as the Lord wills:

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

For you to fully grasp that privilege and responsibility of spiritual rebirth, you need the heart willingness of Abraham to obey God no matter what it costs. It is this willingness to do the will of your beloved Father that truly identifies a follower of Jesus (Luke 8:21). That trust personifies the confidence to be as obediently pliant in the Spirit as is the wind in God's hand: *"You can't tell where the person comes from or where they're going."*

If you're entered into covenant union with our Father and haven't been deceived by man-made creeds and religious systems, you understand that you've become a bond-servant of the King in the **Kingdom of God.** You haven't been called to be an enrolled member of some "church" religious system that mirrors the worldly ways and standards of men — ways that are demonically orchestrated by the "god of this world", Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The Kingdom way of life has no parallel in worldly systems disguised as religious bastions. Rather, we are called to identify with the One Who *calls and separates us to be holy* so that we might press on for His Kingdom purposes. This call to separation from worldly values in order to find the "city whose builder is God" brought commendation to our spiritual father, Abraham.

And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come (Hebrews 13:12-14; see also 11:8-10).

You may have been entangled in your past by one or more of the 38,000 "Christian" religious denominations or sects. Those tentacles of institutional thinking may still be influencing your spiritual life. You may need to take time to retrain your understanding to become a sojourner on earth like

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your father, Abraham. This world *isn't* your ultimate focus if you're heeding the Spirit. As with the apostle Paul, the eternal life toward which you're pressing onward is your goal (Philippians 3:14)!

As a child of the King, you have privileged Kingdom responsibilities that He has empowered you by His Spirit to fulfill with a willing heart. *Out of the heart* come the words that bless or the words that curse; the deeds that bring God praise or the deeds that bring down His name. The grace of God at work in you through His Spirit impels you to *fulfill His will*.

But if you're giving way to the demonically-inspired religious system of which you were once part, you're compromising purity of love for Him as well as unsullied obedience to His commands. Religious systems have *nothing in common* with the Kingdom of God, absolutely NOTHING in common.

Among our goals in these Lifebytes on spiritual power is to help you see the difference between Kingdom living and worldly pursuit. We want to help you, *if you truly want to identify yourself as a follower of Jesus*, to adopt a Spirit-empowered Kingdom lifestyle. Jesus reinforced the importance of Kingdom living to the extent that in the forty days he remained on earth after His resurrection, “[He] spoke about the **Kingdom of God**” (Acts 1:3). From the beginning of His ministry on earth (Mark 1:15) up until His ascension into heaven, our Lord made known to His followers the *Kingdom*.

The ultimate goal of a follower of our Lord is to be welcomed into His eternal Kingdom. Enroute to our heavenly Kingdom He calls us to be actively involved in extending His earthly Kingdom. As a representative and spiritual agent of King Jesus, we're commanded and empowered to do this: “Going [in the sense of as you go

through life] make disciples...” (Matthew 28:19,20) — wherever, whenever. Nothing less is acceptable to our King as we walk in obedient, love-impelled trust. That responsive love is an *action*, a life response that identifies His sheep as those He will welcome into His eternal home (Matthew 25:14-40).

Lesson 1: How “Christendom” Forsook Spiritual Power

“They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him”

(2 Peter 2:19).

Let's explore the manner in which the call to follow in the steps of Jesus devolved into an institutional form of religion. This mutation was not accidental! The *institution* of Christendom was intentionally seduced by Satan into a man-driven power grid, a man-centered system rent by warring rifts and divisions attested to by the previously noted 38,000 competing denominations.

The verse above and other passages from the apostle warn of false teachers with their destructive heresies and ways in which the *way of truth will be blasphemed* (2 Peter 2:1-3). Peter warns that there will be teachers within Christendom who promise people freedom — a so-called freedom which gratifies the inner lusts of the sin nature and discounts any sense of holy obedience. Grievously, these teachers of lawlessness are slaves themselves to *depravity, a total yieldedness to the sin nature*.

Several causes bring about depravity, which begins in the mind and is enacted through sinful deeds (see Romans 1:28,29). Let's see if you can judge if *you've* been seduced or influenced by “teachers of depravity”.

One sign of a depraved teacher is a **“philosophical approach to truth.”** We’ll cover this more extensively in our next Lifebyte, but we want to introduce this evil influence to you now. If the possibility of being tempted away from the truth weren’t real, Paul would not have issued this strict warning to all who love Lord Jesus:

*See to it that no one takes you captive through **hollow and deceptive philosophy**, which depends on **human tradition** and the **basic principles of this world** rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8,NIV).*

The apostle repeatedly cautions against a very real spiritual danger — the *“basic principles of this world”* (Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:20). The root of these principles that so oppose Kingdom living is *“hollow and deceptive philosophy”* which robs you of the truth. Behind worldly philosophy and the empty deceit of man-made tradition is Satan himself, driven by his desire to conquer those who would be true to Jesus (Revelation 13:7). His tactic? To seduce them into embracing lies in their faith practices so that they produce no lasting fruit in the Kingdom of God (2 Corinthians 11:3; 2 Timothy 2:26). Fruitless branches and fruitless plants — neither evidences *life* (Matthew 13:22; John 15:2).

To truly understand the nature of *philosophy that so deceives*, we need to define the term itself. In general, philosophy is the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence. You might admit, “That sounds okay. How else can we learn about the world around us?”

BUT, can you describe the key point that’s missing in the definition of philosophy? What is missing is God. Do you see, philosophy, as with humanism which is the driving force behind public education and much of “Christian” teaching today, emphasizes *man* rather than God at the center of all things. Philosophy is *man’s evaluation* of the world

around him. Neither God nor the eternal veracity of His Word are at the core of philosophical motivation.

There are serious and subtly hidden consequences whenever you leave God out of your pursuit of knowledge and understanding. The Bible proclaims unabashedly, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). If He created all that there is, can we leave Him out when we try to understand how everything came to be? Just how much do you have to *counter* in what you so often hear and in what your children are being taught?

God’s way to understand and gain wisdom is found in Proverbs 9:10: *“The **fear of the LORD** is the beginning of wisdom, and **knowledge of the Holy One** is understanding.”* First, *knowing God* is not the same as *knowing about Him*. To truly *know Him* as the awesome and merciful God that He is is based on your experience as you live in Covenant union with Him through His Spirit. This intimate knowing comes as you respond to Him through His Word that’s made alive by His Spirit at work in you.

Such relational knowing is not the same as *knowing about God* through intellectual study of Him as though He were some academic subject. While we are commanded to *love God* using our minds as well as our other facets (Luke 10:27), we’re not told to just consider concepts about Him.

True wisdom perceives everything around us from God’s vantage point. We are able to perceive from His perspective as His Spirit guides our spirit — not based on analysis that conforms to the pattern of this world, but on the ongoing counsel and power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom and Truth, as He proves God’s perfect good will (Romans 12:2).

Philosophy operates as a function of your soul, that is, it impacts your mind, will

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and emotions. Truth, on the other hand, comes through the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). This is why Paul makes clear the problem we followers of Christ have with trying to be understood spiritually by those who rely on philosophy, which proceeds from humanity's limited perspective:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

But the man without the Spirit [the natural man] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

Since “*philosophy and empty deceit*” lack God as the source of understanding the world around us, they can accurately be described as “*anti-God*”, unattuned to God's perspective and opposed to His ways. But that's not the end of the issue. As people who follow Jesus as Lord of our lives and our King, we need to ask ourselves, ***Who would gain the most through people relying on philosophy?***

Satan himself is the power behind mind-exalting philosophy which rationalizes thoughts of mankind and denigrates the only true wisdom found in God. The deceiver of mankind on earth, (his domain when he was cast from heaven, Revelation 12:7-9), the devil is the power behind all philosophical approaches to understanding the world around us. Philosophy not only functions as an anti-God instrument in Satan's hands, it is anti-*Christ* as our Lord seeks to extend His Kingdom on earth through His followers.

The division of Christianity into so many competing systems has come about

mainly through the philosophical approach to try to establish spiritual truth: they don't mix! This methodology that so heavily influenced ecclesiastical leaders beginning in the second and third centuries emanated from demonically-inspired Hellenists, who exalted the mind.

Over the course of centuries, Church Councils embraced philosophical analysis and produced doctrinal creeds and religious practices that were mandatory for all within their religious spheres. Divergent theories of belief and practice have been the main means Satan has used to divide Christendom and turn the religious structures against one another.

The devil continues his strategy of power-brokering, manipulating a host of self-serving clergy within religious systems to perpetuate hollow and deceptive philosophy among the flocks. Accommodating the sin nature of people, their teaching is depraved — man-centered and compromised — avoiding all sense of the guilt and godly sorrow that would lead to repentance.

You may wonder, “Through all these centuries, how could well-meaning, seemingly pious men let themselves be used by Satan?” First, remember that they were human beings filled with the same frailties we all have. Powerful evil influences always hinder people from completely building their faith practices on the Word of God. Specifically, these influences are **their own sin nature, demonic strongholds**, and the historical **unconfronted influence of demonic Hellenism and Romanism on Christendom**.

The remainder of this Lifebyte explores the influence of the sin nature and of demonic strongholds in the lives of those who are

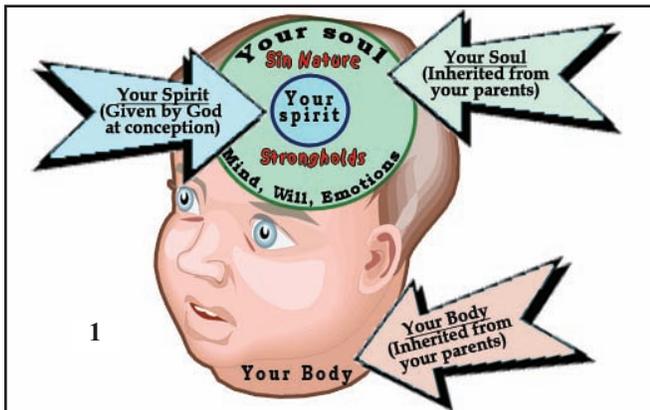
“As they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power. Turn away from these people!” (2 Timothy 3:5,CJB)

being held captive by darkness. We believe that these factors played a key part among the religious leaders who split Christendom into the multiplied thousands of denominations today. And, the prevailing sin nature as well as undemolished strongholds continue to operate among depraved religious teachers today who fail to help people live repentantly and free from demonic influence.

Again, in our next Lifebyte we will further discuss the hollowness and deceptiveness of philosophy as we explore the unconfessed influence of demonic Hellenism and Romanism on Christendom.

The Depravity of Our Sin Nature and Demonic Strongholds

The devil uses the evil forces of the sin nature and demonic strongholds that are lodged within people to induce them to take a philosophical approach to spiritual truths. If it were just Satan we were up against, that would already be a giant opponent. But what we really need to face up to is that Satan had a foothold of operation in each of us when we're born (see diagram 1). And what are these footholds? The first is the *sin nature* that resides in our soul. The innate desire to sin goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, who rebelled against God to satiate their own desires. We are their spiritual descendants, included in that tragic reality that *all* have sinned (Romans 3:23). Our



sin nature will fight against the indwelling Holy Spirit all our lives, yet this is a battle we can overcome through ongoing obedient trust:

*For the **sinful nature lusts against** what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are **in conflict with each other...** (Galatians 5:17).*

Your soul, which comprises your mind, will and emotions, is strongly influenced by your sin nature. Prone in its “natural” state to be anti-Christ and all that He is, your soul struggles by trying to resist the Spirit Who indwells the followers of Jesus.

When you couple your sin nature with any demonic strongholds you've inherited from your parents, you have a strong, built-in allegiance to Satan. This is the state in which all of mankind, other than Jesus in His humanity, are born: controlled by darkness. Only the intervening power of Lord Jesus can help you overcome this innate, internal opposition to Himself. His Word sets forth the process to freedom: >>*repenting and being born again in His Spirit* >> *living repentantly, confessing and turning from sins* >> *demolishing demonic strongholds that inhibit the rule of the Spirit of Christ in your soul.*

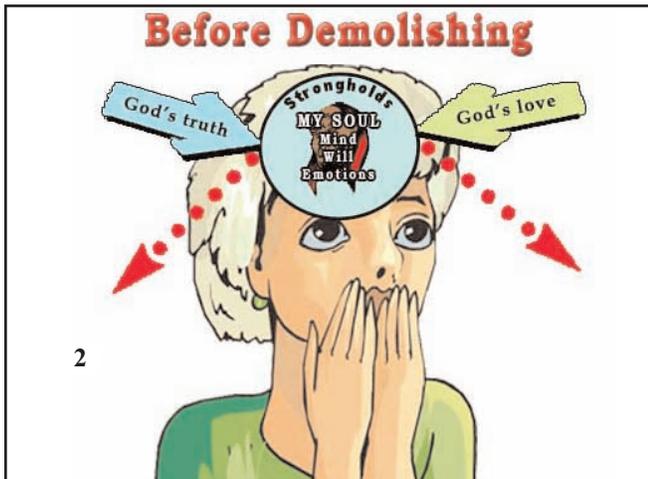
- **Are you free from ALL unconfessed sin right now? How important is it to you to scrutinize yourself for sin that robs you of fellowship with the Father and Jesus?**
- **Do you believe that you must repent for each of your sins? Or, do you believe God has given you “blanket forgiveness” for whatever you choose to do?**

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. ...When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

“As they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power. Turn away from these people!” (2 Timothy 3:5,CJB)

Once again, the influential power behind the divisions we see in Christendom today is Satan, not our God. If you find this hard to swallow, you need to ask our Lord about who has agitated the fragmentation into 38,000 competing pieces.

When you consider all the centuries of Church Council decisions which led to splitting off denominations, many were (and are) ruled by their **sin nature** and/or **demonic strongholds**.



Why do we believe that demonic strongholds, which *block out the truth and love of God* (diagram 2), were perhaps agitating the founders of new denominations? Because, as we've conducted Demolishing Stronghold seminars in various congregations over the years, we've found the *same ruling strongholds* in both the leadership and members throughout the denomination's congregations. One denomination's prevailing stronghold may be pride, another rebellion, another bitterness. While Satan's strategy is for these to remain hidden, the outworking of these unclean spirits in their midst is all too evident. The people may enjoy the familiarity and comfort they feel among those who "understand" them in their darkness. But the Lord Jesus is definitely not being lifted up in purity and truth!

Paul describes the nature of a stronghold

when he exhorts us to employ spiritual power to demolish them: *"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal [the weapons of the world]. On the contrary, they are **mighty in God** [they have divine power] to demolish strongholds, casting down **arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ**" (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).*

"Do not give the devil a foothold"
(Ephesians 4:27).

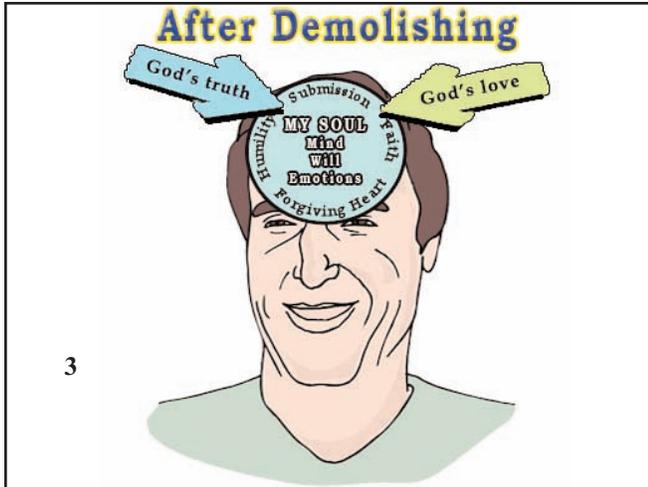
"That they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26).

These demonic influences seduce others with the same strongholds to join them, even those who thought they were attracted to a congregation because of Christ! These unclean spirits have quickly been identified when we've handed out in a faith community our *List of Strongholds Questionnaire*:

<<http://www.restorationministries.org/HtmlFiles/HebraicArticles/DemolishingQuestionnaire.htm>>. Those gathered together have sadly realized the demonic connection they have with each other.

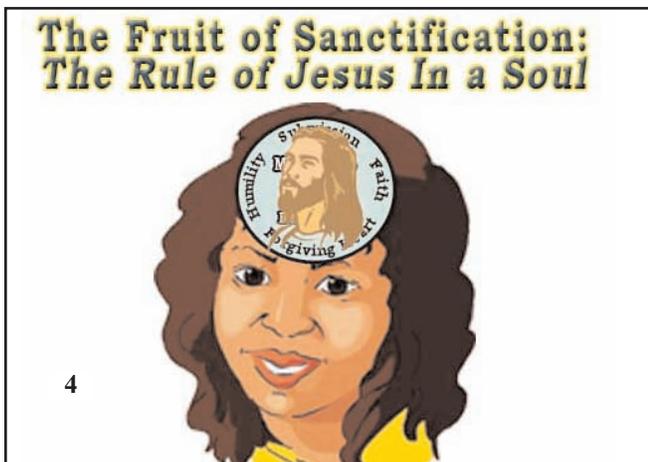
To remain free from the influence of depraved teachers whom Satan uses to seduce people away from Spirit-empowered living, you need to remain free from the influence of strongholds in your soul. Don't give way to demonic-inspired thoughts which lead to ungodly emotions and subsequent ungodly actions which then become habitual strongholds. When you're free from the influence of demonic strongholds (diagram 3, next page) an entire change of understanding God's truth and experiencing His love occurs. New determination to trust in His loving mercy and indwelling power equips you to *apply the Truth* — to put

“As they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power. Turn away from these people!” (2 Timothy 3:5,CJB)



into practice that which He calls for in His Word.

Even greater hope grows when the Spirit of Christ is ruling your soul (diagram 4). The rulership of Lord Jesus is the goal of *sanctification*, a life journey and response of being made holy as He is holy in all that you think, say and do. That's the narrow biblical pathway for anyone on their pilgrimage to their salvation. Sanctification by His Spirit is a process by which you are increasingly conformed to our Lord's character — a life that pleases Him!



The lifelong battle within you as a Jesus follower is over who will rule your soul: Jesus Christ or demonic strongholds that lure your sin nature.

The rule of the Spirit of Christ in your soul is key to *belonging to our Lord*, the critical element of your journey to salvation:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature [in your soul] but by the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9).

- **Demonic strongholds not only block the truth and love of God, they are also *relationship destroyers*, both between you and God, and with other people. Are you free of strongholds at this time? If not, how is Satan using you in a manner that is contrary to the will of Jesus?**
- **How *sanctified* — set apart as holy for God's use — are you? When thoughts and emotions emerge from your soul, do they have the aroma of Jesus, or do they stink from strongholds?**

[For more on *Demolishing Strongholds*, see our workbook and video series by the same name (both are a free download at our website).

book:

<<http://www.restorationministries.org/HtmlFiles/HTMLBooks/DemolishingStrongholdsR.htm>>;

DVD:

<<http://www.restorationministries.org/html/DemStrVid.html>>].

To recap this Lifebyte: Demonic strongholds coupled with ongoing unrepentance in many theologians and religious leaders have perpetuated the division of the 38,000 denominations and sects found in modern Christendom. A person who participates in any of these demonically-inspired divisions strongly indicates influence and agitation by the same controlling strongholds. It's also likely he or she is trying to hide a sin and is not repentant.