

Die and Live Free!

An internet phenomenon has taken place in my ministry. For over four decades in preaching to people from coast-to-coast, much of it to our youth, I have an unusual amount of questions emailed or sent by Facebook or Twitter ranging from doubts of faith to how to handle any number of crisis. Recently, a young man had a question dealing with thought control. After answering him, I decided I should put down some of these thoughts in the forum of Pastor's Word.

In I Thessalonians 4:4 the Bible says, *"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour."* This is a biblical metaphor comparing the body to a vessel. We also see this usage in such passages as Psalm 31:12, *"I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel."* Again in Proverbs 25:4, *"Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer."* I Thessalonians 4:4 commands us to "possess" our vessel, which means to get your bodies under control! We read in II Timothy 2:21 *"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (II Timothy 2:21). What a strong statement! God's desire for us is to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto Him as Romans 12:1 and 2 teaches – and if we do, we shall be "meet for the master's use." This should be our goal, to be vessels meet for our Master, Jesus' use. If we are, God shall, *"... make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory"* (Romans 9:23).

1. Thought life is important.

The Word of God says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he..." (Proverbs 23:7). Jesus said, *"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28). Job was the most righteous man in the earth during his lifetime and this holy man, knowing temptation, said, *"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"* (Job 31:1). Job was determined not to let his mind dwell on something or someone that would take his affection from His Lord or his wife.

On a positive note, Paul said, *"I think myself happy..."* (Acts 26:2). A person's frame of mind can very much determine his or her action and reaction. We do not respond to what is necessarily the truth; we respond to what we believe is the truth. Jesus said, *"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32).

2. Cultivate the freedom of resisting temptation.

The Bible says, *"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"* (II Timothy 2:22). Our Lord knows how very weak we can be, for He said, *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matthew 26:41). If we don't flee temptations, we are setting ourselves up for *"...many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition"* (I Timothy 6:9). The Bible says, *"No man that warreth entangleth*

himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (II Timothy 2:4). Barnes says the word “entangleth” is derived our word "implicate," which means to braid in, to interweave; to involve in, to entangle. It means here that the victims become implicated in those vices like an animal that is entangled in a net.

The world in which we live demands living with a “got-to-have-it-now” approach. Little does the one who succumbs to temptation realize that he or she will become trapped, sometimes fatally. As a matter of fact, that word “entangle” is used again in an even more severe manner directed toward the apostate, *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (II Peter 2:20-22).*

I remind you that Jesus said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Knowing Jesus and His truth is liberating. Conforming to Christ is living in total freedom of any earthbound chain of addiction. “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Romans 6:22). Therefore we should, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). No one on earth is more truly free than the dedicated, consecrated, Spirit-filled Christian. Free from a guilty conscious, free from the enslavement of evil habits, free from accruing a bad name.*

3. Rely on God’s power.

Paul said, *“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (I Corinthians 9:27). He also said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (I Corinthians 6:12). Paul was saying, I will not become addicted to anything! No one and nothing other than Christ is to be Lord over my life!*

The complaint I often hear from weak brothers is, “Pastor, I have a strong desire to do right, but I just can’t seem to make myself do the right thing. I cave in every time!” The very words, “I can’t make myself” is reflective of part of the problem. Paul said his new life was not self-motivated but Christ empowered. *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Always keep this principle in mind: All the power of God’s omnipotence works in behalf of the obedient Christian. Christ in the believer provides not only the “willing” power but also the “doing” power to accomplish His purposes. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13). Did not Paul*

finally declare in joyful resolution, *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Philippians 4:13)?

“Live Free or Die” is the official motto of New Hampshire and the most famous of all state mottos because it embodies the national desire of all Americans who love their freedom. If I may tweak that thought, consider, “Die and Live Free.” Christ said, *“I can of mine own self do nothing...”* (John 5:30). Therefore, how much more should we die to self and live free to operate in His power instead of failing in our own strength? *“...for without Me [Christ] ye can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

-Pastor Pope-