

Why God Requires a Ruthless Pursuit of Holiness From His Children

In Deuteronomy 7, as the Israelites enter the promised land, God tells them He will drive out “seven nations that are larger and stronger.” He promises to overthrow those nations provided the Israelites defeat them, revealing the partnership that God calls us to: our obedience, dependence and faith coupled with His divine power.

God cautions the Israelites to make no treaty with the enemies in the land, to destroy them totally, and to show them no mercy.

“You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods for that will be a snare to you” (Deut. 7:16, NIV).

“The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed” (Deut. 7:22-23).

Interestingly, His pledge in Deuteronomy is reminiscent of His promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13—that He will not allow temptations into our lives that we cannot withstand. Again, we see the partnership between our concentrated pursuit of holiness and the release of His power to fight the battle for us (Jude 24; 1 Pet. 1:5; Ps. 37:23, 55:22).

Things Gone Wrong

In Joshua 7:11-12, the Bible describes what happened to the Israelites when they failed to obey God’s commands: He stopped

defeating their enemies for them.

As time went on, they intermarried with the inhabitants of the land and began to follow their gods—the very thing that God had been trying to avoid.

Evidently, the Israelites saw themselves as wiser and more merciful than God and entitled to the spoils of war that had been forbidden them.

A New Promised Land

All of this, I believe, was a prefigurement of the battle with sin that we experience today.

– The Promised Land that we enter is the Kingdom of God – a kingdom that is to be accessed by a ruthless and unrelenting faith! (Luke 11:20, 12:32, 17:21)

– The *battlefield* in our promised land is the mind, which in Hebrew thought includes the heart (Rom. 12:1-2).

– The enemies are the strongholds of idolatry that reside there : lust, greed, hatred and so forth (Matt. 15:19, Luke 12:34).

Parallel to the Old Testament call to battle, we must be just as ruthless in coming against the enemies in our battlefield as the Israelites were in their theater of war. If we do not, we will suffer the same fate as they did. If we do not deal a ruthless deathblow, our enemies will rise again and lead us back into idolatry.

Taking the Kingdom by Force

The Bible teaches that believers are to take the kingdom by force (Matt. 11:12, Luke 16:16). A *New American Standard Study Bible* footnote says that this forcefulness speaks of the *fierce earnestness* with which people respond to the gospel of the kingdom.

One of the greatest problems in the church today is that we are not ruthlessly and violently taking the kingdom of God by force. In fact, this generation exhibits little passion for holiness (Matt. 17:17, Luke 11:29, Acts 2:40, Phil. 2:15). Instead we “supermarket shop” for holiness, effectively saying, “God, make me holy in this area, but leave me alone in this other area.”

The kingdom of God is not a supermarket! If we want to be holy, we must want to be made holy across the board. Those who pick and choose where to be made holy and where to remain worldly are not submitted to God. They continue to act as their own god (Matt. 7:21, Luke 6:46). They continue to put another god (self) before Him (Ex. 20:3).

Leaving the Slavery to Sin

We have been called to leave the slavery of sin (John 8:34, 2 Pet. 2:19-22) and to do so with utter ruthlessness—a fearlessness that signals our complete devotion to the Lord, that He is good, and that He is faithful to perform His promises.

Oswald Chambers once wrote: “The core of all sin is the doubt that God is good.” In a certain sense, every time we sin, we are doubting the goodness of God—that His promises are for our good—that His commands are meant to be protective, not restrictive. A right understanding of these things enables us realize that love for Him is most perfectly expressed through delightful obedience (John 14:15-, 21, 23-24; Heb. 2:1-4, 3:12-15, 10:26-31).

The ruthlessness required by God for the Israelites as they entered their promised land is the same ruthlessness that we are called to in our battle with the powers of sin (Eph. 5:3-14, Col. 3:5-10). God wants to destroy their power and He will, provided we aggressively pursue holiness and depend on Him to fight the battle for us (1 Sam. 17:47, 2 Chron. 20:15).

“Not that I have already attained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ... I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12, 14).

The Fruit of a Compromised Faith

One problem is that we too often attempt to overcome God’s enemies by our own strength and our own wisdom. Or we compromise with them, treating them as relatively unimportant in an age of grace. We take advantage of the fact that Christ has removed the penalty for sin and flounder in the Sargasso Sea of compromise (Rom. 6:1-7).

Unfortunately, the penalty for us will be similar to that of the Israelites. As we continue to compromise with the enemy, God will eventually lift His hand of protection. The demonic powers that had fled under His authority and power now return to a house swept clean, bringing with them seven spirits that are more wicked and powerful than the first. Consequently, we are left in a worse position than when we started (Matt. 12:43-45).

“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred commandment that was passed on to them” (2 Pet. 2:20-21).

A Reverent Love for God Yields the Fruit of Holiness

Even believers fail at this on one level or another, and there is grace for that in the face of genuine repentance (1 John 1:9). But the issue isn’t failure in the battle:

– It is the need for a heart, established by a passionate love

for God, which is moved to obey every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

– It is a clear understanding that God is worthy not only of the praise of our lips, but the praise of our life as well (Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10, Heb. 3:3).

– It is a *sincere and uncompromising* desire to be made holy in *this* life as well as the next (Lev. 11:44-45).

– It is an understanding that *our* desire, coupled with *His* power, will set us free from the tyranny of sin.

With God, you can do this. God always enables us to accomplish that which He calls us to do. Seek Him diligently for this and you will find Him (Deut. 4:29, 2 b, Ps. 105:4, Jer. 29:13, Heb. 11:6).

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days” (Luke 1:68, 74-75).

“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness” (Rom. 6:19b).

“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor. 7:1b). {eoa}

Adapted from David Kyle Foster's Sexual Healing Reference Edition.

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