Correcting Losing Behavior

Why Do We Misbehave?

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Course III – Unit 12, Lesson 1

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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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Why Do We Misbehave?

In this unit, we will study why people do not do what they should do and how others react to them. This lesson will look at why people misbehave. Lesson 2 will be on whether the response to misbehavior should be correction or punishment, while Lesson 3 is on changing behavior by punishment.

Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing why you think people misbehave. Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet. **Then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any scripture. **Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.**

I. Introduction

Throughout the ages, cultures and religions have demanded or allowed people to act certain ways. When they do not act as their culture or religion allows, they are said to misbehave. Therefore, misbehavior is doing those things that we know are not right. It is doing wrong.

Is culture and society always right? No, there are some actions that are always morally and ethically wrong. Today, most people in America consider it o.k. to take small items like paper and pens from their employer. Is it? No, it is stealing. In God's sight it is as wrong to steal a $2 pen as it is to steal a million dollars. Both are wrong.

How about religion? Is it always right? Not unless it is Christianity. In the First Century, Roman culture and religion demanded that Christians consider the emperor a god and sacrifice to him. As a religion, emperor worship was idolatry. Idolatry is a sin against God. It tells God there is something else more worthy of worship than Him. Regardless of what culture or non-Christian religion says, idolatry is wrong. So even if we obey the demands of culture, society, and some religions, we can do those things that are wrong. In other words, we misbehave.

II. What the Bible Says on How We Behave?

Some years ago, Flip Wilson, a comedian, popularized the phrase, “The Devil made me do it.” When people did something wrong or mean and got caught, they tried to justify it by saying, “The Devil made me do it.” They would try to shift the blame for their action

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from themselves to the Devil. They did not really mean it, but it was a way of refusing to take responsibility for their actions.

Although they did not realize it, they were right. The Devil did make them do it. Rather, they had allowed the Devil to work within their lives. The Devil was using them to accomplish his goals.

The question is how much control does the Devil have over what we do and think? It all depends on us. We decide to allow either God or the Devil to control us.

There is a universal spiritual war being fought between God and the Devil. Man is part of that war. We are either on God's side or the Devil's side. Each of us decides on which side we want to fight. There is no way we can be neutral. We are either with God or the Devil (Ephesians 6:12).

It might seem strange that what we do here on the physical, earthly plane affects this spiritual war. But it does! Our behavior is determined by whether we remain slaves to the Devil or allow God to free us from that slavery.

Proverbs 23:7 says, “As a man thinks within himself, so is he.” If we remain slaves to the Devil, our attitude will be one of doing what we can to advance the Devil's cause. We might not think about it in those terms, but that is what it is. Too often, we like to think that we are capable of being independent, autonomous people who have no need for God or the Devil. Well, the Devil never enters into such a picture because if a person thinks he is free from God, then he does not believe in such a being as the Devil. As much as people try to deny the existence of God and the Devil, it does not work. They still exist. We still allow ourselves to be influenced by them. More people allow the Devil to influence them than those who allow God to influence them. Unfortunately, even those who want to do as God wishes, at times will allow the Devil to influence them (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10).

When a Christian allows the Devil to influence him, does this mean that he cannot return to his relationship with Christ. *NO!* It means that we are human and live in a fallen world. As long as we try to keep a strong relationship with Christ, He will forgive our errors, mistakes, and sins (Colossians 2:20-22; 1 John 3:5-9).

What does this say about temptation? As long as we are in this world we will be tempted. Temptation itself is not sin. Sin is the result of giving into temptation. If temptation were sin, then Jesus sinned. We know that temptation and sin are different because Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted, but did not sin.

Who tempts us? Is it God or the Devil? James 1:13-18 tells us that God does not tempt man. Temptation is the Devil's tool to get us to do his will. He seduces us with works of the flesh by trying to get us to reject God and do his will.

III. Attitudes and Actions That Accompany Misbehavior

Why do people misbehave? Basically, it is because they allow the Devil to influence or control them. Our misbehavior is usually in one of the following areas:

A. Drug Use

The use of drugs in America has varied over the years. We are currently in a high drug usage period. This cycle began in the 1960's. This cycle has lasted longer than earlier ones because it has been accompanied by a general decline in religion, morals, and ethics in the general population. Which came first, drug use or the decline in religious beliefs? The answer is the decline in religious beliefs. As people began to ignore religious values, they exposed themselves to greater influence and control by the Devil. Depending on the type of drug used, the effect can either depress or expand the personality and mental faculties. Whichever way, a person loses control over his inhibitions. A person under the influence of drugs is more easily influenced to do those things that he knows are wrong. Most people use drugs to escape the problems of life. These people no longer care about what is right or wrong; they only want to do as they please. Most drugs are addictive (physically, emotionally, or psychologically). People will do anything to get more drugs. Most of the increase in crime is a result of drug addicts' trying to get more money to buy drugs.

B. Alcohol Use

Alcohol is the number one drug of choice in America. More people use and abuse it than all other kinds of drugs combined. Alcohol is a depressant and inhibits reasoning abilities. People under the influence of alcohol will either ignore others and turn inward or become extremely excitable (their inhibitions have been suppressed), or they will become violent.

C. Sexual Activities

When sex is kept within the bonds of marriage, as it was intended by God, it can be a great blessing. It is when people violate God's intended use of sex that problems happen. Any sexual activity outside the marriage relationship is sin. In Romans 1 Paul says that because of man's desire to be as wise as God, God allowed man to sink into all manners of sexual perversions. Sexual perversion is more than homosexuality

or sexually abusing children. It includes premarital sex, “wife swapping,” adultery and such things. It is having sexual relations with anyone who is not your husband or wife.

D. Outside Activities

Another reason people misbehave is because of the activities and relationships to which they are exposed. Activities and relationships that weaken a person's ties with his home or church destroy a person's sense of morals and values. The activity does not have to be wrong in itself. It can be neutral, like baseball. When a person spends so much time doing it that he ignores family or church, that activity or relationship undermines the influence of the family and church. We show how important something is to us by spending time with it. If we consider our family important, we will spend time with them. If we consider baseball important, we will spend a lot of time playing, talking, and watching it.

IV. Teens Survey on Who Influences Them

A. People Who Influence Children

Children of all ages (infant through teens) are influenced by those with whom they are most closely associated. A 1982 survey of 1,013 Dallas, Texas teenagers indicated:

1. *Girls*

   Girls said that the greatest influence in their lives were their parents and their closest friend. Why do girls consider closest friends as important in their lives as their parents? See B (below) for the answer. The second greatest influence in a teenage girl's life is her boyfriend and her brothers and sisters. Finally, in descending order comes ministers, Bible teachers, and school teachers.

2. *Boys*

   Teenage boys say that the greatest influence in their lives is their mother. Other influences (from most important to least important) are their father, closest friend, girlfriend, brother or sister, minister with Bible teachers and school teachers tying for last place.

   This shows that parents and best friends are the most important people in a child's life. This places two responsibilities on parents. One, they must be the type of parents God wants them to be.

Two, they must ensure that their children are associating with other children who have the same morals and values they do. A Chinese proverb says, "Not the cry, but the flight of the wild duck, leads the flock to fly and follow." This survey indicates that teenagers' peers are extremely important in determining what they believe and how they behave.

B. Reasons People Influence Others

The teenagers in the 1982 survey gave the following reasons why other people influenced them:

1. *Good relationship with each other*
   We all like to be liked. When we like and are liked by others, we will try to be the kind of people they want us to be.

2. *Open communications with one another*
   When we feel that we can trust someone, we will talk with him about our problems and secrets. We feel that we can risk letting him see the "real us," the person we are usually afraid to let others see.

3. *Mutual respect for each other*
   When we respect someone, we often let him have a great amount of control over what we believe and do. During the past few years, there has been a great deal of talk about the types of role models professional athletes provide. Because of their natural physical abilities, many teens want to be like them. Do we want our children to follow their example of drug abuse and immoral life style?

4. *Time together to build a bond*
   Strong relationships are not built overnight. They take time. The more time we spend with someone, the greater the influence he has on us.

5. *Assistance in time of need*
   People are most vulnerable when things are going wrong in their lives. When others help us to get through hard times, we accept their influence more readily than at other times.

These reasons do not develop in any particular order. They grow over time and reinforce one another. The stronger they are, the more influence we have with someone else.

V. Reasons People Misbehave

A. Environment

The world (work, school, home, church) around us has a huge influence on how we behave. Is it oriented toward God or toward the Devil? It cannot be neutral; it is either one or the other. Does it encourage people to be Christ like? Does it tolerate or encourage people to live a life without God? Because we want to be liked and accepted by those around us, we will try to be like them.

B. Examples of Significant People in Our Lives

As children grow, the first role models they have are their parents. As they become more exposed to their culture, other people also start to become more important in affecting their beliefs and behavior. These can be peers, friends, professional sport figures, movie stars, government leaders, and teachers.

C. Encouragement

Our actions are structured by how much we are encouraged, praised, or rewarded for doing something. Our actions can be either good or bad. Whatever the type of action, if we receive positive reinforcement for doing it, we will continue to do it. Positive reinforcement means only that we are rewarded for doing a certain action. The action can be either good or bad.

D. Ignored Misbehavior

When our misbehavior is ignored by others, we usually continue to do it. Because others do not seem to care whether we do it or not, why should we? There might be times when the misbehavior is punished, but it is done so erratically there is no reason for stopping the misbehavior.

E. To Meet Needs

We will never have all our needs met. As long as these unmet needs do not threaten our life or security, we can usually get by without their being met all the time. When an unmet need is life threatening (death by hunger, thirst, exposure to the weather, and personal safety), a person normally does whatever is required to stay alive. Sometimes, even do things that are illegal or immoral. Does this make that illegal or immoral deed right? NO! Right is always right, and wrong is always wrong, regardless of the situation. In legal terms, these are called mitigating circumstances. That is the law says “yes”; you are guilty of violating the law and must be punished.

But your situation at the time is considered, and your punishment is not as severe as if you did it out of greed or malice.

On the other hand, there are people who demand that all their needs (even those which are not life threatening) be met all the time. These types of people can only think of themselves and demand that everybody else give in to them. They have no defense. They stand condemned.

VI. Conclusion

People are not robots. They make decisions. One decision they make is whether or not to live within the boundaries that God and society have created. These boundaries are designed to protect us and allow for the orderly functioning of society. When we refuse to live within them, we are misbehaving. Each of us makes that choice. Although someone else might influence our choice or decision, no one else can make it for us (Deuteronomy 30:19, Joshua 24:15; Philippians 2:13).

When we misbehave, we are allowing the Devil to influence our behavior. The results are always negative, and can have eternal consequences.

When we behave, we are allowing Christ to influence our behavior. The results are always positive. Living the Christian life places us within God's kingdom, both in this life and the life to come (Romans 6:4; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:5).

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**