

Avoiding the Big Rocks of Sin

by Mark Roberts

Thirty years ago the Exxon Valdez did the inexplicable. The huge tanker grounded on a reef, spilling 11 million gallons of crude oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound. The effect on the animals, water, and plants was catastrophic and recovery continues to this day. How could a supertanker with all that navigational technology possibly ram head-on into a well-marked reef?

Last week, a friend asked me if I had heard the heartbreaking news that two Christians I knew had left their spouses and run off into adultery together. How is that possible? How could strong, faithful disciples ram head-on into scandalous, obvious sin? It certainly isn't a knowledge problem. No one is saying "Oh, I didn't know what the Bible said about adultery!" They know better and we know they know better. Why then do Christians keep hitting the big rocks of sin anyway? A few possibilities...

First, we fail to take all our sins seriously. Proverbs 28:13 tells us "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Do you see the Biblical way to deal with sin? Confession and forsaking. Not some sin, not just large scandalous sins, but all sin. All sin is the same to God. The truth is, talking about the "big rocks of sin" is risky because I don't mean to imply some sins are worse than others. I'm just trying to say there are some behaviors so clearly legislated against in Scripture, so definitively marked out, looming so LARGE in the Bible with so many repeated warnings and admonitions that no Christian should ever get involved in them.

But do I see all sin as an affront to God and His holiness? Isn't it true that one of the ways to run aground on the rocks of big "monster" sins is to pretend that when we got involved in "smaller" sins, it wasn't really a big deal? Nothing much to be concerned about? Nothing I needed to confess and forsake? Isn't the mindset that says, "I can ignore the Bible on this 'small' one" the same mindset that may eventually decide, "I can ignore the Bible on this 'big' sin" too?

Secondly, we let "little" sins lead us farther and deeper. Want to see how someone commits adultery? Proverbs 7 describes a young man making a series of small mistakes that lead to a tragic, final disaster. He's in the wrong part of town (v. 12). Prostitutes frequent a certain part of town, so what's he doing over there? He becomes physically familiar with the immoral woman (v. 13). Can't you just hear him say, "Show me in the Bible where it says I can't kiss someone"? Then he listens to her lies (v. 14). The devil may know that we won't smash ourselves against "big" sin today, but he is pleased if he can navigate us just a little closer to those rocks, one small step at a time. That's how the young couple who spent time alone one evening got carried away and a little kissing became sexual immorality. That's how someone who had an occasional drink ... that got less occasional all the time ... became an alcoholic. We started the day

far away from the rocks and then suddenly, we find ourselves nearly upon them, battling mightily to keep from being broken on them. But some Christians battling in the surging tide of sin aren't victorious. To change metaphors, when we don't see sin as a roaring lion and we get close enough to pet it, we very well may get eaten (1 Pet 5:8).

Thirdly, we aren't as strong as we thought. When something terrible happens, we all say, "How can such a strong Christian get involved in that?" We're mystified because all the outward behaviors of a good disciple were in place. Then we're stunned when they leave the Lord because we thought they were so strong. The reality is, of course, that person wasn't that strong. They just looked that way. It was all outward appearance. Perhaps that is why Jesus was so concerned with the Pharisees and their empty religion (Matt 23). I consider framing someone and having the state murder them to be a "big rock," don't you? And yet, the Pharisees had no reservations about doing that very thing to Jesus (John 11:49-50).

I get it. No one thinks, "If I miss my daily Bible reading today I'll probably become a heroin addict." However, the reality is, as we neglect core disciplines like prayer and Bible reading and genuine worship (not just being there!), the inner man gets weaker and weaker. As we renew ourselves day by day, as we consistently listen to God and allow His word to permeate us, we develop His eyes to see things in His way. We adopt the eternal perspective that exposes temptation and sin as so empty and vain, and as something we want nothing to do with. Always remember: looking strong isn't the same as being strong. It takes daily effort to become and stay strong.

How does a giant supertanker hit the most famous and well-marked rock in Prince Williams Sound? The government investigation found a bunch of stuff that was wrong, broken, neglected, and inadequate—a bunch of little stuff that led to a big disaster. How does a preacher or elder or Bible class teacher or good disciple get involved in big-time sin? We ignore a bunch of little stuff ... and it leads to a big disaster. Let's take some spiritual inventory and do what it takes to be sure we're sailing closer and closer to Christlikeness and further and further away from all God-dishonoring sin.