

Introduction:

1. In our first couple of lessons we noticed that holiness is our responsibility. If we are going to live up to God's calling, "Be holy for I am holy," then we must take some decisive action. Sometimes we try to excuse our responsibility by saying that we have been praying to God for motivation or to conquer. But God does not wave magic wands so that we do not have to do anything. We must take the action and ask God to help us on the path to holiness. God will not be blamed for our failures.

2. The scriptures tell us what actions we must take. "So then, brothers, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:12-13). Consider Paul's words in Colossians 3:5, "Therefore, put to death whatever in you is worldly: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry." Both passages tell us that we are to put to death the deeds of the flesh. To put these things to death does not mean that we will not be tempted. Instead, God is telling us that we can kill the power and strength of these things in our lives. These things do not have to have power over us. Sin is trying to rule over us and we have been empowered by God to kill the power of these worldly things.

3. In our lesson today, we are simply going to consider how we can kill the strength of these sins that have power over us. As we explain how to conquer sin, we are by no means saying that these are easy steps. However, if we are going to put sin to death, these are necessary actions we must take in our pursuit of holiness.

I. How To Know Right From Wrong

A. Obedience is necessary

1. We must start with the obvious: we are required to do God's will. If we do not understand this concept and fully appreciate the necessity of doing God's will, we will never put sin to death.

2. Simply start by saying to yourself: no more excuses. No more blaming others for our problems and no more looking for another to finger the blame. No one said that doing God's will would always be easy to obey and no one said that others would not put stumbling blocks in our way. But it is still our responsibility to put to death the deeds of the flesh. So how can we know what is right and what is wrong. In the middle of temptation, it is not simple to go pick up your Bible and start reading. By then, it is too late and you presented with a decision that must be made instantaneously whether to follow through or not. Bible reading can keep us from temptations. But we need to have a game plan for how to know what we ought to do when Satan puts temptation before us. Paul used some questions in 1 Corinthians that can help us in our quest for holiness.

B. "Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is helpful" (1 Corinthians 6:12)

1. Is it helpful? There are many things that in and of themselves are not sinful. There are places we can go that are not sinful. There are things that we can do that are not sinful

according to the scriptures. But are they beneficial for us? Simply because something is not an overt sin does not mean that what we are about to do is good for us.

2. When making decisions in our lives we must ask, "Is this helpful to me spiritually?" "Is this helpful to me physically?" "Is this helpful to me emotionally?" If we answer no to any of these questions, we ought to avoid it. In Corinth, we see that people were stating that since a certain action was not clearly defined as sin that it was okay to do. Paul says that we cannot only ask if it is sinful or not. We also need to ask if it is beneficial and helpful. We have people in our lives that may not be sinful to talk to, but they sure are not beneficial or helpful to us spiritually. We need to steer clear of such people who can ruin us. There may be television shows that are not overtly sinful, but can certainly be considered as not helpful to what we are trying to accomplish as Christians. We must cut out things that are harmful.

C. "Everything is permissible for me, but I will not be brought under the control of anything." (1 Corinthians 6:12)

1. Does it bring me under its power? This is another important question in our effort to pursue holiness and put sin to death. There are many things that we have classified as a gray area, meaning the scriptures do not directly say such an action is a sin, but we see it can have a negative impact on people.

2. As Christians, we are not to be brought under the power of anything except the will of God. We usually use a different word to describe being under the power of something: addiction. We cannot be addicted to anything but God. We are to be able to give up anything that would cause us to divert our focus from God. There have been many topics that have been debated for many years if it is acceptable for a Christian to use, like drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gambling and the like. Instead, I believe we would do well to apply this question that Paul posed to the Corinthians: will it bring me under its power? Is this an activity that has the ability to bring me under its power or develop an addiction? If what we are doing has such power, we should not subject ourselves to it for we may become enslaved to it.

D. "Therefore, if food causes my brother to fall, I will never again eat meat, so that I will not cause my brother to fall." (1 Corinthians 8:13)

1. Does it hurt others? There are many activities that we believe are innocent and pure, yet if we think long enough, we would realize hurt others. Paul said that he would partake in none of his liberties if doing so caused another to sin. There are many things that may be morally neutral, but by engaging in that activity we are doing something detrimental to another. There are many activities that fall into this category.

2. Have we ever thought that we hurt others by not coming together for our assemblies? We not only hurt the other Christians who assemble here but we hurt the work of saving souls when visitors come on Wednesday night or Sunday night and there are only a handful of people here.

3. This is also a good question to consider before we speak. Will the words that we say be considered offensive or hurtful to those who are listening? Are the words we are speaking hurtful about someone else who is not present? We can hide behind our mantle of

“we are just speaking the truth” but the majority of the time we are engaging in gossip that hurts people when the information comes back to them.

E. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

1. Does it glorify God? This is quite a broad statement made by Paul concerning our actions. Notice that there is nothing inherently sins by eating food and drinking liquids. But even still, this is not enough. We must ask ourselves if what we are doing is glorifying God. We must do all things to show the example of Christ in our lives. We cannot do anything that would discredit the work of God or cause others to blaspheme the name of God. Remember the nation of Israel was condemned because their poor actions caused the Gentiles to blaspheme God. We also will be under God’s condemnation if we engage in activities that will cause others to say “if that is what a Christian is, count me out.”

2. Let us return to our social questions. Instead of arguing the merit of drinking, drugs, smoking, gambling and so forth, let us apply this question. Does participating in these things bring glory to the name of God or not? If I go to an unbelievers house to teach them the gospel and they see put out my cigarette, have I glorified God in this unbeliever’s mind? If I go visit a person and bring my half-drunk can of beer in, will I discredit my efforts?

3. We have to see that is not always about arguing how much alcohol is considered drunkenness or if our body is a temple to the Lord is it a sin to smoke. We have to think beyond these elements. Paul said if it would cause another to stumble, though it may be his liberty, he would not do it. Paul said if our actions do not bring glory and honor to God’s name, it cannot be done. Paul said that if the action or decision was not helpful, it should not be done. Paul said if our actions would hurt others, it should not be done. Paul said if the activity might bring me under its power, I ought to avoid it.

4. Consider these four questions and see that this gives us greater guidelines that we are often looking for concerning what is pleasing to God and what is not. This was the great conviction that Paul had which he was trying to impart to his Corinthian readers. So also, we need to strengthen our faith and develop our convictions so that we too can be like Paul in these matters. Let us not simply ask is it sinful, but apply these others test that Paul applied.

II. Make A Commitment

A. Time to get serious

1. Jesus said, “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). This is a serious commitment to holiness that the Lord was calling us to. Jesus said that we must sacrifice many things, in fact, everything to be His disciple.

2. We need to be serious with ourselves and honest with ourselves. Ask yourself this question, am I willing to give up a certain practice or habit that is keeping me from holiness? Many times this is where we fall short because our answer is no. The truth of the matter is that we are not willing to give up our sinful practice. We may say that we want to

but we are unwilling to make a serious commitment to change our lives. We hope it will go away and we refuse to commit to God that we will end our sinful activity.

3. Unfortunately, many times we have developed the “just one more time” syndrome. We justify our actions because this is going to be the very last time. Just one more lustful look, just one more day of not reading our Bibles or praying, just one more lie, just one more deception, just one more word of gossip, just one more.... And it goes on and on and on. We are lying to ourselves if we think that we are going to change next time. We continue to compound our problems by believing that things will be better tomorrow when we are not taking action today. Proverbs 27:20 says, “Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and people’s eyes are never satisfied.” Friends, our one more look never satisfies because we have to do it again. Our “just one more time” syndrome does not work because our lusts and desires are never full, just like the grave can never be full.

4. We must make an important realization this morning. Every time we say yes to temptation, we make it harder to say no the next time. Every time we say yes to temptation, we make it harder for us to overcome this area of sin in our lives. The longer we continue in a sin, the worse we make it for ourselves to try to get out. This should want to make us stop because we are only making it harder for ourselves. We think we are doing well because this will be the last time, but in reality we added a few more degrees of difficulty to reaching holiness.

B. Make it our aim not to sin

1. Instead of saying “just one more time,” we need to adopt a new strategy. We need to make it our focus and aim not to sin. Too often our aim is simply not to sin very much. Many times our aim is to not commit the “bigger” sins. God has not called us to such a commitment. God has called to make it our aim to not sin.

2. We must remember that we are in war against Satan and his forces. Can you imagine a soldier going into battle with the aim of “not getting hit very much?” A soldier with that aim will not live long. Yet how often are we like such a soldier going into the war and having the goal of allowing to get hit by some bullets! The goal is to avoid the fiery darts of Satan at all costs. If we go in with a half-hearted attitude and lack of commitment, then we will be hit with temptations over and over again and fall repeatedly. We have the responsibility, we have the choice, and we have the power by God to overcome any temptation that may come. Let us make it our aim not to sin.

Conclusion:

1. Let us make a new resolve for our lives today to not sin. Jonathan Edwards said it this way, “Resolved, never to do anything which I would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.” That is a good resolve and a truthful resolution because this may be the last hour of our lives. We do not know when the Lord will come and we do not know when it will be our time to leave this world. Let us never do anything that will put our spiritual lives and eternal life in jeopardy.

2. Let us ask these four questions before every decision we make: (1) is it helpful, (2) will it bring me under its control, (3) does it hurt others, (4) does it glorify God. Only if we are

diligent with these thoughts of Paul can we break our sinful habits and break the power and strength of sin in our lives. HCSB

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