

July 14, 2011

Being Born Again — A 180° Turnabout
The Tension Between Believers and Unbelievers

Dear Friends,

The next segment in our ***Way of the Lord*** video series is now available. We continue to focus on your relationship with Jesus, and the hindrances to experiencing spiritual power. You can view **Way 17. Your Relationship With Your Lord Jesus (Part 1)**, by going to our website.

In this segment we discuss how *doubt* in our Lord so hinders you from experiencing spiritual power. Doubt isn't just an individual matter concerning you; it's often contagious among people who have close relationships with each other. Doubt can also be a reliable indicator that you're *yielding to unrighteousness*, another way of saying that you're **tolerating sin**. Because God's Word assures His people that "...*the righteous are as bold as a lion*" (Proverbs 28:1), please watch and discuss this video segment with your family and faith family to scrutinize your life for any doubt of the promises our Lord has given in His Word.

Being Born Again — A 180° Turnabout
The Tension Between Believers and Unbelievers

In our last e-mail we discussed some of the issues that arise between a follower of Jesus and unbelieving relatives. For over 3 decades we've grieved at the resistance of so many of our relatives who steadfastly resist the God of the Bible. You may have found yourself also saddened over the unwillingness in your own relatives to yield to Father's gracious call. Some of the tension you're experiencing may be emanating from your *changed life* — the progressive stages of spiritual development into Christ's likeness that you're in. Study the four stages in the diagram below. (It may help you to recall that time in your life when *you* were as resistant as your unbelieving relatives. Don't give way to doubt that they'll come to Jesus; instead, persevere in prayer on their behalf!)

1. Before Being Born Again

Before you responded to the Gospel of the Covenant in Jesus, your close relationships were most likely based on the comfort zone of strongholds you had in common and on your mutual toleration for sin. (Paul addresses this "old way of life" in Ephesians 2:1,2.)

2. Shortly After Being Born Again

While you enjoy learning more about God in His Word, you may not be *applying* it to your daily life. And, it's hard to separate from what you've been doing with your old friends even though they may give you a hard time about your "new religion". The struggle against those sinful cravings and your new desire to walk in the Spirit can be intense! (See Ephesians 2:3) And your struggle against your sin nature is compounded

if you haven't renounced the demonic strongholds that have bound you and your companions together in the past.

Toxic motivations will also agitate you with thoughts like, "You'll hurt their feelings if you speak up or refuse to join in the old activities you used to do!" But Paul is adamant about putting to death those ways you formerly gave way to (Colossians 3:5). Or, this idea may haunt you: "They'll think you're 'holier than they are now that you want to follow Jesus." If you allow these thoughts to influence or dominate you, you'll find your spiritual development being stunted. Fear of what others say or do to you will entrap you and keep you from maturing in Jesus (Proverbs 29:25). And spiritual infancy keeps you from having God's perspective: *"I could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ"* (1 Corinthians 3:1).

If you fear losing your old relationships that were held together by strongholds and sin-based activities, you'll be a prisoner yourself, held captive by your own double-mindedness. And if you find yourself trapped by the fear of what they may say about you or do to you, follow through in God's command: *"Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"* (James 4:8). Having HIS presence is far more precious than anything people can offer.

3. A Season of Time After Being Born Again

As you continue in God's Word, the Spirit in you uses it to do what it does best: *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). You find yourself responding more quickly to the Spirit, taking God's Word seriously as His wonderful way of life for you. As you put His Word into practice, you discover you want to please your Father because of His great love for you. Living HIS way far supersedes the temptation to go back to your old ways and old companions in their worldly pleasures. As you read the Bible as your loving Father's road map for your life, His Spirit convicts you about different sinful things in your life that you've been allowing to control or influence you. You realize that the Bible is speaking to you in such commands as:

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator"(Colossians 3:5,8-10).

As your conviction leads you to a life of staying repentant before your holy Father, the old friends who want nothing to do with Jesus ultimately leave you. As always, the Bible offers you wisdom even in this situation: *"Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human*

desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what unbelievers choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you" (1 Peter 4:1-4). You begin to develop new friendships based upon your loving, obedient trust in Jesus and on your new motives and goals.

4. Jesus is Lord of Your Life

As you continue to grow in loving appreciation of Lord Jesus and apply the commands of God through the power of His Spirit in you, you begin to die to every worldly value and goal you once held dear. Your heart motives become *intentional* toward everything your Lord wants for your life. That's *sanctification*, His Spirit at work in you in the ongoing work of making you holy in your character and purpose. Your closest relationships are "brothers and sisters in Jesus" who have a common commitment to become more like Him and to do His will. Through this ongoing and ever-deepening heart transformation, you experience authentic fellowship.

A Word of Encouragement

During this ongoing pilgrimage of transformation in becoming more like Jesus, keep focused on the relational priorities of your life in Christ: your intimacy with your Father and Jesus by the Spirit, the wholeness of shalom in your marriage and household, and authentic fellowship with close relationships in the faith. This pursuit will definitely cost you old relationships, especially as your longing for the lost to encounter Jesus stirs your heart!

Why? Because with Jesus as Lord and Master of your life, your new relationships in Him will be based on commitment to each other's Christ-like character development and bringing praise to your Father as you fulfill His purposes. Unlike your worldly companions who shunned or resisted any correction or admonition, your new relationships in Christ have the freedom to correct one another out of love (Proverbs 9:8, 17:10, 19:25, 27:5).

When you live with a heartfelt readiness to repent when you sin and a sacrificial lifestyle of serving others by His Spirit, you'll find an interesting response in others:

**A number of unbelievers around you
will choose to follow Jesus
because of the courageous conviction they see
in those who follow Him no matter what the cost.**

**At the same time, many unbelievers
will be *hindered* from looking to Jesus
because of the worldly compromise,
lukewarmness and fear
they see in self-proclaimed "Christians" .**

We encourage you to scrutinize your own spiritual life. Ask your close relationships in the faith to do the same. In light of the diagram near the beginning, where do you put yourself? Where do they put themselves? Discuss how you can help one another press on into the new life of His character together.

Continuing to prepare the family of Jesus to joyfully walk in His Kingdom purposes,
Mike & Sue