

**Teaching E-mail 67**  
**Is Your Cognitive Dissonance Quenching the Holy Spirit?**  
(February 12, 2013)

*“We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1John 4:13).*

We've realized for a while that what we've shared over the years about the Hebraic foundations seems hard for some to understand. They run into a **mental wall** as they try to grasp the relational intensity of the priorities our Father is restoring to His people. And, they are just not able to feel *His heart's desire* to live in **Covenant union** with His children.

Those whose “relationship” with our Lord consists mainly in a lot of Bible knowledge find it nearly impossible to understand the **Spirit-empowered love and way of life** our Father calls for in His children (Mark 12:30). Nor do they comprehend the amazing privilege and command to live in such a way that they bring Him glory.

Without life in the Spirit, those who are ruled by their thought life can't manifest **heartfelt resolve** to pursue our Father's will—accomplishing purposes that matter for eternity (Matthew 6:19, 20; John 15:8). Only through the Spirit of Jesus within His followers are we able to stop depending on our sin nature-controlled minds and intentionally look to the Spirit first. It's in this context that Paul describes the warfare that's waged within:

“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).

*“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).*

The Bible guarantees that when you become a child of our Father through repentance and trust in the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf, you receive His Spirit (see 2Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). Because the Holy Spirit inhabits us when we're born again, we have sure hope that we are able to love and serve our Father according to His will at work in us (Philippians 2:13). Yet a battle ensues in those who are walled in by the *barriers in their mind*—they are unable to appropriate our Father's purpose for His Spirit to abide within them. For many this mental wall develops through **"cognitive dissonance."**

Humans have a strong inner drive *in their minds* to have everything fit together in perfect harmony. It's such a strong inclination that many take intentional steps to avoid any person, situation or circumstance that might disrupt their “comfort zone” of familiarity and order. Any disruption produces mental disturbance, known as *cognitive dissonance*. Cognitive dissonance describes the **feeling of discomfort** people experience when some new teaching, truth or event such as a miracle conflicts with their previously held beliefs.

When people in whom the Spirit *doesn't* abide encounter some mental discrepancy, they make whatever change is necessary to eliminate or reduce the dissonance—usually by re-entrenching themselves in what they believe already. In contrast, followers of Jesus turn to the **Spirit of Truth** within to discern if the new information or event is valid.

The human mind is a wonderful aspect of our being—until it interferes with wholly trusting God and His Word. Whatever your mind can't comprehend, it avoids or tunes out. This is especially true when it comes to matters of faith. All throughout the Newer Testament we're assured that the Spirit of our Lord indwells us. Scripture fully explores His purpose in the lives of His people, yet so few get past the **wall in their mind** so that they might live by the Spirit.

***“He also said to [Abraham], ‘I am the LORD, Who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it’”*** (Genesis 15:7).

In our last Teaching Email we talked about **emunah**, the obedient trust-based relationship that Abraham had with God. Trust means *following through* when called to do so. That responsiveness runs counter to mere intellectual rumination that all too often goes nowhere.

The Patriarch Abraham, who is the father of all who follow Jesus as Lord (Romans 4:16), overcame any cognitive dissonance in his brain through his profound trust in the One True God. How do we know this? God had promised him a son in his old age by his elderly wife Sarah, and later commanded him to sacrifice that son. This man of trust didn't waver in his willingness to obey, and neither can we.

Here are three others who faced cognitive dissonance and responded to it in various ways:

1. When the angel told *Zechariah*, the father of John the Baptist, that he would have a son in his old age, he voiced doubt. That unbelief meant Zechariah lost his ability to speak until the baby was circumcised and named (Luke 1:5-24).

2. The angel Gabriel told *Mary* that she would bring forth the long-awaited Savior. Her question to the angel, however, came not out of doubt but of willing inquiry. Her *emunah*, like that of Abraham, contained no dissonance but only trust: *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word”* (Luke 1:38).

3. Despite testimony from his fellow disciples, the apostle *Thomas* couldn't break through the wall in his mind that kept him from believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. The Lord Himself confronted him, *“Do not be unbelieving, but believing,”* adding that blessing comes to those who *don't have to see* in order to trust (John 20:24-29).

We who yearn to be true to our Lord Jesus by His grace can't choose to carry the doubt and unbelief of a Zechariah or Thomas. We can't carry a mental “insurance policy” that has to see the projected results before we take action. As the children of Abraham our Lord has called us to live with the same confidence manifested by both the Patriarch and the mother of Jesus. If this still seems a little fuzzy for you, let's review what being born again is all about.

***“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”*** (John 3:3,5,6).

When you are born again into the Spirit of Christ, dramatic change takes place in you. Your reliance on your sin nature-controlled mind diminishes as your trust in the Spirit within you grows. Born from above, you're a *new creation* that's as different as an earth-bound

caterpillar is from an airborne butterfly (2Corinthians 5:17). But your mind doesn't disintegrate when your spirit becomes alive in Christ! That old tendency to trust only in what your mind tells you is logical is still well-grooved in your brain. That's why we're warned to *keep taking our thoughts captive*—those thoughts that would cause dissonance—and bring them into captivity to obey Christ (2Corinthians 10:5). Breaking through cognitive dissonance means you need to ever more increasingly rely on the trustworthiness and power of the Holy Spirit at work in you.

It's the Spirit Who helps you overcome cognitive dissonance enabling you to experience new birth:

- The reality that you were born with a sin nature that already qualifies you for condemnation shakes you with cognitive dissonance as you recognize you are *destined for hell* without the shed blood of our Lord Jesus as your atonement covering (John 3:17,18).
- Cognitive dissonance also hinders you from truly coming to grips with the *depravity of your own heart* and the *sins you've committed* against a holy God. Out of this horrifying self-awareness emerges authentic repentance (John 3:19, 20).

These two points are the doorway to being born again as you respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and turn in wholehearted repentance and grateful trust in Jesus as your Redeemer and Lord (John 16:8). That's why prior to spiritual rebirth your mind is such a battlefield that's used by Satan to keep you from responding to the Father who would draw you to Jesus. The agitation of cognitive dissonance won't let your mind face that you're depraved and destined for hell.

Ongoing unbelief and doubt (as well as fruitlessness) plagues those who through religious ritual are reckoned by man to be "born again." They erroneously believe through false teaching that "Jesus owes me" or "Jesus came to make me happy." And while a clergy person may baptize them in water, Jesus doesn't baptize them with His Spirit. Tragically, without His Spirit they'll live in religious deception, trapped by cognitive dissonance.

***"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).

God's Word is such an important source for us to learn of His holy character and ways, His amazing love that's so fully revealed in Jesus, and His just and holy commands that direct us in how to relate rightly with Him and please Him by our lives. Yet the Bible is *not* synonymous with God. The Person of the Holy Spirit brings about the most intimate relationship a person can have as He indwells that individual. He *brings to life* the awesome truth of the Bible.

Christ in you *through His Spirit* is your hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Worthy of trust beyond which our minds can comprehend, the Spirit of Christ brings *life to our spirit*. That's a far deeper relationship than just knowing *about* Him from words on a page. You need to be aware that your knowledge of the Bible is *not* the same as your love-grounded obedient relationship with Him. Yet that's precisely what most people who are trapped in cognitive dissonance believe: **The more Bible I know, the**

**closer I am to God. No, the more you live by His Spirit in trust, the greater will be your love and obedience!**

Look at the following analogy of the intellectual reliance that's so prevalent in western Christendom because of cognitive dissonance.

Mike served in the navy for many years. What if during that time you asked him, "What do you do in the navy?" and he responded this way: "Oh, all I do is study the navy by reading about it." What's wrong with this scenario?

You know that everyone in the navy has been trained to fulfill a *specific assignment*. That's what the Kingdom of God is like for those who are indwelt by His Spirit. We are given specific assignments using the gifting He has given each of us to cooperate with the gifting of others He's using to fulfill our Father's purpose.

This navy scenario represents the mental block we hear in conversations with so many Christians: They speak of the Bible knowledge they've stored in their brain, but they can't tell you what the Holy Spirit has empowered them to do. They keep reading the Bible, but the knowledge they accumulate never becomes an active, responsive life in service to our Lord. According to James, that kind of "faith" is dead (James 2:17). And if it *stays* dead in this life, then the second death may be their eternal destiny (Revelation 21:8).

***"And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins"***  
(Mark 2:22).

Our Lord Jesus was addressing people

who had just asked Him about the religious practices of His disciples. The "old wineskins" in his listeners represented a cognitive dissonance in which the new wine of fulfilled prophecy in Jesus couldn't be believed.

With the "new wineskin" of loving, obedient trust in Jesus as Lord of your life, you can bypass your brain's fear of dissonance by attentively heeding the Spirit in you. But being a new wineskin filled with new wine only happens as you rely on His Spirit, asking Him for guidance and empowerment with a heart that's intent on following through.

Over the years we've been sharing the Hebraic foundations, we've repeatedly encountered cognitive dissonance as we've conducted seminars in various congregations around this nation. Most people initially try to align the relational priorities we present so they'll fit within the parameters of their church participation, their creed, or with other "religious" preconditions into which they've lodged their faith—things that have given them mental peace but have resulted in spiritual fruitlessness.

But just because their minds are complacently undisturbed doesn't make their religious practices acceptable to God. Just as putting your ladder against the wrong building won't help you with your roofing job, putting your faith in whatever doesn't disrupt your complacency—even if it is at odds with God's Word—is futile.

In the Gospel accounts our Lord repeatedly confronted the cognitive dissonance of those who had placed their faith in religion but had lost any concept of what loving God and enacting that love toward others looked like. Jesus didn't come to encourage harmony; in fact, He knew that what He was proclaiming and enacting would be divisive. He came

to reveal His Father (John 8:19), and His words caused His listeners to have to deeply weigh where their own faith lay. Jesus was grieved but not surprised at their resistance because He knew that they had become children of Satan through misguided faith (John 8:44).

If you belong to our Lord Jesus and truly want to serve Him in revealing our Father as you live as an ambassador of Christ, you'll find yourself confronting cognitive opposition in those you talk with. Our Lord has passed along to all who would follow Him a ministry that's aimed at shattering the complacency which cognitive dissonance creates. Complacency can be especially rooted in misplaced loyalty to family members:

*“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. **I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.** For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother **more than Me** is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is **not worthy of Me**”* (Matthew 10:34-38).

Our Lord Jesus proclaimed these startling words to a very family-oriented, tightly knit society. So if you've been born again, He's also telling *you* what to expect in your loving and obedient determination to follow Him. Your intent isn't to turn your family members against you—but that will happen when you live by His Spirit. Without His presence, those among your biological family who aren't in Christ can't understand either the changes He is making in you or the completely new values, goals and way of life

He is leading you into. Therefore you can expect them to turn against you in one way or another.

As a new creation in His Spirit you are **“breaking the biological boundary.”** Of course your heart is still burdened for their salvation. But as our Lord is telling you to follow Him first and serve Him first out of grateful and obedient love, you can't let yourself be trapped by human loyalty. The cognitive dissonance of putting Jesus first in their lives compared to all other loves prevents so many from following and serving our Lord Jesus: **they fear loss of relationships.**

*“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good”* (1Corinthians 12:7).

When you overcome the cognitive dissonance in your brain, you're then able to actively be used in the gifting(s) the Spirit has apportioned you. The wonder of abiding in the Spirit is that He can guide and empower your life without your brain having to understand every aspect of what He is doing in and around and through you: *“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).

The life of the Spirit in those who are born again is recognizable:

They can't explain it through their mind, but their Spirit-empowered lives reveal the depth of their heartfelt love for both God and for the people they serve. Your trust in our Lord is evidenced by actions and responses others can see. These flow out from His Spirit at work within you, a working which dispels any cognitive dissonance.

When you are released from the control of cognitive dissonance, then with the gifting(s) you've been given by the Holy Spirit you feel a grateful sense of purpose and responsibility to be used by Him. Wherever you're currently situated, whether in your neighborhood, your job, your faith community, or your relational sphere, is because the Spirit *needs your gifting* to be there for the people He wants you to serve. If you don't see yourself through the Spirit this way, you'll serve your own interests rather than your Lord's.

Again, it's like being in the military. Your specialty puts you in a unit that needs what you can do, and from there someone up the chain-of-command assigns you to carry out a specific purpose collectively with others. It's the same with the spiritual gift(s) you've been given. You feel a responsibility to the Spirit:

- To know your own gift(s) and be used by Him;
- To know the gift(s) of others you're in fellowship with and collectively be used by Him.

Because of cognitive dissonance, many can't believe that the Spirit could even use them. They shrink back from their responsibility to know their gift(s) and be used by Him (Hebrews 10:38). Or, they live in cowardice, not wanting to be rejected by others. In the military, when someone shirks their duty or acts cowardly, usually another person gets hurt or killed as a result. When we who are indwelt by the Spirit act this way, a soul may be lost, the Kingdom isn't advanced, our Father isn't glorified.

Perhaps His Spirit indwells you but you've been hindered in your walk through cognitive dissonance. Cry out to Him for the help you need to quit listening to your sin nature. If your heart truly yearns to live by the Spirit, then only He can help you get past the mental barriers you've erected in your mind.