

What Does it Mean to Live in Habitual Sin?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: "Pastor Tim, my question to you is what is habitual sin? Or what does it mean to persist in sin? If an individual has victory over certain sins like pornography, anger, cussing, etc., while growing in righteousness and sanctification, but falls under the force of temptation into a sin like lying, but he habitually resists it; only occasionally falls, but when he does, he grieves over it. He has a heart to give up that sin and is grieved every time he commits it. Can you say he is habitually committing sin?"

Discussion:

Tim: Well, first, why would he even bring that up? Because obviously, there are some pretty radically important texts in Scripture that talk about you can know whether you're a Christian or not based on whether you practice sin or not, right? So let's look at them. Probably the most emphatic, the clearest in all the Scriptures that I can think of - now there are some others - but the first one that jumps to my mind is 1 John 3:7-10. You guys, this is interesting right? This is more than interesting. This is critical is it not? If I say to you, which by the way, the Bible does, well, let's read it. "Little children, let no one deceive you." Now that's key! Because what he's saying is if you get this wrong, you're deceived. Don't let anybody deceive you. In other words, there are a lot of people likely out there in the religious world that are teaching you something that's contrary to what's about to be said.

So, don't be deceived here. He means don't be deceived because this is an area where a whole lot of people are. So you better listen carefully. "Whoever practices righteousness, is righteous, as He, God, is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil. For the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God - if you've been born again - no one born of God makes a practice of sinning. For God's seed abides in Him, and He cannot keep on sinning because He's been born of God. By this, it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

Now, listen to this. Listen to this again. "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil. He cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God." If you have been born of God, you cannot keep on sinning. That's what the Bible says. If you practice unrighteousness, you're of the devil. If you practice righteousness, that is the surest proof that you are born of God. Now is this not important or what? Because somebody's going to say, and we need to say this, we need to ask this, all of you are thinking, well, from the time I claim I was saved, I've sinned. In fact, I've been quite keenly aware that I've sinned. When does that sin that I've committed bring me into the category of being a habitual sinner that's of the devil? And when is my sinning so reduced that I'm one of those that does not keep on sinning and I evidence that I've been born

of God? I mean isn't that a question that you would like to have answered? Isn't that a pretty critical deal?

Look. When you have a situation where it is said, this is how you know you're a Christian; this is how you can know you're not a Christian, here's the evidence, by this, it is evident. Whoa. There's the evidence. There's no more important question on earth to ask than how you can know you can be a true believer. How do you know you are indeed a true one? And here's the evidence. True believers practice righteousness. True unbeliever practices unrighteousness. Son of God. Son of the devil. Wow, we better be able to answer that question. When is my sinning so habitual that I'm not over here anymore and I'm over here? We need to answer that.

Ok. Listen again. Just listen to these verses. Now, let's go back to this. It says don't be deceived. You think there are people out there in this world who teach you can be a true Christian and just keep on in sin? Folks, it's everywhere. Some of you go to churches where that's taught. Let me tell you, that is a damnable lie. It is a lie right out of hell. Don't be deceived by it. We've got people all over this city, let me tell you about it, I'm going to say names, right over there at CBC up on 1604, a woman that my wife talked to this week called up there and was concerned about her son was going to be baptized there. She said she wondered about do you examine their testimonies or anything. She said she was concerned. She didn't believe that there was true repentance there. The woman said, "Oh m'am, we don't require repentance." Let me tell you what, that's damnable. And I'll call that church out. That's damnable. We don't do any favors telling people that that church is ok. They're teaching a lie that sends people to hell.

I'll tell you, John wasn't messing around. Don't be deceived. Because multitudes are. And you want to see where it is? You guys know the verse. Many are going to say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord." And He's going to say, "I never knew you." And what does He say? It's not everybody that comes along saying, "Lord, Lord." It's not everybody that's been baptized at CBC. What does He say? Who's going to inherit the kingdom of heaven? Those who do the will of the Father in heaven. There it is. Practicing righteousness. They do the will of the Father in heaven. What does James say? Don't be deceived. It's not the hearers, it's the doers. 1 Corinthians 6. Paul says, "Don't be deceived. The unrighteous do not inherit the kingdom of God.

Folks, this is taught everywhere. Jesus Christ says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things I say?" Back to 1 John. You say that you know Him and you don't keep His commandments, you're a liar and the truth isn't in you. I'm telling you, folks, obedience and keeping the commandments, a practicing of righteousness, a hunger and thirsting after righteousness, it is the very evidence. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil. Well, what can we say? Here's what I would say. What does the Bible teach? For one, we know the Bible doesn't teach perfection. When it says you practice righteousness, it doesn't mean that you've achieved perfection. Paul says in Philippians that he had not yet attained. In 1 John 2, you remember what John wrote? He said, "little children, I write to you sin not. But if you do sin, you have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous."

And basically, we want to encourage people not to sin. What does the proverb say? Though a righteous man do what? Fall. How many times? (seven) But, what does he do? He rises. Now that's the thing. You see, the person that practices unrighteousness doesn't rise. They drink iniquity like water. We find that in Job. Basically there's none righteous, no not one. This is the picture of the unregenerate person. Do they do good? They don't do good. There's none that does good. They're under the power of sin. Basically, what you find is that they're dead in sins. They're dead in trespasses and sins. They're basically held in bondage. What do you find about the person that's been set free? Romans 6, like verse 17, I thank God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart. To what? To the Word of God. This is the evidence. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. They'll be satisfied.

Here's the thing: Romans 8:13, "If by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Those who set their minds upon things of the flesh, they have a death sentence. Those who set their minds upon things of the Spirit, those are the children of God. Those are the ones that have life. And so, what are we talking about here? Are we talking about sinlessness? No. We're talking about people, who when they fall, they rise. They're like the sheep that's thrown in the mud. You take the pig, you throw them in the mud. What do they do? They stay there. You throw a lamb in the mud, what's he do? He scrambles out. He wants to get the mud off of him. Because it's not natural anymore.

You know what we find in Scripture? Old things are passed away, all things become new. I'll tell you this, though the Christian is not perfect, they come into such newness, they come into such radical difference, they come into a situation where now they are putting to death sin. They have triumph. They're not totally defeated like before. They're not a total slave. They've become obedient from the heart. They have desires of obedience. They hunger and thirst after righteousness. It's a longing. They're longing to do what's right. And you know what? They're succeeding at it. There's a fight. Those who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body, all of a sudden, there's battle, there's warfare.

Sometimes the Christian feels like the battle rages so strongly, they feel like they're not saved at times. But let me tell you something, there wasn't a battle when people were lost. You know what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7? He's commending the Corinthians because they repented, and he says there's a sorrow that leads to repentance, there's a grief that leads to repentance, versus the grief or the sorrow, the worldly sorrow, it doesn't lead to repentance. It doesn't lead to a godly repentance. You know what? There are people who are sorry for sin. Why? Because of the consequences. They're sorry for what it's cost them. They're sorry they committed adultery and they lost their children and they lost their family. They're sorry that their sin has cost them all their money. They're sorry that it's cost them their reputation. But I'll tell you what, there's a godly sorrow in God's children. They are sorrowed that they have offended God. And though they fall seven times, they rise up out of it. And you know what? The Scripture says that they love God. They keep His commandments. Jesus Christ said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." You see, it's more than just a starchy, grit your teeth kind of obedience. He's

our Abba Father. We suddenly have an endearment. There's a longing, there's a hunger; it's something we want to do. It's a relationship we want to nurture and we want to maintain. Do we fall? Yes. Is there grief?

I'll tell you this. You as a child of God get in too much of a pattern of sin - what's going to happen? The Bible says in Hebrews 12 that God disciplines His children, and if you can run in sin and God doesn't come for you and doesn't discipline you, you are a bastard. You are not a true child of God. Lay that down. If you can toy with sin, and your Father doesn't come for you. One of the greatest assurances in my life, is that any time I have strayed, He has come for me. That is great assurance in that. You know what? From the days of John the Baptist, what? You find in Matthew 11, from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is taken by violence. The violent take it by force, folks. Let me tell you this, the Christian life is battle. There is a severing of hands, a cutting off of feet, a plucking out of eyes. I'll tell you, if your life is not battle with sin - I'm not saying you have perfect victory all the time, I'm not saying you don't fall at times. But when you fall, you rise. When you rise, you fight. And by radical means you put it to death.

I'll remind you again of a text I brought up, God says under the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36, He will cleanse you of all your idols. And I'll guarantee you, if you're allowed to have idols stay in your life, and God doesn't come for you and He doesn't discipline you, and He doesn't rip those things away from you, and sometimes painfully so, folks, let me tell you, God gives you a new heart. God gives desires for this thing. What this guy Aaron was describing, the person that's grieved when he commits it, the guy that's resisting, the guy that occasionally falls, but when he does, he grieves; the guy that had major victory over pornography and anger and cussing for some time to fall into a lying lip. I mean even Isaiah, you remember him, he falls down before the Lord and he's saying I'm a man of unclean lips. He's realizing there his mouth had not been perfect.

Folks, this is a battle. It's not perfection, but it's definitely a moving in that direction. There is victory in that direction. Your life has radically become something it wasn't before. If you claim that you've become a Christian, and you see no difference in righteousness, no difference in obedience to the laws and commandments of Jesus Christ; no change in your life as far as what you're committed to, what you hunger after, the mind that is set on the things of the Spirit; that's where life is, the mind that's set on the things of the flesh, that's death. And let me tell you, if there hasn't been a radical change - old things passed away, and all things become new, if you haven't experienced a total different relationship with sin; if you are not at war with sin in a way that you never knew in your past life, then yes, you have reasons to be gravely concerned whether you've been converted or not.

Hey, I can tell you, I wrestle with sin. But I can tell you this, my two greatest desires are to be sinless and even before that one is to see Christ. And I know those are my desires. And I long for those things. And you guys just have to ask yourself that. If you love Christ and are keeping His commandments, love isn't some foreign thing. Love isn't some strange, odd, alien thing. We

understand that. Is your mind on it? What's your mind on? When you were lost, your mind was on all the things of this world. It was on the gutter. It was on money. It was on success. It was on self. It was on sex. It was on fun. It was on pleasure. And it was constantly geared on how to get those things. The mind that is set on the things of the Spirit is a mind that now thinks and is consumed with Christ and righteousness and the Word and the glory of God, and how to love God's people, and how to please the Lord. If that hasn't radically changed in your life, folks, you're still the old man. The old hasn't passed away. We were dead in trespasses and sins, now we've been made alive in Christ.

If you don't know anything about that radical transformation of life in Christ, folks, that's the idea here behind practicing righteousness. It's not perfection. But it's definitely a life of goodness and righteousness where that is the norm. That is habitual. That you are striving to do what is right. Yes, it's going to be intermixed with sin. Yes, we fall short of loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And we fall short of that every single day. Every single hour. But is there a radical change to where we do want to love, we do want to please, we do want His glory? Yes, there is. And does that compel us and prompt us and move us to a life that's radically different than before? Absolutely. And if you can't tell any difference between your life now and what you claim was your life as a lost person, then you're still lost.