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May 2020

God-centered Not Self-centered

Dear Friend,

Recently, I re-learned the importance of setting my attention on Jesus and choosing to place Him at the center of everything that I do. I believe this to be essential when it comes to having a successful walk with Jesus. By choosing to set my full attention **on** Him and **off** myself, and my many problems, I'm shutting the door on pride.

Pride? Yes, pride! Whether we realize it or not, when we set our attention on ourselves and our shortcomings we are being self-centered instead of God-centered and we are in pride. By believing it is our responsibility to clean ourselves up instead of accepting by faith the freedom Jesus purchased for us we are demonstrating just how little we understand about God's grace and how much we are still focused on ourselves. Religion teaches people to focus on their personal flaws and what is necessary to rid themselves of these flaws so that God can use them. If you are hearing a message like this run don't walk to the nearest exit.

This thinking results in an endless cycle of self-introspection, always needing to do more to rid ourselves of our weaknesses. You see it's when a person continues to focus on them self and their own shortcomings that they are taking their eyes off of Jesus; the real solution to their problems. You might be thinking; "No that can't be". Believe me, I thought the same thing the moment this came to my attention. I thought; "How can I be in pride by simply identifying my own shortcomings and attributing them to the reason why God hasn't been able to manifest Himself through me more?"

When we think that His using us is contingent upon our ability to rid ourselves of our own flaws and shortcomings then we are making ourselves the focus of our attention instead of Jesus. The fact of the matter is we have entered into pride. True humility says, "I can do all things through **Christ** which strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) Notice, Paul did not say, "I can do all things through Christ after I pray 20 hours a week in tongues, fast 3 days and read the book of Mark

30 times.” For some reason we can read Philippians 4:13 and still believe we need to do something in order for this to work for us. All we really need to do is believe it.

Here is the thought pattern I had for years. “If only I could pray longer in tongues, and deal with more of the weaknesses in my flesh, God could use me more. Or, if only I could fast more, then God could use me more. Or, if only I could spend more time meditating God’s word, then God will be able to use me more.” These thought patterns were born out of listening to teaching that was rooted in **holiness**, holiness that was dependent of the individual’s actions instead of holiness resulting from being born again a child of the living God. The idea that a person has to do this or that in order to qualify them self for God to use them is a trap that will keep them bound up, believing they are never good enough.

The writer of Hebrews understood this principle when he wrote these words. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (2) Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...”

Most of my Christian life has been spent focusing on **me** and **my** weaknesses and **my** shortcomings. I thought this was the reason why I was being passed over by God for His miracle working power to flow through me. Truth be told, I wasn’t looking unto Jesus I was looking unto myself. I guess it was easier to blame my shortcomings for the reason why God wasn’t using me more instead of just believing that He had already made me everything I would ever need to be in Him. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

“But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

By surrounding myself with ministers who taught me about all the things **I** needed to do in order to put **myself** in a position for God to use **me**, it became more difficult for me to see myself as God sees me, right now in Jesus. My walk with Jesus became all about what I was doing instead of what He already did for me. This type of message keeps Christians locked in a kind of prison where they don’t believe they are ever qualified enough to do anything for Jesus. They are self-centered instead of Christ-centered. Generally speaking a person in this

position could easily spend their entire Christian life held up in church, afraid to step out, always believing that they are just not ready yet.

I remember my first encounter with a young believer telling me about what a preacher did in order to see miracles in his ministry. The minister fasted so many days, prayed long seasons in tongues, and boom the power of God showed up. So, apparently the answer to my problem had to be that I needed to fast until I got rid of whatever was in me that kept Jesus from using me and pray long seasons in tongues. Over the course of years, I did several long fasts and spent countless hours praying in tongues, always **believing** that one day I would arrive at a place where God could finally pour His power through me.

As I look back now, it is so clear to me that the one singular message that I was not hearing was to set all my attention on Jesus, and what He did for me, and get to know Him intimately. Instead, the message was all about what I needed to do in order to position myself where God would use me. I was constantly looking at myself and seeing all the areas I didn't measure up. If you are on this merry-go-round you need to realize that you can spend your life going round and round and never feel ready to be used by God.

“But Mark, what about all my short comings, especially those weaknesses that the devil uses to lure me back into sin?” Here's what I'm discovering, so long as I focus on my own shortcomings and weaknesses I'm exactly where the devil wants me to be and he gladly exploits those weakness. But, when I focus on Jesus and set my attention solely on Him it seems that there is some kind of grace present to overcome the enemy's temptations. Look at Hebrews 12:1 again.

“..let us lay aside every weight and the sin the doth so easily beset us...”

The words used here, “lay aside”, simply denote the action of putting something off. We are told in several places in the New Testament to put off the actions of sin. In other words, stop sinning. But, instead of focusing on not sinning we are to focus on Jesus.

“...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...”

“So, what you are saying, Mark, is to simply get my eyes off of myself and my weaknesses and set all my attention on Jesus. That sounds way too simplistic.” I agree, it does sound too simplistic, but it works. Speaking strictly for myself and what I have experienced since God showed this to me I can tell you that it truly does work.

Paul wrote more about this in his letter to the Colossians. (Colossians 3:1-2)

“If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

If we will “***seek those things which are above***” and “***set our affection on things above***” maybe we won’t be so inclined to keep looking at ourselves and our own weaknesses. It seems to me that if I’m convinced that I’m full of weakness that keeps God from using me, then I’m more convinced God **can’t** use me than I am convinced that God **will** use me. What I’m saying is that it really comes down to what **I believe**.

If we believe the lie that we have to do a certain regiment of spiritual disciplines in order to qualify for God to use us, then our believing this lie actually ties God’s hands from being able to use us. What we believe is either freeing us or putting us into bondage. Thank God I have seen the light after more than twenty years of feeling unqualified, I can honestly say that I am truly qualified in Jesus.

I don’t want to close out this message without first outlining what Paul said to the Colossians about **how** to focus on Jesus. You see, as a teacher I can’t suggest you do something without helping you understand **how** to do it. Just telling you to “focus all your attention on Jesus” is a bit ambiguous. I need to point you in the direction of the answer. Further down in chapter 3 Paul gives a clearer picture of the answer.

He lists a variety of sins of the flesh and tells the people to “put off” these sinful acts. “Well, Mark, If I knew how to stop doing these things I would. Can’t you see that’s my problem? I don’t want to stop.”

I remember hearing a message years and years ago in which the preacher likened the battle the person above is referring to, to a dog fight. The preacher said the dog that wins the fight is the one that you feed. What a powerful answer, and yet so simple. If you are struggling with a particular problem in your flesh that seems to have captured all your attention to the point that you are struggling to think about anything else, your answer is really just as simple as this, feed the dog you know must win.

This is what Paul pointed to in his instruction to the Colossians. (Colossians 3:16)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in songs and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.”

One of the main ways we focus all our attention onto Jesus is by focusing all our attention onto His word. That's not to say we are focusing on His word by reading it over and over some pre-designated number of times, like a formula that will magically cause your problems to disappear. No, just look at God's word and fellowship with Him around His word as if He is talking directly to you as you read. Stop and let Him open your eyes to what He is saying in His word and before you know it those all-consuming, driving, desires that seemed to overwhelm you have been replaced with a strength in Christ that will enable you to keep looking at Him and not yourself and your weaknesses.

What Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, has outlined here is truly the key to a successful life with Jesus. God never intended for us to clean up ourselves. He intended for us to look to Him and His word to be our strength and His grace would enable us to weather any storm that we would face. That's in fact what God told Paul when he was being tormented by the devil and he asked God three times for some relief. God told Paul that His grace was sufficient for him. (2 Corinthians 12:9) ***“My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*** Whose strength? God's strength is made perfect in weakness, our weakness.

Our answer isn't in ourselves it's in Jesus. It's not about what we do or don't do, it's about what Jesus has already done **and our ability to believe that He did it for us**. It's as simple as that.

~ Jesus Loves You!

Mark Jenkins