May the Holy Spirit make you more like Jesus every day!

*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

Galatians 5:17

This passage from the apostle Paul lets us know that it is typical Christian experience to suffer a constant battle between doing good and doing evil. It is not abnormal; it is not an indication that you aren’t saved. In fact, it’s more of an indication that you are saved.

Our flesh, the desires of our hearts, are evil; the Bible tells us that. When we accept Jesus as Saviour, our hearts begin a process of becoming more like Him, but it doesn’t happen immediately; it takes a lifetime for our hearts to change. But that evil basis of our heart remains.

At the same time, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He is the one pulling us toward being like Jesus; He is the one guiding us into a life of holiness. He is the one actually changing our heart.

This is why we are in a constant battle with ourselves: the flesh or our heart against the Holy Spirit.

Knowledge of this battle helps us to understand what is going on so that we don’t become discouraged. It reassures us that we are indeed Christians and gives us motivation to fight against the flesh even more. We aren’t fighting alone; almighty God Himself is leading the battle.

In Christ’s love

John

8-8-21

Psalm 104 (4)

Psalm 104 is a Psalm of worship. It is focusing on worshiping God for His creation; the verses go along with the days of Genesis 1. God is worthy to be praised and worshiped for His creative abilities; He began creation out of absolutely nothing. This demonstrates the power of God; what He conceives and speaks comes into being. He is even able to give life to those parts of His creation He chooses to. It is His Spirit, His breath, that gives life to His creatures.

Verses 19 through 23 consider the fourth day of creation and what it was for. On the fourth day God created the sun, moon, and stars and placed them in the sky. Verse 19 mentions the moon first because the Hebrew people went by a lunar calendar; they set up their months by the moon. Also, their day started at sundown and ended with the following sundown. Thus, the 24-hour day started with the moon instead of the sun.

But notice what the moon is for in this Psalm; it’s for marking the seasons. Notice how the moon is what goes through phases during the month. It has phases like quarter moon, full moon, new moon, etc. It also appears larger during some parts of the year than others. The Israelites were able to mark the seasons and times of the month by the moon.

The sun, on the other hand, doesn’t have these kinds of changes. It’s pretty much the same as it travels through sky during the day. It may be there for a longer or shorter period depending on the time of year, but it doesn’t go through phases. God chose for light to be associated with the sun and darkness with the moon. That gives us an interesting thought: God didn’t create the sun until the fourth day but He created light on the first day; and separated it from darkness. That means that the light existed by itself without the sun. This is what our God is able to do.

The Sun and the moon, like the earth, just hang there in space. The moon goes around the earth and they both go around the sun; each and every day just like they are supposed to. And the Bible lets us know that we don’t have to worry about it. God said in Genesis 8:22,

*“While the earth remains,  
Seedtime and harvest,  
And cold and heat,  
And summer and winter,  
And day and night  
Shall not cease.”*

Next there are passages in Isaiah, 2 Peter, and Revelation that let us know that these things will continue until God Himself destroys what’s here and creates it brand new. We will be safely out of the way when that happens and then get to live in the new creation forever with Jesus and without sin.

God appoints nighttime to come which is characterized by darkness. As we mentioned before, this is good for us. Nighttime is when we should be getting rest from our labors. This is the time for sleep; which our bodies desperately need to function properly. Darkness is the time for the animals to come out and hunt. Some people must come out and work at night; but consider what most are up to when they are out at night. The metaphor of darkness being evil comes into play. Those who are up to no good and out at night can be compared to beasts.

Verse 21 is poetic, “*The young lions roar after their prey, And seek their food from God*.” Certainly, if the lion would roar while it is hunting, its prey would seek shelter far away. The roar here is taken as a kind of prayer; a beseeching of God for food. Notice also that they “*seek*”. In a manner of speaking, the beasts of the night depend on God to provide their food, but they go and get it; they work for it.

The Lord can understand the growling prayer of an animal that isn’t really aware of what it’s doing; how much more can he understand our prayers, no matter how poor we might think them to be or even how poor they actually are. When you are a child of God, He delights in you and is pleased with your prayers. Sometimes we are warned to be careful what you pray for: nonsense. Our heavenly Father is good beyond our imagining and will give us nothing that will harm us.

We must also learn the proper place of work. We are to pray for our daily bread, but like the forest creatures we are to work for it. Remember the manna God provided for the Israelites during their forty years of wandering. It didn’t fall into their bowls and plates. They had to gather it off the ground and sticks and blades of grass. Pray to God, work for your food, then thank Him for His provision and your ability to obtain it.

When daylight comes, it is time for these animals to retire and it is time for people to come out to work. There are many today who don’t like this idea of work; that is part of this fallen world. We were made to work. In Genesis 2:5 we read,

*Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground.*

Notice that it says “*no shrub of the field*” and “*no plant of the field*” had yet sprouted. The garden was there; God had planted the Garden of Eden and that is where the man and his wife were to live. The field was outside of the garden; it was the rest of the earth. In the beginning it was man’s job to till the soil outside the garden to increase the size of the garden for the increasing population.

We all know it didn’t work out that way, but there is still that God-given desire in people to work. There is a sense of accomplishment and a good sense of pride in work; an enjoyment the lazy man will never experience. Because of sin, the goodness of work has been twisted in two directions. There are those who try to avoid it and those who overdo it. For those who overdo it, work becomes an idol and the work is what is worshiped.

Verses 24 through 30 rounds out the fifth and sixth days of creation. Much has already been said about the birds and animals and the multitudes of creatures that live in the waters. We see His wisdom in creating things in the order He did. Consider how beautiful creation is. God could have made everything one color; He could have only made a couple verities of fish or birds. There didn’t have to be flowers.

Even the abilities He gave mankind. Verse 26 mentions the ships on the sea. God gave us the ability to build things like that. Even now, there is nothing wrong with being impressed with what people have built and accomplished, as long as we remember that these abilities are bestowed by God. He has blessed us with some of His creativity.

Satan may have the power of death through our sin; but God holds life and death in His hands and neither happens outside of His will. This is clearly shown in verses 29 and 30.

*You hide Your face, they are dismayed;  
You take away their spirit, they expire  
And return to their dust.  
You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;  
And You renew the face of the ground.*

We can’t live without God; whether we admit it or not, He keeps us alive. We can’t stay alive a moment longer that our spirit, out breath, remains in us. And God is continually granting new life. That is, until history comes to an end and the new heavens and new earth come into being as God intends.

One of the reasons for going through this Psalm is to go into a deeper consideration of worship; in particular, worship of God. While people can display some form of glory; and it is okay to praise someone for a job well done; worship must be for God alone. Worship of anything else is sin. It is idolatry. And God makes it very clear in Scripture that idolatry is completely unacceptable to Him.

There are several reasons to worship God. For one thing, He is worthy of worship simply for who He is. He is God; He is the great I AM; there is no-one or nothing else like Him. He is all-powerful and ever living; He has life in Himself, no-one gave life to Him. His very existence is beyond us; we can’t comprehend His infinity or His eternity; we can’t picture one God who exists in three persons.

We don’t need any more reasons to worship Him, but there are more. As we have been studying in this Psalm, we worship Him for His creative ability. He speaks and huge things come into being; He speaks and the land He created brings forth plants and animals; the waters and air teem. He grants life to beings and they are alive; He breathes into the nostrils of mankind and we exist in His image.

There is another reason to worship God: It’s good for us. Worship is a primary means of spiritual warfare. Consider the account in 2 Chronicles 20. Jehoshaphat was king of Judah and they were about to be invaded by a combined army of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites; Judah didn’t stand a chance. Jehoshaphat did the best thing he could do; he led the people in prayer to the Lord. They worshiped God and reminded Him of His promises.

God answered by means of the prophet Jahaziel. The Lord told them not to fear and to go down against the enemy; the Lord would fight for them. Jehoshaphat and the people responded with more worship. The next morning, Jehoshaphat lead his army out to battle; but in front he put singers who sang worship to the Lord as they went. When the army arrived, the opposing forces has already turned on each other and wiped themselves out. It took three days for Israel to gather up all the booty.

Again, what we see in the physical in the Old Testament very often applies to the spiritual in the New Testament. That is why we know that we can apply praise and worship of God in our spiritual battles. The first thing we have to do is recognize we are in a battle. I think most of us realize this to some extent. Even as Christians, we sin. We are in a constant struggle with satan, the world, and our own flesh. This battle will be ongoing throughout our lives here on earth and God uses this struggle in our sanctification.

There is another category of sin that a Christian might have to deal with; we usually refer to it as “living in sin”. The Puritans called this “besetting sin”. A besetting sin is a sin that we engage in consistently; it is an habitual sin; it is a lifestyle sin. Some examples would be consistent pornography use, addiction, carrying on an affair, lying, or even working to the neglect of everything else. Besetting sins can be very difficult to break.

Often a person has them before they are saved. Sometimes, the Lord sees fit to break that sin immediately in a person the moment they come to Christ; other times, the Lord allows that person to struggle. There are times when even a Christian can fall into a besetting sin. Either way, unless the Lord suddenly breaks it supernaturally, the person is in for a battle.

The first thing to realize is that there is a control issue going on. If you are dealing with a besetting sin, you like that sin. You don’t want to stop. You feel you have control because even if you know you should stop, if others around you want you to stop, if it is costing you things you have in life; none of this can make you stop, you have control. Unfortunately, this is a lie of satan. The sin is in control.

Satan lied to Eve when he told her that in spite of what God said, she wouldn’t die from eating the fruit. Now Eve thought she had control; she thought she could be like God. But the sin got her; it assumed control.

Jehoshaphat was king; he was in control. He was able to command and things got done. He commanded the whole army of Israel. But when he heard about the vast army coming against him, he realized something very crucial: he was not in control. So, he turned to God. Likewise, someone caught in besetting sin needs to realize that they are not in control; the sin is.

Once this step is made, a person fighting besetting sin can begin to worship God. How does this help? Basically, a besetting sin is an idol. An idol is anything that holds sway over your life. If you run off to your neighbor’s wife or your neighbor’s husband every chance you get, that affair has become an idol. It has become an idol and you are worshiping it.

Worshiping God dilutes the worshiping of the idol. God is also more powerful than the idol so worshiping Him will have a greater effect on your life. God inhabits the praises of His people; God will move closer to you when you worship Him and the Holy Spirit will work more in your life.

Breaking a besetting sin will still not be easy, but worshiping God provides the way forward and more strength from God to be victorious. It also makes you more willing to submit to God; and to seek help from your brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to help bear one another’s burdens.

Worshiping God is good for us. He doesn’t need our worship; He is fine without us. It is truly a privilege for us to be able to worship the Almighty God of all things; the Creator of things seen and unseen; the all-powerful God who holds us in His hands. He is pleased to accept what His children offer Him. That, in itself, is amazing.

Prayer

Lord God, when our own children offer us something in love, though it is poor and imperfect, we are pleased to accept their gift and love them for it. How much more, You, the perfect Father, are pleased with our poor and imperfect efforts to worship You.

Thank You that it is this way. That You have chosen to love us and to offer to us the chance to be Your children through Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that it is only by Your only begotten Son that we can become Your adopted children. A privilege that we don’t deserve but we receive by Your grace.

We worship You almighty God and Father, creator and sustainer of all things; we worship You God the Son, our only redeemer and means of salvation; we worship You God the Holy Spirit, who gives life and seals us for eternal salvation. You are one God, forever and ever.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen