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SPECIAL MISSIONS ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE END OF THIS LETTER

June 2017 - IS PERMANENT CHANGE POSSIBLE?

Greetings in Jesus!

Over the past few years we have seen more and more ministers having their “sins in secret” exposed to the world. On the international, national and local scenes preachers are being caught in their transgressions. Quite often these sins involve various forms of immorality. Some of the sinful behavior that has come to light is absolutely shocking; things that God calls an abomination.

What we are seeing is God “cleaning house,” a fulfillment of 1 Peter 4:17, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” During a time of prayer the Lord showed me that He is moving “from the pulpit to the pew,” meaning that it isn’t just the preachers who will have their indiscretions revealed.

As I was raised in church I was taught by some that if a person was truly a Christian, he or she wouldn’t commit sin. But invariably, people who were supposed to be stalwarts of Christianity would sometimes do what I was told they couldn’t do since they were born again. As I look back on it, there was a distinct double-standard: Pastor Bob “made a mistake,” but pew-sitter Pete was never saved to begin with, even though they both did the same thing.

Nevertheless, the belief that a person who’s *really* born again won’t commit sin is not entirely scriptural. You see, the New Testament was written to the Church, the Body of Christ, and repeatedly it contains admonitions to quit sinning and live according to who you are in Christ. To paraphrase Galatians 5:16, “Make a choice to live according to the born again life you received by faith in Jesus Christ and you will not drink, commit adultery, do drugs, have pre-marital sex, lie and defraud, get involved with homosexuality, stealing, or anything else that is sin.”

But to be honest, living the way Galatians 5:16 describes seems to be easier said than done for many Christians. “If I’m really born again,” they think, “I wouldn’t do this stuff. So maybe I’m not even a Christian.” Yet, if more Christians were to openly discuss their private life I believe we might be stunned at how much sin is taking place.

Sometimes it seems as though Christians think that once they were born again they would automatically stop sinning, as if God would take over their ability to choose and violate their free will. Then, when they struggle with an area of sin in their life, they become frustrated and confused about why they can’t stop.

Not too long ago during prayer the Lord began speaking to me about this problem that is faced by so many Believers. He said,

At salvation your spirit, and not your soul, has been reborn with the life of God. Since your spirit now has God's life, it is now more powerful than the soul. But the soul may still have roots of "fleshy weeds," because what has been sown in the soul over the years is not necessarily immediately removed at the moment of salvation. This is why some Christians struggle, and why much in the New Testament is about mortifying the flesh. You would not have to mortify the flesh if all the "fleshy roots" were removed instantly the moment you were born again. This is not about a deficient salvation, but about the difference between soul and spirit, and what really happens when a person is born again.

At the beginning of this letter I mentioned how so many preachers have had their sin exposed and that God said both those in the pulpit and the pew would be judged. Let's consider those people who genuinely prayed to accept Jesus as Savior and are born again, yet have yielded over to sinful practice. What can be done for them? Is it possible for them to be fully restored in their relationship with God? Can they experience a change that is so permanent they never again succumb to the temptations which led to their downfall? How are we to help?

The world tells us over and over that a "leopard can't change his spots." Sadly, Christians have allowed themselves to be drawn into this natural, worldly way of thinking. Instead of focusing on the change which Christ can make, they reinforce the sin: "Hi. My name is Bob and I'm a (name the sin)." The result is that far too many Believers think that some people are beyond permanent change. For example,

- If Tom was raised in a home where his Christian father was a "closet alcoholic," he may have a hard time accepting that a Christian with a drinking problem can live totally free from alcohol.
- If Betty was sexually abused as a child by her Christian uncle or a faithful deacon in her church, she may believe it is impossible for a child molester to permanently change.
- If Sam, his sister and their mother were regularly beaten by their Christian father who was the church Sunday School Administrator, he may think it is impossible for a Christian with an "uncontrollable temper" to change.
- If Roberta was seduced or raped as a teenager by the youth pastor in her church, she may not think that a man with that kind of past behavior can permanently be free of such predatory feelings.
- If Bill's Christian wife of 20 years commits adultery and divorces him, he may think no woman can ever be trusted to be genuinely faithful.

These are just a few of the many examples which could be offered. But is it right for Christians to hold to such beliefs? Are we correct in thinking that some people will never change? What does God have to say about all of this?

First, answer this question: What is the greatest change that could ever take place in a person's life? The answer: to be born again. The moment we choose to accept Jesus, the old, sinful nature

passed down to us from Adam is replaced with the nature of Christ given to us from God. This is a *spiritual* change where we pass from death to life.

No matter how much drinking, drugs, or sexual immorality a Christian could become involved with, it all pales in comparison to his or her previous condition of being lost and having the sin nature. I realize some people may want to strenuously disagree, but what we are talking about is *outward behavior* versus the *spiritual state of existence* of an individual.

Being born again is only the *first step* toward changing outward behavior. What we have to do as Christians is realize that what we've become on the *inside* can become how we live on the *outside*. If the power of God's life in a Christian is incapable of enabling that person to experience permanent change, then we have a real problem because God would then be a liar. How so, you may ask? Read what God has said in His word:

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. (John 8:36)

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?...

For he that is dead is freed from sin....Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof...For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace...Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

(Romans 6:1-2, 7, 11-12, 14, 18)

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:16)

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; (Titus 1:2) That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: (Hebrews 6:18)

Since God cannot lie, everything we've just read about how we can live is true. If a holy and righteous life is possible, then permanent change is *not* impossible. But the problem I've seen is that many Christians *simply don't care!* Since God hasn't struck them down with lightning bolts, they appear to have (at least partially) seared their conscience to His conviction. *If a person doesn't want to change, there's not much you can do.*

But what about those Christians who truly want to change? How do we help them? Consider the fact that as brothers and sisters in the Lord, we have a God-mandated *responsibility* to help fellow Believers who want to experience to the fullest the freedom Jesus died to give us.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.
(Galatians 6:1)

In John 8:1-11, a woman caught in adultery was taken to Jesus. The people reminded Him of the Jewish Law which said such a person should be stoned, then they asked Him what He thought should be done to her. He did not tell them *not* to stone her, but that the person without sin should cast the first stone. He was the only one qualified to throw that stone, but He chose to forgive and restore, saying, “Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.”

The dilemma I see in the Body of Christ is that too many Christians want to cast stones instead of helping to restore. The reason for this is revealed in Galatians 6:1, “ye which are spiritual, restore such an one.” This means that those who are spiritually mature are to be the ones who operate in the restoration process. Why are the spiritually mature the only ones given this instruction? Because spiritually immature Christians will want to cast stones, condemn and tend to believe it impossible for a fallen brother or sister in Christ to be *totally restored* into fellowship with God and that *absolute, permanent change* is a genuine possibility. Yet the Bible says in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

“But Brother Martin,” someone might say, “if that Christian who is in sin is a preacher, he can never be restored to the pulpit!” My question to the person making such a statement is: What scripture do you have to support that belief? Do you not know that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29)?

What I’m sharing is not a “greasy grace” theology. When a Christian has been involved with sin for any length of time, permanent change is not an overnight event. For most, it takes time. How much time is relative to the individual and how deeply the roots of sin are imbedded. The point I’m making is that, from God’s perspective, a Christian who had chosen to live in sin but now wants to get right with Him can experience a permanent change and never again revert to that sin. In fact, it is possible that even their thoughts can be free from the tormenting lusts and desires to which they had yielded.

The key to total restoration and permanent change is to go before the throne of God’s grace to receive the grace and help needed. This requires a drastic altering of a person’s lifestyle to accommodate substantial times of prayer (primarily praying in the Spirit), reading, meditation and confession of God’s word, private worship, and fasting. Applying a human, psychological approach *will not work*; a person must approach this from a *spiritual* perspective according to the principles God has established in scripture.

This one letter will not suffice to properly deal with this matter. If you would like to go deeper into this subject of Christians in sin being totally restored to fellowship with God and experiencing permanent change, I highly encourage you to get my teaching series, “**Restoring the Fallen.**” This 16-sermon series goes into far greater detail about restoration, permanent change, and how Christians can fulfill their role in the restoration process. It also addresses the issue of if and when a fallen minister can return to his or her ministry. This entire series in MP3 format can be downloaded free of charge by going to www.jmmgrace.com, click on “Teachings,” then click on “Audio Teachings,” then click on the heading, “God’s Kingdom Standards.”

If you or someone you know is struggling to overcome an area of sin, it would be to your or their advantage to get this series. It would also be a good idea to give them a copy of this letter. God is there to help you, not condemn you. He will do everything you allow Him to do to help you fully conform to the image of His Son. He will always love you!

In His Grace,

Jim

P.S. - This month's CD offer is a sermon titled, "Pressing Toward Perfection." Available at no charge, it flows with this month's letter. To receive it, use the order form below.

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THE KENYA SPIRITUAL EQUIPPING SEMINAR IS NEXT MONTH!

Dates: Monday, July 24 through Friday, July 28, 2017
Location: Gethsemane Church, Kimaiga Estate, Migori Town
Class Sessions: 10:00 AM, 11:15 AM, 2:15 PM and 3:30 PM
(Lunch will be provided.)

Sponsored by Grace Ministries Bible College, this seminar will be conducted like a college course providing in-depth, line-upon-line Biblical teaching confirming foundational doctrine for effective discipleship. There will be no charge to register or attend. For more information or to register, please call Pastor Tom Adede, +254709749727

Finances can be a great challenge in Kenya so our ministry intends to pay all the conference expenses, estimated to be at the very least \$15,000. First and foremost, we ask for your prayers over this conference; it is going to be a major turning point in the lives of those attending. Also, if you would like to contribute toward this missions project, checks/money orders may be sent to Grace Christian Center, PO Box 291962, Dayton, Ohio 45429. You may also give via PayPal by visiting www.jmmgrace.com and clicking on the "Donations" link in the yellow box. Thank you so much in advance for your partnership in this outreach.

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