

Worship God -- Overcome Sin

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Often when we think of sin we think of not doing this or that. Not smoking, not eating pork, not lying or stealing, etc. There's nothing wrong with that because to overcome sin one must avoid wrong types of behavior. However, in this article let's examine from a somewhat different perspective how you can overcome sin.

Those familiar with the commandments of God generally know what not to do, that is, the behavior we're to avoid in order not to sin. But just knowing what not to do isn't enough to overcome sin, that is, to put sin out of your life and keep it out. Keeping yourself from sin requires establishing and maintaining in an active and positive way a right relationship with God. That is a key to conquering sin that we all must come to understand and practice.

What is your relationship with God? Do you understand its importance if you are to overcome sin?

The Beginning of Human Sin

To understand how sin develops in our minds and actions let's go back to beginning of sin as far as mankind is concerned. "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

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"Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:8-9; 15-17).

In verse 16 the Hebrew is literally: "eating, eat." This is similar to the next verse, literally "dying, die". It is a form of emphasis, expressed in verse 17 properly by the translation "you shall surely die." The similar statement in verse 16 could be as well translated "you shall surely eat" or "eating you shall eat" as it is in the margin of some Bibles. It was a command to eat of the trees of the garden, including the tree of life, representing God's Holy Spirit. God had set before Adam two ways – and told him to chose the one that was best.

Compare what God told the Israelites through Moses: "See, I have set before you today **life and good, death and evil**, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death,

blessing and cursing; **therefore choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may **love the Lord your God**, that you may **obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him**, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them" (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

Adam had not obeyed the command to eat of the tree of life when Satan came to tempt him. "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (Genesis 3:22). Adam had failed to listen to God. He had failed to act on the positive part of God's command to eat of the tree of life, which symbolized communion with God, partaking of God's nature through his Spirit. Adam's first sin was a sin of omission.

Abide In God

We are nourished spiritually through God. He the source of life. The key to bearing spiritual fruit is abiding in God, through abiding in his word. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. **Abide in Me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. **If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,** you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:1-8).

When God's word abides in one he is strong and can overcome Satan. If Adam had respect for God and had abided in God's word and eaten of tree of life, he would have had God's mind, his knowledge of the deceitfulness of sin. He would have had the spiritual strength to avoid Satan's temptation. As the commentary by Keil and Delitzsch correctly summarizes: "By obedience to the divine will he would have attained to a Godlike knowledge of good and evil.... He would have detected the evil in the approaching tempter; but instead of yielding to it, he would have resisted it...." (*Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, on Genesis 2:15-17). Thus, if Adam had first feared God, and in worshipful obedience had partaken of God's nature, symbolized by the eating of the tree of life, he could and probably would have overcome sin by avoiding the sin of eating of the forbidden tree.

Adam's problem then, began with not having a proper fear of God and reverence for him, and thus not acting on his word. This is summarized by the Apostle Paul: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood

by the things that are made, His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans. 1:20-21).

God Is the Lawgiver

If we are to avoid sin, we must cultivate a profound reverence for God, we must worship him in humility, in sincerity and truth, and take heed to his words. We must humble ourselves before God, respect him and yield to God as the Lawgiver.

“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:6-10; cf. Psalm 25:8; Micah 6:8).

We must never forget that God is the supreme lawgiver and judge. “There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy” (James 4:12). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10; cf. John 12:48; James 2:12).

We must not add to or take away from his word. “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

The Pharisees of Jesus day had added a great many rules of their own devising to God's laws, and, at the same time, had sought to nullify some of God's commandments with their traditions. Much the same thing has been done in the traditions of professing Christianity.

“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’ --(that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have

handed down. And many such things you do" (Mark 7:5-13).

Living by God's word is a principle that is illustrated for us over and over again throughout the Bible. When tempted of Satan, Jesus said, "It is written, `Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

God's word defines sin, and righteousness: "Whoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law**" (I John 3:4; American KJV). "My tongue shall speak of your word: for **all your commandments are righteousness**" (Psalm 119:172).

The very first commandment is to worship God, and God alone: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7). This command is explained further and amplified in other Scriptures. "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

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"You shall fear the LORD your God, and serve him, and shall swear by his name. You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (Deuteronomy 6:5; 13-14; American KJV).

In verse 13, the word translated "swear," is the Hebrew: *shaba*. It means, to seven oneself or complete [the number seven indicating completeness], hence, to swear. It can mean to worship in the sense of complete submission, loyalty, etc. "*To swear [shaba], by God...*, is sometimes the same as to worship God..." (Gesinius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon To the Old Testament*). Jesus Christ paraphrased this verse, giving the intended sense: "Then said Jesus to him, 'Get you hence, Satan: for it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve"' (Matthew 4:10).

By listening to and obeying God's instructions Adam could have had God dwelling in him. Jesus explains: "'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.' Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:21-23).

God dwells in those who are truly converted through his Holy Spirit, which is given to those who obey God. "And, we, are witnesses of these things,—also the Holy Spirit, which God hath given unto them who are yielding obedience unto him" (Acts 5:32; (Rotherham Translation).

"And we are witness to the truth of this, and so is the Holy Spirit — the gift of God to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32; Open English Bible).

“We are witnesses to these declarations, as well as the holy spirit which God 'gives to those yielding to Him.’” (Acts 5:32; Concordant Version).

Ignoring God's word led Israel more and more deeply into sin: “For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments; And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

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“They did not keep the covenant of God; They refused to walk in His law, And forgot His works And His wonders that He had shown them.

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“But they sinned even more against Him By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.

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”Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation.

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“Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, And they lied to Him with their tongue; For their heart was not steadfast with Him, Nor were they faithful in His covenant.

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“How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, And grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, And limited the Holy One of Israel.

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“Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, And did not keep His testimonies, But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; They were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. When God heard this, He was furious, And greatly abhorred Israel” (Psalm 78:5-8; 10-11; 17; 22; 36-37; 40-41; 56-59).

When God's word does not abide in us and we don't reverence God we begin to listen to wrong counsel, as did Adam and Eve. And often we may even seek out wrong counsel. Israel is an example:

“Woe to the rebellious children,’ says the Lord, '**Who take counsel, but not of Me**, And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin;

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“Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: 'Because you **despise this word, And trust in oppression and perversity**, And rely on them, Therefore this iniquity shall be to you Like a breach ready to fall, A bulge in a high wall, Whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant. And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel,

Which is broken in pieces; He shall not spare. So there shall not be found among its fragments A shard to take fire from the hearth, Or to take water from the cistern" (Isaiah 30:1, 12-14).

“For the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people,

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“The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.

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“Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait on the Lord, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him.

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“And when they say to you, '**Seek those who are mediums and wizards**, who whisper and mutter, 'should not a people **seek their God?** Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? **To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.** They will pass through it hard pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness” (Isaiah 8:11, 13, 16-17, 19-22).

Seeking God, seeking to obey his word, can keep you from sin: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By **taking heed according to Your word.** With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, **That I might not sin against You!** (Psalm 119:9-11).

Watch and Pray

We are told also to watch and pray:

Jesus said to his disciples on the night he was to be taken away to be crucified: "Watch and pray, **lest you enter into temptation.** The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

To watch in this context means keep awake, be vigilant, in a spiritual sense. It does not just apply to keeping up with the news. It means, among other things, to be spiritually aware. It means to be alert to temptation, and the wiles of the devil.

“**Be sober, be vigilant;** because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. **Resist him, steadfast in the faith,** knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

If we are not being watchful, and constant in prayer, that is, spending a substantial

amount of time in prayer every day, we are likely to fall into temptation.

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; **praying always** with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, **being watchful** to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:17-18).

How much time should one spend in prayer? The Bible does not give us a specific number of minutes to spend in prayer as a daily average. But Paul said in the above Scripture that we should be “praying always.” Not that we should spend 24 hours a day every day in prayer, but that we should be spending a considerable amount of time in prayer every day.

When Jesus was facing the temptation in the wilderness, he fasted for forty days, no doubt spending much of that time in prayer (Matthew 4:1-2). When facing the crucifixion, Jesus went out to pray, after keeping the Passover, and prayed fervently (Luke 22:40-46).

In the Temple under the Old Covenant were two daily services, where sacrifices were offered and prayers were made. David often prayed three times a day. “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17). Daniel, a man much beloved of God, also practiced praying three times a day (Daniel 6:10). Five minutes of perfunctory prayer a day is not likely to accomplish much in helping you overcome temptation. But sufficient time spent in regular, daily, earnest prayer may help you a great deal to overcome temptation to sin.

So as you think about how to overcome sin, how to put sin out and keep it out, remember to pray, study the Bible, fast, seek God, partake of his Spirit. Worship God, learn to love God with all your heart, mind and soul, and overcome sin. God's nature is incompatible with sin. When God is abiding in you fully and powerfully through his Holy Spirit, sin can't.

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