

G.A.P.

Righteousness & Relationships Part 6 Matthew 5:29-30 (cont'd) 5-9-10

Summary: Fighting sin by preferring produces gratitude instead of the resentment or self-pity produced by burdensome abstention from preferred sin. Know what you are trying to amputate – the initial impulse to look (before it becomes a lust) – requires alertness and vigilance. To have power to do all this you need grace (pray to the Father, trust in the Son, and walk by the Spirit through Scripture, Church, and obedience).

- 1) **Prefer What is Better**.....
- 2) **Know what you are trying to amputate**
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Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

a. Prefer What is Better

Jesus teaches us here to amputate and fling away that part of us that is in charge of sinful looking. It is not your physical eye that looks the wrong way – it is something in your inner man. And that part of your soul that wants to look at a person or object in such a way that turns a little impulse into a powerful craving – Jesus tells us to rip that part of you out and throw it away. So before moving on to the next verse in the Sermon on the Mount we are taking a little extra time to think through exactly how that is done.

The first clue we covered last week – it is found in that word **better** in verses 29-30. Greedy, covetous looking promises to bring us pleasure and satisfaction, and so we are reluctant to give it up – we do not want to let go of that pleasure. But Jesus here says there is something better. What is it? Answer: The only alternative to hell – receiving spiritual life from God. Wellness, wholeness – contentment, joy, satisfaction, courage, comfort, strength, insight, the ability to enjoy good things – all the various aspects of spiritual life and wellness. That is what is better and more satisfying than the pleasure of sin. It is for more satisfying to be full of joy and hope and comfort and strength and miss out on looking at a woman than to get the thrill of looking but not have joy and hope and comfort and strength and all the rest. (And it is not just more satisfying in the future; it is more satisfying right now.)

Last week I talked about how to train our souls to prefer the presence of God over the pleasures of

sin in our affections and emotions. It happens when we experience fellowship and communion with God in every part of life – your devotions, your ministry, your work, your play, your marriage¹ – everything. Anytime you do anything in life that does not result in you coming away with a sense of satisfaction of soul, that thing was a failure, because every successful attempt at fellowship with God results in satisfaction of the appetites of the soul. Everything we ever do all day long should be an attempt at fellowship with God, which means anything you ever do that does not cause you to come away satisfied, encouraged, strengthened, delighted, or built up in some other aspect of spiritual life and wellness of soul, is a failure - a failed attempt at fellowship with God.

Glorifies God

So, we fight sinful desire with greater desire and there are a number of benefits to fighting sin that way. The most important is the fact that it glorifies God rather than us. If I just resist sin out of sheer willpower, that honors me. But if I resist it because I prefer fellowship with God to the pleasure of that sin, that honors God.

Generates Joy

Secondly, it is a good approach because it results in joy rather than frustration. If you live your life constantly trying to say no to what you really want the most, that is a life of frustration. If you live your life picking your favorite thing off the menu of options, that is a life of joy.

Produces Gratitude instead of Self-Pity

I mentioned those two last week; now let me add a third benefit to this approach. It generates humility and love for God rather than self-pity and resentment against God. If you have to constantly miss out on what you really want because of God, that can easily push you toward resentment in your heart toward God. You start thinking about God as that one who is constantly depriving you.

Or if it does not push you toward resentment, it will push you in the direction of self-pity. Every time you say no to what you really want because of God, it will make you feel like you are suffering a loss for His sake, and now He owes you one. When godly living means saying no to what you really prefer rather than saying yes to what you really prefer, righteousness becomes burdensome. It is just loss after loss after loss all day long. And when it feels that way to you, the more you do it the more you will tend toward feeling sorry for yourself because of how much you are giving to God. And the result will be a sense of entitlement. I have said no so many times, I have given up so much for God, I have been so good – I deserve a break. I deserve a...treat. I deserve some pleasure. I put up with so much – I deserve this little indulgence. I heard a quotation last week from a famous evangelical pastor who had to step down because of an adulterous affair. They asked him why it happened and he said, “It was a point in my ministry when I was more weary than I ever was in my life and more burdened under the pressures of leadership...” He was carrying out ministry in a way that was burdensome to him, and that sense of being burdened led to a degree of self-pity that ended in him committing adultery.

If serving God, ministry, righteousness, resisting temptation – if those things are burdensome – if they feel like loss instead of gain – if they feel like you giving to God rather than God giving to you; then they will result in either resentment toward God or self-pity and entitlement, which will increase your vulnerability to sin. But if we fight against sin by preferring something better, then the more we resist sin the more we feel indebted to God rather than thinking He is indebted to us. Instead of feeling like we have sacrificed so much and given up so much we will feel like we have been given so much. Instead of resentment will be gratitude. And instead of feeling entitled to some sinful pleasure we will feel a sense of increased obligation to God. So fighting desire with desire not only glorifies God and gives you joy but it also makes you less vulnerable to temptation because you do not have resentment or self-pity.

¹ Proverbs 5:8 Keep to a path far from [the adulteress], do not go near the door of her house ... 15 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. 16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? ... 18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. 20 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress?

b. Know what you are trying to amputate

So, how do you fight sin? *Prefer* – you prefer life from God over the pleasure of sin. That is the P in today’s sermon title – P is for *Prefer*.

The Little Impulse, not the Huge Lust

The second principle that will help us in the battle against sin is to simply understand what it is exactly that we are trying to amputate. We sometimes oversimplify the issue and think falling into sin is just a matter of having a sinful desire, then deciding to satisfy that sinful desire. But there is actually more to it than that. The goal is not to fight the sinful desire; the goal is to kill it before it starts looking. Satan knows he is not going to be able to win the battle most of the time if all he has to work with is a little, tiny impulse in your flesh. If he tries to tempt you at that point he knows you will easily resist. Satan knows that for this sinful impulse to be of any use to him it has to grow into a big, powerful desire that can easily overwhelm your resistance. And so instead of trying to get you to sin he just tries to get you to think about it just a little bit. But if you do that – if you let your soul look, that is what turns it into a big, powerful lust.

So Jesus’ instruction is not, “You need to amputate the big, powerful lust,” but rather, “You just need to amputate the part of you that wants to look.” Fighting desire with desire will work *if* we attack it at that early stage. It is not to the point where you are fantasizing or anything like that – this is before that. This is at the very, very beginning when your soul just kind of throws the idea out there, and your mind says, “I wonder what it would be like to think about that for a second...” That little urge to turn your attention in the direction of a sin – *that is* what needs to be amputated.

If you do not catch it there, and you allow that look – you allow your soul to consider the sin a little bit – that is when the little impulse turns into a huge lust.

Romans 13:14 Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

That is not saying, “Don’t fantasize about the sin.” By the time you fantasize you are already gratifying the desires of the flesh. What it is saying is the same thing Jesus is saying – “Don’t look.” Do not even let your soul glance in that direction.

It has been interesting this week as I have kind of watched my own soul to see if I could discern the moment when this happens. And I found that it is actually fairly obvious – if you are watching for it. You can tell exactly when that moment is when your soul just decides to bend in the direction of some sin.

And I also found that it has been easy to crush the sinful desire if I catch it at this stage. And I also found that it is next to impossible to fight the sinful desire if I don’t catch it at this stage. The lusts and covetousness and greed in us get all their power from looking. But if you catch them before they do that looking, they are easily defeated.

Be alert, vigilant

“That sounds great, if I had time to sit around all day thinking about the inclinations of my soul – but that’s just not practical. I can’t do that – that would require just watching and being on guard all day every day.” That’s right. And that is why Scripture is so relentless in constantly telling us to keep watch and be alert. The only way to avoid falling to temptation is to be constantly on guard.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

Sin has a way of sneaking up on you. The droning on of daily life has a way of lulling us to sleep – especially when you are not suffering. One of the most dangerous, deadly times of life is time of prosperity. Prosperity is a killer, because it so easily lulls us to sleep if we do not labor hard to use that prosperity as a means of increasing our delight in God. We forget we are in a war. We lose sight of the

urgency of the fight, we let down our guard, and the next thing we know we find ourselves defeated. And so as you read through the New Testament you find constant warnings:

- Watch and pray
- be vigilant
- be careful
- be on your guard
- look out
- be alert
- wake up
- pay attention
- be sober minded
- put on armor – and a crucial part of that armor is to have your feet fitted with *readiness*.

Be ready to fight at all times. We can be lulled to sleep by prosperity; we can be distracted from the battle by sin or by the normal anxieties and stresses of life.

Luke 21:34-36 Be on your guard or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life ... 36 Be always on the watch and pray...

Genesis 4:7 sin is crouching at your door

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

There is no doubt in my mind that Satan intentionally backs off of tempting us just for the purpose of causing us to become over-confident and let down our guard. He pulls back the force of temptation, and you seem to experience all kinds of victory, so you no longer need some of the safeguards that you put in place when the battle was really hot. And so you drift into close proximity to temptation, thinking you will be just fine. And then Satan springs and has you in his trap before you even know what hit you.

Keep your distance

And that is especially the case with enslaving sins. There are certain sins that have a particularly enslaving power. The world calls them addictions. Drugs, alcohol, pornography, sexual immorality, overeating, gambling – those are some examples. Whatever it is for you, enslaving sins are especially dangerous and require the utmost vigilance and alertness.

You go anywhere near them and you are trapped – just that fast.

Ecclesiastes 7:26 [her] hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.

Her hands are chains. You get a little bit close – you are not going to sin, you are not going to do anything foolish, if temptation rises up you will run – but now you are fine, you are not tempted, you are strong, and you feel you can venture close to temptation; but as soon as you get close enough she reaches out and touches you and the moment she touches you – you are trapped. Her hands are chains. In place of hands she has handcuffs, and from the moment she first touches you, you are cuffed. You are in bondage.

And not only are her hands handcuffs, so are her eyes.

Proverbs 6:25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart or let her capture you with her eyes

How does that work? How does she take you prisoner with her eyes?

26 for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread

One lustful look and you have all the strength and power and resolve of a loaf of bread. And verse 25 confirms what we found about looking in order to lust. It is not something your eyes do – it is something your heart does – turning your attention toward temptation in a way that arouses forbidden desire.

27 Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? 28 Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?

Our hearts want to deceive us into thinking we can take one quick little look and walk away unharmed. But fire just does not work that way.

Only a fool ventures in close proximity to temptation.

Proverbs 7:7 I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. 8 He was going down the street near her corner ... 10 Then out came a woman to meet him ... 13 She took hold of him and kissed him ... 21 With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. ... 26 Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. 27 Her house is a highway to the grave

Her slain are a mighty throng. Many are those she has brought down – and every one of them did the same thing this foolish youth did. A little curiosity, combined with some overconfidence in their ability to control themselves, they wander a little too close, and before they even know what is happening – they fall.

Lust & Temptation

It is important to understand the relationship between lust and temptation. Lust, or greed, or covetousness (three words that describe the same thing) – that is something that is in your heart. Temptation is outside of you. Lust is that part of you that wants to look the wrong way; temptation is that thing you are tempted to look at the wrong way that is enticing you. And temptation works like a catalyst on lust. Think of the greed in your heart as being like a chemical that is mostly inactive, but then when it is mixed with exposure to a temptation it explodes. Vigilance means doing everything possible to keep those two chemicals from coming in contact with each other.

Destroy both fruit and root

So all that to highlight the point that in this fight we have to know what it is we are fighting against. We are fighting not against the end result of the sin, but against the beginning of the sin. We are going after the root, not the fruit. If you just keep trying to knock the fruit off the tree, or prevent the branches from producing fruit, it will never work. We have to kill the whole tree. If we claim to hate sin, but we do not hate temptation, we are self-deceived.

We have to be continually alert, so we can take drastic action right at the very first inclination of the soul to turn away from the will of God toward some forbidden thing.

John Owen: “Rise mightily against the first actings of your disease... do not allow it to gain the least ground. Do not say, “Thus far it shall go, and no farther.” If you allow it one step, it will take another. It is impossible to fix boundaries for sin. It is like water in a channel, — if it once breaks out, it will have its course.”

That is a good analogy. Giving that look of the soul in the direction of a sin is like letting the water break through the side of the channel. Once that happens the current just pours through and there is almost no stopping it.

Don't Give Up!

On the other hand, if you remain vigilant, you will have victory.

James 4:7 Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Satan knows he will lose if you keep fighting so his strategy is to get you to stop fighting. To just lay

down your arms and give up. He will try to convince you that based on your past failures, the whole effort is fruitless so you might as well just quit fighting. That is why recovery from failure is such a huge part of fighting this war.

Jesus Christ has made provision for our sin – we do not have to become defeated and lose heart when we fail. Always remember, if you lose a battle, the instant you lose that battle, that battle is over and you are in another battle. The new battle is over how long it is going to be before you repent. You lost the first battle, you have fallen into sin, now the battle is over; how long it is going to be before you repent.

And then when you repent, that battle is over and you are in a third battle. Now the battle is about whether you are going to believe what God says about past sins or what Satan says. God says you are forgiven and restored; Satan says you are hopeless and it is a lost cause and you might as well lay down your arms and stop fighting. Vigilance means continuing to fight without letting up until the day you die.

3) Get Grace

So how do we fight against sin? How do you gouge out and amputate and fling away that part of us that wants to look toward sin? First, *prefer* - fight desire with desire. Overcome desire for sin with greater desire for life and wellness from God. Second – realize what it is you are trying to amputate and kill – that little impulse – not the huge forest fire of lust. And catching it at that stage requires tremendous vigilance and alertness. Thirdly, you are going to need power to pull all this off. Where are you going to get that power? From yourself? Not if you are poor in spirit. Remember how the Sermon on the Mount started – you are not even in the kingdom unless you are a person who has absolutely zero spiritual resources and nothing whatsoever to offer. So the power is not going to come from us.

The only source of that kind of power is grace. That is implied in the Sermon on the Mount, but it is stated explicitly throughout the rest of the New Testament, and it is such an important principle that I think it would be a good idea that this point to leave our text here in Matthew, and take a brief excurses to explore what the reset of the New Testament teaches about how to get this grace.

Only Grace Will Work

I want to do this because Scripture is so emphatic about the point that the only thing that can ever teach us how to say no to the sinful impulses of the flesh is grace from God.

Titus 2:11-12 the grace of God ... teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age

Grace from God is the only thing that will enable you to have success in this war. Without grace you will lose and with grace you will win – it is that simple.

Proverbs 28:26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool

And as long as we have confidence in our own ability to overcome the sin, God is not likely to grant us success because if He did that would only confirm our false faith in ourselves. Every day we must wake up with an attitude that says, “If I receive grace today I will be victorious; if not I will fall – period.”

What are you relying on?

And this is hard, because we all think we rely on God and not ourselves. We all think we are looking to God alone for victory, and yet very often we really are not. And you can tell by how you respond to failure. If you are really convinced, deep down, that God is the only source of victory, then what will happen when you fall into sin? It will drive you to seek harder after more grace. But if deep down you think you are the key to your success or failure, then when you fail it will drive you to just dream up more ideas of how to do better. And very often, when we start to think we are the key to our own success, failure causes us to shy away from God for a while until we have cleaned up our act a bit. Whereas if you see grace alone as the solution then failure will drive you to seek Him all the harder, not shy away from

Him. You can tell where your confidence really is by where you run when you fall.

The Role of Punishment

We spoke the last two weeks about the fact that Jesus threatens us with hell in this passage. The threat of punishment plays a very important role in sanctification, but what it does not do is provide you with the power you need for righteousness. Only grace gives you the power. And only grace can protect you. The threat of punishment serves as a motivation for us to do whatever it takes to get that grace, but it is grace alone that gives us the power to defeat sin.

How to Get Grace

So how do you get grace? Obviously it is from God, but how does an individual person gain access to it? Is it just a matter of saying, “OK God, grace please”? That is part of it, but there is much more to it than just that. To understand how to receive grace from God we need to understand some things about the Trinity. Grace is from God the Father, it comes through faith in God the Son, and is delivered to us by the God Holy Spirit.

1. Ask the Father

So let’s start with God the Father. If you want this grace, ask God the Father for it in prayer.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace

Plead with Him. Beseech Him. Cry out to Him day and night. Do not stop banging on the door of heaven until He opens it and gives you grace.

Prayer plays a huge role in our fight against sin. Ephesians 6 is the spiritual warfare chapter that describes the spiritual armor, and there is a strong emphasis in that section on prayer.

Ephesians 6:18-19 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me...

Jesus taught us to pray, “**Our Father...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**” (Mt.6:13).

Praying for grace is the starting place in fighting sin. However – it is not the only step. Sometimes people think when they have prayed, that is like punting in football. “I prayed, now it’s in God’s hands. The ball is in His court now.” But God has revealed a whole lot more about how to receive grace than just prayer. The whole Trinity is involved in delivering grace to us, so in addition to praying to the Father, we trust in the Son.

2. Trust the Son

John 1:16 [the Word became flesh, and...] from the fullness of his grace we have all received grace upon grace.

Grace comes from the Father, through Jesus Christ. He purchased it for us and it is through Him that we receive it.

“But how do you access it?” Through faith.

Romans 5:1-2 ... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace

We gain access to the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that ... he may strengthen you ... 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

So, just as salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, so does sanctification – victory over sin.

Ephesians 6:16 take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Faith is believing what He has said and trusting in what Jesus He has done.

Trusting in what He has done

What has He done? He lived a perfect life on our behalf, so His perfect record could be credited to our account. He died on the cross to not only pay the penalty for our sin, but also to purchase righteousness for us, so that we could actually be righteous. And He is now interceding for us with the Father, so that however eager the Father is to say “yes” to His Son, that is how eager the Father is to give us victory over our sins. So we place our confidence in all that, so that we are fully convinced that all we need is in Christ.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

There is enough grace available to you through Jesus Christ for you to have victory over any sin.

Believing what He has said

That is one half of what faith means – putting all your confidence in those things rather than in yourself. The other half of faith is believing what Jesus has said – the promises He has made. He has made various promises, and we get the power to overcome sin in our lives by believing those promises. The more focused you are on the promise, and the more you lean on it and trust in it and cling to it and hope in it and delight in it – the more grace you get.

Remember before when I said lust and temptation are like two chemicals that will have a strong reaction if you mix them together? It is the same with faith and God’s promises. Faith is in your heart, God’s promises are on the outside – and if you mix the two together they have a chemical reaction that explodes with sanctifying, purifying power. But if you do not mix God’s Word with faith, it is worthless to you.

Hebrews 4:2 the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not mix it with faith.

Mix lust with temptation and you get sin. Mix faith with God’s promises and you get righteousness.

So pick a specific promise for whatever sin you are fighting. If the sin you want to defeat is worry, you fix your attention on some promise in Scripture about God taking care of you. The more you lean on that promise about God taking care of you the more it opens the valves in the pipeline of grace, and grace flows from heaven and fills you with the power you need to overcome the sin of worry. If the sin is greed, pick a promise about God’s provision. If the sin is discouragement in ministry pick a promise about success in ministry. If the sin is laziness pick a promise about reward for diligence. If you are weighed down by guilt, pick promises about forgiveness and His intercession for you before the Father.

And just generally speaking, whatever the temptation, focus on promises about God as the satisfier of the soul. Focus on the promises that His way will bring more happiness and joy and fulfillment than the sin will give.

If you want help with this, I am working on a list of promises from Scripture that are indexed according to the various sins or virtues they correspond to. So you look up in the index whatever issue you are struggling with, and it will list some promises that will help you gain victory in that area if you

trust in those promises. It is available in the Resource Library page of our website (TreasuringGod.com).² Just go to “Articles” and scroll down to the letter P in the list. The document is called “Promises to Trust When...” Memorize the promise, or write it down on an index card and carry it around with you through the day, and fix your attention on it throughout the day and it will empower you in your fight against that sin.

3. *Walk by the Spirit*

So we seek grace from God the Father in prayer. And we receive that grace in Jesus Christ through faith – trusting what He has said. And then third – the way all this happens – the motivation and ability to pray earnestly and in a way the Father will hear, and the ability to have faith in Jesus Christ, the changes that will be required in your desires and affections and attitudes and inclinations – all that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh, you are about to die; but if by the Spirit you kill the deeds of the body, you will live.

It is the Holy Spirit that does the direct, hands-on work inside you to bring all this about.

Galatians 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

That is as straightforward as it can be. How do you defeat the flesh? Walk by the Spirit – expose yourself to the Holy Spirit’s influence.

i. **Scripture**

One way to do that is through the Scriptures.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Psalms 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

John 15:3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Ephesians 5:26 – He cleanses us by washing us with the Word. The grace to have victory over sin comes through the Word. Even Jesus used Scripture to fight temptation.

And it is a ministry of the Holy Spirit because it is the Spirit who moves in our hearts to enable us to understand and believe and accept what the Word of God says (1 Cor.2:14). Back to the spiritual armor again – two of the six items have to do with Scripture – the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. It is the sword of the Holy Spirit – the sword wielded by the Spirit.

So one way to expose yourself to the influence of the Holy Spirit is through Scripture. Listen to it preached, meditate on it, memorize it, think it through, immerse yourself in it, saturate yourself with it. Whatever you do, do not just read it. Mere reading can do more harm than good. If it is just a daily chore to check off your list like doing your exercises and taking your vitamins – you just get through your chapter for the day like some magic pill – as if there mere act of looking at each of the words in the chapter has some automatic effect on your soul; you need to realize that that is not the case. Just glancing at a bunch of words and saying them in your head will not do anything. Doing that is like trying to get energy and strength from taking food and putting it in your pockets. Reading the Bible gives you access to the food, but it does not strengthen you until you digest it– you understand it and delight in it and integrate it in with your system of thinking and believing. Just cranking through your chapter for the day like you are doing a homework assignment accomplishes little if anything when it comes to receiving

² http://treasuringgod.com/resource_library/articles/

sin-killing grace from the Holy Spirit. That is why preaching plays such a huge role. It enables you to keep a passage of Scripture in your mouth long enough for you to chew it up and begin to digest the meat so the nutrients start to get into your bloodstream.

ii. The Church

And that brings us to the other primary method the Holy Spirit uses to deliver grace to you – the Church. Listen to the definition of the Church in Ephesians 1:23:

Ephesians 1:23 [the Church], which is ... the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

If you want to be filled full of grace from the Lord – filled up full of power and strength and hope and enablement and joy and courage and holiness and wisdom and all the rest – then you go to the place that is called “the fullness” of Him who fills everything in every way – and that place is the Church – the assembly of the saints.

And the thing that makes the Church a fountain of so much grace is not just because of the preaching. The preaching of God’s Word is a huge part of it, but just as huge is the grace that comes through the spiritual gifts of the saints in the “one-another” ministry.

1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

When you use your spiritual gift you are actually administering God’s grace to the rest of us. When we use our spiritual gifts to encourage one another, exhort one another, rebuke one another, instruct one another, restore one another, admonish one another, pray for one another, love one another, etc. – that opens the floodgates of grace from heaven. That is why it is SO important for you to use your gifts in one-another ministry. If you are not doing that we are shut off from the grace that God designed to flow to us through you.

That is why we have the prayer groups - a whole hour of intentional, purposeful, focused one-another ministry. If you read in the New Testament how much grace flows back and forth in the ministry of the one-another commands, it becomes very clear very quickly that if all you do is come and sit through the worship service and leave, without immersing yourself in the one another ministry, then you cannot really say you have attended church that day.

And if you think you are seeking hard after grace from God, but you are only marginally involved in church, you are kidding yourself. The Holy Spirit has chosen to dispense grace from the Father through the gifts. That is why they are called the gifts of the Spirit – because they are the Spirit’s way of dispensing grace to His people.

iii. Righteousness

So we walk by the Spirit and expose ourselves to His influence through Scripture, through the Church, and then one more way – through obedience. When you obey God in one area, that gives you grace to win the battle in other areas. And conversely, sometimes God allows us to lose the battle in one area because we are not even fighting it in another area.

And in each area where you fight sin, it is always virtue that will drive out the sin. If you just try to get rid of the sin, but you leave a vacancy there in your heart, the sin will just rush right back in. The only way to get sin out of your heart is to crowd it out with virtue. You cannot just stop being angry – you have to crowd anger out by increasing in humility and love and patience. You cannot just stop coveting that which God has forbidden. You have to crowd out covetousness with contentment and delight in the Lord. You cannot just stop sinful looking. You have to crowd it out with righteous looking. That is why in Ephesians 4, where Paul is telling us to strip away various sins, for each sin he tells us to strip away he gives us the virtue that will be required to crowd that sin out.

Ephesians 4:22-32 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self

... 24 and to put on the new self

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor

You crowd out lying with truthfulness.

28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work ...that he may have something to share with those in need.

You crowd out stealing with work and generosity and giving.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs

You crowd out unwholesome talk with speech that builds up.

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger ...32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

You crowd out anger with compassion and forgiveness.

So how do you walk by the Spirit? How do you gain access to grace through Him? Scripture, the Church, and obedience.

Conclusion

If I were teaching the expositors' class and someone preached this sermon and I had to critique it, I would probably give it low marks. I would say, "That's not a good sermon, because it tries to cover WAY too much material." I did not develop much of anything in this sermon – I just threw out principles at about 100 mph so that in one sermon I could summarize what the entire New Testament teaches about how to fight sin. It probably should have been about ten sermons, but I did it quickly because I do not want to take that much time away from the Sermon on the Mount. But nor did I want to tell you to amputate sin without giving some idea of how that is done.

So my prayer is that even if you do not remember all the points I have made, there will be some value in the overall big picture. How do you fight sin? Just remember G.A.P.

G – Get grace.

A – Alert (attack sin when it first appears – when it is nothing more than the tipping of the soul in the direction of sin)

P – Prefer (fight desire with greater desire – do not just resist the world's delicacies; prefer God's river of delights)

Everything you ever learn the rest of your life about how to fight sin should fit under one of those three headings. But understanding that overview will, I pray, keep us from falling into the various errors that come when we focus on one particular aspect of fighting sin without understanding where it fits in with the overall battle plan.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.