

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

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WHY SOME PEOPLE WILL NEVER BECOME HOLY

Proverbs 22:13 - "The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!"

Before we look at this fascinating verse, let's do a bit of a review. We're still studying what to do with problems of our own making - that is, ***problems that are the result of sinful choices***. Not all problems are the result of sinful choices. We saw that in the first study in this series. We need to honestly and carefully decide just what is the **root** of the problem we have.

But, for now, we're still studying problems that come from our sinful choices. That is one of the four roots of problems we defined.

In our last study we looked at the **three key texts of Scripture** designed to guide our moral choices. We looked at the **Ten Commandments**, the **Beatitudes**, and **First Corinthians 13**. The Ten Commandments will guide your **actions**. The Beatitudes will guide your **attitudes**. And First Corinthians 13 will guide your **relationships**.

Then we closed off our last session looking at the importance of **prayer** in the solving of problems. Remember? "**O, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.**" We looked at the precious capacity for God's delivering and keeping power being released in specific points of need as we call upon Him faithfully in prayer.

Finally, we studied the role of **self control, conscience**, and the **Holy Spirit** in freeing the life from the bondage of sinful personal choices. The important point here was that there are things the Holy Spirit **will** do, and there are things the Holy Spirit **will not** do in the sanctifying process.

The Holy Spirit will give you the power to keep your commitment to the Lord **as long as you crucify the flesh and its fallen desires**. But He will never crucify the flesh for you. So the purifying of the life is **not just the result of human will-power**. But it is also true that the Holy Spirit will do nothing **apart from the exercise of your own will**.

That's where we've come to so far in our study. Tonight I want to consider **why many people will never be able to make this all work in their lives**. I suppose there are many different reasons. But I want to give special attention to one of the **most common reasons for failure in getting out and staying out of the pain and bondage of sinful choices**.

1) **THERE IS SOMETHING IN OUR HEARTS THAT FIGHTS AGAINST OUR INITIAL EFFORTS IN APPLYING GOD'S WORD HONESTLY TO OUR PROBLEMS**

Let's look at our text again: **Proverbs 22:13** - "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!'"

Now, what in the world does this strange verse have to do with experiencing victory and power in the battle with sin and darkness? **Everything**. Let me explain why:

This is a verse about a man who won't go outside to work, or get his food, or fulfill any other obligations. He's trapped in his house. And life is shrinking all around him. He may passively **wish** his life was different. But it's not going to **be** different. And he's blind to the real reason. He's **made** himself blind to the real reason.

The proverb doesn't seem to read properly, does it? "**The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside - I shall be slain in the streets!'**" That's not what I would have expected it to say. I would have expected it to say, "**The coward says, 'There is a lion outside - I shall be slain in the streets!'**"

Certainly we would all understand the phobia - the irrational fear of a lion - coming from the heart of a panic stricken coward. The coward and his fear seem to go together. Even if there **is** no lion in the street his **fear** of a lion could be debilitating.

But the writer of this proverb knew what he was doing. The Holy Spirit planted these ideas very carefully, with a particular lesson in mind. This verse is not about a coward expressing the fear that is honestly in his heart. This verse is

about something entirely different. ***It's about a man who has a problem - a spiritual problem - but who, instead of finding a solution to his problem, creates an explanation to avoid solving his problem.***

This man ***deflects attention away from his real problem (laziness) by creating an illusion (a lion in the street)***. Now, he ***does*** have a real spiritual problem. But his heart is such that the greatest solution in the whole world will be of no use to him. He can't ***find*** a solution for the same reason the bank robber can't ***find*** the police.

He doesn't ***want*** to solve his problem. In fact, he's set all of the creative powers of his mind in a totally different direction. He's manufacturing illusions - diversions that will deflect people's attention - even his own - from the real nature of his sin. This man is ***avoiding*** a solution to his problem while pretending he's ***found*** the solution to his problem.

This man may be ***lazy***, but he's not ***stupid***. He knows no one will approve of this man staying in the house all day just because he is ***lazy***. But a ***lion in the streets*** - who would blame him for staying inside to save his life? All the creative powers of his intellect have been hijacked by his sinful heart. He's the picture of a man working against his own spiritual soundness.

This is what Paul was describing in **Romans 1:18** - "[18] ***For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.***" ***"Suppressing the truth"*** - that's it exactly. This man ***could*** change. But he won't because the change is too demanding.

Thomas Edisson once said, ***"Most people miss wonderful opportunities because opportunities always appear in coveralls and look like work."*** That's this man's real problem.

If we would be truly wise - if we would truly grow in beautiful, simple, holy devotion to our Lord - we need to understand how our own hearts usually work. If we aren't very careful and prayerful, our hearts - ***our desires*** - will always seek to ***bend the way our minds perceive reality***. Our desires will always ***exploit our minds to justify what our hearts enjoy***.

Let me try to say that in another way. Do you remember how we saw that the Holy Spirit would empower His people for holiness as they crucified the flesh with it's fallen desires? Do you remember that even the Holy Spirit wouldn't be able to help the person who refused to do his or her part in confronting the desires of the flesh and putting them to death?

This is another way of saying the same thing. ***It's a mistake to simply pray and ask God to make you a holier person***. By mistake, I don't mean ***wrong*** as much as I mean ***incomplete***.

Here's the mistake: It's a mistake to think that our own hearts are ***neutral*** - that they will naturally or easily ***incline*** in the direction of our understanding of what God wants us to do. They won't. If your heart is lazy, your mind will conclude there is a lion in the streets. ***That's the way sin neutralizes our growth in holiness.***

That's why Adam blames Eve for his sin. That's why American Presidents don't know the meaning of the word ***"is"***. That's why intelligent Christian people can't remember when a person is or is not married. That's why Christians can justify immorality and greed in their lives.

Never forget this vital principle: ***Truth is always held hostage by unrighteous commitments in the heart - John 3:20 - "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."***

John Piper sums it all up with these brilliant words: ***"Doing the evil we love makes us hostile to the light of truth which will expose the evil and rob us of its fleeting pleasures. In this condition the mind becomes a factory of half-truths, equivocations, sophistries, evasions, and lies - anything to protect the evil desires of the heart from exposure and destruction."***

All of this means the lazy man in the house is not going to get anywhere - even if he sits in the house praying and reading his Bible - until he stops in his tracks and says, ***"There is no lion in the streets. My problem isn't outside. It's inside. I'm lazy. And I'm not facing the truth about myself. God forgive me and God help me!"*** All the counseling, and all the information in the world won't change his heart until that confession comes from his lips.

Fortunately, Paul says that kind of confession, and that kind of spiritual transformation of heart is possible: **Romans 6:17** - **“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed....”**

Notice, you and I have to be ***obedient from the heart.*** That’s the kind of honesty, the kind of repentance, the kind of dealing with what’s deeply hidden in our own skins, that the Holy Spirit will work with. Everything else turns into self-deception - the worst kind of darkness and bondage.

If you want to walk in the light and power of the truth, here’s what to do:

- a) ***Know the truth*** - Only truth can save a soul from the deceptive power of sin and Satan - **John 8:32** - **“....and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

This is so basic. Truth unknown is useless to you. You and I simply have no capacity to avoid the ravages of sin and Satan apart from knowing the liberating truth of God’s Word. That’s why the Bible is more precious than fine gold. Fine gold can’t free your soul from sin. God’s Word can.

- b) ***Flee the counsel of the ungodly*** - This is the negative side of the first positive truth. It’s not enough to fill your life with God’s Word. You must also ***make room*** for a love for the truth to grow in your life. That will never happen until we ***eliminate the competition for the mind’s attention.***

Psalm 1:1 - **“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers....”**

Remember, the Psalmist has not yet even given instruction about filling the life with God’s Word. He won’t mention that until the second verse: **Psalm 1:2** - **“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.”**

The Psalmist is really saying something quite stunning. He’s saying to me (and to you), ***“Don, if you aren’t going to quit watching lousy videos and junky television programs, if you don’t see anything wrong with filling your mind with songs whose lyrics are the exact opposite of the Spirit of God, then don’t even bother reading your Bible! Nothing good will come of it.”***

The Word of God must be ***embraced*** to such an extent that it shapes the diet of the rest of the life. You can’t just ***add the Word of God*** to the rest of your daily mental intake. A carnal frame of mind is useless to grasp spiritual truth. And our world is dedicated to creating carnal brains.

We’ve been considering this text in my Christian Education class. Note the ***progression*** of danger in these verses. It begins with what we ***listen*** to. It moves on to the casual ***company*** we mingle with. And it ends with a life of total rejection of truth once held.

And the point - the really hard point - David makes is if sin is going to be effectively dealt with in my life I have to give it attention while it still looks ***insignificant***. If you want to remain holy you will have to look ridiculously cautious to most people. Even in the church.

- c) ***Resist the very first temptation to justify sin*** - Here’s a safe rule of thumb: ***The first temptation to excuse sin is the only one you will resist.*** After the first step of deception is taken, sin gains more momentum than you will ever turn around.

Once you tell others that the reason you’re not going outside is there’s a lion in the streets, you’re never going to admit the real problem is laziness.

But if you can ever muster the presence of mind - the spiritual wisdom - to catch the rebellion of your mind, ***before you make your commitment to sin pronounced and public***, you have a greater chance of turning to the truth and finding spiritual freedom. Once you take your stand in persistent, justified sin, it’s very difficult to change your mind.

Remember, sin indulged in not only increases guilt and judgement (which it does), it also ***hardens the heart against any further work of softening grace the Holy Spirit delights to give.***

So if you want to escape the pain of sinful choices, if you want to find freedom and power to both ***get out*** and ***stay out*** of the painful clutches of the enemy, remember the Holy Spirit only traffics in truth. Let somebody else manufacture the lions in the street.

Your first step toward Jesus may not be brilliant. It may not seem overwhelmingly powerful. But none of that is what counts most. More than anything, your first step toward holiness and deliverance and freedom ***must be absolutely honest.***

God will smile and take you farther than you ever thought possible.