

PROCLAIMING THE REVELATION OF JESUS

SEALING GOD'S PEOPLE

A close-up photograph of a red padlock attached to a metal chain. The padlock is circular with a keyhole at the bottom and six screws around its perimeter. The chain is made of thick metal links and is attached to a dark, textured metal bar. The background is a light, neutral color.

WAKE UP AMERICA SEMINARS
Proclaiming the Revelation of Jesus

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

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Sealing God's People

“Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ‘Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.’ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.”

— Revelation 7:2-4

Introduction

God showed the prophet John an interesting sight described in Revelation 7: an angel rising in the east who had the seal of God sent to delay Earth’s destruction. The angel from the east called out to four angels who are about to harm Earth, **“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”**¹ What does this vision mean? What is the seal of God? How does the sealing relate to the 144,000 and our salvation?

¹ Revelation 7:3

Carnal Nature

Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”**¹ These words are a promise. Yet, when I look around, and also look within myself, I find an overwhelming amount of sin. Why is there so much degeneracy? When it comes to having a pure heart, all human beings have two problems. First, we come from the womb with a sinful nature. Because of this, we are predisposed to rebel against authority from the moment of birth. Second, the devil understands our human predisposition toward sinning and the inherited traits that push us in that direction. Knowing this, Satan does everything he can to entice us into complete rebellion against God’s will and authority. All these factors make rebellion against God and His laws easy and submission to God’s will difficult. In fact, in our present state, it is impossible to submit consistently to the will of God.

When a person experiences the miracle of spiritual rebirth, God installs a second nature – a spiritual nature – that is antagonistic toward the sinful nature. Since these two natures are diametrically opposed, each born-again person lives in a continual “state of war.” When asked about his born-again experience, Martin Luther summarized the con-

¹ Matthew 5:8

test between these two natures by saying that even though the carnal nature remains, it does not reign.

Luther's words, most likely, were borrowed from his favorite Bible writer, the apostle Paul, who reminded the Romans that the carnal nature does not have control if we allow the Holy Spirit to live in us. He wrote, **“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”**¹

No writer in the Bible explains these two warring natures as well as the apostle Paul. After Paul had been a born-again Christian for about 25 years, he wrote, **“And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”**²

Paul's statement confirms that after a person is born again, he or she remains in a constant state of war between these two natures. Paul's discovery about his carnal nature is similar to Sir Isaac

¹ Romans 8:9

² Romans 7:16-18

Newton's discovery of gravity. For thousands of years, no one thought it strange that objects fell in a downward direction because they had weight. Over the course of time, however, a new explanation was needed about the direction objects fall because man discovered that Earth was a large sphere spinning on its axis.

Then the question begged to be asked, "Why do objects fall in the downward direction on a rapidly spinning sphere when logic suggests they should fall in the opposite direction?" Eventually, the law of gravity was discovered and Sir Isaac Newton was among the first to quantify it. In a similar way, the apostle Paul understood the presence of the carnal heart and he quantified the law of sin that operates upon it. Both the law of gravity and the law of sin are predictable and unchangeable.

The law of gravity and the law of sin also have one other similarity – both can be thwarted under the right circumstances. The law of gravity can be thwarted if a spacecraft exceeds 17,000 miles per hour. At this speed, man can overcome the force of Earth's gravity and escape this planet. Likewise, the law of sin can be overcome if a person chooses to obediently surrender his or her will to the Holy Spirit. In this situation, the indwelling power of the

Holy Spirit will enable a person to escape the control of sin.

The law of sin is a code of conduct: an inbred or inborn rebellion against authority. It has dominion over every fallen being. Paul understood that there is no escape from the law of sin except through faith in Christ. He wrote, **“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”**¹ **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”**² Carefully consider the words of this reformed legalist: **“Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”**³

So, this is the explanation. As hard as it may be for some of us to admit, we are sinful from within the core of our being and eventually, our conduct will prove it!

I Need Help!

Paul lamented the inescapable effects of the law of sin in his own life. He wrote, **“So I find this law at**

1 Romans 7:21

2 Romans 7:24-25

3 Romans 7:20

work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”¹ Paul’s remarks in Romans 7 are very revealing because he was devoted to God and once belonged to a religious body mandating sinlessness, purity, and zeal for God.² The Pharisees had meticulously defined impurity as a violation of any one of some 600 laws and Paul was zealous to observe every law. He summed up his life as a boastful Pharisee saying, **“As for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”**³

Then Paul met Jesus. Eventually, he began to understand that the “righteousness” achieved by rigorous obedience and religious devotion cannot produce a pure heart. Religion had deceived Paul. As a Pharisee, he was completely convinced that righteousness came through legalistic obedience—the avoidance of sin. However, after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul saw how wretched and offensive he was in God’s sight.⁴

This remarkable change in his perspective occurred because he caught a glimpse of the righteousness that God requires! God requires a pure heart, but a heart is not pure until it has absolutely no attraction for sin. We may avoid sin, we may

1 Romans 7:21

2 Philippians 3:4-7

3 Philippians 3:6

4 Romans 7:24

escape falling into certain temptations, but the avoidance of sin is not to be confused with a pure heart. When Paul met Jesus, the perfectionist discovered his imperfection. The arrogance of Saul the Pharisee was shattered. God transformed him, renamed him, and called him into the service of His saints.

When a person experiences a complete “melt-down” over entrenched religious beliefs, psychologists call this a paradigm shift. A paradigm shift occurs when concepts believed to be true are proven to be totally false. It shakes us to the core of our being and is emotionally disturbing. When Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul was devastated to learn that his “perfect” religious life was offensive and unacceptable to God.

After Paul realized that he could not make himself pure or acceptable before God by good works, Paul had nothing to boast about. (God sure knows how to silence legalists.) When Paul saw that he had no righteousness in God’s sight, he became a meek man. In this new state of mind, he became a mighty champion of the righteousness of Christ. He wrote, **“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from**

first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”¹

When Paul finally grasped the idea that salvation requires a righteousness which man cannot produce, only then did he realize his desperate need for Jesus.

Nature of Sin

Since the law of sin declares human nature remains rebellious toward God, it is impossible for any person to become pure in heart through human effort. Consequently, the carnal nature is man’s greatest problem. Our carnal nature makes us rebellious and prevents us from having faith in God or obediently submitting to His commands. We are born with a “spring-loaded” carnal nature, ready to do wrong at an early age.

Children do not have to be taught to do wrong, and adults cannot achieve the purity of heart that God requires. Since Adam and Eve’s sin, the human race has been in trouble. Yet, a miracle happens every time a person experiences a rebirth. A miraculous change occurs within the heart. Whereas the carnal heart was full of rebellion, the born-again heart becomes divided. Part of the heart wants to obey God and part of it wants to remain in rebellion against

¹ Romans 1:17

God. This intense struggle never ends. This is why Paul, as a mature Christian lamented, **“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”**¹ Do not despair! There is good news!

Peter demonstrated that through the power of Christ we can do anything, even walk on water. Paul wrote, **“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”**²

This is the key. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit within the heart is crucial. He brings victory to all who live by faith. The victory that the Spirit brings is not manmade and is not merely the avoidance of sin. When the Spirit brings victory, rebellion is removed. When we become no longer attracted to a specific sin, the heart has been set free from the law of sin in that area of life. Therefore, the heart is no longer under the dominion of sin!

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will not give us victory where we want victory the most. Instead, He may focus on other issues that need attention first, but you can always be sure He controls the purifying process. If a person is not gaining victory over

1 Romans 7:18

2 Romans 8:13-14

a specific sin, it could be the Spirit first wants to control another aspect of this person's life. This requires patience and perseverance. James says, **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”**¹

Good news also comes in the assurance of forgiveness as we admit and confess our sin. John wrote, **“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”**²

Can We Become Pure?

It is possible to have a pure heart if we want one, but the means and timing of this event may not be what you expect. Many views exist within the Christian community about the topic of purity. At one extreme, people believe a pure heart comes through an exhaustive struggle with self, and take the responsibility for purity upon themselves. They do everything they can to shut out all worldly influences hoping to avoid corruption.

¹ James 1:2-4

² 1 John 2:1

These people often succumb to the temptation of being legalistic about God's definition of righteousness. The concept of isolation from sin contributed to the early formation of monasteries, and stems from the idea that man is inclined to be evil. Therefore, in order to be pure, a person must separate physically from worldly influences. The truth is, humanity is inclined to do evil because we have a carnal nature. Wherever a person goes, sin is there, for sin is within each person's heart!

On the other hand, some people believe that a pure heart is not possible or necessary since Jesus paid the price on Calvary for man's salvation. Such Christians shudder at the thought of self-denial or bearing a cross. Unfortunately, these Christians often succumb to spiritual complacency. They think religious rituals, rites, and services insulate them from the properties and penalty of sin, but none of this is true. Like the law of gravity, there is only one way to escape the relentless control of the law of sin. His name is Jesus – He is the Way!

No doubt our personalities, religious heritage, culture, and family traditions color our understanding on this fundamental subject. There is no purity in isolation because the carnal nature is within and there is no righteousness in religious rituals, rites,

or services because the carnal nature is ever present.

Christian Handicap

A serious handicap can occur among those people who grow up in a Christian home. Suppose Johnny was born into a Christian home and taught to avoid certain bad habits such as gambling, drugs, smoking, drinking, and pornography. Since Johnny knows nothing about drug addiction or alcohol dependency, he may conclude that he is purer than “those poor souls captured by these sinful habits.” This is not true. He still has a carnal nature just like every prostitute and addict.

Johnny cannot understand the power of addiction because he has not been a slave to lust, drugs, or alcohol. He was fortunate to avoid the prison of addiction and its subsequent consequences because he was reared in a Christian home. However, *Johnny's nature is no different from that of the worst sinner.* His lifestyle may be different, but his carnal nature is the same. Johnny could have become an addict if he had been raised in a non-Christian home without consistent parental guidance. As you may have heard, “But for the grace of God, there go I.” Truer words have never been spoken.

Christians sometimes get vain and self-righteous about “lifestyle.” Just because Johnny does not have a craving addiction for something grossly evil, this does not mean he has a pure heart! Remember, “Man’s greatest problem is his carnal nature.” Avoiding sin is good and religious services can be beneficial, but neither is a substitute for a pure heart.

Power of Sin

Suppose I want to do something that I know is sin. I have at least four options:

1. Yield to temptation because I cannot help myself.
2. Resist the temptation and avoid sinning as much as possible.
3. Pray ahead for help since I know temptation is coming.
4. Recognize the inner attraction for sin, confess it to Jesus, and ask for deliverance.

Of course, all of these options are acceptable except number one. Resisting sin is an important process in character development. However, no person can resist every sin – the carnal nature will not permit it. As Paul said so well, “What I want to do, I don’t do.” In my opinion, option four should be

our greatest focus. Ask Jesus for deliverance from the inner attraction of sin. Ask Him to do for you that which you cannot do for yourself.

This is the key. Remove the desire and the attraction is gone! Victory over sin often depends on being prepared for temptation at any given moment. When you fall into sin, quickly admit it, confess your sorrow, and do not forget how it happened. The Bible says we have an Advocate who is willing to forgive us.¹ But the Bible also cautions that if we continue in willful rebellion against God, He will not forgive us.²

The process of sanctification, or the struggle between the carnal nature and the spiritual nature, does not occur without a constant connection and communion with God. Peter quickly sank into the sea when he took his eyes off Jesus, and we will most assuredly sink into sin for the same reason.

Sanctification is a Struggle

The following statements about sanctification are very important:

1. When a person is born again, a sanctifying struggle begins.

¹ 1 John 2:1-2

² Hebrews 10:26-27; Matthew 12:31

2. No one is granted eternal life on the basis of human perfection. Each person who receives the assurance of eternal life must continually submit to the humiliating process of sanctification.
3. The process of sanctification ends at death or when the carnal nature is eliminated.

God watches over each one of us. Nothing is hidden from His sight.¹ God measures our love and faith for Him by what we do. James wrote, **“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”**²

Sanctification is a lifelong experience under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. When the Bible says that Enoch, Noah, and Abraham walked with God, it does not mean that these men merely walked with God down a country road. Instead, it means that these men endured the humiliation of sanctification and as a result, God was pleased to visit and speak with them as friends. The carnal heart hates humiliation because it hates authority, but Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”**³

Our response to the sanctification process is our way of expressing praise, honor, and faith

1 Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Luke 8:17; 2 Corinthians 5:10

2 James 2:17

3 Matthew 5:5

in God. God would much rather see the process of sanctification occurring in the lives of His children than to hear the praise of 10,000 choirs.¹ Obedience and submission to authority is the most basic form of praise or glory that a child can produce! Ask any parent if you do not believe me. Remember, sanctification does not merit or bring salvation, and our struggle with sanctification does not end until death or the carnal nature is eliminated.

Carnal Nature Eliminated

By now, I am sure that you are aware that the greatest problem for an individual is the carnal nature. This pesky problem is about to come to an end! God will eliminate the carnal nature from each person who passes the test of faith He administers during the Great Tribulation. By the time the seventh trumpet sounds,² God will have placed His seal on each person who lives by faith.³ The 144,000 will be the first people to experience the elimination of the carnal nature. Millions of others will then pass through the fiery test of faith and also experience this miraculous transformation. Before we consider God's seal and the importance of the sealing, a few words about the Great Tribulation are necessary.

1 Isaiah 1:13-18

2 Revelation 11:15-19

3 Revelation 10:7

One of God's objectives for the Great Tribulation is to set up a global situation where His authority is diametrically opposed to man's authority. As these two authorities stand in opposition to each other, God will determine who loves Him.¹ This contest is similar to the struggle going on within the heart of each born-again person to determine which nature will reign. Our actions will reveal which nature is most favored.

During the Great Tribulation, the Ten Commandments will stand in clear opposition to man's laws. In other words, the Great Tribulation involves a great controversy. The contest between the sovereign will of God and the will of humanity will be an intense drama. Dire circumstances will force people to take sides, and this is what will separate the sheep and goats. Using His servants, the 144,000, God will send a powerful proclamation of the terms and conditions of salvation (the gospel) throughout the Earth.

If a person obeys God, he or she will have to disobey man's laws. Conversely, if a person obeys man's laws, he or she will have to rebel against God. Each person will make an informed choice. There will be no straddling the fence or middle ground. Into this chaos, the Antichrist (the lamb-

¹ Daniel 3

like beast who is the devil) will eventually appear and the controversy will finally end. The people of Earth will receive either the seal of God or the mark of the beast. Each person will make an intelligent and informed decision regarding his or her allegiance.

Each person's choice will reflect the dominate influence within that person's heart. If the nature is carnal, that person will rebel against God's authority and have no option but to accept the mark of the beast. If the nature is spiritual, the Holy Spirit will empower that person to submit obediently to God's commandments and Jesus will seal that person in His righteousness.

Of course, no sane person plans to receive the mark of the beast. Likewise, no person in Noah's day planned on drowning! Interestingly, almost every Christian today sees himself as one who would have been smart enough to "get in Noah's ship," but do not forget, only eight people entered. The carnal nature is the only reason why so few entered the ark. Because rebellion is man's greatest problem, God has designed a process that will separate the sheep from the goats during the Great Tribulation.

The Setting

Just before the Great Tribulation begins, Jesus will personally select, seal, and empower 144,000 ordinary individuals of all religious backgrounds. God will use these servants to proclaim the gospel to the world.¹ When the 144,000 are ready to do their work, Jesus will methodically begin to destroy the Earth with enormous manifestations of His wrath. The book of Revelation predicts global earthquakes, meteoric showers of burning hail, asteroid impacts, darkness, sickness, death, and destruction beyond our imagination.

These horrific events will affect the whole world and, for the first time, will suddenly cause billions of people to consider God's enormity and His wrath. In a setting of death, confusion, conflagration, and calamity, billions of people will want answers. God's 144,000 servants will explain what God is doing and why. Currently, because of religious gridlock and religious paradigms, most people will not consider anything about God that disagrees with what they already believe.

Therefore, God will empower 144,000 persons to speak for Him and after He delivers a series of fatal blows to Earth's ecosystems, people will become

¹ Revelation 7:1-4

more willing to consider what the 144,000 have to say. The 144,000 will proclaim three messages which are stated in Revelation 14:6-12. The three messages are condensed as follows:

1. Fear God, worship God, and obey His Ten Commandments.
2. Have no part in the crisis government that will form to appease God. Reject its laws and false doctrines.
3. Do not submit to the Antichrist or receive his mark. If you do, God will severely punish you.

The 144,000 will present these three messages within the context of fierce opposition. The call to worship God and obey His Ten Commandments will collide “head on” with the religions of the world. The demands of God’s Law will be contrary to the laws and demands of the crisis government that will form. This predicament will produce very tough choices.¹

These three messages contain the “saving” elements of the everlasting gospel and, as surprising as it may seem, will completely separate the people of Earth. People who allow their carnal nature to reign will reject God’s authority, just as people

¹ See Daniel 3 for an Old Testament parallel for these events.

who allow the Holy Spirit to reign will submit to God's authority. It is this simple. Notice the four-step process that God has predetermined for the gospel during the Tribulation.

1. Each person will hear and understand the gospel message.
2. Each person must decide either for or against the gospel.
3. Each person's decision for the gospel will be tested (faith tested).
4. Each person will then receive either the seal of God or the mark of the beast.

The first step in the testing process is the proclamation of the terms and conditions of the gospel. The second step is the decision phase. The honest in heart will make the right choice as the Holy Spirit and the Bible direct, even while being threatened with persecution and death. Each person will make an informed decision about God's requirements because the 144,000 will complete their preaching assignments. Each person will choose either to submit to the gospel or rebel against it. The third step will be the testing phase. This phase will confirm whether a person's faith in God is firm and loyal. Last, for those who pass the test of faith, God

will replace their carnal nature with a spiritual nature, which has no propensity toward sin! God will give the sinless nature He originally gave to Adam to the people who pass this test of faith.

Seal of God

Scripture provides four steps that show the sealing process described in Revelation 7 is the change that occurs within the heart when God removes our propensity to sin.

1. The doctrine of justification describes a process whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to everyone willing to submit to the dominion of the Holy Spirit.¹ Because of imputed righteousness, a sinner appears righteous in God's sight even though he is not righteous in reality.² In other words, when the righteous life of Jesus covers the life of a sinner, God sees the sinner as though he or she never sinned. The imputing of Christ's righteousness (justification) is God's gift of grace to every born-again person. This is our all-important "ticket" to heaven which Jesus paid.³
2. The doctrine of sanctification and its supporting texts discussed earlier describe a process

1 John 3:16

2 Ephesians 2:8-9

3 Romans 8:1-9

to which each born-again person must submit.¹ Sanctification is the process of submitting our will to God's will each day of our lives. Sanctification requires patience and perseverance because the law of sin is relentless. God has made a way to put heaven's government within the heart of man through sanctification, and He has made a way for man to enter heaven through justification. Sanctification is our "preparation" for heaven and justification is our "title" to heaven.

3. The sealing of the 144,000 occurs shortly before the Great Tribulation.² The 144,000 are the firstfruits of the great harvest of souls who come out of the Great Tribulation!³ This means the 144,000 are examples of what the harvest will produce. Because they are the firstfruits, the 144,000 are sealed first. Later, those who receive their testimony and pass the test of faith will be sealed during the time period of the seven trumpets. (1,260 days)
4. The mystery of God is finished by the time of the seventh trumpet. **“But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished,**

1 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14

2 Revelation 7:1-4

3 Revelation 14:4; 7:9-14

just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”¹

The mystery of God completed during the Great Tribulation is His plan to transform the carnal nature of every willing sinner into a pure heart! God has not seen a sinner whom He did not love; God has not seen a sinner whom He could not forgive; and God has not seen a problem that He cannot solve. The 144,000 servants will announce the mystery of God, which is God’s generous offer to remove each person’s greatest problem: his sinful nature.

Notice how various mysteries of God unfold over time. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, **“Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise**

¹ Revelation 10:7

in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."¹

Now, examine these words by Paul to the church at Colosse: "Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make

¹ Ephesians 3:2-12

known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”¹

Paul told the Ephesians that the union of Gentiles and Jews into one body of people had been part of God’s plan from the beginning. However, this part of salvation for the human race (the mystery that had been kept secret from ages past) had not been revealed until now.

Now that the appointed time had come for the mystery to be exposed, Paul was empowered to announce this bold new revelation to the world. If you would like to enjoy the fullness of this revelation, read Ephesians 2 and 3 and reflect on Paul’s commission to reveal this “previously unheard” doctrine.

Likewise, Paul told the Colossians that God had commissioned him to become a servant of the gospel, and to present a mystery that God had kept hidden for ages and generations, but was now revealed to the saints. This mystery is that Jesus lives within

¹ Colossians 1:24-29

the hearts of His followers, **“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”**¹

The mystery which the 144,000 will proclaim has been hidden from previous generations. This mystery is that Jesus will remove the carnal heart with its propensity for sin and He will replace it with a pure heart that has no attraction for sin. If sinners will put their faith in Christ and obediently submit to the gospel call which the Holy Spirit is pressing upon their hearts, Jesus will generously grant this miracle.

Response to the Spirit

God loves each person equally and He will not keep a person out of heaven because he lived 3,000 years ago in a remote village and worshiped a false God. Millions of people will be in heaven (including deists, agnostics, and atheists) who know nothing about Jesus! Be assured, I am not advocating universal salvation. Universal salvation is the notion that at the end of sin's drama, God will save everyone. On the contrary, I believe the Bible teaches God will condemn and destroy each person who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit. At the end of sin's drama, I believe this will prove to be many people. God's fairness in giving each person the same op-

¹ Colossians 1:27

portunity for eternal life may be a new thought, especially if you believe that your denomination has the only key to eternal life. When we consider that **“God so loved the world (all 108 billion people) that he gave his one and only Son,”**¹ this becomes a very important concept to understand. The fulfillment of Revelation’s story is about to impact the last seven billion people who live on Earth, most of whom have never had a chance to thoughtfully consider the gospel of Jesus.

Work of the Spirit

Jesus gave four clues in the following text about the Holy Spirit that many Christians fail to understand. **“And so I tell you, [1] every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but [2] blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. [For example,] Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who [continues to] speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, [3] either in this age or [4] in the age to come.”**²

What amazing grace! Forgiveness is possible for every sin and blasphemy except one. Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age or during the age to come. Jesus

¹ John 3:16

² Matthew 12:31-32, insertions mine

added the phrase “in the age to come” because God blesses every being with a gift called “the power of choice” and this gift will continue “in the age to come.” God gave this gift to the angels when He created them and He gave it to Adam and Eve. Because beings are free to exercise their power of choice, Lucifer and his followers became evil when they chose to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve became evil when they chose to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The only way we can blaspheme the Holy Spirit is through choice.

The word “blasphemy” means to insult, defy, denigrate, vilify, or to speak evil. For example, if a person speaks against the Father or Jesus, he can be forgiven.¹ However, blaspheming the Holy Spirit is different. Defying the Holy Spirit is dangerous because we cannot claim ignorance when the Holy Spirit speaks since the voice of the Holy Spirit within each person is strong, clear, and unmistakable. Therefore, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a willful act of defiance and each person who has lived on Earth (except Jesus) has, at one time or another, blasphemed the Holy Spirit. However, do not be discouraged or overwhelmed, because a few mistakes do not automatically mean eternal death.²

1 Luke 23:34

2 Matthew 18:21-35

Sinful Nature

Each person is born with a sinful nature and our sinful nature is hostile toward God's authority.¹ Because we have the power of choice, each child has a throne within his heart and shortly after birth, a contest for this throne begins. Jesus, our Creator, wants to sit on our throne; but because of our vanity and self-seeking sinful nature, we want to sit on our throne. Our sinful nature is an ego-centric, selfish, and self-centered king. Parents do not have to teach a child to be selfish or self-centered. The little Pharaoh does not naturally share his toys or submit to a higher authority (just like Pharaoh in ancient Egypt). Anything that challenges the "will" of little Pharaoh is met with resistance (crying, screaming, pouting, defiance, and rebellion). Worse, as a child grows up, the Pharaoh within him also matures, and most of the time, he becomes more devious and difficult to admonish.

The battle between Jesus and the Pharaoh in us is conducted by the Holy Spirit. His mission is to unseat Pharaoh and put him in "the closet" so that Jesus can reign as Lord and Master. When Jesus reigns on the throne in our heart, the fruit of the Spirit naturally occurs. There is peace, joy, and fullness of life, not only within the person, but for

¹ Romans 8:7

everyone around that person!¹ Because God has given us the power of choice, the Holy Spirit cannot violate our will. Each person has the God-given right to determine his eternal destiny. The Holy Spirit will only install Jesus on the throne of our hearts if we allow it. Because Pharaoh is stubborn, the Holy Spirit applies pressure on us in two different ways. Sometimes, there are gentle and gradual steps (sanctification is a nurturing process which the Holy Spirit uses to draw us to God and into His ways), and sometimes there are bold tests of faith to see if we will listen to God and obey His voice. In either case, we always respond to the Holy Spirit. We answer His prodding with submission or rebellion.

Sanctification is a one-on-one experience. God initiates sanctification shortly after each child is born so that each person might come to know Him and walk in His ways. The Holy Spirit knows how to speak to the heart of each unique person, and all 108 billion of us have been permitted, because of the power of choice, to speak back to the Holy Spirit. This communication is totally private – one-on-one. It occurs within the heart and no one else in the world is privy to the personal exchange.² When the Holy Spirit speaks to us, a strong conviction ar-

¹ John 13:35; Galatians 5:22-23

² 1 Samuel 16:7; John 3:8

rives that requires action. No one else knows about the conviction unless we reveal it. Every Holy Spirit conviction is righteous because God is righteous. The problem with a Holy Spirit conviction is that doing right in God's eyes is usually difficult to carry out, when doing wrong is so much easier.

When Holy Spirit conviction occurs, we communicate and respond to the Holy Spirit through action. Our lips can say anything, but our action reveals submission or rebellion. During the Great Tribulation, there will be four calls to action. The Holy Spirit will challenge everyone on Earth with four bold tests of faith (the 144,000 will deliver these four messages from God) and everyone will communicate and respond to the Holy Spirit through action. Some people will obey the demands of the Holy Spirit and lose everything, including their lives, while many will defy the Holy Spirit in an attempt to save themselves from pain and death.¹

Holy Spirit Methods

The Holy Spirit works in many different ways. For example, each child is born with a developing sense of fairness, as well as a basic ability to learn right from wrong. When possible, the Holy Spirit uses our conscience to draw us closer to

¹ John 12:25

God. When possible, the Holy Spirit uses parents to sanctify the child. Parental training and education, such as the home environment and parental example, can accelerate the sanctifying process. Of course, some children do not have the blessing of a good role model at home. To compensate, the Holy Spirit may use others such as teachers, church leaders, grandparents, relatives, or neighbors.

As a child matures, so does the Pharaoh within. Therefore, the efforts of the Holy Spirit change with time. As a child becomes increasingly accountable for his decisions, the Holy Spirit accepts the choices made by the teen. This explains to some extent why rebellion overtakes some adolescents. If a teen does not want to hear from the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit does not give up, He simply steps back, sometimes for years, waiting for an open heart.

Each child comes into this world needing instruction and training, and each child should learn these essential concepts by age seven: Respect and reverence for God; respect for parents, elders, authorities, and the property of others; self-control; and respect for himself and his/her own body. Teaching these concepts takes time, patience, effort, and determination. Wise parents know about the battle for the throne and they have to allow room for the

Holy Spirit to battle directly with the little Pharaoh sitting on the throne. When overprotective parents do not give room for the work of the Holy Spirit, they can create a rebellious child because one Pharaoh, inside the parent, is struggling with the other Pharaoh, inside the child.

If a person responds to the ongoing sanctification efforts of the Holy Spirit, he will eventually reach a “tipping point.” When this moment arrives, Pharaoh is dethroned and sent to the closet; then Jesus takes over the throne. Even though Jesus ascends the throne, Pharaoh can (and does) jump out of the closet and return to the throne from time to time.¹ Because God is patient and not willing that anyone should perish,² the Holy Spirit does not give up on us with one or even ten blasphemies. Instead, the Holy Spirit only gives up on us when rebellion becomes constant.

Each time we blaspheme the Holy Spirit, our willingness to blaspheme the Holy Spirit grows stronger. If we continue in defiant rebellion, there will come a point where the Holy Spirit can do nothing more. He cannot violate our will. Therefore, our response to the Holy Spirit is far more serious than many people understand because no one

¹ Romans 7:14-25

² 2 Peter 3:9

wants to have a relationship with God after the Holy Spirit abandons him. People who commit the unpardonable sin have no desire or interest in doing right. The devil knows this and he uses every imaginable effort to keep Pharaoh seated on the throne.

During the past 6,000 years, 108 billion people have participated in a contest. Paul called this contest the good fight of faith.¹ This fight will continue for all people until the sealing occurs. During the Great Tribulation, millions of people will hear and obey the demands of the Holy Spirit and be sealed. This means Jesus will take over the throne and slay the Pharaoh in His saints. Finally, Pharaoh's closet will be permanently sealed.

Rebirth

Suppose that "rebirth" occurs when the tipping point (mentioned earlier) occurs. When sanctification reaches a point where Pharaoh is dethroned, Jesus takes charge of our life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This tipping point could come as the result of an altar call at church. At this point, a conscious decision is made to surrender 100% to the authority of Jesus. In such a case, a person might act on a desire that has been forming in his

¹ 2 Timothy 4:7

or her heart for some time. The tipping point could also come through a test of faith where the Holy Spirit brings a strong conviction to do something right and submission follows. Either situation is evidence that Jesus is on the throne. Rebirth in an atmosphere of divine truth looks quite different than rebirth in the absence of such knowledge, but whenever rebirth is present, a person obeys the demands of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”**¹

Each person’s eternal destiny is determined by his response to the Holy Spirit. God has given all people an equal chance for salvation. Such is God’s amazing grace. One blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not fatal and one rebirth experience does not mean the battle for the throne is over. Remember, because we have a sinful nature, there is a life-long battle for the throne of our hearts. We have to fight the good fight of faith every day. The only way we can walk with God is through submission to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The greatest evidence of rebirth is a hunger and thirst to know God, understand His truth, and ex-

¹ John 3:8

perience His righteousness. If allowed, the Holy Spirit will ramp up the sanctifying process. He will cause us to grow up spiritually by imposing new convictions on us. He does this to keep us living in the realm of faith where justification is granted.

A Pure Heart

The sealing described in Revelation 7 is the gift of a pure heart. God has been promising this gift to the human race for almost 3,000 years! God promised His people while in Babylonian exile, **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”**¹

Unfortunately, the people of Israel failed to follow the Holy Spirit. They went astray again and again. Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah and the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36 was delayed. But, it is still coming! Six hundred years after Ezekiel’s day, Paul declared this promise again, **“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

¹ Ezekiel 36:26-27

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”¹

These two texts, one by Ezekiel and the other by Paul, speak about the powerful transformation God has planned. No doubt, both prophets anticipated the fulfillment of this promise in their day, but the mystery is not fulfilled until we reach the Great Tribulation. For thousands of years God has looked forward to the day when He can remove our carnal heart and give us a pure heart. He longs for the day when rebellion will no longer be within His children!

His children also long for this to happen because they are sick and tired of having to deal with the law of sin.² Both Ezekiel and Paul knew that this transformation was coming, but they did not know its appointed time. The saints who live during the Great Tribulation will understand the timing and they will see and experience this transformation!

God removes the sinful nature (the Pharaoh) during the Great Tribulation because Jesus’ inter-

¹ Hebrews 8:10-13

² Romans 7:23-25

cession on behalf of sinners comes to a close at the time of the seventh trumpet. For thousands of years, the righteousness of Christ has been imputed. During the 1,260 days of sealing, the righteousness of Christ will be imparted to each repentant sinner who passes the test of faith. No longer will the saints be reckoned as sinful, for they will be pure!

As individuals pass their personal test of faith, God will do what He has not done since sin began. He will replace the carnal nature of every “faith-filled” saint with a pure heart and seal it within him or her. Therefore, the struggle with sin and the rebellion it causes from within will be finished for all saints when the seventh trumpet sounds!

It is very important that we learn today to recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He often puts us in difficult situations so that we can see the mighty hand of God move within our lives. We need to experience lessons of faith in the school of sanctification now to prepare for the coming test of faith. Start *today* getting to know Jesus.

Knowing About Jesus Is Not Enough

I have four suggestions that will help you to know Jesus in a personal way.

1. Ask for the Holy Spirit

If you want to know Jesus, go to your prayer closet and ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to you. The Holy Spirit will activate your spiritual receptors so you can know Jesus.

2. Stop the "Easy Sins"

Sins that fall into the easy category are sins of carelessness, such as taking God's name in vain, swearing, lying, cheating, and dishonesty. Overcoming them is not easy, but they are easy to identify.

When a person wants to know Jesus, he shows his desire to the Father by cleaning house. He begins with eliminating what he knows to be offensive to God. A person should not expect God to listen to his prayers if he willfully lives in sin.¹ Jesus cannot abide with a person who is negligent, lazy, or indifferent about the importance of sanctification. If you want to walk and talk with Jesus, you need to know that the road to heaven is "uphill," but worth the effort every step of the way!

¹ Psalm 66:18

3. Be Willing to Let the World Go

Our first birth is according to the flesh and it is attracted to the deeds of the flesh. When born a second time, we are born by the Spirit and we are attracted to the endeavors of the Holy Spirit.

When we repeatedly ask the Father to give us the Holy Spirit, we must be ready for a life-changing experience. As the Holy Spirit dwells within a person, He brings with Him transforming power. The most powerful evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is not prophesying, talking in tongues, or working miracles. Instead, it is the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit that brings peace (a calming serenity) and love (replacing hostilities, contempt, and malice for others). The Holy Spirit also brings a strong desire for personal sanctification.

Each born-again person receives a mission along with a new set of eyes. As he matures in the Lord, the mission unfolds. Through eyes of faith, he sees and understands the temporal nature of everything that exists on Earth. He also understands that no one can serve both God and money.

A born-again person may not know where God is leading, but he knows God so wherever He leads will be fine. A born-again person understands that using the name of the Lord is not the same as being called by the Lord!

4. Spend Time with Jesus

It can be very difficult to consistently spend quiet time with the Lord. This is a huge problem in today's society because people are going crazy with busyness. If spending time with Jesus in prayer and Bible study is not protected, the devil will quickly notice our developing habit and he will be sure that we will have no time for Jesus!

Summary

Jesus is eager to prepare us for what lies ahead. Our lack of faith, our failure to do right, our rebellion against God's will, our selfishness and stubbornness are all due to our carnal nature, but this will not be the case forever.

Think of it! A time is coming when God's children will no longer have a carnal nature. This is what John means when he wrote, **“Dear friends, now [in our present condition] we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made**

known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”¹ Did you notice that John said, “We shall be like Him?” Talk about a promise! Remember the words of Jesus: **“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”**² The saints are going to be pure in heart.

The Great Tribulation will be a difficult testing time. It will also be a time of revelation and reward for those who pass the test of faith! Jesus will reward the saints with pure hearts and then they will see the grandest revelation that will ever occur—Jesus appearing in all His glory!

So, do not give up! If you are struggling with sanctification, persevere – pray without ceasing and ask for God’s grace and strength to overcome. People who learn to depend on God’s strength today will not fail during the persecution that lies ahead. Why not learn to walk by faith now?

Each person who walks with God lives in a constant purification process – this can be compared to washing our dirty clothes each day. Every day, God is working on the stain of sin that is within us. One day soon, at the appointed time, the mystery

¹ 1 John 3:2-3, insertion mine

² Matthew 5:8

of God will be revealed. Jesus will eliminate the carnal nature within every saint. This is what the Bible means when it says of the redeemed, **“I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”**¹

¹ Revelation 7:14

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