

**HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE CAN ONE VERSE MAKE? - Part three**  
**Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1288**  
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## **THE NUCLEUS OF EVIL CHARACTER, AND HOW TO AVOID IT**

**Psalm 41:6 - “....he utters empty words, while his heart gathers iniquity....”**

The old KJV actually says “*his heart gathers iniquity unto itself....*”

That’s a fascinating phrase. This whole Psalm is a lesson on how righteous it is to minister properly and compassionately to the poor and the needy. It’s the right thing to do because it’s the thing **God** does. A brother should sustain the weak in his time of need.

In fact, one of the greatest examples of **not** being loyal when loyalty is needed most is taken right out of this forty-first Psalm. In **John 3:18**, when Jesus predicted Judas would betray Him, He quoted verse nine of this very Psalm. This is perhaps the greatest example of a friend deserting and betraying a friend in the hour when loyalty was most needed. To this day, not many parents name their son “Judas.”

But there is still much truth to be sifted out of the phrase we’re studying from **verse 6** - “**he utters empty words while his heart gathers iniquity....**” In fact, let me suggest some of the important issues actually **explained** by this short phrase:

- a) *This verse tells us how good, intelligent people find themselves captive to sin in some area of their lives.*
- b) *This verse tells us why it's so hard to convince people of the dangers of sin before they experience the pain of sin.*
- c) *Finally, this short verse tells us how to best protect ourselves if we want to remain free from sin's bondage. And we never get around that need. It's always the most important feature of any life - its capacity to remain sin-free.*

Let's look at each of these:

1) **THIS VERSE TELLS US HOW GOOD, INTELLIGENT PEOPLE FIND THEMSELVES CAPTIVE TO SIN IN SOME AREA OF THEIR LIVES**

Look at it again - **Psalm 41:6** - "...His heart gathers iniquity [unto itself]...."

The way to make a huge snowball is to make a very little one and simply roll it along the ground. It makes its own increase as it goes. You don't have to go hunting for the additional snow. You simply

create a **nucleus**. Then the nucleus will gather up into itself things that are consistent with its own nature. The little snowball makes its own **increase** as you roll it along. As long as you begin with a little, the little will organize its own momentum.

If sin didn't accumulate in precisely this same fashion we would be far too **intelligent** to embrace it. And almost everyone, Christian and pagan alike, is **morally good** enough to be, at least at first, repelled by the grossness of many sins and stay clear of them if only he could observe and feel, right up front, the **final manifestation** and **pain** and **bondage** of that sin in his heart.

In other words, if we saw the final ugliness and hurt of what seem to be small sins when we first are tempted by them, we'd all be too smart and too good to launch into them.

So how do **intelligent** people and **good** people end up with their lives all dirty and sorrowful and gummed up and bruised in sins they don't even enjoy anymore? This verse tells us.

The heart "**gathers iniquity unto itself.**" What they had planned on, in their moment of free choice, was an invitation to **one small, specific indulgence**. Nothing **seemed** that big a deal. They didn't know this sin would enter their heart as a **host** sin.

In other words, they were counting on a **controlled** situation. They were planning on sampling the fruit of **one selected concession** to their desires. That's what they saw other people doing. Everything seemed fine for them. What they weren't counting on was this uninvited "**gathering**" (that's our text's word) of diverse, conflicting, life constricting, pain producing, pushy sins attaching themselves like leeches on the walls of their minds and hearts. Only the **first** sins are invited. The rest just show up.

This is the sad, slowly discovered, secret power of all sin. Your power of choice only extends to the creation of the **nucleus** of your character. You only control the first few steps. After that, the heart - **your** heart - **my** heart - "**gathers iniquity unto itself.**" And once that process starts, the power of your will to turn this process off is about as effective as **choosing** not to physically grow old.

This is how good, intelligent people get caught in freedom killing, life-destroying sin.

2) **THIS VERSE ALSO EXPLAINS WHY IT'S SO HARD TO CONVINCЕ PEOPLE OF THE DANGER OF SIN BEFORE THEY EXPERIENCE THE PAIN OF SIN**

In any moral or spiritual endeavor, whether for good or evil, the greatest **power** lies in the **beginnings** of things. The **first** choices carry far more weight than the **last** choices, though they don't **feel** as

big when we make them. In fact, the last choices are just the unavoidable **result** of the first choices. The last choices only **seem** more important. It's always the **first** choices that set the course of a life.

Anyone who exercises spiritual leadership, be it leading a church, teaching a class, discipling a small group, or simply trying to be a godly parent, knows how hard it is to convince people of the importance of seemingly small, insignificant choices.

Human wisdom being what it is, we **all** want to make the **big** choices of life well. And we all want to avoid **big** mistakes. Small choices are not considered all that important. Small spiritual blunders are frequently almost overlooked.

Biblical wisdom, however, approaches the whole issue from the other end of the stick. The Holy Spirit wants to teach all of us that life is determined in the **small** choices. In fact, the Word teaches that if the **small** decisions are made with the Lordship of Jesus vividly in view, the **large** issues will virtually take care of themselves - **Matthew 6:33** - **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”**

Now I want to come back to our issue in this second point. Here's

why it is so hard to convince people of the **danger** of sin **before** they experience the **pain** of sin. If there is someone you love, and you want to spare them the pain and bondage and misery of sin, you really only have one hope of accomplishing it. You have to talk to them about sins that they don't see as being a big deal yet.

There's no other way to help them. And, after years of dealing with all kinds and ages of people, I can tell you what they will say to you when you try to help them. They are going to tell you it's no big deal. They're going to tell you there's no problem. If they're theologically inclined or in some area of Christian ministry they're going to call you legalistic. They're going to tell you you're making a **big** issue out of a very **little** issue.

And when they say that to you, in love, sit them down, look them square in the eye, and say to them, ***"Of course, I am. Of course I'm trying to make a big issue out of a small one. There's no other way to do this. I can't possibly talk you out of big, serious, binding sins. This is the only time anyone can help you. You can't talk someone out of trouble who's single and eight months pregnant. But perhaps I can talk you out of the kind of entertainment you're putting into your head. Perhaps I can still talk you out of the friends who are going to lead you down the wrong path. Perhaps I can still talk you out of the kind of music***

***and videos that play up sexual immorality and downplay virginity and purity. This is the only way you can ever beat down sinful addictions and maintain a pure heart. You start by giving the most serious, prayerful attention you can muster to little things - careless things - thoughtless things - the things you don't yet regret, but will deeply regret later on. Because if you can do that, you will never have to fear really big spiritual mistakes!"***

Consider this: In terms of his involvement with human beings, the very first thing the Devil did was ***hide the disastrous results of a seemingly very small disobedience to God***. Eve didn't ***shoot*** anybody. Adam didn't ***leave his wife***. Here's what they did: They ***ate*** a piece of fruit! That's it. ***And there was nothing in that action, apart from the Word of the LORD, to make it look wicked or sinister.***

Here's the measure of ***who you are*** spiritually. ***Here's the test of a healthy, holy heart!*** When the ***only*** sign of wickedness or danger in any decision is the warning from God's Word - without any external pain in your circumstances - ***yet*** - how do I react? That's the test. ***Before*** there is any outward addiction or pain, is the simple revealed will of God enough. If any Christian is going to be safe and holy in this kind of world, he will have to deal quickly and faithfully with a string of things while they are ***still so small*** they don't look like they're a big deal to anyone but the one who desires, more than anything else, to

live right in the center of God's safe and holy will. And this is hard to do because we can't imagine the kind of momentum these small compromises carry into our hearts.

This is the principle: Remember it all your life. Small choices are really the **big** ones. They **build the nucleus**. After that, the heart gathers its own iniquity **unto itself**. It's out of our hands.

3) **THIS VERSE TELLS US HOW TO PROTECT OURSELVES IF WE WANT TO REMAIN FREE FROM SIN'S PAIN AND BONDAGE**

**Psalm 41:6** - "...His heart gathers iniquity [unto itself]...."

The logic of our text is simple, though hard to implement consistently. If small bad choices create the nucleus, and if the nucleus then carries the whole heart into deeper and deeper sin, then the place to stop sinful momentum in my heart is **right at the first impulses toward small compromises**. In other words, it is life's highest wisdom to root out sin at its earliest possible entry point:

For the last year and a bit we've been working our way, verse by verse, through the entire book of Romans on Sunday night in our church. I wonder if you know the importance of the text we studied

only a few weeks ago:

**Romans 13:12-14 - “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”**

One could easily read those words as though they were calling us to an almost impossible task. Are we really expecting the addict to be finished with his addictions the moment he comes to faith? How can this be done? Imagine the will-power this would require.

We could take comfort from the fact that Paul cites strong evidence of people who *did* make such turnabouts in their behavior by the power of the Holy Spirit: **1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”**

Such is the greatness of the power of the life of the Spirit of God regenerating the human heart! But I think if you look at Paul's words in Romans once again you will see something in addition regarding how people can avoid sin's bondage:

**Romans 13:12-14 - "The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."**

Here are the thoughts of this passage:

a) ***This present era of moral darkness is coming to a close. It is almost over.*** If you don't think about this you either haven't read your New Testament, or you haven't understood it. Jesus is coming back very soon. The night will be over. Intelligent Christians orient their activities to the coming kingdom of light - not this present kingdom of darkness.

b) The way to keep clean is to ***"make no provision for the flesh."*** Repeat those words carefully in your mind. They say more

than many Christians think. Paul is *not* just saying “**Don’t get drunk,**” or “**Don’t be sexually impure.**” This belittles and misses Paul’s point entirely. Paul is saying “**Don’t ever put yourself in the kind of environment where drunkenness is a feature, don’t hang around with people who are sexually careless, don’t go places with your friends Friday night where carousing is a source of fun!**”

c) Finally, notice that Paul says people can’t really “**put on the Lord Jesus**” unless they are willing to live life miles away from worldly indulgence - **Romans 13:14** - “**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**”

Do you remember a few years back when there was such a scare about mad cow disease in England? Did you watch all the cattle being bulldozed in those huge pits and set on fire? Hundreds of thousands of animals were destroyed. Very few of them actually *had* mad cow disease. But, unless all of them were destroyed, there was a chance that one or two might have. And they weren’t going to make *any provision* for the possibility of that disease spreading.

That’s the way Christians are to deal with small, but potentially deadly sins. They make no room for them. Keep the nucleus of your heart clean. Every sin feeds and fattens other sins.

Don't give sin any momentum in your heart. And the only way to avoid sinful, self-centered choices is to allow the healing power of God's will to shape your choices while you still have some measure of power over them. Bring God into the choices that build your heart's nucleus. You may not realize it yet, but the night really is almost over. Life is better in the light of God's presence and grace and power. In fact, if you knew how good it felt to live life totally committed to the Lord, with a free and clean conscience in His presence, you'd never settle for less again.