

OUR HOPE

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Sir Francis Drake, Vice Admiral of the British Navy, who circumnavigated the world and harbored along the Marin County coast in 1579, is said to have written this prayer:

“Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

“Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

“Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.”

The Bible says,

“The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God’s glory. It’s that simple.” (Colossians 1:27; MSG)

Who You Are NOT

Knowing who you are means also that to some degree you know who you are *not*.

When strange thoughts come to mind, you don’t identify with them (“That’s not me; that’s not what I’m like; that’s not who I am.”) — that’s what makes those thoughts strangers to you. But what about familiar thoughts or thought patterns?

If you have become a Christian on purpose (by a deliberate choice of your own), the basis and core of your life has changed. You have made Jesus Christ your Leader. However, His Lordship does not automatically change all of your old habits. Each area of operation and authority must be surrendered to His Leadership — your family life, your leisure time, your work life, your church life, your personal thought life.

If you continue to identify with familiar thoughts and thought patterns of your former way of life that do not express the revelation of Christ-in-you (that disagree with God’s thoughts and words about you-in-Christ), you will interfere with and hinder the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. To continue to identify with your old ways, simply because they are familiar is to contradict and resist God’s plan for you.

A common point of confusion surrounds the source of thoughts. Are they from God, the devil, others, or just me? I cannot answer that question for all of you at once, but I can address your confusion. God is moving you toward peace and confidence, away from confusion and uncertainty about such things. If you are confused right now, know that “this, too, will pass,” as you repeatedly yield the leadership of your thought life to the Holy Spirit.

When you recognize that a thought does not have a divine origin, you can (and must) do something about it: First, do not try to ignore or eliminate it, but surrender it to God. To “cast it down” doesn’t mean try to put it out of your mind, but to deny its authority; to declare it to be subject to the Holy Spirit. Second, take the opportunity to declare to Him again your allegiance to Him and His ways. “I

choose to believe what you have said instead. According to Your Word, I am..., or I have..." "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

A Sense of Identity

Isaiah 6 (NLT)

¹ *It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple.* ² *Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.* ³ *They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!"*

⁴ *Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke.*

⁵ *Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies."*

⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.* ⁷ *He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven."*

When the light of God's Word first strikes us it highlights the nature of God. We can only know God for sure by His Word, for that is where He reveals to us what He is truly like. This light then illuminates our sin in contrast to His purity. "Woe is me! I am undone! For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner."

Thus, our first sense of spiritual identity before God is as a sinner. As the Holy Spirit reveals the many ways in which our values and behaviors deviate from God's ways, we experience conviction; we feel guilt and grief and shame. But God does not want us to remain there!

As with one hand the Holy Spirit shows us in the mirror of God's Word our sinfulness, with the other hand He offers us the cleansing blood of our Savior Jesus. See, and be clean. "If I had not shown them their sins, they would still be blind."

It is good to recognize sin for what it is, to admit our faults and errors. But lingering, haunting shame and condemnation are not from God, but are tools of Satan our enemy. God convicts; Satan condemns. The first leads to repentance and cleansing and healing. The latter leads nowhere good at all, but to depression and destruction.

Clean and Unclean

Isaiah 59 (NLT)

¹ *Listen! The LORD's arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call.* ² *It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.* ⁴ *No one cares about being fair and honest.*

⁶ *All their activity is filled with sin, and violence is their trademark.*

⁸ *They don't know where to find peace or what it means to be just and good.*

⁹ *So there is no justice among us, and we know nothing about right living. We look for light but find only darkness. We look for bright skies but walk in gloom.*

¹¹ *We look for justice, but it never comes. We look for rescue, but it is far away from us.* ¹² *For our sins are piled up before God and testify against us. Yes, we know what sinners we are.*

Under the First Covenant, when a person or a sacred object was defiled it was rendered "ceremonially unclean" (as some modern versions read). The defilement was "ceremonial," because the ceremo-

nies of the Jewish worship were and are simply suggestive of the *true* elements and expressions of worship (as they are found in heaven).

But there is an actual spiritual defilement, as well, which we, under the Second Covenant, must be aware of. It is more than ceremonial (which can only isolate us from the ceremonies), and it is not visible to the natural eye, like leprosy or filthy clothes. It is an invisible (but real) condition of the heart that isolates us from the welcoming presence of God. Not that God ceases to be welcoming, but neither does He cease to be holy, and His holiness will not permit fellowship with darkness. And we cease to *feel welcomed*, even while we pursue religious ceremonies and traditions. We may feel disconnected or estranged from God, or we may feel nothing at all. This is a dreadful condition!

Defilement is the opposite of purification. One who has become defiled needs must be purified. Purification removes defilement. Purification restores our fellowship with God.

For every sin in your life you have a Savior: Jesus Christ. His shed blood is sufficient to take away the “sins of the whole world.” You don’t need to persuade Him to be your Savior; He is not reluctant. It was His idea in the first place, and He has finished the work. There remains no more decision on His part, nor any more for Him to do. “It is finished.”

You may be inclined to think that once saved you should never again think like a sinner, or desire to sin, or actually commit sin. The Bible does say some things that have been misinterpreted to suggest that sin does not occur in the life of saints. Here are three instances:

Hebrews 6 (NIV)

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

1 John 3 (NLT)

⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin.

Romans 6 (NLT)

² Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

But those misinterpretations require ignoring the context of those verses and the many other plain statements about God’s abounding and continually available forgiveness, such as:

1 John 1 (NIV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

There is an unrighteousness which is systemic and continuous, a condition of the heart that pervades one’s life. In contrast, righteousness is also a pervasive condition — a condition of personal relationship with God that is initiated and sustained, not by our works, nor by any other means than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is another unrighteousness which is superficial and momentary, a self-centered action of an otherwise righteous person. To complete this line of thought (though I will not dwell here), there is a righteousness which is also superficial and momentary: a generous deed of an otherwise (at heart) unrighteous person.

Matthew 15 (NLT)

¹⁶ "Don't you understand yet?" Jesus asked. ¹⁷ "Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. ¹⁸ But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you.

The superficial is just passing through without defiling, but what has been internalized, assimilated (become our identity), defiles, because it is substantial (representing the core of who we are).

Which is the case with you?

Run to Win

As I said, you may be inclined to think that once saved you should never again think like a sinner, or desire to sin, or actually commit sin. But, to do so reveals that you do not yet understand what God has done for you. This "new birth" is not a rebirth of your body, so your former size, shape, and condition will accompany you into this new life. Nor is it a rebirth of your mind; therefore, your memories and thought patterns and ways of expressing yourself will also accompany you into this new life. What was born again? Your spirit! Dead before, due to the effects of sin, your spirit became alive to God, aware of God, and now agrees with God. But like a newborn, your spirit has a long way to grow — a lifetime of growing. Therefore, there may be frequent disagreements in your body or mind to what your spirit sees and claims as its own.

1 Corinthians 9 (NLT)

²⁴ Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

Who wins the gold? It's your choice. You decide these competitions. You choose the winner of each match. By agreement with God's Word and submission to His Spirit you loose the overcoming power of God in your life. The more often and consistently you do so, the more rapidly your spirit and influence will grow.

There must be a change in your essential identity — a new birth. You cannot continue to reason and make decisions as before and simply don Christianity as an outer garment. You must admit the influence of Jesus into the core of who you are and old routines and manners must be shed like old garments to reveal the new Christ-in-you. That is your "hope of glory."

Hope of Glory

Philippians 1 (MSG)

⁶ There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.

We all need hope, because "we all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2), and it is hope that lifts us to our feet again. We may imagine that God has not even begun a work in us, or even more likely, that He has given up on us in disgust, due to our waywardness and indifference. But you and I who have trusted in Jesus Christ for our salvation have a strong hope that reaches beyond the weaknesses of our flesh.

If Christ is in us, then we have become new creations of God! We have a new nature like His own, holy and eternal. Although your body and mind are often in conflict with the Spirit who guides you, and your desires may rebel against Him, your innermost being (your spirit), now living in communion with the Holy Spirit, overcomes these natural impulses and enables you in grace to behave righteously. This is who you are now! This is how we live in Him! Of course, we are not *always* successful in our efforts, or even in putting forth effort.

Every day is filled with choices — Who will we please? Who will we obey? Sometimes we are aware of our opportunity to choose; other times, we are not. But every day is also filled with the abundant grace of God, given to help us, to see us through, and to carry us over. God's strength is just as present with you as the devil's temptations or your flesh's desires. In Jesus' name, you may access His power just as readily as you may follow your natural inclinations.

However, if your hope reaches only for earthly victories, for the sake of becoming a better person, or proving yourself good, you will surely be disappointed, and will likely become discouraged. You have set the bar too low!

For God has "put eternity" in your heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). You have been born again. You are a person who will live forever. Your destiny will not be found in this world. Whether you become rich or successful or well-known is insignificant to your destiny, for your value to God is not measured by those things, nor will your destiny be shaped by those things.

Your destiny will be shaped by the *inward* shape of your life, by the bent and thrust given to your soul's development by the little choices that you make from day to day — to please God or to please yourself, to starve pride or to feed it.

How do you identify yourself? As a Christian? And if as a Christian, do you simply mean as someone who is a member of a Christian church and not a Buddhist or a Hindu? Or do you mean as someone whom God in gracious power has given a brand new kind of life — a forgiven life, an everlasting life — and someone who is learning to walk out that kind of life right here and now?

As 2011 begins, we don't need more resolutions... We need more revelation, and a revolution of faithfulness!

If you have not surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, I call you to do so today, and begin this new year as a born-again Christian. Jesus has already paid the price for you to receive free forgiveness of your sins and become one of God's adopted children. A new spiritual life is awaiting you right now.

If you have identified more with your fleshly weaknesses than you have with Christ's victory and strength, I call you to lift up your eyes today and see your Savior alive and victorious and standing before the throne of Almighty God interceding for your own triumph every day. Step up to your calling and follow the Spirit's lead. Lay down your self-condemnation or your self-righteousness pride and declare your faithful allegiance to Him once again.