

OVERCOMING OUR DESTRUCTIVE HABITS! - (PART ONE)

HOW THEY CONTROL US!

Some years ago I listened to a prominent national minister, who had been caught in sexual immorality, talk about his own sin. He was genuinely repentant. He took full blame for the pain and hardships his sins had cost others. And he accused no one but himself. But in his conversation, he also revealed a very disturbing belief.

Sympathetically another national minister had convinced him that his "problem" was brought on ONLY by "a demonic condition". After praying, they announced to the world that the problem was now gone. . . . *Six months later the minister was caught in immorality again.*

Now do I believe in demonic influences? Of course I do. You and I must, if we accept the Bible as *absolute truth*. (Although that is not very popular these days.) And based on biblical truth, if you or I believe that there is a heavenly "being" called God, then surely we must also accept that there has to be some sort of demonic force of opposition. But I also believe that for this "evil being" to have some "hold" in our lives, a **"door" must be opened** for that influence or force to begin its rule. Satan isn't able to *just* do whatever he wants to do in your life at any time. . . . **HE DOESN'T HAVE THAT POWER!**

This is the beginning of a series of letters that I hope will help each of you better understand why we do what we do! Especially why, even as Christians, so many of us still struggle greatly with destructive habits, sins, and addictions.

Now to ever really understand this battle, we must first be willing to admit the truth and say to ourselves, "I have a problem." Maybe your struggle is not with some sexual sin. (Although sexual addiction is now considered the number one addiction in America.) Your battle may be with one of many other forms of escape - alcohol abuse, overeating, "zoning out" through hours of television, or hours reading or time spent on the Internet, shopping, being a workaholic, etc. But you will see **the results are always the same.**

To find the freedom we desperately desire from these habits, we must first realize that the *hold* of these addictions is **never rooted in the surface habits that we spend all of our time trying to overcome!** Consequently . . .

**WITHOUT AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROOT CAUSE OF OUR
TEMPTATIONS, WE WILL NEVER FIND FREEDOM OVER OUR ADDICTIONS
AND DESTRUCTIVE HABITS!**

Now think about this! An alcoholic struggles to stop drinking; an obese person bounces from one fad diet to another; and a pastor collapses under the battle with his hidden

pornography addiction. And yet, *the real* "demon" that controls each of their hearts is not the *habit they battle with!* It is simply . . . **AN UNFULFILLED NEED!**

Understand this, the hold of any destructive habit is its ability to provide temporary escape from the emotional pain we feel (caused by an unmet need.) But the destructive habit is not the problem!

Ask yourself this question. How often have you, or someone you know spent hours praying, lamenting, and grieving over some *destructive habit or sin*, looking for some way of escape, *only to end those hours of prayer without any actual or lasting success?* . . . *Be really honest!* Now please hear me, as disgusting as any of the habits or sins that you have struggled with, or now are battling, they almost always are not the problem. Because the truth for each of us is . . .

OUR SINS TRAP US BY DISGUIISING THEMSELVES, AND USING ONE OR MORE OF OUR DEEPEST UNFULFILLED NEEDS, TO SECURE THEIR HOLD OVER US!

A few months ago, while traveling through a major northern city, I passed by one of the largest mega-churches in America. Their electronic billboard was flashing the title of what would be the senior pastor's topic for next Sunday's sermon. Eight-foot-tall letters announced, "Sexual Sin: The Power of Self-control!"

It was easy to guess what the pastor's three-point sermon would be. Sin — more specifically, sexual sin. And to the people succumbing to this powerful and controlling vice, he would offer a simple solution to "trust Jesus", and then . . . just "gut it out and don't do it!"

In my mind I could see hundreds of people who would flock down the isles carrying loads of guilt and shame, desperate to end their struggle with their own "personal demons." Each would repent of sins done in darkness (most of which those around them would be totally unaware of) and then leave with great hope. *But never really understanding the "root need" that holds them captive to their sin.* And the tragic result would be that most would return to their sin within the next week — *only now with a little less hope, and an unvoiced fear that maybe God can't help them.*

In the gutter, you or I may see a glassy-eyed alcoholic staggering and slurring profanities — disheveled in dress, reeking of booze, urine, and sweat. But what we can't see is a person torn apart by life! Someone who may be seeking to escape from the painful memories of a failed marriage, the death of a child, or the loss of a career. And who now sees alcohol as the only escape from what is an impossible reality to cope with.

Yes, their excessive alcoholic bingeing IS the sin of abuse. Always wrong and never justified. . . . But compassionately understood! I believe in "tough love," not co-dependent justification. But I also believe in confronting the "prodigal," not with just the sin . . . *but also with the revelation of the root need, and the "road map" to the source for meeting that need.*

Like the self-righteous Pharisees in the Bible, shamefully I must admit that often I have judged other people for their weaknesses. Never really caring enough to know if they were spiritually equipped to break away from the bonds of their destructive habit or sin? . . . Have you ever done that? The truth is people become involved in destructive habits and sins for a multitude of reasons. *But unless the need for the destructive habit is ended . . . THEIR ADDICTION WILL NEVER STOP!*

Have you ever asked yourself, "Why do I have such a hard time trusting God to meet my needs?" We do, you know. *The fact that each of us sin is proof of that!* Now why do we not trust God? Maybe the answer to that question is found in the original temptation. Remember the serpent's words - "*Hath God said?*" In other words, can I really trust Him? And does He *really* care that much about me? — *Epecially after all I've done!* The trap or lie of any of our destructive habits or sin is this:

INSIDE OUR HEARTS WE BECOME CONVINCED THAT GOD CANNOT MEET OUR NEEDS, WILL NOT MEET OUR NEEDS; THAT OUR NEEDS CANNOT BE MET RIGHTEOUSLY; OR VERY SIMPLY, THAT THE WORLD CAN MEET THEM BETTER!

Now ask yourself, why would we ever believe such lies? I believe the truest answer to that question is found in the fact that most people have prayed sincere prayers for the release from their temptations, and for needs to be met . . . but deep inside *they feel that rarely has God answered those prayers!* And now, as a result, *it is hard for them to believe God cares, or that He wants to, or will answer their prayers.*

Maybe you are one of those people. If so, then my prayer is that for the next few months, as you continue to faithfully read these letters, that you will begin to find answers, and begin to experience a more intimate life with God. Don't give up, because I want you to know . . .

**GOD REALLY DOES DESIRE
TO MEET YOUR NEEDS!**

Listen to what Jesus said of the Father's heart and His love for you.

" . . . do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or . . . what you will wear. . . Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. ARE YOU NOT MUCH MORE VALUABLE THAN THEY?"

Matthew 6:25,26 NIV

And please understand *God's love* is not even dependent upon your faithfulness. Don't you realize He has always loved you unconditionally! Does He desire your faithfulness? Sure He does. But *His love for you* is not based upon, nor judged, nor decided by your actions. His love is based upon who He is — His character. Listen to this scripture. Really listen!

*"If (you) are faithless, (do not believe and are untrue to Him), He remains true (faithful to His word, and His righteous character), **for He cannot deny Himself.**"*

II Timothy 2:13

And remember Romans 8:35, 38-39 also tells us that ***nothing can separate you from God's love — NOTHING!*** In other words, the only way you can ever be cut off from "experiencing" God's love is by you choosing, *consciously or subconsciously*, to walk away from His presence. But listen to me, even if you choose to close the door of your heart to Him, and like the "prodigal" in Luke 15, choose to sin, to walk away from your Heavenly Father—then yes . . . you **WILL** begin to experience the cruelty of this world and the cruelty from those who also have rejected a love relationship with God. And yes, you will sense the loss of His Presence in your life. You will sense the loss of His peace, His joy, and even His love for you. But even though you have chosen to walk away . . .

GOD WILL NOT STOP LOVING YOU!

Let that sink into every pore of your body, every thought in your mind, and every feeling within your heart. In other words, you may at times *feel* that God has stopped loving you. . . . ***BUT HE NEVER HAS!***

Reread this letter. And spend time thinking about all of the sections that are both **CAPITALIZED AND BOLDED**. And in the next letter, I will talk very frankly and openly about . . .

- The real price we pay for our destructive habits. (Most people are totally unaware of it! And it is so much greater than we have imagined.)
- Why most Christians still lose the battle with their destructive habits. And how to begin to change that!
- Satan's hidden plan for your life!

Save these letters! *Because I promise that these next months will be some of the most rewarding of your life!*