

Relapse Prevention 6 – Divided Loyalties

If we say that we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to God, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins. (from 1 John)

We often feel awkward about bringing our recurrent sins before God. We may be embarrassed by the number of times we have had to deal with the same issues -- issues that seem to stubbornly refuse to be washed away. What is going on? Why can't we beat this problem? What will it take for us to find solid ground on which to build a firm and lasting recovery?

The slogan, "If nothing changes, nothing changes" is so true when we look at our relationship with God. Each time we find ourselves coming back from what seems like the "same old failure" we need to give God an opportunity to go one layer deeper into our life. What is the resentment, the hatred, the fear, the shame that we are seeking to cover with the addictive behaviours? God continues to invite us to face that inner pain, bring it to Him, and let that core are of our life to be made whole.

Humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. (James 4:7-10)

Relapse happens because we live a divided life that tries to be loyal to God but then holds onto other things as well. Relapse is well underway when we are willing to engage in harmful thoughts and desires that leads us astray. We often still minimize our need to take responsibility for our actions by blaming others for the harm they have done or the love they have withheld. We continue to operate in bitterness and rebellion against God by holding onto shame and guilt for sins we've done or hatred and resentment for the wrongs others have committed against us.

Relapse into recurring sin results from hanging onto sin --our own or the sins of others. It's just that simple. Instead of honestly acknowledging that we have things we need to bring to God, we divert our attention onto the sin and the pain connected to the sin and little by little discontent fills our thoughts. That discontent shows itself in our circumstances and in the people around us because, of course, we are avoiding what is in our own heart. We begin to see all the things that are wrong with others in our circumstances – what they get away with, how they treat us badly, what they said, the attitude they had, how demanding they are, how unwilling sponsors and counselors are to really understand our point of view. We see how someone else fails and use that to justify

our own self-righteous point of view. This or that is unfair. The list is endless.

To avoid relapsing into active addiction we have to put all excuses and desires to the side. Our primary responsibility is to deal with our own way of responding to God in this moment. It is only God who can give us life. It is only God to whom we give an account for our life. All other relationships, including our relationship with ourself, has to be second to our relationship with God. That means we don't try to figure out what is wrong in our relationship with someone else until we figure what God is asking of us in this moment and give ourself first to that.

So, what does God require of us? ***O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*** (Micah 6:8) Nothing that has happened and nothing that will happen gives us a reason to avoid living this simple formula for success.

- 1) **Choose what is right in God's eyes.** Our first responsibility is to do what God's says is right and avoid what God says is wrong. When our thoughts and God's word are at odds, we need to change rather than trying to bend God's principles to fit our circumstances.
- 2) **Love unconditionally.** No matter what others have done to us or will do to us, God's standard for us is to offer love and forgiveness. Will we lay the sins done to us as well as the sins done by us at the foot of the cross and receive forgiveness and healing from our Saviour?
- 3) **God's ideas before our own.** When we are on the way to relapse we always think we know better than God or the people around us. It is at those times that we are called to be humble and to simply keep on walking with God ***"trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next."*** (Serenity Prayer)

Are we willing to turn away from those attitudes and actions that keep our hearts "divided" ? Are we willing to accept the forgiveness and cleansing God says He will give us for EVERY wrong? Are we willing to turn our attention and our efforts to God and follow hard after EVERY command God gives us? This, and only this, is the road to life and health. There is no easier softer way. If we follow this simple plan, we will find our way OUT of the frustrating cycle of relapse and recurring sin and INTO the fullness of life Jesus came to give us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. *Why is it important to agree with God when He says what we think or do is wrong?*
2. *In what ways do I live with divided loyalties?*