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Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

The Right Question Has an Obvious Answer

I found myself in a room where a lively dialogue was going on as I read a newspaper. L. is a bi-vocational preacher who likes to pick my brain in sermon preparation. It was the first time I had ever seen the other gentlemen. After several minutes of exchange, L. addressed me: "Hey, Preacher, weigh in on this!" I had to disqualify myself from any comment because I really was reading. (Later, someone else asked how I could read with all that racket going on. My one word answer was, Grandkids.") But, I digress . . .

So, I engaged my attention in what they were discussing. It seemed they were trying to get a handle on why so many people just cannot seem to escape sin, even when they are people of faith. L. comes from more of a total depravity view. He argued that the sinful nature is so strong that even after a person comes to Christ, old habits die hard. Some people just don't seem to learn how to depend on Christ for the power to overcome their chains.

The other fellow certainly had a high regard for Christian faith and for biblical truth, but he also seemed to be a little more open to research from other sources. It was his position that the human brain is wired to escape pain and suffering, which, in his mind, is an upward inclination and not an evidence of a thoroughly-depraved nature. Even when sinners stumble into the same old vice or some new one, it is because he perceives the behavior as "an out" for whatever suffering or pain he is experiencing or anticipating at the moment. He lacks the patience, knowledge or trust in Christ to wait on something better.

I really did not see a profound conflict between the two points of view, at least, not a practical one. In the realm of logic and doctrine, neither position resolves itself flawlessly. But, in the real world of sin and suffering, does it matter if sin is making bad choices or rebelliously transgressing? Scripture is replete with many ignorant mistakes and many acts of rebellion. They are all sin, so whether or not man is utterly "depraved" to his core, he is still utterly enslaved to sin.

Of course, when L. asked me again, "What do you think?" I had not muddled through a reasoned response in my mind. What came to mind was much simpler. I thought, "Who cares why some people find themselves constantly up to their necks in the mire, if it keeps happening? Who cares if chronic stupidity or the spirit of a rebel is at fault? The most

needed conclusion to reach for any habitual sinner is not the answer to, "Why do I do it?" but, rather, "How can I stop?"

What I did share was an observation to this effect: "I think you're both stopping one question too short. You should ask, 'What has God provided to safeguard us from falling? Whether a person needs divine strength to overcome his fallen nature or divine wisdom to overcome his bad choices, has God provided any conduits for us to receive what we need?'"

Unequivocally, God has provided such conduits. He has provided them in His church, and together we must persuade the people of faith just how much their dependence on the church is a part of the divine scheme of redemption. The teaching and preaching of God's Word is a conduit for strength and wisdom. Gathering with God's people for prayer and worship is another. Remembering the Lord together at His Table is still another. But all of these things can be accomplished in a couple of hours on a Sunday morning.

The most oft-neglected conduit of strength and/or wisdom in our struggles against sin is fellowship. Christians were created to be in significant relationships with other Christians. How much strength and how much wisdom is missed when God's people diminish the value of the one place where the following are accomplished:

- Be devoted to one another
- Love one another
- Instruct one another
- Build each other up
- Pray for each other
- Confess your sins to each other
- Admonish one another
- Encourage one another
- Spur one another on

There is ample resource in our struggle against sin. Don't miss the obvious.



Karl's Korner