
The Easy Button

Galatians 5:16-26

Introduction Today is our annual Counseling Sunday. This is the day that we have traditionally set aside to concentrate on some biblical counseling topic and to recognize those who have worked so hard for the past 12 weeks completing the counseling training courses.

Russ and I were talking one day about some of the challenges that we face in our counseling situations. We got on the topic of people not wanting to do the hard work of changing. It seems that they are looking for the easy way out. They would be glad to have the Staples Easy Button sitting on the desk ready to be pushed whenever things got tough. Press the button, and WOW. THAT WAS EASY!! Everything would magically change and be perfectly in order and everyone would be happy with life. There is one problem – there is no easy button when it comes to matters of spiritual battles and our desires that want to control us.

Our Wants and Desires

When God created mankind, he put within them the breath of life and created them to be worshipers. They were created with the desire to worship God. But when sin entered into the world, the worship of other things, other than God, created competing desires.

Wants and desires are a normal part of life

Desires are not wrong or evil in and of themselves. It is not wrong to want a husband who loves you and enjoys intimate conversation. It is not wrong to want a wife who is fun and desires to make you happy. It is not wrong to want children who are obedient and successful in life. It is not wrong to want to be appreciated by those for whom you work. These are not sinful desires.

The downward spiral

(This portion is taken from material produced by *Resources for Changing Lives* written by the personnel of the **Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation**, Glenside, PA.)

Those desires are OK. Their objectives are not evil. The problem is the way they tend to grow and control our hearts. Our *desires* must be in submission to God. But, as sinners, we begin to very quickly elevate those *desires* to *demands*. We decide that these *desires* are something that we can't live without and nothing can stand in the way of us getting what we want. We now *demand* to get what we want and we *demand* everyone else to help us get it. Those *demands* quickly grow into *needs*. We come to view what we want as vital to life. Life without what we want is inconceivable. It is painful to live without it. It now becomes appropriate for us to do everything in our power to get it. It becomes our right to have it. So those *needs* produce *expectations*. Our relationships to God and other people are shaped by those *expectations*. We *expect* everyone, including God, to help us get what has become essential to life itself. We have *expectations* of others about

which they know nothing. They have no idea that we are *expecting* them to help us get what has now become the main focus of life. And when they don't meet our *expectations*, our unmet *expectations* lead to *disappointments*. Much of our *disappointment* in relationships is not because people have actually wronged us, but because they have failed to meet our *expectations*. *Disappointment* leads to *punishment*. We are hurt and angry because people who say they love us seem insensitive to our *needs*. So we *punish* them for their wrongs against us. And there are no holds barred in this *punishment*. Do you see how something as innocent as a legitimate desire has spiraled down to something so sinful? You know that this is true because you have experienced it for yourself.

The Unbeliever's Approach

(v. 19-21)

Normally, when this downward spiral of desires gets to this point, there is great turmoil in life. Paul describes what this looks like in verses 19-21 <<read verses>>.

What wants and desires ultimately lead to

(v. 19-21)

He gives a suggestive list of some of the results of sinful desires. He describes them as "works of the flesh". And he says that they are evident. Even unbelievers know that this is not the way that life is to be lived – it is obvious even to them. The end of the list in verse 21 indicates that this list is not all inclusive. He says, "and things like these". There is no way we can list all the ways that we live a life given over to sinful desires. But what is an unbeliever to do when life is lived according to the downward spiral of sinful desires? He goes to pastors who advertise that they can help.

The pastor's to whom they go

These pastors have letters after their names, like M.D., Ph.D., or Psy.D. They are M.D.s in Psychiatry. They are Doctors in Philosophy majoring in Psychology. They are Doctors in Psychology. Yes, you heard me right – I referred to them as pastors. These professionals have begun to refer to themselves as pastors in their own literature. They are very aware that they have a common concern with the clergy, and that is to help people. They consider themselves as pastoring. These pastors are experts at observing life and describing the sinful heart in great detail. As they are going through their long and laborious training, they will come to their own decisions on which of the psychologies they believe will be effective in helping people. There are over 200 psychologies that are currently in vogue from which to choose. Yes, there is no such thing as **A** psychology; there are over 200 out there. And of course, they will change their psychologies from time to time during the course of their ministry as new approaches are put forward and received.

The bible that they use

These pastors also have a bible. It is the compilation of man's wisdom. This wisdom comes from his careful observations of the sinful heart; what the Bible calls the flesh. Thi bible is called, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* produced by the American Psychiatric Association in 2000. And this is what it looks like. (Hold up copy) It describes over 200 mental disorders, not counting all of the various and sundry sub-categories and sub-sub-categories and is over 900 pages long. In

all of this pages, there are only symptoms described. Not one medical test, such as a blood test, is administered in order to make a diagnosis. The pastor asks questions to determine symptoms, severity, length of time, etc. and then diagnoses the mental disorder based on the answers he or she receives.

You may be wondering where this bible came from. It is my understanding that it has come about through various means. But it is not cast in stone. It is constantly being revised and updated. For instance, homosexuality was considered a mental disorder in the Third Edition, but has become an acceptable alternative lifestyle in the Fourth Edition. This change came about by a majority vote of the members of the Association.

I prefer to call these professionals counterfeit pastors. They are attempting what God's Word calls heart work with a counterfeit bible and an anti-god worldview. They are the blind leading the blind. Their help only leads people farther and farther away from God. It gives relief to symptoms, but does not deal with the real issue – which is a saving relationship with the Creator of the universe in which they are practicing.

New Life by the Spirit

So those are the pastors and the bible that those who are not believers can turn to. But what about those who have come to faith in Christ? Those who have trusted Him for not only their eternal life, but for living their lives in the here and now? Are they limited to the same resources? The answer to that is an emphatic NO!

We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit

(v. 25)

As a child of God we have resources that unbelievers don't even desire. Look at verse 25 <read verse>. Those who have put their faith in Christ have a Helper Who is living in them. Romans 8:9-11 reads, "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." God knew that we would need the enabling grace that only His Spirit can provide in order to give us the ability to desire and please Him.

We are united with Christ

(v. 24)

Also at salvation, we were restored to a right relationship to God through Christ. We belong to Christ, which means that His death and resurrection have special significance to us. We were given a new nature which made it possible for us to say "no" to the sinful desires that were a part of our old nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." There is a new capacity to please God which has replaced the old one which pleased the flesh.

The Spirit brings a new dimension – war

(v. 17)

You would think, given the fact that we are a new creation, and the Holy Spirit lives within us, that life would be one big happy party. I don't know about you, but that has not been my experience. In fact, once someone becomes a Christian, life becomes harder—much harder! Why?

Look with me at verse 17 <read verse>. When we become a child of God, a war begins in our hearts that wages every moment of every day for the rest of our lives! We didn't have this when we were unbelievers. New parents have the mistaken idea that once their children become Christians, then life will be so much easier. Wrong! The war is still being fought, but it is an internal as well as exterior war.

What is this verse teaching us? Paul is not saying that we now have two natures that are in competition with each other. We read earlier that we are a new creation; the old has passed away and the new has come. So we cannot have two competing natures. What Paul is telling us is that sin is so corrupting, it has lasting effects. The old Puritans used to refer to these desires of the flesh as indwelling sin, or besetting sin. There are those ways of thinking, and wanting, and doing, and saying that have become a part of us. Paul calls it the flesh. I confess to you that I don't understand it in all of its complications and implication, but this is what the Word teaches.

This war is composed of two opposing desires – the desires of our flesh and the desires of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Our flesh has sinful desires and the Spirit has righteous desires. What my flesh wants to do, the Spirit keeps me from doing. What the Spirit wants me to do, the flesh keeps me from doing. There is a constant battle being waged in my heart.

The Believer's Approach

When believers are struggling in this battle within their hearts; when they recognize that they are losing or have lost the battle of the downward spiral of desires, they go to pastors just as the unbelievers do. Hopefully they go to different ones than unbelievers do.

The pastor's to whom they go

If you will glance down to Chapter 6 and verse one, you will see that those who are spiritual should help those who are struggling. There is a sense in which this means those who have the Spirit of God living within them. This could be other brothers or sisters in Christ, as well as those who are leaders in the church. The idea is that this person should be someone who is characterized as being one who is winning the war more often than not. I am going to speak to this a little more this evening, but for now, let's go with the idea of those who have the Spirit living within and are known for winning the war more than not. These will include those who are charged with keeping watch over your soul and giving an account to God for you – your pastors and spiritual leaders in the church.

The Bible that they use

And the Bible that they use is inspired by God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 tells us that the Scriptures were written by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is His book. He superintended its words as they were written. And 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that the words were breathed out by God Himself. The Scriptures are NOT subject to revision by vote of the majority. The Scriptures are the sure Word of God used by the Spirit to give us everything that we need to live a life of godliness for His glory. There aren't 200 different philosophies that we must discern is the best one to use right now. These counselors have THE Word from THE Creator of all things and all people.

The Believer's Victory

But how does the believer achieve victory over this downward spiral of sinful desires?

The work of the Holy Spirit

(v. 16)

Look down at your copy of God's Word at verse 16 <read verse>. Here is one of the promises by which we can win the raging war within. God tells us that by walking by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. That is a strong statement. We WILL NOT continue down that spiral.

Our union with Christ

(v. 24)

And the second resource is in verse 24, which we read the first part of earlier <read whole verse>. Paul tells us that, as Christians, we HAVE, past tense, crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. When did we do that? We did that at the cross. We were in Christ as He took our sins upon Himself on the cross. So we have put the sinful flesh to death – we have crucified the flesh back at the cross. But now, we must work at becoming what we are. We must continue to put the flesh to death – crucifying the passions and desires that want to control us.

The command – walk by the Spirit

(v. 25)

The question then is, how do we walk by the Spirit? This is an excellent question and the answer is not that hard to understand. Walking by the Spirit involves crucifying our passions and desires. Jesus said it this way in Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." That's pretty plain. We must look at our desires and give them up. We must give up those self-serving desires that we believe are necessities for life itself. We must be willing to sacrifice our comfort, our goals, our very lives for the desires that would glorify God. It means that we must be willing to be used, misused, abused, and suffer to love God with our whole heart and to love others as we love ourselves.

How do we do this? It isn't some super spiritual event or miracle. The Spirit uses everyday ordinary means. He uses His Word. He uses prayer. And He uses His people. He did not say that it would be easy. After all, both Jesus and Paul used the cross as the instrument and crucifixion as the method for winning this war. This way of execution, the cross, is a vivid figure of speech for self-denial. Every follower of Christ is to behave

like a condemned criminal and carry his cross to the place of execution. And then, not only go to the place of execution, but see that the execution takes place. We take our willful and sinful self and nail it to the cross.

Crucifixion is a shameful way to die reserved only for the scum of society. Crucifixion is a painful way to die. It is the most painful means of execution ever devised by man. Putting our sinful self to death is painful. We want those desires to survive and be fulfilled; not die. And crucifixion is a gradual way to die. Many times criminals were able to survive for days before they drew their last breath. When it comes to crucifying our sinful desires, there are no shortcuts, only the long, slow, painful death of crucifixion. But the final thing about crucifixion is that it is always final. Everyone crucified eventually died. And that is what it is going to be like for us. The Spirit's war against the flesh is not a losing battle. The victory has been won and will eventually be complete when we see Him just as He is.

So walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh!

The Easy Buttons

But there is a problem. We don't want to put ourselves to death and we don't want to have to endure the shame, the pain, the gradual, slow, and long battle. So, we look to the counterfeit pastors and the wisdom of the world to try a different way which promises to be easier.

The easy button of drugs

Your son is having great difficulty in school. He will not stay in his seat. He has a difficult time focusing on the work he is supposed to do. He loses things. He is disruptive. He does not play or talk quietly. He doesn't wait for his turn at anything. He always has to be first, and he interrupts other people's conversations and activities. Your pastor has been helping you to work with your son teaching him to be obedient, responsible, considerate, looking out for the interests of others more than himself, as well as other God-honoring issues. He has been constantly encouraging you and challenging you to actively parent your son. But it is too much. It is more than you think you can bear.

The school has told you very strongly that you must have your son evaluated by a professional. You decide this couldn't hurt. So the appointment is set and the session goes well. Afterward, this counterfeit pastor tells you that your son has a mental disorder called ADHD – Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. His brain chemicals are seriously out of balance and low. He prescribes some medication, but cautions you that there is no known cure for this disorder. The medication has two forms. Ritalin is the one that has been prescribed for years and is fast acting. Adderol is a time-release prescription of a similar kind. You start the medication and your son's previous problems all but disappear. WOW. THAT WAS EASY!!

You go back to the counterfeit pastor for a follow-up visit. You are a little concerned because your active son has now turned into a zombie. He has lost his appetite and he often has diarrhea. You also want to know how they were able to diagnose this disorder when you weren't asked for permission to do any blood work or other diagnostic tests. The counterfeit pastor tells you that there are no diagnostic tests for this disorder and there

are no specific physical features associated with it either. Plus, he also didn't tell you that Ritalin is a Class II controlled substance in the same category as opium, codeine, morphine, and cocaine. Nor did he tell you that there have been no long-term studies on the effects of long time use of Ritalin. What are the effects to little boys who begin taking this drug when they are 5 and continue for the next 20 years? What your son will also find out is that if you won't buy him that new Game Boy, he can collect his Ritalin pills and sell them on the open market of the playground to the older kids and make enough to buy his own Game Boy.

Please do not hear me say that there is no such thing as an organic problem requiring medication. There are. Our thyroid gland can quit working and bring on depression-like symptoms. Our blood chemicals can be out of whack and we experience symptoms of anger, frustration, being blue, and others. These are legitimate disorders. The difference is that there are diagnostic tests that are run to determine these organic disorders which have led to symptoms that are commonly associated with mental disorders. I am not referring to these.

The easy button of support groups and group therapy

There is another way that counterfeit pastors can help make life more easy for you. Its called support groups or group therapy. You find that it really is a great help. You have found that there are many others that have the same desires that you do and have experienced the same responses from others. You feel absolutely fantastic each time you leave a meeting. It is great to find what others are doing that seems to be working in order for them to get their desires. You are encouraged to try it for yourself. WOW. THAT WAS EASY!!

What you have done is given your flesh the opportunity to indulge itself even more. This is only a temporary relief. It will not last, nor will it help you in developing the fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about in our text.

The easy button of Christian psychologists

But there is another source of wisdom and help. That is the Christian psychologist. They have the best of both worlds. They are believers and they are experts in the world's wisdom. What do they have to say.

Listen to Dr. James Dobson: "If I could write a prescription for the women of the world, I would provide each one of them with a healthy dose of self-esteem and personal worth. ... I have no doubt that this is their greatest need."¹ WOW. THAT WAS EASY!!

That helped to encourage you to continue to pursue your desires using any manipulative and punitive methods at your disposal until you got what you wanted from your husband. But how does that square with denying yourself, taking up your cross daily, and following Christ? What will be the ultimate results of your thoughts and behavior?

¹ *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Them*, James Dobson

The easy button of change the other person first

But, pastor, you don't understand. I'm not the one with the problem. It's her. I'm not going to change until you work on getting her to change. She is the one who makes me the way I am. I could do all the changing you want me to do, but that is not going to help this marriage. Change her first, then you will find out how she is really the only one with a problem. It's not me. WOW. THAT WAS EASY!!

If that were to happen, I guarantee that you will not change, because you will have gotten what you have wanted all along. In fact, you will be even more stubborn in your sinful desires and will be more skillful in allowing the flesh to control your heart.

I could go on and on with easy button after easy button. We could explore the easy buttons of being a victim, having a horrible childhood, being reared in an environment that was not conducive to positive growth, or forgetting all of your troubles with alcohol, drugs, sex, or pornography, but I think you get the picture. Let me see if I can summarize what we have been considering today/

The world's wisdom and the counterfeit pastors who peddle it are going in the opposite direction to what the Scriptures tell us.

Conclusion

The Word of God has everything that we need to live a life pleasing to God. It is sufficient for living a godly life in this present world, and preparing us for the world to come.

Using the Easy Button is really nothing more than telling God that He doesn't know the best way to live life.

God is actively at work in you producing the fruit of the Spirit. This can only be done as we walk by the Spirit, and crucify the flesh by denying ourselves, taking up the cross daily, and following Him. God calls us to die to self and the desires that I believe I deserve to have. But, there are no easy buttons.

As we walk by the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit that He produces will grow to be more appealing, more tasty, and more nourishing for the benefit of all believers.