

## CHAPTER 7: From Inward Cleansing to Outward Focus

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:22-27)*

In order to see our worldviews changed we must do several things. First of all, we must ask God to change us. We cannot purify and change ourselves. We must want it and seek after it, but we cannot cleanse ourselves. Secondly, we must cast aside wrong thoughts that are identified. Thirdly, we must act on those new beliefs because the fruit of a changed worldview is a changed lifestyle.

A missionary from the West told me of his experience. He said, “I remember the first time I identified some animistic beliefs in my own culture and cast them aside, embracing a Biblical way of thinking and acting. One of the Western animistic beliefs is that a person will receive 7 years of bad luck if he walks under a ladder. However, I had just learned that in God’s kingdom there is no such thing as ‘luck.’ There are consequences God has promised we will face if we sin; there is blessing we can expect if we follow His ways; and there is His promise to carry us through the ups and downs of life as we follow His will; but there is no such thing as a positive force outside of God called ‘luck.’ I went outside and put a ladder up against the house and proceeded to run back and forth under it, determined to prove that I was set free from bondage to that wrong thinking. Sounds crazy? Maybe so, but it was also very liberating to throw aside other beliefs about things which would bring good or bad luck. Then I had to learn to change my words. It is often you will hear Americans wishing one another, ‘good luck.’ It is meant as a blessing. But if there is no such thing as luck, I should not be saying it. Admittedly, this was much more difficult because I heard the phrase constantly, but by God’s grace I was able to adjust my speaking. As I practiced this new way of speaking and believing, it eventually overruled the wrong teaching I had in my culture and helped me to move easily toward trust in God, not luck, as the One in control of my destiny. Over the years I have often found it surprising as God put His finger on different ways I was not thinking Biblically but it has always been thrilling, too.”

We all want to see things as God sees them and break out of the darkness Satan desires to keep us trapped in. Satan would have us believe either that spirits do not exist and everything can be explained by physical causes or that spirits have absolute control over everything that happens. The Bible tells us that God is Spirit, but that

He became man in Jesus Christ, that He created both the spirit and physical world, and that some things are caused by spirits, but other things have physical causes. We submit to God but do not submit to other spirits. Nor do we pretend that spirits do not exist. He has given us the gift of discernment to determine what we are dealing with in each situation. If we fall into the trap of swinging either to one extreme or the other (physical vs. spiritual), we are blinded and can easily move out of the will of God.

Satan would have us believe that wealth and resources are limited and either that this world is a “closed system” with no possibility of intervention by God, or that we are ruled by nature through the spirits embodying animals, rivers, trees, mountains, etc. These lies can keep us from developing into the people God would have us be. God wants us to trust Him for resources that we need. God has also created us to be creative. We are to use Spirit-guided creativity in solving our problems and moving toward God’s intentions in our communities. Sometimes, needed resources are created by our ideas. Today’s useless weed may be tomorrow’s resource. As believers we have authority over evil spirits—they do not control us. If we can break free from the physical bondage that this earth is all there is, or the spiritual bondage that evil spirits are in control, we will have room for growth and freedom to creatively see God’s kingdom come in our nations.

Satan would have us either ensnared to the tyranny of tomorrow at the expense of those in our lives today, or to fulfilling expectations of long-dead ancestors at the expense of believing for possible changes for the better. God would have us realize we are to remember the past and learn from it. At the same time, we are to look forward to tomorrow and God’s kingdom coming in its perfection. Today, we are to carry the hope for a perfect future in our hearts while we build toward it and prepare for it now.

Satan would have us believe that work is a curse. God wants us to know that work is a gift. In God’s economy, all work is important if it is done to the glory of God. No work is more holy than another, depending on the motives and heart attitudes involved. God designed this world that we would need people working in all spheres of life because everything is interdependent. If we are capable of working but cannot find work, this is Satan’s scheme, not God’s. God is at work today and He expects us to be at work as well.

Satan would have us believe that poverty is all about material things and that forces outside of man are the root cause of poverty. While the lack of possessions is an aspect of poverty, God would have us understand that we also face poverty in our relationships—physically, spiritually and socially. Our poverty is much bigger than material possessions but Jesus came to bring the solution. God would also have us realize that it is sin, not spirits, which is at the root of the issues in the community. Because it is our sin, we must take personal responsibility for the problems and believe for the creativity to solve the problems by the grace of God.

By this time, you must realize that changing the way we think is not just an academic or spiritual exercise to make us feel smarter or more holy. Rather, it is a vital step in our discipleship process which should move us closer to seeing God’s

will accomplished in our communities. When Jesus told us to pray that God's kingdom would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10) this was not to be only for some far distant future. Nothing else in that prayer is for the far distant future. It is for here and now. Jesus came "preaching and teaching the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23) and he told the Pharisees that "the kingdom has come upon you" since he was driving out demons by the power of the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28). In other words, it was right in front of them if they would dare to embrace it. On the other hand, He also told the Pilate that His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). When Jesus returns, we will experience His kingdom in its fullness. But this does not mean we should do nothing now. If we reduce the kingdom to something that only happens in the future, we miss out on what God has for us now. Sometimes I've heard people say, "Why do anything? Everything is just supposed to get worse and worse and then Jesus will return and make it all better." This is certainly not what Jesus told us to do. Jesus, as our example was exhibiting the kingdom *everywhere he went*—just as we should be exhibiting it *everywhere we go*!

Often, we think of activities that express the kingdom being things like preaching, teaching, healing the sick, raising the dead, or driving out demons (Matt. 9:35; 10:8). While these are definitely included, it is not the whole truth. How about what Jesus says in Matthew 25:34-46? In these verses Jesus tells us that those who fed the hungry, gave the thirsty something to drink, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited those in prison are those who will enter into their reward. On the other hand, those who did not care for the needy will enter into eternal punishment. If we consider only preaching, teaching or healing as those activities which are spiritual and worthy of the kingdom of God, we are missing God's will for our lives and our communities.

What would it mean to see God's will in our communities as it is in heaven? It possibly would mean sufficient health care and housing for everyone, enough food in the stomachs of our children, good schools for our children, people trained and prepared to work and job opportunities. It would mean unbroken homes, good relationships within families and neighbors, no physical, sexual or substance abuse and hatreds gone. It would mean people in right relationship with God and bondage to demonic/ancestral spirits broken

The great news is this is what God wants for us! That is why Jesus taught us to pray, “May your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10). Everywhere we see God’s will being done, we see God’s kingdom being expressed. This is what we can expect to see in our very own communities *today*. We do not have to wait for Jesus’ return. He has already provided the full solution. Let us pray this prayer in faith and expect to see God’s kingdom expressed through His will being done *through us* in our communities.

James tells us that if we only listen to the word, but do not do it, we deceive ourselves (James 1:22-25). If we listen to God and hear His word to us about what needs changing in our own worldview, we will be blessed. James also tells us, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James :27). Certainly one way to be polluted by the world is to allow unbiblical worldviews to survive in our hearts and minds. If we want to be changed into the people God intended us to be, we will seek to be redeemed in our thinking. But not only will we allow God to change our thinking, we will seek to do His will. We must take our inward cleansing, and turn it into an outward service. Where better to start than with the poor in our communities—especially the neglected widows and orphans? It is then we will see changes in our nations, as believers take their place in serving their communities.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Rom. 12:1-3)