

Developing Successful Self-Control

Romans 13:14 HCSB But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no plans to satisfy the fleshly desires.

Today, we are going to discuss the issue of habits. We'll discuss how habits are formed; we'll discuss how to get rid of bad habits; and we'll discuss how to form good, healthy habits. That means we need to have a clear understanding of what we mean by the word "habit".

¹If you go look in the dictionary for the word "habit" you'll find two meanings. The first meaning is "*a type of clothing characteristic of a certain calling.*"

The second definition is "*a pattern of behavior acquired by frequent repetition that reflects the prevailing character of the person.*"

The Scriptures interweave these two meanings. As our text today puts it, we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ". Adonists consider the characteristics of the Lord Jesus to be something to clothe ourselves with. We deliberately choose to take on the actions, thoughts, and points of view of our Master.



A. Characteristics of habitual behavior

Habits, whether positive or negative, all share the following six characteristics:

1. **Regular**. They occur on a regular basis.
2. **Spontaneous**. They happen without thought.
3. **Reveal**. They reflect our true inner morals.
4. **Ingrained**. They tend to grow stronger and more ingrained with time.
5. **Persist**. They can get hard to change.
6. **Pleasurable**. They must provide some degree of pleasure or we wouldn't do them.

B. Determining your vulnerability to a habit

Jesus taught,

- **Luke 16:13 HCSB** No household slave can be the slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't be slaves to both God and money."

If you want to determine whether your habit has mastery over you or you are mastering it, ask yourself the following questions.

1. Are my **thoughts consumed** with it?
2. Do I **schedule my time** around it?
3. Could my **health be harmed** by it?
4. Does my **guilt increase** after indulging it?
5. Is it affecting my **finances**?
6. Do I **become defensive** when asked about it?
7. Are any of my **relationships hurt** by it?
8. Do I **get upset** when I can't **indulge** it?

While asking yourself these questions, ask the Holy Spirit,

- **Psalms 139:23-24 HCSB** Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. (24) See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

¹ Titus van Rijn in a Monk's Habit by Rembrandt

C. The root causes of bad habits

The root causes of bad habits are three-fold:

1. **Misguided choices** – choosing to escape rather than face the realities of life.
2. **Misplaced dependencies** – Trying to fill the God-void in your life with people, things, or activities.
3. **Misaligned beliefs** – Talking yourself into sin by saying “This will make me feel better. This will make me feel safer. This will include me in the group.” etc.

When you are tempted to think foolishness like that, I want you to cast your mind back to Eve and her little personal inner conversation:

- **Genesis 3:6 HCSB** Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate *it*; she also gave *some* to her husband, *who was with her*, and he ate *it*.

How did that work out for her? For that matter, how did that work out for the rest of us? The Rasha, the wicked person, allows those three factors to drive him into sinful habits.

D. The root causes of the Tzaddik’s good habits

The Tzaddik on the other hand, the righteous person,

1. Chooses to meet the **harsh realities of life** head on. He chooses to actually process painful emotions and circumstances rather than avoid them.
2. Depends on the **Yahweh**. He depends on the Lord God for love, significance, and security.
3. Believes the **Scriptural warnings** about **sin** and allows that belief to **drive** his actions.
 - **Romans 6:23 HCSB** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

E. Gaining proper self control

So, how does one gain proper self control? I believe that the following steps are crucial:

1. Commit yourself to God.

1. Believe that God is involved in the process.
 - **Hebrews 11:6 HCSB** Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.
2. Believe that God has both the desire and ability to help you.
 - **Philippians 2:13 HCSB** For it is God who is working in you, *enabling you* both to will and to act for His good purpose.

2. Separate yourself from sin.

1. Repent and confess that the habit is sinful.
 - **Psalms 32:5 HCSB** Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You took away the guilt of my sin. Selah
2. Review on a regular basis the benefits of obeying God.
 - **Psalms 103:2-10 HCSB** My soul, praise the LORD, and do not forget all His benefits. (3) He forgives all your sin; He heals all your diseases. (4) He redeems your life from the Pit; He crowns you with faithful love and compassion. (5) He satisfies you with goodness; your youth is renewed like the eagle. (6) The LORD executes acts of righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. (7) He revealed His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people

of Israel. (8) The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and full of faithful love. (9) He will not always accuse *us* or be angry forever. (10) He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our offenses.

3. Set a goal.

1. Make knowing God your goal.
 - [Philippians 3:10 HCSB](#) *My goal* is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
2. Make your “sub goals” dependent on that grand goal.
 - [Philippians 2:12 HCSB](#) So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

4. Make your stand on God’s promises.

1. In Christ you are set free from not only the penalty but the power of sin.
 - [Romans 8:2 HCSB](#) because the Spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.
2. You no longer have to be slave to your sin.
 - [Romans 8:12-13 HCSB](#) So then, brothers, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, (13) for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

5. Surrender your mind. Replace your thoughts with God’s.

1. When your habit insinuates “You’re too powerless to resist me” reply with [Philippians 4:13](#).
 - [Philippians 4:13 HCSB](#) I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.
2. When your habit tempts you to secrecy reply with [Hebrews 4:13](#).
 - [Hebrews 4:13 HCSB](#) No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.
3. Focus your thoughts on what God wants you to think about.
 - [Romans 8:5-8 HCSB](#) For those whose lives are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those whose lives are according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. (7) For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God’s law, for it is unable to do so. (8) Those whose lives are in the flesh are unable to please God.
 - [Philippians 4:8 HCSB](#) Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable--if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise--dwell on these things.

6. Surrender your will. Replace your desires with God’s.

1. Transfer ownership of your thoughts, words, desires, time, money and possessions to God. Pray:

- [1 Chronicles 29:11-13 HCSB](#) Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty, for everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to You. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom, and You are exalted as head over all. (12) Riches and honor come from You, and You are the ruler of everything. In Your hand are power and might, and it is in Your hand to make great and to give strength to all. (13) Now therefore, our God, we give You thanks and praise Your glorious name.
2. Admit that the decision is yours. It is a free-will choice you are making.
 - [Deuteronomy 30:19 HCSB](#) I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,
 - [Joshua 24:15 HCSB](#) But if it doesn't please you to worship the LORD, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship the LORD."

7. Stick to the plan.

1. Develop and maintain your dependency on God. The more you rely on your own self-sufficiency the more trouble you are in.
 - [Romans 7:18-19 HCSB](#) For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. (19) For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.
2. Avoid thinking that it will be ok to occasionally indulge.
 - [1 John 2:4 HCSB](#) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," without keeping His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
 - [Romans 13:14 HCSB](#) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no plans to satisfy the fleshly desires.

Make it your goal to be able to say, as Paul did at the end of his life:

- [2 Timothy 4:7-8 HCSB](#) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing.