

Habits

Introduction:

1. No better resolution could be made than, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). As a new year is upon us, let's spend some time talking about habits framed from the mind of Christ. [C] A habit is defined as: "a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up."¹
2. Synonyms for *habit* are practice, custom, pattern, routine, style, way, manner, mode, norm, tradition, matter of course, etc. Note that a habit can be either good or bad. Jesus had the habit of going into synagogues on the Sabbath and reading (Lk. 4:16). It was a developed tendency, manner, or custom of His. This is why New Year resolutions often fail and go the way of the earth because they are not "settled" or practiced with regularity. No tendency has been developed (cf. Rom. 7:19). On a January 5th calendar, "*Form good habits, and they'll be just as hard to break as bad ones!*"
3. [C] "It has been said that, 'habits are like comfortable beds, easy to get into, but hard to get out of.' It has also been said that 'habits are like cable, each day as we do something in a pattern, we intertwine one thread with another.' And, of course, as the threads are woven tightly together, a cable is formed. Using this analogy, we need to realize that on any particular day, the thread we added was probably too small to gain much of our attention. But, after many threads have been woven in, we discover that together they have become a practically unbreakable cable or rope" (R. J. Evans).
4. Habits can, therefore, become a developing nemesis (Prov. 5:22), or a potent ally depending on what is formed. Some developed the habit of forsaking the assembling of saints (Heb. 10:25, note NASB has "habit"). Ask a chain smoker how hard it is to break his habit? No one can claim they are not addicted to cigarettes when they smoke a pack a day. The cost alone shows such to be the case. In 2017, Texas ranked near the middle (at 23rd) on the list of most expensive states to buy cigarettes at \$7.14. New York was ranked number 1. Smoking one pack a day in Texas will cost you just over \$2600.00 in one year. In 10 years if the price remained the same, it will cost you \$26,000.00. From a purely financial standpoint, why wouldn't everyone want to give it up? Because it is an addicting habit.

Discussion:

I. [C] Unhealthy Habits that Hinder Good

- A. Do we stop to think that God is concerned with our habits? "For His eyes *are* on the ways of man, And He sees all his steps" (Job 34:21, cf. Prov. 5:21). Bad habits come in many shapes and sizes but what is truly bad is evil and will cost you your soul. If we are honest, we should see that some of our habits are sinful and need to be corrected.
- B. [cl] *Do I put other things before God?*
 1. Remember the thorny soil (Lk. 8:14)? So many kinds of sinful activity would fall into this verse. Although they hear the right message, the world competes with the word so that they bring no fruit to maturity.

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2. "If we aren't careful, we allow our lives to become so cluttered and busy and full of worldly activities that, before we realize it, less important things are taking God's rightful place in our lives. Our jobs, hobbies, recreation, entertainment, times with friends all have a place, but they should never come before our time with God..." (R. J. Evans).
 3. Matthew 6:33. The Christian with a cluttered life is one who with the passage of time has not grown to be able to know the difference between good and evil (Heb. 5:14).
- C. [C] *Am I a poor steward of what God has given me?*
1. Peter wrote, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).
 2. Stewards are to be faithful in what is put under their control (1 Cor. 4:1,2). Paul spoke of himself as a *servant* and *steward*. As a *servant* of Christ, he is not seeking to be the head nor to begin any faction (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5). As a *steward*, he is presiding over the property of another—a position of sobering responsibility.
 3. "God has entrusted us with the responsibility of caring for our bodies, our souls, our money, our relationships, and our use of time. Are we responsible in these areas? We are not to allow bad habits of poor stewardship to hinder our lives. The Apostle Paul has instructed us to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:15-16). He also tells us that 'you are not your own...For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are God's' (1 Cor. 6:19-20)." (ibid.). As we enter this new year, let's think about how we manage our time, relationships, and duties to the Lord.
- D. [C] *Am I lazy?* I am not talking about times where we need some RNR and feel lazy. But is my manner of life lazy? Have I learned the habit of slothfulness? [C] The book of Proverbs identifies some traits associated with laziness.
1. The lazy man desires but has no ambition to work (Prov. 13:4). He may ask for a handout but is unwilling to labor for it (Prov. 21:25).
 2. The lazy man imagines difficulties when there is a highway (Prov. 15:19). He envisions obstacles of thorns, briars, and fences when there are none. These justify his habit of sloth.
 3. The lazy man squanders his time to make his field ready (Prov. 20:4). Barnes notes that November and December are times when plowing is done in Palestine. He will use the pretense of foul weather to excuse him from duty and then will beg during harvest. In hyperbole, he is too lazy to feed himself (Prov. 19:24; 2 Thess. 3:10).
 4. The lazy man also has a trait of dismissing instruction, thinking he is right while sound wisdom he judges as wrong (Prov. 26:16). "Seven" is the most used biblical number for complete. The Bible's solution for the sluggard is to go to the ant and consider her foresight and industrious spirit (Prov. 6:6). What great lessons can be learned from small and seemingly insignificant creatures! They rest in the winter but are incessant workers in the spring, summer, and Fall. This rebukes man's unwillingness to work during the appointed season.
- E. [C] *Do I grumble?*
1. It can be easy to develop the habit of grumbling when one focuses on all that is wrong or negative. It can also destroy my positive influence for Christ and can cause deep division.
 2. God hates one who sows discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19).

3. How much discord can be sown by grumbling tongues? James taught that it can be like a little fire that burns up a great forest (Jas. 3:5).
4. [cl] The seriousness of ridding this vice from our lives is found in Philippians 2:14-16. The key here in maintaining blamelessness in our world is to do things without complaining (grumbling) and disputing (arguing). You keep your light on by holding fast the word of life, not spewing forth the words of complaints!

II. [C] Removing Unhealthy Habits

- A. Paul spoke of practices that will keep us out of the kingdom of God and also identified practices that we should replace evil with. He contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23).
 1. [cl] How am I to rid myself from practicing things that are sinful. Paul answers in Galatians 5:24, 25. It requires the crucifixion of fleshly appetites. I must mortify the sinful choices first. To crucify something is to put it to open shame and to death. I need to confess that sin to God. I must hold in contempt anything that will separate me from God and then put it to death.
 2. [cl] It requires the inauguration of walking in the Spirit. Bad habits need to be replaced with good ones. I must resurrect from the ashes of crucified sin the fruit of the Spirit. Put another way, I must bear fruits worthy of repentance. These nine things must become my manners.
- B. [C] The example of Hezekiah.
 1. Hezekiah's father was wicked. He and Israel had developed evil habits (2 Kin. 16:1-4; nutshell, see 2 Chron. 28:19, note his habit, *continually* unfaithful).
 2. [cl] Hezekiah chose to reject his father's model and began to remove the wickedness from the nation (2 Kin. 18:1-4; cf. Jas. 1:21). This included the removal of things that were once sacred but perverted like the bronze serpent Moses built (cf. Num. 21:4-9). Even if we had the very cross Jesus was murdered on today, it would still be only a piece of wood and unworthy of worship. We commemorate the death of Jesus not by images of crosses, but the Lord's Supper.
 3. [cl] He trusted in the Lord and served him (2 Kin. 18:5, 6). Notice what "trust" equals.
 4. [cl] He had immediate service to repair the house of God (2 Chron. 29:3-5). Too many want to make verbal resolutions but delay action. Hezekiah moved swiftly in his first year to bring major changes to the nation's direction. If your house is in sin, now is the time to remove the rubbish and make repairs!

Conclusion:

1. In the next lesson, I will identify different areas where repairs can be made to your "house" as you seek to please the Lord in healthy habit building.
2. Invitation: Matthew 11:25-30. The Lord reveals the Father and can offer rest for our souls. Sin brings the wages of death, why not find revival and "rest" (refreshment) with the Lord and let Him show you how to conduct your life here?

Sermon 2 - Introduction

1. [C] What are some habits we can build in this new year? What should we do to build a life that pleases the Lord? As previously mentioned, a habit is “a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.”² Developing good habits should equally be hard to give up!
 2. A habit is a practice. Notice that our spiritual father is determined by what we practice (1 Jn. 3:10). Notice further there are only two fathers. You are either a child of God or a child of the devil. Everyone person (spouse, child, sister, brother, boyfriend, girlfriend, neighbor, etc.) falls into one of those two households and there is no third one. The one who does not practice, the one who is not in the habit of doing righteousness is not of God and is of the devil’s household.
- I. [C] Remove deadly relationships (1 Cor. 15:33, 34).** Remove any relationship that encourages moral decline.
- A. While we want to reach everyone with the gospel, we are not necessarily to become companions with everyone. This passage speaks of the enemy of healthy habit formation. It corrupts, depraves, destroys good habits. How many times when evil is done is it first encouraged by another?
 - B. [cl] Evil companionship bears evil fruit and influence. “He who walks with wise [men] will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20; cf. Jonadab and in his influence over Amnon, 2 Sam. 13:3-5). What benefit was Delilah to Samson (Jud. 16:4)? How did Peter’s warming himself with the world help his faith (Jn. 18:25)? There are relationships that will only hinder us from developing good habits. Do you think a child of the devil is going to foster righteous living in you?
 - C. Contrast Jonadab with the influence of Christians (Heb. 10:24).
- II. [C] Resolve to Have Faithful Attendance (Heb. 10:25).**
- A. There can be growing pains in learning to do anything right. Worshiping God with the saints will take effort and time but it is a good habit to get into. That does not mean that I am encouraging anyone to make worship cold and habitual. However, it can become a manner, a habit, a custom that when developed is “hard to give up.” It is not something that requires future decision making, it is already decided.
 - B. Satan will want you to give it up and he will seek to place obstacles in front of you so as to derail your progress and break this good habit! He is always at work and is effective in seducing people from their responsibility toward God. Ask Eve about his effectiveness in the Garden. Ask Noah how effective Satan was to the world that perished in the water. Ask Noah how effective Satan was in tempting him with wine after he came out of the ark. Ask Abraham, Lot, David and others.
 - C. Recognize the divine solution in James 4:7, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Submit and resist. How better to submit to God and resist Satan than the armor and edification that comes from our assembling together? This is often the first place Satan works to weaken you. Miss a service here can begin a habit of missing more frequently.
- III. [C] Determine to Regularly Read the Bible (Acts 17:11; Eph. 3:1-7).** There are different schedules that can be used for reading. But why is reading God’s word on a regular basis is a good habit to form? What is gained from doing it? Here we see that spiritual understanding is gained by reading (3:4). What does spiritual understanding look like? What is the value in reading the Bible?

² *Ibid.*

- A. [C] It is God's word that you are reading (3:5). This alone should mean something. It is the message from the Holy Spirit to you!
- B. To be able to test what is taught (Acts 17:11; 1 Jn. 4:1).
- C. It reveals what God has done for you. "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). We ought to have caution in attributing acts from God where He has not revealed such to be from Him.
- D. It reveals what we do not know (1 Cor. 2:8).
- E. It reveals what God will do (1 Cor. 2:9-12).
- F. It reveals the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:13-16). This is no doubt instructive. So our next point is...
- G. It reveals what we must do (1 Cor. 2:15; Prov. 6:20-23; 2 Tim. 3:15). Read it to be wise for salvation. What better investment in this new year could you make than to become more familiar with God's word when the salvation of your soul is at stake?
- H. It aids in times of temptation (Prov. 6:24; Christ's example Matt. 4:1-11).
- I. It can benefit you, your children, and your descendants not yet unborn (Psa. 78:4-8). Through this habit, you might become the one who like in Ezekiel who would make a wall and stand in the gap so as to turn away the destruction from the Lord (Ezek. 22:30, 31). I've seen both, where one turns away from the Lord, breaking the wall of faith and opening the flood gates raising their children in error who grow up and embrace and defend that error due to their family ties. I've also seen those come out of a long line of perpetuated error to stand in the gap and redirect their children to the truth. You might be that wall that begins to turn away God's wrath from your family line.

IV. [C] Adopt Watchfulness and Prayer

- A. Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed [is] willing, but the flesh [is] weak."
- B. Paul communicated the need to be alert to the Thessalonians (see 1 Thess. 5:3-8). [C] What this looks like is found in the following verses:
 - 1. Be alert to salvation (5:9)
 - 2. Be alert to each other (5:11)
 - 3. Be alert to those laboring (5:12, 13)
 - 4. Be alert to the unruly and weak (5:14)
 - 5. Be alert to what is good (5:15).
 - 6. Be alert to what is joyful (5:16)
 - 7. Be alert to prayer (5:17, 18).
- C. Why should we watch and pray daily? What is the benefit? Let the Lord teach us (Lk. 21:33-36).
 - 1. [C] *The Lord's word.*
 - a) Note how 21:33 compliments our previous point on reading the word—His words will never pass away. All that is written by man will eventually fade away, but His words will never perish. This is a testimony of the deity of Jesus Christ. He has a unique position to speak of the world and His word. He is the creator of the world and determined its ultimate demise (Heb. 1:8-12; v. 10 is still referring to the Son v. 8 and ties Psalm 102 to the Son.)
 - b) But note further that the perspective and emphasis of Jesus is not on the world—it is momentary, but rather upon His word—it is enduring. The great deception of Satan is to

take our minds away from what is enduring (the word) and make us more concerned with what is temporary (the world).

2. [C] *The Lord's Warning* – 21:34, 35. The warning of Jesus is against being weighed down or having the mind "overcharged" mind (KJV). The Lord gives three specific warnings where the mental capacity is dangerously subdued.
 - a) [cl] "*Carousing*" is defined by W. E. Vines as, "the giddiness and headache resulting from excessive wine-bibbing, a drunken nausea." This is descriptive of what today is termed as "the hangover" where the mind refuses to function as it should.
 - b) "*Drunkenness*" where Henry Thayer relates it to another word that involves, "wine; perhaps any intoxicating drink." Isaiah warns against the evil of drinking such, "But they also have erred through wine, And through intoxicating drink are out of the way; The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, They are swallowed up by wine, They are out of the way through intoxicating drink; They err in vision, they stumble [in] judgment" (Isa. 28:7). He emphasizes *they err* and *are out of the way*. Drinking alcohol takes the Christian out of the way, it makes him err in vision and in judgment. It is ironic, that so many begin a new year with alcohol—the very substance the Lord identifies as dulling the mind. The world tries to celebrate the baby Jesus on December 25th (which is not authorized by Jesus) and then, one week later, celebrates the commencing of a new year with a substance that makes us err in judgment and vision. Is it not puzzling?
 - c) "*Cares of this life*" which is the daily concerns and anxieties of life. If our minds are overcharged by the things in this life, we will not be seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33). Jesus is warning that these three dangers will make us unprepared for a judgment that will come unexpectedly and will be a snare or trap (v. 35).
3. [C] *The Lord's solution: "watch and pray"* (21:36). Why is prayer a good habit to be in? Prayer assists you in remaining sober in a world that is intoxicated with evil. Similarly, after Paul described the Christians war, He insisted on regular prayer and watchfulness (Eph. 6:18). Jesus gives two bold reasons to always watch and pray.
 - a) [cl] *To escape all these things that shall come to pass*. Yes, there were going to be things that would come to pass. For them, Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. But remember, Jesus said all will be judged (Lk. 21:35). It is universal, and this admonition is universal as well. Do you dwell on the earth, then this warning is for you! Every generation of Christians will have their challenges to overcome and their traps to escape.
 - b) [cl] *To stand before the Son of Man*. We will stand before Christ on the judgment day. This word "stand" can mean to stand so as to be kept intact, to stand firm, continue safe and sound, to stand unharmed, to stand ready, be prepared.

Conclusion:

1. [cl] John asked in Revelation 6:17, "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"
2. Paul uses this word three times in talking about the Christians battle in Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14.
3. [cl] When judgment day comes, will your habits enable you to stand before Christ?