

The Deceitfulness of Sin

Sin is deceitful, according to Hebrews 3:13.

Sin can often appear to be the right thing to do, when actually it is very wrong. King Saul perhaps thought it was right to spare King Agag and the best of the flocks (1 Samuel 15), but it was very wrong. Paul thought he was right when he persecuted Christians (Acts 23:1; 26:9), but he was dead wrong. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Sin promises freedom, but what it really brings is slavery. If you don't believe it, ask the man who keeps carrying on an affair, even though it's destroying him, his family, and his spouse's family. He has become a slave to his passions. Or, ask the man who has sacrificed everything else in order to get rich. Looking for financial freedom, what he got instead were more worries than he ever dreamed of. "His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin" (Proverbs 5:22).

Sin can seem very attractive, but it is actually very ugly. With sin, what you see is *not* what you get. The fruit of the tree looked very attractive to Eve (Genesis 3:6), but she didn't stop to think of the ugly consequences (Genesis 2:17). A festering, oozing sore was how God described Judah's sins (Isaiah 1:5-6). When the apostle Peter wrote about brethren returning to sin, he described it as a dog returning to its vomit and a sow to her wallowing in the mud (2 Peter 2:18-22). The advertising industry paints one picture of sin; God paints an entirely different one.

Sin appears to be satisfying and fulfilling, but it winds up being very disappointing. Without a doubt, sin can bring us a certain kind of pleasure. But here's the catch - it doesn't last very long. It was said of Moses that he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25). "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2: 17).

Sin can seem so insignificant, when actually it is very serious. Adam and Eve – all they did was eat a little fruit (Genesis 3). Lot's wife - she turned around and looked at a burning city, what's so bad about that? Uzzah - well, he was just trying to keep the ark from falling (2 Samuel 6:1-11). We try to classify our own sins as minor, but that's not the way God looks at them. We should never trivialize any sin we commit.

Sin appears to bring life, but what it really brings is death. In inviting others to sin, you might hear someone say, "If you really want to live, you should have an affair, get drunk, go to the casino, etc." What they should really say is, "If you want to die, you should..." Romans 6:23 is hard to misunderstand: "The wages of sin is death."

- by Bryan Gibson

7 Techniques for Breaking Sinful Habits

Are there sinful habits you'd like to break? Here are seven Bible-based techniques for breaking sinful habits:

Technique #1: Pray Don't overlook the power of prayer. James tells us that the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas 5:16). The word "effectual" comes from the word "energeo" from which we get the word "energy." James is telling us to pray actively and with energy. The first and perhaps most potent technique for overcoming sinful habits is to ask God for help.

Technique #2: Overcome Evil with Good Paul says in Romans 12:21 to "overcome evil with good. "When you feel the urge to give in to an evil habit, do something good instead. Write a letter of hope to a friend, call and encourage a brother, or visit someone who is sick. In other words, replace your sinful habit with a good work.

Technique #3: Surround Yourself with Good People We're told "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). The opposite is also true: "good company corrects bad morals. If you have a sinful habit you're trying to break, then seek out the company of good people. Let their "goodness" rub off on you.

Technique #4: Confess Your Faults James 5:15 says "confess your sins to one another." Admittedly, confessing your faults and sinful habits will be difficult. You may be embarrassed by the prospect of others "finding out" about your weakness. But when you confess your failings to

others, then they can help look out for you. They can counsel and comfort you as you work to overcome your bad habit.

Technique #5: Make Habits Impossible You may fall back into your sinful habit simply because sin is so accessible! Overcome sinful habits by eliminating or reducing your access to sin. Matthew 18:9 says, "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee..." If you've got a bad habit, make it harder to feed the habit! Look for ways to make sinning inconvenient rather than easy.

Technique #6: Think Good Thoughts The urge to feed a bad habit starts in the mind. Fill your mind with righteous thoughts and you'll reduce the chance that evil thoughts will blossom into sin. Follow Paul's advice: "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" (Phil. 4:8).

Technique #7: Take One Day at a Time It takes only two weeks to develop a habit, but it takes months to break one. Don't despair! Rather than thinking how long it will take and how hard it will be to break the habit, learn to take one day at a time. Don't worry about tomorrow. Work to stop your bad habit today for "each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:34).

- by **Matt Hennecke**

Neither to the Right nor to the Left

In referring to various congregations it is common to hear someone say "they're liberal" or "that church is very conservative." While those statements can be quite vague, most of us have an idea as to what is meant.

If 'liberal' means ignoring and openly violating the rules of Bible authority, then we definitely should stand against that. And, though we are far more inclined toward a 'conservative' approach to things, if this suggests the idea of binding what God's law does not bind, we also should oppose that.

In truth, what we really need to be striving for is full and complete compliance with the pattern of work, worship, and organization for the church as is described in the Word of God. Most are quick to condemn those who are too 'liberal,' but the scriptures would also condemn those who demand things that the Bible does not demand – even if done in the name of 'conservatism.'

The proper balance is that which Moses urged for Israel of old . . .

"Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. . . you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left."

(Deut. 5:1,32 – NASV)

Jesus said that the correct way is "strait and narrow" (Matt. 7:13,14). That being the case, we must exercise great caution – not deviating to the right or to the left. Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**