

OVERCOMING OUR DESTRUCTIVE HABITS! - (PART TWO)

WHY MOST OF US LOSE THE BATTLE WITH THE DESTRUCTIVE HABITS IN OUR LIVES!

Just a few weeks ago I was talking to an old friend about the great struggle I see most Christians dealing with over the destructive habits in their lives. After over an hour of conversation, and even after acknowledging her own personal struggle with a destructive habit, she then looked at me and very sincerely told me that she believed "people just need to make a decision and stop using the destructive habits in their lives for escape." Her implication was that if a person really wants to stop the destructive habit, then it is only a *matter of will*. In other words, just make a decision and "do it".

I tried to help her see that as long as a person is living in emotional pain, and if they have found some destructive habit that actually has the power to relieve the pain of those emotions (even if only for a moment) . . . then that person will either never be free from that habit, or will at best, just find another habit to replace it.

I left the conversation saddened and troubled. One, because I really care for the person I was talking to, and second, because I find most people, Christian and non-Christian, believe this is how to overcome the destructive habits and sins in their lives. But the problem with this theory is that it moves away from your and my need to be totally dependent upon God.

Think about this. If the secret to overcoming destructive habits is simply to "make a decision" and then, just "don't do it any more" . . . *is there really any difference from that and what a non-Christian practices?* **Neither is dependent upon God for their deliverance from the habit!**

And if true, then at least for the Christian . . . wouldn't that make the sacrifice and death of Christ something that was needlessly done? Because in the back of the mind of a Christian who believes that the only way to overcome is by "self-will", won't there always be a voice that tells him . . . "It wasn't God who did this! You did it! You just made your mind up, gutted it out, and changed!"

The current trend of thinking among most psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors is that to overcome a destructive habit . . . "you must replace it with another. But with one habit that is less destructive." Or in other words, **you are never really free.** Just bound to a "less destructive" habit for the relief of the emotional pain in your life.

But wait a minute. Doesn't scripture tell us as Christians that Jesus came to "set us free"? And that it was supposed to be the very presence of "Christ in us" that would cause us to feel "love, joy, and peace"?

So if you or I are bound to a "less destructive habit", *to ease our emotional pain* . . . then isn't that habit just a substitute for the freedom God promised? . . . And a substitute that we have become dependent upon because of the lack of our ability to feel God's touchable and tangible presence in our lives?

Now, I want you to ask yourself a question. What "price" do you think we pay for the "destructive habits" in our lives? And if our choice is "one of those less destructive habits", then is the price we pay really all that much? (*Remember, these "habits", no matter how destructive or harmless they may appear to be to us, are still substitutes for God's freedom in our lives.*) . . . *Can you see that?* So what is the price we pay for the destructive habits in our lives? It is more than we could have ever imagined!

**THE GREATEST PRICE WE PAY FOR THE DESTRUCTIVE HABITS IN OUR LIVES,
IS THE LOSS OF OUR ABILITY TO SENSE, FEEL, OR EXPERIENCE GOD'S
PRESENCE!**

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation chapter 3, we are told of a group of Christians located in the city of Laodicea, whose diversion or escape from the emotional pain in their lives was the wealth they had accumulated (verse 17). And, although their wealth had become a "God substitute" to them, *and now caused them to no longer be able to feel God's presence*, (verse 20) . . . tragically they were totally unaware of it. (Verse 17b)

Now please hear me, money is not wrong in itself. But remember, Jesus said that the "*love of money*" was the "root of all evil". So when you or I begin to look to money as our first or primary source of emotional fulfillment, (security, importance and value, etc.) then in that moment of time money has become a "God substitute" to us.

And moreover because God is now no longer our "first love", and because He also will have no other gods before Him . . . He chooses to stand outside the closed door of our hearts. (Verse 20) And as a result, *we lose the ability to feel His presence!* Is God still there? . . . Yes of course! He promised He would never leave you nor forsake you! But because something else has taken His place as "master" over our life, and as such, He is no longer our first source of emotional fulfillment . . . we have now closed the door to His presence.

Now listen very closely to what I am about to say. *Satan's plan for your life is not to cause you to sin. It is much greater, and more diabolical than that! He has only one motive. . . .*

. . . TO SEPARATE YOU FROM GOD!

And because he CANNOT CHANGE GOD'S COMMITMENT TO YOU, he works to accomplish this goal by getting you to "close a door" to God's presence. Moreover he accomplishes his goal by deceiving you with a source, a "God substitute" that can provide you with momentary relief from the pain of your greatest need!

Now the problem with "God substitutes" is that they are never able to fill the void left by God's absence, and the loss of our ability to feel His presence. As a result, the emotional pain left by His absence never actually leaves. Oh, the "God substitute" does numb the pain momentarily. But as soon as it's effect wears off . . . the pain returns! *So for many of us, all of our life, we continue the cycle of moving from one destructive habit after another after another looking for relief.*

And even if we do choose what counselors call a "less destructive habit", still we exist in pain! Because we have now lost the ability to feel God's presence in our lives! The truth is . . .

WE CANNOT LIVE LIVES OF PEACE, DEVOID OF FEAR AND WORRY . . . LIVES OF COURAGE AND GREAT PASSION, LIVES OF TRUE PROSPERITY AND FEELING UNCONDITIONALLY LOVED . . . WITHOUT AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD!

That's why to ever find freedom, TRUE FREEDOM, *and not just momentary escape from our destructive habits*, you and I must be willing to develop an intimate relationship with God!

Now if all I have said is true, then, . . . **to ever overcome the destructive habits in your life, your mental attention should not be focused on resisting its pleasure. BUT ON IDENTIFYING THE NEED THAT FUELS AND FEEDS THE DESIRE, OR NEED FOR THE HABIT!**

This is also why just making up your mind to stop the destructive habit rarely works. Because the truth is . . . **THAT HABIT IS NOT THE PROBLEM!** The real problem is . . .

THE LACK OF YOUR ABILITY TO FEEL GOD'S PRESENCE WITHIN YOUR LIFE MEETING YOUR EMOTIONAL NEEDS!

Think about this. *If you no longer had the emotional need, that the destructive habit provides relief from, then . . . WOULD YOU STILL NEED OR DESIRE THE HABIT?*

. . . NO, YOU WOULDN'T!

Now listen to me! God loves you more than you will ever know. He would never, never want you to live your life in emotional pain - racing from one destructive habit after another after another.

And He also knows that there is nothing in this world, no person, possession, or job that will meet all of your emotional needs day after day, moment after moment. In fact, all of them together wouldn't be enough to fill the empty void of emotional need found inside of any one of us! And because of this inescapable truth . . . *He wants a relationship with you!*

And not just some dead theological relationship, created from gathered stories, wonderful ideas, and theories about who He is. But God wants a touchable and tangible relationship with you! In fact, He wants to come and spiritually live within you through the Holy Spirit!

Always remember this - each day as you open this door to His presence you are promised (Galatians 5:22-23) that the Holy Spirit will bring within you "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness", and what I call, "God control" or His righteousness!

Next month, I will talk about:

- How to open this door to God!
- How much power does Satan have over you? How does he gain that control? And how can you prevent him from having that power!
- What are "emotions of empowerment"? And how do you identify those emotions within your own life?

Please take the time to re-read last month's letter. Especially the parts in **bold print**. And then, re-read this letter.

Kathy and I love each of you! We consider it an honor to be a part of your spiritual growth!