

Desire for Power

Regarding humanity there are no greater desires that grip us than those for money, power and pleasure. There are arguments that money is power and that both power and money can bring pleasure. Therefore, these things are definitely related to one another in that the desire for them originate from the same place in our being, our nature. However, at the moment, we will deal with the second desire in this list: power. The desire (lust) for power is something that we are born with. It is something that we don't need to be taught. The desire for control of our actions and control over the actions of other people is seen all through our development from early childhood to our golden years.

Power makes us feel safe. It can bring pleasure to an individual when they use it against people that are subordinate to them or even those in authority over them. Conversely, the lack of power also can make us feel vulnerable. Even more, the act of willingly setting aside one's own control just to be subject to another totally works against our nature as human beings. However, this is exactly what happens when we give our lives to Jesus Christ. We are saying in Christ's own words "Not my will, but thine, be done (Luke 22:42)."

We will look at a few examples in the bible that express this very important vice that can become a wedge between us and our God, between us and our loved ones and between us and our success. Our examples are Adam and Eve, Diotrefes, Simon the Sorcerer, Queen Athaliah and the mother of Apostles James and John. Then we will look at Christ as the example for combating this vice. As a historical reference, we will also look at Pontius Pilate.

Let's reaffirm the implication and nuance of this lesson within the context of the "Digging Beneath the Surface" series. Always remember, the desire for power is not a sin. It is not immoral. Control is something that we all desire and it is natural. Fathers want to control the environment of their sons. Devoted wives want to have control over things that endanger their husbands. God Himself puts things within our reach giving us the responsibility and the ability to control the success of our affairs. To appreciate the significance of what we are trying to say, we must go back to the equation for sin in James 1:14 - 15. The sin comes when the tempter comes with situations that put our desire above the word of God. When temptation draws our focus off of God and on to the object of affection, we will do whatever is in our power to possess our object of affection. We are encouraged to "set our affections on things above (Colossians 3:2)." Sin just doesn't happen. Losing focus just doesn't happen. It happens because of something that originates under the surface of us all. We must both be aware of it and also achieve victory over it.

Adam and Eve. The return on Adam and Eve's risk was not favorable when they ate from the tree of knowledge. They were interested in their own desires and could not stand against the temptation that the serpent was using against them. The serpent told them that not only would there be no punishment for going against God's word, but also they would be as gods and would have knowledge of good and evil. The picture the serpent painted, in short, had no negative impact of disobedience; they would be as gods and they would have knowledge. On top of this, Eve looked at the fruit and it looked good to her eyes ("lust of the eyes" I John 2:16).

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, **Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.** And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Diotrephes. This man was actually a believer in a church that Apostle John was affiliated with. For whatever reason, this congregation started to take the turn toward having cult like tendencies. As an outsider we can ask the question "How can people allow one person to have so much power over their lives?" He wanted to control who the congregants came in contact with. This is the difference between a church and a cult. A church is about helping others to the glory of God. A cult is all about controlling people for the glory of people.

3 John 1:9-10 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

Simon the scorcner. Philip preached the full gospel to the Samaritans and before his arrival there was one Simon that had a reputation in the city for doing miracles. While Philip was there without the apostles, there was much joy in the

city, but no one had received the Holy Ghost with the bible evidence of speaking in other tongues. After the apostles were there, God began filling people with the Holy Ghost. There must have been more than the sinner's prayer going on because Simon realized that there was power going on. There was something else going on in the city that captivated people's attention. They were not impressed anymore with Simon's tricks. Simon's status in the city was now being threatened by God. However, because Simon was carnal minded, he thought his status was being threatened by Peter and John. He insisted that Peter and John give him (not the gift of the Holy Ghost, but ...) the power to captivate an audience by laying hands on them and giving them the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:9-23 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, **Give**¹ me also this **power**, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

¹ Give is in the Imperative Mood of the Greek language. Everything in the Imperative Mood is a command. Simon is commanding Peter and John to give him power to give others the Holy Ghost, but not concerned about the necessity of receiving it himself.

Queen Athaliah. In some people, the desire for power is so strong they will kill their own family to have it. This is the extreme case that is recorded in the following passage. You can read the entire story for the full context, but the standard occurrence of what happened after the death of the king was a power struggle. Sometimes this struggle was between warring families. Sometimes the struggle was in the family. This is what makes the peaceful transfer of power in America every four years amazing. Humanity at it's very basest form is capable of great cruelty.

2 Kings 11:1-3 And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land.

Zebedee's wife. Living vicariously through her sons or sons hiding behind their mother to get their own desires? It is funny how people think they have to have a special seat next to Jesus. To know Him is to be in a special seat with Him. If there was anyone who should've believed that there was always room next to Jesus it would've been John the beloved, the one who Jesus loved.

Matthew 20:20-23 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Jesus gave power to seventy disciples to do the miracles as signs of the kingdom and validation of the Gospel. When they returned they were quite happy with the power that they received from the Lord. Jesus didn't exactly give them high fives and hype them up, but he gave the disciples a different perspective on the things that they now had power to do. Don't get caught up in manifestations of power. Why not? Because it is not your power. God is powerful. Powerful

manifestations are what God does. If we fully understand God, we will realize that the possessing Him is should always be our focus. If we want to possess Him (Christ is the goal) as He possesses us², He will always manifest Himself in the midst of His people.

Luke 10:17-20 And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you **power** to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Further, Jesus shows us just how to work against the fleshly desire to control one's own life and actions in opposition to the will of God. It was His desire to do something different than what the Father wanted, but his obedience and humility one over his own desire.

Luke 22:42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Now read the appendix and get a historical perspective on this desire for power. Along with it comes the desire to wield it; the desire to let others know who is in control; the desire to assert oneself.

² Phil 3:12-14

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing:

Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

(New Living Translation)

How does this affect my faith?

First off, God is all powerful. He is the one that is always in control. An undo desire on your part to seek control when you should be seeking how to yield control undermines the very principles of our faith. There is no chance of flourishing growth.

Secondly, controlling other people is not God's will for anyone. Paul Himself said that he didn't want to have dominion over the faith of the Corinthians (I Corinthians 1:24). Others beside preachers can be domineering over believers.

Thirdly, if God is in control, there is no reason to take things in your own hands as in the example of Queen Athaliah. What God has for you is for you. If it's not for you leave it alone, because He won't let you keep it.

How does this affect my future?

If you continue in this type of behavior, you will undoubtedly run into someone else with the same behavior. What if they are in more control than you? Do you really think God is going to guarantee favor when you are being led by the flesh? Or would it be more beneficial for God to allow you to learn something about your behavior so that you can repent and follow Him more completely?

How does this affect my congregation?

Just as in the case of Diotrephes, it is amazing how people will allow mere men and women to control them. In the case of the Corinthians neither Paul, Cephas nor Apollos wanted to control them. The Corinthians formed factions amongst themselves and the result was division. Imagine if controlling people are actually putting their influence to use in order to gain the following of those that are weak in the church? The result is still division and infighting.

If you are a person that likes to be in control all the time, it will eventually cause people to either not want to deal with you or cause them to not try to come up with their own ideas. Another possibility is that there will be some other controlling, uncompromising individual that will always be at odds with you.

If only something about the flesh could actually lead to unity. But ☹

Appendix F

PILATE

1. Name and Office: The nomen Pontius indicates the stock from which Pilate was descended. It was one of the most famous of Samnite names; it was a Pontius who inflicted on a Roman army the disgrace of the Caudine Forks. The name is often met with in Roman history after the Samnites were conquered and absorbed. Lucius Pontius Aquila was a friend of Cicero and one of the assassins of Julius Caesar. The cognomen Pilatus indicates the familia, or branch of the gens Pontius, to which Pilate belonged. It has been derived from pileus, the cap worn by freedmen; this is improbable, as Pilate was of equestrian rank. It has also been derived from pilum, a spear. Probably the name was one that had descended to Pilate from his ancestors, and had long lost its meaning. The praenomen is nowhere mentioned. Pilate was 5th procurator of Judaea. The province of Judaea had formerly been the kingdom of Archclaus, and was formed when he was deposed (6 AD) Speaking roughly, it took in the southern half of Palestine, including Samaria. **Being an imperial province (i.e. under the direct control of the emperor), it was governed by a procurator (see PROCURATOR; PROVINCE). The procurator was the personal servant of the emperor, directly responsible to him, and was primarily concerned with finance. But the powers of procurators varied according to the appointment of the emperor.** Pilate was a procurator cum potestate, i.e. he possessed civil, military, and criminal jurisdiction. The procurator of Judaea was in some way subordinate to the legate of Syria, but the exact character of the subordination is not known. As a rule a procurator must be of equestrian rank and a man of certain military experience. Under his rule, the Jews were allowed as much self-government as was consistent with the maintenance of imperial authority. The Sanhedrin was allowed to exercise judicial functions, but if they desired to inflict the penalty of death, the sentence had to be confirmed by the procurator.

2. Pilate's Procuratorship: We have no certain knowledge of Pilate except in connection with his time of rule in Judaea. We know nothing of his birth, his origin, or his earlier years. Tacitus, when speaking of the cruel punishments inflicted by Nero upon the Christians, tells us that Christ, from whom the name "Christian" was derived, was put to death when Tiberius was emperor by the procurator Pontius Pilate (Annals xv.44). Apart from this reference and what is told us in the New Testament, all our knowledge of him is derived from two Jewish writers, Josephus the historian and Philo of Alexandria.

Pilate was procurator of Judaea, in succession to Gratus, and he held office for 10 years. Josephus tells (Ant, XVIII, iv, 2) that he ruled for 10 years; that he was removed from office by Vitellius, the legate of Syria, and traveled in haste to Rome to defend himself before Tiberius against certain complaints. Before he

reached Rome the emperor had passed away. Josephus adds that Vitellius came in the year 36 AD to Judaea to be present at Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. It has been assumed by most authorities (so Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible (five volumes) and Encyclopaedia Biblica) that Pilate had departed before this visit of Vitellius. They accordingly date the procuratorship of Pilate as lasting from 26 to 36 AD. As against this view, von Dobschutz points out (RE under the word "Pilate") that by this reckoning Pilate must have taken at least a year to get to Rome; for Tiberius died on March. 16, 37 AD. Such delay is inconceivable in view of the circumstances; hence, von Dobschutz rightly dates the period of his procuratorship 27-37 AD. **The procurator of Judaea had no easy task, nor did Pilate make the task easier by his actions. He was not careful to conciliate the religious prejudices of the Jews, and at times this attitude of his led to violent collisions between ruler and ruled.**

On one occasion, when the soldiers under his command came to Jerusalem, he caused them to bring with them their ensigns, upon which were the usual images of the emperor. The ensigns were brought in privily by night, but their presence was soon discovered. Immediately multitudes of excited Jews hastened to Caesarea to petition him for the removal of the obnoxious ensigns. For five days he refused to hear them, but on the sixth he took his place on the judgment seat, and when the Jews were admitted he had them surrounded with soldiers and threatened them with instant death unless they ceased to trouble him with the matter. The Jews thereupon flung themselves on the ground and bared their necks, declaring that they preferred death to the violation of their laws. Pilate, unwilling to slay so many, yielded the point and removed the ensigns (Josephus, Ant, XVIII, iii, 1; BJ, II, ix, 2, 3).

At another time he used the sacred treasure of the temple, called corban (qorban), to pay for bringing water into Jerusalem by an aqueduct. A crowd came together and clamored against him; but he had caused soldiers dressed as civilians to mingle with the multitude, and at a given signal they fell upon the rioters and beat them so severely with staves that the riot was quelled (Josephus, Ant, XVIII, iii, 2; BJ, II, ix, 4).

Philo tells us (Legatio ad Caium, xxxviii) that on other occasion he dedicated some gilt shields in the palace of Herod in honor of the emperor. On these shields there was no representation of any forbidden thing, but simply an inscription of the name of the donor and of him in whose honor they were set up. The Jews petitioned him to have them removed; when he refused, they appealed to Tiberius, who sent an order that they should be removed to Caesarea.

Of the incident, mentioned in Luke 13:1, of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, nothing further is known.

Josephus (Ant, XVIII, iv, 1, 2) gives an account of the incident which led to Pilate's downfall. A religious pretender arose in Samaria who promised the Samaritans that if they would assemble at Mt. Gerizim, he would show them the sacred vessels which Moses had hidden there. A great multitude assembled in readiness to ascend the mountain, but before they could accomplish their aim they were attacked by Pilate's cavalry, and many of them were slain. The Samaritans thereupon sent an embassy to Vitellius, the legate of Syria, to accuse Pilate of the murder of those who had been slain. Vitellius, who desired to stand well with the Jews, deposed Pilate from office, appointed Marcellus in his place, and ordered Pilate to go to Rome and answer the charges made against him before the emperor. Pilate set out for Rome, but, before he could reach it, Tiberius had died; and it is probable that, in the confusion which followed, Pilate escaped the inquisition with which he was threatened. From this point onward history knows nothing more of Pilate.

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