

## Stop Eating the Vomit

I'm sure you haven't heard a sermon title like this one—"Stop Eating the Vomit". If you know the scriptures well then you know where it came from. And if you know the text, well then you know where we're going.

When I was eight years old I was given a puppy. I named him "Inky". He turned out to be a crazy untrained dog. It wasn't long before I watched him vomit and then return to it and eat it. Sometime later I heard the Proverb, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so the fool repeats his folly". So I knew then Inky wasn't special. This metaphor describes us spiritually. When we sin we return to it and repeat it again.

When Paul took the gospel to the Gentile pre-Christian world, he witnessed a lot of vomit consumption. The word "sin" was far more unpopular then than it is today. In fact all of the Apostolic letters of Paul, John, Peter and James are filled with lists of evils as well as lists of good moral and ethical traits. We'll get back to these later. But over time, not much has changed. No matter how civilized or sophisticated we think we are, we still return to the vomit of our chosen sinful follies. Like my good friend, Inky, we are not special at all.

Our current fallen world always attempts to weaken the word 'sin'. On rare occasions you'll hear the word 'evil' used. But the godless prefer words like disorders, dysfunction, disease and DNA to sooth their troubled conscience if its troubled at all.

Added to this is the gradual retreat from absolute truth to a personalized, relative truth. In other words, "I determine what is true for me. And I'm also free to change what is true for me anytime I want". This redefines truth and also describes the "reprobate" whose conscience is seared or numbed to the knowledge and emotion of right and wrong. These are dangerous people to themselves and others. Reprobates are at the end of the trail when absolute truth is abandoned.

But unlike the rest of creation, man alone bears the likeness of God. That likeness is reflected in many ways. Only mankind is born with a conscience to know and feel what is absolutely true or false (Romans 2:15). Since God is morally pure or holy, he desires that we too choose holiness (I Peter 1:15).

Because God is morally pure, sin is always sin. There is no hierarchy of sin. God doesn't grade our sin on a curve. There are no D's or C's or B's, only A's and F's. In other words, no sliding scale of 1 to 5, from "somewhat acceptable" to "totally unacceptable". For instance, God Word tells us, "Satan is the father of lies".

- There are no "white" lies
- Lust is just as unacceptable as any physical sex outside of marriage.
- Hatred is just as unacceptable as actual murder.

Jesus made this quite clear in his first teaching in Matthew 5.

The only difference in sin is the impact of temptation from one person to the next. For example, one person is tempted to steal something while another person would never consider taking advantage. Another difference is one person commits a sin and never commits it again! Someone else may commit the same sin and makes it a life-time habit. This most often is self-

destructive and can destroy the lives of others as well. Every sin is a personal moral choice. Every temptation can become a persistent sin. “ Could you explain that Pastor Borg”? Glad you asked.

First, we often think of destructive addictions such as drugs or alcohol or sex or food or gambling.

But other sins can become habits like theft or deceit or greed or anger and even unkindness or laziness or neglect. What about gossip or selfish ambitions—the list seems endless.

Even sinless pastimes can cross the moral line and become obsessions that absorb your time and talents and money. What about workaholism or shopaholism? These obsessions are very easy to justify. How about the many forms of social media? What about the many forms of what I call unsocial media?

i.e. In a previous ministry a woman confessed to me that she once had an obsession or addiction to classical music. You can't make this up!

How do we overcome temptation and sin? A convent? A monastery? A cave? The problem with isolation is that Jesus said, good and evil comes out of our heart. We can't isolate ourselves from ourselves. So what are we to do?

- So how do you stop eating your vomit?
- How do you stop turning back to repeat your sinful follies?

There is a recurring answer found in the inspired letters of the New Testament. You will notice the answer is revealed in at least four related and decisive actions. Each action compliments and contributes to the others.

Notice as well that the answer has nothing to do with your grit or strength or self-confidence or determination. The answer has nothing to do with anything you can take pride in. God shares his glory with no one. If you want the glory, don't expect God to intervene. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

- So how do you stop eating your vomit?
- How do you stop turning back to repeat your sinful follies?

### **The First Action – Fix Your Eyes on Jesus**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

The writer uses the metaphor of a foot race for following after Christ:

“...get rid of the weight”—this represents everything that's unnecessary in your life. You wouldn't race with a heavy winter coat on. I can't tell you what weights you down from running after Christ. Chances are all the excuses you use are the things that weigh you down.

“...get rid of the sins that easily entangle you...”

These are the irresistible evil pleasures that trip you often. Like boots or high heels, these are sins that make you fall on your face spiritually and morally.

- What are the temptations you find irresistible?
- What are the sins you have justified?
- Who or what are you blaming for the sin that entangles you?

ie: I know a former pastor who blamed his Irish ethnicity for his uncontrolled anger.

*“Fix your eyes on Jesus”*. He is the goal. He started your faith and he is the finish of your faith. Nothing more and nothing less. He is all you need. When the temptation to sin rears its ugly head to offer you the lies of guiltless pleasure and freedom, remember the sin you are contemplating, Christ took the blame for at the cross and paid the penalty of death. Again, fix your eyes on Jesus.

### **The Second Action – Be Transformed by the Renewal of Your Mind**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God —this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Romans 12:1-2

*“...offer your body as a living sacrifice”*. That doesn’t sound very pleasant. But God’s grace changes everything. God’s great love turns your every natural thought upside down on its head. For in Christ Jesus obedience is freedom and surrender is victory. In Christ sacrifice is always gain.

*“...resist conformity...be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”*

Transformed is the gk. word “metamorphosis” = caterpillar into a butterfly. When your mind is renewed, you will be able to “test what is God’s perfect will for you”. This is the restored conscience that excuses and accuses--in other words, your ability to know and feel what is good and evil again. Paul writes about this in Romans chapter 2.

### **The Third Action – Live in the Spirit of Christ**

*“...live by the Spirit...led by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit”*.  
*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* Galatians 5:16, 17, 25

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul exhorts us to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. Too many of us are passive regarding the Spirit’s role in our life to reshape our character into the like ness of Christ.

i.e. It’s like driving an electric car without any awareness of where the next power station is located.

The Spirit of Christ lives in you .But victory over the desires of your body, mind, emotions and will require your intentional cooperation. The fruit of the Spirit is the transformation and renewal of your mind into the character of Jesus Christ. Fix your eyes on the one you desire to be like every day and receive by request the power of his Spirit.

#### **The Fourth Action – Flee and Pursue**

*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:11*

*Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Timothy 2:22*

“...flee temptation and pursue Christ...” Inspired by the Spirit, Paul exhorts Pastor Timothy to flee from the power and pleasure of temptation and sin to pursue the power and pleasure of Christ.

To merely flee “from” sin is to maintain your attention on the sin that “entangles”. This is why Christ-less counselling, Christ-less rehab and Christ-less recovery groups are flawed and fail. They provide sympathy and empathy but no hope. I’m not trashing all counseling, rehab and recovery groups, only those that are not Biblically based and Christ-centered.

Where do we start?

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

Are you weary of confessing the sin that easily entangles you and returning to eat the vomit again?

“...*confession to God of your sins always results in Divine forgiveness*”. Confession is agreement with God and is the best first step. By confession we abandon any denial and any justification of sin such as blaming others, our past, etc. But if after confession we merely flee, the power and pleasure of temptation and sin occupies our attention.

i.e. If you can’t remember being chased as a kid, watch kids chasing one another. Most all kids being chased are instinctively looking behind rather than ahead. Why is that? They have nothing to pursue to—they are simply fleeing. Confession without pursuit of Christ is like putting lipstick on a pig. The pig doesn’t go away!

But when we pursue Christ and the power and pleasure of his fellowship, we grow to become like him and the temptation and sin that entangles will lose its strength. This is Divine deliverance. It could be instantaneous! But most often takes time. The renewal of your body, mind, emotions and will is often a process of daily fellowship and intimacy with Christ. A glance at Jesus on Sunday morning is not enough to transform your character. Keep your eyes fixed on him.

ie: If you only spent one hour a week with the person you say you love the most (parents, spouse, children, or the one you are engaged to marry), what would that relationship eventually look like and how long would it last?

i.e. If you were diagnosed with a treatable cancer but never pursued surgery and chemo, how long would you last?

- Flee the sin that entangles and pursue Christ.
- Hang out with people who are pursuing Christ.
- Seek their counsel and wisdom.
- Choose to be accountable to them.

But in between, deepen your fellowship with Christ every day—fix your eyes on him and never look back. I confess I don't pursue Christ perfectly myself. But what I know for sure is that when I pursue Christ and live in his Spirit, my temptations are weakened.

I routinely ask a question about many things like this one. How did the early Christ-followers in the pre-Christian culture of the first century survive and thrive morally and spiritually without trained counselors, recovery groups or rehab? They fled temptation and the sin that easily entangles and pursued Christ, kept their eyes on him and were transformed in their mind by the Spirit of Christ, living in him , being led by him and keeping in step with him.

And so will you in this post-Christian culture when you “flee and pursue”.