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**VOL. XXIX**  
**NO. 25**  
**June 22, 2014**

# Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

**—Proverbs 18:10**

## The Popeye Defense

I think most of us can still remember Popeye the sailor man, whether from the movie or the cartoon series. Some may even be able to hum the theme song.

Besides Popeye’s love for spinach, the thing I remember most about him was his saying, “I am what I am.” Actually, when he said it through teeth clenched on a pipe stem, it came out, “I yam what I yam.”

Many people today use that same defense. I met a man a few days ago who said that if he was in a car he had to be in the driver’s seat. He could not handle riding in the passenger’s seat. He didn’t try to explain it, he long ago stopped trying to squelch it, he just figured it was part of his mental makeup. “I’m a lousy passenger” he repeated. “I just have to be the driver.”

It’s not a big deal when it comes to some personality quirk or harmless habit. But we must stop using the “Popeye Defense” in matters of right and wrong.

For example, one might fly into a rage, spouting out insults, anger, and all sorts of unfair and rash

generalizations. And then, seeking to justify his behavior, say, “I can’t help it. I just can’t keep things to myself. I’ve got to speak up. I am what I am.”

One might say, “I’ve always had a thing for the ladies. I am what I am.”

One might say, “God made me this way. I was born a homosexual. I am what I am, and I can’t fight nature.”

One might say, “I grew up with money. I’m used to getting everything I always wanted. I’ll never be any different. I am what I am.”

### **The Power to Change**

But no human being, and certainly no Christian, is helpless to change his behavior. First of all, God has not created us to sin. James says,

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (James 1:13–14).

Sin is a choice that we have made, to reject God’s way and pursue our own. We are not doomed to remain in sin. God promises that He will provide “the way of escape” from sin (1 Cor. 10:13), if we will simply take advantage of it.

Every human being has the capacity to change. “God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30–31).

Grady Nutt tells a story in *Homemade* magazine, July 1990, that an old country grandpa bought a new radio, placed it on the refrigerator, plugged it in, tuned it to WSM in Nashville (home of the Grand Ole Opry) and then yanked the knob off! He had it tuned to all he ever wanted or expected to hear, and saw no reason for the radio to retain its ability to change stations.

But that's not what radios are designed to do. A radio with no knob is a broken radio! And neither are people designed to be stuck in one dreary rut of inevitability. People can change. People can stop tuning in to the ways of the world, and start tuning in to the will of God.

In fact, one *must* change in order to be pleasing to God. Ephesians 4:22–24 says,

...that in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

When the mind is educated by the word of God and thereby renewed, we can choose to leave a course of sinful behavior and pursue a path of righteousness. God Himself gives us the strength to change.

If one of us suffers a heartattack, and the doctor says that we must take a vacation, reduce stress, stop smoking, and get more sleep, or else we will suffer another heartattack, we are likely to make those changes. Well, we've already suffered the consequences of our sin, and God is warning us to change, or else worse consequences are to come.

If something is defined as a sin, then God expects us to abandon it. Now, it may be more difficult to put off certain sins. But we still have the power to change. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

A story is told of a Kentucky hillbilly who had to journey with his family to the state capital to conduct some business. For the first time in his life, he found himself standing outside an elevator. Not knowing its function, he watched as an old, haggard woman hobbled on, and the doors closed. A few seconds later, the doors opened, and a young, attractive woman marched off. The father hollered to his youngest son, "Billy, go get your mother!"

Yes, change can be drastic! But drastic change is called for, in order to be pleasing to Christ.

—John Guzzetta

# Marriage Takes Three

I once thought marriage took  
Just two to make a go,  
But now I am convinced  
It takes the Lord also.

And not one marriage fails  
Where Christ is asked to enter,  
As lovers come together  
With Jesus at the center.

But marriage seldom thrives,  
And homes are incomplete,  
Till He is welcomed there  
To help avoid defeat.

In homes where Christ is first  
It's obvious to see,  
Those unions really work,  
For marriage still takes three.

—*author unknown*

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## Quote of the Week:

“Write it on a tablet before them  
And inscribe it on a scroll,  
That it may serve in the time to come  
As a witness forever.  
This is a rebellious people, false sons,  
Who say to the seers, ‘You must not see visions,’  
And to the prophets, ‘You must not prophesy to us what is right,  
Speak to us pleasant words,  
Prophesy illusions.  
Get out of the way, turn aside from the path,  
Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel’ ” (Isaiah 30:8–11).