

ERROR OF POPEYE THEOLOGY

Not only are many misinformed regarding salvation and embrace a Santa-Claus Theology, but also many Christians are just as susceptible to misunderstanding God, making Him conform to the way they imagine Him to be.

Popeye Theology

You remember Popeye the Sailor Man, the cartoon character, and his nemesis Bluto. Compared to the muscular Bluto, Popeye appeared as a weakling. Walking along the beach Bluto kicks sand on Popeye right in front of his girlfriend, Olive Oyl, trying to impress her. To the distress of Popeye, he is unable to defend himself in the eyes of his beloved Olive. A fight ensues with the brute getting the best of Popeye. Seemingly down and out, a can of spinach falls out of Popeye's shirt. You know what happens next. Gulping down the spinach while in the clutches of Bluto, Popeye instantaneously becomes superhuman. From that point the winner of the skirmish is never in question.

Unfortunately most in the church see the same relationship between Popeye and spinach with the believer and the Spirit. Just as spinach produced superhuman strength in a cartoon character, the Spirit allegedly produces supernatural power in and through the believer to live the victorious Christian life.

NO ENERGIZING SPINACH



A Popeye theology is based on the assumption that *you can't do anything in and of yourself that is pleasing to God* (a “trying view” or “self-effort view”). On the other hand, a “trusting view” understands that *only the Spirit can produce godly behavior in and through the believer*. Consequently, the believer can live by sin's power through fleshly self-effort or walk by the Spirit's power. The Christian life is *not* done in one's own strength; rather, it is accomplished only with the Spirit's power. Consequently, the emphasis is on the means of *how* you live or walk. With this understanding, *appropriating the Spirit's power* is analogous to opening Popeye's spinach can.

However, there is a better way to distinguish self-reliance from Spirit-reliance in the Christian life. Walking is a process and human effort is assumed in each biblical passage addressing “walking” in the Christian life. A Christian “walks in the darkness” not because he is “trying to live in his own strength,” but because he actually does “not practice [do] the truth” (1 John 1:6). On the other hand, the same text implies “to walk in the light” is “to practice [do] the truth” (v 7). A believer in Christ can actually “do the truth” or “not do the truth.” Behavior, whether godly or sinful, is always lived out by human effort, based on choices. The emphasis is on *why* you live the way you do, not on the power of sin or the power of the Spirit. Consequently the believers' choices, not power sources, determine whether they walk with respect to sinful flesh in a fleshly orientation or walk with respect to the Spirit in a godly orientation. Chapters 3–6 of *Escape* address this very issue in detail.

Picturing the Spirit as a type of supernatural genie, believers assume they cannot live the Christian life unless they tap into heaven's power source. Rubbing the magical vase, saying the right prayer, using the proper spiritual formula, the Spirit comes to their defense and unleashes God's power in their lives. While many believers reject a Santa-Claus theology for salvation, most readily embrace an energizing-bunny theology for sanctification.

In the Christian life there is no switch or battery pack to release power from the Spirit. The secret of the Christian life is not “getting plugged into the Spirit's power” so that He produces obedience. The answer is to make oneself available to the Spirit's influencing ministry through the Word of God, choosing to do the right thing (Rom 6:13).

Energizing-Bunny Theology

**NO
ENERGIZING
BUNNY**

