

Amalek – a picture of sinful human nature

Introduction

We often hear how somebody makes an excuse for his or her behaviour with: “This is just the way I am. You cannot change me and you will just have to bear with me.” This is not a Christian attitude for the Bible declares just the opposite – a believer must continually, for the better, undergo a process of change:

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but **continually be transformed** by the renewing of your minds...” (Rom. 12:1-2, my emphasis).*

Peter confirms the same principle:

*“...do your best to **add** goodness to your faith; to your goodness **add** knowledge; to your knowledge **add** self-control; to your self-control **add** endurance; to your endurance **add** godliness; to your godliness **add** Christian affection; and to your Christian affection **add** love...” (2 Pet. 1:2-8, my emphasis).*

This change that must take place in the character of the believer is a process which is hindered by the tendencies of our sinful nature. This is what Paul refers to when he writes:

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal. 5:17)

The negative influence of our sinful nature that resists change, can be illustrated by an Old Testament shadow type.

Amalek

Immediately after the thirst of the Israelites was quenched by the Water from the Rock that Moses struck (picture of the Living Water flowing from Jesus’ work on the cross, **1 Cor. 10:4**), their way to the Promised Land, Canaan, was barred by the Amalekites (**Ex.17**). In this case Canaan cannot be a picture of heaven, because unlike Israel who had to fight for every piece of land they wanted to occupy (**Judges 1:1-3**), faith in Jesus as Saviour is all that is required to enter heaven. As believers, our “Canaan” is an inner experience where the rule of Christ is manifested as righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (**Rom. 14:17**). But, just like in the case of the Israelites who had their progress hindered by the Amalekites, the believer finds the working of the Holy Spirit resisted by his or her sinful nature.

Scriptural reason why Amalek can be used as a shadow type of the sinful nature

*“Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” ...Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright”...So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob... **So Esau despised his birthright**” ... (Gen. 25:29-34, my emphasis).*

The real reason why Esau sold his birthright is mentioned in verse 34, he despised it; he disparaged the promise that through his seed Christ would be born. Jacob, on the other hand, must have realized the value of the promise of a coming Saviour. Like in Esau's case, God cannot do much with a person who is self-sufficient and makes God irrelevant to the business of living. That must be the reason why God loved Jacob, but rejected Esau (**Mal.1:2-3**).

What is the connection between Esau and Amalek?

*“This is the account of Esau the father of the Edomites... These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath... **Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek**” (Gen. 36:9-12, my emphasis).*

Esau was antagonistic towards Jacob, for not only did Jacob take away the birthright from him, but Jacob also fraudulently stole the blessing that was meant for him (**Gen. 27:41**). Amalek was Esau's grandson and obviously through example setting, he inherited his grandfather's animosity towards Jacob.

What God said that had to be remembered!

*“Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind... When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, **you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!** (Deut. 25:17-18, my emphasis).*

Application

Just as Israel had to conquer the Amalekites before they could continue their journey to the promised land, we as believers have to resist the tendencies of our sinful nature and overcome its temptations in order to experience more and more of the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:16-22**). In its most blatant form, the influence of the uncontrolled sinful human nature can be seen in what is happening in society and in the world around us today :

“What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies...” (Gal. 5:19-21, GNB).

Although most Christians are no longer guilty of some of these grosser sins, the influence of sinful human nature can also be seen, on a more moderate level, in the lives of many believers. The “*Little foxes*” like impatience, rudeness, touchiness, insensitiveness, pride and unforgiveness can cause much “*ruin in...our vineyards that are in bloom*” (**Song of Solomon 2:15**).

The Biblical answer to the problem of “Amalek”

The Old Testament shadow type of salvation teaches that the blood of the lambs on the doorframes (a picture of Christ’s atoning blood on the cross) protected Israel from the angel of death, but it did not protect them from being attacked by the Amalekites. They had to conquer the Amalekites themselves (**Ex. 17:8-16**) - faith in the atoning work of Christ saves you from eternal judgement, but it does not automatically save you from your sinful nature; it must be overcome by disciplined spiritual growth and through obedience to the Holy Spirit. Victory over your sinful nature is not a one-time experience; it is something that must continually take place every day, from situation to situation! It is a requirement for discipleship:

*“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow Me” (Luk. 9:23, my emphasis).*

We must not forget what God said had to be remembered

God’s instruction to Moses concerning the Amalekites:

*“...Make a record of this in a book, **so that it may be kept in memory**, and say it again in the ears of Joshua: **that all memory of Amalek is to be completely uprooted from the earth**. Then Moses put up an altar and gave it the name of Yahweh-Nissi: For he said, The Lord has taken his oath that there will be war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17:14-16, my emphasis).*

Saul, as the first king of Israel, received the same instruction:

*“The Lord of armies says, I will give punishment to Amalek for what he did to Israel, fighting against him on the way when Israel came out of Egypt. Go now and **put Amalek to the sword**, putting to the curse all they have, without mercy: put to death every man and woman, every child and baby at the breast, every ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Sam. 15:2-3, BBE, my emphasis).*

Saul, however, was disobedient and spared Agag, king of the Amalekites and the best of the sheep and the cattle (**1 Sam. 15:15**). Ironically, because of Saul’s disobedience, there was an Amalekite around to finish him off (**2 Sam. 1:8**). Sparing some of Israel’s enemies had further consequences; Haman, a descendant of the Amalekite Agag, wanted to influence king Xerxes to destroy all the Jews throughout his kingdom (**Esther 3**). It is also interesting to note that Herod who had all the boys under two years murdered in Bethlehem, was an Idumean and the Idumeans were descendants of the Amalekites who were also known as the Edomites.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great)

(Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p.515)

The spiritual lesson to be learnt from the Old Testament shadow type is that you may have mercy on Amalek, but you compromise with your “flesh” at your own peril, because the Word declares that in it dwells no good thing (**Rom. 7:18**).

When are you the most vulnerable for the influence of your sinful nature?

*"Remember what the Amalekites did to you as you were coming from Egypt. They had no fear of God, and so they attacked you from the rear **when you were tired and exhausted**, and killed all who were straggling behind" (Deut. 25:17-18, my emphasis, GNB).*

Be careful when you come home tired and hungry after a long day at work. Weariness can influence your ability to control yourself, you can easily become irritated and do and say things that you might be sorry for afterwards. Keep it in mind when you are tired; relax, enjoy a juicy steak and rest.

Conclusion

The flesh can be a handy instrument in the hands of your spiritual enemies to hamper and hinder your spiritual progress. It is thus important that, like Jesus declared, you crucify the flesh:

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

Furthermore, Paul and Peter's advice is:

"Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16-17).

"...Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Pet. 5:6-9).

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