

Preventing Truth Decay

*“...taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”
2 Corinthians 10:5*

Recently I was pleased to take away from the dentist’s office a good report. But I’m sure flossing had something to do with this; years ago I became convinced how vital it was for healthy teeth. In fact I was told that not even regular brushing was more important. I took this to heart so zealously that even John got into it; now he flosses religiously every day too. Having noted his faithful flossing, I asked him, “you like to floss, don’t you?” He replied, “No, I hate to floss; what I like is not having rotten teeth.”

He makes a good point, flossing is kind of a pain. To do it correctly you don’t haphazardly seesaw between teeth; no, there’s a proper technique involved. The floss should be stretched tight like a clothesline between one or more fingers of each hand. Then it’s wedged between two adjacent teeth where it cradles the structure of one under the gum line. From there the floss is scraped up and down against side of the tooth, then again against the side of the adjacent tooth. And of course it doesn’t end there; this process must be repeated on two new sets of adjacent teeth using a different section of unused floss. Meaning that for those like me without wisdom teeth, it needs to be repeated *only* 25 times. Yes, when you think about it, flossing every day is a pain.

But what’s infinitely more painful is the alternative. Unflossed nooks and crannies harbor plaque, which turns to tartar, which causes periodontal disease and even tooth loss. The disgusting textbook pictures I’ve seen of such oral devastation evoke in me shock and awe; how can anyone tolerate a mouth rampant with decay? Probably because even more shocking might be the time and expense needed to fix it. On a personal note, I know a woman whose delinquent dental habits came back to haunt her; now she needs work costing tens of thousands of dollars. Thus she’s given up, reconciled to a future mouth with dentures. Since unbridled oral chaos doesn’t just spring up overnight, few better examples illustrate how an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure.

Yes, we need to practice maintenance to keep our teeth from falling out, but we also need regular maintenance to keep from falling away spiritually. Like the unchecked bacteria that calcify into tarter and periodontal disease, sins left unchecked can build up and calcify into hardness, spiritual apathy and even overt depravity. But like a severely decayed mouth, this doesn’t happen overnight but little by little, as continual neglect erodes integrity. And the resultant spiritual halitosis, to our detriment, is repulsive to God.

However this ought not to be, for God has meant for us better things, things that accompany salvation (Hebrews 6:9). All is new (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the Giver of our newness has also given us the Bible with everything sufficient for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Including the ounce of prevention needed to keep from falling away in our struggles with the flesh, the World and the devil. Thus if we keep short accounts with God and regularly confess sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Confessing sins routinely is akin to flossing that breaks up trapped bacterial colonies in the mouth; once disrupted and washed away, their toxins can’t linger and destroy gums and teeth. Likewise, after confessing to God, He washes sins away, and once cleansed they can’t be toxic to our spiritual life and fellowship with Him.

Furthermore, it becomes easier with regular practice. On the other hand, when sin remains unresolved confession becomes harder, and the situation is not unlike what happens with irregular dental habits. A mouth not used to flossing is sensitive and bleeds; this is overcome only after the gums adjust. Until then it’s not pleasant, but necessary nonetheless for healthy teeth. Likewise, confession may not come easy to an undisciplined soul, but it’s still necessary for a healthy spirit. Both oral and spiritual health will languish from chronic neglect, and the longer the neglect continues the more difficult is restoration. An ounce of prevention is not only worth the pound of cure, it’s a whole lot easier.

Yet though a 24-hour period between flossing is adequate to maintain oral health, confessing sins should occur as needed. In fact bringing every thought into captivity for Christ includes a moment-by-moment evaluation of our heart and mind. But really, isn’t faithful discipline necessary to obtain and maintain anything worthwhile? Whether it’s our teeth, physical bodies, finances, family or spiritual life, there’s no doubt a direct correlation between its importance and our diligence, including the time and effort we choose to invest. However, like anything else that requires self-control, once it becomes a habit we generally stop dwelling on the inconvenience or sacrifice. I know that after I’ve received the fruit of faithfulness, like a report of healthy teeth, I’m glad to have mustered the self-control necessary to practice something like regular flossing. How much more glad should I be in not growing weary exercising spiritual diligence?

Still, someday our spirit will leave our bodies, with or without our teeth. But what remains forever will be the gold, silver and precious stones resulting from the godly spiritual disciplines of our lifetime (1 Corinthians 3:12). And most desired will be hearing, “well done, good and faithful servant,” as our spiritual report. We walk in the flesh now but overthrow harmful strongholds not with physical weaponry but spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:4), including confession of sin as needed.

Consequently we become, dare I say it, “armed to the teeth” until our eternal appointment with God.