

Why Good People Do Bad Things

Rom. 7:14-24

Introduction:

1. Probably most of us can empathize with Paul's frustration in this text.
2. He describes it as "sin dwelling in me."
3. On the one hand I want to do right, but I find myself doing the very thing that I do not want to do.
4. Why do good people do bad things? I am sure that there are many different reasons why we do the wrong things, and I doubt that we could identify all of them in the next few minutes. So, this lesson is not meant to be exhaustive, but I would like to address some of the reasons that good people do bad things and what can be done about it.

Discussion:

I. The Lord calls on us to amend our ways (Jer. 7:1-11).

- A. There is a way that is right and good.
- B. I am capable of making genuine changes even though I am marred and it will be difficult.
- C. We cannot resign ourselves to becoming a "den of robbers."

II. How we think about ourselves affects the way we act toward others. How we think about our power affects our actions toward others.

- A. The Lord calls for an end to oppression (Jer. 7:6).
 1. Oppression may be defined as the cruel or unjust exercise of power.
 2. The Egyptians oppressed Israel because they felt their power was diminishing (Ex. 1:8). They oppressed a whole race of people when they felt their power diminishing.
 3. Judah oppressed the orphan and the widow. They shed innocent blood. They failed to practice justice between a man and his neighbor.
- B. Good people do bad things when they fear their power and control is diminishing.
 1. Abraham and Sarah lied to king Abimelech in order to maintain a position of power (Gen. 20:11). Abraham feared for his life.
 2. Lying is wrong because it seeks to take a "one-up" position in order take advantage. Why does an individual swear falsely (Jer. 7:9)? To be in a position to exploit weakness and vulnerability.
 3. False witnesses were hired against Stephen, a man full of grace and power, who was performing great wonders and signs among the people. He argued effectively against those in the Synagogue of the Freedmen. They felt their power slipping. They hired false witnesses (Acts 6:13) to get the upper hand and finally stoned him to death (Acts 7:59-60). They became murderers (Jer. 7:9).
 4. The silversmiths of Ephesus incited a riotous mob when they felt their financial power slipping (Acts 19:23ff).
- C. What's the solution?

and

1. Our perception seems to be that power is in limited supply and I have to get what I can. If we perceive ourselves in the role of diminished power we want to rise up and take control. But power is not in limited supply. There is plenty to go around.
2. God uses His power to help us gain power.
3. In our relationships to others we need to use our power to help them gain legitimate power (Not power to crush and destroy (Cf. Rom. 13:1ff), but to empower).
 - a. Parents to children.
 - b. Husbands to wives.
 - c. Leaders in the church.
 - d. Leaders in the world.

III. How we think about ourselves affects our actions toward others. If we feel less than others, lack a positive self-image or have a feeling of deprivation the devil may use these to lead us into sin.

- A. There are all kinds of things that attack our self-image and make us feel less than others.
 1. Satan did this to Eve when he said, "Eat of the fruit and you **will be like** God." In effect he is saying, "You are not like God, in fact you are less." Eve's response was to observe that the tree was desirable to make one wise (Gen. 3:5-6).
 2. How many of you have felt diminished because your education/knowledge level was not up to standard? It would seem the whole educational system is designed to tell us this. Exams. Grading. Degrees. Titles.
 3. The world evaluates and attacks our good feeling about ourselves by evaluating our looks, our intelligence, our finances, our weight, our status, etc. Contra. James 2:1-6. The solution: Recognize ourselves as inherently valuable on the basis of our relationship with God (Gen. 1:26-27). But this is not easy when the world is evaluating us on some other basis.
- B. Some of us have been wounded by being physically, emotionally, sexually, verbally abused. People have sinned against us in traumatizing ways. Humiliation. Disrespect. Betrayal. We have been hurt in indescribable ways. We are vulnerable to various temptations. We would like to find some comfort.
 1. We may find comfort in drinking and using drugs (1 Pet. 4:3).
 2. We may find comfort from the lips of adulterer who flatters us with the words we have longed to hear (Prov. 7:21). Cf. Jer. 7:9.
 3. Some have found comfort in binge eating.
 4. In an Aug. 2002 article in the *International Journal of Obesity and Related Metabolic Disorders* it was concluded, "Abuse in childhood is associated with adult obesity. Physical and verbal abuse are associated with body weight. Obesity risk increased with the number and severity of each type of abuse."
 5. Wounded people are vulnerable to the temptation of offsetting negative feelings with some kind of "fix," be it drugs, alcohol, sex, relationships, etc. Truth be known, sometimes we try to "fix" our problems with addictive sinful behaviors. We try to kill our pain with "pain-killers." We find some kind of relief in numbing ourselves to the pain.

6. The Lord provides healing.
- C. Feelings of deprivation can lead us to ask, "How can I make up for what has been taken from me?"
 1. Envy has been described as you thinking that your hand is empty and you want what the other person has.
 2. Jealousy has been described as you thinking your hand is full and being afraid you are going to lose it.
 3. They are certainly related concepts. If we are feeling that we have been deprived or that we may be deprived sin may be "crouching at the door."
 - a. Cain, deprived of God's approval, killed his brother, Abel, who had God's approval.
 - b. Jesus' crucifixion was precipitated by perceived deprivation. What would happen to the chief priests, the temple, the Sanhedrin if Jesus was the Son of God? It was a risk they were unwilling to take. They presented Him to Pilate as a king as a mechanism to incite feelings of deprivation in Pilate in order to get him crucified, but Pilate knew they had delivered him over because of envy (Matt. 27:18). Cf. Paul was accused of "preaching against our people and the Law and this place" (Acts 21:28). They were seeking to kill him.
 4. If feelings of deprivation can lead to murder they can certainly lead to quarrels and conflicts, covetousness, envy (cf. James 4:1-3), gossip, slander, evil suspicions, anger, factions, strife (Gal. 5:20; Rom. 1:29ff).
 5. Perhaps feeling emotionally/relationally/sexually deprived in a marriage relationship leads some to commit adultery.

IV. Sometimes good people do bad things because they have been made particularly vulnerable to temptations. How should we approach this?

- A. We can excuse responsibility.
 1. "I am addicted and there is nothing I can do."
 2. Such an approach gives in to the sin.
 3. And the disease goes unchecked.
 4. We may even create false religions to validate the behavior.
- B. We can in arrogant misunderstanding condemn them.
 1. "Just do right."
 2. "Just stop it."
 3. Sometimes we do not comprehend the entanglement of sin (Heb. 12:1), nor the power of the spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph. 6:12).
- C. We can both accept responsibility and approach the circumstances with humility.
 1. We can amend our ways (Jer. 7:3). We can lay aside the sin the sin that so easily entangles us (Heb. 12:1). We can put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10).
 2. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).
 3. It is not easy. We must tap into the power of God. We must consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). We must learn to shepherd one another through this life (Ezek. 34:1-6) "strengthening the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, making straight paths for our feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed" (Heb. 12:12-

13).

Conclusion:

1. Good people do bad things.
2. We become ensnared in sin. We become sin-sick. But we must refuse to become a “den of robbers.”
3. We need healing!
4. That is what the Lord has provided for us.
5. And that is what we are to provide for one another. The church is not a “den of robbers” (a hideout for bandits) but a hospital for healing.