

Weekly Newsletter: 1st August 2023

Reflection: How to Fight Habituated Sin

By Joe Barnard

“I gave my back to those who strike me” (Isaiah 50:6a)

A lot of Christians are naïve regarding the danger of intentional acts of sin. We mistakenly think that because we are freed from the legal dominion of sin this means that we are also freed from the functional dominion of sin. Paul would have us know otherwise. In Romans 6:16 he says, “Do you know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” The point of this rhetorical question is to awaken believers from feeling indifferent about our sin. Paul wants us to realise that actions do indeed result in habits and that habits can become a kind of self-wrought chain if we are not careful. Any honest Christian will admit to having experienced the reality of this process. Who among us hasn’t felt a loss of freedom from having repeatedly indulged an evil desire?

Given the danger of habituated sin, every Christian needs to be well schooled in the practices needed to “mortify” the so-called passions of the flesh. We touched upon one of these in the sermon last Sunday morning. There is nothing more potent for fighting entrenched sin than to meditate on the words from Isaiah 50:6, “I gave my back to those who strike”.

This verse reminds us of the horrifying reality that Jesus really did suffer vicariously the just penalty for our sin. When we think back to Jesus being scourged by the Roman guards, or having to carry the cross-beam to Golgotha, we need to own the truth that he did this so that the curse of sin could be lifted from our shoulders. Jesus was not a victim; he was a sacrifice. He willingly gave his back to the whip of justice so that our guilty souls could be pardoned.

Now, as disciples of the cross, we need to learn how to use this sobering truth to find freedom from persistent temptation. The secret is in meditating on the evil of sin. One of the great lies of the devil is that sin is life-giving. In a moment of temptation, a forbidden fruit always looks full of promise. The prospect of quick pleasure is often the only feather needed to tip the balance of the will from a “no” to a “yes”. One of the best ways to counteract this slide is by reflecting on the back of Jesus which bore the pain of our just deserts. If we can remember the high cost of sin – a price that was nothing less than the shed blood of the incarnate Son of God – this can often shake us out of a spiritual stupor. The more clearly we can call to mind the flesh of Jesus being torn on behalf of our flings with the devil, the less excitement we will feel about entertaining a besetting sin.

If anyone needs further help in terms of putting this into practice, my suggestion would be to pray through the wonderful hymn by Isaac Watts, "Infinite Grief! Amazing Woe!". The hymn begins with a vivid statement of the terrible pain that the Redeemer bore in dying on the cross. After bringing this to our attention, the hymn then issues an unambiguous indictment. We read, "But knotty whips and ragged thorns/in vain do I accuse". Likewise, the Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders are put aside as chief culprits. Instead, the source of Jesus' suffering is identified as our sins. The hymn says, "Twere you, my sins, my cruel sins,/His chief tormentors were;/Each of my crimes became a nail,/And unbelief a spear."

The truth that the hymn wants to sear into our consciences is the fact that Jesus really did have to suffer excruciating pain in order to redeem us from sin. That little besetting sin, the one that feels like a negligible self-indulgence, is actually not small at all. The crumbs of gluttony, or the seeds of unkindness, are nothing less than the nails hammered into the wrists of Jesus.

Yet, the hymn is not content with the mere placing of blame. The real purpose of the stanzas is to inspire a spirit of godly sorrow, something that can till the heart and prepare it for a fresh outpouring of grace. This in mind, the hymn engages in a form of self-dialogue. Through the hymn we are invited to cry out in earnest grief, "Break, break, my heart! O burst, mine eyes!/And let my sorrows bleed." The hymn concludes with a plea for the special grace needed to repent. The hymn says, "Strike, mighty grace, my flinty soul,/Till melting waters flow,/And deep repentance drown mine eyes/In undissembled woe."

What we have in this hymn is a very honest picture of what it looks like to meditate on the evil of our sin. My advice to those struggling with temptation this week (which is all of us) is to use this hymn as a tool for saying "no" to forbidden fruit. In the very moment when sin begins to sparkle with beauty and allure, call to mind the reality of the suffering servant who gave his back so that we could be freed from the penalty and power of sin. The more we think about the suffering love of Christ, the more disgust we will feel in the presence of sin. We will begin to see sin for what it actually is: hatred of God.

Pickleball and Table Tennis – this Tuesday

The church will be open on Tuesday evening at 7pm for anyone wanting to play pickleball and/ or table tennis. Everyone is welcome - contact Joe Barnard or Andy Scott for more details.

Prayer Meeting – this Wednesday

Just a reminder that our prayer meeting will be **in person this Wednesday** at 7pm in the church. There will be no Zoom option and hard copy prayer bulletins will be available in the church.

This Sunday

There are three things to flag about Sunday –

- We'll celebrate communion together as part of our morning service
- Gordon and Avril Margery (serving in Ozair-la-Ferrière, France) are in Scotland and hope to be with us
- It's Neil Longwe's last Sunday with us on summer placement. It's been a gift to have him join us over the summer and we'll continue to pray for him and the family as he completes his studies at ETS.

Jacques and Kadi's Wedding

We're delighted that Jacques and Kadi are getting married on Saturday 12th August in the Botanic Gardens. Please be praying for them as they start this next adventure!

Back to School – Prayer Requests

We are planning to have a prayer meeting on Wednesday 16th August to pray especially for our children and adults as they go back to school and university. If want your children and/ or yourself to be included, please complete [this form](#) by Thursday 10th August. Thank you!

Summer Appeal 2023

Thank you to everyone for their generosity. The Summer Appeal currently stands at **£12,411.25** and will go towards the support of our three missionaries. The appeal will close this week.

Men's Weekend Conferences

There are two men's conferences this Autumn that may be of interest to guys at Holyrood –

1. **Deeside Christian Fellowship** is having their annual men's conference 1st – 3rd September. Several guys from HEC went last year and greatly appreciated the fellowship. The location is Faskally House in Pitlochry. The speaker this year is Dr. Mark Stirling. If you would like to attend, click on the [link here](#). Cost is £100.

2. **Cross Training Ministries** is organising a men's conference at Alltnacriche in Aviemore 27-29th October. Joe will be speaking at the event and is hoping to bring up a group of guys from Holyrood. Contact Joe if you are interested. Recommended donation is £50. The theme for the weekend is "Exercising Yourself in Godliness".



Church Calendar

For your prayers and info –

- Tuesday: Pickleball and Table Tennis at 7pm
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm in person
- Sunday:
 - Communion Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Equip at 6pm (and live streamed). Neil Longwe preaching.



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