

THE BOOK YOU CAN TRUST: START SOME HOLY HABITS

II CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

This morning, as we open to II Corinthians 6, let me remind you that: each of us, are creatures of habit.

Habits shape our lives; and little by little, our habits are cementing us into a form that will someday be finished, revealing us for who we really were.

William James (1842-1910), in his classic ***Principles of Psychology*** (1890), put it this way:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke or virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar.

The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying "I won't count this time! "

Well! He may not count it, but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one.¹

What Kind Of Habits?

What kind of habits do you have this morning? And what are those habits making of you? Do you have some consciously chosen holy habits that are conforming you little-by-little, into the image of Christ, through His Word and Spirit?

Those were the questions on Paul's mind as he wrote the longest of his writings to the church at Corinth. Paul wrote to seven churches, letters that total 73 New Testament

¹ William James, *Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), p. 83.

chapters: (Rome [16], Corinth [29], Galatia [6], Ephesus [6], Philippi [4], Colosse [4], and Thessalonica [8]). Corinth received the most inspired chapters of God's Word.

Please open there with me to II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and **stand** as we read:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: " I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore " Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 " I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Pray

Think of the context of these words. To the believers that Paul:

- **explained** the Christian life as a race; and
- **encouraged** them to strive all their life long for the crowns; and
- **reminded** them that every single believer would some day stand all alone before the great Bema seat of Christ; and
- **warned** how all believers are headed for a life's work analysis performed by Christ Jesus Himself—

From that very same Apostle Paul, we get the clearest marching orders for living the life that God rewards by grace.

Ponder with me the implications of God's message to us in II Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

Paul concludes that based on the character and commands of God in His Word, we can have a life that doesn't burn up, and a life that won't cause us to weep at our loss (I Corinthians 3). That life is one that has cultivated holy habits, energized by God's grace (Titus 2:11-13), in order to reap a harvest of the eternal fruit God rewards.

Holy Habits

To live a life that lasts, to gain rewards that survive the fire, and to receive and unfading crown, Paul says the key is a **series of habits in holiness that are energized by grace.**

Note again those penetrating words of II Corinthians 7:1:

“ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

At the end of v.16 Paul says “God has said” and then he quotes from a blend of eight different Old Testament verses from four different books. Think for a moment what Paul does. To instruct and train New Testament believers, in a New Testament local church, Paul explains God’s expectations for New Testament believers living under the grace of the new covenant by using a blend of these Old Testament passages (Lev. 26:11-12; Jer. 24:7; 31:33; Ezek. 37:26-27; Hosea 2:2-3). This should cause all of us to want to catch from Paul how vital the revelation of God to all of us in the Old Testament truly should be.

In verse 17 Paul goes to Isaiah 52:11 and reminds us that God’s command to be spiritually separated is timeless and eternal. Once we get saved we are to start a life-long process of keeping detached from false doctrines, false religions, all sinful habits (as God's Word repeatedly emphasizes in Eph. 5:6-12; 2 Tim. 2:20-23; and Rev. 18:4).

God desires us to “be separate”, and this command is for us as New Testament believers to be just as Christ declares that He was (Heb. 7:26).

Personal Habits Of Consecration

The benefit of personal habits of consecration that lead us away from what displeases God, is explained by Paul in v.18, where he tells us that the result of separation from false doctrine and sinful habits is that we will increasingly enjoy the “full richness of what it means to be children of God”² (Rom. 8:14-17)

When Paul says “**therefore**” he applies the passages from the Old Testament that he blended together for the Corinthians (and for us today). He calls them “**having these promises**” in II Corinthians 7:1. We are called as believers to respond consciously, by active choices we make, to the promises of God's Word as we see in familiar passages like Romans 12:1-2 and II Peter 1:3.

Paul continues to apply God's Word by exhorting them with “**let us cleanse ourselves**”. The form of Greek verb that the Holy Spirit guided Paul to write is a word that describes an action each believer must take for his own life. Each of us are

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur Study Bible, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997, in loc.

expected to have spiritual hygiene habits. Just like you physically wash your hands: when you get home from the store, after being with sick people, or after contact with anything dirty, so we must do the same spiritually.

What are the spiritual goals for cleansing we must make as our habits? Cleansing Paul says "**from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit**". Did you know that we can get filthy spiritually, and that feeds and strengthens our flesh? This is the only time the word translated "filthiness" is used in the New Testament, but in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) it was used three times and speaks of "religious defilement, or unholy alliances with idols, idol feasts, temple prostitutes, sacrifices, and festivals of worship". We must not feed our flesh or defile our spirits with evil doctrine or practices.

Paul concludes his passionate plea to the Corinthians then and us today by saying that we must all be involved while here on earth with "**perfecting holiness in the fear of God**". The Greek word for "perfecting" means "to finish, to complete" and the word "holiness" here speaks of separation from anything that can defile either our redeemed body or Spirit indwelt mind.

This morning God wants each of us who belong to Him to be sure we are cultivating spiritual habits that lead to a growing separation from sin in our lives so that He can work through us and in us more and more.

To help us all get grounded in these habits of consecration to the Lord, here are three of the most powerful that I have sought to cultivate in my life.

First Habit: Make Time for the Word Psalm 132

Psalm 132 talks about David as a shepherd boy, and from this Psalm we see the heart after God forged by a tiny habit that shaped David's entire life. Do you know how big an impact, small habits can have on our lives? Be sure to cultivate some holy habits. Here are some of David's:

David made a habit of God ahead of comfort: Psalm 132:3-4 *"Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed; 4 I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids,*

David made a habit of time for God: Psalm 132:5 *Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."*

David made a habit of longing for God's Presence through worship:

Psalm 132:6-8 *Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; We found it in the fields of the woods. 7 Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool. 8 Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.*

David made a habit of participating personally in worship: Psalm 132:9-10, 16 *Let Your priests be **clothed with righteousness**, And let Your saints **shout for joy**. 10 For Your servant David's sake, Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed. 16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation, And her saints shall **shout aloud for joy**.*

And those habits made David grow closer and closer to the Lord. His heart tuned in more and more often to God, and his walk was more and more in step with God's desires. Those holy habits shaped David's life, just like our habits are shaping ours. What holy habits are you cultivating today for God?

Second Habit: Look for Jesus Isaiah 33

In Isaiah 33:14-17 we find the pathway to seeing Christ Jesus (the King in His beauty) each day as well as the obstacles. God wants us to come under the mastery or control of Christ. A mastered life comes after we surrender to Him. The battles are laid out for us in this chapter. How are you doing at looking for Jesus in His Word each day?

There was one quality that is commanded as a characteristic of every believer in Christ's church. God wants us to seek Him to **master every area of our life** to make our lives pleasing in His sight.

Neglecting Christ's mastery of us, and neglecting the habits of looking for Christ in His Word, and following Christ in daily obedience leads to these signs of Spiritual Immaturity:

1. An un-surrendered believer has marginal desire for God's Word (virtually "Biblically illiterate"), gets stuck in the basics, and basically has no growth.
2. An un-surrendered believer walks in the flesh; and often does not even know the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.
3. An un-surrendered believer is easily swayed or deceived by false doctrines.
4. An un-surrendered believer has limited desires for fellowship with other believers; but often has strong desires for worldly possessions.
5. An un-surrendered believer is often driven by selfish ambitions; and often exhibits a spirit of competition.

6. An un-surrendered believer has difficulty in repenting of personal sins and in forgiving others.
7. An un-surrendered believer is often lacking in compassion for the lost, and usually is not actively assisting in the spiritual development of others.
8. An un-surrendered believer has a limited sense of God, His character or His will; and instead often has a life filled with fear, anxiety, and the absence of peace.
9. An un-surrendered believer is often covetous, boastful, prideful, manipulative, etc. and is usually not accountable to anyone for anything in their private life.
10. An un-surrendered believer has ongoing financial difficulties as result of living far beyond their means, and an inability to stay out of debt).
11. An un-surrendered believer is usually a seeker of pleasure, and a life marked by a lack of physical, mental, and spiritual discipline.
12. An un-surrendered believer has begins to have only partial victory over sin, a nonexistent or lackluster prayer life, and little or no time or sincere interest in worship.³

God offers to us the joy of walking and seeing Him through life.

Isaiah 33:14, 17 Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? 17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.

v. 15a Seeing Jesus starts with a lifestyle of holiness

Isaiah 33:15a He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes,

v. 15b Seeing Jesus continues when we pursue purity

Isaiah 33:15b Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:

One thing God has always said is that only in consecration can we see Him. Just as the pure in heart see God (Matthew 5), so will all who purge them self from lusts that war against the soul; and turn their eyes away from evil; and depart from the iniquities that God hates. Only a life in which the Spirit is un-quenched, and un-grieved is there the clarity of seeing, knowing, and walking with Jesus.

³ Doug Morrell, Wesley's 3-Strand Discipleship, May 18, 2005; <http://www.corediscipleship.org/index.html>

God hates evil and wants us to hate it also. A believer who wants to see Jesus has to take radical measures and cut the alliances that lead to temptation and sin. Radical choices like:

- **Ending any chosen contacts with Satanic realms** such as: the occult, horror literature, and witchcraft (constant themes in movies and games); and
- **Stopping any watching of grisly, Satanic killing and destroying** such as: horror movies, murders, bloodshed, and anything that is in step with the Evil One who came to kill, steal, and destroy (a constant theme in movies and games); and
- **Avoiding all immodesty, as well as all partial, and total nudity** that God says grieves the Holy Spirit, and leads us into the most frequently condemned sin in the New Testament: mental, emotional, and physical fornication and adultery. We are awash in godlessness displayed in immodesty. God says do not look at sexual sin or anything that leads you or others into sexual impurity (which is an ever growing ingredient in most modern movies, most TV shows, and games). As Peter begs us:

I Peter 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

v. 16 Seeing Jesus results in worship, security and growth

Isaiah 33:16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure.

When we see Him we find Him, and in Christ's presence is security and peace. Our souls are nourished and fed, we have hungered and thirsted for God and find rest for our souls. We are satisfied and restlessness ceases.

- God says specifically for us not to enjoying looking upon gratuitous violence. Satan loves to kill and destroy. Who are you honoring by your movie watching and gaming—Satan or God? Beware of Satan the destroyer addicting you to violence.
- As believers entrusted with guarding Christ's dwelling place in our minds, we should be very uncomfortable around horror images, sensual images, and occult images. And avoid capturing into our long-term mental storage movies that are foolish, coarse, filthy, and dishonoring the holiness of our Great God who lives within.

Solution: repent of any tainted or spiritually poisonous videotapes recorded in your mind, and ask God to fill you anew with hunger and thirst after the pure milk His Word.

Next time is a look at:

Third Habit: Close the Door to the Devil Ephesians 4

But before we go today, we can't remain mere hearers of the Word. From all that God's Word has said today, choose something you will begin or renew with Christ.

Decide to start a holy habit and seal it with your pledge, aloud to god by singing # 372 "Living for Jesus" not as just a hymn, but as your own consecration to the Lord.

1. Living for Jesus a life that is true; striving to please him in all that I do, yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me.

2. Living for Jesus who died in my place, bearing on Calvary my sin and disgrace, such love constrains me to answer his call, follow his leading and give him my all.

Refrain: O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to thee; for thou, in thy atonement, didst give thyself for me; I own no other master, my heart shall be thy throne, My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ for thee alone.

3. Living for Jesus wherever I am, doing each duty in his holy name, willing to suffer affliction or loss, deeming each trial a part of my cross.

4. Living for Jesus through earth's little while, my dearest treasure, the light of his smile, seeking the lost ones he died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in him.