

Exam Time

January 6, 2019

We have just finished a long holiday season. It is common for people to slip into bad habits during the holiday season. Maybe you let your self-discipline slip during the last month or so. Maybe you started eating too many sweets. Maybe you made a habit of staying up later and not getting enough sleep. You may have started skipping your regular exercise routine, whatever that is for you. Or maybe you became neglectful of your prayers.

It is easy to slip out of our good habits during the holidays. There is more temptation then. There are more sweets, some of which are only available during the holidays. There are TV specials and favorite movies only show this time of year. And you are busy with all the holiday activities and preparations. There isn't enough time to do all the regular stuff and all the extra stuff.

In short, you have slipped into living a less disciplined life. And once we get into those habits of neglecting the good things we ought to be doing we are likely to drift into sinful habits as well. I know that happens to me. When I slip into periods of less self-discipline for doing the important things, I tend to also allow sinful things back in.

There are several things that contribute to this whole process. One is that we are accessing less help from the Holy Spirit to resist temptation. We set ourselves up for this help in our daily prayer time. So if we ignore our prayers, we are tuning out the Holy Spirit the rest of the day too.

A second contributing factor is more stress. You have more things to get done during the holidays which creates stress. And that stress is aggravated by overeating, lack of sleep, lack of physical and spiritual exercise.

And then a third contributing factor is strong emotions, like those experienced because of unmet expectations during the holidays. Perhaps your life, your family has not turned out as you always expected and hoped it would. We are reminded of this during the holidays. Those old family traditions have disappeared, the ones you so enjoyed at an earlier time in your life. The family get-togethers bring a stress of their own. Instead of being the loving times you always hope for, family members end up in arguments and hurt feelings. People leave relieved it is over instead of being glad they came.

Holidays also accentuate our loneliness, financial problems, and poor health. Your expectations for the holidays have come to naught. And you grieve the loss.

We start to feel sorry for ourselves and decide to treat ourselves. And then we treat ourselves more and more and more. We lose our focus on Jesus and let the things of the world dance in our eyes.

In the parable of the soils, Jesus warned of those who get distracted from the gospel by the cares of this world. He warns of the "deceitfulness of wealth", thinking that all our problems would be solved with more money. He warns of a spirit of discontent with what we have that leads to the pursuit of more and more new things. He describes how

spiritual things are squeezed out of our minds by life's worries and the desire for more possessions. The Christmas holiday brings that out more than any other.

But it isn't just during the holidays that we slip into sinful habits. Normal life gets tiring and we slip into habits of sin, especially as we get into periods of overwork, not enough rest, etc. We let our guard down and drift into sinful desires, thoughts, words, and actions.

So the holiday season has ended and we have turned the corner on a new year. This is a good time for examining your life for sin. I am not talking about making resolutions to become a better person. I am speaking today about examining your life for sin and repenting of that sin.

We are commanded to put sin to death.

(Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1; Ephesians 4:17 – 5:21;
Colossians 3:1–17; 1 Peter 4:1–11; 1 John 2:28–3:11)

Let's read one of these passages.

Colossians 3:1-10 (NIV) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

In order to put sin to death we need to discover the sins that are in us, in our hearts. There may be sinful desires that we are not consciously aware of. We need the Spirit to point them out to us. Or there may be sins that we ARE aware of, but are purposely overlooking. We need the Spirit to convict us about these.

So we need to examine ourselves for sin. This is a prayer activity. We must seek the Holy Spirit's help to identify such sins that may have crept into us, into our lives.

There are many different sins, but only two kinds of sins. There are only two categories of sin.

There are sins of commission. These are acts that you do that you are not supposed to do.

For example, God has commanded that we not steal. Stealing is a sin of commission. We are commanded not to lie. Lying is a sin of commission. We are commanded not to gossip. Gossip is a sin of commission.

There were several such commands in the passage we just read. There are many more spoken against in the pages of the Bible. That is one reason we prayerfully read the Bible, to learn of the sins to avoid.

There are sins of omission. These are acts you are supposed to do, but fail to accomplish.

For example, we are commanded to believe all that Jesus is, did, and taught. Failure to believe this is a sin of omission. We are commanded to trust in the love and salvation of God in Jesus Christ. Failure to trust in Him is a sin of omission. We are commanded to love each other as Jesus has loved us. Failure to do so is a sin of omission.

This was the new command Jesus gave to His followers, to love each other. That plays out in the commands to encourage each other, pray for each other, and forgive each other, among other things. Failure to do these are sins of omission.

Failure to forgive each other is a sin of omission. We are to forgive those who sin against us. This is not optional. It goes to the heart of your relationship with Jesus. Others commit a small amount of sin compared to the great amount of sin we have committed against God. And yet God has forgiven us. So we should forgive the lesser sin of others against us.

Colossians three also lists some sins of omission, commands of what we SHOULD do.

Colossians 3:12-13 (NIV) Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

As we read God's word, we learn of both kinds of sins. We don't repent of unknown sin. We have to know our sin. We do not always know the sinful desires in our hearts.

Have you ever said something you were sorry for? Did you ask yourself, "Why did I say that?" Likely you spoke that because of some sinful desire in your heart. The Holy Spirit reveal why you said that so you can deal with it.

SO we need to examine ourselves. Let your prayer be that of David.

Psalm 26:2-3 (NIV) Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind...

I encourage you to pray this prayer to God. And then examine your, life bit by bit, with God. Ask the Spirit to guide your thinking and bring to your memory any sins you have let slip into your life.

Then you can confess the sin that is revealed. To confess your sin is to agree with God about your specific sins.

Following confession, think with God about how to repent of this sin, how to put it to death. Repentance, you see, was not a one-time decision you made when you first

believed. Repentance is an action you must take whenever you discover sin in yourself. We must continue to practice repentance all our days on earth.

So I am recommending an examination of your life right now. Do this with the help of the Holy Spirit.

When you leave, we have for you a handout of Bible passages and questions to ask of yourself. Use this sheet in your prayer time. Ask God to reveal your sin as you ask yourself these questions. Let me give you a sample.

Matthew 6:12-14 (NIV) Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

- **Is there anyone against whom you hold a grudge?**
- **Anyone you haven't forgiven?**
- **Anyone you hate?**
- **Is there any person against whom you are harboring bitterness, resentment, or jealousy?**

Don't do the whole sheet in one sitting. Do a portion a day. You might need several days on one portion, dealing with only one question in that section on one day.

Don't rush this. Be honest. You aren't going to share it with me, or anyone else. It is between you and God. So be honest. You won't benefit from it if you continue to ignore sin in you.

Describe specific steps of repentance, how you will make changes.

Review the previous day's progress before you tackle today's question(s).

For questions that deal with people, review it in relationship to each individual in your life. These may be family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, students/teachers/staff at school, or people at church.

Invitation

Perhaps in the course of this sermon God has already convicted you of some sin or sins. Now is the time to confess that to Him and begin your repentance of it.

Perhaps you have been found guilty of the sin of unbelief in Jesus and/or lack of trust in Him. Today, give Jesus your heart and soul and life. Receive Him as your savior and Lord.