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by

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QUEST FOR A LIFE THAT IS SPIRITUAL

The basis for our quest is to discover what is a spiritual life. We, as humans, are created by a spiritual, holy God and created in His image, to be His authoritative representative on earth. As a holy God, He is set apart and unique from all else because He is not created and He is the one who created all things. As the Creator, God has the authority to rule over all things. Humanity enjoyed unbroken fellowship with Him as His chosen agents to rule and subdue all of creation on His behalf, as His “imagers.” But humanity chose to rebel against God by choosing to establish our own authority apart from God’s authority and live out of that. When Adam and Eve chose to do that, all of humanity was marked by a sin nature; sin became the ruling authority over humanity enslaving us to it and its ways.

From that point on, humanity has experienced the consequences of sin. The main two consequences are the wrath of God and death.¹ To be dead means that apart from God we can do nothing to save ourselves. We experience the curse between us and the created order to remind us of our rebellion against God and that what we now experience is not the way it was intended to be. Instead of ruling over creation as God’s representatives, the creation order is reversed and we experience the frustration of living in this world as the world works against us.

Since there is no hope for us in and of ourselves to fix our condition, the only hope of a solution must come from God Himself. God extended grace, a free gift based on nothing we deserve, to us. Grace creates life. It invigorates. It reigns, appeases God’s wrath, overthrows death.² It is powerful because it undoes the results of Adam’s sin. And yet, we do not like grace because it exposes our need and puts us in a place that makes us subordinate to the One who

¹ *NET Bible*, (n.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), Romans 1:18-2:16; Ephesians 2:1-5; All scripture notes are cited from The NET Bible unless otherwise noted.

² *Ibid.*, Romans 5:1-21.

gives it. We don't like it because it does not feel fair. It puts us on an uneven playing field, the mercy of God.

Faith is our only response to grace. Faith in God provides a way for us to be set free from the enslavement to sin. Faith, confidence in God, means we must know what is true, agree that it is true and then commit to it by living it out. Faith is believing God with what He promises in the life to come and is not ill-informed. It is the reasonable response to the facts but is in contention with sight. We believe in what we cannot see. Faith is having that knowledge of the facts, but also agreeing with the facts, and then a consent to them displayed by our actions.³

So by faith, we believe we have a new identity in Christ that sets us free from the authority to sin and allows us to have the choice to live according to God's way. In that new identity, by faith, we identify with Christ in His death, resurrection and newness of life. The authority of sin no longer has mastery over us as it did without Him; that is our new freedom. Grace sets us free from sin and from the law.⁴

The law, or trying to live up to the law, is impossible for us in the flesh to keep. The law diagnoses sin so that we can identify it, but it also inflames sin, enticing us to do what that law points out that we should not.⁵ Individual sins come out of that authority of sin in our flesh. The flesh is selfishness, all selfish desires that are counter to God and pull us away from Him. It will always be a part of our lives on this earth. Only when we die and are raised in our glorious bodies will be free from the flesh. We are unable to control the flesh and its desires so God in His continued grace, gave us His Spirit to combat the flesh.⁶ So our new freedom provides an opportunity to live according to the flesh or the spirit. The flesh is self-confidence living apart from God and His ways, while the spirit is God-confidence, living according to God and His ways by faith.

³ *Ibid.*, James 2:14-26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Romans 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Romans 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Romans 8.

The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is referred to as indwelling us as believers, or living in us, but this is simply a metaphor to reflect the deep intimacy of our relationship with God.⁷ We cannot be any closer to Him or Him to us, just as Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Him, and that intimacy reveals God to the world around us.⁸ The Spirit of God connects us with the heart of God so that we know His desires and what pleases Him. This alone is what makes believers in Christ different than non-believers. And this puts us in a place where we experience an internal battle that they do not, the one between the Flesh and the Spirit.

The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to help us engage with the battle with the Flesh and to work against the Flesh. The Spirit works with the law to fulfill its intended goal of developing the righteousness of God in us.⁹ Scripture talks about the “leading of the Spirit,” “grieving the Spirit,” “walking by the Spirit,” “the filling of the Spirit,” and “quenching the Spirit.”¹⁰ All of these are references to the battle with the Flesh. Since we are incapable of wage a war with our Flesh on our own, we need the Spirit to be able to live out what God desires.

I have seen this war at work in my own life. As a conscientious, dominant person, I prefer tasks over people. My flesh desires to be independent and not want to need others. In my flesh, I am more concerned about results and exactness. I can be self-reliant and intense in getting jobs done. I can be unemotional and impatient with others. Since I became identified with Christ, the Holy Spirit has been fighting against my Flesh and these tendencies that are counter to God’s desires. He desires me to depend on Him, created me to live in community, to be more concerned about relationships over being right. I have seen how many of life’s situations have put in me a place to sensitize me to my sin and from that God has grown godly character such as love, patience, kindness, and gentleness among many others.

⁷ *Ibid.*, John 14:10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, John 6:53-56; 15:4; 17:20-26; Romans 14:19-20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Romans 7:4-6; 8:3-11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

However, we do have a responsibility in living the Christian life. We must continually choose to surrender to the Spirit of God with in us to fight the Flesh instead of trusting in self and self-effort to live a holy life, which is legalism. Legalism shows up in the various ways we add rules on ourselves and others in order to live the spiritual life, believing that if we keep rules or preform in certain ways that we will be holy people and pleasing to God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul even calls the believer in the church at Galatia out for trying to live by human effort.¹¹

If legalism kills grace, there is also the possibility of grace being abused. Charles Swindle points out that some “will promote the erroneous idea that you can go on sinning as much as you like.”¹² They take advantage the grace of God in a way that cheapens it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the term “cheap grace,” which “justifies the sin rather than the sinner” and is counter to “true grace,” which “justifies the sinner, not the sin.”¹³

This dependence on the Spirit of God and submission to Him is played out in things that are familiar to the Christians church such as liturgical practices and spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines position us to battle the Flesh, our own selfish desires. They are not a means of getting us closer to God; we already have the most intimate relationship possible with Him. They are us choosing to volunteer for the battle and makes us more sensitive to our sin and to the battle against the Flesh, my selfish desires. Spiritual disciplines put us in a state of training, so to speak, against the desires of the Flesh. Only when I have greater understanding of the flesh and its desires in me, can godly character be produced in me.

In *Desiring the Kingdom*, James Smith challenges us with the idea that as spiritual beings on this quest to be spiritual, we need to deal with the “formation of our desires” instead of informing our heads in Christians education.¹⁴ He claims, “...we humans are liturgical animals,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Galatians 3:3.

¹² Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18-19, 26-27.

whose fundamental orientation to the world is governed not primarily by what we think but by what we love, what we desire.”¹⁵ He makes the case for how we are created to desire but at the fall our desires became disordered and the case for how the world does a much better job engaging our hearts and desires to pull us into worship but worship of the wrong things, worship of the world and not God.¹⁶ Smith demonstrates how the liturgies of the church are key in the formation process. In a way, it is his way of battling the Flesh. He describes just the act of regularly attending church and all that comes with it as being “called from the world” and “into a community capable of praising God,” “gathered from the nations” and scandalous in that “as we’re making our way to worship, not everyone is coming.”¹⁷ He claims that to be human means to be image bearers of God “who image God to the world.”¹⁸ So the importance of liturgies to Smith is that “the practices of Christian worship are nothing less than training to be *human*” to be representatives of God.¹⁹

In this training of our desires as image bearers, as Smith refers to it, we are back to the idea that we are battling the Flesh. For example, we battle the Flesh when we choose to pray. Prayer is a discipline that puts us in a place to acknowledge our need and dependence on God instead of self. And as Smith points out, taking the Lord’s supper is a communal activity that puts us in a place to choose to exercise forgiveness. He says, “...one of the reasons we go to church is to learn to love people we don’t really like that much....”²⁰ Life in Christian community constantly puts us in places where we have to battle the Flesh and that produces godly character.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 162-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

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