

August 15, 2011

Others may, but you may not...

Early in our walk with Jesus that phrase above became an ever-growing, powerful influence in the choices that have shaped our character over the years. We'd like to share part of our pilgrimage with you; you may find similarities among your relationships with your own relatives. The prevailing strongholds that have been passed along for generations in our family have been **deceit** and **rejection**. These two have enticed generations of our relatives to give way to sexual immorality. In the younger generation homosexuality has surfaced, and is tolerated and even approved by many of our relatives. At the same time, most of them regularly attend church services and participate consistently in their denominational rituals and practices. We can only speculate with sorrow to what level of perversion the following generation will succumb.

In years past when we led Demolishing Strongholds seminars, we discovered that the spirit of rejection dominated the denomination of our relatives. It is this spirit, disguised by the spirit of deceit, that binds them to their denomination and to each other. The master deceiver Satan whose very character is deceit (see John 8:44) uses the stronghold of deceit to keep them blinded to the underlying basis to these relationships. Until they renounce these it's impossible for God's love and truth to penetrate.

If you're free of strongholds you may be also facing the demonic barrier with relatives as we are. Realize that you the most likely combination you're up against is the stronghold of deceit + the stronghold(s) of ??????????. Be mindful that the majority of people who choose to demolish their strongholds need to first renounce the *stronghold of deceit*. When you're under the influence of deceit, you don't recognize the presence of other demonic influences in your life because you *are* deceived.

“Once a person is deceived, he does not recognize that he is deceived, because he has been deceived!” Because of this pervasive deceptive spirit, your own relatives may doubt first of all that they have any demonic influence. Yet be aware that behind the spirit of deceit lurks other spiritual strongholds.

Among our relatives, the strongholds of deceit and rejection act like a tag-team in a wrestling match. They cooperate in such a sinister way that those who are agitated and influenced by these spirits can't perceive how they influence their perception of things, even when it's pointed out to them. One of the more powerful symptoms of the stronghold of deceit is **rationalization**. You can recognize this symptom when someone beset by it repeatedly tries to explain or justify their behavior, actions or attitudes (or even that of other people) with reasons which seem logical even if they're untrue or inappropriate. Through the deceptive influence of rationalization, they'll gloss over problems or try to deal with serious relational situations superficially, even making excuses to justify their sinful behavior or attitude.

As it pertains to their religious practices, the stronghold of rejection convinces people that they can never have the depth of relationship with Jesus that He offers. So to fill

that spiritual void, they commit themselves to ecclesiastical practices which they hope will gain God's favor: attending religious services, exalting any number of supposed "saints", reciting repetitious rote prayers, doing good works.

When God's Word is *not* recognized and practiced as the only authentic revelation of *Who God is* and *how to live* in a way that pleases Him, the spirit of rejection influences people to "go with the flow." Fear of getting on the wrong side of relatives and fellow congregants makes tolerant complacency the only valid option because the cost of taking a stand on truth and a willingness to face the consequences of being rejected is too high.

The spirit of deceit blinds our relatives who are engaged in these practices to the "spiritual adultery" taking place in their lives. God condemned ancient Israel for combining their service to Him with devotion to other objects of worship. So do those today who pray to and honor other entities commit *spiritual adultery* against the only One Who is worthy of praise. Between giving way to deceit and refusing out of fear of rejection to stand for Biblical truth, everything that is **anti-Christ** — *anti* what it means to live for Christ alone — perpetuates their slavery to a false religion. Because we both care so much the emotional pain is often tremendous.

While writing this e-mail we're reminded of an incident where a person took a stand for our Lord Jesus. This took place while we were ministering at a retreat center in Connecticut. One weekend we hosted a men's retreat from the inner city. Most of the men lived on the streets or had been through various drug or alcohol programs. The congregation was from the "social gospel" bent of Christendom; that is, the strongholds of deceit and rebellion were the thread that bound them together, masked behind acts of good works. During one of the breaks Mike happened to overhear a conversation on the deck. A man in his forties was describing to three or four younger men how he was using fornication to evangelize women, rationalizing that after intimacy he could then share the gospel with them. The young men sat wide-eyed as they listened.

Mike felt the pastor should deal with this insidious discussion. Finding him downstairs, he explained the situation. Amazingly, the pastor saw nothing wrong with what the man was sharing! As Mike headed back toward the deck to stop the conversation, one of the older men, Thomas, who'd overheard Mike's conversation with the pastor ran upstairs ahead of him. Thomas was a very big man who'd played in the NFL before finding himself on the streets. The man on the deck was still espousing his sinful "evangelistic technique" with the younger men as Thomas approached them. In no uncertain terms he declared, "Brothers, this conversation is OVER!!! Join hands now and pray with me." When Thomas finished praying, those men were on their knees repenting. And, Thomas and Mike became close from that time on.

Consider this maxim:

**If you won't take a stand for Jesus and His Word
by the life choices you make and by the words of your mouth,
then you don't belong to Him.
You may call yourself "Christian," but you're deceived!
*"I tell you, whoever acknowledges Me before men,
the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.
But he who disowns Me before men
will be disowned before the angels of God"*
(Luke 12:8,9)**

There is no middle ground. Either you stand with and for Jesus and His Word, no matter what it costs you. Or, according to His very warning, you'll be disowned in heaven. It's a choice we each have to make **NOW** while we live, and make known to those who know you. Paraphrasing theologian Abraham Heschel, either God is *Lord of all* in your life, or He's not *Lord at all* in your life.

***"For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion
so that they will believe the lie"*** (2 Thessalonians 2:11)

Over the years, many among our relatives have become deluded into embracing the universalist view of salvation that "all dogs go to heaven." This deceived view that everyone will eventually be welcomed by God has evolved away from the view of previous generations that only those of their denomination are acceptable to God. What prompted the change in belief in one household in particular was the doctrinal dilemma stirred when some of the adult children married outside the denominational fold. One nephew married a Jewish woman, thereby prompting a decision that since she's a "good person", she's headed for heaven too. As offspring arrived, this couple decided to let each child make their choice of which faith to follow, Jewish or Christian. While their children were still very young, the Holy Spirit gave Mike a prophetic warning to share with the couple: "Decide now whether the Messiah has already come or not. When you've made the decision, raise your children accordingly."

Recently their oldest daughter turned 12. She'd spent a few years of intense study preparing for her bat mitzvah. The celebration of this event created tension between those in the family who follow Jesus as their Lord and God incarnate, and those who practice religion and believe the "good person, universalist salvation" ideology. Those among the latter took part in the ceremony, rationalizing that "We need to support the family", blinded that deceit and rejection enticed them to support the anti-Christ spirit behind the ceremony.

Those who grieved that a Christ-less rite was taking place did not attend. If our nephew and his wife had diligently pursued whether the Messiah, Jesus, has already come, they would have realized that, ***"The LORD is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you"*** (2

Chronicles 15:2), and, "*Salvation is found in no one else [but Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

Another niece within this family also married outside the denomination, and regularly attended services within her denomination even as her husband attends his own. Mike again received from the Spirit a prophetic warning that they were dividing Jesus and role modeling a "Mommy's God and Daddy's God" framework for their children. This couple too ignored the warning; heartrending events have besieged them.

We've shared this sampling with you because you most likely also have relatives who are oblivious to how they're imprisoned by demonic strongholds, especially deceit. We grieve for our own relatives because we ourselves were once held captive in the same bondage (Ephesians 6:12). As we continue to pray for them daily by name, our hearts yearn for the day they'll recognize the demonic prison they're in and turn in repentance to the Jesus of the Bible. Certainly the censure Jesus spoke to the religious in His day applies to those today who depend on their own form of religion to find acceptance with God: "*They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the [the demonically inspired] traditions of men*" (Mark 7:7,8).

If you love our Lord Jesus with all your heart and soul and are burdened for the salvation of others, you can identify with the heart sorrow we have for the people we deeply care about who refuse to earnestly pursue the God of the Bible and leave the prison they've become accustomed to. Paul's description of his own feelings reflect our personal anguish: "*Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*" (2 Corinthians 11:29).

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God's Word offers us a way of life that please Him: His commands of instruction to guide us in the good we should do as His blessing to others, and laws that constrain us from things to avoid and resist. Certainly in these perilous and depraved times a follower of Jesus will stand out and often be rejected for determining to walk in His steps. Peter warns of the relational resistance and persecution we'll encounter as we represent Jesus by our lives: "*They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*" (1 Peter 4:4,5).

If you identify with the emotional pain of being true to our Lord no matter what the cost, we'd love to hear from you. We encourage you to keep on praying for those you love who have yet to taste the freedom that comes when Jesus alone is Lord of their life.

Mike & Sue