

## Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

### The Sin of Refusing To Trust in the Power of Our Lord Jesus (Part1)

I (Mike) use a certain abbreviation system when I'm reading my Bible. For instance, throughout the book of Acts I've annotated "SP" wherever **spiritual power** has been manifested through someone. I also ink in "DI" in places in which God's **divine intervention** is evident. These two features demonstrate to unbelievers that there is an unseen Someone who is involved with those who belong to Him. Through the demonstration of spiritual power and the recognition of our Lord's divine intervention, early followers of Jesus attracted the interest and attention of other people!

The book of Acts in particular is our Lord's testimony to an unbelieving world that He was involved with His apostles. This power and intervention also permeates the Older Testament as God reveals Himself to be mighty against false gods and demonic belief systems. Throughout both testaments, wherever anyone had *faith to trust Him*, He acted.

During His years of ministry our Lord Jesus not only displayed spiritual power. He also promised that His power would be at work in those who would follow Him as Lord:

*"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).

It's essential that we don't claim to belong to Him and yet tarnish His reputation through our doubt and distrust in His power or ability to intervene in human affairs. Give yourself a faith test:

- When unbelievers encounter you, what spiritual power and testimony of divine intervention distinguishes you from them?
- Describe to someone who's close to you the nature of your spiritual life in Christ as a mighty *instrument of the Spirit* in you.
- Picture yourself sitting with eleven other people in a boat at night on a stormy sea. Jesus comes by, walking on the turbulent waves, and invites you all to leave the boat and walk with Him. Would you? Really?

These aren't questions to deal with lightly. James warns that *"faith by itself, if it is **not accompanied by action**, is dead"* (James 2:17). All too often *faith* is interpreted through an intellectual grid as "I believe" as though that's all that's required for spiritual life. Yet all through the Bible authentic faith always resulted in a demonstration of spiritual power or divine intervention. We who have embraced our Father's Covenant in Jesus have the privilege of fulfilling our Father's purposes. Because of this we need to be sure our lives reflect the same spiritual power and divine intervention as did our predecessors who trusted in Jesus.

***"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power"***  
(1Corinthians 4:20).

For so many centuries, especially after the institutionalizing of "the church" as a religious/political entity, Christians have had the Bible taught *at* them in spoonsize bits and pieces predetermined by the clergy or religious hierarchy. That dependence as "spiritual infants" has meant few have been confident to walk in the spiritual power Jesus promised to those who have been regenerated by His Spirit.

Generation after generation of Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy alike have taught the Bible *without* any demonstra-

tion or testimony of spiritual power and divine intervention in their own lives. But the study of Scripture *without the faith* that reveals the Divine encounters demonstrated in God's Word reduces it to academic, theological information.

Our Lord Jesus criticized the teachers of His time for doing this:

*"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life"* (John 5:39,40).

The entirety of Scripture *bears witness to Jesus* as God the Son Who became man to redeem a people called out of the world's ways to be His own. Over 300 *prophecies* in the Older Testament testify of Jesus as the promised Messiah. Within the Newer Testament is a revelation of what *the life* of those who know and follow Him as Lord should look like.

The Bible indeed points to Jesus and testifies of Him. But JESUS must become the *central focus* of those who claim to belong to Him! There's no power in the Bible itself. Only the Holy Spirit can transform the text from "foolishness" in the world's sight into the wisdom of God (see 1Corinthians 2:12-14). The Word *does* make known the power that's found in the Spirit of Christ who indwells His own. If you have His Spirit then you have the empowerment our Lord promises.

Paul well understood the work of the Spirit that far transcends man's means of communicating: *"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power"* (1Corinthians 2:4). Don't be like so many nominal "Christians" who relegate to history Paul's effectiveness as the Spirit's vessel. They defend their own ineffectual spiritual lives with

this excuse: "That was Paul, but it sure can't be me." Just because those who taught you the Bible demonstrated neither spiritual power nor divine encounters in their own lives doesn't mean our Lord isn't requiring that in *your* life.

### **Sanctification: Your Power Encounter With Our Lord Jesus**

*"Do not conform any longer to the **pattern of this world**, but **be transformed** by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to **test and approve what God's will is**—His good, pleasing and perfect will"* (Romans 12:2).

Our Father calls His people to "*present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable*" to Him. He calls this willing sacrifice of self through being *set apart for His use* our *reasonable service* (Romans 12:1). Paul then goes on to describe our need for a *renewed mind*, a mind with new qualities that isn't bound by old, sinful ways of thinking.

Nominal "Christians" have no understanding of the importance of freeing their minds from their old thought patterns. That renovation certainly isn't emphasized in the teaching they hear. Nor have they interacted with people whose lives have been a *pilgrimage of change* through adamantly pursuing their mind's renewal. Yet it's by the *transformation of your mind* by the Spirit that you're able to discern if new thoughts that come in align with God's will. The transforming power of Jesus at work in you is convincing evidence that you are truly His. After your thoughts are transformed your actions will be changed also.

Protestant theology is generally as silent about renewing the mind as Roman Catholicism is. While Protestantism as a whole claims to build its faith practices on

the Bible, so many of its 38,000 competing forms of religious rituals and creedal expressions focus on external religious issues rather than ongoing, internal transformation. Each religious faction consistently overlooks the central focus of belonging to our Lord Jesus: our lifelong need for *sanctification*, being made holy by the Spirit through the renewing of our minds so we can become more like our Lord and bear lasting Kingdom fruit.

**Sanctification** is the lifelong process of becoming more like Jesus through the work of His indwelling Spirit. This is why Paul could assure fellow Jesus followers, “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are BEING TRANSFORMED into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit*” (2Corinthians 3:18). This is an *ongoing transformation* of replacing the motivations, values and goals in your mind with *His* (1Corinthians 1:2).

All throughout the lifelong process of your sanctification you need *God’s grace*. Grace is the desire and the power to *become more like Christ*, and to *do our Father’s will* (Philippians 2:13). Your sanctification is so important in your life journey that Paul prays for our Father to work this within you: “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ*” (1Thessalonians 5:23).

[For more on sanctification, see The Way of the Lord series, 36. *Theological Hindrances to The Lordship of Jesus (Part 1)*; and our Hebraic Article, *Mutually Growing Christ-like Relationships*. Both are free at our website.]

While much of Protestant teaching relies on conveying biblical facts to people, Roman Catholicism interjects bits from both testaments and then concentrates on traditions

that add to and even contradict scriptural truth. In essence, the Bible taught just as academic fact involves a *one-step* process in your brain. The content enters the logical left side of the brain and gets stored as “information.” Little or no emotional value is attached to these newly acquired facts, however.

Sanctification through the renewing of your mind, however, is a *multi-faceted* process. It requires that you terminate your old, sin-based or worldly value and replace it with a Christ-like one. The process of sanctification relies also on the affective, right side of your brain, the area which *attaches emotional value* to new information. In this light, sanctification becomes *life-altering* in that you place great emotional value on the characteristics that make up your Christ-like growth.

***“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and goodness”*** (2Peter 1:3).

The Newer Testament leaves no doubt that our Lord’s followers have access to His divine power to change us. His spiritual power within us is manifested as we forsake our old ways and acquire His new responses and behavior.

**Everyone receives emotional wounds in life.** You *can’t* heal these wounds yourself through your own efforts. But if you belong to Jesus and seek to grow more like Him, you need to confront the past and present hurt and be healed by His spiritual power. If you don’t, these wounded areas of your mind will become a self-protective wall causing you to grow emotionally calloused. You will fail to provide the affectionate support others need from you. The wall also becomes a mental prison hindering you from experiencing both His love and the loving support of others.

Again, those who've not been emotionally healed become a "bull in a China shop," unaware of how they hurt others through withholding affectionate support. Their self-protective veneer also makes it hard for others to love them. The emotionally unhealed who've never trusted that the power of Jesus could change them consistently display a certain degree of callousness to the emotional needs of others. They may do acts of kindness to cover over their own hurt, but the recipient doesn't experience love.

Destroyed the most by the lack of mutual pursuit of Christ-likeness have been marriages (and of course, any children). Most married couples within nominal Christendom fail to put forth the maximum effort that's necessary to rid their relationship of whatever is hindering Christ-like love from being the hallmark of their union.

Keep in mind that whatever issues and differences aren't dealt with early in a marriage will have negative consequences later. The number of "**gray divorces**" among older people who've been married a long time has doubled in the last 10 years—and nominal Christians aren't immune. These couples not only allowed Satan to prevail as they failed to demolish their spiritual strongholds; they clung to their toxic memories and remained *unhealed* and *untransformed* by the Spirit of Jesus. In other words, they refused to acquire the spiritual power to be sanctified. Hence their marriage died.

A sanctified man becomes more considerate of his wife (1Peter 3:7) and leads their marriage into Christ-likeness by putting into practice a way of life that is pleasing to God (Ephesians 5:25-27).

A woman who is being sanctified overcomes her yearning to rule, control, and

manipulate others, especially her husband. The most crucial facet of her transformation process into Christ-likeness is her absolute trust in Him above all the circumstances that are going on around her (1Peter 3:3-6)!

***"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"***  
(1Corinthians 2:13,14).

If the Spirit of Jesus abides within you, then what we've been sharing makes sense to you. And, if these describe you, then be assured you belong to Him (Romans 8:9):

- You experience the deep desire to become more like Him.
- You undergo emotional pain when you discover things in yourself that are unChrist-like, and purpose for Him to have His way in that area.

But we need to caution those of you who accept nominal Christians as spiritual family. We're speaking of those who, "*have a form of godliness but deny its power.*" As Paul vehemently warns, "*Have nothing to do with them!*" (2Timothy 3:5). They are not seeking our Lord's power to be transformed through sanctification. And, they WILL undermine your own quest to become more like our Lord Jesus.

Be very careful who you consider a brother or sister in the Lord. Jesus defines His family very precisely: "*For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother*" (Matthew 12:50). And Paul describes the sanctifying nature of their lives: "*And we,*

*who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit" (2Corinthians 3:18).*

Our Lord promises His own that we'd do greater things than He, and the Newer Testament illustrates what His power at work in them looks like. Therefore our lives must demonstrate spiritual power and divine intervention by His Spirit at work in and through us. If you're encountering His power to change you, that work will produce in you His heart burden for the unbelievers around you. If you aren't motivated by a yearning heart on behalf of those who have yet to yield to His invitation and experience the transforming power of our Lord Jesus, your spiritual life is missing something crucial—Jesus, Himself!

And, be assured that as you renew your minds, you will develop greater confidence to pursue all the **spiritual power** you need to fulfill His purposes for you. You'll also live for His glory, and trust in His **divine intervention** that evidences His Lordship. Our loving prayer for you is this:

*"We pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And we pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the called-out ones and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Ephesians 3:16-21).*

Turn to the love and power of Jesus so that these words may be real in yourself!