

How To Stop Practicing Sin

*“My dear children, I am writing this to you
so that you will not sin.” 1 John 2:1*

Many Christians ask, “If we were freed from sin when we were saved, then why must we still struggle against sin?” There are two principal reasons. The first reason is that even though our spirit was made alive in Christ when we were saved, our mind still needs to be converted by God’s Word. The second reason is that God uses our struggle against sin to purify our faith and bring us into spiritual maturity. It is a Biblical fact that we were freed from slavery to sin when we were saved because God removed our sinful nature. However, after we are saved, we still have to struggle *by faith* to overcome the sinful desires of our unconverted soul-life until our mind is renewed by the truth of God’s Word. There is a simple illustration of this in the Old Testament. After God miraculously delivered His people from slavery to Pharaoh (*a picture of our deliverance from slavery to Satan*), they still had to conquer the hostile giants in the land of Canaan (*a picture of overcoming sin to possess our spiritual inheritance – “the Promised Land”*). Remember that they could only overcome these giants and take the Promised Land by believing in God and obeying His commands. However, most of those who left Egypt died in the wilderness and never received their promised inheritance because they were unbelieving and disobedient in heart (Psalm 78; Hebrews 3:12-4:11). As Jude wrote, “I want to remind you that after the Lord saved His people out of Egypt, He subsequently destroyed those who did not believe (Jude 5).” This is a lesson and a warning to us all. If we want to possess God’s promised spiritual inheritance, we must forcefully struggle by faith to overcome the hostile “giants” of sin that would stand in our way, and the only way we can overcome sin is by believing and acting on the truth of God’s Word.

What are some of the “giants” of sin that are mentioned in the Bible? We are all familiar with the three “goliaths” of adultery, homosexuality and murder, which the Bible strongly condemns. However, the Bible lists a host of other sins which people also practice, such as being unloving, unmerciful, unrepentant, uncontrolled, unjust, unkind, untrustworthy, unforgiving, ungrateful, impatient, stubborn, argumentative, insolent, hostile, irreconcilable, reckless, rebellious, arrogant, angry, quick-tempered, proud, self-righteousness, self-willed, boastful, selfishly ambitious, domineering, overbearing, rude, abusive, vulgar, quarrelsome, belligerent, greedy, envious, covetous, deceitful, divisive, dishonest, lying, lustful, lewd, sensual, sexually immoral, swindling, stealing, unfaithful, lazy, gluttonous, drunkenness, carousing, foolish, frivolous, fearful, anxious, worried, nagging, cowardly, jealous, hypocritical, double-minded, faultfinding, gossiping, meddling, malicious, prejudiced, resentful, bitter, hateful, vengeful, slandering, manipulative and last, but not least, turning a “deaf ear” to the Holy Spirit. Of these sins, the apostle Paul soberly wrote to first-century Christians: “I warn you, as I did before, that those who practice these things will not

inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21).” Some sins which Christians practice are evident for all to see, such as gluttony or overeating (recent studies show that a majority of Christians attending church are significantly overweight); whereas other sins which Christians secretly practice are hidden from others (but not from God), such as pornography (recent studies reveal that a majority of Christian men attending church regularly look at on-line pornography).

Salvation is only the beginning and not the end of God’s purpose for His people. God’s intention is that we would live a sanctified or holy life after we are saved. The Bible says, “God... has saved us and called us to a holy life... it is God’s will that you should be holy... for God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life... like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy for I am holy’ (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:15-16).” If you are a Christian, there are no exceptions to God’s call to be holy. Many Christians think that just having forgiveness of sins is enough to get into heaven. That is not true. The Bible commands us to “pursue holiness, for without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).” Jesus said if you continue to practice sin after you are saved, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). And the apostle John warned, “No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has seen Him or knows Him (1 John 3:6).” Therefore, it is essential that we learn how to stop practicing sin if we want to know God and enter the kingdom of heaven. Remember, however, that God would never expect us to be holy unless He had also provided the way for us to overcome sin. And the way that God has provided for us to overcome sin is found in the reason why Christ died on the cross. That is why Paul declared, “I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing else but Jesus Christ and (*the purpose of*) His crucifixion (1 Corinthians 2:2).” For when Jesus Christ was crucified, He did not just physically die two thousand years ago on a cross outside the gates of Jerusalem. Since Jesus is the Son of God (*God manifest in the flesh*), His death transcended time and space and took place in “the heavenly tabernacle” - in the realm of eternity, so that He might provide redemption from sin to everyone who receives Him as Lord and Savior (John 1:12; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 9:11-15). In order to redeem us from the cancer (and condemnation) of sin, God the Father used His Son’s sacrificial death to not only provide us with forgiveness of sins, but to also deliver us from the power of sin. How did God accomplish this? Since we were born into sin and were sinners by nature, we could only be freed from sin through death. Therefore, God released us from sin’s dominion by spiritually including us in His Son’s death. The Bible says that when we were born of the Spirit, God spiritually immersed us into Christ’s death in order to remove our sinful nature, so that Christ could dwell in us by His Holy Spirit (Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 2:20; 4:6; Colossians 1:27). Consequently, we are now “dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).” This is the miracle of our new birth, made possible by the divine operation of the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:11-12; Galatians 6:14).

But now that God has saved us, how can we keep ourselves undefiled from the sin of the world? How can we serve God with a pure heart and an incorruptible love? How can we stop practicing the sins that have so easily entangled us in the past? Although God has made us a new spiritual person in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), our soul-life (*our natural personality with its inherent attitudes, affections and thoughts*) was not instantly converted and transformed into Christ's likeness when we were saved (Ephesians 4:22-24). Therefore, we do not have to crucify our old sinful Adam nature (since God has already put it to death and removed it), but we still have to contend with our old Adam way of thinking (the sinful thoughts of our *unconverted* soul-life). Remember, however, that there is a great difference between our old sinful nature (now dead and gone) and our *unconverted* soul-life. Our *unconverted* soul-life (*the unrenewed mind*) does not have the power of the old sinful nature, which was like a sin factory within us, always producing sinful attitudes and actions (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Since God has freed us from slavery to sin by destroying and removing our sin nature/the sin factory, so that His Son's Spirit could dwell in us (Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:11), we are now capable of living a sanctified or holy life. We are now able to overcome sin by fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ (His Person and His completed work on the cross (Hebrews 12:1-2)). When the Bible says that a born again Christian must not and cannot practice sin, it does not mean that we will never sin again (1 John 1:8-10; 3:9). It means that we should be and can be in the habit of overcoming sin by exercising faith in the truth of the cross of Christ (1 John 3:6-8; 5:4-5). Since sin no longer is our master, we are able to bring our thought-life into submission to Christ by renewing our mind according to the truth of God's Word. Paul taught, "Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is... be renewed in the attitude of your mind... put on the new man (*your new mind*) who is being renewed to a true knowledge in the image of God who created him (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:10)." This is what Jesus meant when He commanded His disciples to carry their own cross daily, deny themselves, and lose (get rid of) their *unconverted* soul-life for His sake (Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:26-27). With this command in mind, Paul wrote, "Therefore, brethren, we have an obligation, not to the flesh (*our unconverted soul-life*), for if you are living according to the flesh (*your unconverted soul-life*), you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live... put to death, therefore, whatever is *soulish*: immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire and greed... those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death on the cross their flesh (*their unconverted soul-life*) with its passions and desires (Romans 8:12-13; Colossians 3:5; Galatians 5:24)." Now that we no longer have a sinful nature and Christ's Spirit lives in us, we can put off our old soulish way of thinking and acting, and put on Christ's way of thinking and acting (1 Corinthians 2:16; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10). When we practice this daily sanctification (or holiness) that comes by exercising faith in the truth of the cross, our soul will be

transformed into Christ's likeness and we will prove that our salvation is real and enduring (Acts 26:18; Philippians 2:12-13; James 2:26; 2 Peter 1:10-11). For more on this subject, see our Teaching Tracts #48: Living by the Spirit; and #54: The Secret of Sanctification.

In our daily struggle to overcome sin, it is helpful to remind ourselves of these four divine facts:

- **We want to overcome sin because we love God.** We can only have one master: we cannot serve God and still serve sin. Paul said, "Sin shall not be your master (Romans 6:14)." And Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24)." The Bible says that if we are born again and know God, we will not continue to practice sin. "No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has seen Him or knows Him... no one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him and he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:6 & 9)." And Paul wrote, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love (Ephesians 6:24)." But how can we have an incorruptible love for Jesus if we are continually ensnared by compromising sins? Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will obey My commands... whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me (John 14:15 & 21)." And John wrote, "This is love for God: to obey His commands (1 John 5:3)." Our obedience to His commands is clearly God's love language. Therefore, we want to learn how to overcome sin and obey His commands because we love God and want to please Him. For more on this subject, see our Teaching Tracts #16: The Pearl of Great Price; and #51: God's Glorious Church.
- **If we want to overcome sin, we must do it by faith.** The Bible says that not only are we saved by faith, we must also *live by faith* (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). However, if we want to live by faith and overcome sin, we must *live by the truth* (John 3:21; 1 John 1:6). Faith is not a feeling; it is a *decision* to believe and act on the truth of God's Word. It is impossible to overcome our natural temperament and sinful attitudes and habits by our own strength. Even if we successfully managed to outwardly control our sinful habits, we would still secretly have self-righteous pride that we could do so. The only way we can stop practicing sin is by having faith in the truth of God's Word. How do we get this kind of overcoming faith? We immerse ourselves daily (with a good and honest heart) in God's Word (Luke 8:15). Paul said, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you... faith comes by hearing and hearing from the word of Christ (Colossians 3:16; Romans 10:17). Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32)." And this is the truth that

sets you free from the world's ever-present temptation to sin: God removed your sinful nature when you were saved, so that you would no longer be enslaved to sin, and Christ could live in you and empower you by His Spirit (Romans 6:6-7; Colossians 1:27).

Ultimately, our struggle against sin is a struggle of faith against unbelief because all sin springs from unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-19). Just as unbelief produces lawlessness and yields the fruit of death, our faith in Jesus Christ (who He is and what He accomplished for us on the cross) produces obedience and yields the fruit of holiness, and its reward – eternal life (Romans 6:20-22). Believing and acting on the truth of the cross (that we have died to sin) is the way (the only way) that God has provided for us to overcome sin. The Bible says, “For he who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:7).” God has freed us from sin’s power by destroying and removing our sinful nature (Romans 6:6; Colossians 2:11). This Biblical truth is our God-given “Declaration of Independence” from the tyranny of sin, which Jesus Christ died on the cross for us to possess. This is the liberating truth that Paul practiced and preached: “I (*my old self*) have been crucified with Christ, and I (*my sinful nature*) no longer live, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20).”

Remember that our faith must have corresponding action to be effective (James 2:18-26). Faith is not passive; if we want to overcome sin, our faith must be active and even forceful. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is forcefully advancing, and forceful men take hold of it (Matthew 11:12).” It is not enough to just hear God’s Word, but then not act on it. Jesus said, “Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say?... My brothers are those who hear God’s Word and act on it (Luke 6:46-49; 8:21).” We must believe and act on God’s Word; otherwise it will have no transforming power in our lives. “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the word they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith (Hebrew 4:2).” If we believe and act on the Biblical truth that we have been freed from sin (because we no longer have a sinful nature), we will be empowered to live by faith in the Son of God who indwells us with His Spirit of power and holiness (Galatians 2:20). This is the divine truth that sets us free from sin and enables us to “put to death” every sinful thought and carnal desire that tries to oppose God’s will from being done in our life. If we practice our faith in this truth of the cross, our faith will mature and become steadfast and unshakeable. For more on this subject, see our Teaching Tracts #22: The Works of Faith; #39: The Obedience of the Faith; and also our Bible Studies - Myths Exposed #4: Do Christians Have Two Natures?

- **If we want to overcome sin, we must wage spiritual warfare.** The apostle Peter exhorted believers to “abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul (1 Peter 2:11).” And Paul taught, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this world darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).” In other words, our struggle against sin is ultimately a spiritual battle of faith against the devil and his demonic forces. True spiritual warfare begins the day we are born again. Before we were saved, there was no real need for the devil to wage warfare against us since we were already enslaved to him because of our sinful nature. However, after we have been saved and freed from sin, the devil will wage full spiritual warfare to bring us back into captivity to sin and darkness. The Bible says, “Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. But resist him, standing firm in your faith (1 Peter 5:8-9).” But how is it possible for us to wage spiritual warfare against the power of the devil, who seeks to deceive and devour us in sin? The Bible says we cannot use natural weapons or our natural strength to resist the devil and overcome sin. Paul taught, “The weapons of our warfare are not natural, but divinely powerful to demolish strongholds (*of the mind*). We cast down vain imaginations and every barrier of pride that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).” Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5),” and this includes overcoming sin. If overcoming the devil and sin depended upon our own willpower, natural self-discipline and self-effort, we would surely be defeated. Therefore, we must put no confidence in our own ability and works to overcome sin; instead, we must put our faith and confidence solely in Jesus Christ, and His completed work on the cross, which is the only basis upon which we can overcome sin (Galatians 3:3; 6:14; Philippians 3:3).

Since the devil can no longer control us through our sinful nature (which is dead and gone), he has switched his tactics - the battleground is now our mind. The devil will try to attack our thought-life in order to ensnare us in unbelief and sin. The primary weapon the devil uses against us in this spiritual battle is the “Big Lie.” What is the Big Lie? The Big Lie is the devil’s constant accusation against us that we are hopelessly chronic sinners (John 8:44; Romans 8:33-34; Revelation 12:10). The devil uses this Big Lie to try to deceive and entrap us in sin. The devil also uses this Big Lie to discourage and condemn us after he has ensnared us in sin. As soon as you swallow this Big Lie and believe that you are just a hopelessly chronic sinner, the devil has critically undermined your faith in the power of the blood of Christ. And if the devil can undermine your faith in Christ’s triumph on the cross, he can then try to undermine your faith in Christ Himself.

But thank God that Jesus Christ has given us the victory over the devil and sin (1 John 5:4-5). For greater is Christ who reigns in us, than the devil who rules in this world of sin (1 John 4:4). Thank God that Jesus Christ has given us spiritual weapons to do spiritual battle and overcome the devil (2 Corinthians 6:7; 10:4). And the most powerful weapon in God's heavenly arsenal is the blood of Christ! The Bible says, "They overcame him (*the devil*) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11)." The blood speaks of Christ's victory over the devil and sin through the cross (Colossians 2:15). By His death on the cross, Christ destroyed the devil's spiritual hold over us and his foothold in us by removing our sinful nature (Romans 6:6; Colossians 2:11; 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14). This is why it is essential that we renew and fortify our mind by meditating on this truth of God's Word, and believing and acting on it. As soldiers of the cross, we can put on the armor of God and use the shield of faith (in the cross of Christ) and the sword of the Spirit (the truth of God's Word) to repel the devil's attacks against our mind (Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 John 2:14). Just as Christ defeated the devil during the temptation in the wilderness by testifying to the truth of God's Word (Luke 4:1-14), we also can "fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12)," and overcome the devil's temptation to sin by testifying to the truth of God's Word. And this is that truth: God removed our sinful nature when we were saved, so that His Son's Spirit of holiness and power could dwell in us and enable us to overcome sin (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 2:20; 4:6; Colossians 2:11; 2 Timothy 1:7).

The Bible says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7)." In other words, a man speaks and acts based on who he is - in his inner being. The Bible says that every man was born with a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10-23; 5:6-19; 7:14-24). For this reason, Jesus said that a man's sinful thoughts and actions originate from out of his sinful heart (Matthew 15:18-19). However, when you were born again of the Spirit, God changed your inward identity. Your old sinful nature is dead and gone, and Jesus Christ now lives in you by His Spirit (Colossians 1:27). The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new person; his old being is gone, a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17)." If you believe this Biblical truth, your new attitudes and actions will spring from out of your new identity - who you are in Christ! This truth of the cross is the most powerful and effective weapon God has given you to overcome sin and, in fact, is the only way of escape from enslavement to sin. You can overcome sin by simply making a decision to believe in this truth of the cross that God has given you a new identity in Christ. We are not hopelessly chronic sinners! We are saints - holy ones - who are dead to sin and alive to God because we no longer have a sinful nature, and we now have Christ's holy nature dwelling in us. Armed with this strategic and powerful truth of the cross (we are dead to sin because we no longer have a sinful nature), we can overcome the devil and sin.

Remember that we always fight from a position of spiritual rest. We enter into God's rest by trusting in Christ's victory on the cross. We do not have to fight to attain victory over sin; instead we fight from a secure position of victory because Christ has already secured our victory over sin by His triumph on the cross. Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30)." If we abide in Christ and His victory over sin, His yoke is easy and His commands are not burdensome. However, if we step out of our position of resting by faith in Christ's victory, and instead rely on our own self-effort to overcome sin, we will lose His peace and protection and fall victim to the devil's temptations.

Confessing our deliverance from the power of sin is the natural way for our faith to express the truth of Christ's triumph on the cross. Whenever we believe and confess *by faith* that we are dead to sin (because we no longer have a sinful nature), the devil's power to ensnare us in sin is broken and we are freed to do God's will. The Bible says, "It is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke.' With that same spirit of faith, we also believe, therefore we also speak ... for it is with your heart that you believe, resulting in righteousness, and it is with your mouth that you confess, resulting in salvation (2 Corinthians 4:13; Romans 10:10)." Remember that our confession of faith must be *aligned with the truth of God's Word*; otherwise we do not have true Biblical faith. Therefore, we do not confess *hoping that somehow, sometime in the future we will be* delivered from sin. This is actually unbelief in the cross of Christ. Instead, we confess our faith based on the Biblical truth *knowing that we have already been* delivered from sin because of Christ's victory on the cross. And this is the result: our faithful testimony of the power of the blood of the Lamb enables us to endure and escape every temptation to sin (2 Corinthians 10:13). This is the power of the blood of Christ that protects our mind against the devil's lies, accusations and seductions. "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and after you have done everything, to stand firm... resist the devil and he will flee from you (Ephesians 6:13; James 4:7)." For more on this subject, see our Teaching Tracts #13: They Loved Not Their Lives; #41: Put on the Armor of Light; #55: The Overcomers; Question & Answer #50: Why must I believe that I no longer have a sin nature?; and Question & Answer #51: How can I ever be freed from my deeply ingrained, sinful habit?

- **If we want to overcome sin, we must suffer for Christ.** Paul instructed the first century Christians, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God ... for it has been granted to you for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him but to also suffer for Him (Acts 14:22; Philippians 1:29-30)." Why must we suffer for Christ's sake? Suffering hardship is an integral part of

God's "boot camp," which is designed to test and develop our faith in Christ, and to train us in sanctification. The Greek word for affliction is *thlipsis*. It is also translated as trouble or tribulation, and simply means pressure. God has designed suffering to press us beyond our natural ability to endure trials and resist temptations, in order to train us to depend solely on Christ and His completed work on the cross (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). Trials, afflictions and persecutions are the crucible that God uses to purify our faith in Christ. As God has said, "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48:10)." We cannot be Christ's soldiers and overcome sin if we are not willing to suffer the hardship of His divine training (2 Timothy 2:3). We cannot be Christ's pure bride if we are not willing to suffer for Him in our struggle against sin (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). We cannot receive God's promise of our spiritual inheritance if we are not willing to suffer with Christ (Romans 8:17). We cannot bear God's spiritual fruit if we are not willing to suffer the pain of His divine pruning (John 15:2). We cannot be God's children if we are not willing to suffer and endure His divine discipline (Hebrews 12:5-7). We cannot be Christ's disciples and come into spiritual maturity if we are not willing to suffer and persevere by faith in order to overcome sin (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4). We cannot reign with Christ in the age to come if we are not willing to suffer with Him during our life on earth (2 Timothy 2:12).

In His parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus said we must endure two kinds of suffering to overcome sin and produce the fruit of sanctification (Matthew 13:21-22; Mark 4:16-19; Luke 8:13-14). We experience the first kind of suffering when we endure the trials of affliction and persecution. We experience the second kind of suffering when we resist the temptations of worldly riches and pleasures. We might call these two kinds suffering that prove our faith the twin tests of adversity and prosperity. The Bible says that Jesus was tempted in all things as we are and that He suffered in the flesh (mentally, emotionally and physically) when he resisted the temptation to sin (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). The Bible says, "It was fitting for Him (God)... to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings... although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8)." And Peter wrote, "Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose because he who has suffered in the flesh (*mentally, emotionally and physically*) has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2)." This means we will often suffer (mentally, emotionally and physically) when we resist and overcome sin in order to live holy to God.

Here are some questions to help us see if we are suffering for Christ's sake in our struggle to overcome sin: Are we suffering alienation and hostility from

unbelievers (including old friends, members of our own family, and even unbelieving “Christians”) because of our witness for Christ? Are we suffering in the flesh because we refuse to indulge in the pleasures of sin and the riches of the world for Christ’s sake? Are we suffering with Christ because we are “putting to death” daily the sins (fear, anger, bitterness, pride, envy, lust, greed, etc.) that used to entangle us? Are we suffering with Christ because we are denying ourselves the pursuit of self-gratification and self-fulfillment? Are we suffering for the sake of the gospel because we are laying down our willfulness, personal preferences and prejudices, and selfish desires to Christ’s Sovereignty? Are we suffering in the flesh because we are giving up our worldly ambitions, activities, and associations for Christ’s sake?

Remember that we can only forsake temporal, soulish happiness in this world if we hold fast to our faith in Christ and His completed work on the cross. Jesus told His disciples a parable of a man who sold everything he had in order to obtain a treasure hidden in a field. Why did the man sell all to acquire this treasure? Jesus said the man was willing to give up everything for the joy of gaining this great treasure (Matthew 13:44-45). In the same way, we can give up our unconverted, natural soul-life (and its carnal desires and passions) and endure suffering to resist sin because, in return, we will gain the priceless joy of gaining Jesus Christ. It is this joy of knowing the Lord that gives us the strength to endure suffering for His sake (Nehemiah 8:10). This was Paul’s personal testimony: “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).” The Bible says that Moses was able to endure suffering and resist the temporal pleasures of sin because he had his eyes fixed on eternal God who is invisible (Hebrews 11:25-27). The Bible says that Jesus endured the suffering and shame of the cross because of the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:1-2). This is this heavenly vision and spiritual joy that enables us to suffer in this world and “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).”

To sum up, why does God allow us to suffer in our struggle of faith against sin? Paul said, “We rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; and perseverance proven character (Romans 5:3-4; see also James 1:2-4).” Suffering is God’s way to develop faith in us that has been tested, refined and proven as pure gold (1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-13). What is the “pure gold” that constitutes a tested and proven faith? Remember that our faith must be based on the truth of God’s Word to be Biblical faith. The solid gold of God’s truth that purifies our faith in Christ so that it is immovable when tried and tested is the gospel truth of Christ’s completed work on the cross (Christ died for us and included us in His death, in order to remove our sin

nature, so that He could sovereignly live in us). This is the pure gold of God's truth, which enables our faith to persevere under pressure. The Bible says, "Let us throw off every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2)." And when we have persevered in overcoming sin, our faith in Christ will be more established and stronger than ever. "After we have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you (1 Peter 5:10)." For more on this subject, see our Teaching Tracts #12: Destined to Suffer for Christ's Sake; and #29: Suffering - God's Crucible.

In closing, let us review these four points on overcoming sin:

- We want to overcome sin because we love God.
- If we want to overcome sin, we must do it by faith in the truth of the cross.
- If we want to overcome sin, we must wage spiritual warfare.
- If we want to overcome sin, we must suffer for Christ's sake.

There is a great difference between a Christian who struggles in his own strength against sin and is regularly defeated, and a Christian who struggles by faith against sin and is an overcomer. We are able to overcome sin by fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ (who He is and what He accomplished for us on the cross). By Christ's triumph on the cross, God has freed us not only from the penalty of sin, He also freed us from the power of sin (by removing our sinful nature), so that by His Spirit (which now dwells in us) we could overcome every temptation to sin. Our struggle of faith against sin will often require us to endure hardship as we learn to overcome sin. The Bible says, "He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness. All discipline for the moment is not pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:10-11)." This training is essential to what the Bible calls the practice of sanctification (or holiness), which will continue until we die and are called to be with the Lord in glory. Sanctification requires a daily struggle of faith on our behalf, which is often marked by sacrifice and suffering, but is richly rewarded with ever-increasing, intimate fellowship with the King of glory. Paul taught, "For momentary, light affliction is producing in us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison... for I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 8:18)." As we learn to overcome sin by exercising faith in the power of blood of the Lamb, we will steadily occupy the spiritual land (our spiritual inheritance) that Christ has secured for us by His death and resurrection. When we overcome sin this way by faith in the truth of the cross, we will have the indescribable joy of truly knowing our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, and

we will bear much spiritual fruit for His sake. By our victorious struggle of faith to overcome sin, we prove (by our actions) that we truly believe in Jesus Christ and all that He accomplished for us on the cross, and by our lives we glorify God and prove that we are, indeed, His disciples. The Lord Jesus promised all those who overcome the world that they would not be hurt by the second death, but they would eat of the Tree of Life; they would be clothed in white garments and have their name in the Book of Life; they would receive hidden manna and a new name; they would be a pillar in the temple of God and belong to the new Jerusalem, the city of God; and they would rule over the nations with Him (Revelation Chapters 2 & 3).

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