

Communication And Leaving Babylon (Part Three)

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In the prior two articles in this series, the main theme has been the place, the importance, and the effect of the communication from this world that adds immeasurably to what we have become in terms of attitude and character since our birth.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were not created with the evil nature we see displayed in all of mankind. At the end of the sixth day of creation, God took pleasure in all He had made and pronounced it "very good," including Adam and Eve and the nature or the heart He placed in them. An evil heart cannot possibly be termed "very good." They were a blank slate, one might say, with a slight pull toward the self, but not with the strong, self-centered, touchy, and offensive heart that is communicated through contact with the world following birth.

Following Adam and Eve's creation, God placed them in Eden and instructed them on their responsibilities. He then purposefully allowed them to be exposed to and tested by Satan, who most definitely had a different set of beliefs, attitudes, purposes, and character than God. Without interference from God, they freely made the choice to subject themselves to the evil influence of that malevolent spirit. That event initiated the corruption of man's heart. Perhaps nowhere in all of Scripture is there a clearer example of the truth of I Corinthians 15:33: "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

Comparing our contact with Satan to Adam and Eve's, a sobering aspect is that God shows they were fully aware of Satan when he communicated with them. However, we realize that a spirit being can communicate with a human by transferring thoughts, and the person might never know it! He would assume the thoughts were completely generated within himself.

Following their encounter with the evil one, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). This indicates an immediate change in their attitudes and perspectives. It also implies a change of character from the way God had created them, as they had indeed willingly sinned, thus reinforcing the whole, degenerative process.

This began not only their personal corruption but also this present, evil world, as Paul calls it in Galatians 1:4. All it took was one contact with, communication from, and submission to that very evil source to effect a profound change from what they had been. The process did not stop with them, as Romans 5:12 confirms, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Adam and Eve passed on the corrupt products of their encounter with Satan to their children, and each of us, in turn, has sinned as willingly as our first ancestors did.

When we are born, innocent of any sin of our own, we enter into a 6,000-year-old, ready-made world that is permeated with the spirit of Satan and his demons, as well as with the evil cultures they generated through a thoroughly deceived mankind. In consequence, unbeknownst to us, we face a double-barreled challenge to our innocence: from demons as well as from this world.

Six thousand years of human history exhibit that we very quickly absorb the course of the world around us and lose our innocence, becoming self-centered and deceived like everybody else. The vast majority in this world is utterly unaware that they are in bondage to Satan—so unaware that most would scoff if told so. Even if informed through the preaching of the gospel, they do not fully grasp either the extent or the importance of these factors unless God draws them by opening their eyes spiritually.

Blindness With an Attitude

Notice how Paul makes use of this fact when teaching the Corinthians about the Jews of their day:

Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (II Corinthians 3:12-16)

The veil Paul speaks of is the carnality of a deceived mind formed and shaped in these Satan-manipulated cultures. It is so antagonistic to the true God and His Word (Romans 8:7) that it fights the very approach of God to heal them through a great, freely given gift, just as the first-century Jews opposed and rejected Christ.

However, be aware that the miraculous removal of this veil of blindness by God, through the wonderful gifts of His Spirit and of a great hope, also places an obligation on us. With the blindness gone, we are granted the ability to choose between God's way and the world's way for the first time in our lives. Choosing to submit to God provides our witness of God, as well as being the means of building the character God greatly desires to create within us.

However, the effects of the self-centered way of life we have absorbed through the course of this world remain in our attitudes and characters, becoming what must be overcome. It will dog us all our converted lives as a means of testing our determination to be in God's Kingdom, as well as our love and loyalty to our God and Savior.

In Romans 7:15-25, Paul describes from personal experience what confronts a Christian upon becoming aware of his freedom to choose:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into

captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Though converted for about twenty years when he wrote Romans, Paul comments in verse 17 that sin sufficiently strong enough to pull him in the wrong direction still remained in him. In verse 18, he leaves no doubt that sin was still in him. In verse 19, he admits to occasional sin, and in verse 20, he again states that sin still existed in him, and in verse 21, that evil was present with him. In verse 23, he says that a war raged within him between the law of sin and the law of his mind, and he mentions these two again in verse 25.

The evil that lived in him was the remnant of what he had absorbed of Satan's world before his conversion on the road to Damascus. The law of his mind was his new heart from God that he desired so strongly to rule his life. The war was between the remnant of Satan's world and his new heart. Galatians 5:16-17 confirms this last thought:

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Each influence on his mind was communicating to him. This is why we cannot physically escape Babylon. It has left its mark on our perspectives, attitudes, and characters; we carry it with us regardless of our location. Nevertheless, our escape from Babylon *can be accomplished* because, if it could not, God would not have commanded us to do it.

We achieve it by choosing to allow the law of our mind to triumph against the law of sin and death, even though to do so may require many painful sacrifices during the battle. Where does one find the strength necessary to make the sacrifices required? What might we need to supply us motivation?

First, we need to consider a vital promise. Paul proclaims in Philippians 4:19: "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ." This assurance could just as easily be read as, "He shall supply all our need gloriously!" It is full of exuberant expectation.

What do we need? We need faith in the fact that God is, that He is indeed with us personally and individually, and that His Word is true and absolute. In addition, we need vision and hope regarding the value of what is to be gained or lost through making the right choices. We need much more, but certainly not least, we need His love for Him and fellow man.

What medium does He use to communicate them to us?

The Most Important Medium

Jesus prays in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." At this juncture, the significance of what this verse teaches comes to the fore. However, to clarify further, we will join it with a thought from Romans 5:1-2:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Finally, Isaiah 59:1-2 adds one more truth:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they, representing all mankind, were expelled by God from the Garden of Eden. The Garden represents being in God's presence and thereby having easy access and communication with Him. In Genesis 2:17, God had warned Adam and Eve that in the day they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die. Once they sinned, it became evident that God did not mean they would die immediately, but that, if they ate of that tree, they were as good as dead.

Their human life went on, but God, to emphasize the serious effect of their sin to later generations, placed a flaming sword to guard the Garden's borders. This portrayed that mankind, though still alive, was cut off from any relationship with Him. Thus, sin, which demonstrates a lack of love and fidelity for our Creator, not only seals the death penalty on each sinner, but it also denies an individual access to and thus communication with God while he lives on under Satan's continuing influence.

When Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and we, by faith in that sacrifice, became justified, God legally cleared us of guilt before Him. It is as though the barrier of the flaming sword between us and Him was removed, opening the way for communication with Him and for the growth of a relationship with Him that never before existed for us.

The relationship we have with the Father and the Son through the work of Jesus Christ, both as the payment for our sins and as our High Priest, is *everything* in terms of salvation. Why is this true? Because we can now communicate with Them! Having access to God furnishes an opportunity for a relationship with the Father and the Son. The relationship is the medium of communication—holy, righteous, spiritual communication.

This communication is more than a mere counterbalance to the evil spiritual influence of this world. It decidedly tips the scales in our favor in this war for our spiritual survival if we will but continue to believe and trust Them by taking advantage of the contact, communication, and influence freely given to us. What Jesus does ever so briefly in John 17:3 is to tie quality of life, called "eternal life," to a person's relationship with God.

Even though many in it may be religious, the world does not have a relationship with God. There is no communication from Him to them. Undoubtedly, a lot of people know many things about God, but they cannot actually know Him without access to Him. It is like a person knowing of someone from across town by reputation but really knowing nothing about him through personal contact.

The Lines Are Set

I John 2:10-17 establishes some important facts a child of God needs to understand fully:

He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. I write to you, little

children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Remember that John's epistle is written to church members. Therefore, he frames matters in absolute terms, offering no middle ground regarding sin and one's relationships with God and fellow man. It must be this way because this is our one and only opportunity for salvation, and sin was what cut us off from God in the first place, causing us to need salvation. We do not want to fall into that position again. Sin is serious business!

Regarding our moral and spiritual conduct, we must recognize that there is no twilight zone, especially in our relationship with God. A Christian cannot muddle around morally or spiritually, thinking that sin is a rather minor affair. *It cost Jesus His life!* In this relationship, which is in reality preparation for a marriage, love and loyalty are extremely important.

John spells matters out as either light or darkness, love or hatred, all absolutes. Where love is absent, hatred rules in darkness. Where love prevails, there is light. Through the word "darkness," John is disclosing that, because of the sin or hatred, a lack of love for a brother, the relationship with God declines. Notice in verse 11 that the sin John mentions is against a brother, meaning a fellow church member. Hatred is not a trifling matter! Later, in I John 3:15, John says that one who hates his brother is a murderer. What is the result? A relationship is broken, and communication with the brother ends.

Even more serious, we find that the sin also involves one's relationship with God because the effect of that sin is a measure of spiritual blindness. The hater grows insensitive to or hardened against spiritual truth.

Sin's Evil Progression

Paul reinforces what John teaches, writing in Hebrews 3:12-13, "Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." He warns that sin has a deceptive quality. It promises so much even before it actually becomes an act of conduct, but it delivers far short of its promise. Its truly sneaky aspect is its powerful tendency to lure us into further sin, enslaving us and hardening our minds against righteousness. In other words, it shares characteristics with drugs in that it is addictive or enslaving, destroying one's well-being.

Herein lies the cause of the apostle John's concern in I John 2. God is the source of spiritual truth (light), and we are sanctified as His child and to His service by it because we believe it. However, under the sin of hating, communication with God begins to break down, and consequently, the sinner

puts himself in peril of falling completely away. Notice in I John 2:13-14, John mentions that the fathers—those in the congregation older in the faith—have known the Father. He appeals to them to exercise their longstanding, mature leadership within the congregation in a right manner.

The word "known" ties John's thoughts directly with Jesus' words in John 17:3. Knowing God, having an intimate relationship with Him, is the key to living a life—called "eternal life"—which will be acceptable for living in the Kingdom of God. Hating a brother actually cuts the sinner off from the Source of the gifts and strengths necessary to live that quality of life. In other words, the sinner is not properly using what God has already given him and is showing disloyalty both to God and to another member of the Family.

Beginning in verse 15, John pens three of the more notable verses in his writings. When considered in context, they should be scary stuff for a Christian. Why does he command us not to love the world? Because the sinner's conduct exhibited in his hatred of his brother reveals the source of communication prompting his sin! John exposes the communication to which the hater is responding.

Under no circumstance would God ever communicate the sin of hatred toward a brother. Besides, James confirms that God tempts no one (James 1:13). John is warning that the person's affections are drawing him away from God and toward the world, and he had better do something about it before he slips completely back into the world.

This also connects to John 1:5. "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." Darkness symbolizes the spiritual blindness of Satan's unconverted world. In the book of Revelation, this blindness is represented by Babylon the Great. Satan's world simply does not get it, that is, spiritual truth. Because it cannot grasp God's truths, the only spirituality the world can ultimately communicate is inducement to sin, which it does insistently and attractively.

This leads us back to God's illustration regarding Adam, Eve, and Satan. Satan is the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4), and thus its spiritual leader and governing principle. He persuaded Adam and Eve to sin. So the only way we can come out of the world is to reverse the process that placed us in the world in the first place: to stop sinning. One can phrase it more positively as, to yield to God's will rather than Satan's or to God's communication rather than this world's.

We could never leave the world on our own. God must mercifully deliver us by calling us. We do not understand the mechanics of what He actually does in our minds, but in calling us, He miraculously does something to begin leading us to think of matters in relation to God with a clarity of understanding and intensity that we never before experienced. It is almost as if we suddenly understood a foreign language.

Acts 9:3-17 contains the story of Paul's conversion while on the road to Damascus. A blinding light and a strong voice drove Paul to the ground. The voice forcefully warned him that what he was doing against Jesus Christ was hurting himself. He was given a command he had to follow and was left without sight for three days, at the end of which he followed the instruction, was baptized by Ananias, and his sight was restored.

Before this, even though Paul was religiously zealous and well-educated, he was as unconverted as a jackrabbit. However, due to what God did by calling Paul, he began to think of God along lines that

he had never considered until then. We all experience a similar turning of the mind, though not with the same dramatic force Paul did. He went on to be baptized, but not until he *continued* listening to the communication from God, which demonstrated that he was willing to do whatever was necessary.

Continuing What Repentance Begins

The key word for us here is "continued." Paul was beginning to turn his back on the communication from the world that spurred his persecution of Christians as the enemy. Now, by a miracle, he was listening to the communication from God and starting to grasp reality: that, by sinning, he had made himself an enemy of God.

Here then are the keys to come out of Babylon as Paul did. Out of love, God gives us the start, forgives and justifies us through Jesus Christ's blood, and consequently, establishes peace with us, who had formerly been at war with Him. He then gives us His Spirit, granting us for the very first time in our lives a true opportunity to choose with understanding of God's holy purpose between good and evil. He then grants us access to Him—right into His personal Holy of Holies, not into some mere earthly copy—and is eager to communicate whatever gifts we need to do His will, if we will choose to stop listening to the world's siren song and quit sinning. He wants us to continue in the process He began.

Notice how Paul shows the continuance of a process in his doctrinal writings:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? . . . Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slave whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Romans 6:1-2, 12-16)

Is that not strong, plain language? "Certainly not" is translated as "God forbid," "perish the thought," or "may it never be," in other Bibles. In his epistles, Paul uses this exclamatory expression in relation to sin sixty times! Yet, this world's Christianity has succeeded in communicating to its adherents one of the most devastating of all false doctrines—that the works of keeping God's commandments are not required! They insidiously twist the truth that, though works most assuredly cannot save a person, stopping sin in one's life is absolutely required to provide evidence that one is indeed a Christian, to bring glory to God, and to grow. Jesus Christ died to provide forgiveness of sin. Therefore, if a person persists in sin following his forgiveness, he is trampling "the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified [as] a common thing, and insult[ing] the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29).

Notice these verses, which clearly show this principle of continuing:

John 8:31: Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide [continue, live] in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

John 15:9: As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you: abide in My love.

Acts 14:21-22: And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God."

Colossians 1:23: . . . if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Colossians 4:2: Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.

I Timothy 2:15: Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

II Timothy 3:14: But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.

Hebrews 13:1: Let brotherly love continue.

I John 2:24: Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you will also abide in the Son and in the Father.

Our Everyday Challenge

This last verse brings us back to our earlier context. John counsels that, if we abide in what we have heard in the beginning of our conversion, we will continue in the relationship with the Son and the Father. Here, then, is our challenge once God calls us: to continue to the end the conversion the Father and Son started in us, to transform us into the image of what They already are.

Romans 10:10-17 reveals how we started on this course through God's calling:

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

God communicated to us a message using a human voice. For most of us, the voice was Herbert W. Armstrong's. It is not that he was so important, but he was the one God used to bear the message to those He intended to call to establish His church at the end time. It was what *God* did that was so

important. Even though they did not know it at that time, He communicated directly with those called, beginning a personal relationship. A measure of responsibility for maintaining the relationship falls upon us to continue the communication afforded by direct access to Him.

At this point, prayer, Bible study, meditation, occasional fasting, and consistent obedience come to the fore. These are all ingredients of communication essential to a vibrant relationship based on faith, hope, and love with the very greatest of Beings, our Creator and Savior.

John writes in I John 2:17, "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." Communications from this world are all around us. They are an almost constant, insistent drumbeat, urging us to act and react in carnal ways, stirring our tempers to offend or be offended, as though we are so important that such should not be done to us.

These communications move us to sin by motivating twisted reasoning to the point that we convince ourselves that we are justified in killing, stealing, lying, or committing fornication. It fills us with pride, conceit, competitiveness, and self-righteousness, providing a seemingly solid justification for any sort of sin. It makes vanities seem so important that we *have* to pursue them.

As the apostle John says, obeying God's will is what matters. In order to be able to make the right choices, it is essential to have God's communication of truth. That communication will come either through His written Word or from a direct communication by thought transference due to our personal relationship with Him.

Because we live in pressure-packed but distracting times, it has never been more essential to protect ourselves from the evil communication permeating this world by following Paul's counsel in Romans 13:11-14:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.