

There's Nothing Wrong With Me

Neil Girard

Perhaps one of the deepest deceptions upon Christianity is linked to Paul's statement, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells..." (Rom. 7:18) It is easy to look at the world and see the sickness and death that rules it. One can readily look at the encroaching and sweeping darkness in our own country and see many things wrong. Many can even look at the "church" (though often not their own "church"!) and see that many things need to change. But few are willing to admit that there is anything at all wrong with *me* – and even as we deny this when spoken so openly and baldly, too often we act as if we had God's blanket approval upon all that we are, have, say and do.

Closely related is the subtle, buried belief that *I* and those who think like *me* are the only right kind of Christian. Only rarely do we let this one come to the surface of our thinking and it remains as powerful as it is precisely because we leave it buried in the darkness of our soul and mind. Most of us reject this thought as too open and brazen even as we cling to and practice it as if it were our God-given right and heritage.

Still others have concocted a hyper-grace deception that similarly says, "No matter what you do you're good with God." Under this deception, it does not matter that the person is actually practicing habitual sin and refusing to confront that sin because he or she is now "under grace." Grace, the genuine power and mercy given by God to sinful mankind, is huge and knows only one sin that is too heinous or grievous to forgive but any "grace" that tolerates, promotes or causes anyone to continue in sin is no longer true grace but rather deceptive hyper-grace. It is true that no matter what you've done (with only the one exception – see Mk. 3:29 – a sin not as easy to commit as many guilt-ridden victims force upon themselves), you can still ask for and receive forgiveness and then come under Christ's command to "Go and sin no more." (Jn. 5:14, 8:11)

It would seem that one who has been touched or blessed or used by God is especially susceptible to believing these lies – and this seems all the more true if someone believes themselves to be titled and gifted as something exceptional ("pastor," "apostle," "prophet," etc.) In certain individuals, suddenly *everything* that person does is right – whether it was done in the flesh or in and by the Spirit of God is not even a consideration or at all to be questioned. Few indeed recognize how the flesh intertwines itself around even the best of our actions, intentions, beliefs and attitudes and subtly (at times, not so subtly!) taints them and turns them from an act or thought of godliness into one of self-righteousness or hypocrisy or sin of some stripe or flavor. Most who claim to be "Christians" are content to rest on a one-time "confession of faith" or "sinner's prayer" (neither of these formulas can be found anywhere in the New Testament) and these people are often even taught to resist the purifying work of the Spirit of God as being merely "guilt trips" from the devil and demonic!

But so long as we believe there is nothing that we need to further repent of or surrender, we will be a most dangerous tool for the enemy of our souls to use. We may walk in great power but if we do not continue to grow in the knowledge and truth of our Lord and Savior (see 2 Pet. 3:18), we are walking on dangerous ground indeed. If we presume that God's touch or blessing or usage is a blanket approval of all that we are and say and do, we are deeply deceived and the level of God's power we have walked in will quickly become demonic power instead.

Peter's life provides an excellent example of just how ongoing the interior work will be. Peter was in the forefront of the disciples in all the time that Jesus was with them and even in the first years after Jesus ascended – but consider the other realities that attended him.

- Peter began his time with Jesus by saying to Him, “Depart from me, I’m a sinful man” (Lk. 5:8) but Jesus brought him into His inner circle anyway.

- Peter obviously felt the need to be the greatest of the twelve and even of the three. (compare Lk. 9:46, 22:24, Mt. 20:24) It would seem that the “humble” man who declared his sinfulness at first now felt it carnally correct to be the greatest of Jesus’ guys.

- Peter suffered from rivalry even after Jesus was resurrected. After being told that he would experience an undesirable death, he asked Jesus, “What about John?” Jesus reproved him, “What is that to you? You follow Me.” (Jn. 21:21-22)

- On that same occasion, Jesus asked him increasingly pointed questions: “Do you really love Me more than these do? Do you really love Me? Are you even My friend?” As Peter honestly answered these questions and was rightly grieved, Jesus instructed him in his newer, more genuine humility, to take care of Christ’s sheep. (Jn. 21:15-17)

- When Peter was given a vision of unclean animals and instructed to take and eat, he replied, “Not so, Lord! I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean!” God reproved him, saying, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This had to be repeated three times so that Peter would know he was supposed to go with the Gentile men who showed up just as the vision ended. (Acts 10:13-17)

- Cornelius was a Roman centurion but he was such a good man that God had just sent an angel to visit him. But when Peter arrives, he says, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” (Acts 10:1-3, 28) Peter has just delivered a left-handed insult here revealing his own not so hidden prejudice and hatred of the Romans. The Holy Spirit will fall upon the Gentiles before Peter even finishes speaking. (Acts 10:44)

- When Peter was at Antioch, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when the faction called “the circumcision” came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them. He didn’t try to live like a Jew until the Judaizers came among the Gentiles. (Gal. 2:11-12, 14)

These deeper issues clearly show that Peter was not instantaneously transformed into the righteousness that God instills and requires (Mt. 5:20, 2 Cor. 5:21) but rather retained buried elements of his flesh long into his later life. Hidden prejudices, hidden pride, hidden sins of any

sort – especially when hidden from our own recognition – are proof that the sin nature has not fully died out just because we, in faith, believe it to be so. We have confused the finished work of Christ on the cross with our own unfinished lives that still need to experience overcoming grace and we are failing to take up our cross and follow Christ wherever He might lead us. In short, we are placing ourselves back on the wrong road and once again pursuing judgment and destruction.

As Paul said elsewhere, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” (Phlp. 3:12) The negligent presumption that all is well in my soul just because God has begun a good work (that still needs completed! – Phlp. 1:6) is a dangerous presumption indeed.

Peter and Jude both prophesied that the people of the end times would deny the Master who had bought them. (2 Pet. 2:1, Jude 4) “Theologians” and Bible “scholars” have tried for centuries to spin this as a denial of Christ as being the Christ but it is much more specific than this. Both of these prophecies use the unusual Greek word *despotes* [1203] for “Lord,” a word that signifies the absolute sovereignty of the lord in view. This is the word from which we derive the word “despot.” Peter and Jude prophesied that people would deny the absolute Sovereign who had bought them with His blood His right to be their absolute Lord and Master. And this is precisely what we see today as lawlessness (doing what is right in one’s own eyes – see Mt. 24:12, Jdgs. 21:25) abounds, the love of most has grown cold and very few submit everything they are, have, say and do to the Lordship of Christ. Some “theologians” even deride such thinking as “lordship theology” that is to be summarily dismissed!

This is precisely why the presumptive attitude of “there’s nothing wrong with me” is so dangerous. We do not want – indeed we must not – get caught up in what has been rightly called “introspective paralysis.” But we must not commit the opposite error of presuming that there is nothing further in our life that needs to be surrendered or purified. Paul called on those who believe themselves to be sons and daughters of God to “purify ourselves from *everything* that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” (2 Cor. 6:18-7:1) He also wrote that Christ would be presenting to Himself an assembly “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:27)

Paul instructed, “Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...” (Phlp. 2:14-16) The whole point of the gospel of Christ is that we become pure before God. This is no manmade list of do-s and don’t-s but God’s eternal standard of righteousness which He has placed in Christ. Nor is it something that we manufacture or work up out of our carnal flesh but rather we progressively mature as we cooperate and rely upon God’s grace (His mercy *and* power) to overcome our own sins and weaknesses. It is as we are in Christ that we become the righteousness of God. This is not a matter of inactive presumption built on some piece of intellectual knowledge but of genuine faith that produces true obedience to the Spirit of Christ and God.

So long as we bring anything of the flesh into what we think is the service of God we are doing exactly as did Cain. From the ground that God had cursed, Cain thought it right to bring something of what he had produced and became angry when God rejected his offering. (Gen. 4:3-5) The way of Cain is prophesied to be a prevalent characteristic in the end times. (Jude 11) The writer of Hebrews tells us, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb. 11:4) and John wrote,

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” (1 Jn. 3:11-12) If we are bringing works of the flesh into the work of God, our work is rejected by God and it brings death (whether literal, complete, incremental, physical or spiritual) into the midst of the sacred assembly – no matter how much money we take in the offerings and no matter how many loyal followers we see walking behind us.

One truth that will help us remain humble – no matter how many wonderful things we do in the name of Christ and God – is that there is absolutely no good thing in our flesh. It is the work of the cross that we crucify our flesh however and whenever it raises its ugly head from its hiding places within our soul. Those who refuse to crucify the flesh in these instances will rely on the strength of their flesh and practice carnal religiosity and will be surprised, as was Cain, when their works and even they themselves are rejected as lawless workers of unrighteousness. (Mt. 7:22-23, Lk. 13:27) The truth is there is something very wrong with any part of *me* that is apart from Christ.

Let he who has ears hear.

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