



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

DEUTERONOMY 8:2-3 (ESV)

NOVEMBER 2015

The Cross and Besetting Sin

I was sitting on the stage of a large Christian gathering beside a well-loved celebrity who came to give his own testimony. He said to me in a private moment, "It is absolutely true that when Jesus became real to me as Savior, my addiction to cocaine was broken. I have not even wanted to go back to that. But I can't quit smoking. What's up with that?"

It is common to hear Christians admit to similar experiences. If God could miraculously take away one destructive habit, why not another? It is a question the children of Abraham asked after being miraculously delivered from Egypt by the mighty hand of God. He opened the sea for them and closed it in behind them on their enemy, but then they had to face daily obstacles of survival such as water, bread, and tribal enemies. God answered them:

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has

led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (ESV)

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There are miraculous deliverances and equally miraculous lives lived in covenant relationship with God.

Sadly, some have concluded that enduring besetting sins in daily life is normal and that we can't expect to be free from this enslavement until we die. They seem to be satisfied with knowing the punishment for their sins has been canceled, but they hold no hope for a life on earth with victory over sin. Of course, if they are defining victory as having no struggle or battle, they have misunderstood freedom.

For instance, Adam and Eve in their pristine garden of innocence had a confrontation. Mankind was designed to overcome and subdue. Jesus, the last

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Adam, had obstacles to face. He was personally confronted by the devil in the wilderness just like Adam and Eve in the garden and just like Israel in the wilderness. He told his disciples later that there was coming another big confrontation but

that “[the enemy] has no claim on me.” And so Jesus as our representative faced the originator of sin with the confidence that there would be no defeat. There is great news here for us. After his ascension, Jesus sent the Spirit of life that had empowered him on earth to indwell his people and ensure that we could “live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

What claim does the devil have on us? He is the prosecutor using the law to indict and condemn us. But our case has been settled in the eternal court of justice. God has declared that the penalty for all violations has been paid. The devil is the accuser and daily accuses the sons of God of being guilty of hypocrisy. We say with our lips that we are forgiven sons, but we still fail, so we are susceptible to his charges. Even though the Scriptures say, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), we listen to the accuser's logical accusation. He goes on to conclude that we are victims of our own past, that we—like all animals—have desires that define us and should not have any restrictions from God, that we are not really sons but servants on probation. When we aren't living by the words from the mouth

of God, we are reeling from the accusations of the liar.

When Jesus faced the devil for us, he was able to defeat him because he had nothing to prove. When the devil suggested that he satisfy his hunger by proving he was the Son of God, Jesus lived by the words from the Father's mouth: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." When the devil offered a messianic rule over the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would eliminate the cross, Jesus revealed that he had nothing to fear. He did not fear following the Father's plan of redemption even though it would cost his own life. When your life is shared with God the Father, nothing can defeat you. When the devil offered a shortcut to fame and success, Jesus revealed that he had nothing to gain. The Father would give him the people he would need to accomplish his assignment. He did not have to impress them. The good news in all of this for us is that we share the same life that has already faced these temptations. As we live by the truth of the gospel that comes from the mouth of God, we don't live by the lies of the accuser.

Like Adam and Eve, and like Israel, we still tend to listen to the lies of the destroyer. We know intellectually that

God's word is right. We affirm our belief in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. We actually commit ourselves to live by it, but we still find ourselves falling short. The apostle Paul could identify. In his discussion about the law, the flesh, and the

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Spirit, he declares that the law is right and good. He even says that he delights in it. His mind agrees that what God says is best. He declares that he is committed to live by it, even with strong determination. But he cries out of deep desperation that his mind and will are defeated by something in him, which is stronger. So he concludes that there is a power in him that is stronger than him, and that there is no way for him to get free. He must look for something or someone outside of him and greater than him. (See Romans 7:13–24.)

This power that rules over his mind and will is so strong that death is the only

solution. The demands of the law only energize it, so it doesn't help to have more and clearer laws. New commitments to do better offer temporary relief, but always fail, so exhortations and warnings don't help. Even fear of reprisal doesn't offer enough motivation. Either the person has to die or the law has to die. The law is good and does not need to die. The power of sin must be dealt with in a person, but if the sinner dies, it only demonstrates the superiority of sin and its penalty. Sin kills another sinner. So, Jesus becomes sin. Sin is personified in him. In his death, the power that has ruled over humans since Adam and Eve is destroyed. Somehow, God in Christ takes on sin and condemns

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it, so that forgiven sinners are never condemned. (See Romans 8:1-4.) There is no claim on them from sin. The new claim is the love of God that is expressed in Jesus. That love now is the most powerful force in the universe. Being conscious of being

unconditionally loved releases the power to love the same way. This love for God and what he loves is the new law (principle) that governs the forgiven.

The life of victory does not consist of temptation-free living. It is all about revealing the glory of one who daily offers his grace to overcome as we learn to live by the words that come from the cross. "It is finished," he said. All that is needed for mankind to live and work in the presence of God has been done. We now get to apply that to the many trials and temptations that assault us. There is no time for grieving the loss of our own righteousness. It was and is like filthy rags before God. We have been, are, and shall be forgiven. The devil has no claim on us. Believing that and acting accordingly is the life of freedom.



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