

DEALING WITH HABITUAL SINS -- BEFORE THEY DEAL WITH YOU

Hebrews 12:1-3 is a powerful portion of Scripture. There is much here to be considered. So -- so much has been written about avoiding wrongdoing. Getting victory over habitual wrongdoing takes commitment, a little like acquiring a Black Belt. Oh - yes, quoting Scripture helps. Reading Scripture helps. Understanding doctrine really helps. Also, hanging with people of Christ-centered faith and avoiding certain people, places and things help the emotional and physical triggers from becoming habitual wrongdoing, addiction traps.

Please, remember the purpose for my writing you this letter is just to come alongside you and be a helper of your joy. You have been blessed with maintaining Christ-centered relationships throughout your life. Soon, you will be surrounded with an overwhelming sea of ungodly and anti-godly philosophers who are going to tell you that there are no absolutes, no God and no such a thing as sin...

*"Therefore, let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and **the sin which does so easily beset us**, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfector of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls."*

May I ask you a question? Has anyone of us really ever escaped the revolving- door syndrome of besetting sins: Confession - repentance - confession - repentance, etc., etc.? I know that we sincerely can thank God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will deliver us from all sin indulgences on the day of our glorification, when we depart from our earth-suits (Romans 7). More importantly, how about the now moment of our lives? We all certainly do struggle to have victory over besetting transgressions! Every TRUE Christian living in an earth-suit deals with similar besetting transgressions...

I want us to focus on only one phrase of great importance. That phrase is found in Hebrews 12:1. It refers to "the sin which so easily entangles us." It is the nature of mankind, even the nature of every believer, to be easily entangled in sin. It happens so naturally. These are the transgressions which we commit, confess and, then, commit again and, then, confess and, then, commit again and, then, confess -- the "revolving-door" sins of our lives. Some sins fall into this category, but, in general, all sin seems to have its way with us. What do you think? There are certain *transgressions* which more easily entangle each of us than other ones. Each of us has certain propensities and desires for specific kinds of wrongdoing.

WINNING THE BATTLE OVER SIN'S ADDICTIONS?

First of all, why does the addiction to wrongdoing seem to be triumphant??? Sin has great power over our flesh. Sin is deep in our earth-suits -- our flesh. The reason it so easily entangles us is that it has awesome power, strength and force. It exerts strong influence on our will. It exerts strong influence on our emotions. It exerts strong influence on our affections. Galatians 5:17 says, "*The flesh sets its desire against the spirit.*" They are in opposition and contrary to one another, so that you may not do the things you please. The flesh, our earth-suits, are a captured enemy by sin. Sin exerts tremendous power, tremendous strength against our flesh. It is a very powerful force. It finds in our flesh a very willing supporter, a very receptive environment.

Wrongdoing easily entangles us because it is so close. More than just forcing its way from the outside powerfully on our flesh, it forces its way on our flesh from the inside of us outwardly, from within our earth-suit. In fact, sin is in our most inner being. We can become an isolated monk! I considered the monk idea when I lived in Brentwood, California, back in the "mid-60's," but I was not educated enough. I could have sat in a cave and navel-gazed. I would still be dealing with sin. Jeremiah 13:23 says, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Or the leopard his spots?*" I used to do a huge amount of external martial art workout to become an acceptable SELF-DISCIPLINED & SELF-CONFIDENT PERSON. That had absolutely NO Power over my besetting transgressions of that time!!!

The point being, we can no more change the internal sinfulness that is a part of our lives than the leopard can change his spots or the Ethiopian can change the color of his skin. It is a part of what we are. Sin is very powerful and finds an extremely willing partner in our flesh, because our flesh is fallen. Our flesh, itself, has propensities toward wrongdoing. Sin is very close. Our heart, says Jeremiah 17:9, "*Is deceitful; it is more deceitful than everything else and is desperately sick and wicked.*"

What makes sin easily entangled within our lives is that sin does not remain separate from our earth-suits, but it mingles in all our motives and all our actions. Sin is controlling. Sin is emphatically, internally connected with our flesh. This is why I believe that knowing who the real you is, according the Word of God, is so essential to having victory over besetting sins! YES, you are a UNIQUE, UNREPEATABLE, MIRACLE of God. The REAL YOU IS A SPIRIT who lives in an earth suit, that has a mind, emotions and will.

Sin has a way of weaving itself into the framework of all our duties and all our motives and all our thoughts and all our actions. It entangles itself with our purposes and our plans. In fact, even our very best deeds are mixed with sin. In Romans 7, Paul cries out, "O wretched man that I am." Why? Because no matter how hard he tried, he could not disentangle himself from sin. It is interwoven into everything in our lives. The best that we do is somehow corrupted in some way, large or small, by a taint of SELF-WILL OR SELF-PLEASURE OR SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT OR SELF- RIGHTEOUSNESS, OR SELF-GAIN OR WHATEVER... This thought is a huge pill for us all to swallow!

HUMILITY BEFORE HONOR... HOW DO WE DO THAT???

"Let us lay aside the sin which so easily entangles us." Now the question comes... how do we do that??? 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, *"Let us cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh."* Ephesians 4:22 says, *"Laying aside the old self which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit."* Romans 6:12 says, *"Don't let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lust."* 1 Peter 2:1 says, *"Lay aside all evil."* 1 Peter 2:11 says, *"Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."*

The question comes...how do you have victory over wrongdoing? Yes. It is the work of the Spirit in you. If you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Victory over sin is the Holy Spirit working in you and through you as you yield to the Spirit.

VICTORY OVER BESETTING SIN INSIDE US???

We Christians, generally speaking, tend to come before God with our accumulated transgressions from the last time that we confessed, but with really very little change in the pattern of sinning. That's because, while we want to confess our transgressions and have the confidence that God is faithful and just to forgive them, we don't take the necessary steps to live victoriously. Every time we come before the Throne-room of God, is there a decreased load of wrongdoing? Is the list a little shorter because we're dealing with it on a day-to-day basis? We're not just accumulating sin at the same rate, dumping it all, as it were, on Christ, and receiving His forgiveness in those great moments of confession, but also seeing no diminishing or decreasing pattern of sin in the day-to-day routine of our life.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR VICTORY OVER BESETTING SINS

Number one: Don't underestimate the seriousness of our transgression! I sincerely think that there are some awesomely powerful principles that assist us in laying aside besetting sins or sin. I think the major reason we don't deal with our failing, strongly and firmly, is because we underestimate the seriousness of wrongdoing to God, to us, to those with whom we fellowship, to the church and to the unbelievers. Our wrongdoing steals our joy. Our wrongdoing ruins fellowship with God. Our wrongdoing diminishes fruitfulness. Our wrongdoing robs us of peace. Our wrongdoing draws something away from our service to God. Our offense lessens our effectiveness in evangelism. Our failing hinders our prayers. Our wrongdoing brings the serious discipline of God. We need to understand the seriousness of our sin. It violates, first and foremost, our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and our relationship with significant others and distorts our personal identity with Christ. Consider this statement. It has been said, *"There is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest calamity, the greatest hardship, the greatest injustice, or loss... There is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest misery."* That is profound to my thinking. How about yours?

We look at our lives and, generally speaking, we are overwhelmingly distressed about our calamities, hardships, miseries and mental sufferings, but we are extremely tolerant about our transgressions. We do not understand that there is more evil in the least sin than the greatest calamity or hardship. A calamity, a certain misery, is not necessarily sin. **Sin is sin.** James 4:17 says, *"Therefore to him that knows to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* We each need to treat our sin seriously. It dishonors God. It abuses God's mercy toward us. It despises grace. It presumes on forgiveness. It defiles worship, service and fellowship. It stains and taints and poisons and destroys everything good and holy. To hate sin is to become a friend of the Eternal God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

Number two: There is another important principle that needs to be understood if we are to lay aside transgressions. We need strongly to purpose and promise God to try not to sin. Taking a solemn vow and saying, "God, I do not want to sin. I don't want to break Your law. I don't want to grieve Your Spirit. I don't want to dishonor the name of Your Son which I bear." The Holy Spirit brings our vow to our memory and empowers us. Psalm 119:106, *"I have sworn and I will confirm it that I will keep Thy righteous ordinances."* Unless or until we have that kind of resolution in our life, we will find it much easier to be entangled in sin. In fact, I believe it is that kind of heart-felt purpose and bold affirmation that is at the root of all holy living. Unless or until we make that kind of conscious commitment to the Lord, we are going to battle the same things over and over and be continuously defeated by the sin that dwells within our earth-suits. Remember who the **REAL YOU IS!** You are a Spirit that lives in an earth-suit, that has a mind -- that thinks, an emotion -- that feels and a will -- that chooses. We need to exercise our choices!!!

There is a great verse, in Psalm 119:32, *"I shall run the way of Thy commandments for Thou wilt enlarge my heart."* What I think it means is that God strengthens our heart. **IT STARTS IN THE HEART!** Think of a runner -- a very excellent illustration for you. Runners very often have an enlarged heart muscle because of the tremendous development of their running ability and the strengthening of their heart to keep pumping all that is needed to that body as it pushes itself beyond normal limits. The psalmist is saying, *"I will run in the way of Your commandments, because YOU have enlarged my heart, You've given me a heart for obedience."*

That is the kind of purpose that is absolutely essential. **THERE'S A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SIN DWELLING IN US AND SIN ENTERTAINED BY US. THERE'S A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SIN REMAINING / HARBORED AND SIN PRESERVED.** To lay aside sin means to purpose and promise God to obey -- a firm promise... "I promise You that I will obey You."

Number three: Be suspicious of your own spirituality... "Let the one who stands take heed lest he fall." Job said, *"I made a covenant with my eyes. How then can I gaze on a virgin?"* He said, *"I must be careful where I look, because I don't trust myself. I must start with what I see, because I surely don't trust myself."*

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." We have to be watching for sin's subtle movements within our own supposed spirituality. Our heart is, as noted, *desperately wicked, extremely deceitful*. The seducing emotions of our own hearts can sometimes rise out of the moments of our most focused spirituality. Because we are suspicious of our own spirituality, we cannot trust it. We need to understand that, except for the grace of God, we would fall into any and every sin, because we can be deceived so very easily.

Number four: We MUST resist the first rising desires of the flesh and its pleasures.... We don't try to stop the process of wrongdoing down the track near the end. Victory over besetting sins MUST be stopped at the beginning of the thought process. Victory over every kind of sin habit or addiction is won or lost at the threshold of our minds.

James notes for us a certain process, *"People are tempted when they're carried away and enticed by their own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin."* We want to stop it at the point of conception, not try to stop it at the point of birth. There is a vicious cycle that sin-addiction follows. We need to stop sin at conception! After sin has been conceived and run through a certain period of pregnancy, we will give birth to the sin. We don't try to stop it at birth; but rather, we resist and oppose wrongdoing at the first rising desire of the flesh and its pleasures. Sin comes to us promising many kinds of pleasures. WE NEED TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT OUR GOAL IS NOT TO PLEASE OURSELVES BUT TO PLEASE THE LORD.

Number five: Meditate on the Word. *Psalm 37:31* is a wonderful verse, *"The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip."* When a heart is controlled by the Word of God, the footing is secured. Eph. 6:10-18. I remember in my early conversion to the Gospel of Christ, learning Psalm 119:9. I dearly wanted it to give me victory over the flesh. *"How can a young man keep his way pure?"* How can you lay aside sin and win the battle? The only way is by guarding our hearts with Scripture. It is the constant input of the Word of God that begins to fill up the mind and control our "stinking thinking." God's Word alone becomes the strength and resource in us that can resist the initial impulses and sinful desires of the flesh. How can a young man or woman keep his/her way pure? It is by keeping his/her heart completely committed and guarded by the Word of God. *"With all my heart I have sought Thee. Do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy Word I have treasured, or hid, or kept in my heart that I may not sin against Thee."* It is the Scripture upon which we must meditate. Meditate on the Word of God daily. Routine is the mother of success.

As we start into some kind of attitude of wrongdoing or some kind of act of sin, the Word of God draws our will and restrains us. It will always be the love of God that

restrains us from sinning. 2 Corinthians 5:14 & 15 says, *"For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* When we feel the impulse of the truth, we know to meditate on that, not on the enticing temptations of the flesh and its pleasures.

Sixth grade science taught us, *"Nature abhors a vacuum."* Thus, we put off one thought and put on God's thinking. Philippians 4:8 says, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* There are many Scriptures that relate to putting off and putting on. We are to watch for sin's subtleties and not to trust our own spirituality. Resist and oppose the first risings of the flesh and its sinful desires to please itself and meditate on the Word, the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls and give us the real victory over the sin that dwells within us.

Number six: We need to be immediately repentant over our transgression lapses. Matthew 26:75 says that Peter, obviously having been aware of his transgression at the crowing of the cock, went out and wept bitterly. There is something very good in that. We criticize Peter for sinfulness, but we, also, must honor and respect him for his immediate remorse and repentant heart. Being immediately repentant over our lapses, we must go back to the place of confession. Repentance isn't only saying, "I'm sorry, Lord, forgive me." It is saying, "I'm sorry, Lord, forgive me. I don't want ever to do that again." That's real repentance. When this significant element is present, then you're not trying to fool God about your genuineness or lack of genuineness.

When we confess our wrongdoing and when we say, *"I am sorry, please, forgive me. I don't ever want to do it again,"* then, we should consider naming the sin specifically. Let our own heart and even our own ears hear the naming of that transgression specifically so that we develop a heart of a high degree of accountability to God for having named the very sin for which He is holding us accountable not to commit again. That's how we develop accountability. That's how we develop the fear and reverence of Almighty God. If we hold back from naming our wrongdoing, probably it is because we want to do that sin again. True, sincere repentance will specifically name the sin being confessed.

Number seven: We need to continually pray for divine help.... Ephesians 6:10-18: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

After all of the armor is put on in the battle against Satan and all of his forces, God says, *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication."* Jesus said to His disciples, *"Watch and pray, for you know not when you're going to enter into the hour of temptation."* *Devoting ourselves to prayer is a challenge* (Colossians 4:2). We cannot fight the enemy

from within our flesh and win the battle without the Holy Spirit interceding for us. When we engage the enemy, we must pray and plead for Christ's help. I really think anticipatory prayer is the most effective. We need to start our day, *"Lord, this is the day you have made. I need You to live your life in me and through me as me.* You taught us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil,"* "Lord, please, lead me away from temptation, *please, today, Lord, deliver me from evil."* We need to set the course of our prayers, before the tempter arrives to tempt the flesh and entices us to transgress.

Then, lastly, establish relationships with other believers. This is one of the reasons it has been good to write these things to you and encourage you, as I, myself, am being encouraged by sharing with you some insight from Scripture. Establishing relationships with other believers that hold you accountable is paramount to victory over all wrongdoing. *"Bear ye one another's burdens," says Paul in Galatians 6, "and so fulfill the law of Christ."* We all are in the same boat. We all struggle the same way. We need each other. *"If a man is caught in a sin, a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Each one look into yourself, lest you, too, be tempted. Bear one another's burdens."* We're all in this together. It might be your going down this time. It might be my going down next time. Between the two of us, we're going to hold each other and ourselves accountable to holy living.

I have just one more personal experience that I would like to share with you. The greatest factor in a truly intimate Christian marriage is the intense and intimate spiritual accountability with regard to sin that exists at that trusting level. I believe that there ought to be a high level of spiritual accountability between a husband and a wife for every aspect of life in their marriage. The most intimate knowledge of my spiritual life, apart from God Himself, is in the mind and heart of my wife Beth. The most intimate knowledge of her spiritual life and her struggle as a Christian, apart from God Himself, is in my mind and heart. We know each other better than anybody in the world knows us. Therein lays the highest level of spiritual accountability... for me and for her. No one, apart from God Himself, holds me as accountable for what I am before you and before the Lord as she does and vice versa. That is what makes a Christian marriage really Christian and really distinctive, powerfully beautiful and permanent. That's the highest level of accountability.

There are other relationships in which you engage that can be extraordinarily strengthening for your own spiritual life. You want people around you who lift you up not who pull you down. You want people with whom you associate as friends and close co-workers who will see your failures just as you'll see theirs, love you in the process, lift you up and encourage you to maintain the highest standards.

How are we going to come to the place where we lay **aside the transgression that so easily entangles us**, especially those **besetting habits** which we tend to fall into over and over again? First of all, realize that sin is powerful. It is near, even in us. It is intertwined with everything in our being. In order to deal with it, we must understand its seriousness. We must promise God not to sin or to disobey. We must watch carefully for our own spiritual weaknesses. Don't trust our spirituality. We must resist the first rising

desires of sin in the flesh. We must meditate and focus on the Word. We must be ready to repent immediately for the wrongdoing lapses that come upon us. Also, we must continue in prayer for dependence on God's power working in us and through us uniquely as us and to establish intimate trusting relationships of spiritual accountability.

Jesus Christ is the only One who strived against sin and never fell. He never transgressed. He was, in all points, tempted like as we are; yet, He was without sin... He never succumbed or yielded to sin's temptations. So, if we are going to look at somebody as a role model, let's look at Jesus Christ. He was striving with sin even to death and never fell. He's our model. He's our example. So, we're here living in our earth-suits to remember His death and why we were created. For His Honor, His Glory and His pleasure we were created (Rev. 4:11).

We're here to ask His forgiveness. We're here to ask Him again to be our example as we lay aside our sin and fix our eyes on Him to follow the path of victory over the sin that easily entangles us. Let's humble ourselves and bow together in prayer. Father, we thank You again that Your Word speaks so powerfully and directly to our hearts. We thank You that You have given us the resident Holy Spirit who can and will enable us to be obedient and to live triumphantly, when we, otherwise, would not have the strength. Help us to make the vows that we've learned about as we've considered our entangling, besetting sins and how to deal with them. Help us to take these steps, so that we can pursue the path of holiness and not need to be disciplined as often and so that we will not miss the joy and the peace that should be ours. We pray that no sin will have dominion over us and that You will make us effective in the ministry You have chosen for us. We pray we will take our commitment seriously. We come before You Lord God to confess our sin and to renew our covenant, to lay sin aside, to walk in a holy way. We now confess our sins, all of them, and ask You to wash us and make us clean, forgive us every sin known and unknown. Help us, Lord, not to do them again but to walk in obedience. We pray to finish the race you have set before us with joy, and to accomplish the ministry which we have received from You, the only wise God and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Joyfully and Triumphantly, In Christ's Love & Grace,

Mr. Bob, Always the Teacher, Always the Student