

A Closer Walk With God

Overcoming Sin as a Disciple of Christ

INTRODUCTION:

- I. There is no question about the greatest blessing we are able to enjoy as disciples of Christ.
 - A. We alone have the wonderful blessing of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ.
 1. When we were baptized into Christ, the blood of Christ cleansed us from all our past sins.
 - a. When the penitent Pentecost believers realized they were betrayers and murders of Jesus Christ Peter told them: **Acts 2:38** – *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . ."*
 - b. When sin-stained Saul came to the preacher Ananias he was told: **Acts 22:16** – *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*

2. What a wonderful blessing it is to know all our past sins have been washed away through our faith, confession, repentance and baptism.
- B. But simply because our past sins have been washed away forever, that doesn't mean our problem with sin is over.
1. We still sin.
 - a. **Romans 3:23** – . . . *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . .*
 - b. **1 John 1:8, 10** – *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*
 2. And the reason we still sin is because Satan is our enemy – perhaps even more so now that we have given our allegiance to Jesus Christ.
 - a. **1 Peter 5:8** – *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*
- C. Brethren, if we expect to maintain a close walk with God, and ultimately receive the riches of glory He has prepared for us, we must overcome the problem of sin.
1. In fact, I know of only two ways to overcome the problem of sin:

- a. One is to obviously NOT sin at all: **1 John 2:1a** – *My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.*
- b. But since none of us have reached sinless perfection, the only other way to overcome the problem of sin is to know what to do when we do sin: **1 John 2:1b-2** – *And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*

- II. Therefore, as we continue our series of lessons entitled "A Closer Walk With God," we want to focus on "Overcoming Sin as a Disciple of Christ."
 - A. To do that, there are two things about this subject we need to do.
 1. First, we need to understand how sin develops.
 2. And second, we need to understand all the ways we can overcome sin and its terrible consequences.

Body:

- I. Before we launch into a discussion of these two points, I want to first clear up a common misconception about temptation.
 - A. James, the Lord's brother, wrote what is perhaps the first letter to be circulated among Christians during the first century – it's the book that bears his name.

1. James said this about temptation: **James 1:13** – *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*
 - a. The word "by" in the phrase "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'*" is the Greek word "apo" which can mean either "direct agency" or "indirect agency."
 - b. In other words, it can mean that God does not DIRECTLY tempt us, or it can mean that God does not INDIRECTLY tempt us.
 - c. Which way is it used here? It is used to convey "indirect agency," meaning that God is not even INDIRECTLY involved in tempting us.
2. How many times have you heard someone say, "God made me this way," or "I was born with these desires."
 - a. James flatly denies that. He says God is not even INDIRECTLY responsible for the sins we commit, or for the lifestyle we choose to live.
3. In fact, in the verses that follow James adds: **James 1:16-17** – *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

- a. This means God is the Creator of that which is good and perfect – He does not create that which is morally flawed and spiritually corrupt.
 4. When it comes to the sins we commit, or the lifestyle we choose to live – WE are the one who is solely responsible. Not God.
 5. So, understanding that God is not involved in temptation, how does sin develop?
- II. In the verses that follow, James tells us there are three stages involved in sin.
- A. The first stage in the process of sin is "Temptation."
 1. **James 1:14** – *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*
 - a. Once again, I want you to notice the preposition "by" in this verse.
 - b. Remember? It can mean either "direct agency" or "indirect agency" – either we are directly drawn away by our own desires and enticed, or we are indirectly drawn away by our desires and enticed.
 - c. Which one is it in this verse? The answer is "Direct agency" – we are DIRECTLY drawn away by our OWN desires and enticed.

- c. This simply means that we are completely responsible for the sins we commit. We can't blame them on anyone else – parents, spouses, co-workers, friends – no one except ourselves.
2. Also notice that temptation involves two things – two elements.
 - a. One is "desire" – which is also rendered "lust" in some versions – and means a strong, overwhelming desire or longing for something.
 - b. The other element is "enticement" which refers to the bait Satan uses to appeal to our inner desires.
3. Let me illustrate how these two elements can lead to sin. I've used this example before.
 - a. I could be driving down a deserted highway at night and come upon a bag containing a million dollars in unmarked bills that just fell out of an armored car, and not be tempted to keep it.
 - b. My moral convictions about taking something that isn't mine are so strong, and my love of money is so weak, that I would have no problems turning that bag of money over to the nearest law enforcement agency.
 - c. Therefore, Satan is never going to dangle that kind of bait or enticement before me – he knows it wouldn't work.

- d. However, he IS going to consistently entice me with bait that WILL appeal to desires within my heart – just as he does with certain desires in yours.
 4. We're all enticed by things that appeal to desires in our hearts, but that doesn't mean we've sinned – we've just been tempted.
 - a. The Hebrew writer tells us that even Jesus *"was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."* (**Hebrews 4:15**)
 5. So, when does temptation become sin?
- B. That brings us to the second stage in the process, according to James – and that is "Sin" itself.
1. **James 1:15a** – *Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. . .*
 2. In order for temptation to lead to sin there must be some action on our part.
 3. That action can involve an overt, outward committing of sin, or an inward, secret and hidden sin in our heart.
 - a. For example, Jesus said: **Matthew 5:27-28** – *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

- b. The apostle John wrote: **1 John 3:15** – *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*
 - c. So, we can be just as guilty of sin by fleshing out some desire in our mind, or harboring some sinful feeling in our heart, as if we actually committed that sin outwardly in the flesh.
- C. And that brings us to the third phase in the process of temptation – Death – spiritual death, or spiritual separation from God.
- 1. **James 1:15b** – . . .*and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*
 - a. When we commit sin we lose fellowship with God simply because He refuses to have fellowship, or any association, with sin.
 - b. Sin separates us from God.
 - 2. That separation occurs in two ways:
 - a. Separation from God can occur in this life when we sin.
 - (1). That's what happened to the people of Israel in the days of Isaiah the prophet: **Isaiah 59:2** – *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*
 - b. And separation from God will be permanent if we die in our sins.

(1). This is the state or condition which the Bible calls "*the second death*": **Revelation 21:8** – "*But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*"

II. So, now that we understand the process involved in temptation that leads to sin, and ultimately to spiritual separation from God, how can we overcome sin?

A. Well, if sin is the result of Satan appealing to wrong desires in our heart, then the best way to overcome sin is to change our desires.

1. Getting control of our desires and changing the desires of our heart is all part of the growth process of every Christian.

a. **Romans 12:1-2** – *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

b. Being a Christian means we are constantly working on renewing our mind, and rearranging our thinking.

2. But how do we actually go about doing that? How do we change our desires?
 - a. The Psalmist David wrote: **Psalms 119:11** – *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."*
 - (1). Some versions read *"Your word have I treasured in my heart."*
 - b. We begin changing and modifying our mind by reading, studying and meditating on the Word of God.
 - c. In fact, David added: **Psalms 119:104** – *"Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."*
 - d. The more we read, study and meditate on the Word of God, the more we begin thinking as God would have us think, and the more we begin to despise sin.
 3. But changing our desires takes time. So while we're engaged in that process, what else can we do to overcome the power of sin?
- B. We can obviously limit our exposure to those things that will tempt us, and learn to avoid them altogether.
1. Remember, we sin when we are enticed by our own desires – when Satan dangles the bait of allurements before us that appeals to the desires of our hearts.
 2. So, how do we go about doing that?

a. One thing we can do is to ask God to help keep us from those situations.

(1). Jesus taught us to pray: **Matthew 6:13** – *"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

b. But we also need to do our part in purposefully avoiding anything that will tempt us.

(1). David wrote: **Psalms 101:3** – *"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes. . ."*

(2). Job said essentially the same thing: **Job 31:1** – *"I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?"*

c. We may also need to avoid people who will encourage us to do that which is wrong and sinful.

(1). Again, David wrote: **Psalms 101:6-7** – *"My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. 7 He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence."*

(2). And don't forget the admonition of the apostle Paul: **1 Corinthians 15:33** – *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."*

3. However, it's unlikely that we will be successful in removing every wrong desire from our hearts, and it may not always be possible to avoid every influence or person that might tempt us.
 - a. So what do we do then?
- C. This is when we need to simply exercise some "self-control."
 1. Remember, temptation leads to sin only when we act on the sinful desires of our heart.
 - a. If we can learn to control ourselves, we can accomplish a lot toward overcoming sin.
 2. The big question, however, is how does the Christian learn self-control?
 - a. One way is by cultivating the "fruit of the Spirit" in our hearts.
 - (1). **Galatians 5:22-25** – *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*
 - b. Did you notice that the apostle Paul says we who belong to Christ "*have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires?*"

- c. We did that when we began our *"walk in the Spirit"* – walking according to the power and influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives through the Spirit-given Word.
- 3. One of my favorite passages is: **Philippians 4:13** – *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*
 - a. I have been able to successfully overcome some major obstacles in my life by receiving strength from Christ, and by being determined to *"walk in the Spirit."*
- 4. But none of this comes without some hard work on our part:
Philippians 2:12-13 – *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*
 - a. The Lord is certainly working in us to desire and do what is right, but we also have to do our part – and that involves making a concerted effort to overcome areas of weakness in our own lives.
- 5. Because, when it comes down to the bottom line – there is absolutely no reason for us giving into temptation.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 10:13** – *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will*

not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

- b. I can tell you from my own personal experience, when you give into temptation:
 - (1). It ISN'T because God didn't limit the power of Satan in tempting you.
 - (2). It ISN'T because God failed to provide a way for you to escape that temptation.
 - (3). It's because YOU were willing to give in to Satan's limited power of temptation, and because YOU refused to take the door God opened for you to escape the temptation.
- 6. But, let's be real honest with ourselves – we all sin from time to time.
 - a. The apostle Paul wrote: **Romans 3:23** – . . . *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . .* That includes YOU!
 - b. And the apostle John wrote: **1 John 1:8, 10** – *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.* And that ALSO includes YOU!
 - c. So, when all else fails, what can we do to overcome sin.

- D. The answer is simple – get forgiveness of that sin.
1. Remember, "*sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death*" (**James 1:15b**) – sin brings forth spiritual separation from God.
 - a. You may have failed to overcome the temptations that led you to sin, but you can certainly prevent that sin from destroying your relationship with God.
 2. How? The apostle John, speaking of Jesus, said: **1 John 2:2** – "*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*"
 - a. The word "propitiation" simply means that Jesus has paid the price for the guilt of our sin by offering Himself as a sacrifice to God, and by shedding His blood on the cross – He is not only the "*propitiation for our sins. . . but also for the whole world.*"
 2. However, to receive the benefits of the sin-cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, we need to do one of two things:
 - a. If we're not a Christian, then we need to have our sins washed away in baptism. Remember these passages?
 - (1). Peter told those on Pentecost: **Acts 2:38** – "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . .*"

(2). Ananias told Saul of Tarsus: **Acts 22:16** – *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*

b. However, if you have already been baptized for the remission of past sins, but have sinned since then, here's what you need to do.

(1). The apostle Peter told Simon the Sorcerer: **Acts 8:22** – *"Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."*

(2). And the apostle John writes: **1 John 1:9** – *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

3. It's just as simple as that.

a. There is absolutely no reason why anyone should be separated from God by sin in their life.

b. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, God has done everything He could possibly do to offer us a way to escape the penalty of sin, and have fellowship with Him.

4. However, it's up to us to do something about it.

a. God has lovingly extended the free gift of His grace.

b. But we have to accept that free gift – and we have to accept that gift on His terms.

5. When we do, we will be able to overcome the power of sin, as well as the damaging influence of sin in our lives.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I hope this lesson has given you some encouragement in dealing with the power and effects of sin in your life.
 - A. As long as we live in this world, we're going to be faced with temptations and trials of various kinds.
 1. Satan will always do his best to damage or destroy our relationship with God and with Jesus Christ.
 2. But he doesn't need to succeed.
 - a. James admonishes us: **James 4:7-8** – *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*
 3. And just look at the rewards that await us when we victoriously endure temptation.
 - a. **James 1:12** – *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*
 - B. If you want to win the victory over Satan and receive the crown of life which He promises to those who love Him, then begin right now.

1. For those of you who are not disciples of Jesus Christ – who have never been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins:
 - a. Come to Him now in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing Him before others, and be buried with Him in baptism.
2. And for those of you who are disciples of Christ, but have been wounded by sin:
 - a. Allow the cleansing and spiritually healing blood of Christ restore you to a right relationship with God your Father, and with Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior.
 - b. Repent of those sins, and confess them to God – that's all.