



THE NATURE OF SIN

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²² This righteousness is given through faith in ²⁰ Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:22-24)

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in ²⁰ Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:20-23)

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT SIN?

In previous lessons, we learned that the concept of “original sin” began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when they were tempted by Satan (in disguise as a serpent) into rebelling against God. Sin then became integrated into human nature. Since Adam and Eve would be the parents of every human being to follow, their descendants are born with the same indwelling proclivity to sin. This innate tendency towards sin has separated man from God, who is holy, just, and righteous.

It was God’s desire that man be the caretakers of His creation and be His image on earth. However, man cannot be the image of God when sin indwells our nature. His Holy Spirit cannot occupy vessels that are corrupted by sin. As God still desires relationship with mankind, desires us to be His image and the caretakers of His creation, and still desires connection to us by His Spirit indwelling us, it became necessary for God to make a way for us to be redeemed from sin and restored to relationship with Him.

More than that, sin affects the whole of creation. Catholic teachings speak of “ecological sin”, which is man’s actions that harm the environment. The truth goes somewhat deeper than that concept. When Adam and Eve rebelled, they were no longer the caretakers and masters over the Lord’s creation. Animals would live in fear of humans. The ground would only yield crops through the labor and toil of man. The first animal sacrifice happened when God took an animal to make clothing for Adam and Eve. Man would begin to hunt animals for food during the time of Noah. The harmony between man and creation was destroyed by sin.

From that moment in the Garden of Eden, God began to guide history according to His plan to remove sin from His creation and restore mankind to relationship with Him. We’re His children. It was never His desire that we be lost to sin and eternal death but rather to share life with us. God’s justice requires that wickedness is punished, and the punishment for sin is death and eternal separation from Him. A system of animal sacrifices was set in place among God’s nation of Israel, with the animals paying the penalty of death for the sins of mankind.

However, one true and perfect (and human) sacrifice was required if mankind was to be wholly and completely redeemed from sin. The problem was no human could live a life without sinning in order to be that perfect, final sacrifice. God Himself had to be made flesh in the form of the Son, Jesus Christ. He had to live that perfect life free of sin. Finally, He had to willingly offer His life in exchange for the lives of every human who believed in Him to redeem believers from sin. This was accomplished by Jesus' death on the cross.

From that moment, those who believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and the Son of Man, who believed that He died for the sins of all mankind, and who willingly accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior over their lives, were redeemed. This means that God considers them cleansed from sins (even though believers still slip into sin as we seek to follow Jesus) and restored into relationship with Him. They are considered vessels purified so that the Holy Spirit can indwell them and connect them in relationship with God.

THIS IS THE CONCEPT OF GRACE. We cannot understand the significance of God's grace and what Christ did for us on the cross without understanding the nature of sin and why it hinders our relationship with God.

The purpose of this lesson is not condemnation or accusation. The purpose of this lesson is to make us self-aware that the tendency to sin dwells within every one of us. The purpose is to let you know that God wants us in relationship with Him even though we have that inclination towards sin. The purpose is to assure you of His great love, so great that He died to give us the chance to be rescued from sin and the penalty of death by Jesus Christ. The purpose is also to make us aware how truly deceitful and harmful sin can be not only in our lives but in the lives of those around us. When we are self-aware, we are able to freely choose to accept God's grace so that we can be restored to relationship with God.





So, returning to our original question: Why should we be concerned about sin?

First, because it interferes with our ability to seek and grow spiritually in relationship with God, and consequently to truly and fully experience His unwavering love, mercy, grace, and blessings (not the least of which is forgiveness, fellowship, and eternal life with Him).

Second, because sin is a condition of the individual being broken and suffering because of it in all aspects of his or her life (in personal relationships, in social activities and interactions, and even in the environment) in very real ways.

Third, because the sin that has left us in a broken condition doesn't just harm us---it affects everyone around us in very tangible ways, sometimes with serious and potentially devastating consequences. Consider these examples:

The person whose priorities and desires are dominated by carnal lust. At first, those desires are controlled within marriage. However, lust may become more consuming and lead to infidelity (and the alienation of affection towards his or her spouse). It could lead to sexual abuse of others, to that person creating and distributing pornography (including deep fake AI photos), and at its extreme to delving into rape, molestation, and human trafficking (including selling people who trust them into sexual slavery).

The person whose desires are dominated by greed. We aren't talking about the need to earn a living but the all-consuming need to acquire more money and more material possessions. This, too, can lead to neglect or exploitation of family and friends. It can cause us to betray our deepest principles for material gain. It can cause us to make choices that cause unemployment or impoverishment or homelessness of others or to mistreat those in our employ in the name of "business". In extreme cases, we might even be willing to kill to gain what we want from others.

Consider the sin of anger when it begins to consume us. It can begin to alienate those around us or even cause them to fear us. It can lead to volatility that causes us to physically or verbally lash out at people around us. It can make us volatile and unpredictable, not just in relationships but in our work and social environments. Anger becomes a fuel for hatred that seeks a target, leading to incidents such as road rage violence, hate crimes, or mass shootings. These are extremes examples of what can happen when sin goes out of control within us. Regardless of whether it causes us to harm others, sin wounds us in the heart and in our spirit. God desires to heal these wounds within us before they are exploited by the enemy to cause us further pain or to harm those around us.

The purpose of this lesson is not to cause us shame or to make us despair, but rather to make us aware that every one of us truly does need God's grace, transformation, and healing and that these gifts are available for us freely because of God's mercy and unwavering love. This is the point that we must understand before we go further into examination of sin, man's fallen condition, and redemption and restoration.

Let's consider now the child who has done something wrong (whether something minor or something very bad). When the Father has to respond, what is the motivation and what is his approach? A good father's motivation is to help the child not only acknowledge what he or she has done wrong but to understand *why* it is wrong and the *consequences* of the act not only for the child but for others if someone has been harmed or wronged. A good Father comes from a place of deep love for the child and the desire that the child grows to be a good person who chooses to do the right thing. A good Father has already forgiven the child's mistake, regardless of how great, and seeks only to know that the child acknowledges the wrongdoing and the need to be forgiven. Even the best person at some point will do wrong. Sometimes we will do wrong to others, wrongs that will shame us and make us want to seek forgiveness even though admitting to the wrongdoing is painful. Sometimes wrongs will be done to us that require us to forgive others in turn.



Keep these points in mind as we continue the lesson: God loves you. God wants relationship with you. God does not want to see you hurt yourself by sinful behavior. God does not want to see others hurt because of your sinful behavior. God has dedicated the entirety of history and given His own blood because he wants to free you from being enslaved by sin so that you can grow into the person that God means for you to become.

But, the process comes with some emotional pain. This is the beginning of healing. When we choose to follow Jesus, when we begin to examine the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will at some point use the Scripture to illuminate things within us that God wishes to change. It can be as simple as a feeling tugging at your heart. It can be an encounter with another person that shines a light on the sinful behavior. It can be a gentle leading or a metaphorical (or maybe a literal) slap in the face. For most believers, we will have both kinds of experiences. When we reach the point of self-awareness that we can acknowledge whatever sin (or sins) has us in its grip, we have the choice whether to live with it or repent of it. This is the process of *conviction of the heart*. What we do next will determine our spiritual growth and our relationship with God. We can let the weight of the sin hold us down, even crush us spiritually and emotionally, or we can turn to the God who wants to lift that weight off our shoulders.

There are several ways that we can respond when we desire to free ourselves from whatever sinful behavior is affecting our relationship with God, people, and our own peace of heart. The first response when we feel the weight of sin on our hearts is always to go to God in prayer. There is no substitute for taking your burden directly to the Lord so that His Spirit can help guide you into reconciliation and transformation. When you've identified destructive behaviors and emotions through honest self-reflection, try next to determine what external and/or internal triggers are causing the behavior. **DO NOT BLAME OTHERS FOR YOUR SINS.** Remember that much evil was done to Jesus during His earthly ministry, but His reaction was to pray for those who harmed Him (even those who put Him on the cross). Before we can seek God's forgiveness, we must be willing to give forgiveness to others in turn for the harm they've done to us.

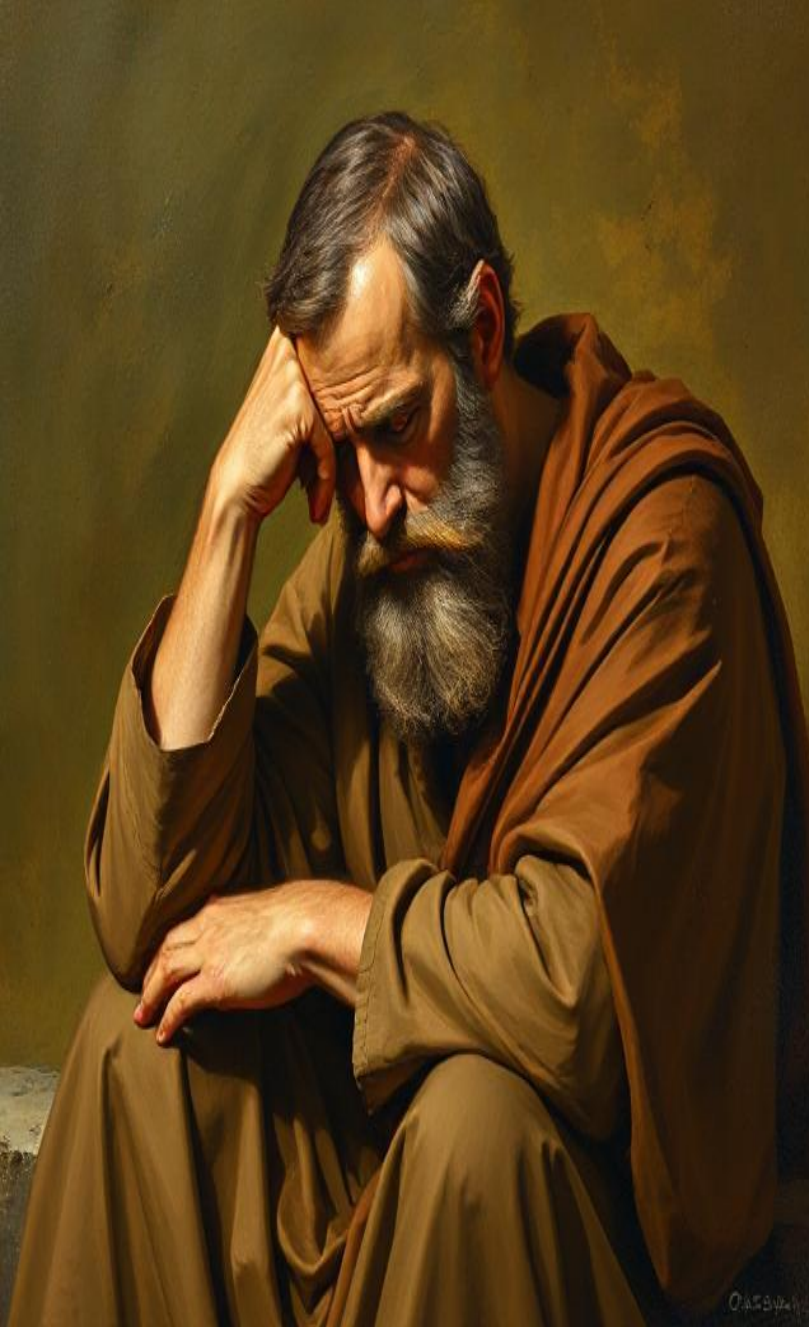




If we have harmed others, peace with God requires us to attempt to make peace with them. In fact, the Bible tells us to seek reconciliation with those we've harmed before we even come to God to worship or ask forgiveness for ourselves. To be clear: You have no control over whether the other person forgives you. If they don't, that is a matter for God to resolve. All God asks is that you sincerely, honestly make the attempt to correct whatever sin has caused others harm, then come to Him to seek forgiveness. This action requires the humility that Jesus modeled and expects of believers.

Self-compassion is also important. Being honest with yourself does not mean beating yourself down emotionally or psychologically. Let's be honest: If we were perfect people, Christ wouldn't have had to die for us. There hasn't been a living Christian in history who lived a life without sin and could have been an atoning sacrifice for us except for Christ. When God says that you are forgiven, the matter is settled. Your concentration should no longer focus on the past but rather look ahead to ways that you can avoid repeating your sins. Seek the counsel of spiritual brethren among the church, particularly spiritual mentors. Join a support group that will help you remain accountable to avoid the behavior if you need to. Talk to family and friends and ask their help remaining accountable (transparency is part of relationships with God and with people). Do not hesitate to seek professional help if you need it. Remember that God places doctors, psychologists, counselors, and other helpers in this world for the benefit of His children. We always go to the Lord first, but that doesn't mean we can't utilize the resources He places in this world. Finally, focus your efforts on positive actions that foster healing. Community service, especially as part of the church, can be healing. Hobbies and constructive activities can also foster a sense of giving something positive into our lives and maybe even the world.

And remember: You will probably sin again. We may be perfected through Christ, but we are still existing in a fallen world where temptations and wickedness is abundant. Forgiveness is NOT permission to keep sinning, but we will be contending with sin until such time as Christ returns. Seek (and give) forgiveness as many times as your need to remain in relationship with God.



What do we mean by sin?

Believers can be comforted by the fact that even the greatest heroes of the faith also wrestled with the temptations from sin. David committed adultery and murder. Moses doubted God. Jonah fled from God on a boat rather than obeying Him. Solomon fell into worship of pagan gods near the end of his life. We know that Paul persecuted Christians before he converted to the faith, but apparently conversion wasn't the end of his grappling with sin. He eloquently sums up what it is like to be a Christian wrestling with sin while desiring to follow Jesus:

“For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature^[a] a slave to the law of sin.” (Romans 7:19-25).

The Bible lists many sins which displease the Lord, and we should be watchful of these sins (which we'll discuss in a moment). However, the Bible has one more bit of advice that is often overlooked in Romans 14:23: *“If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.”* Remember, you have a Holy Spirit at work within you that will tell you when you're heading down a bad road. The trick is to heed the warning. Don't use Scripture to try to catch God in a technicality to justify doing something that you know is wrong and harmful. Scripture is the inerrant word. If you're interpreting it to justify sin, to harm others, then your interpretation is wrong. Seek the counsel of church elders or spiritual mentors.

What does the Bible say is sin?

These chapters and verses list specific behaviors which the Bible teaches us are sin. There are behaviors that the world condones that the Bible still calls sin. You may feel the pull as we go through this list, the worldly resistance to what is said here. Let's begin with an overview.

Remember that the goal of this lesson is not to point fingers, it is not to cast judgment, and it is not to shame. I come to you as guilty as anyone of sinful behavior and the need for God's forgiveness. It is to get us to think, *really* think about behaviors that impact our ability to have a true, meaningful relationship with a holy, just, righteous God. To that I would add a merciful and forgiving God. These sins can be forgiven.

But a warning: The only sin that the Bible says can NOT be forgiven is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. There is some confusion about that one, so we'll circle back to it.

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Mark 7:21-23)

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ... (Colossians 3:4-10)

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:29-31)

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:24-27)

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion. (Leviticus 18:23)

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:17)

And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10:11-12)

Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:16-20)

MOMENT OF TRUTH: HOW DID YOU RESPOND?

It is impossible to have read those verses without something hitting a nerve, causing you to reject what you read, to begin formulating objectives and counter-arguments, and you might have even wanted to stop the lesson here and now. I GET IT. This goes back to the brutal truth that we live in a fallen world, and that fallen world cultivates us to reject God's truth. It tells us that behaviors God says are wrong can be justified because they are socially and culturally accepted.

Keep this in mind: At times, it was culturally acceptable to sacrifice children to gods that don't exist. It was culturally acceptable to burn women as witches. It was culturally acceptable to keep people as slaves. There are practices today that one culture considers normal and acceptable and another culture finds abhorrent. There is no consensus among mankind on "right" or "wrong". Even if there were, WE CANNOT JUDGE WHAT IS RIGHT AND HOLY BY THE STANDARDS OF THIS WORLD BECAUSE THE WAYS OF THIS WORLD ARE FALLEN AND CORRUPTED AND DISTORTED.

I don't mean to put that in all caps, but our eternal souls hang in the balance of the behaviors that we choose to embrace, whether they are the ways of man or the ways of God. It's too important. I have a friend who has basically abandoned the church because she doesn't want to hear that dating another man while her husband was in prison was adultery. Another friend who rejects the church because she had decided to be bi-sexual. Another friend who went to the grave having rejected hearing about God in order to pursue money and lusting for women besides his wife. Christians are not appointed to pass judgement for these behaviors the Bible points out as sins...but neither are we to condone it or participate in it. We are to simply speak what the Bible says. It is up to the Holy Spirit to work on the heart of the person who hears the truth. Don't confuse what is your responsibility and what is the Spirit's responsibility. Think of it this way: If you saw a person standing in the street about to be hit by a car, would you not try to save them? If they were drowning and you had a life preserver, would you not throw it to them? If a thief was coming to break into their house and you knew, would you not warn them?



AN OVERVIEW OF SIN AND VIRTUE IN THE BIBLE

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, are religious and ethical directives, structured as a covenant document, that, according to the Hebrew Bible, were given by YHWH to Moses. The text of the Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20:1–17, Deuteronomy 5:6–21, and the "Ritual Decalogue" of Exodus 34:11–26.

Have no gods other than the LORD.

Do not make or worship idols.

Don't take the Lord's name in vain.

Keep the Sabbath day holy.

Honor your mother and father.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not bear false witness.

Do not covet.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS:

PRIDE

ENVY

GLUTTONY

GREED

LUST

SLOTH

WRATH

THE SEVEN HEAVENLY VIRTUES:

PRUDENCE

JUSTICE

TEMPERANCE

COURAGE

FAITH

HOPE

CHARITY

The seven deadly sins are not listed in a single Bible passage. It began with a monk named Evagrius Ponticus in 400 A.D. (only he cited eight sins compiled from study of the Bible. Pope Gregory 1 created the list of seven deadly sins and seven heavenly virtues.

Proverbs 6:16-19 reads, "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

1. A proud look,
2. A lying tongue,
3. Hands that shed innocent blood,
4. A heart that devises wicked plans,
5. Feet that are swift in running to evil,
6. A false witness who speaks lies, and
7. One who sows discord among brethren."

- Sexual immorality,
- Impurity,
- Sensuality,
- Idolatry,
- Sorcery,
- Enmity,
- Strife,
- Jealousy,
- Resentment,
- Rivalries,
- Dissensions,
- Divisions,
- Envy,
- Drunkenness, and
- Orgies. (Galatians 5:19-21)

UNPACKING THE MEANING FOR THESE PROHIBITIONS:

DIVORCE AND ADULTERY (MATTHEW 19:3-9): Context is important. Biblical times were not pro-woman times. Jesus was counter-cultural in the way that He showed kindnesses to women. Jesus tells us that the reason Moses allowed the practice of divorce because of mankind's hard-heartedness. By Jesus' day, that permission had become exploitative and damaging. Men could divorce their wives for the most minor of offenses (like burning a piece of bread), which was handy if the man was lusting for another woman. Women were completely dependent upon husbands and sons for their livelihood and survival because they had no status or rights. Being cast out of her husband's home left a woman destitute and desperate.

God wants better for men and women. If you think marriage isn't important to God, then I would remind you that the church is called the Bride of Christ and Christ is called the Bridegroom. Jesus is our Bridegroom even in difficult times, even when our actions displease Him, and even when it would have been more convenient and beneficial for Him to abandon us (say, when He had to go to the cross out of love for His Bride). He didn't reject His church bride over any of our offenses, great or small, but rather received us back to Himself in forgiveness. He showed us discipline, but also kindness, mercy, and grace. He is a righteous Bridegroom, a holy and honorable Bridegroom.

Our relationship with Christ is likened to the bond of marriage. And the sad truth is that there are people who would still prefer to give Christ a written notice of divorce so that they are free to pursue activities and pleasures that the Bible says are sinful. The Bible is clear: A man leaves his parents to be joined to his wife. The two of them are considered one flesh in the eyes of God. The Bible commands that a man hold his wife in the same esteem with which he regards himself. He is to be a man of righteousness, who follows Christ's example of love, compassion, and mercy. He is to love his wife as his own flesh. Yes, the Bible says women are to be obedient to husbands, again expecting those husbands to be honorable and follow the Lord's way.



Children are to be obedient to their fathers and mothers. Jesus modeled that behavior when He was a child, obeying Joseph and Mary. The Bible says that to even look at a woman who is not your wife with lust in your eyes or heart is to have already committed adultery.

Think back to Adam and Eve. God created Adam first but understood that it is not good for man to be alone (God does not even exist alone, but in community with Christ and the Spirit). Eve was formed from Adam's rib, which means she was the same flesh as Adam. God does not use the word "servant" to describe Eve. She is called a helper for Adam. They were meant to care for creation and one another TOGETHER. The relationship within the Holy Trinity is a continuous exchange of mutual love, mutual submission, and caring about the needs of the others and desire for the good of the others. This is how it should be within the church. This is how it should be within a marriage.

It's true the Bible also states that divorce is permissible in a case where one spouse has committed adultery. We see that once a husband has been joined to a wife, God regards them not as two individuals but as one being. Remember that we are talking about a Godhead that is Three Persons made one God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). You have made a promise before God to be faithful to your spouse because you are one in the eyes of God. Adultery is another temptation of the world. The Holy Spirit within us empowers us to resist evil if we are obedient and submissive to the Spirit's leading. Pray, seek the counsel of spiritual mentors, seek help from family and friends, and if necessary, remove yourself from situations that place you in proximity to the source of temptation, but do not attempt to ride out the temptation by your own power alone. Divorce shouldn't be one of our first reactions just because it is the simplest resolution to a problem. God expects us to seek the counsel of the church, to seek help from marriage counselors, to repent of our sinful behavior that is harming our marriage and seek forgiveness and reconciliation with our spouse, in other words to have done all within our power to keep the marriage vows that we have made in the eyes of God.





The church body is to do everything that they can to help both spouses in the marriage. God understands that your pain is real, that your desire to leave the marriage might be justifiable, but come before the Lord knowing that you did all within your power to be obedient to Him before turning to divorce. That being said, the Lord does not expect you to remain in a situation where your life is in danger or you are constantly exposed to abuse because of an unrighteous spouse. A spouse who would subject you to physical harm, emotional cruelty, or even threaten your life is NOT being righteous or obedient to God's command to love one's spouse as oneself nor is that spouse following the example of Christ. Seek safety, pray, and await the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

OTHER SINS OF THE FLESH: In part, God has prohibitions against other sins of the flesh because they can lead to the path of adultery and divorce. The prohibition against orgies obviously aligns with His view of man and wife as one flesh. Paul tells us that if we must have sexual relations, it should be done within the bonds of holy marriage. The prohibitions against sensuality and passion also mean those outside of the marriage bond because such things can lead to behaviors that destroy the marriage. These pursuits can even destroy our relationship with God when they become a higher priority than submission to God's will, obedience to God's ways, and a distraction from time spent with God.

Passion in itself is not the sin, it's a vulnerability within us that can be exploited by Satan to lead us into sin. That is God's concern. Passions when perverted by Satan lead into behaviors like adultery, orgies, bestiality, sodomy, rape, molestation, and incest. Internal temptation has become harm not just to one's personal relationship with God but to others, who in turn cry out to God for justice for the harm done to them. Some of these were part of pagan practices in biblical times and led people away from saving faith in God, which is part of the reason He warned His people against them. This is sexuality outside of the marriage bond between man and woman, which is the only sexual bond that God has ordained. We can't escape a topic that has become a cultural hot button topic, and that is homosexuality as biblically prohibited. God takes this so seriously that it is part of the heart of His condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah. Brothers and sisters, I'm here as always merely to tell you what the Bible says. I am not showing you love if I don't. I get that there are some aspects of

VIRTUES THAT COUNTER THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS:

Self-control

Perseverance

Patience

Gentleness

Peace

Love

Gratitude

Kindness

Humility

Love of God and people

Compassion

Diligence

Discernment

Servanthood

Faithfulness

sin that are easier for us to overcome and some that are so intrinsic to our nature that it's literally painful to contemplate or discuss.

Everyone has a particular vulnerability which presents the greatest danger of leading us to rejection of Christ or distortion of His Word for our personal gain. This is one of those topics. Again, I get it. So let me just start with this: Christ loves you. The enemy does not love you. He wants to conform you to his image rather than Christ's image. He will do everything within his power to accomplish that purpose and lead you away from God. This world is the enemy's domain because it is fallen. That includes cultural mores. The enemy will encourage self-destructive behaviors. He will get people who follow culture instead of Christ to affirm self-destructive behaviors. He will cause you every kind of pain and doubt and encourage every rebellious inclination to keep you apart from Christ by making the enemy's way seem easier, more desirable, logical and reasonable, and even casting those who speak God's Word as the "real enemy" (remember the people who put Christ on the cross accused Him of serving the devil at one point). Keep all of these things in mind. The church is not appointed to be judges, neither are we meant to condone what God says is wrong.

This is something that we must guard against in *any* form of temptation and sinful behavior: *There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death* (Proverbs 14:12). Culture changes according to the whims of man, and culture will pass away. Culture does not care for our good, our welfare, or our eternal souls. Each of us has to give an accounting for our individual decisions before God. We can't blame the devil for our behaviors. We can't blame other people for our behaviors. We can't justify it by saying "everyone was doing it" or "it was legal (culturally)". When we have heard the Word of God, we become accountable to God to follow it, not to justify disobedience.

Gluttony is another sin that is a matter of degree. It is not a sin to eat or to enjoy food. Jesus is seen sharing meals with people. In the early Christian context, gluttony was considered overindulging in food without sparing some for the needy. This applies today, but also encompasses general wastefulness of food. *Sloth* is the willful avoidance of work, but can also refer to willfully avoiding spiritual growth in the Lord.

A vertical silhouette of a cross stands on a dark, grassy hill. The background is a warm, orange-hued sunset or sunrise over a range of mountains. The sun is a bright, glowing orb partially obscured by the cross's vertical beam. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a lighter, hazy yellow at the top. The mountains in the distance are silhouetted against the bright sky.

OTHER SINS OF PASSION: COVETING, ENVY, WRATH, AND PRIDE

Coveting is another form of lusting for something, in this case lusting for something that does not rightfully belong to us (like someone's specific house, car, or other property, someone's wife or husband, Coveting springs from the sin of envy, which originates in our hearts. I am not talking about all forms of desiring something. It's okay to desire to have a car. It's okay to desire to have a house. It's fine to see something in the store and desire to have it. Coveting means you don't want just any house, you want that specific house which already belongs to another person. You envy that person for having it. Coveting is when something crosses the line from desiring it to being obsessive about having it even to the point of committing crimes and sins and causing harm to others to obtain it. Envy fosters resentment, jealousy, and hatred (perhaps ultimately violence if left unchecked) towards the person who has the specific object we desire. That resentment can even be directed against God and cause us to put God to the test ("Don't you love me? Why won't you give me this thing that I desire if you really love me?"). God's way is contentment with what the Lord provides for us and trust that what He provides us is all that we really need (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Wrath is just as perilous to ourselves and to others. Not all anger is wrath nor is all anger harmful. Jesus felt anger at the moneychangers and people who defiled God's temple in Jerusalem. When we say "wrath of God", we are talking about a response to injustice and wickedness and things which cause harm physically or spiritually to people. God's response to such thing is always tempered by mercy, love, and grace. His discipline for such wrongdoings is usually preceded by warnings against the behavior and the opportunity to repent (God did warn Pharaoh before unleashing the plagues. He did send prophets to warn Israel and Judah before sending Assyria and Babylon to conquer them. God sends His Word now to warn us of future judgement). The kind of anger that is sin is uncontrolled, untampered, and harmful to oneself or to others. It comes from destructive emotions within one's heart. Envy and wrath can lead us to devise wicked plans against other people and even to shed blood and commit murder. The Bible says to be slow to anger.

Pride is another tricky sin. It's okay to feel a little pride, example to be proud of good works, to be proud of a child's accomplishment, or even proud of one's own accomplishment. Like anger, pride becomes a sin when it becomes excessive to the point of rebellion against God. It is when our view of our own self-worth gets to the point where we're glorifying and honoring ourselves instead of God, where we don't acknowledge God's sovereignty over our lives (and His hands in our accomplishments). Remember, Christians are charged to glorify and honor God and to magnify Him rather than magnifying ourselves. Pride is actually subtle and insidious. It takes the form of find faults with other people when we ought to be more concerned with the Spirit's work on our own hearts. Pride makes us harsh and judgmental and intolerant of other people, including their sins (again, we should be concerned with making right our own sins). It's possible to pray for someone from a place of being prideful (are you praying for them out of a desire for their good according to God or because you're exasperated that they aren't conforming to your expectations?).

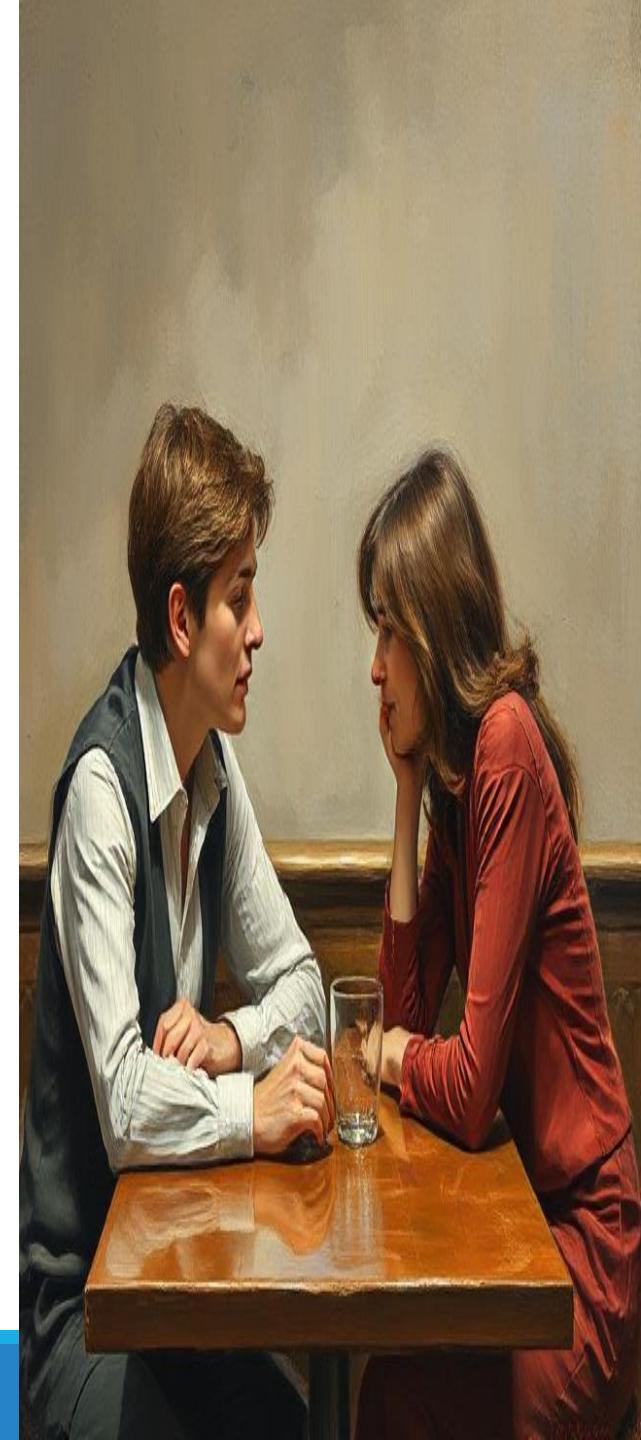
Pride can make us superficial, concerned only with how other people perceive us (include whether they are perceiving our holiness). Pride puts us in a posture of defensiveness, especially if we are accused of some wrong behavior by others. Defensiveness can become hard-hearted resistance to the Holy Spirit's leading. Humility gives us strength to stay grounded in the Lord. Pride with God cuts both ways: We can be so prideful that we forget God is God, or so overly humble that we doubt God's ability to forgive us (in a weird way, we're convinced that our sins are particularly unforgiveable---we're looking at ourselves instead of looking at Christ). Pride craves the attention of others (and their accolades). Pride can cause us to become judgmental. Pride can cause us to value one person above another person (example: We esteem the opinions or approval of a person we perceive as powerful or particularly holy but consciously or subconsciously overlook people we perceive as undesirable, weak, or having nothing to offer us).



SINS THAT COME FROM SPEECH

You will notice that many of the sins listed have one thing in common: Our tongue. Lies and false witness come from the tongue. Slander and gossip come from the tongue. *"So too, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it boasts of great things. Consider how small a spark sets a great forest ablaze. The tongue also is a fire, a world of wickedness among the parts of the body. It pollutes the whole person, sets the course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:5-6).* Proverbs 18:21 says: *"Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit"*. In Matthew 12:36-37, Jesus warns, *"But I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned"*. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:29: *"Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up the one in need and bringing grace to those who listen"*. James 3:10 tells us bluntly: *"From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so"*.

Just as believers should be slow to wrath, they should also be slow to speak. We are speaking on behalf of the Lord whom we profess to serve and love and imitate. When we speak, it should come from a place of love and a desire to build up others so that they can come into the love of Christ. When we are asked to mediate or give an opinion, it should be a balanced perspective that sees all sides of a subject and accounts for the good of all people involved without favoritism, for God shows no favoritism. We are not to sow discord or strife with our words. We can correct and rebuke without maliciousness or scorn. We can remain strong while still being gentle and humble. We can speak of others with discretion rather than gossiping (for our concern is truth, not rumor or supposition). We can communicate effectively without obscenity or crudeness. A popular phrase is: "Would you kiss your mother with that mouth?" Try this phrase: "Would you speak to God with that mouth?" We saw earlier that the Bible warns us that whatever comes from our mouth comes from our heart and defiles us. When we speak, we are revealing the true condition of our hearts and whether the Holy Spirit truly works within our hearts. Again, this can be a struggle when cultural norms approve and even encourage obscene talk, gossip, and slander.



THE SIN THAT SHALL NOT BE FORGIVEN: BLASPHEMING THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” (Mark 3:28-30)

And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him. Luke 12:10

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? Hebrew 10:29

“Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—Mark 3:28-29.

Basically, we blaspheme the Holy Spirit when we:

- Deliberately resist the work of the Holy Spirit and the testimony proclaiming Jesus Christ
- Credit Satan with works or miracles that were really performed by the Holy Spirit (a biblical example would be those who said that Jesus Christ drove out demons through the power of the devil rather than crediting the Holy Spirit and recognizing Christ as the Messiah. They accused Jesus of being demon-possessed rather than Spirit-filled.
- Persistent, unrepentant refusal to acknowledge the divine source of God’s work, especially as revealed to you by the Holy Spirit
- On-going hardening of one’s heart against the Holy Spirit.

God knows our hearts. He recognizes a heart that has rejected Him.

Relationship with God: A Refresher

How do we cultivate a relationship with God?



First: Do not neglect prayer life. Rather, make a conscious, consistent effort to incorporate prayer into your daily life regardless of life's demands and distractions. We can't have a relationship if we don't have communication, and prayer is our one-on-one time with God. It doesn't have to be fancy prayer, it doesn't even have to be verbal. Simply spending quiet, undistracted time with God is enough if that's all you feel able to give at the time. Prayer is the time when you dialogue with God. Don't be shy---you can't tell God anything that He doesn't already know, but in the quiet time together, the Spirit will direct your heart, mind, and attention towards God's response.

There are many forms of prayer. Petitionary prayer isn't about getting what we want but rather about aligning our will with God's will, seeking His wisdom, trusting in His ultimate plan for our lives, and accepting God's response (whether He grants what we ask or answers "no"). Intercessory prayer follows the example of Jesus Christ. This is prayer on behalf of other people. Jesus tells us to pray for people, including those we consider our enemies (though in true forgiveness, we shouldn't see people truly as our enemies but in compassion see them as people in need of God's intercession and grace). When we pray for others, it's an act that reflects God's love, compassion, mercy, and grace and shows the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming our hearts. This act is part of our spiritual support of others (believers and unbelievers). Contemplative prayer is the everyday dialogues that we have with God, letting Him know what is weighing on our hearts and minds so that we can entrust our burdens into His hands. It is reflective time that focuses on quieting our minds and hearts so we can listen for God's voice.

Remaining rooted in God's Word is also part of cultivating relationship with God. This is the part of the relationship where we learn about His past, His values, and His plans for the future (which include us).

We also have to remain dependent on God's grace (and be aware that we are depending on God's grace, not self-works).

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