

Communion

Becoming Accountable

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Contents

The problem of our self-righteousness	1
Wait for the Lord	2
Come to Him, accountable before Him	3
Before Him in silence, our mouth stopped	4
In repentance and patient hope.....	5
Life in the Kingdom of God.....	6

I want to focus on the need for us to have our mouths stopped when we come before the Lord. In poverty of spirit, we stop talking.

We know that Jesus said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

But what is, and what is not, poverty of spirit? Well, it's not claiming variations on this theme: 'I'm not worthy to be alive because I'm a disgusting worm'. Nor is it poor in spirit to state, 'I know I have problems, but I know God has the antidote for them.' True poverty in spirit is knowing that in ourselves we have absolutely no life at all, and that unless Jesus looks upon us, as He said through the prophet Isaiah, we are spiritually dead.

“But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Isaiah 66:2)

The problem of our self-righteousness

The disciple Peter was very self-righteous. No matter what Jesus said to him over the three and a half years He walked with and taught the disciples, Peter always felt he was equal to

the task. He heard, agreed with and believed the word of the Lord, but Jesus knew that Peter was not yet converted. He had to tell Peter, in essence, 'There's going to be a break point, a change in you, Peter. You will not live as you have, and when you've turned, when you've been converted, strengthen your brethren' (Luke 22:32; John 21:15-23).

Hearing that, Peter probably objected, 'But I've seen miracles. I've *done* miracles! I've been on the Mount of Transfiguration and seen Elijah and Moses; I've had the Spirit revealed to me; I've known Jesus the Messiah; I have great and wholehearted zeal to serve God and I want to see Him on His throne. How could I possibly need to be converted?'

We are like that too. As we've been hearing the Lord telling us we need to be converted, we may well have responded with the same kind of objections: 'But I come to church. I've been faithfully coming for years! I go to Bible school; I'm on serving teams; I have devotions every morning. I believe and agree with the word. I'm *already* converted!' But what is the fruit of all this activity? Is the life of God being produced in and through you? Is there sin that keeps troubling you, from which you cannot break free though you try and try again?

The breakthrough for Peter came when he had denied Christ and he turned and looked at Christ and Christ looked at him, right into his heart (Luke 22:54-62). When Peter looked into Jesus' eyes, he had nothing to say but went outside and wept.

The problem for us is that we grow up with the Bible and our church traditions, living church life, thinking that agreeing with and commentating on the word of God is the same as obeying it, and that our intellectual assent to God's ways is the same as repenting from our own ways and walking in His. We think that if we know and confess that we are sinful, we are believing and repenting. But this was merely our own understanding, not the truth, and there is no power at all in our own understanding. That is what Peter discovered about *his* understanding. The only step we can take that has any power in it at all is to look upon Christ, and *then* we understand that truly, we are poor in spirit. When we have come to know *this*, we can begin to see things as they really are. And when we see, we stop talking.

If you or I go about seeking help by explaining our problems and their causes according to our own diagnoses, we are not poor in spirit. We are leaning on our own understanding of our condition and trying to prescribe our own remedies. This is part of our problem! We *don't* understand. We have no capacity whatsoever in ourselves to change ourselves.

Poor in spirit, we wait on the Lord. And we wait *for* Him.

Wait for the Lord

The Scriptures tell us:

"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him." (Lamentations 3:25)

Therefore, rather than hearing the word of the Lord at the communion table and responding by assessing and commentating on what it means for us and how it applies to us, hear His word, come to Him and wait on Him, asking *Him* what He means and how it applies.

"It is good that [the person who seeks Him] waits silently for the salvation of the LORD"
(Lamentations 3:26)

The hallmark of a person who is poor in spirit is that all their chatter, which is only a function of anxiety, stops. Keeping on talking, keeping on stating our agreement with the word, does not equate with faith. Abraham's conversation with God, recorded in Genesis chapter 15, is a good example. At the time the Lord spoke to him, Abraham was fearful, and apparently quite anxious and depressed that he didn't have a son to be his heir. When God told Abraham, 'There's going to be life and fruitfulness in your household, for I'm going to give you a son who will come from you and your wife', Abraham responded along these lines: 'Let me just be clear here, God. I don't really think that's possible, because Sarah and I are ancient, there's no capacity in our flesh for that to happen, and I only have a servant to be my heir.' (Genesis 15:1-3)

Like Abraham, we also have to come to the point where we acknowledge to ourselves and to the Lord that there is no capacity in our flesh to fulfil what God has spoken. We can't work it out. We're not smarter than Abraham, the father of all who believe, as if we can understand what he couldn't. What Abraham was saying was the truth. There is *no* capacity in our flesh to bring life, and God knows that. As we stop commentating, *He* brings life! (Genesis 15:4-5)

At first, Abraham and Sarah didn't stop commentating. They had the idea of involving Hagar, Sarah's servant, to bring about by the flesh the son that God had promised. As a result, Ishmael was born, whom Abraham continued to love, crying out to the Lord, 'Oh, that Ishmael may live before you!' (Genesis 17:17-18). What could be wrong with that? Abraham was a dad, crying out for his son.

But God was not blessing any ‘fulfilment’ of His word by the flesh. Abraham and Sarah, looking to their flesh, were unable to think straight; unable to believe that God would bring His promise to pass without their anxious commentary and intervention; unable to believe and wait quietly on the Lord.

Can you see that it is good to wait quietly? When the Lord speaks to you and begins to stop you in your tracks, and your thoughts and ideas run around in your head, just stop, and wait quietly. Go and find a fellowship about the matter. You will need reflection. If you try and work it out, or think you *have* worked it out, you will have a serious problem, because God destroys the wisdom of the wise and sets aside the cleverness of the clever (1 Corinthians 1:19). No matter how intelligent or smart you are, you will *never* understand by your own understanding, which God brings to nothing because His wisdom is the cross (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The cross confronts our flesh and renders it powerless to save. We think we *know* that, just by agreeing that it’s true. But we don’t really know it until God puts us through what the cross actually means for us, personally.

“It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth.” (Lamentations 3:27)

The Lord wants young people to learn how to wait quietly upon Him. That is a big thing for a young person! In the energy of our youth, we want to tear into life and make things happen, as if to verify that we’re alive and valid. But that doesn't work with God!

Come to Him, accountable before Him

What does Paul have to say about this?

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that

every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God.” (Romans 3:19)

That we are ‘accountable to God’ means we are guilty before God. We *all* need to come to fellowship with Christ in His cross and sufferings, because we *all* need healing, regeneration and recovery. But we must each recognise something very important in coming to Him: that *we* are accountable for Him suffering for us in the first place. It is not enough to come to Him for healing from our problem.

By way of illustration, we see that young people often become aware that their parents are flawed but at the same time consider themselves to be disconnected from or somehow above the weaknesses of their parents. But our parents are ‘the rock from which we are hewn’, and the inherited realities in our families, our circumstances, our physical and emotional makeup, looks and genes can’t be isolated from us and can’t be blamed for the actions we take of our own volition. If we attempt to blame our heritage or circumstances for our actions, denying rather than accepting our accountability, God is not swayed.

It would be ludicrous for someone who is ill to go to the doctor, do all the talking, diagnose their own condition, prescribe their own treatment and then leave. What, then, when we self-diagnose our spiritual condition and in self-righteousness self-define our recovery process? How very foolish! Should we not let the Doctor examine us? Should we not listen to the Doctor, submit to the necessary tests, wait for the test results, follow the Doctor’s treatment plan and take the prescribed medicine? It is *God* who sees, removes our fears and recovers us, and only He can do it. Coming to terms with our own accountability as He sees it, we find that despite everything

we've done, God in His love still has a name for us, and a purpose for us.

When Christ looked at Peter from His bloodied and marred face that was the product of Peter's sin, Peter had to face his sin. He had to look at Jesus and absorb what he had done to Him (Luke 22:61-62). And as Peter looked at Him, the love of God was being poured into his heart. Jesus was not condemning him. Rather, He was showing Peter, 'Yes, you put Me here. I'm going through this because of you, and for you, but this is to become your salvation.' Peter saw then what he had never seen before: the work of the cross of Christ. He saw what it truly was, what it *is*, and what it ministers. And seeing it, Peter went outside and wept bitterly (Luke 22:54-62).

By that look from Christ, Peter had been illuminated and was set on a pathway towards recovery. He saw his accountability, and that was his point of breakthrough.

Before Him in silence, our mouth stopped

We *all* need such conversion, for even if we were born into a Christian household, have the divine nature in us and are a son of God, we can still be carnal. We know that's true, because none of us has children who have never manifested carnality.

Our point of conversion, when we truly begin to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh, is when we come to silence in relation to our own law (Romans 7:4-23). We recognize that our law is killing us, and we know we are powerless to stop it because we are completely poor in spirit. Just recognising our own law and the fact that it's bad doesn't enable us to stop living by our own law. Even the Apostle Paul didn't know and couldn't control what he was doing when he was

operating under the power of his own law (Romans 7:15-25).

We don't know what *we* are doing when that law is running in us, but what we do know is that it keeps killing us. That outcome is directly connected to the fact that we are sowing seed that is coming from our own law. The breakpoint of this deadly cycle and the beginning of our conversion comes when we cease from our mental arguments and verbal commentary by which, whether we register the fact or not, we are attempting to argue ourselves into righteousness.

For many who've been Christians for years, this is a *major* issue! Thinking that religious commentary is righteous, and not knowing it is part of the problem, it grows to become a bigger barrier to being spiritual than almost anything else. Without waiting on the Lord for His perspective, the things we identify as being the real problem very rarely are. In fact, they are almost *never* the problem. Underneath everything we think we see is the deep-seated fear that drives us every moment of every day. We fear annihilation; not mattering; not being successful; not establishing what we think matters; not achieving anything worthwhile; not leaving something meaningful behind. Veiled fears deep inside us infect our thinking and indeed, our whole being.

Abraham was afraid, so when God came to him His first words to Abraham were, 'Do not fear'. When we hear God say that to us, we can only respond, if we're honest, 'I don't know how. I have no way of not being afraid'. Confessing that, our mouth is stopped. If we try and overcome our fear by the power of our will or by anxiously praying about it, we will not be delivered from our fear. We've tried that again and again, some of us for decades, but the fear remains, driving us.

Our mouth must be stopped and our response before God must be that we don't really know what He means; we don't even know what it is to be unafraid and not driven by fear. The Lord knows that. All these years He's been watching it and trying to speak to us about it while we keep self-righteously trying to fix it. Poor in spirit, we surrender to His Spirit to bring His word to pass.

The break point comes when we finally know and confess, 'Lord, I repent. Help me turn from being driven by my fears and going my own way by my own law. I don't know how to stop. I don't know how to free myself from it. I'm bankrupt in spirit. There is nothing I can do or say'. When we know this, we come to silence before Him. Our mouth is stopped, and with it, all our commentary and analysis.

Our self-condemnation, which is just another form of commentary, is also stopped when we know our poverty in spirit. Some Christians live by condemnation, believing that, on balance, it's Christian. As if it's spiritual to condemn yourself for a suitable while after falling short, then let yourself off the hook when enough penance has been done and you feel yourself empowered again to live the Christian life. Swinging between condemnation and empowerment, which is always according to the measure of our own law, is not Christian. It's wicked.

In repentance and patient hope

We are repenting and waiting on the Lord who is our hope, our *only* hope. We are turning from taking hold of the word of God and trying to fulfil it by our own law, capacities and resources. We are repenting from denying our utter poverty in spirit and our powerlessness to change. We are being converted from walking after our flesh, from holding on to the

deception that there is some vestige of good in us; some inherent capacity; some native appeal or usefulness to God.

This doesn't mean that you who are young (or, for that matter, you who are older) must suddenly arrive at some new level of Christian behaviour. Even wanting to do this would show we were still trying to respond to the word by our flesh. It does mean, though, that we all recognise we have our own law that keeps driving us to carnality, and that the Lord has an antidote! His remedy is the cross of Christ as we recognize our culpability in putting Him there. When we recognise *this*, we no longer commentate but repent, confessing, 'That was me. It really was. I put Christ there.' The Lord responds to this confession immediately!

When His word comes to you, in true repentance turn, receive His word, then stay there with Him. Endure. If doubts rise up within you about whether God really said what He said, you don't need to commentate but simply believe, asking the Lord to help you in your unbelief. There is no condemnation there.

We all believe, and we all have unbelief, but nevertheless we stand (Ephesians 6:13), even when under fire from doubts and fears that try so powerfully to convince us, 'You're not going to do it, you know. This isn't going to work. You've always failed before, and this is not going to be any different.' Fear opposes and imposes itself on faith, smashing away at it in giant waves that build up into a storm. 'You're going to fail... You're *going* to fail! You're going to *fail*! You know you are. You know you will. You know you always will.' That is how the enemy works - attacking our faith to destroy it and make us give up altogether on trusting in the Lord's word by deceiving us into believing

that what God has promised is altogether too hard for us and we will always fail.

But what if we *do* sometimes fail? If we know we're poor in spirit, we also know that there *will* be times when we revert back to our flesh and consequently fail. But God is not condemning us! He encourages us, saying, 'Just get up again. Let's go again, but this time, not that way. This time, stop your commentary and look to My Spirit'.

No one is never afraid. The Scriptures tell us that unbelievers live their whole lives in fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). Human fear just ticks away. The clock of mortality ticks away in different directions with different manifestations but it's always ticking, and everyone knows it's ticking. But God doesn't have a clock because time can't contain Him. Time is just a measurement for us who are bound under the sun. It makes the organisation of our lives possible but that's all it means to Him.

Life in the Kingdom of God

We don't need to fear the ticking clock of mortality because it is not ticking for us. God has called us into His kingdom, which is eternal. As we turn and look into His face, we touch everlasting life, the power of His endless life, and His blood begins to work for us. As we turn and look to Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, He is priesting to us the power of His endless life. That is the Good News!

And this is our breakpoint: 'Lord, I don't even know how to stop my commentary. That is what I do. I *am* a commentary!' We need to be delivered of this. As we come to Him in humility, He will help us.

This is the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Romans 1:16). As

we turn to look into the face of Jesus Christ, we receive the power of His offering towards us. In turning to face Him, we recognize our accountability, our culpability and our guilt. Yet at the same time, we know and recognise that He is pouring His love into our hearts so that we are not condemned. Far from being condemned, we begin to be joyful, because we know the power and the joy of His salvation.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!