

It Is Written

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Seven Techniques for Breaking Sinful Habits

By Matt Hennecke

Are there sinful habits you'd like to break? Are you thinking that January 1, 2000 is an appropriate time for such change? Though I don't recommend delay, here are seven Bible-based techniques for breaking sinful habits:

Technique #1: Pray. Don't overlook the power of prayer. James tells us that the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16). The word "effectual" comes from the word "energeo" from which we get the word "energy." James is telling us to pray actively and with energy. The first and perhaps most potent technique for overcoming sinful habits is to ask God for help.

Technique #2: Overcome Evil with Good. Paul says in Romans 12:21 to "overcome evil with good." When you feel the urge to give in to an evil habit, do something good instead. Write a letter of hope to a friend, call and encourage a brother, or visit someone who is sick. In other words, replace your sinful habit with a good work.

Technique #3: Surround Yourself with Good People. We're told "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). The opposite is also true: "good company corrects bad morals." If you have a sinful habit you're trying to break, then seek out the company of good people. Let their "goodness" rub off on you.

Technique #4: Confess Your Faults. James 5:15 says "confess your sins to one another." Admittedly, confessing your faults and sinful habits will be difficult. You may be embarrassed by the prospect of others "finding out" about your weakness. But when you confess your failings to others, then they can help look out for you. They can counsel and comfort you as you work to overcome your bad habit.

Technique #5: Make Habits Impossible. You may fall back into your sinful habit simply because sin is so accessible! Overcome sinful habits by eliminating or reducing your access to sin. Matthew 18:9 says, "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee...." If you've got a bad habit, make it harder to feed the habit! Look for ways to make sinning inconvenient rather than easy.

Technique #6: Think Good Thoughts. The urge to feed a bad habit starts in the mind. Fill your mind with righteous thoughts and you'll reduce the chance that evil thoughts will blossom into sin. Follow Paul's advice: "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Technique #7: Take One Day at a Time. It takes only two weeks to develop a habit, but it takes months to break one. Don't despair! Rather than thinking how long it will take and how hard it will be to break the habit, learn to take one day at a time. Don't worry about tomorrow. Work to stop your bad habit today for "each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:34).

Was Jesus A Violent Social Revolutionary?

By Dan Gatlin

"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!' Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.'" (Jn. 2:13-17).

During the riots of 2020, there were several memes circulating on Facebook (and perhaps other places) depicting Jesus cleansing the temple. Accompanying the picture were various statements like, "Even Jesus used violence to effect social change." It seems that the motives of those who created these memes is two-fold: first, to justify political violence (even in the name of Christ). Or second, to paint Jesus as a hypocrite who taught one thing but practiced another. How should we respond to those who would use Jesus' actions in the temple to justify violence today?

Jesus was not political. The gospel was preached to everyone, and people from all political stripes were drawn to it. It was prophesied that Jesus' kingdom would be peaceful (Isa. 11:6-9). Consider two statements by Jesus, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mk. 12:17) and "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (Jn. 18:36). Christians must strive to peacefully exist, even under corrupt governments like the Roman Empire. Government is established by God (Rom. 13:1-7), and civil leaders will be judged by the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16; Dan. 2:21; 4:17). (Of course, there are issues that are both religious and political, like abortion and homosexuality. These are things that eventually need to be addressed. Those who accept sin and sinful ideas need to be taught that true repentance requires a rejection of those things.) Neither Jesus, nor His disciples, asked someone's political positions before teaching them the gospel. An individual's eternal soul is far more important than their politics. Whatever motives one attributes to Jesus' actions in the temple, it was not political nor intended to bring societal change.

So, why did Jesus cleanse the temple? This seems contrary to the mild, soft-spoken Jesus that is commonly portrayed by the religious world. Remember, Jesus was "God in the flesh" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). Paul states of God, "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off" (Rom. 11:22). Jesus, as God, could become angry when He witnessed sin (Mk. 3:5). Of course, His was a righteous anger (Eph. 4:26).

The Jews had turned the temple into a "house of merchandise." This phrase takes us back to Jer.7:1-15 where the Jews believed that simply having the temple in their midst would bring salvation, regardless of their behavior. Their personal lives were corrupt, they worshipped idols, then they would go into the temple and "worship" God. Verse 11 states, "'Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,' says the LORD." The Jews in Jesus' day were just as corrupt as those in Jeremiah's day. After witnessing this, the disciple's minds were taken back to Ps. 69:9, which speaks of His zeal. There was no hypocrisy on Jesus' part. The real Jesus bears little resemblance to the "cleaned up," tolerant version of the religious world.

Consider also the larger context. "So the Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body" (Jn. 2:18-21). In asking for a sign, they were seeking proof of His authority to act in such a way. Jesus tells them that the proof of His authority will be His resurrection from the dead. The resurrection still shows us the authority of Jesus, "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom. 1:3-4). The temple was His Father's house, and He had the authority as the Son of God to defend it.

Jesus acted appropriately because of who He was, but we have no such authority. "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (Rom. 12:17-19). Those who would use Jesus cleansing the temple to defend their own political violence are perverting the scriptures and taking authority that has not been granted them.