

DENIAL, SECRET SINS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT – PART 1

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DENIAL, SECRET SINS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. PART 1

In 1943, war hero and ace fighter pilot Col. Robert Scott wrote a book to declare his faith. It was titled, **“God is My Co-Pilot S”**. In 1945 the book became a movie of the same title. I’ve not read the book nor have I seen the movie but there is something about the title that may be evident to you this evening.

The title, **“God is My Co-Pilot”** exemplifies a common human problem and a “me first” attitude. As Tim Hawkins and others have said, if God is my co-pilot, I’m in the wrong seat! This attitude is an early sign of denial, thinking that we are in charge of our lives. The truth is that for all of us our lives are unmanageable. Oh, we may cope alright when things are going well but the illusion that we are in control and directing our lives is just plain false. (Example: nice house, good business, lots of great friends, travel, lots of toys and then illness or a bad economy or a major tragedy hits and our helplessness becomes quickly apparent.)

The Bible is clear on what our priority should be: to love the Lord our God with all our soul, strength and mind. Jesus emphasizes this in the Sermon on the Mount when he says in **Matthew 6:33** that we are instructed to **“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”** Notice that it doesn’t say, “if it’s convenient for you.” Another part of that denial is thinking or living as if my spiritual life could take second place to anything else - my work, my family, my hobbies, my material possessions.. Remember Jesus’ reminder about this in **Luke 12:34: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”**

Tonight and next Sunday evening, everything we’ll explore needs to be on the foundation of putting first things first. If we don’t prioritize seeking God’s kingdom, the rest of what I’m sharing is pointless. While that may seem obvious, the vital question is, ***“If I know that’s a priority, do I live my life as if it is?”***

My objective is to examine what scripture tells us and what God reminds us to do as part of our ongoing struggle with sin and how to step out of denial into the light of His truth so that each of us can walk ever more closely with our Lord, and as a result, be closer to our loved ones, to our church community and to all our neighbours wherever we meet them.

Our main text for this evening is **Galatians 5:16-6:2**. Let's read it together.

“16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. 6 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

There is a trap so insidious for many of us, particularly long time Christians, and we frequently miss it or deny it to ourselves - the trap is where we tell ourselves that we **mostly** have our Christian act together. We might compare ourselves with others to pump ourselves up. We have all the right “Christian-ese” words to say, we chat in the church lobby or in Bible studies with all the “right” answers and nary a nasty word passes through our lips - at least at church. (*Think James chapter 3 about taming the tongue!*). We volunteer, go to Christian worship concerts and have all the right songs on Spotify, we post positive and godly posts on social media and sometimes can be quite self-congratulatory about how well we're doing in our Christian walk. But secret sin creeps in, sometimes slowly on cat-like feet! Pride is frequently the first step and it's insidious and covert much of the time.

Most of us from time to time get the niggling and nagging prompt in the back of our minds that something is not quite right with us.

It might be lingering unforgiveness of something from long ago. (*Christine S. Example*)

Perhaps it's falling into "Christian" gossip - *"You know, I was told this in confidence but as a brother/sister in Christ I need to tell you this; Pastor Jonathan really needs prayer for his attitude and his behaviours; he's really struggling so let me tell you what he told me"*.

Or it might be an emotional attachment to someone you're not married to: *"She/he understands me and listens to me and is so comforting and kind in a way my spouse has never been."* Of course the question is, "Am I putting the same effort into my marriage that I've put into this "friendship"? Emotional adultery is a real and sinful thing.

Do I have unrealistic expectations of others - spouse, family (parents, children), pastor, boss etc? Would I be able to meet my own standards if they were applied to me?

Or is it putting your own needs and expectations above everyone else's? *"You made your own mess so leave me out of it."*

Philippians 2:3 says, **"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."**

I suggest to you that the things I've mentioned and others, are sins we can succumb to while thinking we are fooling everyone else and sometimes ourselves. We can "fake" as if things are good when they are absolutely not!

I have three main points this evening so let's get to the first.

1. THERE IS A SPIRITUAL BATTLE GOING ON IN EACH OF US.

Gal.5:17 "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

In the text, Paul contrasts the results of our carnal nature and our Holy Spirit driven nature.

Have you noticed this in your own life and how you may experience inner conflict? In verses 21-22 we are given examples of these carnal, sinful impulses: **"sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits**

of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these”

You might say, “But I’m not like that!” Or are you willing to admit that you sometimes struggle with at least some of these? Each one of the sinful impulses mentioned could be elaborated upon, and Paul doesn’t let us off the hook by adding “and things like these”. Let’s look at a couple of examples.

Idolatry is an interesting one, isn’t it? I recently needed to replace my old and dying vehicle and about 10 days ago picked up our new-to-me SUV. Even though it’s a couple of years old, it’s got lots of bells and whistles that my previous vehicles didn’t have and I found myself feeling very good about the new wheels and obsessing a little bit about the better stereo, the improved gas mileage, the lovely colour, the pride of ownership - you’ve got the idea. I even woke up in the night a couple of times thinking about it. And it dawned on me that there was a significant element of idolatry here; I was putting more emotional energy into this new ride than I’d put into my devotions and prayers that morning. That’s idolatry, and it’s a sneaky and deadly trap. And I know I’m not the only one here who can get caught up in the excitement of a new house, a new toy, some nice new clothes, the adulation of others, an award at work. The list goes on.

Or perhaps there is someone in your family, or a neighbour who just rubs you the wrong way and you have conflict with them from time to time; this might lie in the sins of “**strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, division**”, or perhaps it’s a colleague or someone here at Cedarview Community Church!

I could choose any item from that list, but you’ve got the premise. The take away here is that it’s easy for you and for me to be in denial about our sinful ways; we can put on a good show for our Christian friends and colleagues but upon close personal examination and with a willingness to surrender all of our will and all of our lives to Jesus, our transgressions become painfully clear. It’s truly a burden to be caught up in secret sin, yet act as if everything is perfect and just the way it should be. Oh, and it’s not really secret; YOU know and GOD knows!

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US A NEW WAY OF LIVING.

(5:16 “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh”)

This passage starts off with Paul's prescription for our protection against our sinful natures. And later in the passage he tells us clearly what the Holy Spirit brings into our lives if we choose to accept the Fruit of the Spirit. **("5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** Notice that the Apostle Paul uses the singular **"fruit"**, not fruits. This is an indication that this "fruit" is a unity of attitudes and attributes that enrich and enhance your relationships with God and with others. The fact that this "fruit" comes as a composite whole rather than a bunch of individual items is a reminder that you have access to all of these through the Holy Spirit. So saying, ***"I'm unloving," or "I'm not a patient person," or "I'm not dependable,"*** are statements of the old, bad beliefs and attitudes that come from our carnal nature, **not** the Fruit of the Holy Spirit! You might think of the **Fruit of the Spirit** as a priceless diamond with many facets, with each one a part of the whole. This precious gem is a gift to you from the Holy Spirit, but gifts need to be accepted and treasured.

A friend of mine used to say, ***"you have to do it yourself but you can't do it alone."*** That seems fitting here. You have free will so accepting the Fruit of the Holy Spirit is your choice. Part of that choice is, I believe, consciously remembering to whom you belong. You can't do this on your own. **(Gal. 5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.)**

3. LIVING BY THE SPIRIT HAS RESPONSIBILITIES.

Gal. 5:25-6:2 "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. 6 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Living by the Spirit requires us to stay aware and focused. We are instructed to ***"keep in step"*** with the Spirit and to watch out for the incursion of carnal behaviours and thoughts ***(Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.)***

(Do this: Keep in step; Not that : become conceited, provoking, envying..)

Note that these first reminders of our responsibilities are aimed at you and me personally - addressing our own thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

THEN the focus turns to our brothers and sisters in Christ, verse 6 ***Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. (a facet of the fruit of the Spirit)***

Paul then returns his focus to us with a caution, **“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”**

He reminds us in Galatians 6:2 of a core principle in all of this:

2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

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The law of Christ is a reference to the commands Jesus gave us, **Matthew 22:37-40: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”**

Of course, it’s difficult to miss another connection here as we are instructed to bear one another’s burdens. While we cannot make the kinds of sacrifices Jesus did on our behalf, we can help ease the burdens of others as our own way of thanking God for the sacrifice Jesus made, to carry all of our burdens at Calvary. It’s a step in our sanctification, our goal, to be more like Jesus.

Let’s pray.