

Doctrine of Besetting Sin

1. A person who has been an observant Christian for any period of times knows that within the church fellowship there is an individual or perhaps several that do not seem to be thoroughly changed by the gospel. They have what the Puritans called a “*darling sin*” and what the *Scriptures* refer to as a “*besetting sin*.”
 - *Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*
2. What is a besetting sin? The following description helps to identify it.
 - A besetting sin is a sin which is a transgression of the moral law of God. All sin is a transgression of God’s perfect will and moral code of conduct. *1 John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*
 - A besetting sin is an attitude or action that violates the conscience and leaves a residue of shame and guilt.
 - A besetting sin is easily committed despite the inward condemnation and conflict it brings to the soul, despite the pain it inflicts on others and despite the loss of fellowship with God.
 - A besetting sin brings a certain amount of pleasure during the course of its expression.
 - A besetting sin is a sin which the soul struggles to be free of but it remains like a “*monkey on the back*”.
 - A besetting sin may be a secret sin in the sense it is known only to self or to others who are of like mind and faith in the expression of that particular transgression.
 - A besetting sin differs from person to person. For one the besetting sin might be an inappropriate relationship. To another it might be an addiction to pornography, drugs, smoking or alcohol. Someone else might find their besetting sin to be an explosive anger with innumerable flash points resulting in harsh words which wound the spirit of others and leaves the soul critical and judgmental. A sharp tongue is rooted in a bitter soul.
 - A besetting sin, when personified or given human like qualities, argues and maneuvers to survive. Sin takes on a life of its own. The personality becomes divided. The soul is compartmentalized. Allowance is made for the besetting sin through suppression of any thoughts that would arrest its expression or acts that would mortify or put it to death. Provision is made for sin’s manifestation. It will not be denied in the will to power.

3. Sometimes, individuals give up struggling with their besetting sin and no longer try to lay it aside despite the way it weights heavily on the soul. There are two major reasons for this.

- **Modern psychology.** One reason why a besetting sin is not laid aside is because modern secular psychology has given individuals permission to live out their various lust patterns. The person who hates, the person who is bitter, the person who is angry, the person who engages in promiscuous sex is not morally condemned but is understood as simply having problems with living. If they want to change, that is good but if not then others must learn to adjust and accept them as they are and love them in spite of their evil aberration.
- **Acceptance of the Carnal Christian doctrine.** A second reason why a besetting sin is not laid aside is because of the ever-increasing popularity of the carnal Christian theory. This teaching says in effect there are three types of people: the saved, the lost and the saved person who is acting like the lost. The person in this last category is said to be a *carnal* or *fleshly* Christian. They are born again but they are acting just like an unbeliever. Of course there is no justification for the modern concept of a “fleshly Christian” any more than it is right to speak of a “heavenly devil.” The biblical image is consistent. There are sheep and there are goats. There are those who are saved and those who are lost. There are those who are spiritual and there are those who are fleshly. *Romans 8:9 But ye [brethren] are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

What many well meaning believers do not anticipate when they accept a third category of people called the carnal Christian is the fruit or repercussion of this terrible doctrine and that is a belief it really does not matter how a person lives. The argument goes that while a carnal Christian might be fleshly at least they are converted and if they die they will go to heaven so nothing is lost. What is forgotten is that if the carnal Christian theory is accurate nothing is gained by conforming to the moral law of God. A person might as well enjoy the pleasures of sin, and then go to heaven. That thought of course is contrary to the entire biblical teaching on what constitutes a Christian.

4. For some who struggle with a besetting sin, as initially comforting as psychological counseling might be, as relieving as acceptance of the carnal Christian theory might be, neither position changes the heart, removes the guilt, or takes away the shame and inward conflict.
5. Some people want to be fundamentally and forever different. They want to be changed. They want to conform to the moral law of God. They want to have a pure conscience. They want the secret life to die. They want to have the hope of heaven restored to their hearts. They want to be free of this “*monkey*” on their back. They want an integrated personality. They do not want a compartmentalized soul. They do not want to be a spiritual Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde.

6. The only question that remains is “How”? “*How does a person deal effectively with besetting sin*”? “*How does a person lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset the soul?*”
7. There is an easy answer to this question on one level and therein is part of the frustration. The answer is so easy that it is rejected. The answer is rejected because the soul becomes convinced the solution must be more profound and complex. In summary unbelief comes in to rob the soul of the simplicity that is found in Christ.
8. Because the divine solution is set aside the sin is not.
9. What is the divine solution to a besetting sin? The Biblical answer is threefold.
 - First, Someone must be trusted.
 - Second, something must be laid aside.
 - Third, something else must begin.
10. First, Someone must be trusted. In order for a besetting sin to be dealt with Someone must be trust to take away sin’s power to rule and reign in the life. That Someone is Jesus Christ who came into the world in order to destroy the power of sin.
 - *Hebrews 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*
 - *1 John 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

By His sacrificial work at Calvary Jesus died to destroy the works of the devil. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God and commit the keeping of their soul to Him find themselves pledged to a Savior on whom they can rely for forgiveness, understanding, strength, protection and guidance.

11. Second, something must be laid aside. What must be laid aside or stopped is the preparation for and the execution of the besetting sin. A besetting sin can be laid aside or halted immediately or Jesus would never have commanded His followers to deal with sin in a radical manner.
 - *Matthew 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

A Christian can cease from performing a habitual sin and yielding to sin in any given moment because the will has been set free. Christ has loosed the believer from sin's ruling power.

- *Romans 6:13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*
- *Revelation 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed [freed] us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

The soul of the Christian is set free to pursue righteousness unless it voluntarily yields itself to sin's power once more.

- *Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*
12. Third, something else must begin. As the besetting sin is simply laid aside like a coat or put off like a filthy garment something else must happen. There must begin a movement towards the prize. The author of Hebrews uses the image of a marathon runner going towards the finish line saying, "*let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*"
 13. The Christian life is both negative and positive. Negatively, there is something to cast off; positively, there is something to do. The only question is whether or not a person will obey in both areas.
 14. Unbelief steps in to enslave the heart and say, "*I cannot do what Christ has commanded me to do.*" Faith steps forth to say, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (*Phil. 4:13*).
 15. Though the motions of sin in the soul are strong, though the passions storm to wash over the will moving it towards a direction of evil or harmful behavior, Christ has overcome the world.
 - *John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world .*
 16. Sin is likened to a weight. It holds the soul back. Every runner removes as many obstacles as possible in order to have greater freedom of movement. Every Christian will find greater spiritual freedom when the sin, which does so easily hinder the heart, is removed.

17. The primary responsibility for laying aside the besetting sin and running the spiritual race unhindered is given to the believer.
18. This primary responsibility may not be wanted but it has been placed on each person nevertheless.
19. Therefore, there are only two options: obey and remove the besetting sin or drop out of the race and lose out on the prize, eternal life.
20. Let the Christian remember these words of the apostle John: *“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” 1 John 5:4*
21. A person who lives openly and knowingly in a known sin and who has no intention of doing what is right has no claim on the merits of Calvary despite any form of a religious upbringing or even a present life of prayer and religious *“God talk”*. Knowledge is not enough for salvation.
22. It is highly possible that a person living openly and knowingly in sin and who has no intention of doing what is right in a given matter may already have been turned over to a terrible condemnation passed by God. Their fleshly lifestyle is simply a divine manifestation to all the world of a judgment already passed. This doctrinal truth is taught in Paul’s epistle to the Romans. God gives people *“up”* once and then twice before giving them *“over”* to a reprobate mind.
 - *Romans 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:*
 - *Romans 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:*
 - *Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;*
23. Those whom God gives over to a reprobate mind are not simply on the list of the damned, they are damned. It is only a matter of time before the execution of a sentence already now passed in time is carried out in eternity.
24. Those with a religious background may not believe they are numbered with the damned. They may not believe God has given them over to a reprobate mind. They may not believe they are dead men walking, but they are. Let God be true and every man a liar.
25. Despite strong gospel warnings as found in Hebrews 12:1, despite the warning against living in a religious state of *“believing unbelief”* judgement has been passed. There is only one hope for someone in this state whose conscience is aroused: flee to Calvary, turn from evil, do right and live. Live! Live! Live! Why will you die?