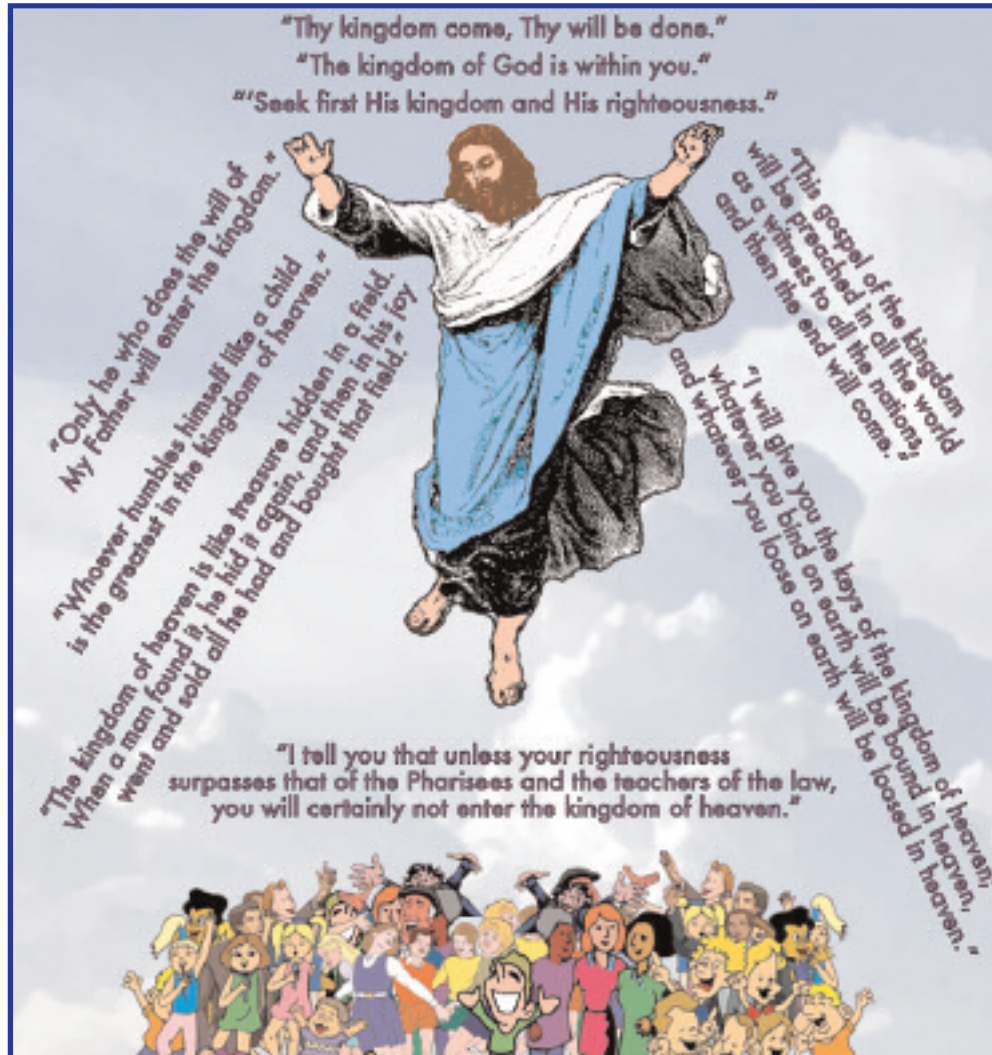


## Lifebyte 68

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

## Lesson 3: What God's People Must Do To Regain Spiritual Power (Part 1)



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## What God’s People Must Do To Regain Spiritual Power (Part 1)

So little, it seems, is being brought up these days about the *Kingdom* of God — a topic so dear to the heart of our Lord Jesus that He focuses on it over and over again in His parables. Everything we’re proposing to you about regaining the spiritual power of His first followers is based on you firmly believing that Jesus is establishing a *Kingdom* which He’ll rule as *King*. (Check out the prophetic truths in Zechariah 9:9 through 14:21 for a foretaste of that wonderful Day!)

Since this may be ground you haven’t explored at length, we encourage you to refamiliarize yourself with our discussion on the Kingdom of God in **Lifebytes 51 thru 57**. And, pause now to make sure that your heart is so aligned in love and obedient trust in Lord Jesus that you’re prepared to do whatever He requires of you — no matter what the cost (1 John 5:2,3).

You can readily see that any vestiges of man-made religious passivity are at total odds with a life of obedient trust. Scrutinize yourself for anything that may hinder you, and cast it down out of *love for Him* and a heart’s desire that your life choices *not bring down His Name*.

As is evident in the Newer Testament, those who were lukewarm in their love for Jesus or in their obedience to His commands were not sealed with the Holy Spirit (John 14:23,24). Obeying His commands and doing what pleases Him evidences *His Spirit living in His own* (1 John 3:21-24) — the heart parameter for Him to pour forth His spiritual power through you. And, this is what we’ll be discussing in this Lifebyte: the *condition of your heart* for the Spirit to be at work in and through you.

## Be Free of Soulsh Dominion If You Want to Serve Your King

Are you familiar with the phrase “soulsh dominion?” We first heard this term from our friend Exie the night we arrived in Jerusalem in 1993.

*Our soul — our mind, will and emotions — is our point of vulnerability to the enemy. It’s within the thoughts of our mind, the agenda of our will, and the impressions of our emotions that we respond to deception and temptation.*

That’s why Paul makes such a point of taking captive *our thoughts* and aligning them in obedience to Jesus (2 Corinthians 10:5). James as well warns about being drawn away by our *desires*, choosing to be enticed into sin (James 1:14,15). When we give ground to our thoughts, personal agenda, and feelings more than we heed the righteous input of the Spirit of Christ in us, we’ve given way to soulsh dominion — we’re *ruled* by our soul.

Recently the Spirit gave us further understanding of the impact soulsh dominion has, whether before or after we cast down unclean spirits.

**ALL demonic strongholds, and the sinful attitudes and behaviors they habitually arouse, hold us captive under the dominion of our sin nature-controlled soul.**

**Even after we’ve demolished the strongholds, soulsh dominion reigns until the old ruts of behavior and attitude have been filled in by the *truth and commands of God’s Word* as He works righteous responsiveness in us through His Spirit.**

In fact, unless those old familiar patterns of sinful attitudes and behaviors are

**"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves"**  
(Colossians 1:13)



replaced by righteous responses, as we warn in our book *Demolishing Strongholds*, people's lives tend to get much worse! (See Diagram 1.) Jesus warned about the danger of casting out an evil spirit, which must leave because of the authority of His Name, and *not filling your life* with the work of the Holy Spirit. The evicted spirit searches out "*seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first*" (Luke 11:26).

How do you know when you're *no longer captive* to soulish dominion? A key indicator we've seen over the years is that you develop a merciful and forgiving heart toward those who once hurt you or let you down.

This is especially true as you are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to change your attitude and behavior toward your family members and relatives. Whereas you were previously critical of them, irritated by them, or quick to pass judgment on them, when you're free of soulish dominion you're able to realize that they're in reality *captives to the same strongholds* that you've now been freed from.

Your heart becomes burdened to see your relatives become free from the soulish dominion that keeps them vulnerable to Satan's relationship-destroying lies. This *change of perception* on the part of the freed has proven to be THE major sign that soulish dominion is gone.

In contrast, holding onto bitterness and unforgiveness evidences that soulish dominion remains. You *keep on believing* the agitating thoughts and negative feelings that permeate you, and discount anything anyone tells you otherwise. Your sin nature and/or strongholds still hold sway over your soul, keeping it from being led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). This is why we need input and feedback from each other to help fill in the old ruts of attitude and behavior *after* the strongholds have been demolished.

We can all too easily fall back into the rut of wrongful thinking, which leads to detrimental emotions and causes us to choose unChristlike responses in our attitudes and actions toward others. It's a vicious cycle if not confronted by those who care about you walking in the steps of Jesus!

### **Soulish Dominion Is the Root of Communal Unrighteousness**

If you've read any of our writings or seen any of our videos on **communal righteousness**, then you know this parameter is our Father's preeminent feature for fellowship with others. Just being around others who take part in religious practices with you is *not* biblical fellowship! There's the *obedience factor* in the life of those who claim to love Jesus as Lord of their lives. Jesus Himself so often connected *belonging* to God with *hearing* Him — and from the Hebraic understanding, hearing means *obeying* (John 8:42-47).

Even an uneducated blind man was able to confront the self-righteous Pharisees with the well-ingrained truth that "*God does not listen to sinful men!*" This man then continued with the obe-

dience factor: *"He listens to the godly man who does His will"* (John 9:31). To love Jesus, then, as Father God calls us to (John 8:42), we must remain free from unrepented sin and obey our Lord's commands.

If we claim fellowship with those who choose to continue in sin, then God will *not listen to our prayers*. While many modern doctrines rampantly disregard sin as they promote a perversion of grace that excuses it, God *never* separates "belief" from "obedience". In fact, it is this distinction between "practicing righteousness" or "*not practicing righteousness*" in our daily lives that indicates whether we are children of God or children of the devil (1 John 3:7-10).

So, are you welcoming the *unrepentant* — those who excuse or rationalize or try to hide their sin — into your times of worship before our holy God? Have you considered that from *His* perspective, this compromise with the world's ways labels you an *enemy of God*? (James 4:4) He has called you and set you apart for *righteousness*, not for toleration of sin: *"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them"* (Ephesians 5:6,7).

In essence, out of love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, we must *remain free* from unconfessed sin so that the prayers of others in our faith family can be heard by our Father (1 Peter 3:12; James 5:16). That's the kind of relationship Jesus was referring to when He reiterated that *"My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it"* (Luke 8:21).

Unconfessed sin hinders the prayers of everyone in your fellowship family from being heard. Your reluctance to *confront*

someone who is sinning as Jesus commanded in Matthew 18:15,16 indicates you *don't really love* that person as a brother. Yet how rarely is our Lord's restorative practice of *biblical confrontation* followed in contemporary Christendom! But it's a vital relational component for fellowship among those who don't want to see the Name of Jesus muddied by people who claim to be His followers.

If your fellowship family is dedicated to earnestly participate in seeing the Kingdom expanded, you must ALL be free from soulish dominion!

Does the following statement coincide with your own experience: ***Most Christians either aren't aware or don't pay attention that demonic principalities exist and rely on the strongholds in each person's soul to influence and control large groups of people.***

We've found over the years that one or several identical spiritual strongholds will predominate not only in a specific congregation but also within that group's denomination! Since we've encountered this phenomenon so often, we've realized that just as certain denominations have particular creeds that identify them, so are they marked by the soulish dominion that identifies their way of thinking.

People within those religious systems who have been freed from soulish dominion find they can no longer stay within that denomination or faith community. But is *their freedom* welcome news to those still in bondage? No way! Rather, many find themselves driven out by demonic ostracism through coldness or deceitful slander by those clinging to the chains of soulish dominion within them (2 Timothy 2:26).

The demons will make sure that agitation rules so that those who are free of soulish dominion are excluded from

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influencing others. And some who are now walking in freedom find they have to leave before they're seduced back into their old soulish dominion of sinful patterns of attitude, thought and action.

***"Come out from them and be separate", says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you'; "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"***  
(2 Corinthians 6:17; Hebrews 13:12,13).

It's no surprise that people who have been freed from the dominion of old thoughts, purposes and emotions ultimately find themselves outside the clergy system of organized religion. When they read their Bible with a new Spirit-guided understanding, He enables them to see the hindrances in the religious system that have kept them from becoming *Kingdom-minded*.

- They come to understand that having someone over them who claims a title of authority such as "pastor" or "father", even though forbidden by Jesus, countermands the intimacy and place of *His authority* in their lives.

- They forsake analytical reasoning in their soul as a guiding influence in their readiness to obey the commands of God. They attune their mind, will and emotions to the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Who guides their spirit.

- Their financial giving changes. No longer feeling compelled to keep a religious system afloat, they cooperate with the Spirit of Jesus to support where *He's* working. For example, people who once gave to TV religious teachers stop, espe-

cially to the ones who *peddle prayer* — "If you donate to us, we'll pray for you." (2 Corinthians 2:17) This manipulation parallels the sale of indulgences within Roman Catholicism that prompted the Reformation.

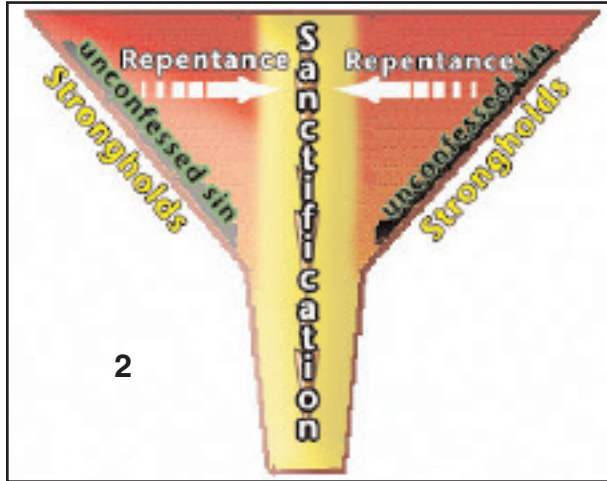
God can't be bought. Again, His ear is attentive to the prayer of the righteous, and that's the character of those who are free of soulish dominion. You depend on the indwelling Spirit of Christ to guide and empower you just as His Word promises (John 14:26). It's in the intimacy of this relationship that you become ever increasingly Kingdom-minded, because with each step of sanctification you become more like your King.

Our Lord calls for a *purposeful separation* of yourself from unholiness (2 Corinthians 6:17; Hebrews 13:12,13, cited earlier). Again, popular religion has introduced a false understanding of "fellowship" that nullifies the holy way of life our righteous Lord calls for in those He has *called out* of the world's way of doing things. The great transgression of contemporary Christendom is to believe that "fellowship" refers to anyone who shows up for your scheduled religious service regardless of whether they live according to His Spirit and His Word. While that perspective may fulfill people's desire to "feel accepted" and make others "feel accepted", it *brings down the Name of our holy Lord!*

Let's examine our funnel diagram to illustrate our collective need to be free from **communal unrighteousness**. If you yearn to press on in all that the Spirit would do in and through you as He transforms you into more of Christ's likeness, you can't remain in fellowship with the unrepentant in your spiritual walk.

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**Diagram 2** represents the *ongoing way* of personal and communal righteousness. Repentance as the Spirit convicts you brings you to a place where He can continue to sanctify you into increasing Christ-likeness.

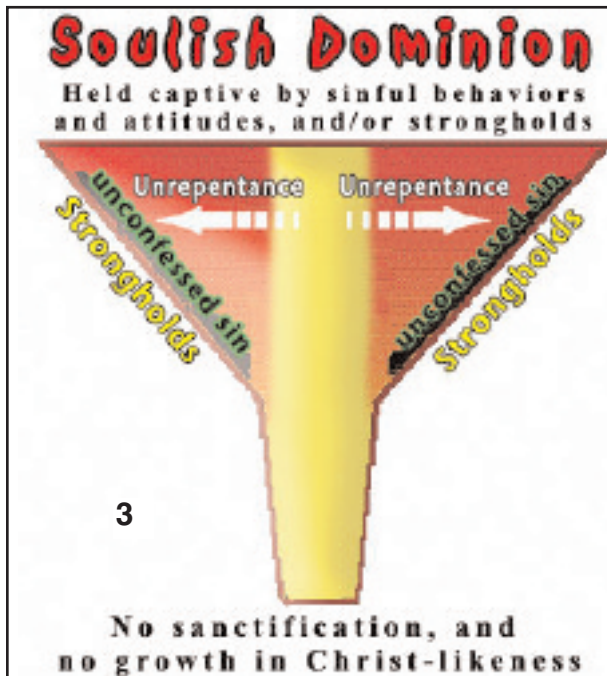


authentic love by privately confronting that person about their sin (Matthew 18:15-17). If he or she doesn't repent, you bring one or two others to establish that this isn't just some personality difference between you but rather a genuine violation of God's Word of which he or she needs to repent. But realize that you can't keep waiting for them to repent yet keep welcoming them to fellowship in their disobedient resistance!

Refusal to repent has serious consequences. Addressing two different faith communities, Paul warns us as well that those who *keep on sinning* have no place in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10, Galatians 5:21). John as well affirms that no one who belongs to God *keeps on sinning* (1 John 3:6,9).

Notice in **Diagram 3** what happens when one or more persons among those with whom you "fellowship" refuses to repent. They've chosen *soulish dominion* rather than the freedom of living in Christ in obedient trust. How should you handle this situation? First, you enact

You face danger yourself if you don't leave behind those who are determined to go on sinning. You too may succumb to the temptation to tolerate sin in your own life. Heed this warning to the called-out ones in Galatia: "*Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted*" (Galatians 6:1).



The temptation to tolerate sin rather than turn from it is a great force within each of us because within each of us is a **sin nature** that would like nothing more than to get us back into sinning. So if your heart's desire is for our Lord to use you powerfully for His glory and praise, then make sure you maintain both personal and communal righteousness in your life.

### Can Syllogistic Reasoning Look Like Doubt To Our Lord?

The apostle Thomas stands as an example of one in whose mind every-

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thing had to add up in order for him to believe it as truth. His spirit refused to accept by faith that which others who'd seen the resurrected Lord had so fervently testified to.

*Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe [trust] (John 20:25).*

A week later when Jesus did show Himself to Thomas, the Lord rebuked his dependence on reasoning: **"Stop doubting [unbelieving] and trust... Because you have seen Me, you have trusted; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have trusted"** (John 20:27,29). Make sure any need you think you have to *reason everything out* isn't the doubt of unbelief from our Lord's perspective.

We mentioned in **Lifebyte 67** that the Hebraic approach to truth, the block logic that accepts what God's Word says *because He said it*, was lost when Greek philosophers converted to Christianity and infiltrated scriptural teaching with Hellenist thought. We've also noted in other writings and videos that when God restored Jerusalem to the people of Israel in 1967 in fulfillment of His promise (Luke 21:24), He also began to restore the Hebraic foundations to Jewish and Gentile followers alike. (We who are older are among the first generation to whom these truths are being restored!)

We today share a similarity with the first followers of Jesus. They were introduced to a *prophesied New Covenant* through which they could be reconciled with our Father (Jeremiah 31:31, apperceived in Luke 22:20). Their minds needed to be *retrained* as to their source of righteousness. It was no longer found in keeping the law and depending on ani-

mals sacrificed to atone for their sins. With the shed blood of Jesus as the once and for all Perfect Sacrifice of atonement, they could be forgiven by their heavenly Father and be garbed in the imputed righteousness of His Son.

What a paradigm shift for their trust! And, as with them, you can expect those whose faith practice is based on religious observance to reject the path of "block logic trust" *you* embark on. You'll most likely encounter misunderstanding and even rejection as they did — your own experience in Jesus' teaching on the unshrunk cloth and the wineskins (Mark 2:21,22). Religious system practices and obedient trust in Christ *can't exist together*.

**Might the rise of 38,000 competing denominations be a direct result of the loss of our Hebraic foundations because of the *anti-Semitism* of the Hellenist "Church Fathers"?**

**Our Father, in His infinite mercy, is encouraging those who trust in His Son to be free from the curse brought on by a religious system which despised the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3). But we must proactively rid ourselves of the lies we were taught, and begin to apperceive from *His entire Word* the way of life that pleases the King of the Kingdom.**

More and more followers of Jesus are letting go of the anti-Semitic lie about the irrelevance of the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament. They're realizing that God is restoring the Hebraic roots of obedient trust and service to Him for HIS pleasure rather than their own self-pursuit. He's restoring to His people a *God-centered, God-honoring world view* to replace western Christendom's man-centered, man-pleasing perspective that was

introduced into the Church by the converted Greek philosophers of the second and third centuries.

Have *you* believed the lie that the Older Testament is a "book of law" for the Jews, while the Newer Testament is a "book of grace" for Christians? Then hear this: The *entire Bible* reveals a loving, caring Father reaching out to establish a covenant relationship with His people. To view both Creation as well as history apart from the Bible's testimony of God's motives and interactions in prior covenants does a great disservice to understanding what He is doing in our day.

**The Ten Commandments given at Mt. Sinai proclaim a God Who calls for His people to *love Him exclusively* as their Lord. In return for obedient love, He promises to be merciful to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9).**

**Because He is God, He has the right to stipulate our responsibilities in this relationship, such as honoring our parents, not stealing or coveting, and caring for those who can never repay us. These are all dimensions of enacting His command to "love our neighbor" — a *love that takes action*.**

**Refusing to live in the love He calls for and ignoring His righteous purposes for their lives robs many who would follow Jesus of the fullness of being a child of a wonderful, caring Father (John 14:23,24).**

Keep in mind that for yourself, your family, and those who would go on with you in biblical fellowship, the foundation of serving your King in expanding His Kingdom is *love*.

***"LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment***

(Matthew 22:37,38, apperceived from Deuteronomy 6:5).

In both the Older and Newer Testaments our Lord makes the same demand of those who would belong to Him: to *love Him*. The Hebrew word that expresses your heart devotion to God is *ahav* [uh-HAHV], a yearning to cling to Him with all that's in you. Hebrew letters have meaning, and those that comprise *ahav* mean "a window into the Father's heart." Isn't that what we who love Jesus as our Lord desire? And it's the *Spirit of Jesus in His followers* Who makes this happen! He alone enables us to experience the loving heart of our Abba, "Dad".

This kind of intimate, sacrificial love grows as we remain humble and repentant. Girded with yielded, self-denying love from the Spirit, you can truly lay down your life for your Kingdom family — the kind of "friendship" which Jesus modeled that sets others before self (John 15:13,14).

Everything about our love for our Lord is captured by the apostle He dearly loved: "***If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love***" (1 John 5:3). Because of His Spirit in us and our hearts responding to His love, we find that His commands are neither burdensome nor heavy (Matthew 11:29,30). It's a *way of life* that pleases Him and brings about answers to prayer (1 John 3:22).

It's from a *heart response of love* that we must diligently search the Scriptures to know what He commands. His children aren't weighed down by His good



and righteous ways, His Law; rather, we're empowered by His Spirit to live in a way that pleases Him (Romans 7:12)! He calls us to depend on His Spirit, not doubting that what He commands can be accomplished in and through us — to *trustingly put into practice* what He shows us, without regard for the consequences (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2,7-8).

In light of our need for the love-based obedience which pleases our Father, we need to ask ourselves this:

- **Why were the rule-keeping, tradition-bound Judaizing Stream in Israel more predominant than the Hebraic Stream who loved God and one another in obedient trust and expected Him to act?**
- **Why are more people today within Christendom seduced into creedal-based religious systems than those who love our Lord wholeheartedly and are about His Kingdom purposes in obedient trust?**

***"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"***

(1 Samuel 16:7b).

Our next Lifebyte on the subject of spiritual power will discuss the Holy Spirit and how the spiritual power our Lord offers is worked in and through those who love and obey Him. But first let's explore *the nature* of those whom Jesus would entrust with His spiritual power to flow as streams of living water. We'll visit a familiar parable to give you a Kingdom's eye view of His teachings — a parable that is as much a warning as instruction.



## **The Parable of the Sower**

(an aggregate of Matthew 13:18-23 and Luke 8:11-15)

(1) *"The seed is the word of God. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the devil comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.*

(2) *The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he believes for a while and in time of temptation falls away. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*

(3) *He who received seed among the thorns are they who hear the word, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures. He becomes unfruitful, bringing no fruit to maturity.*

(4) *But the seed that fell on the good soil are those who, having heard the word [understanding it] with a noble and good heart, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop: some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty."*

Most of us have a tough time wrapping around agricultural parables. We don't labor in the fields like they did in Jesus' time, where their very lives depended on the *quality* of the seed and the soil in which it was planted — and the *grace of God* to provide the sunshine and rain! We in the US just expect food to be available at our grocery stores, fresh and at an affordable price. So the issue of soil that produces nothing lasting seems unimportant to most of us.

But stop for a moment and put yourself in the context of Jesus sharing this

parable of spiritual life and death. The lack of fruitfulness is deadly in agriculture. (If you have a concordance, look up the word "famine" to see its consequences.) Now consider the parable of *where* the seed fell and you come to realize that *wayside*, *rocky* and *thorn-infested soils* are all useless for crop production. They bore NO fruit to nourish and sustain life.

As with all parables, there is an underlying truth to be gleaned and applied to our lives. Our Lord reveals what made so much of the scattered seed unproductive:

1. The seed along the path are people who hear spiritual truth but *don't put it into practice*. Either they fail to see its importance, or their hearts are hardened so that they don't understand Kingdom truth. They may have been exposed (as at a Crusade or revival service) but the truth made no lasting, life-changing impact in their lives.
2. The seed that fell on rocky places are those who initially delight in the gospel message because it *sounds beneficial* to them and *hasn't cost them anything*. But when people begin to mock their faith or exclude them from activities or even threaten their employment because of Jesus, they quickly choose the way of the world.
3. Those whose hearts are compromised with "thorns" when they receive the Word find themselves *distracted and overcome* by cares and worries. They're also reluctant to forsake their pursuit of wealth and whatever in this world makes them happy, so the Word diminishes to the point of fruitlessness in their lives.
4. The good soil are those whose *hearts are already prepared*. The seed finds

them ready to be transformed, with an intentional purposefulness that perseveres and refuses to give up. Undistracted, they *put into practice* the truth they hear so that their way of life produces fruit to their Father's glory.

Note that in all three fruitless heart soils, the Word was initially heard and received yet *became insignificant* to them. In a sense, they were all inoculated against the Gospel, since each one was exposed but was never permanently transformed by it. God's Truth became a "been there, done that" experience. Could soulish dominion, adamantly embracing attitudes and behaviors contrary to the Word of God, have contributed to the fruitlessness of the first three places the seeds of truth landed? We strongly believe it does!

Stop for a moment and ask, "What is my own heart soil like?" Only ONE type of soil endures to the end to produce lasting fruit according to the work of the Spirit in each person. The first three types of soil are warnings from our Lord of the consequences of fruitlessness. As He reiterated with His discussion of the Vine and branches, anyone who fails to bear fruit is cast out to wither and burn (John 15:5,6). His purpose for our lives is to abide in Him with love and bear fruit that evidences His life in us (John 15:8).

Kingdom living calls for a vital response to the indwelling Spirit. Anyone who claims to be His but lives fruitlessly for himself, compromising with the world's goals and values, is at risk before His throne!

As these next examples illustrate, negligence brings its own penalties:

- "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came **seeking fruit on it and found none**. Then he

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(Colossians 1:13)

said to the keeper of his vineyard, "Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and **find none**. Cut it down; why does it **use up the soil?**" ... If it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can **cut it down**" (Luke 13:6-9).

- "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does **not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire**" (Matthew 3:10).

- "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be **taken away from you** and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (21:43; see also Matthew 25:14-30 for more of our Lord's warning about those who are negligent).

Do the above passages indicate that the King of the Kingdom *excuses* those who pursue self-interest and don't produce the fruit He calls for? Not at all! Our Lord, Whose Spirit indwells His followers, knows the power and grace that are available to those who trust and obey Him. People who try to play religious games will suffer the consequences (Matthew 7:20-23).

If you do find yourself in one of the first three unfruitful soil categories, you may be dismayed with sorrow. Can you change? Absolutely! God is on your side. He responds to the cries of the repentant with love! "*For nothing is impossible with our God*" (Luke 1:37).

***"Is not My word like fire," declares the LORD, 'and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'"***

***"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be***

***called great in the kingdom of heaven"***

***"It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law"***

(Jeremiah 23:29; Luke 16:17; Matthew 5:19)

The soil of your heart can be changed by the Law of God wielded by the Holy Spirit! Through the Law we realize how far we fall short of God's commands and how greatly we need to humbly receive His grace to forgive us in Christ and empower us to walk in His ways (Galatians 3:24). His law is used by His Spirit to *bring us to repentance*.

If you've been taught that Jesus did away with the Law, you've swallowed a lie! And, embracing that lie will keep you from bearing fruit for our Lord. Blatant disregard for God's holy and righteous Law permeates a large part of Christian thought today. But nothing could be further from the truth, especially for those who yearn to please their Father.

Those parts of the Law that concern the Temple sacrifices and Levitical priesthood have been fulfilled in Christ as the true and final Sacrifice for our sins. We His followers are now under the priesthood of *Melchizedek* — Jesus Himself is our High Priest (Hebrews 5:6,10). And, we who love and serve Him are His collective temple (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19).

The "laws" of God are His righteous teachings and instruction to us, both in the Older Testament as well as the 1050 commands in the Newer Testament. References to the Hebrew Bible pepper all of Jesus' teachings.

The only Scripture to guide the first followers of Jesus was the Older Testament. They looked to the commands of Moses, the prophecies of warning and what to anticipate, and the instructions in the Psalms to reveal a way of life that

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pleases God. (These three sources also served as witnesses to Jesus as the coming Messiah!) And, if these commands of our Father applied to the disciples of our Lord, then they must also apply to all of our Lord's followers for all time.

Those parts of the Law that pertain to our *relationship with God* and our *treatment of our fellow man* are still in force. They reiterate on a human level how we should interact with each other based on the love He calls for in all our relationships: **"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"** (Matthew 7:12).

Consider this: If you were God Who created everything, how would you make known to the humanity You created in Your image *how they should live*? You would make it known to them through commands that would be related from generation to generation (Psalms 78:5-7). How our Lord wants us to treat each other is encompassed in much of His Law, which is His *life instructions* for us as His people.

**"We know that the Law is good if one uses it properly"** (1 Timothy 1:8).

Here within the pages of the Newer Testament we find Paul extolling God's Law when it is used as He intended it. For those who would put their trust in Jesus, the Law reveals a lifestyle that God has commanded for the good of His people out of His love for them.

Prior to Jesus' first coming, the Jewish people looked to obedience to the Law as their means of righteousness before God: **"Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us"** (Deuteronomy 6:25).

Doing what was *"right and good in the sight of the Lord"* would find His blessings showered on them (Deuteronomy 6:18).

As the Older Testament makes abundantly clear, the purpose of the Law was to *reveal the righteous teachings* of holy God. Yet, it also shows that *no one* can fully keep the Law of God — and there's a *death penalty* for violating that Law. Therefore, our God required the Israelites to make annual atonement for their sin by shedding the blood of an unblemished, substitute sacrifice (Exodus 30:10). Our Perfect Sacrifice, Jesus, has now become the eternal Atonement for all the sins of mankind (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17), bringing eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

The purpose of the Law for us today is made plain by Paul: **"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the Law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the Law had said, 'You shall not covet'"** (Romans 7:7).

Again in Galatians Paul sums up the purpose of the Law for us who would respond in the way God intended: **"So the Law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith"** (3:24). How would we know our own depravity and the guilt of our sin if it weren't for knowing the righteous laws of God and how we've fallen so far short of them? The Law *reveals our sin to us*, so that we may repent and confess, knowing with utterly grateful humility that Jesus has taken our punishment for them. Our trust in this truth justifies us in the eyes of our holy God.

Even the most piously careful Israelite couldn't perfectly keep God's righteous ways. They were dependent on His loving

kindness and mercy as they obeyed His sacrificial means of restoring fellowship with Him. And that took TRUST in both God to forgive and that the substitute sacrifice was sufficient before Him.

*Trust* in God even before the Incarnation was the standard of righteousness set by Abraham, who was willing even to sacrifice his own son when God commanded it. That kind of trust was enacted by God's people when they lived according to His commands and repented when they sinned. They counted on the mercy of God which *multiplies* pardon to those who *turn from sin and return to Him*:

*Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon* (Isaiah 55:7).

Since *all* people sin and fall short of God's commands, we can never be justified by keeping the Law. But many of the Pharisees and Law experts in the first century tried to — as do many today who consider themselves "good people" by what they do or don't do! As Paul laments, "*For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God*" (Romans 10:3).

Unwilling to follow the Way of truth, they *added* to God's righteous statutes by building behavioral "fences" around Scripture just to make sure no one came close to breaking it. Those were the heavy burdens to which Jesus referred that the religious authorities relentlessly tied onto people's shoulders (Matthew 23:4) — all in a struggle to try to appear righteous before God.

But justification *never* comes from trying to keep every aspect of God's Law.

Paul couldn't make it any clearer: "*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by Law; you have fallen from grace*" (Galatians 5:4).

We can *never* earn right standing before our holy Lord through what we do or don't do. But there is great value in knowing and living by His commands *out of love for Him*. Having been justified only in Christ, we are empowered by His in-dwelling Spirit to live in a way that pleases our God and shows the world the difference. And when we do sin by violating His Law, He has graciously provided the means to restore fellowship with Him:

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

So, how can you confess anything as *sin* if you don't know what *God* considers sin? That's the purpose of the Law. And this very truth is what the Jews who rejected Jesus failed to grasp: The *means of righteousness* is found in Jesus, and the purpose of the Law is to lead people to Him:

*What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone* (Romans 9:30-32).

Again, we followers of Jesus find our righteousness *by faith*, not in keeping the Law. Our righteousness is found in our trust in Jesus and in His shed blood paying the penalty for our sins. The Jews who rejected Jesus missed this essential

understanding. But living by the good and righteous commands He has made known in both testaments pleases Him. Look up in your concordance all the verses that concern living a life that is *pleasing* to God—they’re all proactive in following His ways in obedient trust.

Think about these summary paragraphs:

- **Through knowing God’s Law and humbly confessing the sins you committed against Him, you can change the “soil” of your heart. Yieldedness to the Spirit in fruit-bearing as God’s available vessel is the foremost sign that you live repentantly in grateful love.**
- **If you’ve neglected to learn and put into practice our Lord’s commands, then how can you be fruitful in our Lord’s sight? Eagerly purpose to explore His Word for the good and righteous commands of a life that pleases Him. Don’t deceive yourself by claiming to be His and remaining unfruitful, heedless of our Father’s will.**

### Concluding Thoughts

As you can readily see, we’ve shared the intense motivation and dedication to righteousness each person who loves and follows Jesus as their Lord needs in order to be the vessels to whom He’ll entrust His spiritual power.

After having read this Lifebyte and considered how it applies to your life, you may find that your *dedication to righteousness because you love your Lord* is being hindered by those in your faith family who ignore communal righteousness and remain committed to soulish dominion. This is the hangup for most who yearn for the spiritual power of our Lord to flow through them and wonder what’s holding them back — they fellowship

with the unrepentant!

**Please, seek our Lord for confirmation of how critical to your fellowship with Him is by maintaining communal righteousness among those with whom you are family in Christ.**