

Tuesday, July 21, 2020

SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Becoming Physically Fit Pt. 2

Choosing character over compromise involves your whole being - mind, soul, *and body!* So yesterday, we discovered that **the first two “whys” of getting physically fit** are because **1) we are free and 2) we belong to God.**

The third “why” we often don’t think about, but it is very important. 1 Corinthians 6 verse 15 (ESV):

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

This passage, verses 15-20, which we are covering today, was largely written to address the area of Spirit driven, self-mastery, over sexual immorality. That was the main problem that was being addressed. Sexual immorality was a problem then, it’s a problem now, and it will be a problem until Christ comes back to judge the world.

But why deal with it? Why deal with any addiction or idol in our lives? Why pursue physical fitness? Verse 15 tells us: You are the body of Christ. Each one of us makes up part of Christ’s body: the Church. Romans 12:5 says, “We, who are many, are one body in Christ.” This is the third “why”: **You are the body of Christ.** You see, when we sin, when we allow addictions and idols into our lives, we are not just jeopardizing our own lives and reputations; we are jeopardizing the health and reputation of the Church.

In a follow-up letter to the Corinthian church, Paul says that we are ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). We represent Christ and His Church. When we abuse our bodies through food, sex, drugs, alcohol, sleepless nights caused by technology, and so on, we can hurt the reputation of the Church. Not only that, but we disrespect our unity with God.

What’s the number one response from non-Christians about becoming a Christian? It’s this: “Why would I want to become a Christian? You guys do the same stuff we do, but you do it while saying everyone shouldn’t do it!” When I talk to people who have left the church about why they left the church, they often tell me it’s because of the hypocrisy they experienced inside the church.

Now listen to me: Perfect behavior is not a requirement for being a Christian: never has been and never will be. What is essential is genuine heart change and growth. We call that sanctification.

What is sanctification? Sanctification means consecration or purification. It comes from the word *hagiazō* which comes from the word *hagios*, which is the word we translate as holy. But when it comes to sanctification, we have several kinds: *positional sanctification*, or what we call justification. We are made justified before God. When God sees us, he sees us as blameless.

There's *ultimate sanctification*, which is also known as glorification. It's that day when we will have our resurrected bodies and we will be presented before God as holy.

And then there's the in-between sanctification called *progressive sanctification*. This is what we're talking about now. It's that daily growth and transformation of becoming more and more like Christ.

1 Peter 1 says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (4:14-16, ESV).

Now, after hearing that verse, it sounds like God expects perfection. Well, God is holy, so He does expect perfection. However, He knows we won't hit perfection. That's why God offers us mercy and grace. He is in the gracious process of molding us each day.

But listen to me. I'll say it again: Perfect behavior is not a requirement for being a Christian. However, the outflow of saving faith is genuine change and growth. So when we pursue physical fitness, we remember we are the body of Christ. And this is crucial, because a common pushback to Christianity is the hypocrisy of Christians.

So should the world judge Christianity by its followers? Yes and no. Yes because we are ambassadors of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." We represent Christ to the world. Jesus said that we are salt and light. He didn't say act as if you were salt and light. No, He said you *are* salt and light. Create a thirst for Christ in others by how you live. Create flavor in a rotting world by how you live. Be a shining light in your words by sharing the Gospel. Be a spotlight that points straight up to Christ in how you talk. Again, our life change through sanctification is so important.

But we do know there are imposters and false converts in the church. Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

That is a frightening passage. There are people who will know of Christ, but never repent of their sins and take Jesus as Lord and Savior. So when these people arise and the world judges Christianity on their behavior or words, I point them back to Jesus. Jesus is the perfect Savior. Not me. Not you. Not the false teachers and converts. So, when people reject Christianity because of people, I encourage them to read the Gospels and walk with Jesus. Allow His words, His life, and His testimony be the final and authoritative piece of evidence.

DISCUSSION with Arnie Cole:

N: Arnie, you talk with people about Christ and you're very familiar with people saying they're turned off to Christianity because of the hypocrisy they've seen. Give our listeners some practical advice on how to handle that argument.

A: You know, when I was 19, when I walked away from my faith - which was really no faith at all - but when I walked away from everything that had to do with Christianity, my big thing was, they're just a bunch of hypocrites. And really, I felt that way for many, many years. But now, as I look at people's spiritual lives - and you know, we've studied, gosh, probably close to a million now - I don't think being a hypocrite is such a thing; I think it is being judgmental, or throwing the Bible at people; coming with convicting people, instead of trying to help them find their way. And I don't see very many people taking a stand anymore, like they used to back in the day, but there's a different kind of problem now. And that is saying nothing, having no testimony whatsoever. So, okay. You're not going to be judgmental. You even watch those wide open shows that show all kinds of lifestyles. You really don't say anything. You've got your kids there. You don't say much. You laugh at the jokes. You're not a hypocrite. The last thing they'd call you is a hypocrite, because you really show no signs of your belief. It seems like the pendulum has kind of swung the other way. And it's more about saying nothing and doing nothing. And I don't know if it's because of being a hypocrite, or just being lukewarm.

N: Well, I want to explore that a little bit with you, because at the beginning you said when you were 19, you left the faith or you really didn't have a faith; yet you were raised with a missionary family. And so you were exposed to it your whole life. How'd you come to that point, where you realized, "You know what? I really don't believe this"? And the point later on, where you'd say, "You know what? Okay, now this is for real"? How did you work through that, because I think there's a lot of people who feel that same way today?

A: I'd like to say it was easy, but it was not. It was very, very hard. Leaving the faith, I had the wrong concept of who Jesus was. I thought He was a good luck piece. And at 19, 20, my life really started to fall apart. And I thought Jesus should rescue me. And I made some stupid mistakes, and I thought Jesus should save me. And it just did not work that way. And I got furious with God. And pretty soon, I started thinking, "Man, there is no God. Or if there is a God, He's sound asleep". And really, and then I started going down this road with psych - humanism, you know: all roads lead to Heaven; good thoughts. So it was a long, long journey filled with anger towards Christ followers, and then years and years of psychotherapy, which did absolutely no good.

You know, you try everything. And then there comes a point; for me, it was in 50 to 75 foot waves, in a storm. And it's like, "Oh, all of these positive affirmations aren't going to change anything; aren't going to change my fate. I can't think my way or imagine my way through this." And that's when I broke down and said, "Lord, if you save me, I'll be yours".

N: Wow. That's a wonderful, amazing story. I think a lot of people are going to resonate with that. So thank you for sharing. What Arnie said about hypocrisy, I think is so right on the money. Because today, we have become silent as Christians. We're afraid to call out sin for sin, whether it's in a fellow brother or sister in Christ, or anything else, but to be human and to be broken is to be a Christian. We're not being hypocrites to struggle with sin. We're being hypocrites to say, we've got the solution in and of ourselves, or to deny that there's a problem. But to be a Christian is to recognize the only hope we have is found in Jesus Christ. That's exactly what you did Arnie. And that's what those of us who are in Christ today did as well.

So, why do we pursue physical fitness? Remember physical fitness is really about submitting your life and behavior to the Holy Spirit. It's not being a slave to any worldly thing.

So we pursue physical fitness because: 1) We are free, 2) We belong to God, and 3) We are the body of Christ. And we don't want to hurt the body.

3 down and 2 to go. #4 might make you a little upset.

18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Paul says, flee from sexual immorality. Sexual sin is a special kind of sin because it doesn't just hurt you, but it hurts the other person or persons involved. It hurts the whole body: mental, spiritual, and physical. It is in a league all of its own.

Paul says to flee! The Greek word is *phuego* (*FYU – GO*). It means to run as fast as you can from danger. Run, get out of there. When my kids light a firecracker, they don't sit down by the danger. No, they scream and run away. It's the same idea. Get out of there. It's dangerous.

You should become physically fit. Why? Because you have a choice! That's a big "why". **You have a choice.** You are not trapped by the circumstances of your past, or the cage you've built. You have a choice. This is why it makes us upset. We can't blame people or the past.

You can flee and run away from your addiction or idol. Yes, you may have had some really horrible, bad things happen to you. I am sorry if that happened. None of us get through life unharmed. But there's good news: Christ has freed you and you have a choice. You don't need to be dominated by your past hurts. You have a choice.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." We can overcome our addictions and idols, but we need to really want to do it and then do so in His power.

Here's the truth of the matter. If you're walking back into the slavery of sin, it's not really a physical battle, it's a spiritual battle. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish

arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (3-5).

Your sin struggle - your physical battle - may have the symptom of a physical addiction, but friends, at its root it's a sin issue. It's a stronghold. Satan would love nothing more than to have you believe the lie that you can't change. He wants you to believe that Christ isn't enough. He wants you to believe and love slavery to sin. But friends, every thought is to be obedient to Christ. Our battle and our prayers should be to demolish strongholds. Let's live it, and battle where the battle really lies: in the spiritual realm.

We can become physically fit, but we have to choose to do so in His power. You are free. You belong to God. You are the body of Christ. And you have a choice. Quickly let's look at the last biblical why.

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

I was driving my youngest son from school to the Children's Museum a few months ago. He said, "Dad?" "Yes, buddy?" "Jesus is God." "Yep." "And Jesus, He lives in us." "Yep." "That makes us God." "Heretic!" Just kidding. But you can see the wheels are turning. He recognized that we are special.

We were bought with a high price. One of the results of this purchase is becoming a temple, a holy place. A special place. Think about that. The Holy Spirit could live anywhere, but where has He chosen to live? In every believer.

Why would we want to be physically fit? Because: **You are the Holy Spirit's Home.**

Every time we know someone is going to pop by our house, the first words out of Tiffany's mouth is "This place is a pit. We need to clean." Why? Because she feels someone special is coming over, and apparently, we need to give the appearance that no one actually lives in our home. I guess some people fall for this mirage that people own model homes to entertain in.

Only kidding: We all do it. We want to spruce up the place, because we have special guests in our home. We do it for ourselves, because we want to be living in a neat and orderly home. But we do it also to honor the people who will be in our house. We recognize the significance of a special guest in our home. We should be motivated, knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in us. We want to keep up, and keep His temple holy and clean.

If Jesus was right next to you, would you be looking at pornography? Overeating to the point of exhaustion? Would you focus on your phone to the point of ignoring the King of Kings, like we ignore our closest family members? We all will say "No way! Not in a million years." Friends, we do it every day. We don't have Christ standing next to us, but we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, Who sees and experiences it all. This should change everything.

You see, whatever your “what” is, and regardless of how you get there, **you must have a strong biblical *why*. You need to know and believe that you are free. You belong to God. You are the Body of Christ. You have a choice. And you are the Holy Spirit’s home.**

When we believe this, our idols and addictions will rightly appear not so important and not so unconquerable. Our goal of becoming physically fit is not only doable, but the *only* option!

I promise you, no matter the issue, God can heal you and help you to be fit for life: spiritually, financially, relationally, and physically. Not in *your* power, but in *His*.

N: Let’s join my discussion partner, Arnie Cole, once again. Arnie, your career history includes a lot of time spent working with addicts. What is the connection between the physical and the spiritual when it comes to addiction?

A: You know, Nat, I not only worked with a lot of addicts, I was one. Okay. And I had a very strong addiction in my twenties, and we'd spend thousands of dollars a month. I had owned a chain of stores, and we had extra money. Let me put it that way. It is a tremendous physical thing, but it's also a spiritual battle as well. And at least I see in other people, oftentimes it seems like the spiritual battle is almost stronger than the physical battle, if the physical battle doesn't kill you. Now, I know there's withdrawal things, where you can actually die. And I get that and understand that. But for me, the spiritual battle was so much more, and I had to conquer that. And then the physical battle wasn't nearly as bad. And back in the day, I was too proud and too career oriented, to get any kind of help or go in any kind of treatment thing. So I handled my own addictions as a spiritual problem, and solved it without Jesus, sadly, but I solved that problem. So one day I'm an addict and the next day I wasn't.

N: Wow. Yeah. I think so many people, they look for freedom from the problem, but they never really address the issue. And the issue is the heart, and it's a sin issue. And so people can go through treatment and they can get help. But the reality is, they are still a slave to sin, and true freedom is found in Christ. And so once we address the heart, from there, then we can start addressing all the symptoms that come with it. Well, speaking of problems, let's talk about porn for a little bit, because as we know, porn is a big problem and it's invaded the church. What do we need to know about this addiction, and how it's best treated?

A: It’s a real problem, because people are only as comfortable telling you the depth of their problem, and that's about it. So they'll only explain as much as they can trust you. And when you bring a husband and wife team together, you can see disaster, because you might say in your men's group, you know, I've got this porn problem. And then John goes back to his wife, “Hey, did you know, Bob has this problem?” And then she tells the wife. And you know, it's just a tremendous problem, that Satan takes advantage of and just wipes guys out, from an early age on. There's not really simple answers, Nat, as I'm sure you well know.

N: Right, but it does start with acknowledging the depth of the issue. I mean, it's that leadership principle, right? You cannot change what you don't manage. You can't manage what you don't know. The same is true for our addictions and our struggles. And I remember this in counseling

sessions galore: Session number one, “What's the problem?” “Oh, we're fighting”. “Why are you fighting?” “Well, because he's an idiot.” “Because she doesn't show me respect”. “Okay, great”. Then you press on a few sessions later; you realize, “Oh wait, there's actually a problem with porn”. Then you go a little bit further and you realize, “No, there's actually an issue from childhood”, or whatever it is. So you have to actually get to the root of the issue, so you can start dealing with it, so I think you're right.

Now, I know that there are plenty of people listening, who are wanting to make changes in their lives. from being financially responsible, to eating right, to being fit, to growing spiritually. Can you give them some final words of encouragement?

A: Yeah. You know, the best advice that I ever heard from somebody - he was a guy I worked with - his name was Jim Ingle, a researcher, the father of focus groups. He founded focus groups, of all things, but he said, “If you want to change tomorrow, you simply have to change today”. So it's, you can't look back, because you can't change the past. You can't look forward, because, who knows? It's you've got today - deal with today. It's 24 hours. Focus on Jesus and know this isn't like a simple thing. It may be the toughest thing, but the best way to do it is focus on Jesus. Get through today. If you can change today, you'll start changing tomorrow.

N: Arnie, is that why you focus so much on the daily discipleship, on the growing with Jesus daily?

A: Oh yeah, because that's the one thing that's the easiest. I'm not saying it's easy, but it's the easiest thing to control, are your thoughts of the present, of today. And that's going to have the biggest impact on tomorrow.