

DENIAL, SECRET SIN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (Part 2)

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Good evening! For those of you who were here last Sunday, I'm going to do a short review of where we left off and for those who weren't here last week, consider this a quick precis of last Sunday evening's message.

We had three main points last week:

1. There is a spiritual battle going on in each of us.
2. The Holy Spirit gives us a new way of living.
3. Living by the Spirit has responsibilities.

We spoke about the importance of making our primary priority in life to seek the kingdom of God... putting first things first. We examined denial as a means to avoid our failures and transgressions and we looked at so examples of so called "secret" sins that can sabotage a Christian's life if we don't put seeking God's kingdom first.

As I have prayed and pondered these ideas over the past few weeks, I've been convicted about my own life: how easy it is for me to become distracted, to make excuses when I am straying from first principles and choosing wrong priorities. For example: I was working at my desk earlier this week with lots to do and praying about this message and suddenly found myself distracted by the thought of food and the temptation to just go get something to eat. The fact that breakfast had only been a couple of hours ago was a reminder that I wasn't actually hungry; it was a mental distraction, a carnal focus that took me away from putting first things first and sticking with the task at hand. It's easy to think, "Well, keeping fuelled is important; I have to take care of my body, after all." But when I look in the mirror or stand on the bathroom scale, it's apparent I've got plenty of fuel on board and the back up tanks are loaded too.

Why do I share such a mundane example? It's so easy to get sidetracked, isn't it? And for born again Christians it's often those secret "little" sinful moments where we are so good at deflecting and rationalizing our selfish wants and getting defensive or self-righteous about it, particularly when challenged by others or when our consciences tap us on the shoulder. That's a good time to recall Romans 3:10 **"As it is written, there is none righteous, not even one."** (CSB) As followers of Jesus, it's vital that we faithfully continue the process of refining and honing our awareness of where we've been in denial, what "little" attitudes, thoughts and questionable behaviours are keeping us from the kind of deep and intimate relationship with Christ we desire.

Here's some questions to consider as you do this:

- A. "What one area of my life is most in need of focused and godly work?"**
- B. Am I willing to accept the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit to transform my life?**
- C. If I do this, how will my life change and how will my relationship with Jesus improve?**
- D. When will I start?"**

So what area needs help? Is it my finances? My physical health? My marriage? My parenting? My work ethic? My devotional life? My spare time? The list goes on but you get the idea. As we said last week, living by the Holy Spirit has responsibilities; our full participation is required.

This evening we have two main texts and my desire and prayer is that through examining God's word we will understand more fully how the Holy Spirit empowers us for God's kingdom and what we are required to do as professing Christians to consciously recognize what changes we need to make, and how our great God helps us with that, when we surrender fully to him.

Let's have a look at our first text:

2 Peter 1:3-11: "3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Let's start with point #1!

1. GOD'S DIVINE POWER PROVIDES EVERYTHING WE NEED FOR LIVING A GODLY LIFE

2 Peter 1:3 - "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence"

Then Peter goes on to remind us that it is through God's *precious and very great promises*, we become partakers of the divine nature. But there is also an implication in the text that you and I can get sidetracked by our carnal nature.

I love how he then goes on to give a wonderful prescription to curtail that malady: we are instructed to "make every effort to supplement" our faith. And then he gives very specific instructions: 2 Peter 1:5-8 "supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Another way to say this is that virtue (in some translations, "goodness") represents moral purity. Knowledge certainly refers to our knowledge of Jesus, and self control refers to resisting evil desire and not succumbing to our sinful nature. To be steadfast is a reminder to each of us to persevere, to continue, to stay the course in our faith. Godliness reminds us to love God and adhere to the standards he has set for us. Peter is reminding us with the phrase, "*brotherly affection*" to do good to fellow believers, and then segues to love, a reference in some part at least to Christ's command to "love your neighbour as yourself". That includes everyone. Placing "love" at the end of this list is a strong indication that love is the link or the glue that holds all of these together. Love for God, love for the brothers and sisters in the church, and love for all of our neighbours around the world.

It's a bit embarrassing to say, but as I've been reading and rereading this text over the past few weeks, I've been aware of how easily I can get distracted and act like other things in my life and work are more important. That's denial and it can lead to the erosion of our spiritual growth. (If you never get distracted by the things, situations and people around you, you can take the rest of the evening off or just have a nap!)

Peter has outlined here some sometimes difficult but clearly straightforward steps we can take to hasten our recovery from our sinful patterns and grow in our sanctification, to be more like our Lord Jesus.

2. SUPPLEMENTING OUR FAITH PROTECTS US

2 Peter 1:8-9 - "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."

Some of you may take vitamins or mineral supplements. People take these in order to help them with physical issues and to maintain as much as possible their health and vitality. In a similar but more important way, these verses from 2 Peter tell us that our spiritual life with Jesus is enhanced by developing and working on the qualities in this list. It's rather like a spiritual inoculation, a way to protect each of us from spiritual blindness and amnesia, to strengthen our spiritual immune system. This is part of the process of mind renewal written about several places in the New Testament.

Let's now look at our second text for this evening,

1 John 1:5-10: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

3. SALVATION IS A FREE GIFT BUT IT'S NOT UNCONDITIONAL

There's an old joke that a tourist was walking through Manhattan and asked someone walking by how to get to Carnegie Hall. The local replied, "Practice, practice, practice!"

And that's, in essence, what Peter and John are telling us; a Christian life requires practice - action on our part. In 2 Peter 1:9, he writes, "9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."

And in the passage we've just read from 1 John 1:6 he declares, "6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

Our choices have consequences. It reminds me of many passages from the Old Testament where Israel, usually under a poor or weak king or judge, strayed from the Lord. Here's one of many examples: Judges 2:11-15: "11 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. 12 And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods

of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. 13 They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. 14 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. 15 Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

These chosen people abandoned their commitment to the Lord; they fell prey to their carnal ways even though they had been warned, and they suffered the consequences. You and I also suffer the consequences of our spiritual laziness, our pride, and our unwillingness to face the truth of our sinful impulses. Negative consequences can be unpleasant and even devastating if we are unwilling to correct course. The wonderful thing is, though, that Holy Scripture is full of God's promises and of a myriad of prescriptions to help us correct our ways and return to the path of righteousness - if we accept the free gift God offers us.

The Bible, in many places, has direct or indirect if/then statements and this passage from 1 John has 5 if/then statements. Too often we are prone to focus on the "then" part of the statement while minimizing the "IF".

Let's look at some example from 1 John 1.

1. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, (then) we lie and do not practice the truth." Verse 6
2. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, (then) we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." Verse 7
3. "If we say we have no sin, (then) we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Verse 8
4. "If we confess our sins, (then) he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Verse 9
5. "If we say we have not sinned, (then) we make him a liar and his word is not in us." Verse 10.

In each of these declarations, there is an implication of cause and effect. ***As Christians there are things required of us.***

John goes on to teach us and assure us in chapter 2, that we sinful humans do have an advocate with the Father through Jesus Christ the righteous. And that chapter too, has several IF/THEN statements. I would encourage you to watch for these statements as you read your Bible, whether they are direct or implied. It will help you in more fully understanding what your faith requires of you. And ask the Holy Spirit to help you to discern and understand how you can keep your eyes upon Jesus as you walk through this sometimes difficult and challenging world.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read the story of the rich young ruler. He sought out Jesus and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus reminded him of the ten commandments and the young man declared that he had followed those since his youth. Jesus then told him to sell everything he had and distribute his wealth to the poor to lay up treasure in heaven. But the young man walked away, sad and despondent because he had much wealth. *(Holding on stops us from reaching out to Jesus)*

What are you holding onto that the Lord wants you to surrender? Are you still trying to pilot your own life and using your faith as a "get out of jail" free card?

The wonderful 20th Century Christian teacher and author, A.W. Tozer , wrote about this in a devotional entitled **“The Responsibility of Choice.”** I’d like to end with this.

The Responsibility of Choice
A. W. Tozer

“Our Lord Jesus looked after the rich young ruler as he walked away, but He did not follow him or attempt to coerce him. The dignity of the young man's humanity forbade that his choices should be made for him by another. To remain a man he must make his own moral choices; and Christ knew this and permitted him to go his own chosen way. If his human choice took him at last to hell, at least he went there a man; and it is better for the moral universe that he should do so than that he should be jockeyed to a heaven he did not choose, a soulless, will-less automaton. God will take nine steps toward us, but He will not take the tenth. He will incline us to repent, but He cannot do our repenting for us. It is of the essence of repentance that it can only be done by the one who committed the act to be repented of. God can wait on the sinning man; He can withhold judgment; He can exercise long-suffering to the point where He appears "lax" in His judicial administration; but He cannot force a man to repent. To do this would be to violate the man's freedom and void the gift God originally bestowed upon him. Where there is no freedom of choice there can be neither sin nor righteousness, because it is of the nature of both that they be voluntary. However good an act may be, it is not good if it is imposed from without. The act of imposition destroys the moral content of the act and renders it null and void.”

Are YOU willing to repent of your sinful ways, admit your wrongdoings before the Lord? I don’t know what you do, say or think in private but I know God does and so do you! Isn’t it time to choose the path of righteousness, and take that 10th step into the outstretched arms of our Saviour?

Let’s Pray.