

MARK JENKINS MINISTRIES

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Every Man's Battle

Dear Friend,

In last month's teaching letter, we discussed the issue of strongholds and how they are present in each of us. We also discovered how these strongholds have the potential of stopping us from fulfilling all that God has called us to do. This month, we are going to look at one man's battle with a particular stronghold that plagued him for years and how it eventually threatened to derail the progress of the early church. What we will witness is how God had to eventually use another man to intervene and bring correction for the sake of the Gentile believers, as well as, the preservation of the message of righteousness by faith apart from the Law. The man we are going to follow is Peter.

Peter was one of the three key leaders in the early church, along with James and John. He was one of about 120 believers who waited in the Upper Room for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost and the birth of the church age. Peter played a crucial role in much of the events following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, which helped to establish his position of authority in the early church. With authority comes great responsibility; responsibility first of all for dealing with our strongholds and putting as many of them to death as possible. Don't think for a moment that Peter was immune to strongholds or that God could just ignore them. God wouldn't use the excuse, "Well, it's Peter and that's just the way he is." Excusing our strongholds is a luxury none of us can afford, no matter who we are.

Despite Peter's strongholds, God did use him to deliver what I believe to be one of the greatest Words in the New Testament. Through Peter came the revelation that salvation was for Jew and Gentile alike and that the observance of the Law and its strict dietary requirements was over. It's in Acts 10 that we see the account of Peter falling into a trance on the rooftop of Simon the tanner's house. (Acts 10:13-15)

"And there came a voice to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. (14) But, Peter said, 'Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or

unclean.’ (15) And the voice spake unto him again the second time, ‘What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.’ ”

This was approximately nine years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. At that time, the Jews were still predominantly the only ones receiving the message of salvation. (Acts 10:34-35)

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, ‘Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (35) But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. ’ ”

God picked Peter to deliver this earth shaking revelation. So, the question is, how did the other leaders in Jerusalem embrace this message? Did they adopt the belief in the equality of Jews and Gentiles and suspend observing the Law, or not? Unfortunately, even after Peter’s revelation, years passed and the message coming out of Jerusalem was a mixed message. A distinction between the Jew and the Gentile believers still existed, as well as, a belief in the need to continue eating “kosher” food and observing the Law. The leaders were apparently not embracing Peter’s message, and consequently Peter himself struggled to adhere to his own revelation. But, it wasn’t that Peter didn’t believe in the validity of his revelation. What we will see is that it was his stronghold of “fear of man” which caused him to recoil when faced with the responsibility to make a stand against those he knew would oppose him. “Fear of man” is what drives a person to conform to the wishes of others to satisfy their own longing for acceptance. When someone has this stronghold, their need for acceptance is rooted in a fear of rejection and they will do practically anything necessary to please whomever they esteem. In Peter’s case, his esteem and desire for acceptance so crippled him that it jeopardized the future of this revelation to his generation. Fortunately, Paul intervened in Antioch and then wrote of his intervention in his letter to the Galatians, while trying to stem the tide of the “Judaizer’s” influence. Paul began his letter to the Galatians by firmly establishing that he knew that no man had called him, but that God called him. Paul looked to no man for approval. (Galatians 1:1)

“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead).”

Paul explained how he was by no means a man pleaser nor was he interested in conforming to the ideas of others. (Galatians 1:10)

“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

What Paul solidified in these statements was the fact that he knew his authority wasn't delegated to him by a man or a group of leaders, but by God Himself and that he wasn't looking for man's support for what God had called him to do. The resounding confidence in whom God had made Paul, as well as, what God had called him to do is ironically what Peter lacked so desperately. Peter's stronghold is like an invisible weight around his neck, constantly pulling against his efforts to serve God. Paul went on to explain how the revelation he preached was given to him directly by revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:12) The next chapter is what we want to focus on. It begins with Paul's return to Jerusalem accompanied by Barnabas. Here, Paul gives an indication as to the prevailing mindset in Jerusalem. (Galatians 2:3)

“But, neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek (Gentile) was compelled to be circumcised.”

Paul was showing the Galatians that even though there was still pressure in Jerusalem to conform to Jewish Law, Titus, a Gentile believer, refused to bow to their pressure. Titus wasn't being rebellious he just wasn't going to accept their wrong doctrine, no matter who they were or how important they thought they were. (Galatians 2:6)

“But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me.”

Peter, James and John, who Paul acknowledged as seeming to be “pillars”, perceived the grace given to Paul for the Gentiles and extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul. (Galatians 2:9) While they continued to focus on the conversion of the Jews, Paul and Barnabas focused on the Gentiles. Keep in mind, Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians, a Gentile church, and his whole motivation is on trying to convince them not to succumb to the pressure of the “Judaizers”. How does Paul do this? He does this by showing how Peter, a “pillar”, a leader from Jerusalem, visited Antioch and mixed with the Gentiles and ate their “non-kosher” food with them. Just the fact that Peter mingled and ate with the Gentiles, which was against the Law, was Paul's proof to the Galatians that at least one “pillar” knew the Truth, that following the Law was over. (Galatians 2:12)

“For before that certain came from James, he (Peter) did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.”

Here was a “**pillar**” eating with the Gentiles, (B-B-Q pork I’m sure), and enjoying their fellowship. Who then separated himself once the men from James arrived. Paul is explaining to the Galatians that Peter undoubtedly believed in the validity of his vision from God, or else he could never have mingled with the Gentile converts, let alone eat with them. Paul’s mention of his correction of Peter to the Galatians revealed to the Galatians where the real problem existed. The **real problem** wasn’t that Peter didn’t believe the revelation that came through him, the real problem was his stronghold **that would not allow him to make a stand and proclaim the revelation**. Could there be any doubt as to what revelation Peter preached to those Gentile believers in Antioch? By word and action, Peter preached the message of equality with the Jewish believers and freedom from the Law? Peter should have been like a soldier with a steel rod for a backbone, spreading this revelation everywhere he went. **He believed the revelation, but when pressure was applied to his stronghold, by the arrival of men sent by James, his hunger for man’s approval forced him to backslide**. Then comes Paul’s correction. (Galatians 2:11)

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I (Paul) withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.”

In a real world situation, Paul’s actions might be similar to a member of the Board of Directors being publicly excoriated by one of his underlings. What a strange turn of events. This former “Christian- hunter”, Paul, was now correcting Peter, a “**pillar**” in the early church. We are generally taught that correction comes from the top down and not the bottom up. So, why did Paul correct Peter? The situation with the early church was at a tipping point and Peter’s stronghold was threatening to derail its progress. Almost eight years had passed since Peter’s roof top vision and still the message of salvation for the Gentiles was not wholeheartedly being promoted by the Jewish leadership. Even worse is the fact that the man through whom the message came was afraid to make a public stand for Truth.

Peter flip-flopped right in front of everyone. Paul witnessed Peter’s blatant act of hypocrisy and corrected him for it on the spot. Put yourself in Peter’s shoes. Even though God had entrusted him with this earth shaking revelation, Peter’s “man fear” caused him to turn tail and run back to observing the Law instead of standing up to the men sent by James. Strongholds such as Peter’s can have such a debilitating effect on us that we simply crumble under the emotional pressure.

Why didn't Paul just let it go? Why make such a big deal about Peter's hypocrisy? People's issues with their strongholds aren't always put on public display for the entire world to see. In Peter's case, his "man fear" had caused him to back pedal from the very revelation that God had delivered to him at least eight years earlier. What a blow this would have been to every Gentile watching Peter. Peter, the man through whom the revelation welcoming the Gentiles into the Family of God had come, separated himself and returned to the dietary requirements of the law all because of the men sent by James. Hypocrite!

Paul wasn't the least bit interested in ignoring Peter's hypocrisy or catering to him because of his position of leadership. Compared to Peter, Paul was a "newbie" and yet God used this former "Christian-hunting", "newbie", to correct one of the three leaders of the early church. God used Paul this way for the sake of the future of the church. Paul refused to be moved by man's position, which made him the perfect person to use. Think about it, had it not been for Paul, who could God have used to turn the tide of the "Judaizers" in the early church? Moreover, how many Gentiles might have died and gone to hell because no one bothered to stand up and proclaim Truth to them?

As difficult as it had to have been for Peter to be corrected by Paul, Peter survived and continued on in ministry. As for the message of salvation for the Gentiles, thank God it was preached. Thank God for the message of righteousness by faith apart from the works of the Law.

What kind of setback could one man's strongholds have had on the foundation of the early church? **I'm sure the more preferable solution would have been for Peter to have already put this "fear of man" stronghold to death by prayer and fasting. Why else would God have waited all those years, if not to give Peter the opportunity to change?** But, after having had approximately seventeen years, the period since the crucifixion and birth of the church age, to deal with this stronghold, apparently the time had come for correction. Remember all those years ago, it was Peter who had denied knowing Jesus three times at the cross before the rooster crowed, demonstrating his "fear of man" stronghold was present way back then. For Peter to waffle again under the pressure left God no alternative. I believe seventeen years was a sufficient amount of time for Peter to have defeated his stronghold. Even at that, **what a perfect picture we see of the nature of our longsuffering Father exemplified in His willingness to wait as long as possible for Peter to put his stronghold to death.**

In case anyone reading this gets the impression that Paul's correction of Peter gives us a license to run around correcting one another's strongholds think again. Here's what Jesus said, (Matthew 7:3-5)

“And why beholdest thou the mote (twig) that is thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam (piece of timber) that's in thine own eye.” (4) Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, ‘Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye.’ (5) Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

It's not hard to understand what Jesus was saying here. He is warning us of our weaknesses, or strongholds, and how they impair our ability to properly correct each other. Our perception is impaired by whatever strongholds we have allowed to remain inside us. That's why the best correction comes from the Holy Ghost. Unlike us, love is His only motivation. Pointing at Paul's correction of Peter and claiming it to be the rule instead of the exception to the rule is like pointing to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and declaring that since they dropped dead for lying everyone who lies will drop dead. It's impossible to look at Ananias and Sapphira or Paul and Peter and not take into account the crucial timing of these events in the establishment of the early church. Are they the rule or the exception to the rule?

As a tribute to Peter, I have found nothing in the scriptures indicating his rejection of Paul's correction. On the contrary, Peter apparently accepted his correction and did what was necessary to change. Peter's first letter was addressed to certain Gentile churches, one of which was Galatia. (I Peter 1:1) In it he declared that the Father would judge without **respect of persons**. (I Peter 1:17) Then, Peter admonished them to lay aside their hypocrisy. (I Peter 2:1)

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.”

Each of us have strongholds, which can be quite devastating, and the Holy Ghost is the one best qualified to deal with our strongholds because He does it with such love. For anyone to think that their job is to be the “Holy Ghost” in someone else's life is a recipe for disaster. God prefers that we be willing to judge ourselves and choose to do what is necessary to empower the Holy Ghost to destroy those strongholds in us. Only in a worst-case scenario, as with the future of the early church, might you find the Holy Ghost having to work through a man like Paul to bring correction to a situation if there's no other way. Consider the fact that approximately eight years had lapsed since the vision until the time of

correction finally came. Trust the Holy Ghost and be confident that He won't hurt you as together you put your strongholds to death.

The Holy Ghost is the one whose job it is to keep the people who deliver the Word in line as they submit themselves to Him. It's also the Holy Ghost whose job it is to protect the listeners from whomever stands in front of them proclaiming they have the Word of the Lord. Why do we need protection? Because every preacher, me included, have strongholds and those strongholds continue to taint our understanding of the Truth. Here's a good saying for preachers, "Don't you dare believe what I am telling you just because I say it. You get your own Bible out and you pray and see if the Holy Ghost shows you the same thing." We need protection from anyone who stands up in front of us proclaiming they have the Word from the Lord, and our protector is the Holy Ghost. We preachers must realize that whatever strongholds are in us are affecting our perception of the Truth. We must continue to surrender ourselves to Him and His process of change and do our best to receive the purity of the revelation from the Holy Ghost. We must follow Him as He directs us in delivering what He has given us, realizing always that our strongholds may be influencing our message, our delivery or ability to deliver. And we listeners must realize that what we hear preached also passes through our strongholds, causing the purity of the revelation to be dulled by whatever is still alive in us.

In conclusion, strongholds do exist inside all of us, but we can do something to attack them and put as many of them to death as possible. Looking back at Matthew 17, Jesus gave us the secret for how this is done. (Matthew 17:21)

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

The "kind" Jesus is referring to is not a more powerful devil. We already have all the authority we need to cast them out. The "kind" here is the certain "kind" of unbelief that we don't even know we have that threatens to keep our lives fixed in a holding pattern until we see Jesus.

Do you want to attack the root of whatever is holding you back? The answer is to attack it with prayer and fasting. Praying, particularly in other tongues, will build you up so that you finally see what is holding you back in the same light as God sees it. Once your "want to" lines up with God's desire for you, you are ready to put that thing to death. Prayer exposes it and puts you in the position to destroy it. Fasting is what finally puts it to death. People with health issues should obviously consult with their physician first. For everyone else, choosing not to fast because you just don't like it is a real good indication that you probably need to fast. Every believer is responsible for how they address the issue of fasting. (Matthew 6:16)

“Moreover when you fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.”

Jesus did not say, “If you fast”, He said, “When you fast”. He clearly never intended fasting to be neglected or overlooked. He expected us to simply do it because He told us to. So, ask the Holy Ghost to help you fast and allow Him to direct you on when and how long you are to fast.

I hope this lesson has helped to open your eyes to the reality of what’s holding you back. Don’t be like Peter and allow something to remain in you for years that you could just as easily put to death by fasting and prayer. The consequences of your decision to allow something to remain might not be felt until you stand in front of Jesus, but then it’s too late. Do yourself a favor and put whatever it is to death now and enjoy a fruitful rest of your life until you go to be with Him. Look to the Holy Ghost and open your heart to Him and ask Him to bring whatever correction is necessary in your life. I can assure you that He will do it with love and compassion because He has only your best interest at heart. Trust Him. He will not hurt you. He loves you and wants you to be free.

Mark Jenkins Ministries has been in a transition period now for several weeks. New things are on the horizon for us which Debbie and I believe will enrich our ministry to you and make it a more personal and direct experience. More details soon to come.

~ Grace be with you

Mark Jenkins