

A Light in the Valley

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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Lesser Discussed Sins: And the Like

by: Justin Brewer

With our final article in this series, we want to expand our examination into sins that are not specifically mentioned within the pages of the Scriptures; while it is beyond the scope of this series to delve into every single activity that could/should be identified as sinful, this final article looks at “and the like” from Galatians 5:19-21. How do we determine if an activity is sinful? What did the Apostle Paul mean when he included “and the like” within this passage? What should modern Christians learn from this inclusion?

As with many of the other sins discussed within this series, the inclusion of “and the like” is not an overly popular one simply because it can and does include any sinful practice not specifically mentioned within the pages of the Bible. No matter what time period, people will argue that some specific activity is not mentioned specifically as being sinful and therefore it cannot be condemned as being sinful. From a logical stand-

point, would it even have been possible for every variation of every single sin to be specifically covered within the Scriptures? Would we have been able to read all of it and remember it? Wouldn't it have been overwhelming? We have two basic principles that help guide us: first, we look for positive authority for an activity (where does God allow or command it?) and second, we seek to reflect the glory of God in what we do (does this activity glorify God?). Additionally, we should examine our own attitude concerning sin; do we view abstaining from sin as being a sacrifice or do we view it as an escape from filthiness (reference 2 Peter 2:22)? What do the Scriptures teach about determining whether we should participate in a particular activity or not?

In Galatians 5:19-21, the Apostle Paul wrote that “the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies,

outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." There are a few important aspects of this passage that we should carefully consider; first, this is not the only passage within the Scriptures that includes a reasonably extensive list of sins and it adds some that the other passages do not. Second, each of the sins discussed includes subcategories of sins; for example, Paul included "murder" within this list, but should Paul have included every method of murder ("But Paul didn't say I couldn't murder someone with a knife...")? Or was it sufficient to simply include "murder" as covering all the variances? Third, the Apostle Paul included "and the like" at the end of the list, which means that Christians throughout the ages could identify an activity as being "like" those mentioned within the list. How do we do so?

The term "and the like" should be reasonably self-explanatory, yet rebellious attitudes in the world make it harder to define than it ought to be. In 1 John, two distinct lifestyles are put forth and we have a choice between them; we can live a life of righteousness or one of lawlessness. Therefore, our activities fall under one of these two categories; are our activities "like" those of righteousness or are they "like" those of lawlessness? In 1 John 3:4-9, it is written that whoever "commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." For Christians, this passage establishes not that it is literally impossible for a Christian to falter and sin, but that Christians choose a lifestyle of active righteousness rather than lawlessness (sinfulness). Again, in 1 John 2:1-2, it is written, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." From just these two passages (which is further substantiated by reasoning through the entire book of 1 John, as well as the rest of Scriptures), we learn that faithful servants of God choose a lifestyle of righteousness rather than lawlessness; when we falter, we repent and are forgiven again, but we do not excuse our sins as being somehow justified.

When we are looking to participate in an activity, do we look to see what it is “like”? Does it fit with the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21 (and similar passages), or does it fit with the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-25? These two concepts are clearly at odds with one another; Paul wrote that if we walk “in the Spirit” then we “shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another...” (Galatians 5:16-17). Does the activity fit more with our lives previous to becoming Christians or does it fit with the concept of holiness? Peter wrote, “...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14-16). As is written in 1 John 2:29, “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him,” and so we can determine the righteousness of an activity by comparing what we learn in the Scriptures about righteousness and lawlessness. Further, we are told: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16). For the sins that are specifically listed within the pages of the Bible, do they not fit under these umbrella statements? Are they not the lust of the flesh and/or eyes, or the pride of life? If seeking to participate in an activity, we should ask whether it fits with these descriptions or if it fits with the fruit of the Spirit.

Finally, consider that the Apostle Paul contrasted the lives of Christians with their past life of sin. He wrote that we should no longer “walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:17-19). Have we learned better? Have we sought out God in order to walk with Him? As Paul wrote, we are to “put off, concerning” our “former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of” our minds and that we are to “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:20-24). Do we seek to look like the world or do we seek to look like Christ in our actions? Our goal should be to take on the righteousness of Christ and live by it, which means that we abstain “from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22 KJV).

Can Someone Fall From Grace?

by: Trevor Bowen

Rooted in the doctrines of Calvinism, the idea that “once one is saved, then he is always saved,” is often used to comfort Christians and give them confidence towards their final salvation. However, while the Bible does provide a basis for confidence, it does not teach that Christians cannot fall from grace. Moreover, the teachings of Jesus and His apostles actually warn Christians to beware the danger of falling away. The Bible even contains examples of people who did fall away.

Warnings Against the Possibility of Apostasy

Several passages in the Scripture warn against the possibility and danger of one becoming an apostate, or falling away. The Bible uses several different phrases to refer to a Christian’s action of falling away from the faith, both in their practices and in God’s judgment. These passages speak clearly of not only the possibility, but the looming danger of falling away. Please read the following passages:

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Hebrews 3:12-13

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? ...” Hebrews 2:1-3

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.” I Corinthians 10:11-12

All of these warnings would be meaningless if Christians could not fall away. Therefore, the very existence of these warnings proves that Christians can fall from grace. But, this point is made even clearer when we investigate examples of Christians who struggled against falling away, and some who actually did.

Examples of Apostasy

The most powerful example of a Christian struggling to remain faithful is the example of the apostle Paul. Considered by many to be one of the strongest and

most active apostles, Paul not only felt the danger of becoming apostate, but he also wrote about it to help warn those who were over-confident:

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” I Corinthians 9:27

If the apostle Paul had not achieved a state of permanent perseverance, then how can we expect to remove ourselves from the danger of becoming “disqualified”? Shortly after writing this statement, Paul warned the Corinthians with the statement, “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”

In addition to these warnings, the New Testament contains examples of other Christians who actually did fall from the faith. The Christians at Galatia had succumbed to a false doctrine that was rampant during the early New Testament era. This doctrine involved binding parts of the obsolete Old Testament, such as circumcision. Consequently, the apostle Paul cautioned the Christians in Galatia that they had actually fallen away by accepting this false doctrine.

“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:4

Not only had the Galatian Christians become apostate, they had become apostate by what may seem to us a small thing. This is a lesson to us about God’s judgment upon those that add to, or take away from His Word.

Besides this example, the Scriptures contain other cases of individuals who were overcome by sin and no longer in fellowship with God. The following statement was issued by the apostle Peter to a new convert, Simon, who had just recently sinned:

“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” Acts 8:22-23

“... Having faith and a good conscience,

Study Opportunities

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Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

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1023 E Baxter Ln,
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Everyone Welcome!

which some have rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymaenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” I Timothy 1:19-20

In this last passage, we learn of two Christians that had suffered spiritual “shipwreck.” From these cases, we can understand that Christians can and do indeed sin so that they may fall away, and no longer be in relationship with God. How severe is this separation? From the passage in Galatians 5:4, we discover that they had actually become “estranged from Christ.” This is a terrible condition because only those who are “in Christ” will be saved (Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 1:3-7). Therefore, one can and will forfeit salvation by practicing sin or by adopting false doctrines.

The Good News

While the Bible does teach that we can fall from grace, it does not teach that this condition must be permanent. The entire book of Galatians is evidence to this fact. The book was written to encourage and call to repentance those who had become “estranged from Christ.” So, what are we to do if we find ourselves in this condition? The Bible teaches a clear course of action for any and every sin:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I John 1:9

The verse corresponds with the instruction that we examined earlier, which was given to the new convert, Simon.

“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” Acts 8:22-23

These passages teach a clear promise from God: If we will but simply confess and repent of our sins through prayer, then God will forgive us. However, this process of repentance towards forgiveness should not be confused with the initial conversion process. In each of these cases, the people given the above instructions were already Christians. The Bible teaches a different plan for salvation for becoming a Christian and receiving the initial forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion

Although the idea of “once saved, always saved” provides comfort and confidence

in our ultimate salvation, it is an empty hope that deceives its believers into a false sense of security. As with any question or teaching, we must be sure to examine the Scriptures to see if it is true (Acts 17:11). When we do turn to the Bible, we learn of numerous warnings against over-confidence, and to take caution against falling from the faith. Besides this, we see examples of great Christians, like Paul, who struggled to remain faithful; moreover, we sorrowfully read of Christians who failed in this struggle.

Fortunately, God offers a means of being forgiven when we do stumble. He has promised to forgive us if we, through prayer, repent and confess our sins to Him. However, the very fact that Christians who sin, need to ask for forgiveness is another proof to the Bible's truth: sin, both before and after our conversion, separates us from God. If we do not repent in either case, then we can and will forfeit our salvation and God's grace.

Brief Exhortation

Compiled by: David Riggs

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2)

THE CLOCK OF LIFE

The Clock of Life is wound but once
And no man has the power;
To say, just when the hands will stop,
At late or early hour.

To lose one's wealth is sad indeed,
To lose one's health is more;
To lose one's soul is such a loss
That no man can restore.

Now is the only time you own,
So live and toil with will;
Place no faith in your tomorrow,
For the clock may then be still.

(Author Unknown)

Daily Bible Reading

July 2018

July 2 Hosea 1:1-2:1
July 3 Hosea 2:2-23
July 4 Hosea 3
July 5 Hosea 4
July 6 Hosea 5
July 9 Hosea 6-7
July 10 Hosea 8
July 11 Hosea 9
July 12 Hosea 10
July 13 Hosea 11-12
July 16 Hosea 13

July 17 Hosea 14
July 18 Joel 1:1-12
July 19 Joel 1:13-20
July 20 Joel 2:1-11
July 23 Joel 2:12-32
July 24 Joel 3
July 25 Amos 1:1-2:3
July 26 Amos 2:4-16
July 27 Amos 3:1-4:5
July 30 Amos 4:6-13
July 31 Amos 5

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