

HOW TO MAKE OUR LIVES COUNT FOR SOMETHING GREAT!

Part 2: Dealing with Unresolved Guilt (b)

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Colossians 3:5; Romans 8:13

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Last time:

In this series, "How to make our lives count for something great," we are considering formidable obstacles that are keeping us from loving others with greatness. In our first installment we focused on one of the greatest obstacles in truly loving others, namely, **the preoccupation of the self**. We learned a number of ways to begin breaking this formidable wall.

In our second installment we directed our attention to another formidable barrier that is keeping us from loving other with greatness **unresolved guilt**. We highlighted three areas in our lives where unresolved guilt finds pertinent expression, namely, past mistakes, reoccurring yielding to fleshly appetites and sinful tendencies, and the inability to forgive those who have wounded us. All three areas are compounded by *more guilt* when we attempt to rationalize and/or numb what we have done by means of illegitimate or false pleasures that are offered to us by a hostile system to the things of God.

In the first sphere of unresolved guilt, it is the classic, "*What I have done is sooo bad! There is no way I can be forgiven!*" The second sphere of unresolved guilt can be expressed this way: "*I'm scared to release this habit! I need it to function for I am fearful that without it, I will do something worse!*" And in the third sphere of guilt we often see this exclamation: "*Letting go a little forgiveness is nothing compared to the sins committed against me!*"

After exploring these three areas where unresolved guilt emerges, we turned our attention to the ultimate remedy for unresolved guilt: the extraordinary biblical theme of God's grace. When you place your trust in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead, you will receive over 215 divine benefits that can never be taken away. Benefits like being declared righteous, eternal life, and reconciliation between you and God you will receive because Jesus substituted Himself on the cross of Calvary

for your sins as predicted in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). We then spent the rest of our time unpacking the divine provision of God's forgiveness for the believer as expressed in passage like 1 John 1:9.

All three previous lessons are available at my personal website at www.prshockley.org or www.prshockley.com; you will find this series and many others other valuable resources to enrich your spiritual life.

This Time:

This time we are going to continue our examination into dealing with this seeming impenetrable wall, namely, unresolved guilt, by turning our attention on how to deal with reoccurring sins that haunt our footsteps. Next time we will deal with the third sphere of unresolved guilt, namely, **lack of forgiveness**, and explore practical ways in which we can begin the healing process of forgiving those who have hurt us and hopefully spend the remainder of time considering one of the most subtle obstacles from making our lives count for something great, namely, **diversion**.

What I mean by diversion is being so consumed with the trivial, the unimportant, and urgent, that we are *only* able to offer our leftovers to loving others with greatness. So preoccupied are we with busyness that we have little remaining energy, time, and resources remaining to pursue what matters most to God. It is a clever plan devised by Satan that immobilizes us from making our lives count for something great. But by being taken up by the diversion, we also display a lack of biblical wisdom.

Consider:

This morning I would like raise the following questions: Why aren't we "more godly" than we are right now? Why do keep committing the same sins over and over again no matter how sincere we are in our confession of sin? We may believe we are earnest in our confession but then find we find ourselves yielding to the same sin repeatedly. No matter how hard we confess our sins, and no matter how much we beg God to free us from vice, we find ourselves spiraling downwards in defeat, guilt, and shame. Yet we hear, read, and see accounts of those who gained great victories of over their particular sins? What can we do?

Clarification need. First, we need to understand what confession of sin does and what it does not do. Often times I have discovered that we turn to confession of sin to get rid of our appetite for that particular sin. But there is a confusion of divine provisions. See, sincere confession is necessary to restore our intimacy. However, confession of sin does not deal with our appetite for particular sins. Sincere confession gets us right in our intimacy with God, but confession does not remove our appetite for those sins. Every time we give into sin, our appetite for that sin grows and changes us in the most unexpected ways. Confession of sin does not remove the lust for that sin. But we can begin breaking down this appetite, this lust, this propensity for that sin by applying the two commandments given to us by the apostle Paul: Colossians 3:5 and Romans 8:13.

In those two passages namely, Colossians 3:5 and Romans 8:13, we believers are called to mortify the flesh. Mortification means to “*put to death*.” As a verb, “*mortify*” is used 11 times in N.T. 9 instances it refers to a literal putting to death of a person. For example, in Matthew 10:21 it states “children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.” Other references include Matthew 26:59; 27:1; Acts 7 with the death of Stephen. But there are other two instances whereby to mortify refers means “*putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh*.” It is these two passages, namely, Colossians 3:5 and Romans 8:13 that concern us if we want to learn how to break down these fleshly appetites and sinful tendencies.

Colossians 3:5 states:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

The Greek tense of this command “*Put to death*” implies a decisive action, as if Paul said, “*Do it now!*”

Romans 8:13 says:

“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death [mortify] the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

(1) “*You put to death*” implies it is your responsibility; (2) The verb literally is “*putting to death*” is in present tense. It is to be continuous in the life of the believer; (3) you must be dependent on the Holy Spirit as stated in the phrase “*but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body* [or “flesh”].” Self-discipline is insufficient.

To mortify a sin then involves the following:

1. Subdue a sinful appetite, tendency, or temptation;
2. Deprive the sin of its power;
3. To break the sinful habit that we developed we must continually refuse to give into the temptation of that particular sin.

The goal of mortification is to weaken if not break a sinful habit for the danger is that if you yield to a particular sin long enough you may experience the following sequence:

“Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. So a character, reap a destiny.”

Therefore, mortification focuses on the sinful appetites and fleshly tendencies. Mortification targets habitual sins that we find ourselves yielding to and regularly confessing.

Since mortification is concerned with personal and practical holiness, it deals with our habits, our character, and our propensities. A habit is a tendency to think, desire, act, and respond to something without consciously willing to do. Character has to do with the sum-total of one’s habits. Mortification involves moment-by-moment decision-making as the believer attempts to “*put to death*” the misdeeds of the flesh. It is not merely confessing sin (1 John 1:9) but cutting down the particular sin (s) that haunts our footsteps.

How can we put to death the misdeeds of the flesh? How can we deprive and break down the sins we have come to both love AND hate?

First, the overall mindset we must have in order to even begin mortifying sin is to **see sin from God’s perspective** (regardless of its form or popularity in culture). Sin is an act of rebellion against God. It is not merely something that is counter-intuitive to our new identity in Christ or something that causes uneasiness or feelings of guilty. It is

an act of rebellion because you are exalting your desire above God's will. Moreover, yielding to sin is to contribute to Satan's counterfeit kingdom.

Second, as revealed in passages like Psalm 1, Psalm 19, and John 17:17, the overall means to breaking a habitual sin or fleshly tendency in your life is to take ownership of God's Word in your life to the extent that Scripture has become your very identity. We are to intimately know, invest in, delight in, and be obedient to God's Word by means of the Holy Spirit whereby both inward desires and outward conformity harmonize together as reflected in passages like Psalm 1, 19, and John 17:17.

And third, we must be aware of this foundational truth: We are free to say "no" to that sin because we are new creatures in Christ (Galatians 2:20). Mortifying our sinful appetites and fleshly tendencies is saying "no" to any sinful desire we have. While our environment may energize our sinful tendency, it is always possible, since we are freed from the enslavement to sin, to say "no" since we are new creatures in Christ, indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit's agency we are free to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God in view of the choices we make in moment-by-moment living.

Let's consider it this way. I want you to liken the various sins you commit to a forest. Each sin represents a certain tree. You have various trees of sin just like you find yourself committing various types of sin: immorality ("porneia" is "fornication"); Impurity (a wider perversion); lust (pathos, uncontrollable passion); evil desires (illicit craving); greed (coveting); gossip; lying; legalism.

Some are fast growing like an Arizona Ash whereas others are slow like a Magnolia. You have small tiny trees like a Chinese Tallow to giant oaks. But then you have these sequoia trees... these are the big sins that you cannot ever seem to shake. They are always in your presence lurking like wolves following a rabbit. These are big ones with whom you are truly identified. Like one godly theologian once personally said to me, "The sins of my youth still haunt me today but as I have walked with the Lord they have lost their attractiveness."

Apart from divine deliverance, these sequoia trees of sin will never leave you. But that does not mean you cannot begin a life-time cutting them down whereby they do not have the hold on you as the once did.

But even if you are able to cut down this tree and pull up the roots, just know that particular sin has changed you just as that tree affected its environment. In contrast, every time you give into that sin, know that you are fertilizing it and with every yielding to that sin, the roots grow deeper.

The first time I heard these steps were from Dr. John Hannah of Dallas Seminary and so I am indebted to him for introducing me to the mortification of sin.

When faced with the temptation do the following:

1. Consider the dangerous consequences of sin both vertically (guilt; loss of peace & strength, grieve the Holy Spirit, & wound Christ) and horizontally (sin impacts others). Moreover, yielding to sin opens the door for God's chastisement, scourging, etc. When we willfully sin, as believers, we are inviting God to chastise us.
2. Load the conscience with the guilt of sin. In other words, consider God's infinite patience & forbearance-for God has been so good to you. Why would you want to do that against Him? You are His living representative!
3. Consider the state of one's self all times in terms of frailty, because of depravity, & vileness: the presence of sin. Even though you have been set free from the penalty of sin and are united to Christ, you are a very frail person. In other words, you are not immune to sin and sin will take you places you never thought you would go. Remember that you are a "saltine cracker" sitting on the floor of a child daycare center; one faulty & childish step-you are crushed. Though you can sincerely confess the sin, thus restoring your fellowship, you will have to live with the consequences from your sinful choices. But God is always present, available, and necessary. He is here.
4. Trace the particular manifestation of sin to its root. It is not enough to deal with the fruit; you've got to get to the root! Seriously ask yourself: Why? Why? Why do you do you keep committing that sin over and over again? Get to the bottom of it!

5. Relatedly, don't hurry to gain relief for your sin. While we need to immediately and sincerely confess our sins before God (1 John 1:9), we need to send ourselves into the bedroom and deeply consider why we do what we do. Once again, we've got to get to the root of the problem and deal with it lest it leads to a place we never thought we would go.
6. Act quickly against the first temptation to sin. There is a clear and obvious reason why the New Testament states that we are to stand firm against the devil and immediately flee from sin!
7. Allow God to speak peace rather than assume you have it. This is very important because it is so easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually dynamic even though we are harboring and cultivating sinful habits and tendencies (e.g., cohabitating; premarital sex; gluttony). Sometimes we can start thinking that there are certain sins which are respectable or tolerable before God's eyes (e.g., cohabitation; premarital sex; adultery; gluttony).

In addition to these seven steps we have others weapons we can use to bring these trees of sin down. We have mental weapons in the struggle against sin such as whole hearted trust, faith, & obedience, the presence of right thoughts; recognition of God's sovereignty, the effects of sin, the love & kindness of God, the wonder of Calvary, & the reality of indwelling sin. We have prayer. We also have the opportunity to be part of an authentic community. Lastly, let us never forget that you need to have intimate godly friends to support you. There is strength, love, and wisdom to be gained from the exhortation and admonishment of others.

I have discovered that when I practice these steps and use these mental weapons (all bathed in prayer) I don't give into the temptations. But when I do not practice these steps, I find myself yielding to that temptation once again. So, these steps of mortification work when I apply them and do not work when I don't use them.

Conclusion: The opportunity is before you while you have the air to breathe, not to give in to the habitual sins that you both love AND hate. Instead, make it your singular ambition to love the Lord your God from out of your whole heart, soul, mind and strength, offering Him your utmost with the moment-by-moment decisions you make, the

activities you promote, the values you embrace, and the pleasures you pursue. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then you have a new mind to know Him, a new heart to love Him, and a new will obey to Him. You are free in Christ to serve Him! But if you want to begin depriving, subduing, and pulling up and out of your life certain appetites that have a hold on you, I invite you to ask God to help you begin practicing these practical steps of mortification by means of the Holy Spirit.

Final Thought:

“Tell me in the light of the Cross, isn't it a scandal that you and I live today as we do?”

~ Alan Redpath.