

Elimination for Spiritual Growth

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Elimination has not been fully appreciated by Christianity. We usually think that spiritual growth happens when we accumulate more of the Word, more time in church, more prayer, or more praise and worship. We want to accumulate more of the outward expressions of Christianity, but these are not the most important elements in a relationship with God that bring spiritual growth.

Repentance is about eliminating our attachments to the things of the world. This is how we can be in the world, but not of the world. We don't need to isolate ourselves physically because this is another outward attempt that doesn't deal with our attachments. We take them wherever we go, and this is what keeps us bound to the things of the world. We are the problem and not the things themselves. We need to approach God wherever we find ourselves because the location of our heart is what determines how close we get to God. Escaping to another physical location doesn't free us from the Law of Sin that is within us; neither does physically isolating ourselves. It tags along. Walks in nature don't do it. Only the God of nature can free us from the law of sin and death. Saint Paul describes this law as doing the things that we don't want to do, and not doing the things that we should (see Romans 7:15,19). No one is exempt from this, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17).

2Peter 1:4 speaks of "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". Our personal lust is what keeps us attached to this world; and this is why there is no physical

place to hide. Our bondage to the Law of Sin doesn't stay behind when we go elsewhere. The converse is true when we carry Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. We take Him everywhere we go. God doesn't live in temples made with hands.

Lust is another word for desire. Is all desire bad? Yes and no. It depends on how you use the word. If the word is used synonymously with wanting something that we need, the answer would be that it is not bad. God wants us to ask Him for the things that we need; but at times, need gets confused with wanting something that we believe will make us content in life. We want something to fill the void caused by the Law of Sin. This is when it becomes idolatry. Whatever we previously got didn't bring us to that place of peace and contentment that we thought we would arrive at, but we believe that more of the object will do it. Within this type of desire, we never get enough to satisfy us. Ephesians 4:22 tells us to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts"; "That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God" (1Thessalonians 4:4-5). Lust is not just a personal issue. James 4:1-3 says: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts".

God is the one who is supposed to bring us to peace and contentment. When we circumvent Him, we end up with unexplained frustration and discontent because it can't happen without Him. We wonder why the things that we thought would make us content do not. They are not supposed to. Things can never be a substitute for the contentment that God brings. This is why Paul could say in Philippians 4:11: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever

state I am, therewith to be content”.

How do we eliminate our attachments to things without eliminating our thoughts as is promoted in eastern philosophy? The Biblical emptying out of our minds is the emptying out of our inordinate attachments to things and not the total emptying of our minds that is promoted in eastern meditation. Also, in the Bible, we bring Christ into the process, and not just rely on ourselves to do it. This is how we arrive at Christ's peace and rest. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

Because non-Biblical spiritualities generally do not recognize the Law of Sin and its weakening effect on us, they do not separate the human weakness from our thoughts. I believe that this is why they try to negate all thoughts to be at peace. Biblical spirituality does not require this. Also, they do not recognize the place of Christ in the process. The peace that passes all understanding is Christ's peace that He shares with us when we trust in Him. Being at rest in Christ does not prevent us from using our thoughts. Thinking is a normal human function. It could hardly be said of Saint Paul that he was not a serious thinker.

The reality of human weakness is experienced by everyone, but there are different explanations for it that are offered. The Biblical explanation is that it is the result of what transpired in the Garden of Eden, and that we need Jesus Christ to bring us out of it. A popular humanist explanation is that it is an evolutionary stage for humanity and that we will eventually evolve into a higher consciousness that brings us out of it. Many believe that if we find just the right political or economic system, it will hasten this evolution. Others believe that technology with its enhanced communications will be the answer. None of this has happened despite humanity's best efforts, but hope springs eternal.

In humanist ideologies, violence, hate, and division are promoted as agents of change. Efforts at human equality end in division and hate. This is because there is nothing else for them. The works of the flesh are described in Galatians 5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God". The Law of Sin has no humanist remedies. If it did, what Jesus Christ accomplished was a waste of time and blood. Much of human controversy revolves around these worldview differences.

There are a number of verses in the Bible that tell us how to go about eliminating our attachments. They are found in both Testaments. The basic method of drawing close to God for this applies to both the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, the God-man. Unconditional trust is the common denominator. The objective is to find rest for our souls. "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where [is] the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16).

- *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Not leaning on our own understand is different from emptying our minds of all thought, if that is even possible. We generally want to trust our own perceptions or mental constructs, even of God, without leaning on Him; and we make many bad choices that way. It is more important how we relate to God than what we know about Him. This passage of Scripture is a statement of unconditional trust in God where we surrender all of our

attachments to things. Trust in God brings us to the place of the heart, and away from excessive reliance on our thoughts. It takes the intensity away from our mental constructs, and it moderates us so that we can be more objective. We make better choices when we are at peace; and not when we are angry and frustrated. "And let the peace of God rule [be the umpire] in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

- *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful [anxious] for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:5-8).*

This was one of the first passages of Scripture that gave me the basic elements of Biblical spirituality. Our moderation comes from the Holy Spirit. We need to first be anxious for nothing in order to arrive at the peace that passes all understanding. We eliminate our anxieties. This is the unconditional trust in God that empties our minds of our attachments to things. Then God wants us to bring our requests to Him by prayer. After this, we fill our minds with the good things. The order is important. Replacing bad thoughts with good thoughts is not enough. Unconditional trust need to precede this because God's peace and strength facilitate the removing of bad thoughts and the bringing in of good thoughts; otherwise, the Law of Sin makes this difficult.

This is probably the first passage that I noticed that directly related to Matthew 6:27 which says: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" This verse in Matthew impressed me at about 19 years old, and made me think that I should not worry about anything. It was my first glimpse of Biblical spirituality. We eliminate worry. I was very attracted to it at the time but didn't know if I was misreading it. I would have loved to believe, that in order to please God, I wasn't supposed to worry about anything; but I had never heard of this before. I was taught that obeying Church rules was the best way to please God. That was the level of spirituality that I was taught. There is no grace in legalism. Paul says in Galatians 5:4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Trying to conform to rules and regulations for favor with God does not bring Christian righteousness. Paul calls it dung (see Philippians 3:8).

- *"Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, Casting all of your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Peter 5:5-7).*

This is the definition of humility toward God. Casting our burdens and cares on the Lord empties our minds of our attachments. This is how we eliminate our cares and get exalted in due time. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught". (Colossians 2:6-7). This is how we grow in the Lord. 2Peter 1:4 speaks of "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". Lust is what keeps us attached to this world, and it is not our

thoughts per se. Lust is what we need to eliminate toward the Lord, including worry, anger, and unforgiveness. All of these things revolve around fear, and this is why they need to be surrendered to the Lord. As we unconditionally trust in the Lord, fear and its manifestations are neutralized.

- *“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh [near] to God, and he will draw nigh [near] to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (James 4:6-10).

This passage is similar to 1Peter5:5-7 in that God will lift us up when we humble ourselves before Him. It also tells us that our own efforts at laughter and joy for distracting ourselves fall short, and that we should abandon ourselves to the Lord in order to be lifted up by Him. The fallen human condition is well described here; and that we need God to bring us to the place of real contentment.

- *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever; for in the LORD God is everlasting strength”* (Isaiah 26:3-4).

This verse is important because it brings in the element of strength. Trust in God is the main ingredient for both peace and strength. There is very little talk of strength in non-Biblical spiritualities. They experience some peace using their spiritual practices, but strength

is what gives peace its permanence. This comes from Christ. Galatians 5:22-24 says: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts". Temperance is the one pertaining to strength. This passage sums it up. It lists all the qualities of character that are given to us by the Spirit. Notice that these are all personal qualities.

See also Psalms 105:4 which says: "Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore.", and Proverbs 10:29: "The way of the LORD is strength to the upright". Righteousness results from the strength of the Holy Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4). Peace and righteousness are connected: "righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalms 85:10).

- *"Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved"* (Psalms 55:22).

This can only be a God thing. He lifts, sustains, and strengthens us, and gives us peace when we eliminate our burdens on Him.

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2Peter 3:13-14).

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