

Introduction:

Last week we answered the question, “How can a Christian commit that sin?” So often, we’ve been shocked by some of the sinning Christians do. And while we do not excuse or justify this sinning, we recognize the reason it can happen is because Christians are not immune to temptation and sin, Satan is attacking us even harder, and Christians aren’t perfect, they are growing. When we consider the onslaught of Satan, the cosmic powers of darkness, and spiritual forces of evil (cf. **Ephesians 6:12**) that are arrayed against us, a bigger and more important question arises. How can a Christian not commit that sin? Being in Christ means being set free from sin (**John 8:32**), but how does that remotely happen when we have such an enemy as Satan waging such a war against us. How can any Christian ever be victorious in any battle against Satan and sin? To be truthful, it really is more surprising that Christians overcome sin than that they fall sometimes. In fact, while I understand that anyone of any faith or lack thereof may make a positive choice at any given moment, it really takes the power of heaven to have real victory over sin. We should be amazed by it. In later lessons, we will probably come back and expand on some of these points. However, today’s lesson is going to be a brief survey of helpful concepts, attitudes, and practical tools.

Discussion:

I. Remember what God has done so we can win this victory

- A. Paul understood what it was like to try with every fiber of his being to overcome sin and yet come up short, falling again and again. His despair was so great that he cried out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (**Romans 7:24**, ESV). However, the great thing is he had an answer. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (**Romans 7:25**, ESV).
- B. This faith is explained in **Romans 5:6-11**. Paul grasped that if God was willing to sacrifice Jesus in order to bring us into this relationship, do we really think He will simply let us drift away without fighting for us? Of course not. No doubt, some rebel and turn away. However, the God who sacrificed His own Son to reconcile us is working on our behalf to save us and give us life. So, no matter how fearful you are that you won’t overcome sin and have the victory, remember what God has already done to make you victorious. Keep your faith in that and press on.

II. Recognize your powerlessness.

- A. I know this sounds like an odd place to start. Normally we tell folks, you’re strong enough. You’re good enough. You can do this. Just keep trying harder. However, I think in this case, the advice is just the opposite. We are at war with an enemy that is too strong for us (**Ephesians 6:12**). If we keep trying to wage the battle from our own strength, we are going to be in trouble.
- B. Jehoshaphat in **II Chronicles 20:12** gives us a great example. When attacked by strong enemies, he knew he could keep trying to marshal all his strength, and they would still lose. Instead, he admitted his powerlessness, turned to God for strength, and simply did what God told Him. They won the victory. Why? Because Jehoshaphat and the Judean army were so strong? No, because God is that strong. Thus, when Paul talks about our battle in **Ephesians 6:10**, he tells us to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (ESV). When we are weak, God can be strong through us (**II Corinthians 12:9-10**). This does not mean we sit on our backsides and do nothing as some fear and have erroneously accused me of saying. Rather, it means not relying on ourselves but relying on God by finding out what He says and doing it.

III. Put on God’s Armor

- A. When Paul talked about being strong in the strength of the Lord, he tells us to put on God’s armor (**Ephesians 6:11**). This is more than putting on armor that God has fashioned. This is putting on God’s very armor. He is willing to arm us in the battle. We can be like David walking on the battlefield before Goliath, not armed with the feeble panoply of man, but with the full armor that is God’s.
- B. Paul details and describes the armor in **Ephesians 6:14-17**. But rather than getting bogged down in all the different aspects of the armor, note where we find God’s armor. Our offensive weapon is God’s very Word. As Jesus quoted Scripture to defeat Satan in **Matthew 4**, so we can defeat Satan and temptation the same

way. However, there is more than this. The belt of truth can be found in God's Word (**John 17:17**). The breastplate of righteousness is fitted on us through the God-breathed Scripture (**II Timothy 3:16-17**). The shoes of the gospel are found in the Word of Truth (**Colossians 1:5**). The shield of faith is forged in the Word of God (**Romans 10:17**). The helmet of salvation is found in the sacred writings that come from God (**II Timothy 3:14-15**). The Bible is not a homework assignment. It is God's Word where we find God's armor. Apart from this we cannot possibly win, but through it, we can be victorious.

IV. Walk in God's presence.

- A. When Paul wrapped up the armor of God, he exhorted us to pray "at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (**Ephesians 6:18**). We can't win the battle apart from this connection with God. This begins with a foundation of regular, focused prayer time. This is the prayer closet kind of praying. Find your place and time of prayer and invite God to be part of your day. Trust me, we don't have time not to pray.
- B. We need to go beyond this foundation, and make prayer a part of our entire day. Based on some things that I've read, I call this walking in God's presence. By that I mean actually being cognizant that God is with you. He is sitting with you now. When you drive home or to the restaurant today, He is in the car with you. When you go to work tomorrow, He is walking with you. He is right there. You can talk to Him. This is taking **I Thessalonians 5:16-18** very literally. Are you being tempted? Talk to God about it. Do you have a choice? Take it to God. Did you win a victory? Rejoice with God. Did you notice a blessing from God? Thank Him for it, right then. Did you stumble? Confess it immediately. He is with you. Talk to Him. Walk in His presence.

V. Seek God's ways of escape.

- A. In **I Corinthians 10:12-13**, Paul provides an interesting contrast. He first explains that people who think they stand, will likely fall. That is, those who believe they can overcome sin because of the strength they have in their own legs, will stumble in their weakness. Rather, we have to take God's way of escape. This picture is actually different from what most envision. Most people envision this as someone coming right up to the edge of sin, but somewhere God should provide a way out. That is not this picture at all. Someone who is getting right up to the edge of sin is actually standing on their own feet. They have used their own strength to walk past God's points of escape, thinking somehow by their own strength they'll say no to the actual sin. That won't work. It's like this. If I want to avoid downtown Atlanta, I have to take the bypasses well before I get to downtown Atlanta. If I wait until I'm on the edge of downtown Atlanta, it is a whole lot harder to avoid. Taking God's way of escape comes much sooner than at the edge of sin.
- B. In fact, in context, this statement in the letter to the Corinthians is pretty astounding. It comes in the section where Paul had claimed that eating meats offered to idols was technically lawful because an idol was nothing. Some folks, because of their knowledge, were doing that even at the expense of the souls of weaker brethren. Paul admitted that it was technically lawful to eat that meat. But in a masterful stroke he comes back around to encourage these knowledgeable people to be really careful. Why? Because if they arrogantly keep proclaiming their ability to eat in the idol's temple, they may find themselves falling into idolatry. So, right after this exhortation to take God's ways of escape, he encourages them to "flee idolatry" and then talks about the danger of eating in the idol's temple (**I Corinthians 10:14-22**). In other words, it may be technically lawful to eat meats offered to idols, but be careful. If in your arrogant knowledge you keep pushing the envelope, declaring your knowledge and strength, you may find yourself face first in a colossal fall.

VI. Cut off everything that leads you to sin.

- A. This goes along with our last point and drives it home. In **Matthew 5:29-30**, Jesus explained that if our eye or hand causes us to sin, get rid of them. This is drastic and extreme, but what is more important—hanging on to your hands and eyes or being with the Lord for eternity? If you have one of those sins that you just can't seem to get rid of, start looking at what leads you there. Addicts learn about rituals. A drunken binge rarely comes out of nowhere for an alcoholic. Actually, he/she usually goes through a ritual. Perhaps it starts with driving home from work a certain way or agreeing to go out with a certain group of friends. Maybe it includes getting money out of the ATM or going to a particular convenience store. Those who find themselves obsessively viewing pornography go through rituals. It may be as simple as walking through the house and checking to see if anyone is home. It may begin with clearing out the cache and history on the computer. It may begin with changing the safe search parameters on your Google or Bing. For some it begins with turning on the computer when no one else is home.
- B. Whatever the case, you need to cut off these things that lead you to sin. Break the rituals. Don't go to the same places, hang out with the same people, interact with the same tools. Addicts are told that if they want to recover, they have to change their playgrounds, playmates, and playthings. A drug addict who keeps his

hookah laying around the house is going to have a hard time overcoming. If you find that after watching a particular show you are always sexually aroused, cut it out. If you find that anytime you engage in a particular activity, you are led to lie, cut out that activity. If you find that anytime you hang out with certain people, you go along with some sin, quit hanging out with those people. If you find that working some job always leads you to disobey God, quit the job. If you keep getting on gambling sites whenever you get on the internet, then you may need to cut off the internet. "What?!" someone cries. "Get rid of the internet? Do you know how important that is to my job?" Sure I do. Do you know how important a right eye and a right hand are? Yet, Jesus said if they cause you to sin, cut them off and throw them away. It is better to go into life poverty stricken because you had to quit your job, than to go into hell wealthy because you hung on to it. Please understand that in the battle for victory over sin, half-measures avail nothing. God sent Jesus to die to help you gain victory over sin. He refused to take half-measures. You should too.

VII. Pack your bags for righteousness.

- A. We've read **Romans 13:14** before. It tells us to put on Jesus Christ instead of making provisions for the lusts of the flesh. As our last two points have demonstrated the battle for sin is often won or lost long before we are confronted with the temptation to commit actual sin. Making provision for the flesh is not necessarily the same as succumbing to the flesh. Rather, it is providing for it. It is preparing the way for it. It is like getting ready to take a trip. Packing your bags, getting your money together, and loading the car is not the same as taking a trip. But it is making provision for it. Certainly, there are rare cases in which you pack your bags, but don't take the trip. But most of the time, once you've packed your bags, the trip happens. You've made the provision for it, what would stop you from the trip. However, we rarely take trips we haven't provided for.
- B. In like manner, we are constantly packing bags for different trips spiritually. If we are packing for unrighteousness, don't be surprised when unrighteousness and sin occurs. But if we pack our bags for righteousness, the trips we most commonly take will be trips of righteousness. Think about an illustration. Have you ever been on a restrictive diet? When is the most difficult time to stay on the diet? Isn't it when you find yourself out, hungry, and no actual meal packed? If you planned out your meals that day, provided for them from the beginning and had your proper meal packed, isn't it easier to stay on your diet rather than when you didn't plan anything, pack anything, and find yourself driving by McDonalds? Pack your bags for righteousness. Plan what you will do in the face of temptation. Plan the alternative activities to your sin. Give yourself reminders. Let all that you do be done with pursuing righteousness and fleeing sin in mind.

VIII. Don't take the journey alone.

- A. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** demonstrates that we can fight these battles with other folks more easily than we can on our own. Imagine the temptation to abandon the Lord that comes after being arrested and threatened. But Peter and John knew exactly what to do in that situation. They went to their friends and prayed together (**Acts 4:23ff**). **James 5:13-16** explains this very point. I believe the sickness here is actually a spiritual one (a topic for another lesson). Whether you agree or not, at least by the time it gets to talking about confessing to one another, we see the point. We need to be connected with other Christians enough that when we are struggling and even when we've stumbled, we need to have developed confessing relationships.
- B. I can assure you from personal experience that this is one of the most important practical tools in the battle over sin. I am a firm believer in the mantra that we are only as sick as our secrets. When I try to hang on to some struggle because I'm afraid of what people will think of me and think I can somehow stuff it down, it usually gets so big in my mind that it takes over and directs me to do the very thing I'm scared of doing and trying to avoid. However, when I share the dirty little secret in a safe relationship, it usually loses its power. You may think that you are safe in an isolated cocoon. You are not. Isolated, disconnected, and alone is the most dangerous place you can be. Develop relationships with safe people to open yourself up to. Call them in dangerous moments. Call them when you're struggling. Call them when you have stumbled. Call them when you are repenting. Call them when you need extra strength. Call them just to check in. By the way, an amazing by product of this that I have experienced is how often you might get a call from them exactly when you needed one because they are also struggling. Don't take the journey alone.

IX. Prepare before you enter the battle.

- A. We've talked about a lot of things so far. Let me address the biggest problem with all of this—procrastination. Many of us are saying, "This all sounds good. I can see how this will work. I should do this more." The problem is that right now we aren't facing a huge battle. Things are floating along well. So, we put off these important actions. We are like the teens and twenty-somethings that are repeatedly told about good health, better eating, and consistent exercise. They all know they need to do it. They all plan to do it. But they aren't facing any

effects of not doing these things, so they keep putting it off. But it is too late in the midst of a heart attack to start exercising or trying to eat right. You have to prepare before the battle hits. (And, of course, I use this as an illustration to try to prompt myself.)

- B. In **I Peter 5:8**, when Peter tells us to be sober and watchful, he is really making that point. It is too late to take steps in the midst of the lion's leap. We need to be vigilant and watchful ahead of time. You may not be in a crisis right now. Find that friend that you can call on. Trust me, if you don't develop that relationship and ability to call when you don't need it, you won't likely develop it on the fly when you do. If you haven't been putting on the armor and walking in God's presence in the easy times, it won't come easy in the hard times. Don't procrastinate using these tools just because you aren't in a crisis right now. Work on these tools before you are in the midst of battle.

X. When you fall, turn back to God and His people.

- A. As we pointed out last week, even all of this is a growth process. You will have progressive victory over sin. But you are growing and will still stumble and fall sometimes. Don't slink away in shame because you aren't the perfect warrior on the battlefield. Bring your wounds to the Great Physician and His staff of wounded assistants. Secret shame never healed anyone. Sharing your struggles and seeking aid from those whose whole purpose is to seek and save the lost is the only way back to victory. I know you are afraid that some will sit in judgment (and regrettably, like the older brother, some might). I know you are afraid some will use it against you (and regrettably, some might). I know you are afraid it will wreak havoc on your reputation (and regrettably, with some it will). But at some point you have to decide if your reputation is more important than your salvation. I remember a time when I had to confess some pretty significant sins to an eldership and a congregation ten years or so ago. Put yourself in my shoes. Not only might I lose face and reputation, I might lose a job. Marita and I cowered in fear, praying. Praise the Lord, through His grace we discovered that it was more important to overcome sin than to keep a job. We turned to God's people and they did not let us down. But even if they had, we knew that God would not.
- B. Do you remember what Peter did when he took his eyes off of Jesus and sank in the stormy waters? Turning back in on himself in shame would have resulted in death. That is exactly what it does for us when we try to swim back to the ship on our own strength when we've fallen. But that isn't what Peter did. Rather, he cried out, "Lord, save me" (**Matthew 14:30**). And do you know what the Lord did? He saved Him (**Matthew 14:31**). He'll do the same for you. When you stumble, don't run and hide. Run back to the Lord and His people. That is where salvation and victory reside, and that is the only place.

Conclusion:

Victory is in Jesus. Hang on to Him. Trust Him to provide victory, not by sitting on your backside, but by adopting and using the tools He provides. You can beat sin in Him. Let us know what we can do to help.