

WHY THINGS GO WRONG AND HOW TO PUT THEM RIGHT - Part four

Teaching #1797 - Sunday, April 5th, 2015, 6 p.m.

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GETTING OUT AND STAYING OUT OF PERSONALLY DESTRUCTIVE CHOICES (continued)

Jude 24-25 - "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, {25} to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

Once you know *where problems come from* you are well on your way to correcting them and avoiding them. Many of our problems are the result of *our own sinful choices*. When we put ourselves in those situations the road out involves the same three steps that initiated the conversion process - *confession, belief* and *renewed obedience*.

Once you *get out* of those situations, the need is to *stay out*. There is provision for all believers to escape the drudgery and hopelessness of *repetition of sinful habits*. We are in the process of studying *three key passages of Scripture* geared to freeing the life from, not only the *guilt* of sin, but the *bondage* of sin.

The *Ten Commandments* will guide your *actions*. The *Beatitudes* will guide your *attitudes*. And *First Corinthians 13* will guide your *relationships*.

We looked at the first two texts last week. Let's pick up our study with the third text. Then we'll wrap up this teaching studying the relationship between prayer and staying out of destructive habits and choices.

1) A LIFE REGULATED BY THE LOVE OF GOD WILL ALWAYS BE HOLY AND PLEASING TO GOD

Romans 13:8-10 - "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. [9] For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Several things are worth noting:

- a) **The Christian *owes* love to his brother (Romans 13:8)** - That's because we have *received* God's grace and love when we least deserved it. We didn't *merit* God's love and He still gave it at His own expense. Now we *owe* that love to our brothers and sisters in exactly the same *kind*.

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**" (John 13:34). This is not Jesus' way of telling us to love each other a whole bunch. This is distinctly *Christian* love. This is *cross-rooted* love that extends grace for the distinctly Christian reason that we've *received* atoning grace for our own sins through faith in a crucified, risen Lord.

- b) **Loving actions fulfill the law of God in all my relationships - Romans 13:10** - "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

The important point here is that as I extend God's love in all my relationships, I not only benefit those whom I love, *I keep my heart pure*. I fulfill the law of God in this very big part of my life.

But not just any definition of love will do. The kind of love that fulfills the law isn't *Hallmark's* love. It's *Scriptural* love. Only love *defined on God's terms* will fulfill God's law in my heart.

That's where **1 Corinthians 13** comes in. Love is defined *morally* rather than *emotionally*. Scriptural love isn't *romantic* or *sentimental*. It's rooted in the *will*.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 - "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love

never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

LOVE IS	LOVE IS NOT	LOVE DOES	LOVE DOES NOT
patient(4)	jealous(4)	rejoice with the truth(6)	brag(4)
kind(4)	arrogant(4)	bear all things(7)	act unbecomingly(5)
	provoked(5)	believe all things(7)	seek its own(5)
		hope all things(7)	take into account a wrong suffered(5)
		endure all things(7)	rejoice in unrighteousness(6)
		never fail(8)	

Again, the importance of this little table is its ability to show that Scriptural love is **primarily directed at the human will**. Far more terms are used to describe love's **actions** than its **definition**. Most of Paul's words are given to explain what love **does and does not do**, rather than **how love feels**.

Not one marriage would end in divorce if all partners were fully demonstrating this kind of love to their spouses. Parents and children would live in harmony. There would never be a church split. And the counselors offices would usually be empty.

This text teaches me something I don't want to hear in the face of relational problems. It tells me much of my problem is solvable without changing anyone but me. Most people want to change **others** or their own **circumstances**. This passage puts the emphasis on my own **actions and responses**.

2) THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Almost all Christians know these famous words:

“O, what peace we often forfeit
O, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.”

Many Christians look at daily prayer as a **discipline** they ought to observe. In other words, somehow they know God **wants** them to pray, so they feel they **should**. A strong prayer life will rarely be built on that kind of attitude. You will pray like you eat liver - because it's good for you.

The reason those words from “What a Friend in Jesus” are so important is **they address the proper attitude for coming to God in prayer**. It's not primarily for **Him** (though He does love us and wants communion with us). Prayer is for **us**.

Without daily prayer we will live with **“needless pain.”** That is, we will fall into problems of our own making. Consider these Scriptural provisions for those who will pray:

- a) **Prayer will provide strength in the face of temptation - Matthew 26:41 - “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

Temptation will come to everyone. Prayer will keep you from **entering** temptation. It will keep you out of the clutches of the enemy. **But the strength to resist temptation isn't magically found right at the moment of trial**. You can't just pull resisting strength out of a rabbit's hat. Strength to resist temptation is laid up long before, like the muscles developed by hours of work out in the gym. Prayer builds up the muscles of faith gradually. The

strength to say “no” to temptation is stored up **long before** the actual battle arrives.

- b) **Prayer will help you live in fullness of joy - John 16:24 - “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”**

Nothing will build your faith and confidence in God like seeing Him respond in answer to your prayer. It produces a joy that nothing else can. It may also deepen your joy by teaching you to see answers you weren't expecting when you started asking.

- c) **Prayer will build perseverance and strength in the Lord - Isaiah 40:30-31 - “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”**

That word “**weariness**” is the old Scriptural word for what we call **stress**. Stress doesn't come from added pressure. It comes from subtracted prayer time.

Again, notice that verb, “**wait**.” It's a passing-of-time word. We all know what it is to wait for something. “Waiting on the Lord” means sustaining focus on Him. It means pushing back doubt and sometimes anger. It means keeping your desire rooted in God Himself while you wait.

- d) **God heals affliction in response to prayer - James 5:13a - “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray....”**

Is everyone instantly healed who prays. No, I don't think so. But I am sure of this. Far more healings **would** take place if more people **would** pray. In other words, for every situation of non-healing that I can't explain, there are probably dozens of people whom God wanted to heal, but they didn't ask. They looked elsewhere.

- e) **God will give wisdom to those who will ask in prayer - James 1:5 - “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”**

Here is a promise specifically aimed at helping Christians **stay out of the pain of sinful choices**. It takes wisdom to choose well. God gives wisdom to those who pray for it.

I pray this regularly. I don't know how to do everything in a church this size. Every month I hear of pastors and churches messing things up. And they're usually smarter than I. I can't tell you the number of times I've prayed in my office, “**God, keep me from making mistakes I don't even see on the horizon yet.**”

This is such an important point. Reading God's Word is absolutely essential for **knowing** the right thing to do. But **knowing** isn't the same as **doing**. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to produce a heart that is **willing and anxious** to yield to the authority of the Scriptures (**remember the effects of the fall and our sinful nature?**).

Wisdom is the ability - the **wisdom** to apply - what we know to real life temptations and choices. It will only come on our knees

3) **CONSCIENCE, SELF-CONTROL, AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN AVOIDING SINFUL CHOICES**

There are many speakers and teachers to promote **self-help and wholeness**. They will emphasize the role of conscience and being true to your inner self. There are also Christians who talk about **being led by the Holy Spirit**, but who never address the Scriptural role of conscience and self-control. Both positions lack Biblical balance.

The Scriptures constantly put these three ingredients **together - conscience, self-control and the power of the Holy Spirit**. Let's quickly go over how this inward process works:

- a) **Conscience** - Conscience is God given. It is the inner nudge away from sinful choices. It is given to **all** people - Christians and non-Christians alike - to provide moral sense and direction. It's part of the **image of God** in human beings. Animals are **driven** by **instinct**. People are **led** by **conscience**.

Conscience can only function properly in God's hands. The Bible is clear that if conscience is **untrained by God's**

revelation, and if it is *repeatedly ignored* when it speaks, it will cease to function in the way God intended:

Romans 1:28-32 - “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God ***gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.*** [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] ***Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.***”

Remember, we’re studying the relationship between *conscience*, *self-control*, and the *Holy Spirit*. When these people, *who knew what was right* (conscience), *gave in to their fallen desires* (self-control), they lost the help and *enablement of God to function righteously* (the Holy Spirit).

- b) ***Self-control and the Holy Spirit*** - It’s important to notice what the Holy Spirit *will* do in my life, and what He will *not* do. The Scriptures make these points very clear:

Galatians 5:16-17 - “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] ***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.***”

That’s the battle we all face. We are all aware of something pulling us in one direction and something pulling us in another direction at the same time. There’s a plus and a minus taking place. It’s the battle between *self* and the *Holy Spirit* for control in the heart and mind.

But here’s the important point. *The Holy Spirit won’t do His work until I do mine*. There is something the Holy Spirit will not do for me:

Galatians 5:24-25 - “And those who belong to Christ Jesus ***have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*** [25] ***If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.***”

The Holy Spirit will not crucify the flesh for you. You probably can’t help some desires from manifesting, but you *can* determine which ones you will *feed* and which you will *starve and reject*. *You* have to do that. You have to *renounce*. You have to *resist*. You have to *plant the flag and choose the Lordship of Jesus*.

But if you *will* do that, here’s what the Holy Spirit will do for you. *He will give the strength to fulfill those godly desires*. He will *bring the Word to your mind*. He will *create a deeper appetite for the things of God*.

So this relationship between *conscience*, *self-control*, and the *Holy Spirit* is more than just human resolve and will-power. *But it’s never less*. You must choose. *Once you commit your way unto the Lord, He will bring it to pass*.

So we’ve seen that the *choice* - the *decision*, good or bad - is the last part of a long process. We’ve been studying how to *stay out* of the problems of sinful choices. *Get out* of sinful situations by *confession, belief, and renewed obedience* to the Lordship of Jesus.

Then *stay out* of those same situations by *regulating your life by the Word* (the ten commandments, the beatitudes, and 1 Corinthians 13) - that will cover *actions, attitudes, and relationships*.

Also, *be a person of regular, daily prayer*. That will keep your life from the “*needless pain*” the hymn writer talked about. And finally, remember the crucial relationship between *conscience, self-control*, and the *inward work of the Holy Spirit*. Do your part - *commit* to doing your part, *before* you expect the Holy Spirit to do His.

More on this next week.