

Elements of Motivation (Part 6)

Sin and Fear of Judgment

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I am going to once again continue the series of sermons I have been giving on the motivating factors that are essential to overcoming and growing. The one we are going to go over today is the one that I think hear the most about. This is the only motivating factor that I feel has a very strong negative twist to it. It is a *desire not* to do something that provides an impetus to doing something else instead.

This is an impetus so strong that it will drive us immediately into facing sacrifice, or even some emotional or physical pain. This is because we know that to go the other way, while it might be immediately pleasurable, is in the long run going to have a far more painful and serious consequence.

We need to have a real fear of sin and judgment. Much of this message you may have heard before, but I think it bears repeating because we have got to see what sin does in the long run. Much of sin is deceptive because it is often immediately pleasurable to human nature, but this obscures the absolute fact that its effects are going to be devastating.

I am going to begin where the last sermon I gave left off, because I feel that it provides a good stepping stone into this sermon. We are going to go back to Revelation 3: 4-5. This is in the message to the church in Sardis.

Revelation 3: 4-5 You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before his angels.

Our part of what God is working out is small, but it is vital. I want you to notice that even Jesus Christ said that there are some people who are worthy. Now who is worthy? The verse tells us—"Those who are clothed in white." Who are those who are clothed in white? It is those who have not defiled their garments.

I think we all understand that in the symbolism of the Bible, the kind of clothing a person is shown wearing symbolizes the kind of life he has been living. Right within the context, those who overcome wear white clothing. (You might contrast this with the Laodiceans in this same chapter. They are described by God as being naked. This gives you an idea of the kind of life that they are living.) Now brethren, it is this simple. It does not say here that these people have earned this, but ~~is~~ saying that they have character that is fitted to walking with Christ.

We are going to pick up something from a couple of verses that Jesus spoke when He answered something about which these people questioned Him.

Luke 20:35-36 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God; being the children of the resurrection.

We see two things here: Those who are worthy are the children of God. Again, there are people who are worthy to go into the Kingdom of God.

Let us go back to the book of Revelation and we will add another factor to this. The question was asked: "Who are all these people—this multitude of people?"

Revelation 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Now we have another modification to this. This whiteness has something to do with the way these people conducted their lives. It also has something to do with the fact that they had been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. We can connect this to Luke 20. Those who are worthy to be in the resurrection are going to fit these categories. They are going to be in that resurrection because they are living a life that is fitted to walking with Christ, and because they have been made white by the blood of the Lamb.

We see here a process of people repenting and overcoming. As they repent they are forgiven, and they are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. You can connect to this Hebrews 9:22 where it says that almost all things are purged (made clean) by blood.

What we have seen encapsulated in these few verses is the process that leads to people being worthy. It consists of being cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. You cannot dismiss the way a person lives, as he's being cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. That too is a continuous process. John makes this very clear in the book of I John that the cleansing by the blood of the Lamb is a process that continues throughout the person's Christian life. This is what Christianity is all about.

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready.

We know that the wife is the bride, which is the church. We can see here that she had to do something to make herself ready. We are talking about the bride taking action. We are talking about works. We are talking about the things that she did on her part to make herself worthy, and not allowing her garments to become defiled.

Revelation 19:8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

There again we have the reference to clothing, and we find that white is equated with righteousness. Righteousness is the keeping of the commandments. Righteousness therefore is not sinning. I think that those statements made here are very clear. Getting ready, walking worthy, being dressed in white is overcoming human nature and its proclivity to sin. It has to be

that way if we are going to be in God's Kingdom.

Every one of the rewards granted in those seven messages is granted to those who overcome. So overcoming has very much to do with being worthy, to be in the resurrection.

Now because those in God's Kingdom live a certain way of life, human nature and sin do not belong there. Human nature is antagonistic to that way. It is divisive. It is uncooperative. It will not submit. It thinks it knows more and better than others. It is assertive, controlling, deceptive, and critical. Chaos, confusion, and then despair follow in its wake.

Now let us put a cap on the first part of this sermon here.

Revelation 21:7 He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.

Connect that to Luke 20: 35-36. The children of the resurrection are the sons of God. The sons of God are those who overcome. I do not see how it can be made any clearer.

All of the good things that we look forward to at the resurrection hinge on whether we are overcoming human nature's proclivities toward self-centeredness: uncooperativeness with God, His law, and with His people. It means overcoming sin. It means overcoming the world and its temptations. It means overcoming the trials of life in order to show that one's faith is firm and steady and is springing forth in love—faith working through love. In II Corinthians 5:10 Paul brings judgment into the issue.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we [Christians] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body [in this life], according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.

Brethren, there has to be a very strong concern in our life about facing this judgment. It is something that we need to be concerned about. We are going to be judged on how well we do with what we have been given. Our judgment does not matter how much prophecy we know, or whether we can recite from memory long portions of Scripture, or know all of every doctrine's technicalities. What matters in terms of judgment is whether we are living what we know, and that we are striving to live like God. Do you know why? Because that is what love is. Love is something you do. Real faith works through love.

Humanly, the opposite of love is hate. That is because humanly we tend to judge things according to the senses. Love therefore in the human realm is a strong feeling *for*. Hate is a strong feeling *against*. The Bible though shows this definition is narrow. Biblically, the opposite of love is sin. Love is keeping the commandments, is it not? Sin is breaking the commandments. Though feeling is a part of the biblical love, the will and truth are to play a much larger part. Now if we sin, biblically we do not love God. We do not love fellowman, at least at that instant, at that time. For that matter we do not even love ourselves, because sinning means that we have taken steps to put ourselves to death. The wages of sin is death. Is this not something we want to overcome? Do we want to commit suicide, as it were, at a slow rate, or a fast rate?

If we will practice sin, it must mean that we do not like the fact God has given us life and the promise of a great and awesome future. Brethren, that is the stark reality of what faces us since

God has opened our eyes and has revealed His purpose to us. It brings to the fore that if we love what He has revealed, then we had better come to the place where we hate sin, because sin destroys everything God loves. Sin destroys everything God's revelation stands for.

Let me give you just a simple illustration of what sin does in the area of relationships. It is not going to involve relationships all that much, but I still think it illustrates sin's affect fairly well.

Suppose somewhere along the line of your life you got it in your mind that 2 plus 2 equals 5. I think you can begin to see that none of the math problems you face that have that combination of numbers would ever work out correctly. That includes your business deals and all of your shopping situations. Every time this combination of numbers would arise you would get a wrong total. No matter how sincere you were, no matter how well-meaning you were, in those areas of life things would not add up correctly.

In addition to your problem, there are other people just as sincere, just as well-meaning, who believed that 3 plus 3 equals 7, and there were others who believed that 4 plus 3 equals 6, and so forth. The first thing you know, people are bumping into each other, squabbles arise, tension fills the air, and people are trying to sort out all their differences through some kind of compromise. But each group argues for the strength of its position, but meanwhile nothing really works to anyone's satisfaction.

But there is another factor involved in this. This well-meaning mathematical mistake—this deviation from a correct standard—has an addictive power to not only make one hold onto its own position, but to make more deviations. Meanwhile everybody else is insisting to one degree or another that their answers are correct, and nobody can agree on what the right standard should be. The competition gets more fierce. People go to war against each other in order to impose their answers to life's mathematical problems on everybody else.

I think you should be able to get the point. The reality is that in the world of mathematics there are rigid standards that almost everybody agrees upon, and so there are very few wars ever fought over mathematics.

There are also very high and rigid standards regarding relationships. Even though there is almost universal agreement as to what many of these standards are, people ignore them because they cannot, or will not control themselves to submit to them. The drive to compete and control for one's own benefit and satisfaction is so strong that they will not overcome it. They will not overcome it even when they are shown it is wrong.

We ought to be able to see that in the world of relationships, self-interest rules the day. There will never ever be a good culture to live in until each person controls himself within the right standards. Do you get that? There will never be a good culture to live in until each and every person takes it upon himself to force himself to live within those right standards. God has summoned us to learn those standards and believe in those standards, and to take steps to master them within ourselves. If we are ever going to overcome sin, it is going to be because we are motivated to overcome it.

Sin is alluring, appealing, and yet persistent. It is a destructive enemy that leaves us without hope and delivers us into as much pain as it possibly can along the way. This sermon is

designed to help us see why we must come to hate it so that we will be motivated to fight it with every fiber of our being.

In the Bible sin is viewed as being a malignant power having man in its absolute possession. Talk about being enslaved and brainwashed. So basic and pervasive is its grip that it is not merely seen as an external power, but it has gotten into every fiber of our being. It is so deceptive that the person thinks he is in control, when in reality *sin* is in control. I want you to see this from the lips of our Savior:

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant [is the slave] of sin. And the servant abides not in the house for ever: but the Son abides ever [forever].

Everyone who commits sin is its slave. Verse 35 reveals how serious the situation is, because a slave does not eternally abide in the house—in God's house. It is from a statement such as this that I am sure John got his statement in I John 3 where he says "you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." We are dealing with serious business here.

Genesis 4:6-7 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why are you wroth? And why is your countenance fallen? If you do well, shall you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin lies at the door. And unto you shall be his desire, and you shall rule over him [it].

Notice the wording "over him." This is a masculine pronoun indicating a malignant *living* power within us. There are two ways of interpreting what God said to Cain here. The first and most common application is that God is showing a major purpose He intends for man, which purpose is to be accomplished by overcoming or mastering sin's desire to be in control and do its own thing. He shows here that sin's desire is always at the threshold of man's moral and ethical choices. We need to be aware of this, but we need to have the drive to conquer it.

The second application is that this is a warning contained within a prophecy to any and all who read it, but given specifically to Cain. God understood. He knew Cain's character. He knew Cain's personality. God saw in Cain a strong proclivity to sin, and God was prophesying that Cain was going to become a master at sinning. We would say today that Cain was going to become a real "pro" at sinning. So the warning to all is: Do not allow yourself to do as Cain did. Cain nurtured sin within him. It has become a proverb in the Bible: "The way of Cain."

Actually these two interpretations of these verses are really very similar. If we let ourselves go the way Cain did, we will become a pro at sinning. We will become very skilled and adept at it, because sin—this malignant power within us—knows how to break out and exercise its authority over us. Human nature is quite sneaky that way, so we can see then that it is always going to be at the threshold of our moral and ethical choices. We are going to have to master it, conquer it.

We all know that I John 3:4 says "sin is the transgression of the law." That is a broad definition, but unfortunately there is within us a strong tendency to apply what it says there very narrowly in terms of law.

Modern translations tend to translate that "sin is lawlessness." That says essentially the same thing, but it is really a little bit stronger interpretation of that verse. Incidentally, "sin is lawlessness" is a more correct interpretation because the word "lawlessness" there is *anomos*, and it means "to be without law. So the verse is presenting sin as simply ignoring the rules as if they did not exist, as if there are no laws at all.

Brethren, that just scratches the surface. The Bible's overall approach to sin is really a great deal more specific than that.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation [or conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

First of all, this verse shows us why sin can be viewed as a living and malignant power. That is because it is being generated through the inspiration and persuasion of the living and malignant "prince of the power of the air." Because sin is being generated from a living being, sin then in the Bible is seen *asdynamic* rather than static. Sin is not passive. It actively works.

Now look at the first several words in this verse and let the seriousness of this thing called "sin" sink in.

Ephesians 2:1 And you has he quickened, who were *dead* in trespasses and sins.

We were dead! God calls things exactly what they are from His point of view. We thought we were *alive*. Yes, we had animal life, but God does not think the same way as we do, according to Isaiah 55: 7-8. From His perspective it shows how wrong our thinking is. We were dead! God said to Adam and Eve, "In *the* day you eat thereof, you shall surely die." The wages of sin is death. As far as God was concerned, sin had already killed us, but in His mercy He made us alive. Why? So that we could overcome it this time! So that we could conquer it rather than be conquered *by* it, because when it conquers us, we are dead.

In order for us to be fitted to the Kingdom of God we have to conquer *it*. That is what we have been given liberty to do. The liberty that we have in Christ is the liberty to choose to *live*. Now we were of course alive to animal life, but we were dead to the kind of life that God has in mind. We were dead to holiness and eternal life. You know, a corpse is insensible. It cannot see, it cannot hear, it cannot smell, touch, or taste.

Brethren, do you realize that we were just as dead, just as insensible to the life of God—to eternal life, to true spiritual life—until God called us? We were blind. Is that not what the Bible says? We could not hear His Word. We could not see it. A miracle has occurred! In God's summons, He made us alive to *real* life so that this time when we are met by sin we can conquer it.

There are two words here translated "trespasses and sins" that we want to pay attention to. These two words have virtually the same meaning. The first word, trespasses, is translated

from *paraptoma*. It simply means to go off the path, to fall aside, to slip aside. When that word is applied to moral and ethical issues, it means to deviate from the right way, to wander from a standard.

The word "sins" is translated *hamartia*. We all understand this is a military shooting term which means "to miss the mark"—to fail to achieve a bull's eye. When it is applied to moral and ethical issues, it means to fail of one's purpose, to go wrong, to fail to reach a standard or an ideal.

Now it is these two terms that help us see why sin is so universal. We can all readily agree that the robber, the murderer, the drunkard, the child-abuser, the rapist are sinners, but in our hearts sin has deceived us into thinking that we are respectable citizens. These terms bring us face to face with the breadth of what sin is because it begins to reach into other areas of life besides those things that are so clearly seen. These terms help us to see that what sin involves is the failure to be what we ought to be, and what we could be.

Now there are many specific standards. The Ten Commandments are merely broad areas within which many specific sins may lie. Sin is not something that the ministry has invented. Christianity is a way of life that reaches into every aspect of life. The central idea that is contained within sin (within *paraptoma* and *hamartia*) is failure—the failure to be what we ought to be, and could be.

Sin is the failure to live up to standards of the way of life established by God and revealed through Jesus Christ His Son. Because of this, sin then reaches into husband and wife relationships, childrearing, cleanliness, clothing, makeup, hospitality, health, the way we work, and as Ephesians 3:2 shows, it reaches into our very heart and involves itself in vanity, pride, envy, hatred, and greed.

Hamartia is always used in the New Testament in a moral and ethical sense, whether in commission, omission, thought, feeling, word, or deed. That begins to get *veryspecific*.

Ephesians 4:11-15 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

There brethren, is the standard of standards. Remember Romans 3:23: "All have come short of the glory of God." There is the glory of God—the life of Christ. That is what *hamartia* and *paraptoma* are: to come short of the glory of God; to come short of the standard—the life of Jesus Christ—to fall short of the ideal. So *hamartia* and *paraptoma* (what we might think of as rather minor, unimportant, and secondary issues) are tied together directly into the Ten Commandments.

Sin does negative things to us; otherwise God would not be concerned. Its effect varies

according to a person's awareness and conviction of it. The greater these are the greater sin's impact. That is why God says that "Whatever is not of faith is sin." The greater the knowledge, the greater the psychological destructive power that sin reaps on us.

There is an interesting series of verses in I John 3. Tie this into Romans 14.

I John 3:18-19 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him.

If we love in deed and truth, then we are going to assure our hearts before Him. That is, we are going to live confident and positive lives. They are going to be filled with joy and peace. There will be tranquility and a sense of security within them because we are loving, and we are doing it in deed. If we love in the conduct of our lives, it is going to reap for us the good fruit of being confident before God.

Now on the other hand, what if we sin with knowledge? Brethren, that will tear us up. The psychological effects are just the opposite. There will be an overpowering sense of guilt, depression, despair, and self-pity. Keep that in mind. The joy and peace that God wants us to have comes from when *weknow* that we are doing the right things.

I John 3:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

It is a word of assurance from John, that when we do sin, there is a payment for that sin. God is greater than our heart, and He is able to remove that defiled conscience from us upon our repentance, and we will be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ once again.

We can broadly say that sin does two things simultaneously, and both are bad: It produces, and it destroys.

Now what I am going to give you I have taken largely from William Barclay's commentary on these verses in Ephesians that we just went through. If you have that commentary and later on want to go back to it, you will see that is where I got it from, although I am going to give you a great deal more than he has there. I think the things he wrote for our edification as to what sin does is very important, that we understand it.

The first thing sin does is destroy innocence. Innocence is that quality of being free from blame. It means to be pure, virtuous, above suspicion. Just think of the verses we just read there in I John 3. It means to be pure, virtuous, above suspicion. It means to be simple, fresh, undefiled, completely harmless. An innocent person is one whom others feel no sense of threat to be around. There is no fear, no competition with that person.

Genesis 3:7-11 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him,

Where are you? And he said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he (God) said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?

This illustration is showing us that no one can ever be quite the same after one has sinned with knowledge. Notice they sinned *after* God instructed them. Nobody had to tell them. They knew. Do you know why? Their conscience that had been educated by God convicted them. This is why I said a little bit earlier, when we sin with knowledge, the psychological effects—the damage—is much greater than when a person sins in ignorance.

You will remember that Paul said, "I did those things in ignorance." This is why the apostle Paul always seemed to be on his high horse to get people to be obedient to God, because now these people were leading lives with the knowledge of God's law and with the knowledge of God's purpose. In many cases they were not overcoming sin.

Nobody had to tell Adam and Eve they sinned. They knew. They now looked at things in a different light from the way they did before, and a sense of wrongfulness rushed in on them immediately. A moment before, brethren, they had been friendly and joyful, and all of the garden seemed to be obedient to their every wish. Suddenly there was guilt and fear, and it seemed as though every creature in the garden was witness to their act, condemning them. They felt exposed, and they tried to hide. Separation from the purity of God began immediately. The virtue of their innocence began to lose its vitality. In Psalm 40 David wrote a few interesting things in regard to this

Psalm 40:11-12 Withhold not you your tender mercies from me, O LORD: let your lovingkindness and your truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about: my iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up.

Does that remind you of Adam and Eve? Did David feel guilty? Did he feel condemned? Did he feel unworthy? What does a child do when he is caught telling a lie? He hides his face. What do criminals do when they are taken out of the police car and the television cameras are there taking a picture of them while they are hauled off into the corridor, or whatever? They pull their jackets over their faces. They try to hide. They turn. They know. The innocence is gone.

Psalm 40:13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me.

Jeremiah 6:15 Were they [the children of Judah] ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush; therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, says the LORD.

Why are children so adorable? Do you know what it is we love about them? It is the beauty of their innocence. What happens on our trip to adulthood? Sin changes our view. It changes the way we look at life. We become distrustful, sophisticated, worldly, competitive, cosmopolitan, cynical, suspicious, sarcastic, prejudiced, self-centered, cool, and uninvolved. Sin drives people

apart, and it creates fear. Sin and its companion—worldliness—does that to us.

Sin also destroys ideals. An ideal is a concept or a standard of supreme perfection. It is a thing perceived as the ultimate object of attainment. I think it is indicative of this world's cynical attitude regarding ideals that it has a tendency to call a person who has high ideals as being impractical, a visionary, and a dreamer. This is interesting, because most of us had very high ideals, especially at the beginning of our teens when we were becoming more aware of life and its scope. But as we go through our teens, something begins to happen. What is it that enters to destroy that idealism? Well, we meet the world and its sins to a degree that we never experienced before when we were a kid at home.

There is a tragic process begun whenever we become involved in sin. When we first do it with knowledge, we regard it with horror. I remember one minister telling a story about a man with whom he had contact. This man had been in a family of Seventh-Day Adventists and followed their doctrines very closely. They were vegetarians. The man came into the Worldwide Church of God, and there he learned that it was all right to eat meat.

Apparently this man's first foray into eating meat happened to be a hamburger, and it was done in the presence of others who were part of that particular congregation. The man took a bite of the hamburger and instantly vomited. There was nothing wrong with the meat, but psychologically, even though now he believed it was all right for him to eat meat, his conscience revolted at the idea that meat should enter his body. Now that is the way it is with sin.

If we sin, we will feel unhappy and uneasy about it. But if we continue to sin, we will later do it without a qualm because each sin makes the next one easier. The ideal is gradually being lowered, and a person's conscience is no longer operating at the high level it once did. Sin has an addictive quality. In this case it is very much like a drug.

In Mark 10:17-24 we have the story of the young man who came to Christ. He wanted to be part of Christ's work. He wanted to be in the Kingdom of God. But when Christ told him he was going to have to get rid of all that he had if he wanted to be a part, this young man's sin (covetousness) destroyed the ideal, and he was willing to settle for less.

Jeremiah 4:22 For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish [stupid] children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

The ideals were gone. They had practiced sin so frequently and so fervently that the knowledge of godliness had been lost. The end result was they went into captivity. Psychologically, the person becomes blind to truth, and repentance is no longer possible. They are so blinded they do not even *want* to repent, so it is like slow suicide that destroys the standard that makes life worth living.

A third thing that sin destroys is the will. The will is that power or faculty by which the mind makes choices, and then acts to carry them out. We will engage in some forbidden pleasure because the person really does want to do it, but it is a struggle.

Now this destruction of the will is not a process that happens quickly, anymore than drug

addiction happens over night, but in the end the person engages in his sin because he cannot help to do so. He is sin's slave. His own will is gone. Once a thing becomes a habit, it is not far from being a necessity. There is an old saying, "Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny."

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

This living malignant malevolent power that is within us is deceitful, seductive, and enticing as well. To be deceitful is to be misled. Deceitfulness lies in that what it promises it cannot deliver. What does sin promise? It promises pleasure. It promises contentment, fulfillment, and self-satisfaction. Go back to the beginning if you want the proof of that. What sin delivers in those areas is fleeting. This is why it has an addictive quality. This pleasure is never quite enough to produce the kind of contentment and fulfillment we really want, so people are forced into greater and greater perversions until it produces death.

Sin deludes a person into thinking he can take it or leave it. How many times have you heard this: "I can walk away from alcohol at any time." I have heard that one a lot. Sin offers rationalizations and justification. It puts on a plausible appearance and can even take the form of being virtuous. Think about the situation-ethics craze that went on a few years ago.

Sin's drug-like quality always demands more, because what formerly satisfied no longer will, and so the person gradually becomes its slave. But more than that, all along the way it will produce hardness of heart as well. That is what this verse says—"hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

The Greek word "hardened" there is translated into the English "sclerosis." Have you ever heard of multiple sclerosis? This is the same word with the word "multiple" in front of it. In the Greek, it is a hardening. It is used for a callous a person gets on his hand from constant rubbing and rough wear and tear there. It is also used for the ridge that forms around a broken bone when it heals. This same word is used in moral and ethical situations, and when it is used in that way it means "to be impenetrable, insensitive, blind, and non-teachable."

A hardened attitude is *not* a sudden aberration, but a habitual state of mind that shows itself in inflexibility of thinking and in insensitivity of conscience, and eventually it makes repentance impossible.

We are going to go back to the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a great book for describing sin and its effects.

Jeremiah 9:1-5 Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, says the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbor, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk

with slanders. And they will deceive everyone his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.

This was a people just near the time that God took them into captivity, scattering them in Babylon. They had become so inert to sin, so enslaved by sin that they wearied themselves pursuing after it, and doing it. They got themselves physically tired out trying to sin!

The next thing sin produces is slavery. This of course follows directly from the other three things previously mentioned. The apostle Paul made a significant statement regarding this area in I Corinthians 6:12. Just before this, he mentions a number of areas of sin and tells them in verse 11 that "Such were some of you; but you were washed, you were sanctified." Then in verse 12 he said:

I Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, [He meant all *lawful* things are lawful] but all things are not expedient [or helpful]: all things are lawful for me, [Notice this last phrase] but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Paul understood. He said, "I will not be a slave of any practice that might corrupt my mind or destroy my liberty." It is almost like it is a reflection on Genesis 4.6: "You shall *master* it!" Overcome it! Rule it! Dominate it!

If you want to read further, you will find that Paul applied this principle even to good things like food and sex, because these people here in Corinth were saying, "Well, the belly is for meat, and meat is for the belly. Therefore, let us indulge in it." "God made the stomach. Let us really fill it up." Then they applied the same thing to sex. "God made the sex organs; therefore let us satiate ourselves and go into fornication and adultery. It cannot be all that bad. God made the sex organs for those things." Paul said even good things were not going to be a slave to him. He was going to be under control of his body at all times. He was not going to be its slave.

Sin produces more sin. There is a very clear illustration of this in Genesis 37 regarding Joseph and his brothers. You can follow this right through that chapter. The sin began like this: Jacob made a serious mistake. One of his sons became his favorite. That is respect of persons—the favoritism of one child. You can begin to see the irritation grow within the family. It grew to jealousy within Joseph's brothers and proceeded on to hatred. Then it grew to a conspiracy. The brothers conspired to kill Joseph. From there they sold him into slavery. Then they had to lie and deceive their father to cover their guilt.

Now using this sermon as a backdrop, what do you think happened to the brothers' relationship with their father because of what they did? Did they always fear that one of them would tell? See, one sin just leads to another. We have the Days of Unleavened Bread and the symbolism of leaven there. Sin just keeps touching other parts of the body and corrupting as it goes along.

The next thing that sin produces is degeneracy, sickness, and pain.

Mark 2:4-11 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto

the sick of the palsy, Son, your sins be forgiven you. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, why reason you these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, your sins be forgiven you, or to say, Arise, and take up your bed, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins—he said to the sick of the palsy, I say unto you, Arise, and take up your bed, and go your way into your house.

Sin caused this man's condition. I do not think I need to go further in that. In John 8: 5-14 you can clearly see where the connection between sin and sickness is. Jesus said, "Do not go sinning anymore lest a worst thing come upon you."

John 5:8-9 Jesus said unto him, Rise, take up your bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath.

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you.

The final thing that sin produces is death. Now death of course is the ultimate in slavery. It is the last enemy to be destroyed. You can find that in I Corinthians 15: 54-56. Sin destroys innocence, ideals, and the will. It produces slavery, more sin, sickness, and death.

Now I did not give any solutions in this sermon. I just wanted us to understand a bit more about how the Bible looks at sin. It is a formidable, devastating opponent. God does not expect more of us than we can accomplish. It is not so formidable or devastating as "God in us" cannot conquer it.

Brethren, we have to see sin for the enemy that it is, or our attitude toward it in ourselves will be one of tolerance, because it is ours. We have a way of making things like that acceptable to ourselves. We cannot afford to have that approach, or we will not be motivated to overcome it.

Sin is responsible for *ALL* of the pain in your life. I am not talking here about the little accidents that we have. I am talking about that pain that is really pain. Brethren, it does not matter whether or not it was your sin that caused the pain. It was just sin. Sin caused it. There is nothing that can be done to change other people. It is our responsibility to change ourselves, and overcoming sin is a major part of this.

We need to work hard at understanding how sin has caused your pain. If you cannot be motivated to take positive steps to avoid it happening again, I will be very surprised, because that is our individual commission from God. We are to overcome sin, and unless we are motivated to see sin for what it really is and take the steps to overcome it, we are going to be finding ourselves in great difficulty of being counted worthy—being able to walk in light. God has freed us in order to conquer this enemy that is within us.