

A Newton's Cradle with five silver balls and one red ball. The red ball is on the left, and the other four are on the right. The red ball is in motion, having just struck the other four, which are now in motion.

Lesson 9

RG and PERSONAL SIN

The Gospel Centered Approach to Addressing Personal Sin

KEY PASSAGE(S)

¹ “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. 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 those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1, 2).

THE BIG PICTURE - THE Story

Like so many other areas of the Christian life, this area has suffered much at the hands of those who would remove the gospel from how one approaches this subject matter.

Remember, **Jesus is not only necessary, but He is enough.** The first strike in Newton’s Cradle has far-reaching and inevitable consequences. The only possible way **not to transfer** the energy from the first strike is to remove the ball from the trajectory. If, however, one keeps the ball in proper alignment, then the energy from the first strike will follow through to the succeeding objects. How we view the gospel impacts how we view our own sin (and the sins of others).

The cross of Christ conquered sin. The woman’s seed crushed the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). God has delivered His people from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Victory is ours and the end is glorious. This study seeks to show and celebrate the believer’s altered relationship to sin.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER

1. What God does for us, He gives to us and works in and through us to those around us.
2. The cross changes forever our relationship to God and to sin.

BASIC IDEAS:

- 1[?] Sin is a defeated foe (cf[?] Lesson 3)[?]
- 2[?] We are dead to sin[?]
- 3[?] Sin no longer has dominion over us[?]
- 4[?] We are in Christ (cf[?] Lesson 3)[?]
- 5[?] We are over-comers (cf[?] Lesson 13)[?]
- 6[?] Confession, repentance, and putting off the old are all fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf[?] Lesson 8)[?]

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

In 1 John 2:1-2, John addresses sin in the life of the believer with this statement of fact:

¹ “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **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 those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1, 2).

God’s declared will is that we do not sin. Yet despite this clear statement, our experience shows otherwise. We do sin. What is to be the biblical response to known sin in the believer’s life? As those who are now living in Christ and thus “under grace,” what does such a relationship look like in the life of the believer on a moment-by-moment basis? Should grace impact the way we currently live the Christian life? Does grace matter? We will tackle this area of the Christian life by asking and answering the following five basic questions.

- Q1. What place does sin have in the life of the believer under grace?
- Q2. What are the implications of Calvary that impact our relationship to sin?
- Q3. What does our sin do to us?
- Q4. What does our sin do to God?
- Q5. What should we do with our sin?

TODAY’S LESSON

I? Question #1 - What place does sin have in the life of the believer under grace?

There are three responses to this question.

A?The reality of sin in us

Because of our old self (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), sin is always with us. There is a side of us that is always acting fleshly, natural, and unregenerate. Such a thought is clearly presented in such passages as Romans 6-8, 1 Corinthians 3, and Galatians 5.

“knowing this, that **our old self** was crucified with *Him*, in order that our **body of sin** might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6).

Romans 6:6 (see also Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9) tells us that our “old self” has been crucified with Christ. The grammar indicates that this is a completed past action where the old self is the passive recipient of the work of Christ that now makes it possible for “the body of sin” to be destroyed.

Every Christian is always capable of committing the most grievous and heinous actions. However, the Scripture is clear that such acts do not characterize the life of God’s people. No believer lives in a pattern of sin (1 John 3:9). Yet sin in the life of the believer still happens. John speaks to this idea in 1 John 2:1, 2.

B?The relationship of sin to us

Let us note three thoughts.

- First, sin is a **defeated foe (the penalty of sin [cf. Lesson 4]) - Justification.**

The death of Christ has defeated sin. Sin's defeat is viewed as a past fact. The penalty of sin has been removed from the believer.

"I am writing to you, little children, **because your sins have been forgiven you** for His name's sake"
(1 John 2:12).

- Second, sin is **judicially dead (the power of sin [cf. Lesson 5]) - Sanctification.**

A believer's old self was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6). The purpose of this co-crucifixion was "in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." Our co-crucifixion is a historical fact. There was a point in time when our old self was crucified with Christ. At the cross, Jesus Christ did something to our old self.

"[Since] **you have died with Christ** to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees" (Col. 2:20).

Colossians 2:20 (see also Gal. 2:20), "You have died with Christ," also speaks of a completed and finished action. Thus, there is an element within us that had died and is dead in Christ.

- Finally, sin will one day be **permanently removed (the presence of sin [Rom. 8:17b-30 {cf. Lesson 13}]) - Glorification.**

The joy of this truth has already been noted. As believers who live lives of constant struggle and longing, it is essential we realize that victory has already been secured and we are now only waiting for its full implementation.

C?The rule of sin over us (see point 2 above)

Because of our standing in Christ, we are dead to sin. This is the truth claim of Scripture. What does it mean, "To be dead to sin?"

"Even so consider yourselves to be **dead to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).

We are no longer legally obligated to obey sin's dictates. No longer does sin hold sway over us. We now have the right and power to say no to its sinful demands. It no longer has dominion or authority over us.

This brings us to our second question.

II Question #2 - What are the implications of Calvary that impact our relationship to sin?

We will consider four responses to this question.

A We are in Christ (Rom 6:1-4)

¹“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ²May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³Or do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** Jesus have been **baptized into His death**? ⁴Therefore we have been **buried with Him** through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so **we too might walk in newness of life**” (Rom. 6:1-4).

We are joint-heirs with Jesus (Rom. 8:17a). The Father has imputed to our account the very righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:6). Because of being “in Christ,” we now have immediate and direct access before the Father (Rom. 5:1). Whereas there was once animosity and wrath there is now only peace and satisfaction (Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:1). By being in Christ we are beloved children in whom He is well pleased (Eph. 1:4-14).

B We are the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9)

“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed **the Spirit of God dwells in you**. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Rom. 8:9).

Such condescension on His part is an act of indescribable grace. How the infinite has chosen to reside in the finite, the Creator within the created, is truly an expression of the inexhaustible riches of grace. Yet we have within us all that God is in the totality of His being. What a shocking truth. **We have gone from Emmanuel, “God with us” (Isa. 9:6; John 1:18) to “God in us.”**

C We are the sure work of the Father (1 Thess 5:23, 24)

²³“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴**Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass**” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

What we could not merit nor maintain, God Himself in grace will finish. The consistent message of Scripture is the work of God in us will not fail. The Bema Judgment is a universal declaration of God’s success and faithfulness in bringing to pass that which He had begun.

D We are commandment-keepers (Rom 8:3, 4)

³“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴**so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us**, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3, 4).

Just as in Adam, all are lawbreakers and idol-makers, so also in Christ His people are commandment-keepers. Just as in Adam we were instruments of sin, so now in Christ we are instruments of righteousness. In Adam, one's identity as a lawbreaker was not determined by performance but by position, so also in Christ one's identity as a commandment-keeper is not determined by performance but by position.

Commandment keeping is not about rule keeping or good works. It is about believing and loving Jesus.

This brings us to our third question.

III? Question #3 - What does our sin do to us?

This question is always intriguing. When hearing someone say, "What happens when I sin?" our immediate response is to ask, "What does not happen when you sin?" In answering that question, the rest tends to answer itself. If as a believer our sin no longer separates us from God, then what does happen? The good news is all the consequences of sin are horizontal. **Nothing vertically!** So how might we answer this question? Let us note four thoughts.

A?There is a providential judgment against sin which is corrective?

God has chosen to establish natural laws against sin's expression. There are natural laws established by God that determine the reaping of what is sown (Gal. 6:7, 8). **There is an inherent demerit to all sin.** The Scripture tells us, "that the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) and that "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20). No one can sin and get away with it. Everyone shall pay the consequences for sin, whether in this life horizontally (for the believer and unbeliever) or in the life which is to come vertically (for the unbeliever).

B?There is a sense of disappointment for failed responsibility?

With reference to the believer, there is a sorrow that happens in committing sin or in the failure to meet divine expectations. The reality of human inability causes those who see Jesus to offer themselves up to Christ's work and that of the Holy Spirit to empower them for obedience on a daily basis. No one who knows their flesh ever puts any confidence in it to live the Christian life. **What hope the Christian has lies solely in Christ and His grace dealings with them.**

"Sin takes away potential, it removes opportunity." [Brian Jensen]

C?There is an initial straining and potential severing of human relationships from expressions of sin?

There is always a straining of relationships when one has sinned against another. Such offenses need to be dealt with immediately. Each is to act toward the other in a gracious manner. Never should such a condition exist long term. Whether it is as simple as saying we are sorry, or where physical harm has been committed, the offending party needs to make sure that any necessary restitution has been made. As for the offended, forgiveness is to be offered immediately and unconditionally (Eph. 4:32). To act toward another in this fashion is to treat them in grace and to depend on God to meet the necessary needs.

There is the potential for unnecessary bondage to a pattern of sin

Christians are not to live in sin (1 John 3:9-11). Such is completely incompatible with their position in Christ. Yet some out of weakness to the flesh or because of Scriptural ignorance have fallen prey to a pattern of sin (Gal. 6:1). Such bondage is unnecessary. No Christian need live in bondage to sin.

Sin will always take us further than we wish to go, cost us more than we wish to pay, and keep us longer than we wish to stay.

No believer "living in sin" wishes to be there. Victory is not only possible; it is our right. How to gain victory over daily sin will be discussed later (cf. Q5).

Let us now consider our fourth question.

IV Question #4 - What does our sin do to God? Nothing

The Impassibility of God:

One of our difficulties in speaking to this question is understanding God's "emotions" from a finite vantage point. God condescends to our finitude and uses human terms so that we might know Him. It is accurate to describe God as loving, wrath-filled, kind, displeased, etc., but we should use such descriptives cautiously and guarded for His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). With this cautionary word, let us begin.

God hates sin. Such a simple statement can cause us to overlook the gravity of such a statement, but nonetheless God hates sin. **Our sin is serious enough for the Father to send His only begotten Son to be the Savior of the world. Regardless as to where it is found, God always hates sin.** Two thoughts are immediate. First, in the unbeliever, he is the object of God's present wrath (John 3:36) and is simply waiting His future wrath (1 Thess. 5:9). Second, for both the unbeliever and the believer, there is a natural consequence to all sin. Though the believer will never experience the wrath of God against sin (1 John 2:2, 4:10), it does not mean it is any less serious.

Is grace therefore a license to sin? May it never be. That is an abuse of grace.

"For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

V? Question #5 - What should we do with our sin? Stop

One of the tensions when approaching this thought is making it man-centered rather than Christ-centered. Although you and I act, our responses to sin are fruits of the Holy Spirit. Thus, no such actions are possible apart from the working of the Holy Spirit. In addition, all such actions are natural and expected consequences of the believer's position in Christ (Rom. 6) and the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8).

Let us consider five responses.

A? Acknowledge sin by agreeing with God concerning it (1 John 1:9 [cf. Lesson 10])?

"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).

B? Repent of it and thus put off its presence and pattern (Eph? 4:22)?

"Though crucified, we are still called upon to lay aside the old self" (Eph. 4:22).

"That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit" (Eph. 4:22).

C? Make no provision for its future manifestation (Rom? 13:14) by mortifying its deeds (Col? 3:5)?

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

"Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Col. 3:5).

D? Seek to live in newness of life (Rom? 6:5) by knowing, reckoning, and yielding?

"For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5).

CONCLUSION

Sin no longer has any authority or legal right over you. When you make much of sin and your relationship to it, you are placing yourself under its dominion and authority.

Our relationship to sin is much like learning to drive or flying a plane. It is not a natural skill but one that is learned. For those who are just learning, it is very mechanical and unnatural. They are governed by the imperative (“how to”). In time, they no longer think about what they are doing. They think about the indicative (they just fly). In time, the act is no longer governed by “rules and regulations.” Those skills become natural and second nature. So also, with life in Christ. What begins as very mechanical, should become natural. We are teaching people to fly who are already flying. All they might see is “obedience” and “rules” but all we see as believers is JESUS.

Recognizing that it is His working in us and through us, we choose to stand in His Son. We choose to live in the fullness of His forgiveness. We choose to live in His limitless love. We choose to accept a more than abundant grace. We desire to live the Christ life.

We are free from condemnation because Jesus, through His death, condemned sin. If we must still face His wrath, then the death He died was insufficient. The law is powerless to condemn sin in the flesh. It is powerless to liberate the sinner from the power of the flesh. However, the incarnation enabled Jesus to condemn sin in the flesh. If this pardon from condemnation does not reach into our current practice, then we do not understand what it means.

“In spite of the fact that the Christian is in a continuing struggle with the law of sin in his members, there is no verdict of condemnation against him. There is no charge, no indictment, no judgment, and no penalty – because he is ‘in Christ Jesus.’ As A.T. Robertson comments, ‘This is Paul’s Gospel.’ This freedom from condemnation means freedom from past sins and pardon for future sins.”¹

Until we see the shallowness of life lived apart from Christ, we will never see the sufficiency and satisfaction of life lived in Christ. May we hunger after all that God has already secured for us in Christ.

Q6 - What is to be a biblical response to known sin in the believer’s life?

Q7 - What does my sin do to me? What happens when I sin?

Q8 - What does my sin do to God?

NEXT LESSON – RG and Confession

¹ Clifton J. Allen, *Romans*, 86