

Introduction:

We've all heard it. A Christian, perhaps even an elder or a preacher, confesses some intense sin. Or maybe worse, they don't confess, they get caught. As the weeks go by, the stories multiply. We hear of the brother who rages and beats his wife. I once heard of a man who left his wife two weeks after he was appointed to be a shepherd in his home congregation. He moved into an apartment he had already rented before he was appointed. I also recently heard of an elder's wife who ran off with another woman. Stories are told of drunkenness, pornography, immorality, impropriety, vulgarity, lying, theft, even murder. When we hear these stories, someone inevitably asks, "How can a Christian commit that sin?" This question can come from multiple sources. Sometimes it comes from the worldly detractor who wants to highlight the supposed hypocrisy of Christians to justify avoiding the claims of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it comes from the self-righteous Christian who hasn't committed that sin yet and wants to use that fact to prove they are a better Christian. Sometimes it comes from the Christian who has committed or been tempted by the same sin but wants to put on the mask of near perfection so no one will guess the struggle that Christian is facing. Sometimes it comes from the well-meaning Christian who hasn't committed that particular sin, can't fathom committing it, and doesn't really know how to respond to it or how to help the brother or sister face it. And sometimes it comes from the one who committed the sin as he or she searches for an explanation to how they did this thing they committed themselves not to do.

We ask this question as if being baptized makes a person immune to temptation. But there really is an answer. I'd like us to consider how this happens. We're actually going to have four lessons in this series. We'll have an AM track and a PM track. Next Sunday morning, we're going to answer the more important question: "How can a Christian not commit that sin?" Over the next two Sunday nights, we'll answer the question: "How Should We Respond When a Christian Commits that Sin?" Please understand, there is not a single part of these lessons intended to teach Christians are free to sin. I am not trying to excuse the sins of Christians. However, I do want us to understand that Christians are not perfect people; they are forgiven and growing people. I especially want to help those of us who have struggles with temptation and sin to know that we are in the midst of an understanding and helpful people. We can take the masks off and admit our struggles and failures, finding the help we need to overcome right here.

Discussion:

- I. Christians aren't immune to temptation and sin.
 - A. Certainly, Christians aren't supposed to sin (**I John 2:1**). However, the Bible clearly demonstrates that Christians are not immune to temptation, and, therefore, are not immune to sin. Over and over again we can see that. Peter warns against Christians going back into sin in **II Peter 2:20-22**. In **I Corinthians 5:1-2**, we hear about a Christian committing the sin of sexual immorality and a bunch of other Christians committing the sin of arrogance and looking the other way.
 - B. But perhaps the passage that is most helpful to us is **Galatians 2:11-13**. This is not a rebellious sinner trying to get away with stuff. This is not a worldly person parading as a Christian under false pretenses. This is not a weak Christian or a fringe member. This is an apostle. He got caught up in hypocrisy and even led the Son of Consolation and Encouragement, Barnabas, into his hypocrisy.
 - C. If the apostle Peter was not immune to temptation, why would we think we are or that our brethren will be?
- II. Satan is attacking us even harder.
 - A. Not only are we not immune to temptation and sin, we need to recognize that when we are baptized into Christ, Satan paints a special target on us. According to **I Peter 5:8**, Satan is a roaring lion and is seeking to devour someone. That someone is you. Think about it. He certainly will keep a steady supply of temptation and sin ready for those who are complicit with his will. How much more though will he step it up when he has lost one of us.
 - B. According to **Ephesians 6:10-12**, we are at war. Christianity is not a walk in the park; it is time on a battlefield. Goliath didn't take aim at all the warriors who were staying in the camp, but as soon as one walked onto the battlefield, he took special notice and made special attack. When we get baptized, we are stepping onto the battlefield and Satan will turn all his attention to us.

III. Christians aren't perfect; we are growing.

- A. **II Peter 1:5-8** makes a profound but subtle point as it talks about our growth as Christians. When it tells us that we need to add and increase characteristics, it tacitly explains that today we don't have the complete and perfect measure of any of those characteristics yet. Note that means none of us have a complete and perfect measure of virtue, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, or love yet. That means even now we lack some virtue and self-control. Have no doubt that Satan who is attacking extra hard will exploit that every chance he can. He'll even use our failures as further temptation to get us to completely abandon God.
- B. Think about what this means for us. We are growing. As long as we stay in Christ, we will be having progressive victory over our sins. We will have victories we didn't have before entering Christ. But since we haven't been completely perfected yet, we will have some failures as well. Because we are growing, the very things Satan used to capture us before we entered Christ will be there, perhaps in decreasing degrees, but nevertheless, they will provide a foothold for Satan to tempt us.
 1. According to **James 1:14**, Satan uses desire to tempt us. No doubt, in Christ, our desires are changing to the point we will eventually say along with the Psalmist that our greatest delight is the Lord Himself (cf. **Psalm 73:25**). However, as we grow some of those old desires linger and provide a foothold for Satan.
 2. As we grow in Christ, our fears will increasingly subside. However, as **Galatians 2:12** demonstrates, those old fears can linger, leading us into the refuge of the sins that we used to turn to in order to protect us from our fears.
 3. When we were in the world, the things of the world—lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (**I John 2:15-17**)—took us captive in sin. We developed a relationship with them. In Christ, our allegiance is progressively changing. But we have not been perfected. Therefore, our friendship with them continues to pull on us (**James 4:4**).
 4. In the world, like Martha, we were distracted from the only necessary thing (**Luke 10:38-42**). As we grow in Christ, our devotion to God and focus upon Him will increase. Yet, the same distractions will catch our eyes and lead us astray at times.
- C. Please, don't misunderstand. There is a difference between those who are in Christ and those who aren't. In Christ, we are set free from our sins. We are forgiven, no longer defined by the sinning we've done. By faith in Christ we gain the empowerment to overcome sin. We are striving to overcome sin; those in the world are running headlong into its arms. We are gaining progressive victory. As we increasingly rely on the grace of God, as we increasingly desire Him above all, as we increasingly find confidence in Him, as we increasingly long for heavenly things, and as we increasingly put our focus and attention on Him, Satan will win less and less. We will win more and more. But we need to understand that Christianity is a growth process. It is about progress not perfection. Stumbling doesn't mean you aren't a Christian. Stumbling doesn't mean your brothers or sisters in Christ are bad Christians or wicked people. It means we are all growing Christians.

IV. Quit being shocked.

- A. When we consider this, we shouldn't really be shocked at all when a Christian commits that sin. If that was something that tempted them before they entered Christ, it will tempt them afterwards and they may stumble. I don't want to step too much on our next lesson. Rather than being shocked that a Christian might commit that sin, we should remember that, like us, they are growing and not perfect. Their sins might be different than ours, but the fact that they still sin is the same as it is for us.
- B. Unfortunately, because we act like it is a crazy thing for Christians to sin, too few of us admit it when we stumble. Instead, we hide it, cover it up, stuff it down inside where it ends up taking control and dominating us just like it did before we entered Christ. Then it eventually gets so big it can no longer be hidden. Instead of acting like it is a crazy thing that Christians sin, we need to understand and accept that we are not immune to sin. We need to teach each other the proper response to stumbling and show some understanding so people are willing to follow that proper response. They need to know that right here is where they can find the understanding and help they need to continue in progressive victory in Christ. We'll talk more about how we should respond when a Christian commits that sin in our next lesson.

Conclusion:

If you are one of us Christians who have committed that sin, remember what it says in **I John 2:1-2**. God hasn't given us permission to sin. But in Christ, He has given a propitiation for our sins in Jesus Christ. Don't try to hide your sin; bring it to Him and let Him forgive you. Try as we might, we may still be shocked at what you've done. But trust me, God never is. He knew what you would do and sent Jesus to die for you. Turn to Him now.