

SEVEN HABITS OF UNHEALTHY CHURCHES PART - II

Text: Revelation 3

Key Word: Habits

Key Thought: There Are Seven Habits That Every Church Must Avoid

*** *"I hate being late," my friend lamented. "It has been a problem for me all my life."*

"Do you really want to change that?" I asked.

"Yes, I do."

"All right. Every time you are late to work or anywhere else where you have committed to be at a particular time you must give me \$25."

"No way!" my friend responded. "I would go broke! But I will do \$10."

"All right, \$10 it is. It has to be a large enough amount of money for it to hurt your pocketbook."

"Believe me, that will hurt," my friend said. About a month later my friend found great motivation to be on time to every place she had to be. In the first week, I got only \$10 from my friend. The next week, \$20. The third week, nothing. By the fifth week, my friend had changed a lifelong habit that had hindered her all her life. In order for my friend not to be resentful of me for the money she had to give, we put it in a jar to be given to some other Christian cause. This ensured my motive was only for her best interest.

Some might be reading this now and say it is legalism. For my friend it was freedom. For the first time she had some means of changing a behaviour that had caused her problems in relationships and her own work habits. Psychologists tell us that it takes 21 days to form a habit. So, if you need to change some habit, you need to be actively engaged in that new behaviour at least 21 days. My friend needed help to change a habit she didn't like about herself. It took another individual to hold her accountable, and it took a potential loss of something to provide the added incentive. ***

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*** A successful businessman was experiencing a difficult marriage. When counselling the couple over dinner one night, a friend of mine noticed that the man often criticized his wife. After further counsel it was determined the man simply could not love his wife.

My friend asked him if he truly wanted to see change in his marriage. When the man said he did, my friend said, *"Every time you criticize your wife you must agree to give me \$100."*

This man was well-off and needed substantial incentive to change his behaviour. After the man rebelled and retorted, he agreed in front of his wife.

A few weeks later a report came back that things were changing. This man did not want to write any checks to my friend. Although it was a competitive game to the man, it was also yielding some positive changes in his marriage. He began to acquire the habit of avoiding criticism of his wife, which was killing her spirit.

What are the habits that keep you from becoming all that God may want you to become? Do you desire change enough to be accountable in a way that it costs you something when you fail? Ask a friend to hold you accountable in an area that needs change. You will find new freedom as you conquer old besetting habits.

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What are Seven Habits of Unhealthy Churches?

Last week we looked at the first four of these habits

I. THEY FAIL TO CONTINUE LOVING GOD AND EACH OTHER (2:1-6)

II. THEY ARE FEARFUL OF ADVERSITY (2:9,10)

III. THEY TOLERATE POOR THEOLOGY AND IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR (2:14-16)

IV. THEY WHITEWASH OVER SINFUL ACTIONS (2:20-23)

Today I Wish to Focus on the Last Three That Are Mentioned by the Lord and Recorded by the Apostle John.

V. THEY RELAX IN THEIR REPUTATION (3:1-3)

VI. THEY FOCUS ON THEIR WEAKNESSES (3:8)

VII. THEY FAIL TO DEPEND UPON GOD (3:17,18)

V. THEY RELAX IN THEIR REPUTATION (3:1-3)

It has never been healthy for any church to feel that it has arrived/reached its goal. If it has, it better soon set some new ones that will challenge its future. **Relax mode is always danger mode.** Remember what happened to king David when he remained home from battle? Lot lost all his possessions as well as his wife and reputation. This righteous man was distressed by the filthy lives of sinful men (II Peter 2:7) but also took a relaxed attitude in dealing with it. **These men and many more began a poor habit.**

“A habit is something you can do without thinking—which is why most of us have so many of them.”

Frank Clark
“Register and Tribune Syndicate”

“These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

3. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”

Revelation 3:1-3

No church dies overnight. It must allow a seed to germinate and a root to form before the fruit is seen. Once a seed takes root, (good or bad), even if you relax, it will grow.

*** An elderly teacher, with a pupil by his side, took a walk through a forest. Suddenly he stopped and pointed to four plants close at hand. The first was just beginning to peep above the ground, the second had rooted itself pretty well into the earth, the third was a small shrub, while the fourth was a full-sized tree. The tutor said to his young companion, ‘*Pull up the first plant.*’ The boy did so eagerly, using only his fingers. ‘*Now pull up the second.*’ The youth obeyed but found the task more difficult. ‘*Do the same with the third,*’ he urged. The boy had to use all his strength to uproot it. ‘*Now,*’ said the instructor, ‘*try your hand with the fourth.*’ The pupil put his arms around the trunk of the tall tree and couldn’t even shake its leaves. ‘*This, my son, is just what happens with our bad habits. When they are young, we can remove them readily; but when they are old, it’s hard to uproot them, though we pray and struggle ever so sincerely.*’

The Heidelberg Herald

VI. THEY FOCUS ON THEIR WEAKNESSES (3:8)

“I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

Revelation 3:8

Do you ever feel weak? If you answered this question “NO!” I would probably question your integrity. I honestly believe that there comes a time(s) in everyone’s life when they sense their weakness(es). I don’t believe it is wrong to admit to times of weaknesses, but I do believe that we need to go on in life and not focus on whatever the weakness is.

Unhealthy churches live in their past failures and continue to believe that the past will dictate what the future will hold. On the other hand, **Healthy churches are able to see God in control of the doorknobs of life no matter how difficult they are to walk through.**

*** One such recent case is being played out at the Northview Community Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Abbotsford, B.C. The Senior Pastor, Vern Heidebrecht had to take a 5-month medical leave in January, 2002. He had served for 15 years and led the congregation from 300 to around 3,000 with 4 services each Sunday. His doctor discovered that he had Parkinson’s disease. He could have focussed on his weakness but instead is leading his congregation back to an even healthier condition.

“Looking back on the crisis, Heidebrecht said, **“I don’t want to waste the hurt. I want to go to school on this.”** He studied others who gained through their times of weaknesses without being overwhelmed by the weakness. He quoted A.W. Tozer as saying, **“Those whom God wants to use greatly He has to hurt deeply.”** In studying Jacob, he now is not sure whether he can trust a person without a (spiritual) limp. He and his congregation have now become “wounded healers.” ***

“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

10. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in my weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

II Corinthians 12:10

VII. THEY FAIL TO DEPEND UPON GOD (3:17,18)

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

18. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”

Revelation 3:17,18

Laodicea was renowned for its wealth. It succeeded all other cities in its region of Phrygia. It boasted having banks, a medical school as well as a thriving textile industry. They also were renowned for a medicinal eye treatment consisting of a salve.

Its material prosperity played an important role in its failure to depend upon God to meet its needs. Countries that are materialistic actually are at a disadvantage many times in spiritual growth. Christians who have plenty often don't consider their need for God. After all they can benefit from the latest medical treatments and technology. They have secure jobs and lovely homes and drive dependable cars. They never lack food and have plenty of money to spend upon leisure activities.

Christians in other countries that are not as “blessed” are praying that our nations become more dependant upon God. If God answers their prayer, it could mean a tremendous change to our way of life.

“Man, despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication and many accomplishments, owes the fact of his existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.”

Source Unknown

When it comes to our spiritual needs, we need to recognize even more our dependency upon God.

Dear God,

“So far today I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, I haven't lost my temper, I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or overindulgent. I'm very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot of help. Amen”

Source Unknown

Lets strive this year to break habits that endanger our spiritual life. Its imperative if we wish to make our lives count for God. None of us can escape the fact that there are many dangers that lurk in the shadows if we decide to continue to follow our instincts and persist in reproducing our past habits.

** A man who flew his own plane got tired of the long auto trip from the airport to his country place which was situated on a lovely lake. So he had the idea of equipping his plane with pontoons so he could land right in front of his cottage. However, on his first trip up to the country with his newly-equipped plane, he headed for a landing at the airport just as he always had done in the past. Old habits are hard to break.

But as he was going in for the landing it dawned on his wife what was happening and she hollered, "*What do you think you're doing? You can't land this thing on the runway. You don't have any wheels, you've got pontoons on it!*"

Fortunately, her warning shout was in time and he pulled up from his landing pattern and swung the aeroplane around and headed the plane for a landing on the lake.

After the plane landed safely on the lake, he heaved a really big sigh of relief and turned to his wife and said, "*That's about the stupidest thing I've ever done!*" Then he turned, opened the door, stepped out, and fell directly into the lake. **

James S. Hewett
"Illustrations Unlimited"
pp. 268-269.
<http://www.ezillustrator.com/>

C:\My Documents\WPWin(2020)\Sermons.2021\Hearing God's Voice\Revelation2.wpd

Date: Mar 28/21

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: All He Wants - C

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