

Lesson 11

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A JOURNEY TO HOLINESS

The Scriptures tell us that we died to the seven areas of sinful control. Now we must consider how this truth affects our sinful actions. The Scriptures call us to live in the hope that God will keep His promise to make our lives holy:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (He.10:23 NASB)

Hence, we must believe God's promise that we died with Christ. Since we died to the seven areas of sinful control, we must deal with our sinful actions one act at a time:

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. (Co.3:3-7 NIV)

The Greek verb tense of “put to death” is the aorist tense, active voice, imperative mood—unlike the other verses on the seven deaths whose verbs are in the indicative mood. The indicative mood is a mere statement of fact: we are dead because we were crucified with Christ. However, the imperative mood expresses a command: we must put to death our sinful attitudes and actions. The active voice implies that the person given the command will accomplish the action. Because of the active voice and the imperative mood, we know that God commands us to put to death our acts of sin. When we were baptized, we instantly died to the cause of our acts of sin. Since our baptism, Christ has been cleansing us of our acts of sin. Christians are not perfect; rather, they are continually transformed toward perfection throughout their lives. Christ's main concern is not that we recognize sins in our lives but that we respond appropriately when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin.

NOTES:

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

1. If we died to the seven areas of sinful control, why does the Bible command us to put to death our “sins”?
2. What are the differences between apathy and ignorance?
3. Why should mature Christians speak to self-professed Christians who continue in their sins?
4. Since Christians will never be perfect, why must they confess and turn away from their sins when the Holy Spirit convicts them?
5. What are the differences between mercy and grace?
6. What are the three Scriptural definitions of sin? How do they relate to a Christian?
7. What are the three degrees of sin? How do they relate to a Christian?
8. What is the Scriptural definition of blamelessness?

Philippians is one of Paul’s later letters to the churches. In Philippians, Paul writes:

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
(Php.3:12-14 NASB)

Paul was not perfect, and we will never attain perfection in this life. Nonetheless, we must forget how we have failed in the past and strive to be like Christ in the present. Even though we will not become perfect, we must always strive for perfection:

We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. . . Aim for perfection.
(2Co.13:9, 11 NIV)

As Christians, we must never lose our zeal to be perfect like Christ. The Christian life is like canoeing up a river: Either you paddle up the river, or the current carries you back to where you came from. Christians should never be content with their level of holiness:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.
(1Co.9:24-27 NASB)

According to Paul, a person who claims to be a Christian will be disqualified from heaven if he does not continue to strive to become like Christ—Who is sinless. We must become like Olympic athletes, who know that they will not win gold but still train, striving to do their personal best and hoping to do better than they did before. In other words, we must always strive to do our personal best:

Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.
(Php.3:15-16 NRSV)

We need to maintain the progress that we have already attained while we continue to seek God and all that He offers. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we need to respond to His conviction. In 1 John, the

Scriptures give us three responses to conviction. I call them the three “if’s”:

The first “if” addresses those who think that they are good people without sin:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1Jn.1:8 NKJV)

While it is true that we died to the seven areas of sinful control, we must always concede that we will never be perfect. When we acknowledge that we are imperfect, we are humbled; consequently, we seek God’s grace so that we can change and grow to become more like Him. I knew of a church that claimed that their people were perfect and without sin. When I became acquainted with some of their people, I discovered that they had redefined sin; hence, they considered themselves sinless. What the Bible calls sin, they called mistakes. Disobedience to God by any other name is still sin. As Christians, we would still have sins to overcome even if we lived for a thousand years. Christians must admit that they are imperfect but also assert that Christ is still transforming their lives to become like Him.

The second “if” addresses those who humbly acknowledge that the Holy Spirit continues to convict them of sin:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jn.1:9 NKJV)

Since the Holy Spirit lives in us, He will continue to convict us of sins. The Holy Spirit writes God’s laws on our hearts and minds, revealing areas in our lives that are not congruent with God:

This is the covenant I will establish with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (He.8:10 NASB)

When we confess our sins, we agree with the Scripture and the Holy Spirit’s conviction that we have sinned. Once we admit to God that we have sinned, we must ask Him to forgive our sins. God then grants us mercy that forgives our acts of sin. When we confess our sins, we must also ask God to cleanse us of our acts of sin. Consequently, God gives us grace that removes the desire to repeat the act of sin. Mercy is reactive because we receive it; grace is proactive because we find grace to strengthen us when we are tempted:

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (He.10:14 TNIV)

Every Christian will be transformed into God’s holiness. Without practical holiness, we will not go to heaven:

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. (He.12:14 NKJV)

Since we are sincere children of God, God will discipline us if we refuse to live up to the character of His name:

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. (He.12:9-10 NASB)

Therefore, Christ came to earth to enable us to live blameless and holy lives on this earth and to prepare us for heaven. If Christ is not transforming us toward perfection, we will not spend eternity with Him.

God's faithfulness to keep His promises is the foundation of our transformation from sinners to saints:

*But now that **you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God**, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.* (Ro.6:22 TNIV)

Through Christ, God redeemed us from our former master sin and the kingdom of Satan. Now, God is our master Who owns us and enables us to imitate the holiness in Christ:

*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and **righteousness and sanctification** and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."* (1Co.1:30-31 NRSV)

We are not the source of our holiness, for only God can achieve holiness in our lives. Holiness is not a position; it is the moral purity of our conduct, the way we live in this world:

*Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that **we have conducted ourselves in the world**, and especially in our relations with you, **in the holiness and sincerity that are from God**. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.* (2Co.1:12 NIV)

Christ came to enable us to live blameless, holy lives in this world. Holiness is the very essence of a born-again Christian:

*Put on **the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness**.* (Eph.4:24 NKJV)

The Gospel does not teach that Jesus died on the cross solely so that we could go to heaven. Rather, the Gospel teaches that Jesus rose from the dead so that He could live in us to transform our lives. God's purpose for Christians is to share the Gospel so that people can be freed from sin and enabled to live godly and holy lives:

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that **we may** live peaceful and quiet lives in **all godliness and holiness**.* (1Ti.2:1-2 NIV)

The goal of Christianity is to enable mankind to live peaceful, godly, and holy lives on earth and to live eternally with God. There is no salvation apart from holiness. We are perfect before God in heaven only if the Holy Spirit is transforming our lives on earth:

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have **one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are**--yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may **receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*** (He.4:15-16 TNIV)

God gives us His grace to overcome temptation. God's grace enables us to either escape or withstand the temptation:

*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**, but with the temptation **will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it**.* (1Co.10:13 NASB)

When we are tempted, we must not only believe that God will control where the tempter can tempt us but also believe that God will provide the strength so that we can be victorious over the temptation. God's grace prevents the power of sin from regaining control over us:

*For **sin shall no longer be your master**, because you are not under the law, **but under grace**.* (Ro.6:14 TNIV)

The grace of God empowers us to refuse sin and to live in godliness:

*For **the grace of God** that brings salvation has appeared to all men. **It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age**, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us **to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good**.* (Ti.2:11-14 NIV)

Therefore, when we confess our sins, God not only forgives us but also purifies us so that we do not desire to continue in our acts of sin. Hence, God perfects holiness in our lives.

The third "if" addresses those people who defend their sinful actions as if their actions were not sin:

***If we say that we have not sinned**, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.* (1Jn.1:10 NKJV)

Some churchgoers deny that they have sinned even though they are convicted by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they justify their actions by misquoting Scripture. God holds us accountable for what the Holy Spirit reveals:

For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (He.10:26-27 NRSV)

If a Christian disregards the Holy Spirit's conviction and continues to repeat the same sin, he deliberately sins. It is a damnable offense to deliberately continue to commit the same sinful action, not caring that the action is sin. Christians are on the journey to holiness. Even though Christians will not attain absolute holiness, they strive daily to become like God—Who is holy:

*By one sacrifice he **has made perfect for ever** those **who are being made holy.*** (He.10:14 NIV)

Therefore, a Christian should be convicted of sins in his life. However, if the Christian deliberately continues to commit those sins, he will suffer in hell.

A SATANIC DECEPTION

Today, some preachers teach that there are no consequences for Christians who continue to repeat sinful actions. The Scriptures warn us about these false preachers who use grace as a cover-up for evil:

*For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago **have secretly slipped in among you.** They are godless men, **who change the grace of our God into a licence for immorality** and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.* (Jude 1:4 NIV)

There are many false teachings that make allowances for a Christian to continue in sin. For example, some preachers redefine sinful actions to be sicknesses that are caused by childhood trauma. When preachers call sinful actions a sickness instead of sin, they dramatically affect how the church responds to these actions. For example, false preachers call alcoholism a sickness even though the Scriptures call drunkenness a sin. These preachers justify sins by the following logic: How can we condemn someone who is an alcoholic, if God does not condemn someone who has cancer? Do not be deceived. The Scriptures call alcoholism a sin; therefore, an alcoholic is a sinner. But the Scriptures do not call cancer a sin. Peter warns us that the false teachers will be among us:

best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless.

(Php.1:9-11 NRSV)

The Holy Spirit, Who lives in us, convicts us of sin and grants us the strength to be blameless:

And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1Th.3:13 NRSV)

We have no excuse to commit willful sin because God works in our hearts to keep us blameless. God has promised to give us strength to stand against all temptations, but we must daily ask Him for this grace:

*Therefore you **do not lack any spiritual gift** as you **eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.** **He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless** on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1Co.1:7-8 NIV)

Some Christians spiritualize the previous passage of Scripture, only applying this passage to their life in heaven. However, the previous passage uses the phrase “you eagerly wait for our Lord” which supports that we achieve blamelessness on earth. God's promises are very clear:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (1Th.5:23-24 NKJV)

God has promised to keep our bodies, souls, and spirits blameless; but God has never promised that we will be sinless while we live on this earth. Even though we are not sinless, we will sin less and less each day because God works in us to do what pleases Him:

Now the God of peace. . . equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (He.13:20-21 NASB)

It is God Who works in us to live blameless lives that are pleasing to Him. The almighty God promises to change our lives. In the same way that we were predisposed to sin, we are now predisposed to holiness:

*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us **purify ourselves from everything** that contaminates body and spirit, **perfecting holiness** out of reverence for God.* (2Co.7:1 NIV)

remarried, I would try to please my second wife like I please my first wife. However, the habits that pleased my first wife could very well displease my second wife because the two women are different. Because I would not want to anger my second wife, I would need to learn how to please her—a process that takes time. Similarly, before we were saved, we lived to please the sinful nature for so long that its sinful actions became habits. Hence, we need time to learn how to please God. When we grow in our knowledge of Christ, we grow in the grace to overcome our sin:

*But **grow in the grace and knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* (2Pe.3:18 TNIV)

Therefore, the sin that does not lead to death is the sin that we commit in ignorance.

BLAMELESSNESS, YOUR PERSONAL BEST

The Bible never teaches that Christians will live perfect lives; instead, it teaches that Christians are to be blameless. The Scriptures define blamelessness:

*Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. **Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.*** (Ps.19:12-13 NIV)

According to the Bible, blamelessness is to be without willful sin. The Bible calls Christians to be blameless:

*Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.*** (2Pe.3:14 NASB; Eph.5:27)

Paul and his missionary team lived holy, righteous, and blameless lives among the people that they ministered to:

*You are witnesses, and so is God, of **how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you** who believed.* (1Th.2:10 TNIV)

The Christian life is a journey. When we gain knowledge, we also gain responsibility to live up to what God has revealed to us. Thankfully, when our responsibilities increase, God's grace also increases, enabling us to overcome our sin:

*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow **more and more with knowledge and full insight** to help you to **determine what is***

*But there were also false prophets among the people, **even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,** even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.* (2Pe.2:1 NKJV)

The enemies of truth are not only outside the church but also inside the church, introducing heresies that will destroy people. Paul warned the elders of Ephesus about sinful men in the church:

*I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things,** to draw away the disciples after them.* (Ac.28:29-30 NASB)

There are wolves who promote sin among the sheep. These false teachers say that God is a God of love and that we are not to judge another's actions. These false teachers argue theology while they negate personal holiness. They claim that Jesus came to save us in our sins; however, Jesus' name means that He will save people from their sins:

*Both **the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy** are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.* (He.2:11 TNIV)

Christ came to earth to save us from our sins and to make us holy. In conclusion, we will be made holy and will discontinue our past sins because Christ lives in us and transforms our lives. Anyone who teaches otherwise is a false prophet:

*Anyone who runs ahead and **does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God;** whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.** Anyone who welcomes him **shares in his wicked work.*** (Jn.2:9-11 NIV)

The Bible records some of the events of the early church. Even though these events are true events, they are below God's standards for Christians. For example, the Corinthians allowed sin to exist unchecked in their church:

*It is actually reported that **there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife.** And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that **he who has done this would have been removed from among you?*** (1Co.5:1-2 NRSV)

The man lived with his father's wife (stepmother) and attended the church in Corinth. In response to this man's actions, God commanded the church to remove this man from its congregation. The church placed the man out of its fellowship and back into the world, forcing him to choose between the world and Christ. Christians cannot come to church on Sundays and continue to live like the world. Consequently, people cannot remain in the church if they deliberately continue in their sin after they accept Christ. The church uses discipline in the hope that churchgoers who claim to be Christians but continue to sin will repent of their evil ways and finally put to death their sinful nature:

*When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, **hand this man over to Satan**, so that **the sinful nature may be destroyed** and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.* (1Co.5:4-5 NIV)

The churchgoer who continues in his sins did not die to his sinful nature and is not saved from hell. In 1 Corinthians 5, the man did not lose his salvation but proved that the Holy Spirit did not control his life and that he did not belong to Christ:

*Those controlled by the sinful nature **cannot** please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but **by the Spirit**, **if the Spirit of God lives in you**. And **if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ**.* (Ro.8:8-9 NIV)

Because Christians died to their sinful nature, they now live by the Holy Spirit with His divine nature. If we continue in the acts of our sinful nature, we prove that we do not have the divine nature or the Holy Spirit and that we will not go to heaven when we die:

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that **those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God**.* (Ga.5:19-21 TNIV)

The churchgoer who continues in the acts of the sinful nature does not possess eternal life. A person is either controlled by the sinful nature or controlled by the Holy Spirit (Ro.8:5):

*So I say, **live by the Spirit**, and you **will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature**.* (Ga.5:16 TNIV)

*Speak to the children of Israel, saying: '**If a person sins unintentionally** against any of the commandments of the LORD. . .'*

(Le.4:2 NKJV)

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies with blood to atone the sins that the people of Israel had committed in ignorance:

*Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, **which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance**.* (He.9:6-7 NKJV)

The sin that does not lead to death is any sin that is committed unintentionally or in ignorance:

If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. (Jn.9:41 TNIV)

As Christians, if we do not know that an action is sin and commit the action, God will not consider us guilty of the sinful action because of our ignorance. However, once the Holy Spirit teaches us that the action is sin, we cannot continue to do it and claim our ignorance. The sin that does not lead to death is unintentional sin—sin committed without willful intent:

*If I had not come and spoken to them, **they would not be guilty of sin**. Now however **they have no excuse for their sin**.* (Jn.15:22 NIV)

If a Christian commits a sin in ignorance, he does not sense the guilt of the sin. However, once he is convicted of a sin by the Holy Spirit, he will experience guilt. The guilt moves him to confess the sin to God, after which he receives both mercy and grace to overcome that sin. Paul's life illustrates that sin committed in ignorance does not lead to death:

*Even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy **because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief**.* (1Ti.1:13 NRSV; Jn.16:2-3)

We do many things because of habit—a learned behavior that repetition has established in our lives. Some of these habits are not evil but merely ways to approach tasks. For example, I have been married to my wife for over thirty years. I know what pleases her and what angers her. I strive to live in harmony with my wife. If she died and I

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, **you who live by the Spirit** should restore that person gently. But **watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.** (Ga.6:1 TNIV)

Again, we are warned to humbly seek God's strength daily and not to be overconfident in our holiness:

Therefore **let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.** (1Co.10:12 NASB)

Either we remain humble before God, or God will humble us. Once the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we need to confess it; for we need to receive God's mercy:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you **will not sin**. But **if anybody does sin**, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins**, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (Jn.2:1-2 NIV)

Remember that mercy is God's reaction to our confession of sin, for we receive mercy after we confess our sin. Grace is God's proactive response which occurs before we commit the sin again. Grace purifies us from the desire to repeat the sin if we ask God for the strength to overcome the sin. As a Christian matures, he commits intentional sin less and less because the Holy Spirit transforms his life to be like Christ.

Third degree sin: Most Christians sin because they are ignorant of what God teaches. For example, we might disobey God in a situation because we do not know the correct response for that situation. Consequently, we respond in the same sinful manner that we have always responded. Hence, we continue the habit without the foreknowledge that our habitual response is sinful. When the Holy Spirit convicts us that the habitual act is sin, we must seek God's grace to help us overcome the sinful habit:

Let us therefore **come boldly to the throne of grace**, that we may **obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** (He.4:16 NKJV)

For the Christian, sin is not probable; but it is possible:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you **will not sin**. But **if anybody does sin**. . . . (1Jn.2:1 NIV)

Most Christians do not know that the sacrifices in the Old Testament were for unintentional sin. Leviticus 4 stresses unintentional sin:

A person is controlled by the Holy Spirit, **if** the Holy Spirit lives in him. Consequently, if someone continues to live to please the sinful nature, he proves that he is void of the Holy Spirit, controlled by the sinful nature, and separate from Christ. This person can only expect to experience eternal destruction:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. People reap what they sow. **Those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction**; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Ga.6:7-8 TNIV)

Either a person will put to death his sinful nature with its sinful actions through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, or he will die in the lake of fire:

For **if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die**; but **if by the Spirit** you put **to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live**, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Ro.8:13-14 NIV)

Christians were crucified with Christ, and Christ now lives in them. Consequently, Christians cannot personally put to death their sinful acts; for only the Holy Spirit, Who lives in them, can put their acts of sin to death. For example, a dead man cannot bury himself; only those who are living can bury him. Because we were crucified with Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, only the Holy Spirit can eliminate our sinful actions. A churchgoer does not go to hell because he continues in sin but because his sinful behavior proves that the Holy Spirit does not live in him:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. **Neither** fornicators, **nor** idolaters, **nor** adulterers, **nor** homosexuals, **nor** sodomites, **nor** thieves, **nor** covetous, **nor** drunkards, **nor** revilers, **nor** extortioners **will inherit the kingdom of God**. And **such were some of you**. But you **were washed**, but you **were sanctified**, but you **were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and **by the Spirit of our God**. (1Co.6:9-11 NKJV)
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In 1 Corinthians 6:11, God uses the past tense to describe our relationship to our past acts of sin. Some of us were those types of people mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; but the Holy Spirit changed us. Hence, God expects us not to commit the sinful actions of our past. Since the Holy Spirit lives in us, He changes our nature. This change in nature affects our eternal destiny. We do not go to heaven because we are good; we go to heaven because Christ lives in us:

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1Jn.5:11-12 NASB)

IGNORANCE OR REBELLION

One day, my wife and I invited a young unmarried couple to our house for lunch. In a conversation, I explained that Christ came to free us from our life of sin and to enable us to be transformed into His holiness. Shortly after that day, I heard that the couple stopped living together. This young couple did not sin out of rebellion toward God; rather, they lived in sin because they were ignorant of the Scriptural teaching of holiness. God recognizes the difference between ignorance (I don't know) and apathy (I don't care). If a person who continues to sin is ignorant, we must teach him the truths that will transform his life. If he is apathetic, we must discipline him according to the Scriptures. Consequently, we must determine whether a person continues in sin because he disregards the commands of God or because he is ignorant of the teachings of Christ. For this reason, we must talk to the person who continues in his sin so that we can determine his attitude:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

(Mt.18:15-17 NASB)

If we see a Christian who continues in his sins, we must go to him one-on-one to teach him about God's salvation from sin. We teach him to remove his ignorance. Hence, we teach him that his actions are incongruent with Christ's teachings and that Christ died to enable him to overcome his sin. This first step is done in private, one-on-one.

would always forgive me if I asked Him. Therefore, I asked God to forgive me for my sin after each party. Nonetheless, while I stood up from my knees, I was already thinking about the next party. If I died at that time in my life, I would be in hell. Christians do not commit premeditated sin:

But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No-one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

(1Jn.3:5-6 TNIV)

Beware. Premeditated sins never happen spontaneously. For example, a person does not live a holy life one day and then sleep with his secretary the next day. There was a period of time between the birth of the lustful thoughts and the act of adultery. Hence, the sin was premeditated. If you deliberately plan and perform an action that you know is sin, you are in danger of hell.

Second degree sin: Christians should never intentionally sin. Intentional sin is usually committed by young Christians who respond to situations without thinking. We can understand intentional sin better if we compare spiritual maturity to physical maturity. When a baby is born, he lays in the position that you place him in. As he matures physically, he learns to roll over, crawl, and walk. When he first attempts to walk, he constantly falls. The more the baby walks, the less he falls. When he is five-years-old, he only falls when he either forgets where he is walking or runs faster than his feet can carry him. When he becomes an adult, he rarely falls. Since you have become an adult, when was the last time that you fell while you walked? After spiritual rebirth, a spiritual infant will intentionally sin. But he will overcome these sins as he applies the truths that can transform his life. A mature Christian will rarely sin intentionally because he has learned to rely on the Holy Spirit, Who controls his life. Intentional sin usually occurs when we do not think before we incorrectly respond to a situation. An unkind word spoken in haste is an example of an intentional sin of a mature Christian. Intentional sin is unacceptable. For a Christian, intentional sin is not probable; but it is possible. Intentional sin does lead to death if a Christian does not confess it and turn away from it. As mature believers, we must never be confident of our ability to refrain from intentional sin:

unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. (Nu.15:27-29 NASB)

According to the law of Moses, God forgave unintentional sins. But could those who deliberately sinned expect God to forgive them? The law of Moses did not offer mercy for deliberate sin:

*But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one **is blaspheming the LORD**; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, **that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.*** (Nu.15:30-31 NASB)

If an Israelite in the Old Testament deliberately sinned, he was guilty of blaspheming God. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Since He has not changed, His opinion about sin has also not changed. People sin because they are either ignorant or apathetic. An ignorant person **does not know** that he has sinned, but an apathetic person **does not care** that he has sinned. God deals with ignorance differently than He deals with apathy. The New Testament is clear; God does not tolerate apathy that promotes deliberate sin:

*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that **will consume the enemies of God.*** (He.10:26-27 NIV)

God will not forgive Christians who deliberately continue to sin after they know that their actions are disobedient to God. According to the previous Scriptures, Christians who deliberately sin will suffer hell with the devil and those who continue to live as enemies of God. God's perspective of sin is similar to the three degrees of murder. First degree murder is premeditated murder: A person planned the crime before he performed it. Second degree murder is intentional murder (not premeditated): A man becomes angry with another man and strikes him to kill him. The murder was deliberate but not planned in advance. Third degree murder (manslaughter) is accidental murder through negligence: A sleeping driver hits an oncoming car and kills his passengers. We will consider the parallel between the attitudes of sin and the three degrees of murder.

First degree sin: For Christians, premeditated sin is damnable. Before I was saved, I deliberately sinned. My church taught me that God

However, if the person refuses to uphold Christ's teachings or acknowledge his sin, the second step is to establish witnesses:

For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy "on the testimony of two or three witnesses." How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

(He.10:26-29 NRSV)

We take one or two respected Christians with us in order to establish the testimony that the person still commits the sin and knows the truth. Two witnesses are adequate testimony while three witnesses are abundant testimony. In the presence of multiple witnesses, the person in sin is again taught from the Scriptures that his actions are sin and that Christ redeemed him from his sin. If the person still refuses to turn from his sin, he is brought before the whole church. The church then teaches the person that his actions violate both the Spirit and the Scripture and that Christ came to free him from his sin. This step of public discipline impedes gossip which Satan can use to divide the church. If the person in sin still refuses to repent before the church, then he is denied fellowship with the church. In this last step of discipline, the church excludes the person in sin from all church activities, thereby forcing him back into the world. There are four steps between the time that a churchgoer is found in sin and the time that he is removed from the church. The church in Corinth obviously did not know the mandate of discipline found in Matthew 18. Consequently, to stop the rampant sin in the Corinthian church, God commanded the Corinthian church to place the man with his father's wife directly outside the church. Any sin in the church that the public knows about must be disciplined in a public manner, for the sin affects the reputation of Christ and His church:

*But now I am writing to you **not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one.** For what have I to do with judging those outside? **Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge?** God will judge those outside. **"Drive out the wicked person from among you."** (1Co.5:11-13 NRSV)*

When a church expels an unrepentant churchgoer, its goal is not to punish the churchgoer or to inflict vengeance. On the contrary, the church's goal is to discipline him so that he will change his behavior and die to his sinful nature. The church does not want to leave him in the world. Instead, the church wants to facilitate a change in the character of the unrepentant sinner so that his character will agree with the teachings of Scripture. Hence, the man in 1 Corinthians 5 remained outside the church until he not only repented but also put to death his sinful nature. In 2 Corinthians, the Scriptures record this man's response to his discipline:

*If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me **as he has grieved all of you, to some extent**—not to put it too severely. **The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.** Now instead, **you ought to forgive and comfort him**, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, **to reaffirm your love for him.*** (2Co.2:5-8 NIV)

The man who had his father's wife repented of his sin. Hence, the church of Corinth was told to welcome him back into its fellowship. Because this man discontinued his sin, he obviously had sinned in ignorance and not in rebellion; he did not know the Scriptural truths that could set him free. This man proved that he was not a rebellious churchgoer but an immature Christian. After discipline, he put his sinful nature to death by yielding his life to the Holy Spirit. A church removes unrepentant churchgoers from its fellowship to convey that they will eventually find themselves outside the kingdom of heaven and in the lake of fire if they continue in their sins:

*"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** Thus you will know them by their fruits. **Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, **did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?**' Then I will declare to them, **'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'**"* (Mt.7:18-23 NRSV)

The people in the previous passage accomplished miraculous signs while they continued in their acts of sin. Holiness, not miraculous

*brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' **for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.***" (He.8:10-11 NKJV)

We must believe that the Holy Spirit will speak clearly to our hearts, and we must use the Scriptures to confirm that what we hear is the will of God and not the voice of Satan. We sin when we act indecisively rather than wait until we are sure of the Holy Spirit's directives. Therefore, the third type of sin is the sin of indecision: to refuse to live by faith, disobeying the Holy Spirit's directives.

THE THREE DEGREES OF SIN

Christians no longer live under any form of written law; rather, they live under the new way of the Spirit. When we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit convicts us if we have disobeyed God by a sin of commission, omission, or indecision. Once we are convicted of our sin, we are accountable to confess it, claiming God's promise to purify us. John differentiates the attitudes of sin:

*If anyone sees his brother commit **a sin that does not lead to death**, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those **whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death.** I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and **there is sin that does not lead to death.*** (1Jn.5:16-17 NIV)

John is not writing about different levels of sin, for God considers all sin to be equally sinful. God is perfect, and sin is imperfection. For this reason, stealing someone's wife is no more sinful than stealing a cookie:

*For whoever keeps the whole law and **yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.** For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, **you have become a lawbreaker.*** (Ja.2:10-11 NIV)

To break a single command from God's law is to break the entire law. In 1 John 5:16-17, John refers to two different attitudes in which a person can sin. In the Old Testament, God distinguishes between unintentional and deliberate sins:

***Also if one person sins unintentionally**, then he shall offer a one year old female goat for a sin offering. The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray **when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven.** You shall have one law for him who does anything*

Whatever is not from faith is sin.

(Ro.14:23 NASB)

The previous two types of sin do not completely define sin for two reasons. First, the law of Moses does not address or list every way that we could wrong our neighbor. Without a complete list, we do not always know if we have wronged our neighbor. Second, the law of Christ does not prioritize good deeds. Without a prioritized list, we cannot fulfill the law of Christ; for we need to know which good deeds take priority over the others. For example, when we know more than one good thing to do at one time, we cannot do them all. Since we cannot do all the good deeds that we know of, we appear guilty of sin. God's solution to these difficulties is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit replaced the written law when He indwelt us; hence, we do not follow a list of rules but rather respond to what the Holy Spirit says to our hearts:

*But now, by dying to what once bound us, **we have been released from the law** so that **we serve in the new way of the Spirit**, and not in the old way of the written code.*

(Ro.7:6 NIV)

We have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, Who lives within us. Hence, the Holy Spirit warns us when we are about to do wrong and directs us to do the good that we should do. Before we do something, we must always consider what the Holy Spirit is saying to our hearts. Is He revealing that we are about to harm our fellowman? Is He exercising our hearts to share the Gospel with Dick, to visit Harry who is sick, or to help Tom move? A Christian cannot help three different people at one time. Hence, Christians must learn to wait until they can act confidently in the Holy Spirit's leading. God has planned only one good deed for a Christian to do at one time:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart** and lean not on your own understanding; **in all your ways submit to him**, and **he will make your paths straight.

(Pr.3:5-6 TNIV)

What is the Holy Spirit saying to your heart? If He is convicting you of sin, turn away from it and confess it. If He is directing you to do something, do it. If He is telling you to talk to someone, then speak to him. The Holy Spirit writes God's will on our hearts:

*"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his*

works, is the sign of a born-again Christian! Sin is a slippery slope that a person might slide down and eventually find himself in the lake of fire on the day of judgement. If a churchgoer continues to sin, we must confront him in love to prevent him from eternal separation from God. We must nip sin in the bud stage before it blossoms:

*But **among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed**, because these are improper for the Lord's people. **Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place**, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: **No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a person is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things **God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.** Therefore do not be partners with them.*

(Eph.5:3-7 TNIV)

We must not only discontinue our sins but also address the attitudes behind our sins as well. According to Colossians 3:5-7, the Christians in Colossae discontinued the sins of their past. In Colossians 3:8-11, God commanded the Colossians to eliminate the underlying attitudes behind their sinful actions:

*But **now you yourselves are to put off all these**: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, **since you have put off the old man with his deeds**, and **have put on the new man** who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, **but Christ is all and in all.***

(Co.3:8-11 NKJV)

Even though we died to sin and are dying to the acts of sin by the Holy Spirit, we must also remove from our lives the attitudes behind our acts of sin. Therefore, since we died with Christ to the seven areas of sinful control, we will discontinue our sinful acts and attitudes. If a churchgoer does not discontinue his acts of sin, he should find himself not only barred from the church but also destined for the lake of fire:

He who overcomes shall inherit all things**, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. **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.

(Re.21:7-8 NKJV)

SIN DEFINED

Today, the church has re-categorized sins so that certain sins are acceptable instead of sinful. For example, consider how many churches gradually accepted homosexuality. When I was a child, society and the church universally acknowledged that homosexuality is a sin. When I was a teenager, psychologists promoted homosexuality as a sexual disorientation caused by childhood trauma. When I was raising my family, society considered homosexuality to be a moral alternative to heterosexual relationships. Now, homosexuality is a movement led by a minority of people who seeks to force its sinful preference on all mankind through the media and education. Because these churches did not preach against society's conclusions, they succumbed to the pressure of society and adopted the world's view; for they did not want to appear judgmental. According to some churches, churchgoers can choose to be homosexual, just like heterosexual couples can claim to be Christians and choose to live together outside of marriage. However, God does not change; and He teaches in the Bible that homosexuals and the sexual immoral will never enter His heaven. Because the church and society has lived by moral relativity, we must relearn the Scriptural definition of sin. According to the Scriptures, **sin is disobedience to God**. However, the New Testament defines three types of sins that a person can commit.

The **sin of commission** summarizes man's failure to keep the Old Testament law. We must not **commit** wrong against our fellowman in any way:

All wrongdoing is sin. (1Jn.5:17 NRSV)

This verse—1 John 5:17—is the heart of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments can be summarized by two commands: Do not dishonor God, and do not wrong your neighbor. Jesus summarized the entire law:

He answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself. (Lk.10:27 TNIV)

Hence, 1 John 5:17 summarizes God's moral standard that we should not commit wrong against God or man:

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Ro.13:10 NASB)

When we harm a neighbor, we commit the sin of commission. The law was intended to show us that we have committed sins, but the law was never intended to enable us to attain the holiness of God:

*We also know that law is made **not for the righteous** but for **lawbreakers and rebels**, the **ungodly and sinful**, the **unholy and irreligious**; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.* (1Ti.1:9-11 NIV)

Therefore, the first type of sin is the sin of commission: to commit wrong against God or our neighbor.

The **sin of omission** summarizes man's failure to keep the law of Christ. We must not **omit** doing good for anyone who is in need. If we refuse to help, we sin:

Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin. (Ja.4:17 NRSV)

When we do not perform the good that we know we should do, we sin by omission. While the Old Testament law is broken by the sin of commission, the New Testament law (the law of Christ) is broken by the sin of omission. The law of Christ is to love:

*A new command I give you: **Love one another.*** (Jn.13:34 TNIV)

When we know the needs of another person, we sin if we omit acting out of compassion. However, if we respond in love to the needs of other people, we fulfill the law of Christ:

*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way **you will fulfill the law of Christ.*** (Ga.6:2 NRSV)

Therefore, the second type of sin is the sin of omission: to refuse to do the good that we know God wants. When we commit the sin of omission, we break the law of Christ.

The **sin of indecision** summarizes our failure to live in communion with the Holy Spirit, Who writes His laws on our hearts and minds. When we ignore the Holy Spirit's leading, we sin. Christians must always live in the confidence of the Holy Spirit's leading: