

# *Sin*

## *A Brief Biblical Analysis*

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# *Sin*

## *A Biblical Brief Analysis*

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First Edition

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## Introduction

### ***Introduction***

There's something wrong with the world, and there's something wrong with us. Opinions abound about the problem and solution. Most agree there is a problem and have hope that a solution exists; although some have thrown up their hands in despair. Scripture reveals sin is at the heart of our problems, and God has a solution, if we'll look to Him for answers.

The chapters in this book were previously on my blog: *Thinking on Scripture*. However, I decided to put the material into printed format for two reasons: 1) some who read my articles prefer holding a book in their hands and, 2) so the material could be made available to those who do not have access to the internet such as inmates in jail or prison.

Because some of the articles overlap concerning their content, there is some repetition of statements and Scripture citations. I prefer repetition on certain subjects because it reinforces the material in the reader's mind. It is my prayer that the material in this book brings greater understanding of God's Word and is used by God the Holy Spirit to transform the life of the reader in a godly way.

Steven R. Cook, D.Min.

# Introduction

## The Meaning of Sin

### *The Meaning of Sin*

The word *sin* is found throughout Scripture, and both the Hebrew and Greek share the same basic meaning. The Hebrew word חָטָא *chata* means “to miss the target, or to lose the way,”<sup>1</sup> and the Greek word ἁμαρτάνω *hamartano* is defined as “miss the mark, err, or do wrong.”<sup>2</sup> In Judges 20:16 the Hebrew word is used of skilled soldiers who do not *miss their target*, and in Proverbs 19:2 of a man who hurries and *misses his way*.<sup>3</sup> Sin is when we transgress God’s law and depart from His intended path.<sup>4</sup> The apostle John states, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and **sin is lawlessness**” (1 John 3:4). “*Sin* may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act,

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 305.

<sup>2</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49.

<sup>3</sup> G. Herbert Livingston, “638 חָטָא,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 277.

<sup>4</sup> Other Hebrew and Greek words related to sin include: *evil* (עָרָא *ra* – Gen. 3:5), *wicked* (רָשָׁע *rasha* – Prov. 15:9), *rebel* (מָרָד *marah* – Deut. 1:26), *transgress* (פָּשָׁע *pasha* – Isa. 1:2), *iniquity* (אָוֹן *avon* – Isa. 53:6), *error* (שָׁגָה *shagah* – Lev. 4:13), *guilt* (אָשָׁם *asham* – Lev. 4:22), *go astray* (טָאָה *taah* – Ps. 58:3), *sin* (ἁμαρτία *hamartia* – 1 Cor. 15:3), *bad* (κακός *kakos* – Rom. 12:17), *evil* (πονηρός *poneros* – Matt. 7:11), *ungodly* (ἄσεβής *asebes* – Rom. 4:5), *guilty* (ἐνοχος *enochos* – 1 Cor. 11:27), *unrighteousness* (ἀδικία *adikia* – Rom. 1:18), *lawless* (ἄνομος *anomos* – 1 Tim. 1:9), *transgression* (παράβασις *parabasis* – Gal. 3:19), *ignorance* (ἄγνοεω *agnoeo* – Acts 17:23), *go astray* (πλανᾶω *planao* – 1 Pet. 2:25), *trespass* (παράπτωμα *paraptoma* – Rom. 5:15), and *hypocrisy* (ὕποκρισις *hupokrisis* – 1 Tim. 4:2).

## The Meaning of Sin

habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence.”<sup>5</sup>

Divine laws are a reflection of the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God may be defined as the intrinsic, immutable, moral perfection of God, from which He commands all things, in heaven and earth, and declares as good that which conforms to His righteousness and as evil that which deviates. God’s character is the basis upon which all just laws derive; either divine laws from God Himself or human laws which conform to His righteousness.<sup>6</sup>

The underlying idea of sin is that of law and of a lawgiver. The lawgiver is God. Hence sin is everything in the disposition and purpose and conduct of God’s moral creatures that is contrary to the expressed will of God (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 7:7; James 4:12, 17). The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against God, even when the wrong we do is to others or ourselves (Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4).<sup>7</sup>

God permits sin, but is never the author of it. Sin is the expression of a creaturely will that is set against God. The sin we commit may be mental, verbal, or physical. It

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<sup>5</sup> J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 82.

<sup>6</sup> If there is no God, then there is no absolute standard for right and wrong and we are left with arbitrary laws based on manufactured values.

<sup>7</sup> Merrill F. Unger and E. McChesney, “Sin,” ed. R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1198.



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may be private or public, impacting one or many, with short or lasting results. Below are biblical examples of sin:

1. Lucifer sought to place himself above God (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:11-18).
2. Adam and Eve disobeyed the command not to eat the fruit from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7).
3. Lot’s daughters got him drunk and had sex with him (Gen. 19:30-38)
4. Aaron led the Israelites to worship an idol (Ex. 32:1-6).
5. Moses struck the rock when the Lord told him only to speak to it (Num. 20:8-12).
6. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg. 16:1-4).
7. David had an affair with Bathsheba and conspired to have her husband, Uriah, murdered (2 Sam. 11:1-21).
8. Solomon worshiped idols (1 Kings 11:1-10).
9. Peter tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross (Matt. 16:21-23).
10. Peter publicly denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34-35; 69-75).
11. The Christians at Corinth engaged in quarrels (1 Cor. 1:11), jealousy and strife (1 Cor. 3:1-3), fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-2), selfishness and drunkenness (1 Cor. 11:21).
12. The Apostle John twice worshiped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

The above list is a just a sampling of sins in the Bible. Biblically, every person is a sinner in God’s sight.

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Jesus is the single exception.<sup>8</sup> We are sinners *in Adam* (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), sinners *by nature* (Rom. 7:18-21; Gal. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-3), and sinners *by choice* (1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9-23). Sin separates us from God and renders us helpless to merit God's approval. We are helpless to solve the sin problem and save ourselves (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-3), and good works have no saving merit before God (Isa. 64:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5). We cannot save ourselves any more than we can jump across the Grand Canyon or throw rocks and hit the moon. Sadly, many people buy into the lie that they can help save themselves by doing good works. The biblical teaching is that salvation is never based on good works or adherence to law, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 16:31). Scripture states, we are "not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Gal 2:16; cf. Rom. 3:20, 28), for "if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21).

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<sup>8</sup> Jesus, because of His divine nature (John 1:1, 14; Col. 2:9), and the virgin conception (Isa. 7:14; Luke 1:30-35), is the only person ever born without sin and who committed no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). His perfect humanity and sinless life qualified Him to go to the cross and die in our place. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

## Original Sin

### *Original Sin*

Original sin refers to Adam's sin in the garden in which he disobeyed God (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-24). Adam is the head of the human race. When Adam sinned, we all sinned with him. His fallen position is our fallen position. His guilt is our guilt. The pure image of God (*imago Dei*) that belonged to the first couple was marred when they sinned and all Adam's children are born with a distorted image and a proclivity toward rebellion against God (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin is imputed to all his offspring (Rom. 5:12-21; cf. 3:9-23), excluding Jesus, who was neither born with sin, nor committed sin. Scripture reveals Jesus "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15), and "in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). His sinless life qualified Him to die a substitutionary death in our place, "*the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18).

Related to the subject of original sin is the biblical concept of *total depravity*, which means that sin permeates every aspect of our being. Our mind, will, sensibilities and flesh are all submerged in sin. We often think of *total depravity* as meaning that people are as bad as they can be; however, this is wrong. The truth is there are many moral unbelievers in the world who rely on their good works to gain them entrance into heaven. The fact of Scripture is that God declares everyone under sin, and this includes the most moral persons who have ever lived. Is there any person who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?" (Pro 20:9). The answer is an emphatic NO! The human heart is corrupt, for "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9). "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good

## Original Sin

and who never sins” (Eccl. 7:20), and “There is none righteous; not even one. There is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become useless. There is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:10-12; cf. 8:8). Some might argue, “What about unbelievers who live moral lives and do good? Certainly they exist. Doesn’t their morality provide something worthy in the eyes of God?” The biblical answer is NO! Even the most moral unbelievers are unacceptable to God. Scripture states:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isa. 64:6)

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Gal. 2:16)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

By human estimation, even the worst person can do

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some good. But human estimation is lower than God's estimation and it is God's standards that define what is truly good. "Total depravity must always be measured against God's holiness. Relative goodness exists in people. They can do good works, which are appreciated by others. But nothing that anyone can do will gain salvational merit or favor in the sight of a holy God."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase *total depravity* is commonly used to make explicit the implications of original sin. It signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent. It declares that no part of us is untouched by sin, and therefore no action of ours is as good as it should be, and consequently nothing in us or about us ever appears meritorious in God's eyes. We cannot earn God's favor, no matter what we do; unless grace saves us, we are lost.<sup>2</sup>

Only the work of Christ on the cross satisfies God's righteous demands toward our sin (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2), and only by faith in Jesus can we accept God's gift of salvation (John 3:16; 14:6; 20:31; Acts 4:12; 16:30-31). To be saved, we must turn from all other considerations of merit, and trust in Christ alone as Savior. At the moment of faith in Jesus, God gives us the gift of His righteousness (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9), which is imputed to

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 253.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993).

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us, ungodly sinners (Rom. 4:5), solely because of His goodness and not because of any worth in us (Eph. 2:3-9). The gift of God's righteousness means that we are declared as perfect as He is perfect. Won't you accept God's free gift of righteousness by turning to Jesus as Savior and trusting that what He accomplished on the cross is sufficient to save? It's simple; "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

## The Noetic Effects of Sin

### *The Noetic Effects of Sin*

The noetic effects of sin refers to the affect sin has on the mind of every person. Sin impacts our ability to think rationally, especially about God, Who has made Himself known through general revelation (Ps. 19:1-2; Rom. 1:18-20) and special revelation (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Tim. 5:18; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).<sup>1</sup> God's revelation disrupts the mind of man, confronting wrong thoughts and inviting conformity to the mind of God. Though God's revelation is clear, rebellious people "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18), and their foolish heart is "darkened" (Rom. 1:21). When confronted with God's revelation, the person who is negative to God either denies His existence (Ps. 14:1), or reduces Him to the status of a creature (Rom. 1:22-25).

The biblical record of mankind is dark. It reveals that the majority of people throughout history think evil thoughts and are consumed with themselves and their own agendas rather than God's will. Moses wrote of Noah's contemporaries, saying, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every

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<sup>1</sup> At times God spoke directly to people (Ex. 19:9; 1 Sam. 3:1-14; Isa. 6:9-10), and at other times He revealed Himself through dreams (Gen. 28:12; 31:11; Dan. 7:1; 12:8-9), visions (Isa. 6:1; 1 Ki. 22:19), and angels (Dan. 10:10-21; Acts 27:23-24). Most specifically and clearly, He revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14, 18; 14:7; Heb. 1:1-3), and in the written Word (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 3:14-16). Jesus Christ is now in heaven and therefore not subject to observation such as when He was on the earth. Though God continues to reveal Himself through nature and acts of providence, it is Scripture alone that informs and guides the Christian concerning faith and conduct.

## The Noetic Effects of Sin

intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Later, Solomon declared, “the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives” (Eccl. 9:3). And Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). One would think that when Jesus came into the world that mankind would rejoice in His light. However, the Scripture provides a different picture, telling us, “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19; cf. 1:4-5). And Jesus Himself spoke of the human condition, saying, “for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matt. 15:19).

Sin permeates every aspect of our being, corrupting the mind and will, so that the natural tendency of our heart is to think according to the ways of the world. A hostile heart may search the Scriptures to know God’s Word and yet be completely closed to accepting its message. This was the case with the religious Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day (John 5:39-40). When talking to religious Pharisees, Jesus declared, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word” (John 8:43). This is true of all unbelievers, for “the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:14). Even something as simple as the Gospel message is “foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor. 1:18), in whose case “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).



## ***The Sin Nature within the Christian***<sup>1</sup>

If the devil were a broadcaster sending out his signal through the world, the sin nature in every person would be the receiver that is specifically tuned to welcome his message. The sin nature, sometimes called “the flesh” (Gal. 5:17, 19) or “old self” (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), has a natural affinity for Satan’s values and his world-system. More so, the sin nature is not eradicated from the believer during his time on earth, nor is it ever reformed, as though it can be made to love God.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh [unbelievers] cannot please God. (Rom. 8:5-8)

Everyone knows what it’s like to walk in the flesh, according to the sin nature, but only the Christian knows what it’s like to walk in the Spirit, assuming he’s growing in his walk with the Lord.

For the flesh [sin nature] sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you [the

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared in my book, *The Christian Life: A Study of Biblical Spirituality*.

## The Sin Nature within the Christian

Christian] may not do the things that you please.  
(Gal. 5:17)

Concerning Galatians 5:17, William MacDonald writes:

**The Spirit** and **the flesh** are in constant conflict. God could have removed the fleshly nature from believers at the time of their conversion, but He did not choose to do so. Why? He wanted to keep them continually reminded of their own weakness; to keep them continually dependent on Christ, their Priest and Advocate; and to cause them to praise unceasingly the One who saved such worms. Instead of removing the old nature, God gave us His own Holy Spirit to indwell us. God's Spirit and our flesh are perpetually at war, and will continue to be at war until we are taken home to heaven. The believer's part in the conflict is to yield to the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The sin nature is resident in every person; both saved and unsaved, and is the source of internal temptation. "*The flesh* refers to that fallen nature that we were born with, that wants to control the body and the mind and make us disobey God."<sup>3</sup> Since the fall of Adam, every person is born with a sin nature, and it is this nature that internally motivates men to rebel against all legitimate forms of

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<sup>2</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Publishing, 2001), 18.

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authority, both human and divine. At the moment of salvation, God the Holy Spirit indwells us and gives us a new nature that, for the first time in our lives, has the capacity and desire to obey God. Because the sin nature is not removed from the believer after salvation, the believer begins to experience conflict within. “The presence of two opposing natures (not two personalities) in one individual results in conflict.”<sup>4</sup>

The old nature (which has its origin in our physical birth) fights against the new nature which we receive when we are born again (Gal. 5:16–26). No amount of self-discipline, no set of man-made rules and regulations, can control this old nature. Only the Holy Spirit of God can enable us to “put to death” the old nature (Rom. 8:12–13) and produce the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22–23) in us through the new nature.<sup>5</sup>

Only the Christian has two opposing natures, and his spiritual growth guarantees internal conflict. The sin nature, though crippled at the moment of regeneration, does not give up control without a fight, and only the spiritually advancing Christian can overcome the power and habits of the flesh, as he devotes himself to learning and living Scripture by means of the filling of the Spirit. The Christian is to “lay aside the old self...and put on the new self which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:22, 24). Such language speaks

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 112.

<sup>5</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 2, 480.

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to the reality that the believer has two natures, one that is corrupt and wants to please self and one that is new and wants to please God.

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but [the] sin [nature] which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me [the Christian], the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man [according to the new nature], but I see a different law [of sin] in the members of my body, waging war [causing conflict] against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (Romans 7:19-23)

I have pondered Paul's struggle between his two natures on many occasions. Every Christian who has grown spiritually and lived for any time in this world knows exactly what Paul is saying. He writes that he wants to do good, but then finds himself doing the very opposite. On the one hand Paul states that he "joyfully concur[s] with the law of God in the inner man" (Rom. 7:22), but that he experiences a war within because of "the law of sin" which is in his flesh (Rom. 7:23). This is the Christian experience.

Torn inside with desires to do that which we know is evil and new desires to please God, we experience the rage of the battle. The internal conflict manifests itself in everyday life as the believer is tempted to sin. The source of this conflict is the old sin nature, which is the root cause of the deeds of sin. In the conflict the believer is not

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passive. He has a vital role in determining to whom he will give allegiance—the old nature or the new nature. From the moment a sinner trusts Christ, there is a conflict in his very being between the powers of darkness and those of light. The one who has become a member of the family of God now faces conflicts and problems that he did not have before.<sup>6</sup>

Though the Christian will struggle all his life with his two natures, he also knows the victory is already won. The sin nature has been defeated and its strength diminished because of the believer's union with Christ (Rom. 6:6, 11). At his resurrection, the Christian is guaranteed a new body in heaven that is free from the sin nature as it will be just the like body of our Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:20-21).

Not only is the Christian commanded to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” but he is to “make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts” (Rom. 13:14). He must not only choose to live according to the new nature in conformity to the Spirit's guiding, but must also learn to starve the monster that is his sin nature. To “make no provision for the flesh” means the Christian is to stop exposing himself to the things of the world that excite the flesh and lead to sinful behavior. The positive action is to grow spiritually with biblical teaching, Christian fellowship, worship and prayer so that the believer grows strong (Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). It is only by spiritual growth and drawing closer to God that the

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<sup>6</sup> Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 1995), 206.

## The Sin Nature within the Christian

Christian glorifies the Lord and learns to live in righteousness.

## When God's People Commit Sin

### *When God's People Commit Sin*

Do God's people ever behave poorly? Yes. There are times we behave poorly. As a Christian, there are times we behave poorly toward God by refusing to do His will (James 4:17). There are times we behave poorly toward other Christians by not modeling the love or grace or truth that should characterize a growing believer. And, there are times we behave poorly toward unbelievers by not modeling the love or grace or truth that reveals God to them. Though we have eternal life by faith in Christ (John 3:16; 10:28), and are among the Lord's righteous (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), we still sin (1 John 1:8, 10). As a believer, Solomon understood "there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). There are numerous biblical examples of believers who behaved poorly. Old Testament examples include:

1. Lot's daughters got him drunk and slept with him (Gen. 19:30-38).
2. Judah slept with Tamar, assuming she was a prostitute (Gen. 38:13-18).
3. Aaron led the Israelites in idol worship (Ex. 32:1-6).
4. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg. 16:1-4).
5. David had an affair with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11:1-21).
6. Solomon ended his life worshipping idols (1 Kings 11:1-10).

New Testament examples include:

1. James and John (nicknamed *Boanerges*, or "Sons of Thunder"; Mark 3:17) wanted to call fire down

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- from heaven to kill the residents of a Samaritan city (Luke 9:51-55).
2. The mother of James and John requested special treatment for her sons, that they might have a place of prominence seated on thrones to the right and left of Jesus (Matt. 20:20-21). This upset the other disciples (Matt. 20:24).
  3. The disciples tried to send away a woman who had come to Jesus for help with her demon possessed daughter (Matt. 15:21-23).
  4. The disciples tried to prevent a man from doing the Lord's work (Luke 9:49-50).
  5. The disciples argued amongst themselves as to who was greatest in the kingdom (Luke 9:46).
  6. Peter argued with Jesus and tried to prevent Him from going to the cross (Matt. 16:21-22). The Lord reproached Peter sharply (Matt. 16:23).
  7. Peter denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34-35; 69-75).
  8. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement that resulted in their separation as friends in ministry (Acts 15:36-39).
  9. The Christians at Corinth were guilty of quarrels (1 Cor. 1:11), jealousy and strife (1 Cor. 3:1-3), fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-2), selfishness and drunkenness (1 Cor. 11:21).
  10. Peter engaged in hypocrisy and was publicly rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14).
  11. The Apostle John was twice corrected for worshipping an angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). John knew the depravity of his own heart, and how easy it is to fall into idolatry, and he cautioned other Christians to "guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).



## When God's People Commit Sin

12. Five of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 behaved poorly by not doing God's will, and the Lord Jesus reprimanded them.
  - a. Church at Ephesus – “you have left your first love” (Rev 2:4).
  - b. Church at Pergamum – “you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*” (Rev 2:14).
  - c. Church at Thyatira – “you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20).
  - d. Church at Sardis – “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God” (Rev 3:2).
  - e. Church at Laodicea – “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot” (Rev 3:15).

Though there are numerous examples of believers, both in the Old and New Testament, who behaved poorly toward God, other believers, and unbelievers, this is never what God expects from us. As His children, God calls us to live holy and righteous lives (Tit. 2:11-14), to manifest love (1 Thess. 4:9), grace (Eph. 4:29), and truth to others (Eph. 4:15). When we fail, we should humbly confess our sins and move on (1 John 1:9), as we keep striving to know God and walk in His will (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18).

## When God's People Commit Sin

## *When Believers Live in Perpetual Sin*

The purpose of this chapter is to show that a child of God can simultaneously surrender some areas of his/her life to God and other areas not. Like train tracks that run parallel, a believer may be obedient in one thing and disobedient in another. David and Solomon are my biblical examples. Both men were believers, were appointed by God to serve as kings in Israel, received direct revelation from the Lord, wrote Scripture, and are in heaven today. Yet, both men directly disobeyed God's Word, not just on occasion, but on a continual basis throughout their lives (Solomon especially). The failure of both men pertained to their kingship. In order to understand their ongoing failure, we must start with what God commanded of the kings of Israel. Moses wrote:

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’<sup>15</sup> you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, *one* from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.<sup>16</sup> “Moreover, **he shall not multiply horses for himself**, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’<sup>17</sup> “**He shall not multiply wives for himself**, or else his heart will turn away; **nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.** (Deut. 17:14-17)

## When Believers Live in Perpetual Sin

God wanted the kings of Israel to be servants who trusted in Him. God had proven He could deliver His people by His might (Ex. 14-15), so He forbid the kings to multiply horses, wives, silver and gold because these would tempt them to turn away from the Lord and seek human solutions to their concerns. The natural inclination of the human heart is to trust in self and worldly wisdom rather than God and His Word. Multiplying horses meant the king would rely on his military power to deliver rather than the Lord. Kings also acquired wives as part of political alliances to keep their borders safe. And the accumulation of gold and silver would influence them to pursue pleasure and rely on wealth to solve their problems. There's nothing wrong with horses, marriage, or wealth; except that these can, when increased, be impediments to our walk with God. When given the opportunity, most people will not intentionally place themselves in a weak and vulnerable place. Yet, it is often in the place of weakness that God's wisdom and strength is magnified (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it shows people as they really are, having both good and bad qualities, successes and failures. For example, Scripture reveals David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), was chosen by God to be king over Israel (1 Sam. 16:12-13; cf. 1 Chron. 28:4), defeated Israel's enemies (1 Sam. 17:1-58), and authored Scripture (73 Psalms). However, David was not without his faults. David sinned when he had an affair with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, murdered (2 Sam. 11:1-17), and later he failed as a father when he would not deal with the rape of his daughter, Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1-39), and again when he sinned against the Lord by taking the census in Israel (2 Sam. 24:1-15).

## When Believers Live in Perpetual Sin

Like David, Solomon had his successes and failures. Solomon did well in the early part of his kingship. In humility he sought the Lord for wisdom (1 Ki. 3:4-15; 4:29), executed wise judgment among God's people (1 Ki. 3:16-28; 10:9), ruled over a large area (1 Ki. 4:21), was chosen by God to build the temple in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 28:6), and wrote several books of the Bible including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. However, we know that Solomon sinned when he broke God's code for the kings of Israel by multiplying gold (1 Ki. 10:14-15, 23), horses (1 Ki. 4:26; 10:26), and wives (1 Ki. 11:1-3).<sup>1</sup> This eventually led to a complete turning away from God. The final days of Solomon's life were given over to worshipping idols (1 Ki. 11:4-8).

But what does the Bible say about David and Solomon's perpetual sin? By perpetual sin I mean continuous, uninterrupted sin that lasts for many years. Both David and Solomon's perpetual sin was polygamy. They both multiplied wives throughout their kingship in spite of God's clear command (Deut. 17:17), and they never turned from it. David had eight wives that we know by name: Michal (1 Sam. 18:27), Abigail (1 Sam. 25:39-42), Ahinoam (1 Sam. 25:43), Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:24), Maacah, Haggith, Abital and Eglah (2 Sam. 3:2-5), and

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<sup>1</sup> Nehemiah dealt with pagan influence in his day, as foreign women did not convert to Judaism, but rather, turned the hearts of God's people toward idolatry. Nehemiah compared the situation in his day to that of Solomon, who sinned against the Lord. Nehemiah said, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin" (Neh. 13:26).

## When Believers Live in Perpetual Sin

other wives that are unnamed (2 Sam. 5:13).<sup>2</sup> Solomon's kingship started with a political marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Ki. 3:1). By the end of his life, Scripture reveals Solomon "had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away" (1 Ki. 11:3). God permitted Solomon to sin in this area of his life, and it eventually ruined his walk with the Lord. Solomon eventually worshipped idols (1 Ki. 11:4-10), and this brought God's anger. God said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant" (1 Ki. 11:11). God punished Solomon for his sin, but He punished him as a son and not an unbeliever. In spite of David and Solomon's sin, God used them both to accomplish great things. Eventually, Jesus, the promised Messiah, was born in their family line (Matt. 1:6-7, 17).

Today, there is a battle that rages concerning whether a believer can sin perpetually and still be a true believer. The answer is yes; he can. However, the believer who disobeys God's Word and abandons his walk can expect the Lord to discipline him, perhaps severely (Heb. 12:4-11), even to death (Lev. 10:1-2; 2 Sam. 6:1-7; Acts 5:1-10; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17). The believer who dies by the hand of the Lord goes to heaven (John 10:28), but because of his sin, he forfeits eternal rewards (1 Cor.

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<sup>2</sup> As far as I can tell, David married only women within the Israelite community and he cared for his wives. In one biblical account, two of David's wives, Abigail and Ahinoam, had been taken captive (1 Sam. 30:5), and David prayed to God concerning the matter. God provided David victory so that he could reclaim his two wives as well as many possessions (1 Sam. 30:6-18).

## When Believers Live in Perpetual Sin

3:10-15). This need not happen. The sinning believer can turn from his rebellion and humbly seek the Lord through confession (1 John 1:9), and once restored, can pursue a life of righteousness, as God expects.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Tit. 2:11-14)

## When Believers Live in Perpetual Sin



## The Sin of Idolatry

### *The Sin of Idolatry*<sup>1</sup>

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol [פֶּסֶל *pesel* – an idol or carved image], or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship [שָׁחָה *shachah* – to worship, bow down] them or serve [עָבַד *abad* – serve, work] them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me. (Ex. 20:3-5)

Idolatry is the selfish sin of substitution in which we devote ourselves to worship something or someone in the place of God. It is foremost a sin of a covetous heart that leads us to desire more than what God provides, and to trust something or someone lesser than God to satisfy our wants and needs. Paul addresses the heart of idolatry when he writes that covetousness “is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Covetousness is idolatry because the covetous heart desires things and pleasures more than God. The believer who is satisfied with God is content with what he has (1 Tim. 6:7-11; cf. Phil. 4:11), but the covetous heart is never content and always seeks more (i.e. money, success, friends, etc.) in order to feel secure or to please the flesh.

In a general sense idolatry is the paying of divine honor to any created thing; the ascription of divine power to natural agencies. Idolatry may be

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared in my book *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*.

## The Sin of Idolatry

classified as follows: (1) the worship of inanimate objects, such as stones, trees, rivers, etc.; (2) of animals; (3) of the higher powers of nature, such as the sun, moon, stars; and the forces of nature, as air, fire, etc.; (4) hero-worship or of deceased ancestors; (5) *idealism*, or the worship of abstractions or mental qualities, such as justice.<sup>2</sup>

### What is an idol?

Throughout Scripture an idol is almost always a carved image, something crafted by human hand, made of wood or stone. An idol can be either a physical object that symbolizes a deity, or it can be an abstract concept such as greed or justice. A physical idol is merely the work of a craftsman (see Isa. 44:9-19). There no life in it (Ps. 115:1-8; Jer. 51:17; Hab. 2:18-20), nor can it deliver in times of trouble (Isa. 46:5-7). Ultimately, an idol is the thing or person we trust more than God to provide, protect, or guide us in life. Biblically, there is only one God, and He demands that His people worship Him (Ex. 20:3-6). The exclusive worship of God is for His glory and our benefit.

### Can God's people engage in idolatry?

Yes. We can engage in idolatry. The record of Israel's history—with the exception of a few generations—is a record of their unfaithfulness to God as they worshipped pagan idols (Ex. 32:1-6), which at times included human sacrifice (Deut. 12:31; 18:10; 2 Ki. 21:6; Ezek. 16:20-21). The books of Judges, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah,

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<sup>2</sup> Merrill F. Unger, ed. R.K. Harrison, "Idolatry" in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

## The Sin of Idolatry

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea (just to name a few) all reveal Israel regularly committed idolatry, and this caused them to suffer greatly under God's discipline as He faithfully executed the cursing aspects of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:15-68).

Idolatry is dangerous because it is connected with the activity of demons (1 Cor. 10:19-20), who seek to steal God's glory and wreck our relationship with the Lord. Many of God's people have fallen into idolatry. Aaron led Israel into idol worship (Ex. 32:1-6). Solomon, by the end of his life, bowed down to idols (1 Ki. 11:6-10), and there is nothing in the biblical record that suggests Solomon ever turned back to the Lord. The apostle Paul addressed idolatry in his letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:14-33; 2 Cor. 6:16). The apostle John twice worshiped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). John knew the sinful proclivity of all Christians and I believe this is why he warns us, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

### **Why do we commit idolatry?**

Even though we are born again believers with a new heart (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), we still possess a sin nature (Rom. 6:6; 13:14; Gal. 5:16-17, 19; Col. 3:9), and there is always a conflict within us (Rom. 7:19-25; Gal. 5:16-17). We commit idolatry because we seek to satisfy our sinful desires over God and His will. In American culture we tend to worship at the altar of self-interest, greed, personal achievement, personal security and self-satisfaction.

## The Sin of Idolatry

### How do we guard ourselves from falling into idolatry?

First, **realize our hearts are sinful and bent toward idolatry**. It is the natural proclivity of mankind to worship things and people in the place of God. It comes very easy to us, even as Christians. Second, **be devoted to God**. Paul writes to Christians, stating, “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*” (Rom 12:1). This is a lifetime commitment to God in which we bring all of our life under His directive will. Third, **constantly be in God’s Word**, letting it guide our thinking and behavior. As Christians, we do not worship the Bible, but neither can we worship God without it (John 4:24). The Bible is God’s inerrant and enduring written revelation that tells us who He is and what He’s accomplished in time and space. The Bible is written in understandable language and made acceptable by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14-16; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:3-4). Our walk with God depends on rightly understanding and applying Scripture (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Fourth, **surround yourself with Christian friends** who will help you in your daily spiritual walk with the Lord. Our fellowship with other growing believers is paramount concerning our spiritual health. The Bible is very clear when it states, “bad associations corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). This is true in every way, and it helps us to have growing Christian friends who influence us to worship God and stay close to Him always. Fifth, **make time to worship the Lord daily**, singing to Him and praising Him for all His blessings (Ps. 95:2; 105:2; Eph. 5:18-21; Phil. 4:6; Col. 3:16-17). A heart that is satisfied with God will not seek lesser people or things to fill the void that occurs when we turn away from Him.

## The Worthless Person

### *The Worthless Person*

In several places in the Bible there are references to *worthless* persons (Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 25:17; 1 Ki. 21:9-13; Prov. 6:12-14; 16:27; 19:28; Nah. 1:11). The term *worthless* translates the Hebrew בְּלִיעַל *belial*, which occurs 27 times in Scripture. The word means “Uselessness, wickedness...good for nothing.”<sup>1</sup> These are people whom God designates as *worthless* because they continually resist His will and disrupt the activities of His people. Over time, the term *Belial* became a name for Satan (2 Cor. 6:15), who embodies wickedness, worthlessness and trouble, always resisting God and seeking to harm those who walk with Him (1 Pet. 5:8).

Solomon writes, “A worthless [בְּלִיעַל *belial*] person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers; who *with* perversity in his heart continually devises evil, who spreads strife” (Prov. 6:12-14). The *worthless* person employs all forms of communication using his “mouth,” “eyes,” “feet,” and “fingers” to advance his evil agenda. His companions understand his various forms of language and consent to do his bidding. Solomon describes him as one “who *with* perversity in his heart continually devises evil.” That is, he revels in the natural inclinations of his own depravity (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-22).

Elsewhere, Scripture describes the *worthless* person

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 134.

## The Worthless Person

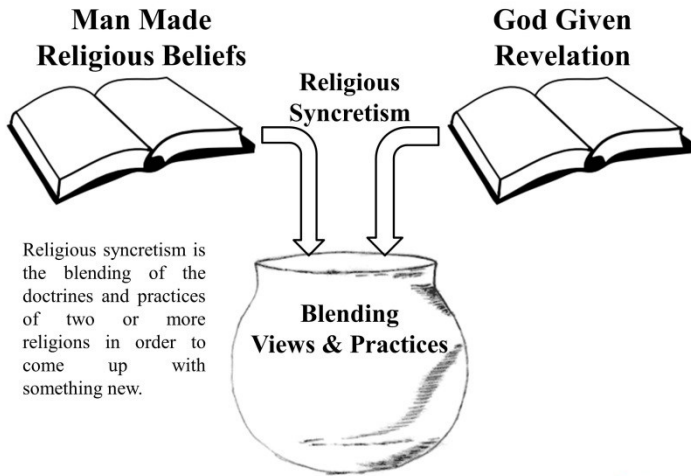
as one who “digs up evil” (Prov. 16:27), “makes a mockery of justice” (Prov. 19:28), and “plots evil against the LORD” (Nah. 1:11). He leads others away from the God (Deut. 13:13), is given to lewd behavior (Judg. 19:22), hides from justice (Judg. 20:13), is unreasonable (1 Sam. 25:17), defies authority (2 Sam. 20:1), is willing to lie against the innocent and promote injustice (1 Ki. 21:9-13), and seeks to overpower the timid leader (2 Chron. 13:7). It should be noted that *worthless* persons can be born into good families, for “the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD” (1 Sam. 2:12). And, they can attach themselves to a godly leader and cause trouble, such as “the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David” (1 Sam. 30:22).

It is a mistake to see the *worthless* person within the narrow context of criminals or public mischief-makers, although it certainly includes them. Rather, we must see them as permeating all aspects of society. Broadly speaking, *worthless* persons are males and females, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, educators and students, politicians and citizens, bosses and employees, religious and irreligious, wealthy and poor, and they live to provoke rebellion and discord wherever they are.

Is there hope for the *worthless* person to turn from his wickedness and live honorably? Yes, of course there is. But this requires humility and a willingness to turn to God for salvation (John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-9), and a renewed mind (Rom. 12:1-2). Once saved, God generates a new heart that desires to walk with Him, and the once *worthless* person can be a *worthy* person who walks in a manner “worthy of the calling” of the Lord (Eph. 4:1; cf. Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:11-12).

## Religious Syncretism

### *Religious Syncretism*



Religious syncretism is the blending of the doctrines and practices of two or more religions in order to come up with something new.

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Several years ago I had a strange conversation with a young woman who was in graduate school and finishing her degree in Social Work. The woman became excited when I mentioned I was in seminary and she proceeded to tell me about the Baptist church she was attending. She'd been active in her church for several years and was involved in the choir and occasionally substituted for her Sunday school teacher. The conversation took a confusing turn when she told me she follows her daily horoscope, believing it helps guide her life. Stranger yet, she began talking about how she believes in reincarnation. When I asked her why she believes in reincarnation she said, "Because I believe God is fair and gives people second chances in another life to make up for bad choices in a previous one." She said all this with a big smile on her face.

## Religious Syncretism

However, when I politely tried to explain the biblical teaching against astrology and reincarnation, she quickly shut the conversation down, saying, “I believe what I believe.” She then changed the subject and started talking about her work. This woman was engaging in religious syncretism.

Religious syncretism is the blending of the doctrines and practices of two or more religions in order to come up with something new. Religious syncretism has been going on for millennia. Modern day examples include Christlam, New Age, Christian Science, Unitarianism, and the Interfaith Movement. A biblical example that dates to about 1100 B.C. is found in Judges 17 where an Israelite named Micah blended the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites with the worship of Yahweh. The culmination was a monstrous self-serving religion that fostered spiritual anarchy among God’s people (see Judges 18). In Judges 17 Micah is introduced as a son who stole a great amount of wealth from his mother. He returned the wealth fearing the curse she’d uttered on the thief, and his mother subsequently blessed him in the name of Yahweh (Judg. 17:1-2). The historical account gets bizarre when Micah’s mother—in the name of Yahweh—used some of her wealth (silver) to create a molten image and graven image, which she gave to her son (Judg. 17:3-4). Micah took the images from his mother and put them in his shrine and made an ephod (either to be used during worship, or as an object of worship; see Judg. 8:24-27). He added several small household idols (teraphim) and then ordained his son to be the family priest (Judg. 17:5). Micah’s house was a type of Israel during the period of the Judges, in which “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6), and all of this was against God’s instruction for Israel (Exodus 20:4-



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5; Deut. 27:15). Micah then welcomed a wandering Levite (Judg. 17:7-10), whom he consecrated to serve as his family priest (Judg. 17:11-12). This was contrary to Scripture, for only descendants of Aaron could serve as priests, whereas Levites were to serve as priestly assistants (Num. 8:19; 18:1-7). Micah falsely believed that by having a Levitical priest as the leader of his new religion that he would also have God's blessing (Judg. 17:13). This would later prove untrue (see Judges chapter 18).

God's revelation in the Bible makes it clear that there is no room for religious syncretism (Exodus 20:4-5; Deut. 27:15; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Phil. 1:27), and Christians should be mindful to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Christianity is built on certain theological essentials from which Christians cannot depart. There is room for love and grace when disagreeing on secondary doctrinal matters. There will always be false teachers who will deny the inerrancy of Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the hypostatic union, Jesus' substitutionary atonement, His death, burial, and bodily resurrection, and His second coming. Only those who are advancing toward spiritual maturity by learning and living God's Word will find protection against false teachers (Deut. 13:1-4; 18:18-22; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2). Those who fail to grow spiritually will find themselves vulnerable to all sorts of pagan concepts.

## Religious Syncretism

## The Sin that Brings Death

### ***The Sin that Brings Death<sup>1</sup>***

If anyone sees his [Christian] brother committing a sin that does not bring death, he should ask, and God will give life to him-- to those who commit sin that doesn't bring death. There is sin that brings death. I am not saying he should pray about that. (1 John 5:16 HCSB)

It happens from time to time that a Christian will see another Christian “committing a sin.” The apostle John distinguished two kinds of sin in the life of the Christian: the “sin that does not bring death” and the “sin that brings death” (1 John 5:16-17). The “sin that does not bring death” is any sin the Christian commits that does not warrant physical death from the hand of God, though it may bring divine discipline if the believer continues in it (Heb. 12:5-13). John does not specify which sin leads to death and which sin does not, as the punishment is finally determined by the Lord.

The sin that leads to death “denotes a sin habitually practiced by a believer, leading to God’s removing him from this life, but not taking away his salvation.”<sup>2</sup> It refers to the Christian who has become so sinfully rebellious that God disciplines him to point of death and takes him home to heaven. There are references in the Bible where God personally issued the death penalty for one or more of His

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared in my book *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*.

<sup>2</sup> Paul S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study: With a Guide to the Scofield Study System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 359.

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erring children who had defied His authority. Examples include: Nadab and Abihu, who disobeyed the Lord in their priestly service (Lev. 10:1-3), Uzzah, when he touched the Ark (2 Sam. 6:1-7), Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11), and some of the saints at Corinth who were abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-30).

Under the Mosaic Law, God willed that sin be punished, but only some sins were punishable by physical death.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes God Himself executed the punishment (Lev. 10:1-3; 2 Sam. 6:1-7), and other times it was carried out by Israel's leaders (Ex. 32:19-28). In the New Testament, God does not call Christians to put anyone to death, but has delegated that authority solely to the governments of this world (Rom. 13:1-4), or He does it Himself (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

### **Most sin does not lead to death**

It appears from reading the Bible that most sin committed by believers does not result in the Lord putting them to death, although it may bring great punishment. It

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<sup>3</sup> There were certain laws under the Old Testament that brought the death penalty: intentional murder (Ex. 21:12-14; cf. Gen. 9:6), attacking or cursing a parent (Ex. 21:15), kidnapping (Ex. 21:16), habitual rebellion against God (Deut. 17:12), sacrificing to pagan gods (Ex. 22:20), cursing God (Lev. 24:15-16), working on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:2), being a false prophet and leading Israelites into idolatry (Deut. 13:1-5), religious human sacrifice (Lev. 20:2), the practice of divination, sorcery or witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Deut. 18:9-14), adultery and premarital sex (Lev. 20:10-14; 21:9; Deut. 22:20-22), sex with an animal (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15-16), incest (Lev. 20:11-12, 14), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), and the rape of a married woman (Deut. 22:25-27).

## The Sin that Brings Death

was a terrible sin when Aaron led the Israelites into idol worship (Ex. 32:1-6), but God did not call for Aaron's death. Samson slept with prostitutes (Judg. 16:1-4), and though he was disciplined, the Lord did not kill him. When David had an affair with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah, it was a rotten sin that brought divine discipline. The Lord told David, "I will raise up evil against you from your own household" (2 Sam. 12:11); however, the Lord also told David, "you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). It was evil when Solomon worshipped idols (1 Kings 11:1-10), but even here the Lord did not pronounce death for his sin. Peter argued with Jesus and tried to prevent Him from going to the cross (Matt. 16:21-22), and later publicly denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34-35; 69-75), but Peter was allowed to live. The apostle John twice worshiped an angel and was rebuked for it (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9), but the Lord let him live and used him in ministry. God's grace and mercy is very prominent all throughout the Bible, and He repeatedly gives us ample opportunity to confess our sin and turn back to him. Thank God for His great grace.

### **God disciplines us for our good**

As God's children, He expects us to live holy and righteous lives that conform to His will (Tit. 2:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). When we sin, we can be restored to fellowship with God by means of confession (1 John 1:9). If we fail to confess our sins, and choose a sinful lifestyle, we put ourselves in real danger of knowing God's discipline. The Scripture states, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). The wise believer accepts God's correction. David writes, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I

## The Sin that Brings Death

may learn Your statutes” (Ps. 119:71), and later states, “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (Ps. 119:75). The foolish believer rejects God’s correction, and if he perpetuates his sin, God may administer a final act of discipline and remove the believer from this world.

Many Christians rightfully suffer because of their sinful lifestyle (Heb. 12:5-11), and those who persist in their sin will eventually die by the hand of the Lord. Such death is the pinnacle of suffering in this life, but we should never conclude that it means suffering for eternity. All believers are eternally secure in Christ. At the moment of salvation, all believers are given eternal life and imputed with God’s righteousness (John 3:16; 10:28; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). They are forever kept by the power of God and cannot forfeit their salvation (John 10:29; Rom. 8:38-39). This means that when a believer dies—whatever the cause—he is guaranteed heaven as his eternal home. At his resurrection, the Christian is guaranteed a new body just the like body of our Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:20-21).

### Summary

It is possible for a Christian to sin, and to sin as badly as any unbeliever. However, unlike the unbeliever, God disciplines His own (Heb. 12:5-11), and, if necessary, disciplines to the point of death (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). This need not be the case. The Christian is called to a life of holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16), and this means learning to walk with God and do His will. Though we still possess a sin nature, the Christian knows victory because of his union with Christ (Rom. 6:6, 11-13).

## Atonement for Sin

### *Atonement for Sin*<sup>1</sup>

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement [Heb. כָּפַר *kaphar*] for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement [Heb. כָּפַר *kaphar*]. (Lev. 17:11)

And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Heb. 9:22)

Atonement is a very important concept in the Old Testament. The word *atonement* translates the Hebrew verb כָּפַר (*kaphar*) which means to “cover over, pacify, propitiate, [or] atone for sin.”<sup>2</sup> The animal sacrificial system—which was part of the Mosaic Law—taught that sin must be atoned for. The idea of substitution was clearly taught as the sinner laid his hands on the animal that died in his place (Lev. 4:15, 24; 16:21). The innocent animal paid the price of death on behalf of the guilty sinner. God established the Levitical animal sacrificial system as a way of teaching that human sin must be atoned for. The atoning animal sacrifices were performed daily by the Jewish temple priests on behalf of Israelites who committed sins in ignorance (Lev. 4:1-4, 20, 26, 31). More serious sins—those deliberately committed—were atoned for once a year

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared in my book, *Knowing God in Prison*.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers 1979), 497.

## Atonement for Sin

on the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur—by the High Priest who would enter the Holy of Holies in the temple and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed bull and goat on the mercy seat which was on the top of the Ark of the Covenant (Lev. 16:14-15). There were two sacrifices on the Day of Atonement: a bull was sacrificed for the sins of the High Priest (Lev. 16:6, 11), and two goats for the sins of the nation (Lev. 16:7-10). The sacrifice of the goats were “to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year” (Lev. 16:34). One goat shed its blood on the altar, and the other was sent away into the wilderness after the High Priest had laid his hands on it and confessed over it “all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins” (Lev. 16:21). The innocent animals died in place of those who were guilty of sin.

*Atonement* means making amends, blotting out the offense, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship. Scripture depicts all human beings as needing to atone for their sins but lacking all power and resources for doing so. We have offended our holy Creator, whose nature it is to hate sin (Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13) and to punish it (Ps. 5:4-6; Rom. 1:18; 2:5-9). No acceptance by, or fellowship with, such a God can be expected unless atonement is made, and since there is sin in even our best actions, anything we do in hopes of making amends can only increase our guilt or worsen our situation. This makes it ruinous folly to seek to establish one’s own righteousness



## Atonement for Sin

before God (Job 15:14-16; Rom. 10:2-3); it simply cannot be done.<sup>3</sup>

The animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law taught that God is holy, man is sinful, and that God was willing to judge an innocent creature as a substitute in place of the sinner. The animal that shed its blood gave up its life in place of the one who had offended God, and it was only through the shed blood that atonement was made. A life for a life. The whole animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law was highly symbolic, temporary, and pointed forward to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Levitical priests would regularly perform their temple sacrifices on behalf of the people to God, but being a symbolic system, the animal sacrifices could never “make perfect those who draw near” to Him, for the simple reason that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1, 4). For nearly fourteen centuries the temple priests kept “offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb. 10:11), until finally Christ “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time” and through that one offering “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” by it (Heb. 10:12, 14). What the Mosaic Law could never accomplish through the sacrifice of symbols, Christ did once and for all time through His substitutionary death on the cross when he died in the place of sinners.

Jesus’ death on the cross was a satisfactory sacrifice to God which completely paid the price for our sin. We owed a debt to God that we could never pay, and Jesus paid

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<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995), 138.

## Atonement for Sin

that debt in full when He died on the cross and bore the punishment that rightfully belonged to us. In Romans 3:25 Paul used the Greek word ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*)—translated *propitiation*—to show that Jesus’ shed blood completely satisfied God’s righteous demands toward our sin, with the result that there is nothing more for the sinner to pay to God. Jesus paid our sin-debt in full. There’s nothing for us to pay. The Apostle John tells us “He Himself is the propitiation [ἱλασμός *hilasmos* – the satisfactory sacrifice] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2; cf. 4:10). Jesus’ death on the cross forever satisfied God’s righteous demands toward the sins of everyone for all time! God has “canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). Regarding Christ’s death, J. Dwight Pentecost states:

You can be adjusted to God’s standard, because God made Christ to become sin for us. The One who knew no sin, the One in whose lips had never been found guile, took upon Himself our sin in order that He might bear our sins to the cross and offer Himself as an acceptable substitute to God for us—on our behalf, in our place. And when Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners and went to the cross on their behalf and in their place, He was making possible the doctrine of reconciliation. He was making it possible for God to conform the world to Himself, to adjust the world to His standard so that sinners in the world might find salvation because “Jesus paid it all.” You can be adjusted to God, to God’s standard, through Christ,

## Atonement for Sin

by His death, by His cross, by His blood, and by His identification with sinners.<sup>4</sup>

Atonement for sins is the basis for reconciliation, because God has judged our sins in the Person of Christ who died on the cross in our place. The death of Christ has forever satisfied God's righteous demands for our sin and it is on this basis that He can accept sinners before His throne of grace. The blood of Christ is the only coin in the heavenly realm that God accepts as payment for our sin-debt, and Christ paid our sin debt in full! That's good news!

Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

Because Jesus' death satisfies God's righteousness demands for sin, the sinner can approach God who welcomes him in love. God has cleared the way for sinners to come to Him for a new relationship, and this is based completely on the substitutionary work of Christ. God has done everything to reconcile us to Himself. The sin debt that we owed to God has been paid in full by the blood of Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mi., Kregel Publications, 1965), 89.

## Atonement for Sin

## Simultaneously Righteous and Sinful

### ***Simultaneously Righteous and Sinful***<sup>1</sup>

The Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, coined the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, which translates as, *simultaneously righteous and a sinner*. Luther correctly understood the biblical teaching that we are righteous in God's sight because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us at salvation and at the same time we continue to possess a sin nature and practice sin. This is based on four biblical truths:

#### **We are all born sinners with a sin nature**

Every person born into this world—with the exception of Jesus—is a sinner. We are sinners because *Adam's original sin is imputed to us* (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), we are *born with a sinful nature* which urges us to sin (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), and *we choose to sin* when we yield to temptation (Jas. 1:14-15). Sin is anything that is contrary to the holy character of God. Sin permeates every aspect of our being and renders us separated from God and helpless to save ourselves (Rom. 5:6-10; 6:23; Eph. 2:1-3).

#### **God has provided for our salvation**

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus took our sin upon Himself and bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us (1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:3-4; Col. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:24). This is substitutionary atonement, in which Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared in my book *Thinking on Scripture: A Collection of Theological Essays*.

## Simultaneously Righteous and Sinful

died in our place, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6-10). Jesus paid the redemption price for our sins (Mark 10:45), and calls us into fellowship with Him (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13-14). Salvation comes to us only as a free gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). God is completely satisfied with the death of Christ, who “is the propitiation [ἱλασμός *hilasmos* – satisfaction] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2; cf. Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10). At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness requires and provides us salvation as His love desires.

### **We receive a new nature at the moment of salvation**

At the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior we are born again (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and we acquire a new nature that desires to do God’s will (Rom. 7:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9-10; 1 John 2:29; 3:9). In addition, our identification with Adam is cancelled and we are immediately united with Christ (Rom. 5:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:22), we are indwelt with God the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 1:13-14), forgiven all our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:27-28), bestowed with God’s own righteousness (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), and have the power to live righteously (Rom. 6:1-13; Tit. 2:11-14).

### **Christians possess a sin nature after salvation**

Though we have our new nature in Christ at the moment of salvation, we continue to possess our sinful nature, and this produces internal conflict throughout our

## Simultaneously Righteous and Sinful

Christian life (Rom. 6:6; 7:14-25; 13:14; Col. 3:9; Gal. 5:16-17). This reality explains why Paul tells the Christians at Rome to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom 13:14; cf. Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), and to the Christians at Galatia to “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Though we struggle with sin, we are assured that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1), for we are “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9). Both are true. We are perfectly righteous in God’s sight because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and we continue to possess a sin nature and commit sin.

The person who has thus received the gift of faith Luther described as “at once righteous and a sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). Formerly he had understood this term in the Augustinian sense of “partly” a sinner and “partly” righteous. ...Now, however, while retaining the paradox of simultaneity, he sharpened each of the clashing concepts into a sovereign, total realm. Luther continued to use *simul iustus et peccator* after 1518-19, but he did so in the sense of *semper* (always) *iustus et peccator*. **The believer is not only both righteous and sinful at the same time but is also always or completely both righteous and sinful at the same time** [bold added]. What does this mean? With respect to our fallen human condition, we are, and always will be in this life, sinners. However for believers life in this world is no longer a period of doubtful candidacy for God’s acceptance. In a sense we have already been before God’s judgment seat and have been acquitted on account of Christ.

## Simultaneously Righteous and Sinful

Hence we are also always righteous.<sup>2</sup>

### Summary

So then, as Christians, we are simultaneously righteous and sinners. We are righteous in God's eyes because of the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us as a free gift (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). And, we continue to possess a sin nature that continually causes internal temptation and conflict (Rom. 6:6; 7:14-25; 13:14; Col. 3:9; Gal. 5:16-17, 19). Though the power of the sin nature is broken (Rom. 6:11-14), the presence of the sin nature is never removed from us until God takes us from this world and gives us a new body like the body of Jesus (Phil. 3:20-21).

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tenn., Broadman and Holman publishers, 2013), 72.



## ***Restoring Broken Fellowship with God***

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light [i.e. purity and holiness; cf. John 3:19–21; 8:12; 12:35–36], and in Him there is no darkness at all [i.e. no sin; cf. John 3:19; 1 John 2:8–11].<sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness [i.e. commit sin], we lie and do not practice the truth;<sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another [between God and the Christian], and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin [as believers] we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins [i.e. agree with God about our sin], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned [as God’s Word declares], we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:5-10)

What person can say, “I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin”? (Prov. 20:9). No one is ever free from sin in this life, “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins” (Eccl. 7:20). Sin (from the Hebrew חַטָּא *chata* or the Greek ἁμαρτία *hamartia*) means to fall away or miss the mark of God’s intended will. Sin is failure to do God’s will, and both unbelievers and believers commit sin. “The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against God, even when the wrong we do is to others or ourselves (Gen. 39:9; Ps.

## Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

51:4).”<sup>1</sup> The Bible teaches everyone is a sinner (Rom. 3:9). We are sinners *because of our relationship to Adam* (Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), we are sinners *by nature*, born with a rebellious heart (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), and we are sinners *by choice* every time we yield to temptation (Jas. 1:14-15).

At the moment of faith in Christ, all sins (past, present, and future) are forgiven (Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:13), and the believer’s relationship to Adam is terminated as the Christian begins a new identity *in Christ* (Eph. 2:5-6). At the moment of the new birth, the believer is completely justified in God’s sight, and this is by grace, because Christ died in our place and bore the penalty that rightfully belongs to us (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18). Believers stand acceptable before God, not because of any righteousness of our own based on good works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), but because of the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to us by faith (Rom. 4:1-5), “the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9). As Christians, we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). God made Christ “who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ died a death He did not deserve, that we might have a life and enjoy spiritual riches we could never earn (Rom. 5:5-10; Eph. 2:1-6). Salvation is truly a gift from God.

From the moment of my spiritual birth until I leave

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill F. Unger and E. McChesney, "Sin" In , in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, ed. R.K. Harrison, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

## Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

this world for heaven, I am *in Christ* and all my sins are forgiven (Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:13). In addition, I have a new spiritual nature (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and the power to live righteously in God's will (Rom. 6:11-14). However, during my time in this world, I still possess my sin nature (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17), and occasionally I yield to temptation (both internal and external) and commit sin. "Conversion does not mean the eradication of the sin nature. Rather it means the implanting of the new, divine nature, with power to live victoriously over indwelling sin."<sup>2</sup> My acts of sin do not jeopardize my eternal salvation which was secured by the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:28), but it does hurt my walk with the Lord (1 John 1:5-10), and stifles the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within me (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). I sin every day, and some days more than others. As I grow spiritually in my knowledge of God's Word, I will pursue righteousness more and more and sin will diminish, but sin will never completely disappear from my life. Living in the reality of God's Word, I know three things are true when I sin:

1. There is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Though I have sinned against God, my eternal security and righteous standing before Him is never jeopardized. I am eternally secure (John 10:28), and keep on possessing the righteousness of God that was imputed to me at the moment of salvation (Rom. 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).
2. I am walking in darkness and have broken fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-6). When I sin, as

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<sup>2</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2310.

## Restoring Broken Fellowship with God

a Christian, I have broken fellowship with God and stifled the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within me (1 John 1:5-6; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). If I continue in sin, or leave my sin unconfessed, I am in real danger of divine discipline from God (Ps. 32:3-4; Heb. 12:5-11; 1 John 5:16-17; cf. Dan. 4:37).

3. If I confess my sin directly to God, He will immediately forgive my sin and restore me to fellowship (1 John 1:9; cf. Ps. 32:5). Being in fellowship with God means walking in the sphere of His light (1 John 1:5-7), being honest with Him about my sin (1 John 1:8, 10), and coming before His throne of grace in transparent humility and confessing my sin that I will be forgiven (1 John 1:9; cf. Heb. 4:16). God is faithful and just to forgive my sins every time I confess them because of the atoning work of Christ who shed His blood on the cross for me (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2).

The forgiveness John speaks about here [i.e. 1 John 1:9] is parental, not judicial. Judicial forgiveness means forgiveness from the penalty of sins, which the sinner receives when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called judicial because it is granted by God acting as Judge. But what about sins which a person commits after conversion? As far as the penalty is concerned, the price has already been paid by the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. But as far as fellowship in the family of God is concerned, the sinning saint needs parental forgiveness, that is, the forgiveness of His Father. He obtains it by confessing his sin. We need judicial forgiveness only once; that takes care of the penalty

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of all our sins—past, present, and future. But we need parental forgiveness throughout our Christian life.<sup>3</sup>

God's grace compels me to pursue righteousness and good works (Tit. 2:11-14). But since I still have a sinful nature and live in a fallen world with temptation all around, I occasionally fall into sin. When I sin, I agree with God that I have done wrong and I confess it to Him seeking His forgiveness. When I sin against others and wrongly hurt them, I confess my sin to them and ask for their forgiveness. Because my sin hurts others (and their sin hurts me), there is a need for love, patience, humility, and ongoing forgiveness among the saints.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col. 3:12-15)

God's grace is wonderful to me. By grace he saves, and by grace he forgives and restores me to fellowship. It is very simple. Daily I confess my sins directly to God, and He faithfully forgives me and restores me to fellowship

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<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2310-11.

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with Him. It is all His goodness, and I am the fortunate recipient of His mercy and love.

## The Solution for Sin

### *The Solution for Sin*

It does no good to talk about sin if we don't also address God's solution. God, because of His mercy and love toward us (John 3:16; Eph. 2:3-7), did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He provided a solution to the problem of sin, and that solution is the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:18). God the Son—the second Person of the Trinity—came into the world by human birth (Luke 1:26-35), lived a perfectly righteous life (Matt. 5:17-21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5), and willingly died in our place and bore the punishment for our sins. The gospel message is that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Jesus died in our place, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6-10). Biblically, we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24), and “maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Rom. 3:28; cf. 4:5), “for by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9), for “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life” (Tit. 3:5-7). In order for us to be reconciled to God, we must simply trust in Jesus as our Savior (John 3:16; Acts 16:30-31). When we trust in Christ as our Savior, we are forgiven all our sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), and given eternal life (John 3:16; 10:27-28).

## The Solution for Sin

### God Desires that We Pursue Righteousness

As newborn Christians, God desires that we pursue a life of righteousness, which life is consistent with His character. The testimony of Scripture is that God is righteous (Ps. 11:7; 129:4; 145:17; Lam. 1:18; John 17:25; 1 John 2:1). He is essentially righteous in character. It follows that since God is righteous, He will promote righteousness and approve of those who do. David writes of God, saying, “The LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face” (Ps. 11:7). The verse speaks of what God is as well as what God loves. He is righteous and He loves righteousness. David here—and in Psalm 33:5—uses the Hebrew verb אָהַב *aheb* to speak of the affection God has for righteousness and those who pursue it. The “upright” refers to those who conform to God’s character and commands, and to “behold His face” means one is welcome into His presence with favor (cf. Ps. 17:5; 140:13). In another place David states, “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? <sup>2</sup> He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart” (Ps. 15:1-2). Solomon adds, “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves one who pursues righteousness” (Prov. 15:9), and “to do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3). Isaiah states, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Preserve justice and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed’” (Isa. 56:1), Jeremiah adds, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of *his* oppressor. Also do not mistreat *or* do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed



## The Solution for Sin

innocent blood in this place” (Jer. 22:3; Hos. 14:9; 10:12). Paul writes, “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13; cf. 6:19), “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22), and Peter states, “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24; cf. Eph. 4:24; 5:8-10; 1 Tim. 6:11; Tit. 2:11-12; Heb. 10:38).

### **God Produces His Righteousness in the Believer**

God is working to produce His righteousness in us from the moment of salvation onward. Paul writes, “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). God produces His righteousness in us to justify, sanctify, and ultimately glorify us. *First*, at the moment of salvation, God imputes His righteousness to us, and this is the basis for our justification. By imputed righteousness He is dealing with the guilt of our sin. Of the believer, Paul states, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 5:17-18; 8:1; Phil. 3:9). *Second*, by crippling the sin nature He is dealing with the power of sin in our lives (Rom. 6:1-14; 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:5). Paul writes, “do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom 6:13). *Third*, by removing our sin nature after death He is dealing with sin for eternity (Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 1 John

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3:2, 5). Paul writes, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21), and Peter writes, “according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13). Such a righteousness as that which will exist in the new heavens and earth means there will be no sin of any kind. God alone, without human aid, produces the first and third aspects of our salvation (i.e. our justification and glorification), and the believer simply benefits from His action. However, the second aspect of our salvation is not automatic (i.e. our sanctification), as God chooses to involve the believer to produce His righteousness. That is, there is a volitional aspect to a life of righteousness, as the believer must choose to obey God’s commands and rely on the His divine enablement to carry them out. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing necessary to grow spiritually (Eph. 1:3), but we must lay hold of that provision and make good choices that conform to His will and character.

### **How to Achieve the Righteousness Life**

But how is the life of righteousness achieved? What is it that each believer must do in order to be the righteous person God expects? It does not help the believer to say he/she must be righteous if we do not also provide the necessary biblical information to accomplish the task. Once saved, God provides each believer a portfolio of spiritual assets that enable him/her to walk in obedience to His commands. Those who utilize God’s provisions and obey

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His commands will walk in conformity to His will. This is experiential righteousness. For the Christian living in the dispensation of the church age, there are at least seven things he/she must follow in order to produce a life of righteousness.

*First*, the Christian must be in daily submission to God. This begins with a decision to dedicate one's life to God. Paul writes, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1). Paul then goes on to say, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

Paul has shown that the gospel he preaches has the power to transfer Christians from the realm of sin and death into the realm of righteousness and life. But this transfer, as Paul has noted (6:11–23; 8:12–13), does not absolve the Christian from the responsibility to live out the righteousness so graciously granted in the gospel. God is working to transform us into the image of his Son (8:29), but we are to take part in this process as we work to make this transformation real in our daily lives.<sup>1</sup>

The Christian is to participate in the life of righteousness to which he/she is called. Positively it begins

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "Romans," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1150.

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when we present our bodies as “a living and holy sacrifice” to God. This presentation begins at a moment in time, in which the believer decides to follow God and not the world. To surrender his/her life to whatever God has planned. This is a dedicated life to God. Concerning the believer’s dedication to God, Charles Ryrie states:

What is it that the Christian is to dedicate? The answer is himself. “Present yourselves to God” (Rom. 6:13), “present your bodies” (Rom. 12:1), “glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20), “submit yourselves...to God” (James 4:7)—this is the uniform appeal of Scripture, and it concerns our bodies. If this is so, then it follows that dedication concerns the years of one’s life, since that is the only period in which the body functions. Dedication concerns the present life, not the life hereafter.<sup>2</sup>

This is a surrendered life, a yielded life, in which the believer seeks the will of God above his/her own wishes or desires. The desires of self, no matter how noble, are sacrificed in order to do God’s will above all. This can be challenging, for the believer lives in a world that calls us to live for self, to do as we please, to live our way. But Paul says, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

*Second*, the believer must be in continual study of Scripture, applying it to every aspect of his/her life (2 Tim.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago, Ill., Moody Bible Institute, 1994), 80.

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2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Regeneration does not, in itself, remove a lifetime of worldly viewpoint. The Christian must look to Scripture in order to unseat the worldly mind, for in its pages we learn about God and what He values in life. This requires learning. Paul writes, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Later he states, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, **for training in righteousness**; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Christian cannot live what he does not know, and learning Scripture necessarily precedes living in God’s will. It is only by Scripture that the believer receives “training in righteousness.”

*Third*, the Christian must learn to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The Christian may be submitted to God and learning His word, but he/she must also be empowered to live as God intends. Paul commands Christians, “And do not be drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled with the Spirit**” (Eph. 5:18). When a person consumes alcohol and gets drunk, eventually it influences his thinking, words, and behavior in an obvious and often negative way. The Bible does not condemn drinking wine, but it does condemn drunkenness, in which the believer loses control of his/her thoughts, words and actions. Drunkenness is sin. In contrast to being drunk, the Bible commands the believer to “be filled with the Spirit.”

“Be filled with the Spirit” is God’s command, and He expects us to obey. The command is plural, so it applies to all Christians and not just to a select few. The verb is in the present tense—“keep on being

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filled”—so it is an experience we should enjoy constantly and not just on special occasions. And the verb is passive. We do not fill ourselves but permit the Spirit to fill us. The verb “fill” has nothing to do with contents or quantity, as though we are empty vessels that need a required amount of spiritual fuel to keep going. In the Bible, *filled* means “controlled by.” “They... were filled with wrath” (Luke 4:28) means “they were controlled by wrath” and for that reason tried to kill Jesus. “The Jews were filled with envy” (Acts 13:45) means that the Jews were controlled by envy and opposed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. To be “filled with the Spirit” means to be constantly controlled by the Spirit in our mind, emotions, and will...But how can a person tell whether or not he is filled with the Spirit? Paul stated that there are three evidences of the fullness of the Spirit in the life of the believer: he is *joyful* (Eph. 5:19), *thankful* (Eph. 5:20), and *submissive* (Eph. 5:21–33). Paul said nothing about miracles or tongues, or other special manifestations.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis S. Chafer adds:

To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit fulfilling in us all that God intended Him to do when he placed Him there. To be filled is not the problem of getting *more* of the Spirit: it is rather the problem of the Spirit getting *more* of us. We shall never have *more* of the Spirit than the anointing

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<sup>3</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2, 48.

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which every true Christian has received. On the other hand, the Spirit may have all of the believer and thus be able to manifest in him the life and character of Christ. A spiritual person, then, is one who experiences the divine purpose and plan in his daily life through the power of the indwelling Spirit. The *character* of that life will be the out-lived Christ. The cause of that life will be the unhindered indwelling Spirit (Ephesians 3:16-21; II Corinthians 3:18).<sup>4</sup>

And Charles Ryrie states:

To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit. The clue to this definition is found in Ephesians 5:18 where there is contrast and comparison between drunkenness and Spirit-filling. It is the comparison which gives the clue, for just as a drunken person is controlled by the liquor which he consumes, so a Spirit-filled Christian is controlled by the Spirit. This will cause him to act in ways which are unnatural to him, not implying that such ways will be erratic or abnormal, but asserting that they will not be the ways of the old life. Control by the Spirit is a necessary part of spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

*Fourth*, the Christian must learn to walk in daily dependence on the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, "But I say,

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, "What is Spirituality?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969): 206.

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**walk by the Spirit**, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” and “If we live by the Spirit, let us also **walk by the Spirit**” (Gal 5:16, 25). Walking by the Spirit means we are walking in dependence on Him and not relying on our own resources, experiences, or human wisdom. It means we are walking in the same direction He is going, and like a friend, we are glad to be in fellowship with Him. It means God is regularly in our thoughts, and we live every day conscious of Him and His will for our lives (Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:16-17). It means being sensitive to what may offend Him, and making every effort to please Him through a life of faith (2 Cor. 5:9; Heb. 11:6). Sin will break fellowship with God; however, the Christian can restore that fellowship by means of confession (1 John 1:8-10). When we walk by the Spirit, we live as He directs and our lives will manifest His work (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:1-3). It is important to understand that the Spirit guides us biblically and never by vague impressions. Walking is a learned behavior, and it gets easier with practice.

Constant dependence on the power of the indwelling Spirit of God is essential to spiritual growth and victory. By its very nature, walking is a succession of dependent acts. When one foot is lifted in order to place it front of the other one, it is done in faith—faith that the foot that remains on the ground will support the full weight of the body. You can only walk by the exercise of faith. You can live the Christian life only by dependence on the Holy Spirit. Such dependence will result in the Spirit’s control over the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:17-21) and the Spirit’s production of the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). Dependence on the power of God and effort on the part of the believer are not mutually



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exclusive. Self-discipline and Spirit-dependence can and must be practiced at the same time in a balanced spiritual life. Dependence itself is an attitude, but that attitude does not come automatically; it usually requires cultivation. How many genuine Christians there are who live day after day without even sensing their need of dependence on Him. Experience, routine, pride, self-confidence all tend to drag all of us away from that conscious dependence on God which we must have in order to live and act righteously.<sup>6</sup>

*Fifth*, the Christian must restore broken fellowship with God through confession of personal sin (1 John 1:5-9). “If **we confess our sins**, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It is never the will of God that we sin (1 John 2:1); however, when we do sin, we break fellowship with God and grieve and/or quench the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. Sin hinders our walk with God and halts our life of righteousness. Paul writes in two places, commanding the Christian, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30a) and “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). The Spirit is a Person, and He is grieved when we sin and act contrary to His righteous character. Grieving the Spirit occurs when we knowingly commit sin contrary to His guidance. When the Christian commits sin, then the Spirit is grieved and His ministry is diminished, and He must then begin to work on the heart of the Christian to bring him/her back into fellowship. “Sin destroys spirituality. It is necessarily so; for where sin is tolerated in the believer’s daily life, the Spirit, who

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, 198.

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indwells him, must then turn from His blessed ministry *through* him, to a pleading ministry *to* him.”<sup>7</sup>

To “quench the Spirit” is to resist His will as He seeks to guide according to divine revelation. In the early church, God provided special revelation both through His written word (Rom. 15:4), as well as through prophetic utterance (1 Thess. 5:20). “Today, we have a completed revelation in the Word of God and there is no need for prophets. The Apostles and prophets helped lay the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20) and have now passed from the scene. The only ‘prophetic ministry’ we have is in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup> It is only through Scripture that we possess special revelation about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and what they have provided for us and expect from us. Scripture is our guiding light (Ps. 119:105, 130; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17), and “refusal to submit to the Word of God is quenching the Spirit, making the fullness of the Spirit impossible.”<sup>9</sup>

Fellowship with God is always on His terms, not ours. He establishes the guidelines for our relationship with Him and if we are to walk with Him, we must follow His commands. God never follows us in our sin, but always calls us back to walk with Him in righteousness. When the believer breaks fellowship with God through personal sin, the only solution is to seek forgiveness through confession. Confession of sin is a common theme throughout all of

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual*, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2, 189.

<sup>9</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI., Zondervan Publishing, 1977), 198.

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Scripture (Lev. 5:5; Ps. 32:3-5; 38:18; 51:4; 2 Sam. 12:13; Neh. 9:2; Dan. 9:1-16; Luke 15:18-21; 1 John 1:9), and it is by confession that sin is forgiven. Scripture states, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

According to 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This passage, standing as it does in the center of a revelation of the basis of fellowship with God (1 John 1:5—2:2), is a message to Christians. It avails not to the unsaved to confess their sins, as they have not accepted the Savior who was the sacrifice for sins. For the unsaved the exhortation is likewise summed up in one word, *believe*. For the Christian who stands in all the blessed relationship to God wrought by saving faith in Christ there remains the issue of maintaining fellowship. It is this issue that is in the foreground in 1 John...The presence of sin in the life of the Christian, however, constitutes a barrier to fellowship. While the Christian’s sonship is in no wise affected, the happy family relationship is disturbed. On the human side, confession must come before restoration into fellowship is possible. The cause for grieving the Spirit must be judged as sin and confessed.<sup>10</sup>

Because sin is easy to produce and because most men are simple in the way they think, God had to make restoration of fellowship as simple as confession. Just as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 201-202.

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believing the simple message of the gospel saves (1 Cor. 15:3-4), so the simple act of confessing one's sins leads to forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). There's no need for penance, guilty feelings, or any payment on our part. Forgiveness, like salvation, is provided to the believer because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The simple act of confession as taught in 1 John 1:9 guarantees God's forgiveness and restoration of fellowship.

Complete assurance is given that this approach to the sin problem is acceptable to God. It is not a question of doing penance nor of inflicting chastening punishments upon oneself. Nor is it a matter of leniency with the Father when He accepts the confession. The whole act is based upon the finished work of Christ, and the question of penalty is not in view. The price for restoration has already been paid. Accordingly, the Father is *faithful* and *righteous* in forgiving, not merely *lenient* and *merciful*. The Father could not do otherwise than forgive the Christian seeking forgiveness, for His own Son has already provided a complete satisfaction for sin. The process from the human side is, accordingly, amazingly simple.<sup>11</sup>

*Sixth*, the Christian must take advantage of the time God gives to learn and grow spiritually. The believer does not reach spiritual maturity overnight, and since each believer has only a measure of time allotted by God (Ps. 139:16), his/her days must not be wasted on worldly pursuits, but on learning Scripture and living in God's will.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 202.

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The growing Christian, who is in pursuit of righteousness, will maximize his/her time and live wisely. As Christians, we all start off as babes who need to feed on the milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2; cf. Heb. 5:12), and as we grow spiritually, over time, we develop a taste for solid foods (Heb. 5:13-14). As we grow spiritually, we will maximize our time wisely. Paul exhorts Christians, “be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,<sup>16</sup> **making the most of your time**, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). To live wisely, according to Scripture, means knowing God’s will and having the skill to execute it. Making the most of our time means living in God’s will and acting in accordance with His expectations.

*Seventh*, the Christian must engage in good works for the benefit of others (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 10:24; Rev. 2:5). God is now working “to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Tit. 2:14). As Christians, we are to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). Though good works are never the condition of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), God has manufactured good works for us—as Christians—to walk in. Paul states, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). And the writer to the Hebrews states, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24). Doing good works fan the flames of our relationship with God and others and keeps us moving in the path of righteous living. When we’re living as we ought, there’s no time or opportunity to live in sin.

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### Three Obstacles to a Righteous Life<sup>12</sup>

There are obstacles to the Christian life; satanic impediments that hinder our walk of righteousness. Every Christian is born on a spiritual battlefield and throughout his life will face opposition to the work of God. The opposition will use both pleasure and pain to pull the Christian away from God in order to stifle our walk. The believer experiences opposition from his sin nature (Gal. 5:17, 19-21a; Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), the devil (2 Cor. 11:3; Jam. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8), and the world system that is all around (Col. 2:8; Jas. 1:27; 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16).

The *first* obstacle is the sin nature, sometimes called “the flesh” (Gal. 5:17, 19) or “old self” (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), which has a natural affinity for Satan’s values and his world-system. Paul writes, “For the flesh [sin nature] sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you [the Christian] may not do the things that you please” (Gal. 5:17). The sin nature is resident in every person; both saved and unsaved, and is the source of internal temptation. “*The flesh* refers to that fallen nature that we were born with, that wants to control the body and the mind and make us disobey God.”<sup>13</sup> Since the fall of Adam, every person is born with a sin nature, and it is this nature that internally motivates men to rebel against all legitimate forms of authority, both human and divine. At the moment of salvation, God the Holy Spirit indwells us and gives us a

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<sup>12</sup> Some of the material in this section is repeated from the chapter on *The Sin Nature within the Christian*.

<sup>13</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2, 18.

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new nature that, for the first time in our lives, has the capacity and desire to obey God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Because the sin nature is not removed from the believer after salvation, the believer begins to experience conflict within. “The presence of two opposing natures (not two personalities) in one individual results in conflict.”<sup>14</sup>

The old nature (which has its origin in our physical birth) fights against the new nature which we receive when we are born again (Gal. 5:16–26). No amount of self-discipline, no set of man-made rules and regulations, can control this old nature. Only the Holy Spirit of God can enable us to “put to death” the old nature (Rom. 8:12–13) and produce the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22–23) in us through the new nature.<sup>15</sup>

The *second* obstacle is the devil. Before his self-induced fall, Lucifer was a wise and beautiful creature, having “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezek. 28:12). He was an angel, called an “anointed cherub” (Ezek. 28:14). However, this perfect angelic creature produced sin from the source of his own volition, and the Scripture states, “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you...and you sinned” (Ezek. 28:15-16a). Concerning Lucifer’s sin, the Lord says, “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor” (Ezek. 28:17a). Self-centered pride turned Lucifer’s wisdom into

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 2, 480.

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foolishness, and in his madness he sought to usurp God's throne and rule over His creation. Lucifer became Satan (a term meaning "the adversary") at the time of his rebellion (Isa. 14:13-14).

The devil is a real, personal being who opposes the Christian and seeks to make him ineffective in his Christian life. He is a formidable enemy of the Christian since he is intent on devouring Christians (1 Pet. 5:8); hence, the Christian is called on to resist the devil (James 4:7). This can be accomplished through putting on the armor for a spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-17).<sup>16</sup>

The *third* obstacle is the world. Since the Fall of Adam, God has temporarily granted Satan permission to govern this world (Matt. 4:8-9; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:19). Satan, and those who follow him (both demons and people), are ultimately under God's sovereign control, and even their evil plans and actions are used for His good purposes (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 76:10; Job 1:6-12; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28; Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Satan governs by means of a system he's created, which Scripture calls the κόσμος *kosmos*. The κόσμος *kosmos* "and everything that belongs to it, appears as that which is hostile to God, i.e. lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved."<sup>17</sup> Satan's world-system consists of those philosophies, values and

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<sup>16</sup> Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 314.

<sup>17</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 562.



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practices that influence humanity to think and behave contrary to God and His Word. John writes, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15-16). Lewis Chafer provides an apt description of the *kosmos*:

The *kosmos* is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God—a civilization in which none of its promoters really expect God to share; who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects, nor do they ascribe any causality to Him. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, jealousies; its education, culture, religions of morality, and pride. It is that sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they live on this earth. It is properly styled “*The Satanic System*” which phrase is in many instances a justified interpretation of the so-meaningful word, *kosmos*.<sup>18</sup>

Satan’s world-system is not changeable and cannot be modified to conform to God’s will. At the core of Satan’s world-system is a directive for mankind to function apart from God, and when obeyed, people produce all forms of evil. Worldly-minded persons embrace Satan’s

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, “Angelology Part 4” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99 (1942): 282-283.

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system and love their own because they share the same values of selfishness that exclude God. By promoting the gospel and biblical teaching, Christians disrupt Satan's kingdom by calling out of it a people for God. When a person comes to Christ for salvation, they are transferred from Satan's kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's Son (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13-14), and become ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). The lifetime of worldly thinking that shaped our values and behaviors are not suddenly eradicated at the moment of salvation. Rather, God calls us to be transformed in our thinking by renewing our minds and living by faith in His Word (Rom. 12:1-2). Though Christians have the capacity, we are not to love the world (John 16:33; 17:14-16; 1 John 2:15). To love the world is to turn from righteousness, and the Christian who loves the world makes himself the enemy of God (Jam. 4:4). Those who love God and His Word share a mutual love for each other. By learning God's Word, Christians can identify worldly conversations and either avoid them or disrupt them by interjecting biblical truth. The life of righteousness means we will invade the lives, thoughts and discussions of others with biblical truth. Of course, this should be done in love and grace (Eph. 4:15; Col. 4:6), not by argumentation (2 Tim. 2:24-26). When we learn God's Word, obey His commands, and show love to others, we are rebelling against Satan's world-system and sowing the seeds of spiritual insurrection in the lives of those who live and walk in Satan's kingdom.

These three obstacles can wreck the Christian as he/she advances toward spiritual maturity and a life of righteousness. The sin nature is not removed during our time on earth, the devil never ceases in his efforts to attack us, and the world-system can never be reformed. The

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Christian must not only be aware of these obstacles, but must always be clinging to God and His word to guide and sustain.

### **Summary**

God is righteous and He calls believers to live righteously in conformity to His character and commands. Once saved, the believer is positionally sanctified in union with Christ, and this status will never change. However, positional sanctification does not guarantee experiential sanctification, as the believer must choose to comply with God's righteous expectations and advance to spiritual maturity. God has provided the believer all that is needed to live a righteous life. The advance to such a life involves committing oneself to God for service, continual study of Scripture, learning to be filled with the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit, regular confession of sin, and time to grow. The believer who is living the righteous life as God expects will face obstacles, which include the old sin nature, the devil, and his world-system. The believer who keeps advancing spiritually will attain Christian maturity and prove effective for God.

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