

Can I Really Stop Sinning?

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

When God asks us to do something, He will give us the power to do it. For instance, in 1 John 2:1 the apostle said, “I write unto you little children that you sin not.” That tells me that it is possible to live in this world without being in bondage to sin. But how?

Do not misunderstand it. We have an old sin nature, and we will sin from time to time. And if we do sin, 1 John 2:1 also says that we have an advocate with the Father to plead our case. But if we establish spiritual fortresses in our hearts that are founded upon the Word of God, we can practice a life that does not sin.

The Holy Spirit resides in every born-again believer. He is ready to empower us in situations where temptation and weakness would try to overtake us. This booklet is written to reveal how Christians can develop a lifestyle that defeats the number one enemy against faith—which is doubt—and how we can keep from

sinning by grasping the unseen realities of God's kingdom through the faith of Jesus Christ.

Chapter One

LIVE ACCORDING TO UNSEEN REALITIES

“...For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23*b*).

As sinners who have been saved by the Blood of the Lamb, we have a relationship with the Savior that is continually developing over time. Our growing relationship with Christ, His Word, and the Holy Spirit helps us to live godly lives as it helps us to overcome the many sins that do so easily beset us (Hebrews 12:1).

God has given believers all the tools that we need in our walk with Him, including grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, and truth. The problem is that too often we do not live in the reality of faith concerning God’s truths for our lives.

According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And in Hebrews 11:6, God says that to live by faith—by unseen realities—is the

only way we can please Him. At any given time, every Christian is operating either in self-centered productivity (the old sin nature) or in eternal productivity (God's nature), depending on the individual's value system. Living according to unseen realities represents a faith that pleases God. We are called to reveal a living testimony—not a dead one. God's unseen realities have been hidden in our hearts and in the innermost parts of our souls, bringing in the favor, pleasure, and joy of God to our lives.

I know Christians who act as if God were dead, as far as their obedience to God and adventures in faith go. It seems as if not a single thing could motivate or energize them because they have not allowed God's wisdom to overrule their experiences in Adam. They become spiritually exhausted and grow weary in the race, because they are not receiving their strength from Christ and His Word (Psalm 27:1).

Understanding Spiritual Autonomy

Every believer needs to develop a measure of "spiritual autonomy." This does not mean that we become independent of the local assembly. We are members in particular in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), knit together in

love. Yet it does mean that if, God forbid, you were in prison for several years, deprived of fellowship and even deprived of necessities, you would make it with God because of what you have learned in the assembly of believers. The grace of God would be your sufficiency (2 Corinthians 12:9). *

As a modern day example, we could look at the lives of those two young women missionaries who were imprisoned in Afghanistan for several months, at the time of the terrorist attacks on American soil. Their testimonies resound with the faithfulness of God in circumstances more desperate than we could imagine.

Beyond a superficial life that gives mental assent (and agrees with the knowledge of the truth without a commitment to the truth), true spiritual autonomy is manifested in a life that understands warfare in the cosmic system—God's kingdom of light versus Satan's kingdom of darkness. A believer living in spiritual autonomy is full of wisdom from God's Word. Wisdom is the application of knowledge of the truth in the application and experience of life, motivated by love and the light of God's life that illuminates a willing heart. When wisdom takes precedence over our subjective experience, we

begin to understand warfare. Wisdom rules over what we think we need. It rules over wounds of the past that cause us to dwell upon the pain that others may have inflicted in our lives.

Only Faith Will Set Us Free

Faith is not a “living” faith until we apply the Word of God in our lives by faith-obedience to the truth. Faith becomes real when we apply God’s unseen realities to the details of our lives. An example would be for you to accept the fact that you are a brand-new creation in Christ. Now, in the mirror you may look the same, and the people around you may say that you still act the same. But 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that in Christ *all* things are new. So instead of the old standards, even if they seem good, God wants you to live by the highest standard, as a new creation in Christ. Therefore, you trust Him to reveal the reality of your life that is hid in Him.

The things in your life that are not spiritual priorities will never bring benefits from God. Never allow the disheartening, discouraging, and painful negativity of the past to have a moment of your time. Remember that hope looks forward, toward unseen realities in the future. But faith, which looks upward, operates in

unseen realities that could happen this very moment, this very day, or this very week. Once you have agreed with God about your sin and you have repented, forget about the failures of the past. Now is the time to begin a new life of faith.

Mental Consent versus a Living Faith

It is so crucial that we understand the difference between faith and mental assent or consent. To give mental consent means to thoroughly understand and agree with the truth about something that concerns you. Faith, however, is based upon something that is *in* you. It is something rooted in you in the reality of God's essence. It is the Holy Spirit, who empowers the truth of God into a personal reality of faith, even if the outcome is not yet evident. It is faith that gives us victory over sin.

Though mental consent may appear to be oneness, unless a person derives his faith from the One who died for him on the Cross, he will not have any lasting victories. In fact, outside of a derived life from the Savior, a person can only experience psychological living, which is derived from spiritual death. It may look good, and it may be kind, but it is not the life of Christ being manifested.

Thousands of pastors no longer preach because of the negative or sinful thoughts that they have allowed to dwell in their souls. They now live in unbelief. God says, "I will supply all your needs." But they respond, "No. You didn't, and You can't."

"My grace is sufficient for thee," the Lord declares in 2 Corinthians 12:9. "No, it isn't," they think in their hearts. "With Me, all things are possible," God says. "No, I don't believe it," they argue.

This is the essence of unbelief: It knows the truth, but it allows circumstances and needs to overrule spiritual realities. Instead of letting God's wisdom take precedence, circumstances too often take over the natural man's psyche with negativity and psychological living. The natural man is convinced that he must fulfill his needs with natural provisions. As a result, the natural man lives in bondage to sin instead of being free in the perfect liberty of God.

Sadly, according to Ecclesiastes 9:9, many of the kindest people you know are facing eternity without God. In order to spend eternity in heaven, a person must receive Jesus Christ as his Savior. Good works will not save a person. A pleasant disposition, unless it is derived from a

life in Christ, will not get anyone into heaven. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Therefore, when you pray for souls and when you meet people in your walk with God, do not go by sight. Be led by the Holy Spirit and ask Him for specific wisdom to reach the lost.

** For more about the faithfulness of God in times of trials and tests, be sure to read Welcome the Thorn, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 2002.*

Chapter Two
DEFEATING DOUBTS

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11, 12).

The way to overcome the lusts of the flesh is to be crucified with Christ, to walk in the Spirit, and to let grace teach us to deny ungodliness. True grace has a standard, and that standard is Calvary. True grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. It teaches us to go to the Cross and come out in Resurrection. True grace brings us out with courage, humility, meekness,

honor, and submission.

Suppose, after all these decades of being a pastor, I were to allow myself to become a casualty. Time goes on as I refuse to repent. I refuse to let God change me. This means that though I used my gifts to serve Jesus Christ, I was operating only in mental consent. I did not live a life rooted and grounded in Him and in His faith (Habakkuk 2:4; Acts 3:16).

I have explained things to this point in order to help you understand the greatest enemy of a victorious Christian life: doubt. Doubt questions God's integrity because of negative experiences in the reality of our obedience as Christians. Doubt questions God's provision when we linger over the times that it appears He has not provided for us.

Doubt often plagues people who have suffered extreme physical or mental abuse. They do not believe because they are wounded, hurting, and bleeding, spiritually speaking.

The Maturity Factor

Doubt refuses to recognize the reality of the Bema Seat evaluation of our lives, when every Word of God will judge the believer as he stands alone before God (see John 12:47-48; Romans

14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

In doubt, a Christian will say, "I have done everything God says, and I have been true to my ministry. But life is just too hard and complicated, and I need to take a few years off from serving God." What appeared to be a life-time commitment to a life of faith is now revealed as mental consent—a mere tip of the hat—to the fact that he was called to serve God by faith. What began as a faith vision began to fade in the darkroom of his soul. *

An image exposed to a piece of film will not produce a clear picture if it is not allowed to go through certain processes of development. God sees every believer according to the Finished Work. He gives us promises in His Word and He has placed us in a body of believers who help us to see who we are in Christ. He allows many different circumstances in our lives that He can use to refine us, as we become who He has made us to be, yielding to Him by faith.

We have to personally deal with the difference between faith and mental consent, the difference between hearing and doing, and the difference between doubting and confidence. Confidence develops when we refuse to doubt the God who has made us. The Holy Spirit bears

witness that He is working inside us, making us into His image. No matter what happens, we need to realize that He who calls us will be faithful to us, to make His truth a reality inside of us (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Then, we will run in self-discipline to receive the prize (Philippians 3:14), and we will bring glory to God.

Defining the Laws of Love and Liberty

The royal law of love and the perfect law of liberty have very precise definitions (James 2:8; James 1:25).** Every time I love God, love my spouse, love my family, and love those who sin against me, I make myself the instrument of perfect love. When I live in faith, according to the perfect law of liberty, I hear the Word of God, I believe it, and I do it. It is very easy because I know I have heard the Word and the Holy Spirit is here to do it through me. I practice what I hear in practical obedience.

Just as doubt is the enemy of victorious Christian living, perfect faith abolishes doubt and fear. Remember what we said in the beginning: Only faith pleases God, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Therefore, the only way we can stop sinning is to live by faith, moment to moment.

Every time a Christian obeys God in his circumstances and situations, he reveals perfect faith to the angels. When we put what we hear into practice, our faith is made perfect.

Faith is made perfect as I walk in obedience. Love is made perfect when I let the Holy Spirit do the loving. The highest value a Christian can possess is to be able to say at the end of a day, "I haven't lusted. I have had no desire to violate purity today. I had no desire to live in dishonesty. When I was tempted to sin, I prayed instead. I did not have to control people and force them to fit into my frame of reference."

There is no greater feeling than being able to put my head on the pillow at the end of a long day, knowing that, to the best of my God-given ability, as an instrument of righteousness, I have exhibited and executed God's perfect love. The Holy Spirit has shed that love abroad in my heart, and that love does not fail.

** For more about the unconscious, subconscious, and conscious levels of processing in the human mind and how God works His vision into our hearts, be sure to read *Imaginations of the Heart*, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

*** Be sure to read *The Perfect Law of Liberty*, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 2002, for a more thorough discussion on this subject.*

Chapter Three

WE CAN STOP SINNING

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

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

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

“If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we

have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 1:4-2:5).

A Principle and a Paradox

I have the privilege to “sin not.” It is my choice not to sin, but it has to be done through the power of the Holy Spirit to bear fruit that remains. God would never instruct me to do something I cannot do. I have the privilege and potential not to sin—today, tonight, and tomorrow. Yes, I am a sinner. But I have the potential to “sin not”.

If I walk in the light, in the fellowship and the purity of God, then the Word and the Spirit protect my soul. I will make positive decisions as I live through the Cross, in the Cross, and by

the Cross, controlled by Resurrection life. When Resurrection life controls my life through the Cross, then I derive everything from His ascension. In this state, a person can walk with God without sinning.

Aman who says he has no sin is a liar (1 John 1:8). But I also know that 1 John 2:1a says, “My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not.” A believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit and controlled by God’s Word does not live in bondage to sin (1 John 3:6). Some Christians have this idea that you are putting yourself into the gears of legalism, pride, and self-righteousness if you enter into this approach to the Glorious Gospel. So let me say it again: It is possible for any Blood-bought believer to not sin—even mentally—this morning, this noon, or tonight. We don’t even have to think of sin; we can just walk in the Holy Spirit and the light of the Word as God leads us each step of the way.

Walking in the Spirit

Walking in the Spirit is the way God protects us from sin and the way He prevents us from sinning. If we walk in the Spirit, then we do not fulfill the lust of the flesh. All we have to do is make sure we stay confessed up-to-date. We put

on the Lord Jesus, and we make no provision for the flesh.

The flesh is nothing to worry about if we concern ourselves with putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. If we walk in the Spirit, put on the Lord Jesus, and walk in love, we are protected from sin because we do not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

I am no longer a victim of fear. I am no longer discontented. This is neither arrogance nor pride, because I know where God has brought me from, and I am in awe of His abundant grace and excellent mercy for even allowing me to breathe.

Occupied with Christ

God called Job a mature and perfect man (see Job 8:20). The Lord wasn't calling Job sinless, but He was saying this: "Job, you know how to go through a day and a night and glorify Me completely."

We can have conversations from heaven and live without terrible dispositions, irritating reactions, and strange wandering thoughts of human evaluations. We can live without insecurity and anxiety. We can live very happy lives as we are occupied with Christ.

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Philippians 3:15).

My faith becomes perfect when I am obedient in every area that I know of, to the best of my ability with God. My love becomes perfect when I literally love everyone and refuse to allow any negative energy to flow out of me.

The Secret of a Life of Joy

“And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

“So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

“And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make

great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (Nehemiah 8:10-11).

The men and women of Israel were comforted and filled with joy when they heard the words of the Lord. The issue was no longer their sins that led them into captivity. They could go forward as a nation redeemed with unmerited favor because of God's love for them. No longer did they have to live in self-effort, trying to please God. The joy of the Lord became their strength.

Those Christians who *do* sin do not have to sin. Everyone has an old sin nature, but that nature does not have to be active. It has been crucified. There isn't a single thing we cannot do in Christ when the old sin nature is dead and the Kingdom of God is alive in us. God is for us! Believe it, receive it, and let His faith become alive in you.

CONCLUSION

What do you think of the possibilities God sees for our lives? Can you comprehend that God's words are Throne Words? They are not "pie in the sky" hopes without practical possibilities. He who has called you will also do it! Every word that has proceeded out of God's mouth is true, and not one of His promises has ever failed.

We are not teaching a false doctrine of sinless perfection, but we are being instructed in levels of maturity in Christ as believers. There is a process involved with spiritual development, but some Christians won't even face the possibilities of what would happen if they were to apply these truths to their lives. Instead, they choose to live in the devil's lie that no one can live purely before God without a system of works. Sadly, they continue to make excuses and never even see the potential of their lives.

We do not have to sin! I have given you a

heart-to-heart, Scripture-for-Scripture presentation. I have just declared what our potential can be according to the Holy Word of God.

Stay focused on the veracity of God's Word, concentrate on God's promises, and make a declaration of who you are in Christ by letting your conversation and affections be set above (Colossians 3:2).

Father, bless these thoughts to our hearts. They are important thoughts that could be misunderstood by those who are living in partial rebellion. They can be privately interpreted by those who don't want to grow in sanctification. But they can also make a broken heart absolutely joyful in the light of Your glory and grace. Thank You for always drawing us nearer to You. In Jesus' precious name we pray, Amen.