

Communication And Leaving Babylon (Part Two)

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Last month's article centered on God's clear command in Revelation 18:4 to come out of Babylon lest we experience the same plagues it is to receive. However, fleeing from Babylon is presently physically impossible because it is a worldwide system. Nevertheless, until God provides a place, we can come out of it spiritually by taking strong steps to blunt its influence.

We absorb Babylon's influence through the communication of the beliefs, values, and practices of the culture into which we are born. These characteristics are instilled in us with virtually no resistance. They are, in fact, all we know until long after the foundational damage has already been done during childhood and adolescence.

A clear example illustrating how this absorption occurs is found in the language we learn to speak as children. It is native to the environment into which we are born, in this case, our home, and it becomes part of us through the verbal communication of our parents, older siblings, extended family, and community. Our native language is a quality we never question. It is simply there, and we grow up speaking it.

As youngsters, we do not critically evaluate and then decide what language we choose to speak. Thus, the family's language, which in most cases is also the language of the surrounding community and culture, becomes a fundamental part of what we are. Similarly, other characteristics of this culture—basic attitudes, perspectives, and conduct—also become part of what we are.

So strong are these absorbed traits that we find, following God's calling of us, that some—perhaps even many—are contrary to God's purpose. However, we discover to our dismay that, so engrained are they in our character, they hold us in bondage, and we find it very difficult to break free from those that could be damaging to our relationship with God. Many of our efforts to grow and overcome are directed against these.

A major facet of this is that the source of the overwhelming number of the beliefs, values, and practices we absorb from our native cultures is Satan. He, the Bible confirms, has deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He has had a virtually free hand, as god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4), to communicate these enslaving traits to all of mankind.

A high percentage of the influence from Satan's world comes to us through our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. We live through all of life's experiences with these communication receptors constantly involved and leaving impressions upon our hearts—or we might say, upon our minds and memories, and therefore upon our attitudes and character.

Additionally, both casual and formal instruction takes place in the home, schools—all the way up to and including universities—and certainly, in church or its lack. Even atheism and agnosticism are to some degree schooling and impressing upon our attitudes, character, and conduct.

We realize that some form of communication also occurs between us and living things such as plants, which thrive when the person tending them loves them, and inanimate objects such as water, whose crystals mysteriously distort in the presence of negative attitudes.

Communication From Spirits

The Bible confirms that communication can take place between us and spirit beings, whether from God our Father and Jesus Christ, or Satan and his horde of demon spirits imprisoned beneath the canopy of air that covers earth and in which we live and breathe. We share the same environment with those demonic spirits, and since the earth was first their place of habitation before man was created (Jude 6), they regard us as invaders and therefore enemies to be destroyed before God removes them and gives us the earth exclusively, completely reversing the original state of affairs.

The dangerous quality of communication from spirit beings to us is that it can be made, performed, or transferred directly into our minds, influencing us without any participation of our senses. We see, hear, taste, smell, or feel nothing while the communication occurs.

Matthew 16:21-23 records:

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Like Peter, we could be motivated to believe or disbelieve something, accept or reject something, say something or keep silent, depending on the circumstance. Additionally, we may have no reaction at all at the moment of communication, but the thought is stored and available for later use or supplementation. It is entirely possible for a person to go through his entire life as a pawn of Satan and never know it.

This situation reflects a usage of what the Bible's writers term "spirit." *Spirit* is the English translation of the Hebrew *ruach* (*Strong's* #7304), in the Old Testament and the Greek *pneuma* (*Strong's* #5141) in the New. It can literally mean "a current of air," "breath," "blast," or "breeze." However, when used figuratively, it indicates "vital principle," "disposition," "the rational soul," etc., or an invisible super-being such as God, Christ, an angel, or a demon. Whether used literally, as with "wind" or "breath," or figuratively, as indicating God, angel, or demon, it describes something that is invisible and immaterial and at the same time powerful, even a thing of considerable power. The foremost elements of spirit, then, are invisibility, immateriality, and power.

E.W. Bullinger remarks in Appendix 9 of the *Companion Bible*: "The meaning of the word is to be deduced only from its *usage*. The one root idea running through all of the passages is *invisible force*. . . . [I]n whatever sense it is used, [it] always represents that which is *invisible* except by its manifestations." He also shows that *ruach* is used in nine different ways in the Old Testament, while *pneuma* is used fourteen different ways in the New Testament.

In John 6:63, Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." Here is a clear example of the figurative use of "spirit." Words are the symbols used for communication; they are received into our minds through sight, as when reading, or sound, as when hearing. But once in the mind, nothing material is packed into our brain. Words—and thus the concepts they carry with them—are spirit because they are immaterial, invisible, and of considerable power, depending on how we use them. Thus, we can receive "spirit" in the form of words or concepts from a spirit being. In this case, it is in reality "thought transference" because no sound is heard through our ears.

Matthew 10:16-20 provides us with another example:

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

God is not going to announce, "This is God speaking through so and so." Rather, it will appear to those listening, as well as the person speaking, that everything being generated is from the persecuted disciple. However, thought transference by means of spirit will occur between God and His child.

I Kings 22:20-22 presents another incident during which a demon was used to convey a message:

And the Lord said, "Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?" So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, "I will persuade him." The Lord said to him, "In what way?" So he said, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And the Lord said, "You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so."

This demon did not suddenly appear, walk up to Ahab's false prophets, and say, "I am going to tell lies through you so Ahab can be lured into battle and lose his life." No, the demon remained invisible, transferring its thoughts into the false prophets' minds. To all concerned, during the meetings held to counsel Ahab, it appeared to human eyes and ears that the lying counsel was initiated solely by Ahab's advisors. The Bible gives no indication that they deliberately conspired to dupe him. At the same time, the advisors themselves were unaware they were being used in that manner. However, God's Word reveals that they had all received unseen and unheard communication from a single, invisible demon.

Just because one is close to Christ does not eliminate the prospect that a demon will communicate with and through him. As seen in Matthew 16:22-23, Peter did the speaking, but Jesus spoke directly to Satan, naming him as the source of Peter's outburst against God's will that Jesus suffer and die. Without Peter's recognizing it, he permitted himself to be a conduit for Satan's will. The disciple's "good" intention was against God's will, and Jesus thus judged it to be evil.

The Course of This World

The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:2, ". . . in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." Previously, we defined the word "course" (*aion* in Greek). It bears reiteration because this word is of unusual importance to our understanding how Satan generally communicates with us. If we cannot understand this, our chances of coming out of Babylon are diminished significantly.

As examined above, the Bible uses *spirit* to designate an invisible, immaterial, powerful influence whose characteristics are absorbed and then exhibited in the attitudes and conduct of the general population of a given people.

Course is an influence of which we can be much more aware. We can compare it to a path, riverbed, or highway, suggesting a way by which or in which something flows. It is a means to an end, a result, which may be a destination or an action. *Course*, under the heading "tendency" in *Roget's International Thesaurus*, has synonyms such as "thoughts," "disposition," "character," "nature," "makeup," "bent," "slant," "frame of mind," "attitude," "inclination," "drift," "mindset," and "perspective." It is helpful to understand "the course of this world" by rephrasing it as "the disposition of this world," "the character of this world," "the nature of this world," or "the makeup [mindset, attitude, perspective, etc.] of this world."

In the apostle Paul's usage of this word, "course" is the whole mass of elements that encompass the conduct and attitudes of the times, the *zeitgeist*. It would not be the same all over the world because its expression in people would differ depending upon many factors. However, in Paul's writings, its elements will invariably be carnal and evil because the spiritual source, Satan, is always evil.

We can begin to understand this more practically by realizing that someone from France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, or Iraq, though carnal, would not be as inclined to see, understand, and react to a given situation exactly as an American would. The specifics of what affects their minds will differ. Though all are of the world, the things that make up one nation's course will impress themselves on other nationalities somewhat differently.

Regardless of nationality, the course of this world greatly enhances the self-centered pull that we are born with, and becomes our nature. It is from this that we must be converted, the largely unrecognized foundation of our pre-conversion attitudes and conduct, and it is the same force still motivating us when we behave carnally. Despite conversion, it remains within us, compressed like a spring ready to leap into action and reveal itself in carnality once again.

A prime characteristic of this world's course—exhibited worldwide, regardless of culture—is that it is habitually self-centered rather than God-centered. This is due to the underlying spirit beings who are its heart and soul, the key elements in communicating the course of this world into humanity. Through a simple illustration, we can perceive how it became this way. Genesis 1:31 reads, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day." God's statement of satisfaction in all He had made at the end of the sixth day of creation includes Adam and Eve's nature, as by this time they were already created.

Thus, in the beginning, mankind's nature is designated by our Creator as, "very good." Genesis 3 records the episode that began the transformation of their basic nature to the extremes of self-centeredness we witness today. Man's nature was not created evil, but it *became* evil through the influence of another spirit—besides God—that Adam and Eve *chose* to follow without any interference from their Creator.

Once they committed to that initial step, the course of this world began. By the second generation, murder had occurred (Genesis 4:8), and by the Flood, men were so evil that they were "only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). It is this same peak of evil toward which this world and its multiple courses are being driven. All of this takes place because of the communication, reception, and acceptance of evil concepts from an evil source.

II Timothy 3:13 reveals a general principle still working as we "progress" toward the return of Jesus Christ: "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Improving character and conduct in any given culture are temporary, indeed very brief, when observed within a survey of all of man's history.

The same process of moral deterioration that concluded with the Flood was quickly restarted shortly after its waters receded, and it persists to this day, as each person is born into this world and exposed to the same spirit and to the variety of courses that influenced Adam and Eve and all their progeny. Because we are made of flesh, we are born with a slight pull toward self, but not with the corruption that later develops and reveals itself in our conduct. Contrary to Catholic Church teaching, evil is not passed on through procreation, but by the spirit of the age through the course of this evil world. It is transferred to us primarily through the cultures into which we are born, all of which are carnal to the core.

It is the responsibility of converted parents to God and to their children to ensure that the right spirit prevails in their homes so their children can be properly nurtured. People grasp this to some degree when they observe that, "The apple doesn't fall very far from the tree," or "Like father, like son." Unless parents make a concerted, persistent effort to change and live as God commands, they will succeed only in passing on copies of themselves.

This world's Christians, in an effort to evade responsibility for the evil in them, have instead blamed God for creating man this way. God is responsible to a degree, in that He has not yet chosen to halt Satan's deceptions. Nevertheless, God did *not* make us this way. Mankind, represented by Adam and Eve, *chose* to submit to Satan, and all of their descendants, including us, have also chosen to become evil under the sway of the same evil spirit that offered our first parents the choice. This creates and accounts for "the course of this world."

It Is Worse Than We Think

Paul warns us that "evil men . . . will grow worse and worse." How evil is this heart that has been so easily communicated to us? Jeremiah 17:9 proclaims, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" The Hebrew word translated "desperately" can also be translated as "incurably." Our basic, carnal drive cannot be repaired; it cannot be changed.

Occasionally, we are asked whether it is possible that Satan might repent. The answer is absolutely not, based on the fact that our hearts are a reflection of his heart, as he has communicated it to us. Verse 9 could be paraphrased: "The always deceitful heart of man is desperately corrupt, incurably sick." It is so bad, so evil, that fixing it cannot salvage it. It must be replaced with a new heart—a new nature—which God promises elsewhere (Ezekiel 36:26).

It is not very hard to be fooled about the truly desperate condition of our hearts. However, we do not tend to judge our hearts as thoroughly incurable as God does. What Jesus says in Luke 11:13 is interesting in this light, as it is a New Testament reflection of Jeremiah 17:9: "If you then, being evil,

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Jesus directly calls those to whom He was speaking "evil"! Apparently, they were just ordinary people listening to Him teach; they were not representatives of any of those groups that were constantly disputing with Him. Verse 1 suggests His audience was made up of His own disciples! Yet, there is no equivocation at all in His statement. *Evil* is synonymous with "diseased," "hurtful," "calamitous," "derelict," "vicious," and "malignant." The word derives from the Greek word for "labor," indicating it is something that is worked at, thus producing these evil effects.

In Matthew 19:16, Jesus Himself is called "good," but He promptly corrects the person, saying that only God is good (verse 17). He presumably said that because there were elements of human nature in Him by virtue of His human birth. Luke 11:13, then, is God's assessment of human nature: evil. Just because a human knows how and actually does some good things—acts of kindness or generosity—does not alter the fact that his heart is still incurably evil. Human pride tends to blunt God's assessment of the carnality within us, motivating any remaining enmity (Romans 7:14-24).

Our pride rises to defend us from the condemnation of the standard to which we are compared—God. We consider Adolph Hitler to have been utterly evil, but he is said to have cherished children and dogs, a trait we would tend to judge as good. In a similar vein, James 3:9-10 says that with our tongues "we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing." Where do those words come from? Do they not proceed out from an evil heart (Matthew 12:34)?

People judge human nature to be a mixture of good and evil, but that is not acceptable for life in the Kingdom of God! It may as well be totally evil! Is God Himself contaminated, a blend of good and evil? According to I John 3:2, in His Kingdom "we shall be like Him." We will be purified and uncontaminated as He is. Human nature's evil mix will not be seen in God's Kingdom.

We should by now realize that salvation can only be by grace. Human nature *not* only cannot be made good, but even now it resides just under the surface. Our conversion barely covers it over, as Peter's outburst against God's will illustrates and Paul's experience, reported in Romans 7, amplifies.

Heart or Will—Which?

Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-13:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

The apostle is urging us, not to work to achieve salvation, but to labor to carry out the responsibilities that the receipt of God's grace has imposed on us (Titus 2:11-15). Christianity is not merely the passive receiving of forgiveness and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. We are to carry forward what we have freely received from God to its proper end.

We need to add to this another thought found in Deuteronomy 5:29: "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" Which of these—the will to carry forward what we have

received or the heart—is more important to growth in conversion and leaving Babylon? Which of them is subject to the other? Is the will a self-determining agent, or does something else determine it? Is the will superior to every other faculty of the body? Is it sovereign or servant? Does it govern, or is it subject to the pleasure of other faculties?

Most who consider themselves Christian, believe that, because free moral agency exists, the will is the more significant. Human philosophies also insist that the will governs man. However, this cannot be. To the contrary, the Word of God teaches that the heart or mind is the dominating center of our being.

Consider a circumstance that each of us faces, perhaps many times on any given day. If a person has before him two options, which will he choose? Unless some overriding reason exists, he will choose the one most agreeable to him, that is, to his heart, his innermost being.

What if the choice is between moral or immoral alternatives? If a person is what the Bible calls a "sinner," and he must choose between godliness and sinful indulgence, which will he select? He will choose the latter because he prefers it, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding.

Why? Because, as Jeremiah 17:9 says, his heart is desperately wicked. Jesus reinforces this in Matthew 15:19-20: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man. . . ."

If one were to present a truly converted person with the same options, he would choose the life of piety and virtue. Why? Because God has given him a new heart:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:24-27)

Ezekiel's prophecy is in perfect harmony with God's promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Thus, it is not the will that makes the sinner impervious to all appeals through the gospel to forsake his way, but it is his corrupt and sinful heart.

The sinner will not come to Christ and keep the Sabbath and holy days, quit stealing from God, or do any other thing commanded by God because he does not want to. He does not want to because his heart hates Christ and loves sin. Romans 8:7 is proof that human nature is at war against God.

The human will is the faculty of choice, but it is as much subject to the mind as the hands, feet, eyes, and sexual organs. It is a servant of the mind, and in turn, various influences affect the mind throughout the course of life. Proverbs 4:20-23 confirms this:

My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out it spring the issues of life.

The heart determines one's preferences and inclinations, and thus it determines one's choices, subjecting the will to it. Because of this, it is imperative to understand the evil that Satan and his demons have communicated to us either directly or through the course of this world. The world has shaped our pre-conversion heart, and thus it affects our relationship with God.

Hatred Removed

Jesus declares in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." His statement limits who can be converted: Only those the Father selects and draws may be converted. Indirectly, the verse intimates that men will not come to Him unless drawn.

Paul adds in Romans 3:11-12, "There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." People suppose they are free to choose to seek God at will, but this verse vigorously disputes that notion. *Nobody* seeks after God!

Jesus reinforces this: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). In this instance, they had God in their very midst, and they would not choose to follow Him. He states this even more bluntly in John 15:18: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." "Hated" is a strong word!

However, some did choose to follow Him. Notice what Scripture says about them: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). This passage clearly says that those who followed Christ did so, not by exercising their wills, but because they were prompted by God's will. Recall Paul's statement in Philippians 2:13, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do. . . ."

The fulfilling of God's twin promises in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-28 in our lives makes all the difference in the world concerning the use of the will. By them, we have a new heart as a gift from God—a heart that does not hate God. The proof that the hatred has been removed is that one who has received this benefit consistently uses his will to choose to obey God's will as expressed in His law. The new heart and submission to God's will go hand in hand.

A statement from the apostle Paul helps to put our attitude on the right trajectory: "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (I Corinthians 4:7).

What we have received is a gift of grace, unearned in any way. We need to understand that man's free will is free only in that God never compels anybody to sin. The sinner is not free to do either good or evil because his corrupt heart, formed by Satan's dominion, always inclines him to sin. Man is enslaved by that heart, a bondage that can be broken only by God's merciful intervention.

By virtue of God's gift, only the called of God are truly free to exercise their will to choose the good. God's gift does not merely counterbalance the evil heart corrupted by Satan's world, but can thoroughly dominate human nature because God works in us to do His will. Exercising this will that is motivated by a God-given heart will enable us to flee Babylon's evil influence.