

OVERCOMING SIN

Hebrews 12:1

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HEBREWS 12:1

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

- “We also” refers to us; a “cloud of witnesses” refers to the men and women listed in the previous chapter.

- Our minds should focus in on a few key words: “weight,” “sin,” and “ensnares.”

RUNNING THE RACE

V1 - And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

The metaphor of a *race* creates an image lifted from the footraces of ancient Israel, Greece, and the amphitheaters of Rome.

It is not an uncommon illustration that the Apostle Paul uses to describe the Christian journey.

PHILIPPIANS 3:14

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-25

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

We not only need to finish the race, but we are also obliged to remove all things that hinder us along the way.

V1 - Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us.

- The passage exhorts the believer to identify the sin that we are most prone, or most exposed to
- The author confronts the *superfluous weight* of the Christian

ILLUSTRATION: ANKLE WEIGHTS AT THE OLYMPICS

THE DIMINISHED VIEW OF SIN

- The concept of sin has lost its emphasis in our culture and generation
- Society does not appreciate the accusation of sin, or that there would even be such a thing
- Relativists plot sin on a curve
- Social justice advocates define sin as anything that interferes with their happiness
- These are non-absolute positions on truth

If you are not dealing with sin, you are living a spiritually anemic life. This neglect will most likely be the catalyst for most of your problems.

SIN IN THE BIBLE

Although it may not be trendy to discuss sin, the Bible isn't shy to address the topic.

The Bible uses a broad range of words to describe sin. There are at least eight basic words for sin in the Old Testament and twelve in the New. Interestingly, there are only three words used to express grace (Old Testament: “chen,” “chesed”; New Testament - “charis”).

OLD TESTAMENT:

Chata, Ra, Pasha, Awon, Shagag, Asham, Rasha, Taah

NEW TESTAMENT:

Kakos, Poneros, Asebes, Enochos, Hamartia, Adikia, Anomos, Parabates, Agnoein, Planao, Paraptōma, Hypocrisis

- The nuance between these definitions gives us a true sense of the multi-dimensional nature of sin
- The constant thread throughout the Bible is the problem of sin
- Worth remembering: Jesus died for our sins, not our happiness or any other end
- We need to change our paradigm and concept of sin
- As a culture, we regard sin only partially, not for the abhorrent reality that it is
- There is not one Christian here today who does not desire for sin to decrease in his or her life. If we are honest, we would admit that there is a *particular* sin that we have become aquatinted with
- For many, the desire to deal with sin is eclipsed by a sense of hopelessness
- Sin must not remain unsubdued; it cannot be underemphasized or ignored

If we are to be victorious in our battle with sin, we need to rethink our relationship to sin, specifically, the implications. I truly believe that if we knew sin’s full impact on our intimacy with God and with one another, along with our sense of well-being, we would become a people committed to the pursuit of holiness.

Consider Isaiah's vision in chapter six of Isaiah.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

ISAIAH 6:2-5

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."

- If we could truly comprehend His holiness, we would hate sin in the most desperate way
- When seen next to the purity of God's holiness, the impurity of human sin is all the more evident
- As we draw closer to God through His Word and obedience, our sin is illuminated
- The self-awareness of sin is proportional to our closeness to God

Sin is the single area of your life most responsible for the confusion and lack of growth in your life.

Let's lay the foundation. We are all sinners.

INDWELLING SIN IN THE BELIEVER

- Each of us has an innate propensity towards sin
- The sin nature is that aspect in man that makes him rebellious against God
- For those of you with kids, you are profoundly aware of the *sin nature*

- Romans 7 describes this as the law of indwelling sin. Paul uses words like:
 - Sin is alive in us
 - Sin springs to life
 - Sin ceases opportunity and deceives us
 - Even when I want to good, evil is right there with me
 - It is sin living in me that does what I do not wish
 - Sin permeates all areas of our existence
 - Sin is magnetic to humanity
 - Sin finds a willful ally in the carnal man
 - The sin nature is universal in humanity
 - We are all ensnared by the disease of sin

1 JOHN 1:8

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

ROMANS 3:10

As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one.

ROMANS 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

ISAIAH 6.5

Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips.

1 TIMOTHY 1:15B

That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

JOHN 1:27

It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”

ECCLESIASTES 7:20

For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

- Sin’s grip on our free-will and intentions is a disheartening reality
- Sin is one of the most troubling phenomenons that exist in the human life. It is common to all of us.
- Sin is a problem that naturally forces itself upon the attention of man. Sin is obvious and verifiable
- Sin is an unpleasant topic, especially in a society that does not appreciate righteousness weighing in on its actions.
- As a pastor, I am not thrilled to discuss sin; I don’t wish to address an issue that most people don’t want to address for themselves — individuals should remember not to shoot the messenger.
- As people, we react to sin in various ways: denial, rationalization, disregarding it, minimizing it, lamenting it — even self-flagellation

ARE ALL SINS EQUAL?

- All sin is equally sufficient to establish guilt before a Holy God.

JAMES 2:8-12

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder."

Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

- Some sins carry greater consequences than others
- The civil ramifications can vary
- The restoration or retribution for the sinner has a variable obligation
- Some sins are intrinsically worse than others

To stretch your thinking of what sin looks like, we should not reduce it to extravagant obvious sin. The sinful nature is menacing, and it presents beyond *category-five sins*:

THREE AREAS OF SIN

1) Body

- Our actions and behaviors: external

2) Mind

- Our thoughts and the conscious inner dialogue
- Matthew 5:21-28
- The mind's duty is to be engaged in the things of God
- The mind is the space inside of you that ascribes worth and value to a potential action

3) The Heart

JAMES 1:15

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

- The heart is that spiritual part of you where emotions and desires dwell
- The posture of the heart determines a lot
- The affections of the heart are inclined towards certain things
- The heart is where sin is conceived
- The heart is where you are enticed into actual sin
- Your heart is your command center

MATTHEW 12:34B

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

PROVERBS 4:23

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

- As King David was a man after God's own heart, we, too, should desire the heart of God.
- The Bible sets high importance on keeping our hearts pure.

Please don't make the mistake of reducing sin to overtly wrong offenses and disregard what might seem peripheral. Anger, bad attitude, a complaining spirit, etc. These are all sin. They are all unbecoming of a believer

- 1) We must despise sin and return it to being our number one enemy
- 2) Sin is the ancient enemy of the soul; it causes us to make grave mistakes

3) How we see sin and how God sees sin, are remarkably different.

- We need to reconnect with the treacherous reality of sin
- There is a temptation to not speak definitively about the nature of sin
- Sin grieves the Holy Spirit and negatively impacts our fellowship with God

THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF SIN

To allow our fallen nature to remain untamed brings about total carnage and calamity in our life.

JOHN OWEN - BE KILLING SIN OR IT WILL BE KILLING YOU.

a. Sin separates us from God

ISAIAH 59:2

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

b. Sin separates us from one another

Inversely, righteousness separates us from evil people.

Sin is a double-edged sword: it kills on two fronts 1) it separates you from God 2) it separates us from each other.

c. Sin robs us of Spiritual blessing

Sin hurts our prayer life, friendships, marriages, work life, sleep, health, our eternal reward, and fellowship with God. When we sin, we step out of the favor and privilege of God,

Sin resonates in the temporal and the eternal. We lose at every level. The sole victor when we sin is the devil.

THE PENALTY OF SIN

You may be sitting there thinking, "Hasn't my sin been dealt with? Isn't that one of the perks of the Gospel?"

EPHESIANS 2:1

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

The penalty for sin has been paid for, but sin still exists and we must battle it. If we are to understand how to overcome sin, we must first agree that we are required to confront sin.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO WAGE WAR AGAINST OUR SINFUL NATURE

- We may not win the war on sin, but we can win battles.
- The Bible does not teach perfectionism in this life.
- The fact that the Bible is replete with injunctions to throw off sin and walk in righteousness infers that we can fight and be victorious.

ROMANS 6:11

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

GALATIANS 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Sin is the primary battlefield of man.

The Bible utilizes different expressions to describe the battle:

- Putting off the old man, putting on the new (Ephesians 4:17-24, Colossians 3:1-17)
- Crucified and raised with Christ (Galatians 2:20)
- Dying to self (Romans 6-8)

- Taking up your cross (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23)

There are two extremes in our handling of sin: legalism and antinomianism; both are equally wrong.

ROMANS 6:1

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

A LONG SUFFERING GOD

- Make no mistake: your sin will surface and your sin will find you out
- How often do we hear of someone who is being used by God and their life is rampant with sin?
- God in His goodness is long-suffering
- Motivated by His love, He will eventually expose our sin

SINFUL MOMENTS

What doesn't seem to follow acts of sin are comments like:

- "Well, that was worth it."
- "I feel good about that."
- "No harm, no foul."
- "I'm glad I was afforded the opportunity to lie."
- "I enjoy my shameful thoughts."
- "Tomorrow I'm going to have an even bigger attitude towards that person."

Why? Because of the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

For the most part, as believers, we don't want to sin; however, when we sin, we regret the sin. There is some odd pathology going on here.

ILLUSTRATION: YOGURTLAND

At the root of all sin is the belief in a lie. When sin is conceived, we falsely attribute value and worth to it.

If we were to experience the full consequences of our sin at the moment of sin, I wonder how willing we would be to continue in that sin that ensnares us?
YOGURTLAND CONTINUED.

APPLICATION

YOUR WORLD: THE CIRCLE

- Do not allow anything into your circle that is not permitted
- Sin is like a living cell that seeks to prey on every good thing
- Do not sublet parts of your life
- Evict non-residents

BY WHOSE STRENGTH AND AUTHORITY TO WE FIGHT

- How do we increase the conviction of His holiness?
- How do we bridle our sinful nature?
- How do we take control of our thoughts and actions?
- By what method do we overcome sin?
- If sin begins in the heart, how do we condition our heart?
- You can't just *will* revelation and understanding
- The battle with sin is a spiritual battle
- The battle belongs to the Lord, but you are the soldier
- To try and overcome sin on your strength is to try and move clouds with your breath

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

It is the Spirit of God and the Word of God that counteracts the sinful nature. God will strengthen the inner man to walk in obedience, and will establish a path towards victory.

TEN WAYS TO GROW IN SIN

1) The fear of God must decrease

PROVERBS 16:6

In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity; And by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.

- God is watching your thoughts and actions
- The only antidote to sexual purity

2) The Word of God must decrease

- God's Word is very inconvenient to your fleshly desires

PSALMS 119:11

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

- The Word is where we interlock with the heart, intentions and desires of God

3) Walk in the flesh so that sin may abound

GALATIANS 5:16

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

4) Afford your thought life some liberty

- Mediate on heavenly things

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...

5) Take temptation to its limit

Stop sin at the beginning of the process. There is a point where the grip is greater than the will.

The soul is seduced of its faithfulness towards God.

ILLUSTRATION: FINDING NEMO *"WE'RE HAVING FISH TONIGHT."*

6) Create habits that facilitate sin

7) Determine your environment

Sinning is a lot easier if you can keep company with other sinners.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33

Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

8) Create idle time for yourself

Idle hands are the devil's playground

LUKE 2:49B

Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?

9) Neglect prayer

LUKE 22:46

Then He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.

10) Purpose in your heart to sin

OUR RESPONSIBILITY WHEN WE SIN

1 JOHN 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- Confession must be more than lip service or ritualistic confession rather with a genuinely repentant heart that is burdened by the implications of sin. In particular, there must be sorrow for the loss of fellowship with God.
- In Revelation 1:9-20, Jesus moves amidst His Church with eyes of fire looking deep into the condition of His people.
- More and more, may we must become conscious of our sin.
- May we deal thoroughly with sin.
- We must crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.