

How To Get Free From Evil

Letter to the Colossians

In the last section of the letter to the Colossians that we looked at, I talked about what the death of Jesus on the Cross means for us. Our sinfulness got us into a place of death, but through his death on the Cross, Jesus has rescued us from death and made us alive to God. Our sinfulness also got us into a place of debt with God. It's a debt so big, there is no way that we could repay it, but Jesus took the record of our debt and nailed it to the Cross, for all the world to see that our debt to God has been paid in full through His death on the Cross. The point I wanted to make last week, but didn't have time to make, was that our sinfulness has also got us into a place of defeat. But through the Cross, Jesus sets us free.

So let's read the next section of this letter to the Colossian Christians. This part of the letter to the Colossians is written by Paul to address an issue that was a problem in the Colossian church. People were turning the Gospel of grace into a set of rules and regulations that were causing people to move from a simple trust in what Christ had done into a religious system of trusting in their own efforts to please God. Instead of living in a place of victory, these people were living defeated lives. So today I want to address the principles of living a life of freedom in Christ.

"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:15-23 NIV)

1. Freedom from our sinful nature.

When writing to another church, the Apostle Paul described a battle that was going on inside himself. He said "I have this desire within me to do good, but I can't carry it out. When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." Do you understand that battle? You want to do good, but the evil inside you is stronger than your desire to do good. Has that been your experience? It's certainly been mine. I want to live a good life, but when I really try in my own strength, I just finish up defeated and discouraged. The harder I try, the worse it gets. The Apostle Paul puts it this way. He says "What a wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?" The answer the bible gives is that we can't do it on our own.

We need to understand what we are up against. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul writes ***"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*** It's not just the evil within us that makes it so hard to do good, it's the evil around us that works against everything God is doing in the world. Unless we recognise that Satan is alive and well on planet earth, we will never understand why things happen the way they do. Here's an example of what I mean.

If you regularly watch the news on TV it's not hard to get the impression that there is evil behind world events. Why is there is so much strife and turmoil? Here is an example of what goes on behind the scenes. Northern Ireland has been a place of hostility, division and strife for generations. Why has that been? You can try and explain that politically and you will find some of the answers. You can look at the history of the country and find more answers, but is that the only reason for the deep divisions and bitterness?

If you look at Northern Ireland's history from a spiritual dimension you discover that Northern Ireland has been the most Christian part of the whole of the United Kingdom. It has spent more money and sent more people overseas to spread the gospel than any other part of the United Kingdom. I believe that country has been the target for Satanic attack. There are principalities and powers, evil forces, spiritual rulers and authorities that have the aim of defeating and destroying what God has been doing in Northern Ireland. The Bible tells us there are spiritual forces of evil - personal intelligent beings who are opposed to God and His people. They are superior to us in strategy, intelligence, strength and subtlety. We are no match for them.

Norman Vincent Peale was a Methodist Episcopal minister in the United States. In 1952 he wrote a book which became an international best seller. It was called "The Power of Positive Thinking". That book was instrumental in a whole movement that has swept the Western World, and transformed education, business, sociology and has pervaded the way many people think and act in our day. It is at the basis of the human potential movement, which says that we need to feel good about ourselves, and we are capable of achieving far more than we ever imagined. That teaching has been a much needed corrective to our world, and hundreds of thousands of people have seen remarkable changes in their lives. However, those who have pinned their hope on the power of positive thinking can end up disillusioned and defeated, because there are two ingredients that are not factored in that make all the difference. No matter how much we practice positive thinking, it's not the answer. It's never going to result in transformation of our lives for two reasons;

- **We are born with a corrupted nature.**

There is a defect in our character that we are born with that the Bible calls sin. It's a powerful thing within each of us, that is far stronger than our desire to do good. It's something deep within us that is off balance. We have an inbuilt tendency to do wrong rather than to do right. If you don't believe this is true, then ask yourself why it is that a parent never needs to teach their little children to say "no". Where do little children learn that? Where do they learn to hoard their toys and not share them? Where do they learn to scream and shout when they don't get their own way? Do you think parents sit down and have lessons on how to throw toys out of the cot? Do they have lessons at pre-school on how to be selfish? We are born with this corrupted nature, and even though we know that we want to do good, and we try to do good, there is a very powerful force within us that pulls us away from the good and pulls us toward evil. There is a powerful, corrosive part of our nature that doesn't go away with positive thinking.

- **There are evil forces against us.**

These evil forces are more powerful than we are, and we do not have the ability to defeat them. These evil forces combine with our sinful, corrupted nature to pull us off track. No matter how hard we try through our own efforts to break sinful habits, or to fight against the evil within us or the spiritual powers and authorities outside us, we can't win. We need God's power to overcome them.

When people get really honest with themselves, and admit that that they are not winning the war with the evil forces arrayed against them on the outside and they are not winning the war with their corrupted human nature within, they discover an inward despair and an admission of defeat. That's when we get to admit we need the Cross.

The good news is that on the cross, Jesus dealt with the problem of our sinfulness within and the evil forces outside of us. His death on the cross transforms our corrupted nature from the inside out. He exchanges our corrupted nature for his goodness. The Bible tells us that when we put our trust in Christ and his death on our behalf, we are clothed with the righteousness, or the goodness of Jesus. That's why we say to new Christians that living the Christian life is an impossibility. You just can't do it by trying. It's only by trusting in the goodness of Jesus that we can be acceptable to God. It's by Him living His life out in us that we find the strength to do good. It's being clothed in His goodness that gives us our defence against the evil one. Then we can say "I can't do this in my own strength, but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I'm not good enough, but Jesus is."

2. Freedom from spiritual opposition.

The other thing Jesus did on the Cross was to disarm the spiritual principalities, powers and authorities that want to do us so much harm. The Cross was the culmination of all the spiritual battles. All the goodness of Jesus met all of the evil of Satan in one supernatural battle. The sky was so black with the presence of evil that the sun was blotted out. On the cross one sinless man was single-handedly taking on all the powers of darkness in the universe. All the principalities, powers, all the spiritual rulers of wickedness were concentrating everything they had on destroying Jesus. The day of the Cross was D day.

As far as Satan was concerned it was destruction day. As far as God was concerned it was deliverance day. It's seemed to every watching human being that the battle was lost. But on that day Jesus defeated all the powers of darkness. He disarmed the spiritual rulers. Those spiritual powers and authorities tried everything they could to break him – and he broke them. He stripped Satan and his armies of all their weapons and made a public spectacle of them. Jesus disgraced Satan and his evil forces by taking them on parade before all of heaven. That is such good news for those who feel constantly oppressed and defeated.

3. Freedom from Legalism.

The Cross spells freedom for us in a different way too. Jesus spells freedom from legalism. Freedom from religious rules and regulations. Or if you want it more simply, Jesus has set us free from a religion of "do's" and "don'ts".

When Paul was writing to the Colossians the issues of legalism were over what people ate and drank or what religious festivals they celebrated. The issues are different today but the principles are the same. Within the Christian church legalism can easily creep in. There are people coming into our churches who are telling stories of spiritual abuse that they have suffered in the church that they have come from. Authoritarian Pastors, who demand absolute loyalty. Leaders who claim they are the Lords anointed and cannot be questioned. Tithing that is taught in such a legalistic way that there is no joy in giving. We can become legalistic over how often we read the Bible, whether we fall on the floor when we have been prayed for, whether we speak in tongues, whether we raise our hands in worship or whether we Home School our kids or send them to a Christian or state school. It's performance-based Christianity that chews people up and spits them out bruised and damaged.

Those of you that have never been in a religious system of rules and regulations probably won't grasp the magnitude of what Christ has done for us on the Cross. But for those of you that have been following a whole set of man-made rules and regulations, you will know what joy it is to be free. Being free from legalism doesn't mean we are free to do what we like. It means we are free to do what the Lord wants. We are free to live in a way that pleases him.

The Cross spells deliverance from evil for all those that are in Christ. We are set free from living defeated lives because of what Jesus has done on the Cross. Let's enjoy our freedom! Don't you think it's good news that Jesus died for us? The only way we could be rescued from death, from debt, from defeat and from legalism was by Jesus dying for us. He's done it all on the Cross. Let's thank Him!

David McChesney, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland