

CAN SINNING COST SALVATION?

By Bernie Koerselman

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Introduction

In the “Christian” world today, we see little emphasis on sin, little preaching on it, little rebuke of it, and little abhorrence of it. It seems we’ve lost sight of what God thinks of sin and how he speaks of it in his Scripture.

As an example, today we see men and women of all ages living together out of wedlock. Many times these are people attending church regularly. The Christian culture no longer condemns this. In the Bible belt of America, we find divorce more common among purported Christians than among American atheists, according to a recent poll. For a more complete discussion of this subject, see the article “May Christians Divorce – And Remarry?” on our website at: www.bereanpublishers.com.

I suggest that many “Christians” neither live, nor even know, biblical Christianity. Instead they live in what I call a Christian culture. This culture has nominal Christian values, but doesn’t preach or teach the teachings and commands of Jesus (commanded to be taught by Jesus at Matthew 28:20); instead it has picked and chosen favorite verses to comprise its theology. As a result, false doctrines abound. Indeed, I fear that Jesus’ question is in danger of being answered in the negative when he asked, “When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

This article will view the subject of sin. If you presently have other than a biblical view of sin, it is my hope that you will begin to see it as God sees it.

In the Beginning . . .

In the beginning there was no sin. But then Adam and Eve believed the lies of the serpent and ate the fruit God commanded them not to eat. And that was the beginning of the sin nature of mankind that has been passed down to the successors of Adam and Eve. The first death occurred when God took the lives of animals to make garments for Adam and Eve who suddenly realized they were naked.

It was after that first sin that God apparently told Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel what kind of sacrifices would please him and cover over their sin – sacrifices that required the taking of life and the shedding of blood. The jealousy of Cain caused him to kill his brother Abel after God was pleased with Abel’s sacrifice of fat portions of the firstborn of his flock, but displeased with Cain’s offering of fruit of the soil. Cain tried to do it his way, failed to please God, and then committed another sin by killing his brother.

In the Law . . .

At Exodus 29:10-14, God taught the children of Israel how to make a sin offering. They were to take a valuable bull, slaughter it, and follow God’s instructions as to the blood and the fat, as well as how and where to burn the flesh, hide, and refuse. The people were being taught that sin is costly! God taught that sin has consequences and the cost of getting right with God is high. Further, it will require the shedding of blood. We learn from the book of Hebrews that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

The Cost of Sin

What Our Sinning Cost God!

One of my favorite summaries of the Gospel tells us what sin cost God:

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he [God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Colossians 1:21-23).¹

It cost God the death of his Son, his only begotten Son. God had to have a spotless “lamb” to die so that his blood could redeem mankind. But this “lamb” had to be human, a kinsman-redeemer who would pay the price with his own life and blood to redeem mankind from its slavery to sin. When John the Baptist saw Jesus pass by he exclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

Peter later explained it for us:

¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18).

When John was caught up to heaven, he was privileged to see a ceremony which honored the Lamb, looking as though it had been slain. The Lamb was handed a scroll. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. ⁹ And they sang a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

What Our Sinning Cost Jesus!

It is hard to imagine the cost for God the Father and Jesus the Son. The Apostle John revealed that Jesus, previous to his birth on earth, was “The Word.” John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2). He was in heaven with God. He was God and was with God in the beginning.

Paul gives us another glimpse as he exhorted the Philippians:

¹The New International Version, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

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⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8).

It was not enough that Jesus should die for our sins. The method by which he was to die – public crucifixion – was invented by the Romans to act as a deterrent. It was intended to be the most painful, agonizing, humiliating way to die they could devise. God used crucifixion to have his son shed his blood and die to redeem you and me from our sins.

What Our Sinning Can Cost Us!

Knowing that his purpose on earth was to redeem mankind from their sins, Jesus was aware of the punishment in hell for sinning. He warned:

²⁹ “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matthew 5:29-30).

What a dreadful illustration! We think of gouging out our eye or cutting off our hand as beyond contemplation in a civilized world. The world has been made aware, however, that the strict followers of Islam still cut off the hands of thieves and kill people for a variety of offenses.

Why does Jesus use such a terrible example? Likely he did it to get our attention and make us realize that sinning can cause us to go to hell! That isn't a popular notion these days, is it? After all, aren't we able to simply ask God to forgive us and we'll be cleansed from our sin and on our way to heaven? Perhaps it isn't as simple as that. Let's consider additional Scriptures on that issue and about the consequences of sinning.

Sinning That Can Condemn Us To Hell

Sinning That Will Deny Us Salvation

The Apostle Paul's ministry was to the heathen of his age – Gentiles who had not known the Scriptures or God's requirements for his people. He had to start from the beginning to teach them God's ways and God's commands and what God defined as sin. One of the things he had to do was make them aware that there is a penalty for sinning – for committing the very acts they previously thought nothing of before they became Christians. Paul defined sin as he warned the Galatians about the penalty for sinning:

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn

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you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Could this be a mistake? Can sinning deprive us of salvation? Paul warned the Corinthians:

⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Paul phrases the words as to be objective, neither accusing the recipients nor excusing them. It is the kind of language that says, “If you are one of these, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.” It is inclusive in that he is including those to whom he is writing. He isn’t writing about only the wicked people in the world.

Paul defines sin for the Ephesians and warns them of the consequences of sinning:

³ 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 God’s holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them (Ephesians 5:3-7).

Lest there be any question that these warnings include those who hold themselves out as Christians, Paul begins his warning to the Ephesians with the words, “But among you . . .” Paul specifically addresses them and warns them of the consequences of being immoral or impure or greedy. In this case he not only says they will not inherit the kingdom of God, but also says such people will be the objects of God’s wrath because they are disobedient.

Jesus, seated on his throne, told the Apostle John to write down this definition of sin and the warned of the consequences for sinning, “for these words are trustworthy and true”:

⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

We finally have the full picture. Many human actions are defined as sin. The Apostle John defined sin as lawlessness (1 John 3:4). He said all wrongdoing is sin (1 John 5:17). We’re warned multiple times that people who continue in sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then we’re warned that God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient – those who are committing those sins. Finally, Jesus himself warns all those who will thereafter read his Word that the place for sinners will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur – the place we commonly call hell – exactly what Jesus warned when he said it was better to gouge out the eye that causes sin or to cut off the hand that causes sin rather than be thrown into hell.

Unforgiveness Condemns

There is a special sin, not of commission, but of omission, that Jesus mentioned specially. Some of the church has tried to paper over this sin, saying that life will not be as pleasant or your relationships will not be as good if you do not forgive. But Jesus put a bottom line to unforgiveness that requires us to understand this issue and obey. Jesus gave us the model prayer (called “The Lord’s Prayer”). Verse 12 (below) is part of that prayer.

¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

Then Jesus explained a spiritual law in verses 14 and 15:

¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14-15).

In order for us to be saved, our sins MUST be forgiven. Jesus came to earth, born of a virgin, to die on a cross so our sins could be forgiven, so that we could be reconciled to God. If we could be saved without our sins being forgiven, Jesus died for nothing. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). It was not possible. Our sins could not be forgiven without Jesus dying for our sin, atoning for our sins by taking our punishment for our sins on himself.

But Jesus didn’t leave us wondering about this without further evidence. Instead he told us the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18). In this parable, the servant owed the master the equivalent of millions of dollars – a debt too large for him to pay. When he begged for time to pay, the master forgave the debt. Later the unforgiving servant took a fellow servant by the throat and demanded he pay him the small amount he owed; though he pleaded for mercy, the unforgiving servant had him thrown in prison until he should pay the small amount. When the master heard about this, he called in the unforgiving servant. This is what he said:

³² “You wicked servant,” he said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed” (Matthew 18:32-34).

Jesus called the servant wicked! The master reinstated the debt that he had earlier forgiven because the servant refused to forgive his fellow servant. Then he turned him over to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. We know from the beginning of the parable that the servant could not repay the debt.

Frightening for you and me, Jesus concluded the parable by a direct application to us:

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35).

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God will do the same to us – turn us over to be tortured until we can pay back all we owe. But we know that it took the perfect lamb – Jesus Christ – to atone for us so that our sins could be forgiven. If we could atone for them ourselves, Jesus didn't need to die. But he did. And we can't!

The simple black and white result: If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven and we cannot be saved. We can damn ourselves by our petty unforgiveness. God is willing to forgive us a monstrous debt caused by our sin that we can't repay. God requires that we forgive others whatever they may have done against us – it is puny compared to our offenses against God.

Don't for a moment get caught up in the favorite excuse for not forgiving, i.e., the person didn't ask to be forgiven. When they ask, I'll forgive! Will we put our salvation on the line for that? Why not just wholeheartedly forgive, no matter what is done to us? As an example for us, Jesus asked his Father to forgive those who were crucifying him. Stephen asked God to forgive those who were stoning him to death. None of those asked to be forgiven. Do we need better models?

Do we want God to say to us, "Sorry, you didn't ask to be forgiven of this (or that) sin. Therefore you are damned!" No, we're counting on God's grace so that if we had committed a sin, not remembering to confess it, that we're not damned. You and I need God's gracious forgiveness, even when we've not remembered or had time to ask forgiveness for each specific sin.

Parables of Jesus Showing Sinning That Condemns

We've just reviewed many sins that will cause loss of salvation for those who continue in them. In addition, Jesus told parables which further illustrated, in real-life settings, those who would forfeit eternal life by their actions. We've just seen that in the parable of the unforgiving servant. Let's examine some others:

The Parable of the Wise and Faithful Servant

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:45-51).

Jesus tells us both sides of this parable – the wise, faithful servant who will be rewarded by the master. But then he says, suppose that servant is wicked! What will happen to him? He will be punished terribly – the worst punishment of any of the parables – first being cut to pieces, though not killed, and then thrown into hell. The horror of this particular parable is that we're dealing with someone who is a servant of the Lord, albeit, in the second case he becomes wicked and unfaithful. This servant is in charge of other servants. He could be a

church leader, teacher, pastor, elder, or deacon. It doesn't matter what his title. Jesus said he will be condemned if he is not faithful and becomes wicked – sinful.

The Wedding Banquet

In this parable Jesus told about the King who prepared the banquet for his son. He had sent out invitations but the people who had been invited sinned by refusing to come. How did the King react?

⁷“The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city” (Matthew 22:7).

As the parable continues, the King invited others – all the people his servants could find, both good and bad – and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But then we find another lesson in the parable:

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:11-14).

The man came to the wedding but sinned by not fulfilling the requirement of the king to come in clothes suitable for a wedding. Isn't that similar to the people who come to church, act like they're Christians (and likely think they are), but sin by not obeying the teachings and commands of Jesus – thus sinning by not doing the will of God? Consider what the Apostle John heard in heaven:

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Those invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb (the Son of God) must be wearing fine linen – representing the righteous acts of the saints.

Parable of the Ten Virgins

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

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¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

¹²“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

¹³“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:1-13).

In this parable Jesus is warning to always be ready for his coming. That warning applies to the untimely death of each of us. Most of us will not experience the rapture. Instead we’ll die normal, but often unexpected, deaths. Will we be ready? Will we have oil in our lamps? Or will we hear Jesus say to us, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.” There is no doubt that those not known by Jesus will not enter heaven.

The Parable of the Talents

¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²²“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

²³“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸”“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:14-30).

This parable is applicable to all “Christians.” There are four people in this parable – three servants (Christians) plus the master (Jesus). Each servant is given talents to manage according to his ability. Those who sin because they do not use their talent(s) for the Lord Jesus will be condemned to hell. Jesus calls them wicked and “worthless servants.”

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’ ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46).

This fascinating parable is all about salvation, but is surprising in that it doesn’t speak at all about having faith. It speaks about showing faith – the evidence of faith through works. Jesus taught we are to love others as ourselves – and even the higher standard of loving our brothers as Jesus loves us. Those who had done that (the sheep) Jesus praised. To those who claimed to be Christians, but who sinned because they did not obey Jesus in showing love to their fellow man and their brothers in Christ, Jesus had this to say:

“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

Again, Jesus makes the point that his followers must live out the Christian life, not just give lip service to it. The price for refusing to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus is the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Jesus is the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:9). A true, saving faith includes obedience.

John's Tests Showing Sins That Condemn

In 1 John, the Apostle reviewed the issue of salvation, looking at many different facets of it. One of them had to do with sins that showed such persons were not in the Kingdom of God but were still in darkness.

Hating Your Brother

Do you remember Jesus' command that we are to love our brother as he loved us? What if we don't? What if we hate our brother? John answers those questions:

⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him (1 John 2:9-11).

But, you may ask, what has that to do with salvation? John answers that question also:

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him (1 John 3:14-15).

Should this give pause to people who seemingly detest others in their church fellowship – those who should be loved by them as their brothers? How about the people who are involved in church splits that become hateful? It appears such people should test themselves to see if they are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Loving the World

Those people who love the world are either part of the world or seem to want to be. What effect does that have on their relationship with the Lord Jesus and God our Father? Peter reminds us that true Christians are aliens and strangers in the world (1 Peter 2:11). We are not to be part of the world. But what about those who love the world and the things of the world? John warned:

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:15-16).

According to the Apostle John, loving the world and loving God are mutually exclusive. You cannot love God and love the world. John says the world is characterized by “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does.” Obviously all those things are sinful in God's eyes.

James spoke to the same problem. He said:

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⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 3:4).

James could hardly be more direct. Is anyone saved who has hatred toward God or who has become an enemy of God? Of course not!

Continuing In Sin

Can a true Christian continue in sin? The Apostle John answered that question two ways:

⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him (1 John 3:6). ¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin (1 John 5:18).

I think each of the first two sentences refers to a different scenario. The first, I believe, refers to the person who truly came to a saving faith. That person, who has seen and known the Lord Jesus, will not keep on sinning. He knows Jesus as his Master and Lord and knows his responsibility is to be a faithful, obedient servant to his Lord. If he should later sin and then continue in sin, he no longer lives in Christ Jesus as his Lord.

The second sentence, I believe, refers to those who appear to have come into the faith, but who have not changed their behavior, who continue in sin. Consider people who are living together outside of wedlock who come to church and claim to become new believers. However, they do not marry, but continue to live together in sexual intimacy. John says they are not believers; they have neither seen Jesus nor known him. They have not submitted to his Lordship over their lives and do not seek to please and obey him.

That is true of those with the secret sin of addiction to pornography. If a true believer becomes addicted to pornography, is he still in Christ Jesus? John says NO! If someone claims to have come to the Lord Jesus with a saving faith, but continues in his secret addiction to pornography, has he really become a believer? John says NO! Why? Pornography causes lust. Jesus said, "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Such a person is an adulterer, according to Jesus. Scripture says God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral (Hebrews 13:4). Paul assures us that adulterers will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Denying Jesus Is the Christ

We can sin by what we say and by what we believe. The Apostle John emphasized that Jesus is the Christ and that he came in the flesh. In his days, the Gnostics had already begun to pervert the Gospel. See what the Apostle John called them and what he said about them:

²² Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also (1 John 2:22-23).

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Is there any question about whether salvation is at stake here? John called these people liars, a category of sinners who will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). Now consider what Jesus said about those who disown him:

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32-33).

Can you imagine a scene in heaven where Jesus says, “He’s not one of mine!” Could there be salvation for anyone that Jesus has disowned before his Father in heaven? Of course not.

Sins of Omission That Cause Condemnation

Usually when we think of sin, we think of committing some act that is sinful. But there are also sins of omission. We’ll look at several:

Failure To Do Good

James described another sin of omission this way:

¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins (James 4:17).

Have you ever seen someone in need and felt you should do something to help? If you know you should, but don’t, you sin!

Failure To Forgive

We discussed earlier the special sin of not forgiving. That is another sin of omission. We are commanded to forgive. Jesus said we can’t be forgiven unless we forgive. Refusing to forgive will cost salvation.

Failure To Produce Fruit

Jesus told the parable of the vine and the branches and said: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit” (John 15:1-2). Again it is a sin of omission. The result is being cut off from Jesus by the Father. Can there be salvation for anyone cut off from Jesus by the Father?

Failure To Remain In Jesus

In the same parable of the vine and branches, Jesus continued: “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6). Again a sin of omission, failing to remain in Jesus, will cost salvation – being thrown into the fire and burned.

Failing To Obey

The Apostle John warned of another sin of omission:

We know that we have come to know him **if we obey his commands**. The man who says, “I know him,” but **does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him** (1 John 2:3-4).

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The person who does not do what Jesus commands continues in sin. It is a sin of omission. John says he does not know Jesus and is a liar. Jesus said all liars will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

Failure To Deny Yourself

Jesus said that anyone who would come after him must obey an unconditional command:

²³ “If anyone would come after me, **he must deny himself** and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it (Luke 9:23-24).

The condition is “if anyone would come after me.” If we would come after him, then we must do what he says – we must deny our self. Those who would save their “self” will lose it. We must deny our “self” and follow Jesus in order to have salvation. If we fail to do so, we have committed a sin of omission that will cost salvation.

Failure To Take Up One’s Cross Daily

Jesus said we must take up our cross daily:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and **take up his cross daily** and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?” (Luke (9:23-25).

So many people don’t want to take up a cross and die to self on it. They want to save their life, but Jesus says they will lose it. They will lose eternal life – salvation. To want to save one’s “self” is active sin. To fail to take up our cross daily is the sin of omission.

In Jesus’ day people were crucified on crosses, one of the most painful and humiliating public deaths. Yet that is what Paul said we must do as we take up our cross daily:

⁶ For we know that **our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—**⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:6-7).

Each day it seems our sin nature can be resurrected from our flesh. Each day we must crucify our self so that we are no longer slaves to sin. Jesus requires we die to sin. Those who refuse to crucify their self remain slaves to sin. They have neither salvation nor eternal life.

Failure To Follow Jesus

We are also required to follow Jesus. It is not enough to simply try to be free from sin and die to self. All three requirements must be met:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me.** ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it (Mark 8:34-35).

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On other occasions Jesus stated:

Anyone who does not take his cross **and follow me** is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:38). ²⁷ And anyone who does not **carry his cross and follow me** cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27).

Is there any question about whether this is a salvation issue? Jesus said we must both carry our cross and follow him or we are not worthy of him and we cannot be his disciples. Only disciples of Jesus will be saved. Only those worthy of him will be saved. It is not enough to say you serve God. Multitudes throughout the world say that. **The one thing that differentiates biblical Christianity from all other religions is that Christians follow the Lord Jesus Christ and him only (John 14:6).** It is because of the name of Jesus that his followers are persecuted. We should not be surprised if we are persecuted as he was.

Failure To Hate One's Own Life And Those Most Loved By Us

Jesus did not teach us to hate. But the Jewish manner of making a point was to use an extreme example. In this command Jesus said his followers should hate their closest, most loved relatives – even their own lives:

²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not **hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life**—he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26).

Jesus' point makes the contrast: we are to love Jesus so much more than we love our most loved relatives and even our own lives.

The salvation issue comes through loud and clear. We must do this or we cannot be his disciples; we must do this or we cannot be saved and have eternal life. It is a sin of omission when we fail or refuse to do what Jesus has commanded us to do.

Failure To Give Up Everything

When Jesus came to earth as a man, he gave up more than we can begin to imagine. In heaven He was the Word who was God, with all honor and glory and majesty, but he came to earth as a man to die for us, to save us and to reconcile us to God (Philippians 2:5-8). We are required to give up everything we have, just as Jesus gave up everything – the majesty, honor, and glory of heaven – to become a servant who would be crucified. Jesus first illustrated the point for us this way:

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

If you recall the wars described in the Old Testament, sometimes every person in the losing army was killed. That is the scene Jesus is setting here. The king with the smaller army, knowing that he and all his men may be killed, asks for terms of peace. He offers everything he has, including that he and his men will become slaves of their conquerors, if only he and his men may live.

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Then Jesus made the application to us:

³³ In the same way, **any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple** (Luke 14:31-33).

Our King Jesus requires the same of us. We must give up everything we have, everything that we think is of value, including our lives – we must become slaves to God (Romans 6:22) so we can be part of his kingdom, so we can have eternal life and all that is of real value. Unless we do that, we cannot be Jesus' disciple – we cannot be saved. If we refuse, we continue in sin – a sin of omission, in rebellion against the teachings and commands of our Lord Jesus.

Failure To Do The Will Of God

Jesus warned:

²¹ **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven** (Matthew 7:21).

Again we see this is a salvation issue. **We must do the will of God.** It is not enough to know it or hear about it or listen to innumerable sermons about it. We must do it or we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What about people who appear to be “super-Christians.” They appear to have the gifts of the Spirit, perhaps healing people, casting out demons, and speaking in tongues. Surely they are assured of salvation. No. Jesus said quite the contrary:

²² **“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’** ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, **‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’** (Matthew 7:22-23).

What was wrong with these “super-Christians”? Jesus told us. They were evildoers. Paul taught, “Everyone who confesses the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (2 Timothy 2:19). Though they appeared to be powerful Christians, perhaps they harbored pride or unforgiveness or exalted their “self” instead of dying to self. Whatever it was, Jesus saw through their actions to their hearts; he saw they were sinning by not doing the will of God.

What is the will of God? What is the Christian to obey? I've written in depth on this subject. The articles “Which Law Does the Christian Obey?” and “Sabbath, Sunday, Or . . .” can be found at www.bereanpublishers.com under the heading Important Issues. The subject is extensive and more than should be included here. You are encouraged to read those articles for a complete review of that issue. I will try to summarize some points here.

Jesus' arrival as the Christ marked the change of law and priesthood. Scripture says, “For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a **change of the law**” (Hebrews 7:12). Paul called the new law “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), that body of Jesus' commands and teachings that Jesus commanded be taught to every new disciple – “Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

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Jesus did not merely suggest that believers should obey him. He stated as fact that true believers – those who love him – will obey him. He said, “If you love me, **you will obey** what I command” (John 14:15). The law of Christ – the teachings and commands of Jesus – is found primarily in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament of the Bible.

Jesus reaffirmed many of the Old Testament commands. For example, he reaffirmed nine of the Ten commandments. He did not command observance of the Sabbath.

Jesus changed some commands and strengthened others. He commanded that we not swear at all, thus assuring we not break the Third Commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.” As to committing adultery, he said that if a man looks lustfully after a woman, he commits adultery in his heart.

It becomes extremely important to understand and to obey these commands. For example, no adulterer will enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus created a standard where those who lustfully watch pornography are guilty of adultery. A recent survey of pastors said that 24% (to the best of my memory) of those who responded were addicted to pornography! It has been said that over half of all internet use is to view pornography. Imagine the number of people involved in activity that will send them to hell! Do they know this? Do they know the teachings and commands of Jesus? We should. We all have Bibles. There is no excuse!

Failure To Repent

Jesus warned:

“But **unless you repent, you too will all perish**” (Luke 13:3,5).

Another important sin of omission, we must obey and repent or perish.

Failure To Be Born Again

Jesus taught:

“I tell you the truth, **no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again**” (John 3:3).

What if we fail to do what is necessary to be born again? Can we be saved? Jesus made it unequivocal – NO ONE can be saved unless he is born again.

Failure To Be Righteous

Jesus warned:

“For I tell you that **unless** your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly **not enter the kingdom of heaven**” (Matthew 5:20).

Some like to say that we can never be righteous ourselves, but that Christians are assured of imputed righteousness through Christ Jesus. Much of the New Testament, however, focuses on, teaches, and insists that we be experientially righteous in the way we live. I believe that when we do the best we can to live lives pleasing to God, the righteousness of our Lord Jesus

will be imputed to us to make up for what we lack. However, the base requirement is that we try to live righteously, as best we can. You can see from this discussion on sin that there is condemnation for those who continue in sin, even the sins of omission.

Failure To Persevere

Jesus warned:

“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). Paul confirmed this fact: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2. See also Colossians 1:21-23).

There are many who seek to ignore these clear warnings. Failure to persevere is a sin of omission. We are to persevere against everything. The only person who can defeat us is ourselves. There is no outside person or power that can take us out of the hand of God (see John 10:28-29 and Romans 8:38-29).

Doctrines That Excuse Sinning!

Men have created doctrines that claim to permit them to continue sinning without losing their salvation. These doctrines are contrary to Jesus’ teachings and Scripture. They are false doctrines that make Jesus’ warnings about sin appear to be without force or merit.

The Doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security

This doctrine, sometimes called “Once saved, always saved,” (OSAS) teaches that once you have made a sincere confession of faith, you are forever saved and cannot be “unsaved” or lose your salvation. An extensive analysis can be found at <http://www.bereanpublishers.com> under False Doctrines in the article “Is the Believer Eternally Secure?”

To apply that to the issue of forgiveness, if you were not to forgive after you have made a sincere confession of faith, according to the scriptures just discussed, God would not forgive you and you would be subject to the tortures of hell. But, according to the proponents of the Unconditional Eternal Security (UES) doctrine, those scriptures cannot be true if you are “once saved, always saved.” Somehow they have made ineffective great portions of Scripture that deal with sin and how continuing in sin will deny salvation.

Dr. Stanley’s Teachings

Some may doubt what I have just said, so I will quote from the writings of Dr. Charles Stanley, one of the most outspoken proponents of this doctrine. His book *Eternal Security Can You Be Sure?*² can be found in most Christian bookstores.

Dr. Stanley defines unconditional eternal security as “eternal security is that work of God in which He guarantees that the gift of salvation once received is possessed forever and cannot be lost.”³ Those who hold this doctrine often teach that if a person has once made a sincere

² Stanley, Charles, *Eternal Security Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990),

³ Stanley, Charles, “Eternal Security What Do We Have To Lose?”, Tape #6, MI090.

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confession of faith by trusting Jesus as his Savior for the forgiveness of sin that person has salvation and can never lose that salvation.

A reader unfamiliar with this doctrine may find it almost unbelievable that people would have created such a doctrine, recognizing immediately it is contrary to the teachings of Scripture. But it gets even worse.

Dr. Stanley says:

“It is not lying, cheating, stealing, raping, murdering, or being unfaithful that sends people to hell.”⁴

Strange, isn't it, that the scriptures we looked at said the exact opposite. None of those Scriptures made any exceptions for those who claim to have once received the gift of salvation. Just the contrary, those scriptures were written to Christians in the early churches.

However, Dr. Stanley writes:

But if a man or woman who has been rescued once from a state of unforgiveness need not worry. For **once 100 percent of a man's or woman's sins have been forgiven, the potential for being unforgiven has been done away with**. The risk factor is zero. There are no more fires from which the believer needs to be saved.⁵ [Emphasis added.]

As you see from the prior quotation, those who subscribe to the eternal security doctrine will assure you that nothing you thereafter do will affect your salvation if you are certain that you once were rescued from a state of unforgiveness. According to Dr. Stanley, there are no sins that can affect your salvation, notwithstanding what Scripture says, no matter that Paul warned both the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Galatians about sins that would prevent those practicing them from inheriting the kingdom of God, and no matter that Jesus told the Apostle John about sins that would cause people to be condemned to hell. According to Dr. Stanley, none of those scriptures can pertain to those who hold to the doctrine of eternal security if they once trusted in Jesus for forgiveness of sins and received the gift of salvation.

Dr. Stanley goes even further. He wrote:

“The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His People is of such magnitude that **even those who walk away from the faith** have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand.”⁶ On other occasions he taught, “**Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy**”⁷ and “. . . **believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation . . .**”⁸
[Emphasis added.]

⁴ Ibid, p. 70.

⁵ Ibid, pages 79-80.

⁶ Ibid, page 74.

⁷ Ibid, page 93.

⁸ Ibid, page 94.

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We've just seen from the teachings of Jesus and his parables that none of the above teaching of Dr. Stanley is biblical. It is a great deception. How many millions of people will endure hell's fires because they believed the teaching of Dr. Stanley and others who assure them there is unconditional eternal security? Dr. Stanley's influence in the Christian church is immense. He was twice president of the Southern Baptist Convention. His international TV and radio program, "In Touch," is broadcast throughout the world.

Dr. Stanley also claims:

“. . . God does not require a constant attitude of faith in order to be saved – only an act of faith.”⁹ He says, “It [saving faith] is a singular moment in time wherein we take what God has offered.”¹⁰ He wrote: “Faithful or not, every person who has at any time had saving faith is a permanent part of the body of Christ.”¹¹ [Emphasis added.]

Scripture, however, has quite a different message, emphasizing that it is continued faith and faithfulness that counts. The idea of a one-time commitment that saves forever is false. Consider Paul's warning to the Corinthians:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. **Otherwise, you have believed in vain** (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). [Emphasis added.]

This scripture is especially important as Paul acknowledges the Corinthians received the gospel, took their stand on it, and are saved if they hold firmly to it. What if they don't hold firmly to it? Paul warns **they will have believed in vain**.

Likewise, Paul's warning to the Colossians:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — **if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel**. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Colossians 1:21-23). See also James 1:12).

Jesus emphasized perseverance in his parables, as we saw above. He also warned: “All men will hate you because of me, but **he who stands firm to the end will be saved**” (Matthew 10:22) and “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but **he who stands firm to the end will be saved**” (Matthew 24:12-13).

We saw that God requires fruit in the life of the believer or he will be cut off from the vine, thrown into the fire and burned. But Dr. Stanley claims, “. . . we are presented with a

⁹ Supra 6, p. 80

¹⁰ Ibid, page 81.

¹¹ Ibid, page 94.

Christian who at **no point in his entire life bore any eternal fruit. And yet his salvation is never jeopardized**¹² and “. . . there are **Christians who show no evidence of their Christianity** as well.”¹³ [Emphasis added.]

Each of us has the ability to choose right or wrong, eternal life or condemnation to hell, if we have heard the Gospel. Some will inadvertently choose condemnation and eternity in hell by accepting a false doctrine, believing it to be true. Their blood will be on the heads of those false teachers. That is true of those who wilfully continue in sin, believing it is not a salvation issue, because of the teachings of the doctrine of eternal security (once saved, always saved) as presented by Dr. Stanley and many of the best known preachers in America and other western nations.

Calvinism

This theology was begun with Augustine, centuries later endorsed by Luther, and then greatly expanded and popularised by Calvin to the extent it became known by his name. The early Christian churches of the first two centuries knew nothing of such doctrines. It appears to have been invented by Augustine in the third century.

Though there are five theological points to Calvinism, the only one we need to consider is that of Predestination. Calvinism teaches that before the creation of the world God predestined those who will be saved and those who will be damned.

Calvinists emphasize the sovereignty of God, believing God sovereignly determined who would be saved long before any individual had an opportunity to accept or reject God's salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. They also emphasize grace because by their view man does nothing, and can do nothing, to gain salvation. Calvinism's efficacious or "irresistible grace" is defined as that grace that reaches down from God and saves you, irrespective of your desire or intent; it is both irresistible and permanent.¹⁴

All of these beliefs arise from the Calvinists' assertion that before the creation of the world God predestined who would be saved. If one is predestined by God to be saved he will be, no matter what his wishes are, no matter how he lives, no matter what. According to the Calvinists, God exercises his sovereignty and saves those whom he chooses to save and damns those whom he chooses to damn.

Man is No Longer Accountable

But is this what Scripture says? Or is this doctrine a creation of men who misinterpreted Scripture? Their motives could have been pure or they could have been tainted by man's continuing desire not to be accountable. After all, if predestination is true, how can God hold anyone accountable? By their view, the reason a person is saved is not by anything he has done, but rather is dependent solely upon whether a sovereign God predestined him to be saved.

¹² Ibid, page 121.

¹³ Ibid, page 71.

¹⁴ Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979), page 165.

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Calvinists claim that those predestined to be saved are irresistibly moved upon by the Holy Spirit and are brought to repentance and faith, and thus made heirs of eternal life.¹⁵ But they claim such actions are totally that of God, that man has done nothing and is incapable of doing anything to receive or accept salvation.¹⁶

Many, perhaps most, possibly all of Christ's commands and the teachings of the New Testament become irrelevant if one is predestined to be saved or to be damned. His command to make disciples of all nations is apparently a nice idea, but it makes no sense to try to make disciples of those who are predestined to be damned. Nor is it really important to evangelize those who are predestined to be saved because the sovereign God will make sure they are saved through "irresistible grace" with or without help from anyone else.

Faith, purity, righteousness, holiness and obedience all become nice concepts under Calvinism but are irrelevant as to salvation.¹⁷ One will not be saved by anything if the Sovereign God has not predestined him to be saved. Nothing any person can do or wants to do, pro or con, will affect whether he is saved; ultimately, it is all dependent on God's election – God's predestination of those who will be saved.

As you have already seen, from the scriptures that showed that those who continue in various sins will not inherit the kingdom of God, sin can prevent us from being saved. Continuing in sin shows we are in rebellion against the Lord Jesus who commands us to live righteous, pure, and holy lives. The many proofs of the falsity of Calvinism will not be shown here, but are shown in the articles found at <http://www.bereanpublishers.com> under False Doctrines.

Future Sins Forgiven

One of the fruits of the Doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security (as shown from the writings of Dr. Stanley) is that both past and future sins are forgiven.

This seems to be a necessary corollary to the doctrine of once saved, always saved. Otherwise, if a person who once had a saving faith began to sin and then continued to commit sins condemned by Jesus and the New Testament writers, that person could lose his salvation. But the doctrine strictly forbids such a thought. Thus it is the Scripture that must be bent and changed so that its interpretation conforms to the doctrine. If one's future sins are forgiven, then there will be nothing for God to charge against such a person. And the person has a blank check, after once being forgiven, to commit any kind of sin without concern for loss of salvation. That is exactly what Dr. Stanley teaches.

¹⁵ *Id.* at page 163.

¹⁶ *Id.* at pages 162-163.

¹⁷ But Scripture says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). And, "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Jesus said, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Peter said, ". . . you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth . . ." (1 Peter 1:22). Paul taught, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17, quote from Hab. 2:4). Paul said his God-given mission was "to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5).

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You may be horrified that anyone could have evolved such false doctrine. Yet that doctrine is being taught in pulpits throughout the western world.

Peter spoke to this issue:

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Peter 1:5-9).

The meaning of Peter's statement seems obvious, the same understanding each of us would normally have. If it were possible that all future sins would be forgiven, then it would be totally unnecessary for anyone to repent or seek forgiveness from God after having once been forgiven. Yet John obviously thought we would continue to need God's forgiveness:

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives (1 John 1:8-10).

From the prior scripture, we must conclude (if we believe that our future sins have all been forgiven) that John is speaking to unbelievers. They are the only ones, according to that doctrine, who have sins that are not forgiven. But that is not so! In 1 John 2:12-14, John makes clear that he is writing to believers, those who know God, whose sins have been forgiven (v. 12). John said even the believers are not without sin; they must confess their sins and God will forgive "us" our sins and purify "us" from all unrighteousness.

The most convincing of all, to me, is from the Lord's prayer:

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us **today** our **daily** bread. ¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:9-12).

Note this prayer is intended to be daily. The prayer is for "daily" bread. Thus the prayer for forgiveness will also be daily. And, note, the prayer for forgiveness is conditional, asking to be forgiven as we forgive others. You'll note the ominous results in the earlier section on "Unforgiveness" for those who do not forgive others.

Instead of Scripture affirming that our future sins are forgiven, Jesus teaches us to pray each day that our sins may be forgiven.

Forgive

Consider the unequivocal statement by Jesus after he taught his disciples the "Lord's prayer":

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¹⁵ “But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”
(Matthew 6:15).

Suppose a person comes to the Lord and, according to this false doctrine, all their sins are forgiven. But later that person refuses to forgive someone else. Jesus said, in that case, his Father will not forgive that person’s sins. But the false doctrine says he has already forgiven them. A conflict exists. Do we choose what Jesus said or the false doctrine?

Further proof of that is found in the passage in Matthew 18:23-35 that we looked at earlier, regarding the unforgiving servant. In that parable the King forgave all the man’s debt. But afterward, the unforgiving servant refused to forgive another servant’s tiny debt. What did the King do? Did he say, “Well, there’s nothing I can do, I’ve already forgiven all his debt and his future debt?” NO! Instead, he reinstated the debt he had earlier forgiven and turned the unforgiving servant over to the torturers until he should pay all (which he could never do, thus being consigned to eternal torture).

Scripture once again proves that future sins are not forgiven ahead of time. Forgiveness must be sought and there must be repentance. The example of the need to forgive others as we have been forgiven shows that forgiving others is absolutely essential for forgiveness and salvation.

Repent

Examples of the proof of the continuing need to repent – defined as turning from sin and turning to God – are the letters to the churches in the second and third chapters of the Revelation. There the glorified Jesus is dictating to his Apostle John letters to the churches.

Let’s remember, these are churches Jesus is writing to! Based on the false belief that future sins are also forgiven, if one is ever once forgiven, then these churches should have had nothing for which to repent. If that false doctrine were true, their future sins were already forgiven as well as those in the past.

Obviously this is not so. As you read these excerpts from the seven letters, you’ll see that five of the seven churches had to be told to repent of sin. Only the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna were following obediently after Christ and did not need to be rebuked.

To the church at Ephesus, Jesus said: “You have forsaken your first love. ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! **Repent** and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:4-5).

To the church at Pergamum, Jesus warned: ¹⁵ “Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ **Repent** therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:15-16).

To the church at Thyatira, Jesus wrote: ²¹ “I have given her time to **repent** of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they **repent** of her ways. ²³ I will strike her

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children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds” (Revelation 2:21-23).

To the church at Sardis, Jesus commanded: “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and **repent**. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you” (Revelation 3:2-3).

To the church of Laodicea, Jesus said: ¹⁹ “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and **repent**” (Revelation 3:19).

Let us also remember that we are to be faithful and obedient to our Lord Jesus each and every day. When we fail him, when we sin, we are to obediently and quickly repent and ask for forgiveness. We should see the necessity for keeping short accounts with God – frequently confessing any sin and asking his help to turn from it and turn to him alone for forgiveness and deliverance from sin.

Romans 7:14-24

This passage of Scripture has been quoted by many well-meaning people as illustrating the very difficult task (they say) of living the Christian life. They have apparently forgotten that Jesus said his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30). Paul says in that passage that those things he would do he does not do, and the things he would not do, those he does. It is the picture of a troubled person without peace. But the Christian life is noted for its peace; peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, Romans 7:14-24 is abused by people who say, “If Paul couldn’t be obedient and couldn’t get rid of the sin in his life, how can I? Am I more spiritual than Paul?” So they use the passage as an excuse for sinful living, as if Paul’s description is the norm for the Christian life.

Reading carefully that passage, Paul calls his spiritual state wretched (Romans 7:24)! He seems spiritually tormented. He describes himself as needing rescuing. Is his spiritual condition something he would recommend others emulate? A loving, caring person wouldn’t recommend Paul’s condition to his worst enemy.

But that is what Paul does. He holds out himself and his life as an example to the Christians of his day, often calling them to live as he did and to follow his teachings that he said agreed with his life. Consider what he told the churches about himself:

Paul says he has a clear conscience (2 Timothy 1:3), has fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). He said, “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 (2 Corinthians 1:12). We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one (2 Corinthians 7:2). Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you (1 Thessalonians 2:9. See also 2 Corinthians 11:22-29). He continued, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of

Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul said his way of life in Christ Jesus agrees with what he taught everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17). Paul urged his readers to live a life worthy of the calling they received (Ephesians 4:1. See also 2 Timothy 2:2).

Would Paul exhort others to follow his example if his example were "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing"? (Romans 7:19). Absolutely not! It was Paul who wrote that those who do evil will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

In the article "Romans 7 Revisited," I reviewed at length the proofs that this scripture passage does not, and cannot, refer to Paul as a Christian. In that passage he is describing the struggle of a person who desired to serve God (Saul as a Pharisee, before he was converted), and how impossible it was for him to do so. Please see these proofs at www.bereanpublishers.com under the heading False Doctrines.

Differences In Sin

The Unforgivable Sin

There is an unforgivable sin. Jesus describes it:

³¹ And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31-32).

Not many seem to be clear about what constitutes blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. We may often hear Jesus' name used in vain, but I've never heard the Holy Spirit's name used in vain in the same way. Is that because of an inherent fear of committing the unforgivable sin?

The context in which Jesus told us of the unforgivable sin was a confrontation with the Pharisees. This is what they said after Jesus had driven out demons:

²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons" (Matthew 12:24).

The Pharisees were imputing to Jesus the power of the devil, but Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees were claiming the power of the Holy Spirit was really the power of the devil. To do that may be the unforgivable sin.

Have you ever heard someone in the church say of someone else who had a spiritual gift with which he did not agree say, "That's of the devil!" I fear for that person's salvation and pray that I have never said such a thing.

Sin Beyond Repentance

In perhaps one of the most fearsome passages in Scripture, the writer to the Hebrews describes someone who has experienced fully the Christian life, but falls away:

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⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace (Hebrews 6:4-6).

We know the persons described here were truly Christians because they shared in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not given to non-believers, nor will they be able to share in the Holy Spirit. How frightful this is! “Impossible . . . to be brought back to repentance,” he says. The passage also reminds us that true Christians can fall away from the faith.

Pray for Some Sins

John was concluding his first epistle when he wrote:

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death (1 John 5:16-17).

Is John also talking about the unforgivable sin that Jesus described as “as sin that leads to death”? Perhaps, as it is stated in the singular. Interestingly, he states we should not waste our time and God’s time by praying about that. Therefore it must be unforgivable – something that cannot and will not be forgiven.

Deliberate Sin

Have you or I been guilty of doing something we know is wrong – of deliberately sinning? Likely so. But I wonder if we know what Scripture says about this.

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I did not include this scripture under the section titled Unforgivable Sin because of two key words: “keep on.” Those who persist in deliberate sin will be dealt with according to this passage. Salvation? No! The wrath of God? Yes! Deliberate sin is NOT an option for the Christian. Note this passage is for Christians. Note the second word: “we.” Yes, if WE do this, notwithstanding that we may think we are Christians, this passage describes our fate.

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Shouldn't we each carefully consider our lives? What are we doing that is a deliberate sin? Could it be that we gossip about others? We know gossip is often false, thus it is not only slander but also lying. Didn't Jesus say that there will be no liars in heaven? How about the person that habitually stretches the truth . . . into a falsehood. Isn't that also lying?

Again consider the epidemic problem today of those addicted to pornography. Any Christian knows it is wrong. To engage in it is a deliberate sin. This passage describes what such a person has to look forward to. It calls for all of us to REPENT – to turn from our sin and to turn to God.

Sin By Actions Not From Faith

Paul discussed for the Romans the problems of his day in which some foods had been offered to idols. Paul revealed to us a spiritual principle:

²³ But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and **everything that does not come from faith is sin** (Romans 14:23).

For example, if a person has a question in his mind about whether it is permissible to drink wine he should not do so. He cannot do it from faith. For him it would be sin. For the person who believes in his heart it is perfectly fine to drink wine, he can do so without sin.

Sin Is Lawlessness

We saw earlier that the law the New Testament Christian is to obey is the law of Christ – the teachings and commands of Jesus. The Apostle John says that when a person sins, he breaks the law.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).

But “the law” includes more than the law of Christ. From a reasonable interpretation of John's definition, we should conclude that when we break secular law we sin. That can include something as simple as the speed limit. It can also cover the act of fudging on one's income tax return. Anything that would be dishonest and contrary to God's law and man's law will be sin.

Perhaps there is an exception that should be noted. If the secular authorities command actions that are contrary to the word of God, we must make a choice of the law that we will obey. Will we obey God's law and break man's law? Or, because the consequences may be severe, will we obey man's law and break God's law? There will be a time when people then living (and it could be you and me) will have to make the choice of receiving the mark of the beast, according to the secular command of the day, or refuse on the basis that God's word says that all who take it will be forever damned. The punishment by the secular authorities, according to Scripture, may be extreme:

¹⁶ He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, ¹⁷ so that **no one could buy or sell** unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name (Revelation 13:16-17).

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Imagine not being able to get groceries because you didn't have the mark. Likely, even though you had money in a bank, the banking system would not allow you to get money from your accounts. But there is also evidence in Scripture, that the penalties could be much worse for those who refuse to obey the secular authorities:

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands (Revelation 20:4).

Yes, the alternative to receiving the mark may be death by being beheaded. Will it be easier to obey the secular authorities or God? I'm reminded of Jesus' warning: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24).

What About Those Who Cause Others to Sin?

Jesus said God has special thoughts about such people:

⁶ But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but **woe to the man through whom they come!** (Matthew 18:6-7).

In these days of powerful media images, there are many who may be causing others to sin. Consider the entire abortion industry who for profit seek to cause women to abort their babies. Consider the movies that are filled with violence, obscenities and illicit sex. Think of the magazines that advance the same kinds of themes. Then there are the popular recording stars, the recording companies, and the stores which sell these materials. All are part of commercial enterprises that seem to encourage and cause others to sin (according to God's standards – the law of Christ). There are those who entice others to try drugs and alcohol, many times leading to addiction.

It can be much closer to home, however. The person in the small group who suggests wrongful behavior and, because of peer pressure, causes innocent ones to sin. In the home itself, there can be the unwise, ungodly actions of parents that cause their little ones to be led into sin.

The Fate of Those Who Sin and Do Evil

Parables

Jesus often revealed the punishment for sinning and disobedience through parables. Let's consider some that describe the punishment of those who are wicked and disobedient:

Parable of the Weeds

Jesus told the parable of the landowner who planted wheat but found that an enemy had sown weeds into his wheat. He told his servants that they would wait until the harvest and separate the weeds from the wheat. The weeds would be burned in the fire. Then Jesus explained:

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² **They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**

(Matthew 13:41-42).

Notice what will be weeded out of his kingdom! Everything that causes sin and all who do evil. Will we be among those who do evil? Or will we be those who are slaves to righteousness?

Where will they go? Doesn't a fiery furnace sound similar to hell? Isn't that where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth?

Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus said the rich man died and was buried. That must be the end of it. But no! Jesus described suffering:

²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire'" (Luke 16:22-24).

This parable gives us the best insight into what happens after death, at least what happened after death before Christ's death and resurrection. We know from this parable that there is hell, that it is a place of torment, and there is fire there. We also know this was the place the person was sent who was rich, dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day (Luke 16:19). It sounds much like Jesus' warning, ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort" (Luke 6:24).

The Parable of the Unfaithful Servant

Then there is the parable we looked at before of the faithful and unfaithful servants. Jesus said this about the unfaithful servant's punishment:

⁴⁸ "But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:48-51).

This powerful parable shows what happens to one of God's servants in charge of others who loses sight of the goal and becomes wicked; he does not persevere in faithfulness and holiness. It is the only parable that speaks of being cut to pieces (one might think of a cat of

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nine tails ripping and tearing the flesh) as well as being thrown into hell with the hypocrites. This is a good example of Jesus' warning that those who know much will have much expected of them. This servant knew much – he was given responsibility over others – but in spite of that he was unfaithful.

This person was a hypocrite. He knew what his master wanted but rebelled. What about the innumerable “Christians” who appear so pious on Sunday at church but live like the devil the rest of the week? It isn't any wonder that unbelievers often speak disdainfully of Christians as hypocrites!

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

This parable, also reviewed earlier, has two parts, the first dealing with those who were invited but would not come. They were severely punished by the King. The second part deals with the King reviewing his guests who had come from everywhere the servants could find people to invite. He found one who was not dressed in wedding garments:

¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him **outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**’” (Matthew 22:13).

The man had been invited and he came. What was his error? How does Jesus mean that he was not dressed in wedding garments? Consider Jesus' warning:

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.
⁸ **Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.**
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints) (Revelation 19:7-8).

The man's error was in his life. He did not possess the righteous acts of a saint. He was one of the many who are part of a Christian culture, perhaps going to church regularly, but not letting the truths of the Gospel get from his head to his heart. He did not live out the Christian life.

Parable of the Talents

In this parable, also reviewed earlier, the servants were given talents by their master to use for him. One servant did not use it. Instead he buried it. When asked what he had done with it, he simply returned it to his master. The others had multiplied the talents given to them. The master said:

³⁰ “And throw that worthless servant **outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**” (Matthew 25:30).

This parable warns us that we can be condemned for what we do not do. The place is one of darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It seems to be another description of what hell is like and what happens there.

Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

We looked at the full text of this parable earlier. It is a remarkable parable in that the only mention by which the people are judged is by what they've done. There is no mention of

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their faith, whether they believed or what they believed. It was only actions. One group, the sheep, obviously were obedient Christians. They visited the sick and those in prison, they clothed the naked and gave food to the hungry. Jesus said what they did, they did it as unto him.

But the other group did none of those things. What was their fate?

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”
(Matthew 25:46).

Their sin was one of omission. They did not do what the Lord Jesus had told them to do. They did not love their brothers as Jesus loved them. This parable clearly states where they went and unequivocally states hell is eternal punishment!

Jesus' Description of Punishment

Christians are fortunate to have the Word of God that reveals to them what will happen at the end of time. We know the ending, but also are warned about what will happen to those without a saving faith. The requirement is that those who would be saved must have their name in the Lamb's book of life. Those whose names are not written there are condemned:

¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death”
(Revelation 21:8).

Nothing impure will ever enter it [heaven], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:17).

We should be sure we qualify for salvation. The stakes are so high. Eternity with God and the Lord Jesus in heaven or eternity in a fiery lake of burning sulphur. It is any wonder Paul exhorts us: ⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We should examine ourselves often. Are we strong in the faith? Are we living lives we know to be pleasing to the Lord? Are we obedient to the Lord Jesus' teachings and commands? Are we faithfully doing those works that God prepared in advance for us to do? Or are we hiding our talent that we buried in the ground? Are we part of the Christian culture, but have no real connection with the Lord Jesus and are not following him obediently as our Lord? Are we a second or third generation “Christian” who has not personally submitted his life to the Lord Jesus to be his bond slave? We must continually remind ourselves that unless we give up everything we have, we cannot be the Lord's disciple.

The Standard For Judgment

We are properly taught in our churches that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Unfortunately, we don't bother to thoroughly investigate what "faith" means as used in that scripture. Unknown to most people today, I believe, are the scriptures that tell the standard by which we will be judged by God. Let's look at some of these. The most persuasive is what was shown to John about the final White Throne Judgment:

The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.¹³
The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done
(Revelation 20:12-13).

How can this be? Where is the simple requirement for faith that will save, that enables the person to plead, "I believed in (had faith in) Jesus as my Savior! I must qualify to enter heaven." No, that is not the standard (and being saved by believing in Jesus "as Savior" has no support anywhere in Scripture. A discussion of a true, saving faith is found at www.bereanpublishers.com under Book: *Saving Faith*).

Numerous other passages speak of being judged according to what we have done: Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matthew 16:27);¹² "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Revelation 22:12).

There are two sides to the judgment, reward or punishment. Paul explained:⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done."⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (Romans 2:6-8).

Doesn't this seem inconsistent with "believing" and "having faith" unto salvation? It may seem so, but it is not. Paul (above) and James provide the keys:¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? . . .¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. . . .²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. . .²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead (James 2:14,17,24,26).

Faith – true, saving faith – will be evidenced by action, fruit, works, and obedience. False faith or dead faith will be evidenced by sin and evil in the life of a person. What we have done (good or evil) is recorded in God's books and will determine how we are judged. Our good works, fruit, and obedience do not save us; they cannot save us. Rather, they are simply evidence that we have a true, saving faith.

Sin and evil in our lives proves we have a false faith, just as the lack of works, fruit, and obedience proves we have a dead faith. Both false faith and dead faith will reap God's wrath and judgment in the lake of fire.

Instructions for the Church

In light of the warnings of Scripture pertaining to sin, what is the church (which includes individual Christians) to do? How are they to act and react to those who hold themselves out as Christians but continue in sin? Paul must have experienced this problem because he wrote about it to the Thessalonians and to Timothy.

Shunning!

The Amish and Mennonites practiced the scriptural command not to associate with those who are living in sin. They call the practice “shunning.” Paul first taught it to the Thessalonians:

⁹ I have written you in my letter **not to associate** with sexually immoral people — ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must **not associate** with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to **keep away from every brother** who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

¹⁴ If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. **Do not associate with him**, in order that he may feel ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

Paul recognized that even church leaders may go astray. After stating that criticism of an elder should only be entertained when brought by two or three witnesses, he gave the rule:

²⁰ **Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly**, so that the others may take warning (1 Timothy 5:20).

The purpose of the public rebuke is the health and purity of the body of Christ. If others see that sinful behavior is not tolerated in the body, perhaps (hopefully) this will deter them from behaving in an un-Christlike manner. It is intended to keep one person’s sin from contaminating those who are innocent of sin. It is much like the bushel of apples that contains a rotten apple. Almost immediately it will begin to rot those nearest to it. Left alone, it will cause the entire bushel to rot. No wonder Paul’s instruction is to have nothing to do with such people. We are not to associate with, or even eat with, such a person.

Then Paul recites a list of terrible things that will happen in the last days (perhaps the very days in which we live). Note his final advice (in verse 5):

There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers

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of God—⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

We are not to associate with people who hold themselves out as Christians but live in sin. As Paul told the Thessalonians, we are not to regard such people as the enemy, but people who have to be warned as brothers. We do not associate with them to show them that their actions are not acceptable for Christians. If we do associate with them, we seem to be giving our tacit approval to their sinful behavior or, at the least, to give them the message that we're willing to tolerate their sinful behavior. If we do that, then we sin as we violate the commands given to not associate with such people.

Teaching About Sin and Righteousness

Perhaps we don't emphasize the awfulness of sin enough. Henry Blackaby suggests that "an exalted view of God brings a clear view of sin and a realistic view of self. A diminished view of God brings a reduced concern for sin and an inflated view of self." Perhaps that is the major problem in the church – that we've lost the proper view of our holy and righteous God.

The Mind of Christ

Scripture says Christians are to have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). With respect to sin, what is the mind of Christ? To determine that, let's look at what Scripture says about his walk here on earth:

²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "**He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth**" (1 Peter 2:21-22).

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

And **in him is no sin** (1 John 3:5).

Our example, the Lord Jesus, committed no sin.

Jesus Is Our Model

Jesus' disciples are to be like him. John said, ⁶ "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6). How did Jesus walk? He walked without sinning! Only those who live in him will be saved. John says we must walk as Jesus did. Is that a paradox that is inexplicable, i.e., we have a sin nature and do sin upon occasion. Does that mean we're not like Jesus? Of course we're not perfectly like Jesus who was perfect. But we can have a mind that seeks to please God, that hates sin, that seeks to be obedient to the will of God. We are exhorted to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Jesus must be our model; we must be conformed to his likeness if we would be saved. The narrow gate becomes very narrow when we see the implications of Romans 8:29. There Paul revealed God's predestined standard for those who will be saved:

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²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29).

It is important to understand this verse. God created a standard for those he foreknew would be saved: They **must** be conformed to the likeness of his Son. He predestined this. What God predestines must come to pass. This is not a predestination of who will be saved, but a predestination of a standard that each person must meet who will be saved.

Can you see why John says no one who is in Christ Jesus will continue in sin? Jesus did not sin or continue in sin, and those who walk as Jesus did and who are conformed to his likeness will not either.

Be Perfect?

Jesus lived a perfect life, in perfect obedience to his Father (and our Father, if we are true believers). Is that what we are called to do – to live a perfect life?

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (Matthew 5:43-48).

Jesus exhorted us to be perfect. Have you ever heard anyone urge you to be perfect? I wonder why not. Has anyone ever told you that is the goal? Paul urged us:

⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and **we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ** (2 Corinthians 10:5).

If we really would take every thought captive to make it obedient to the Lord Jesus, we would be perfect, wouldn't we?

Paul urged the same upon the Roman church in different language:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2).

We are to be transformed into a new creation. What happens with a new creation?

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; **the old has gone, the new has come!** (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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The old sin nature is gone. There is a new nature born of God through the Holy Spirit. We are to nourish and feed this new nature with the Word of God. The important thing is that we are a new creation. There is no possibility of pleasing God unless we have been born anew of his Spirit.

Was Paul perfect? Had he achieved all that he has urged us to be? He confessed:

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me (Philippians 3:12).

He said he hadn't yet been made perfect, but he was trying! He pressed on to be what Jesus wanted him to be. We also are to keep on trying, pressing on to be what Jesus wants us to be.

Paul restated the same idea for the Corinthians:

⁷ Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with **bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth** (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Paul says we are to be a new batch of bread without yeast – without malice and wickedness, but instead to be bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Conclusion

Sin caused mankind to be alienated from God. God reconciled us to him by providing a way our sins could be forgiven, but it cost God the life of his only begotten Son, who was made to die the most cruel of deaths so that our sins could be forgiven. Jesus, the Son of God, gave his life as an atoning sacrifice so we could be forgiven of our sin. We, the disciples of the Lord Jesus, are to give our lives to him and to die to self and to sin.

The stakes are high. We can have the pleasures of sin for a season and spend eternity in the lake of fire with all those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Or we can renounce sin, pledge our lives and our all to the Lord Jesus Christ, pledging to obey him as our Lord the best we can for the rest of our lives.

When we do that, our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, God becomes our Father and we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Then God sees us in the Lord Jesus – blameless and free from accusation.