

## KEY ANTAGONISTS

When we look at the work of the Holy Spirit in revival we see that God opens the heavens and pours out his refreshing rain. In every generation, God is moving through a remnant that will pass his fire on to the next generation. God's wind of his Spirit blows his church forward toward his divine purposes. God is looking for those special someone's who will hear his voice and obey. God used Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, John Hus, Wycliffe, Luther, John Wesley, Charles Finney and so many others. They all faced opposition from Satan and it came through people. Jesus experienced more opposition than others and it came mostly from religious leaders.

They were there at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. They were drawn to the Judean desert when they saw the large multitudes from Jerusalem, Judea and the Jordan area flocking to hear John the Baptist. They were not there to applaud but to scoff. John the Baptist discerned the hearts of these Pharisees and Sadducees as he spoke these words to them:

**"You brood of **snakes!** Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"  
"Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'we have Abraham as our father..'  
- Matt.3:7, 9**

Jesus came with a new wine that would not fit into their old wineskins. John exposed the root of their venom and deception, it was **pride in their religious traditions**. As one walks with Jesus through the gospels, they will find that these people with '**religious spirits**' are often lurking around with their self-appointed sinister task; to attack Jesus and his ministry.

**".....looking for a reason to accuse Jesus..." - Matthew 12:10**

They got so caught up in their hatred that they even plotted to kill Jesus - Matt.12:14. They saw Jesus as a threat to the status quo. They had power, prestige and position and Jesus exposed their false motives and their love of money - Luke 16:14-15. At the end of Jesus' ministry, he gives an excoriating assessment of their utter hypocrisy in Matthew chapter 23. The Pharisees felt they had the proper intellectual interpretations of Scripture and often questioned Jesus' authority and beliefs. They were proud of being right but were blind to their lack of heartfelt compassion towards people. Also, they did not recognize the workings of the Holy Spirit through Jesus. They resisted, grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit and his activity. They ended up blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

I have heard more than one famous preacher say that one could only do that in Jesus' day, but no one can blaspheme the Holy Spirit today. However, Jesus made it clear that those who attribute his works to the devil and fully reject Him reach a point where they have blasphemed the Spirit - Matthew 12:22-37. Their conscience becomes seared as their hearts become so hard and their wills so solidified in stubbornness that they will not change. This described the Pharisees. Jesus said to them.....

**".....how often I have longed to gather your children  
together..... but you were not willing." - Matthew 23:37 NIV**

These religious spirits were active against the early church too. Just before they stoned Stephen to death, he gave them a fiery message:

**"You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears!  
You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"  
- Acts 7:51 NIV**

While in a time of prayer in November 1986, I asked God to show me the spiritual stronghold over my home area in rural upstate New York. Immediately a picture came to my mind. It was an old lady in a rocking chair and the meaning came right away with one word: **'tradition.'** A few years before that I had been using the term Model T Christianity to refer to

the type of religion in my home area. No Christians were driving to church in Model T cars (from the 1930's) but instead in newer updated cars. However, they were stuck in religious, formal traditions from the past that allowed little room for the workings of the Holy Spirit. They were driving updated cars but were not willing to update their churches to keep in step with the Spirit.

**"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." - Galatians 5:25**

Just before I headed for the mission field for the first time in 1983, my pastor's wife invited me over to their house to talk with me on a late Friday afternoon. It was more like an interrogation for the hour visit. She told me that I was too evangelistic and she didn't even like Billy Graham! She also questioned whether the mission group I was going with was a cult. (It was a well respected evangelical group called Operation Mobilization). Her problem? She was too proud of her church denomination and enmeshed in hyper-Calvinist theology (which over emphasizes God's sovereignty but downplays the responsibility of man). This same woman had caused me grief in early 1981.

I had gone to visit some Spirit-filled friends one night at their farmhouse. There was a new couple there who shared many stories about how Jesus was working in their lives. When I said that I was leaving for Florida in a few days to attend a 10 week ministry course, they prayed for me. Relevant words of knowledge were spoken over me. They revealed what was troubling me in my heart, things that only God could know about. The next thing I remember is waking up, lying on the floor with a feeling like I was floating on a cloud. Billows of laughter came forth from deep within me! I was resting in the presence of the Holy Spirit. (it was joy unspeakable and full of glory! Out of my belly were streams of living water. - 1 Peter 1:8-9, John 7:38-39)

The next morning my Sunday School class teacher decided to omit the lesson. Instead, they asked if I had anything to share. Boy did I ever! I shared my experiences from the night before. The Pastor's wife then remarked: 'Are you sure that wasn't of the devil?' It took me by surprise, but the Lord gave me the words to respond. I mentioned how when Jesus came out of the tomb, the Roman guards fell to the ground because the presence of God was so strong!

The pastor's wife may have been genuinely concerned about me through her comments to me, but she was speaking about things she knew little about. The Sadducees made the same mistake. Jesus told them that they were in error because they **'did not know the scriptures or the power of God'** - Matthew 22:29.

Jesus faced almost constant criticism, misunderstanding and even threats of death during his public ministry. It had been prophesied at his childhood consecration in the temple. Simeon spoke these words to Mary:

**"This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." - Luke 2:34-35 NIV**

Jesus walked where we walk and knows the battles we face. He was an overcomer in spite of the attacks that he faced from antagonists - Hebrews 4:15-16. We can now come boldly to the throne of grace. It is there that we receive mercy and find help in our time of need.

**Blood Covenant of Jesus Christ - Revelation 12:11**

My salvation (my deliverance, liberation and complete wholeness) includes the power, the kingdom and the authority of Jesus Christ. The accuser has been cast down. I overcome him by the blood of the Lamb of God Jesus Christ, by the word of my testimony and by my full commitment to Jesus, even unto death. I overcome the enemy because I am part of the blood covenant that God made for me! I walk in his peace, power and provision

CROSS: Jesus suffered before and during the crucifixion

Confession: My part.....I agree and testify to what he did for me

Commitment: I am willing to die for this belief