

Sin and Overcoming, (Part 2): What Is Sin Like?

Essential Reasons Why We Must Not Sin

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Years ago, I tried to encourage a man in the church to not give up. I encouraged him to keep trying to overcome sin and not allow himself to become spiritually lukewarm. He had extensive knowledge of the historical content of the Bible, having memorized all of the Kings of Israel and Judah and their dates of reign. He had a steel-trap mind for historical facts, which was obvious in his biblical knowledge of people, places and dates.

He was good at memorizing Bible verses and lists, such as 'the works of the flesh' and 'the fruit of the Spirit.' However, he had a serious flaw in his religious beliefs—they were preferences rather than convictions. He saw few imperfections in his own character, and little reason to overcome sin he could not see.

He said something—in a matter of fact way—that stunned me at the time: "I think I will have to go through the Tribulation before I will feel any real commitment to the church or desire to change my ways or have a close relationship with God." So intellectually he realizes that is what it would take for him and that he was not to that point. However, of course as far as internalizing it into his heart he had no clue as to how to do that.

He believed that God was going to have to force him to be a real Christian because he just did not see that his sins were all that bad. He certainly could not see that he had very much to overcome. Sadly, his spiritual condition was such that he was little more than a shell of a man spiritually. He eventually stopped attending altogether.

I hope none of us has ever had this defeatist attitude that God is going to have to force us to be committed to Him before we will make the effort to overcome our sins. I hope that none of us is at that point or even close to it.

Let me ask you a question. Are you struggling with some habit that holds you as its slave—struggling, wrestling, and always fighting it, yet somehow never able to conquer it? I think in varying degrees we all have something we are struggling with and that we are trying to overcome. It may be something very serious or it may be something a lot less serious.

I think it will be helpful to look at what is sin like. Sin is often described as a form of tyranny or bondage.

Proverbs 5: 22, warns that sin wraps the sinner up with strong cords, and Hebrews 12:1 adds that it easily entangles its victim. So we have a picture there of not really being able to do anything or go anywhere but just be frustrated.

Cain was warned not to let sin gain a foothold in his life because sin is a slave driver that he must have mastery over.

Genesis 4:7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.

Those who yield to sin are its slaves, as it holds them in its clutches. Sin is the master of the rebellious person. He experiences abject servitude under this merciless taskmaster. Although Cain did not take the hint, the psalmist of Psalm 119 did, praying that sin would not rule over him.

Jesus warned that "everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

Slavery is an institution based on a relationship of dominance and submission, whereby one person owns another and can exact from that person labor, or other services. As we give in to sin it becomes the master. Slavery has been called by many names among which are: bondage, servitude, and serfdom.

We are all slaves to something in varying degrees. We are slaves to governments, to laws, to employers, but hopefully as Christians no longer to sin.

Paul spoke from experience and inspiration when he vouched for the bondage of sin from his own experience as a man "sold as a slave to sin...a prisoner of the law of sin" (Romans 7: 14, 23) He also warned the Galatians, "the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (Galatians 3: 22) The Bible continues to equate slavery with sin.

There is a way out of bondage. As God led the ancient Israelites out of the oppressive physical slavery of Egypt, He provides a way out of the spiritual slavery of sin. By becoming free of this slavery, we become slaves of another sort. Freedom from sin is found in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Through faith in Christ we can come out of sin, just as "By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt."

Hebrews 11:24-29 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

Life confronts everyone with alternatives, as it did Moses, and often we can make a responsible choice only by faith. By faith Moses took a series of important decisions by which he cast in his

lot with the people of God.

Moses had the wealth of Egypt at his fingertips. Material wealth was characteristic of Egypt; its riches and treasures were the greatest the world had seen, but Moses decided against them in favor of physical abuse in this world and God's approval in the next. We can make this kind of decisive choice only by faith.

It is only by faith that we can decide not on the things that please us, but on the things that please God, exalt Christ and help others. Without faith in the right place, sin is enslaving.

Secondly, sin is like stumbling or turning away from a good path. It is like stumbling over an obstacle that prevents us from going through the narrow gate. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Sin is found through the wide gate down the wide path where there is no true direction.

There was a commercial a few years ago that I thought was detrimental to young people or school age children. It said something about not driving between the lines. They would show some people who looked out of fashion. Then they showed a younger person driving a vehicle off the road and not to drive between the lines and obey the rules of the road. Later in the commercial they showed a child in school having to print between the lines but showing him randomly going over the lines. Moreover, they were praising this as an exciting way of life—go beyond the lines, break the limits. Also I think they did the same with swimmers. They were showed them swimming down an Olympic pool with the lines down there, and one swimmer decides to go into the other lanes and go his own way. The point is that sin is like that. Sin is straying from the narrow way and just going off and doing your own thing.

During the time of Isaiah, ancient Israel was in a spiritually sickened condition. Priests and prophets were apparently bewildered because of drinking alcoholic beverages, which caused them to falter when rendering decisions, and giving advice.

Isaiah 28:7 But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, They are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

This "wine" probably also referred to "the wine of spiritual fornication" with pagan religions from surrounding foreign nations as well.

You may remember that shortly after 9/11, the memorial service that this nation had in the cathedral in Washington, DC invited various leaders of pagan religions to speak. Apparently they thought it was in honor of the dead from 9/11. They had Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and they may have had other religions represented there. The point was that the leaders of our nations see no difference between the religions. They think the same God is the one that is the One, which is worshipped by all. In the news just recently in the Netherlands a Catholic priest has

just called for all Christians to refer to God as Allah. So we see the tendencies in the leaders of nations, especially our own, to just invite all of the different religions in.

Apparently the prophets and priests of Israel were doing similar things. The leaders of the people, the priests and prophets were drunkards (both physically and spiritually). There would probably have been judges among them as well. Isaiah paints a picture of spiritual guides lacking not only spiritual insight, but also common sense. That is what we see today in our leaders and the religious leaders of the nations. There just does not seem to be any common sense in the things that they are preaching and the rulings that they are coming out with in the law.

The righteous administration of justice requires vast wisdom and clear-headedness. Isaiah pointed out that God Himself is a spirit of justice giving wisdom to the judge. Without God's help to follow and enforce godly standards there can be no righteous administration of justice.

The influence on the rest of society by wicked leaders is tremendous. We all remember the effects of the sex scandal between a recent president and a female intern. The perverse acts that he committed carried all the way down to elementary school. "The leader of their nation did it so it must be all right" is the way school children falsely reason.

Many Catholic priests have been found to be pedophiles. As a result we saw an increase in covert acceptance of pedophilia. It is spoken about in the media so often now that this sick society has almost become numb to it.

Now, what if a righteous man falls prey to the perverse influence of an evil society? When a righteous man turns from righteousness and does evil, God places a spiritual obstacle in his way.

Ezekiel 3:16-21 Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. "Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul." Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand." Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

We see there the responsibility that God places on His watchmen.

The man had already turned from God's ways and done evil, so this stumbling block was not placed by God deliberately to cause the righteous to fall into sin. Rather, it was an obstacle set into the path of this man to see how he would continue to respond, whether he would continue to sin or whether he would change his ways.

The word 'stumbling-block' means an occasion for stumbling, either literally or in a moral or ethical sense. It does not indicate in verse 20 that God deliberately sets out to trip up the righteous and bring him crashing to the ground.

It does indicate that He leaves opportunities for sin in people's paths, so that if their heart is bent on sin then they can decide for themselves to follow their own desires; in this way they earn their own just reward. God is a fair God.

If the righteous man continued on the same path, his spiritual understanding would continually erode away, eventually to the point of no spiritual understanding at all, and he ends up in total spiritual darkness with the world.

Spiritual stumbling is not inevitable. It always involves moral choice. There is also the watchman's word of warning to point out where and what the stumbling blocks are. Today, God's ministers are the spiritual watchmen. It is a minister's duty to tell God's people the truth, and to warn them of spiritual pitfalls in the world, human nature and from Satan.

The Eternal told Isaiah, "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins".

Ezekiel was God's watchman for Israel. If a watchman saw a potential danger to a city and failed to warn its inhabitants, he was held responsible for the following destruction. Therefore, God warned Ezekiel that if he failed to warn the people of God's curse on disobedience, Ezekiel would be responsible for their death. God told him, "I will hold you accountable for his blood."

Those charged with declaring God's Word have a weighty responsibility to be faithful. This is why we ministers try to keep you informed of what is wrong in the world and show you how much better God's way of life is than this perverse society.

There are always some who despise the table of the Lord. Sometimes we feel like we have to figuratively drag them to the truth as they kick and scream about our warnings as watchmen. Malachi had to warn the people of the nation about this very thing.

Malachi 1:7, 12 You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.'

What is Malachi talking about here?

He is chastising the congregation of Israel for despising the messages and warnings that His ministers, as watchmen, are inspired by Him to preach to the people. The table of the Lord is the spiritual food that His ministers place on the spiritual table for the brethren to partake of

and to learn from and apply in their lives.

Have we ever complained about the sermons, knowing that the members of God's church have prayed for God's inspiration of the sermonettes and sermons?

We rightly ask for God's inspiration on the speaking and hearing at the beginning of every Sabbath service. I have no doubt that every minister of God prays multiple times for God's inspiration of his message during the course of his sermon preparation.

It is a sign of faithlessness to despise the table of spiritual food God Himself has set before us. When we humbly ask God for His inspiration we can be confident that He is giving us or allowing us to be given what we need.

In the case of heresy from a man posing as one of God's ministers, as long as we remain humbly submissive and intimate in our relationship with God, He gives us the discernment that we need to see through deception.

Even in the best of times, we all stumble in various ways. After praying about it we should turn to a righteous friend like Job, whose words supported those who stumbled and strengthened faltering knees. With all that Job went through, even before he went through all of this, he was quite an impressive individual in the value that he was to society at that time.

Here we see Job's friend Eliphaz explaining to Job that he had sinned.

Job 4:1-3 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: "If one attempts a word with you, will you become weary? But who can withhold himself from speaking? Surely you have instructed many, and you have strengthened weak hands."

The word '*instructed*' in verse 3 is the technical term for 'education' used to express training for life through discipline. Job's friend is reminding him that he needs to remember and practice what he has preached in the past. He should remember the education about the right way of life that he has helped others to understand. Job was in this "woe is me" stance, and even blaming God in a mild way for his situation.

Job 4:4 Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have strengthened the feeble knees;

Eliphaz reminded Job of his reputation as a man of understanding and wisdom, especially his ability to help others in their difficulties.

James Moffatt translates Job 4:4, "Your words have kept men on their feet." Never underestimate the power of words to encourage people in the trials of life. The right words, spoken at the right time, and with the right motive, can make a tremendous difference in the lives of people struggling in a trial or something that they are trying to overcome.

Our words can nourish those who are weak and encourage those who are defeated. But our words can also hurt those who are broken and only add to their burdens, so we have to be

careful what we say and how we say it.

Job 4:5 But now it comes upon you, and you are weary; it touches you, and you are troubled.

Eliphaz frankly told Job that he was unable to apply to himself what he had preached to others. At first, he gave Job a friendly reminder that his past life of righteousness had given him confidence and hope for his present trial

Then, Eliphaz moved into his accusation. Job could "give it," but he could not "take it"! He could dish it out, but he could not eat it himself. He could tell others how to handle their trials; but when trials came to his own life, he was not practicing what he preached. I think that happens often in trials that we go through in life where we have forgotten the encouragement or advice that we have given to others and how it would help us.

Job 4:6-8 Is not your reverence your confidence? And the integrity of your ways your hope? Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of His anger they are consumed.

Eliphaz argued that if Job is living a godly life, then he has nothing to fear; because God always blesses the righteous and judges the wicked.

The basic premise is: Do what is right and things will go well for you, and if God allows you to go through a trial, He will give you the strength; do what is wrong and God will send judgment. That judgment may sometimes be gradual, like the growing of a crop for harvest; or it may be sudden, like the coming of a storm or the attack of a predator. Nevertheless, we can be sure that judgment will come, because God is a righteous Judge.

Ultimately God blesses the righteous, His own people, and judges the wicked; but that is not the question discussed here in Job. It is not the ultimate result, but the immediate consequence to which this is referring here in verses 1-9.

Those with sound judgment, who walk in the ways of wisdom, have great peace and will not stumble. However, those who follow the way of the wicked who travel in deep darkness do not even know what makes them stumble.

To sin is to go astray—to turn to our own way and stumble. Even though sin is a kind of wandering, it is no accident. Both the writer of Proverbs and the prophet Isaiah observe that the feet of sinners 'rush into sin.'

Jeremiah 8:6 I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, as the horse rushes into the battle.

I know that this is not the case for God's people because God's people are trying very hard to overcome sin.

But this is the way a person heads when he starts repeatedly committing the same sin over and over again.

Biblical history reflects the moral tension between righteous God and sinful human beings. This universal conflict generates a drama of opportunity and choice to sin followed by the tragedy of the consequence of sin.

Again and again, the wrong choice is made. Loss follows loss, creating a downward spiral that, apart from divine intervention, leaves everyone without peace and without hope. That is always the direction of habitual sin.

The antidote for going astray in sin, or stumbling over it, is found in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:105, 165 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.

God's statutes, law and covenant form an illuminated pathway through life. Those who love God's law cannot be made to stumble. That shows us how imperfectly we are keeping those things and how hard that we have to work to overcome.

Thirdly, sin is like a bad debt that must be paid. It is very costly. Sin requires a penalty that can be laid as a charge against someone.

God's Word calls debt a form of slavery.

Proverbs 22:7 The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

I guess that makes almost every one of us at least somewhat of a slave to some lender, if we have a mortgage or a car payment, or anything of that sort.

If we are truly God's, we cannot be slaves to any man or institution. Debt permits the past to govern the present and to dictate the future. We cannot, and should not, be enslaved to debt because the present and the future belong to Christ. We are called to be free men and women in Him. Yes, it is a spiritual application but there is also the physical principle involved as well.

John 8:36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

That is where our freedom lies. The Bible recognizes that debt may be necessary in times of acute distress and emergency, but not for luxuries or pleasures. The Scriptures set definite time limits on debt: six years. By the seventh year debts are to be paid off, or forgiven. This in no way relieves the debtor of his debt.

Psalm 37:21 The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives.

Those two extremes, evil and good, are being contrasted there.

Through such a sabbatical rule as the forgiveness of a debt, God has established a system to keep individuals from debt and slavery.

God's word prohibits both perpetual debt and multiple indebtedness. We are not to make borrowing a habit. We are not to go into debt beyond our ability to pay the debt within the prescribed time. In addition, we are not to pledge as collateral that which has already been pledged. In this way, God seeks to protect both the debtor and the creditor.

The present Babylonian credit economy is built on the ungodly, anti-biblical concept that the individual, and the nation, need not worry about perpetual debt or multiple indebtedness. We should live for today and not lay aside that which will see us through to tomorrow. In an overwhelming way this nation has trillions of dollars in debt, and that debt is going to be called in some day. I am not sure what it is now, but I think that personal debt of every individual in this nation, because of what the nation's leaders have built up in their tab, is somewhere over ten to fifteen thousand dollars a person. It may be double that by now.

This is the foundation for Caesar's growing power and control. The system encourages debt and caters to the "live now, buy now" appetite. Interest is deductible. It is not what you owe but how it fits into your monthly budget—meaning, pay the interest and do not worry about principal. In this way, the debtor is seduced into the world of perpetual economic servitude. The Babylonian system of economics based on debt and high rates of interest is a concept of social control and imperialism rested on usury.

It is not surprising, then, that Babylon the Great, the harlot, is the type in the Book of Revelation of the one-world global economic-governmental system, which is seducing all nations, especially the greedy United States.

Revelation 18: 4 calls upon God's people to come out from such a world system and not be partakers of its sin "And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."

In Deuteronomy 28: 44, Moses warned of the consequences of debt: "He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail."

Holding an individual in debt holds him down. That is a form of economic bondage. The fetters of inflation are one device of such bondage. Usury is another. Part of the material cost of debt is the usury extracted. In many cases, the compounded interest exceeds the principle, which was borrowed.

The Old Testament tells us that we are not to take usury (interest) when we loan to a brother in need. It also makes clear that when the collateral is a necessity of life, it must be returned to the debtor should he need it to sustain life or earn a living.

Exodus 22:25-27 If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious.

A reasonable charge may be made for the use of money in the normal course of business transactions. The individual is entitled to a fair return on his property, as the two following scriptures show — in principle:

Luke 19:23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?

Matthew 25:27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

This relates to business, not to the poor. It is a type or a physical example to teach us the spiritual principle that we must use our God-given gifts and blessings to produce good fruit and not just let them waste away.

We are not to just sit on what God has given us. We are to use it for the benefit of the church and then for the benefit of the brethren.

The evil of taking monetary advantage of a person in distress is clearly prohibited in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25. The evil of those who take advantage of a community or a nation (that is, its citizens) in distress or peril by charging usury on the loan-money needed to protect or rebuild the nation is also prohibited.

When God gave His chosen people a land "*to possess it,*" He also drove the rebellious out of it because they disobeyed His laws. Among the reasons for their expulsion was "You have taken usury and increase and you have greedily gained of your neighbors by extortion and have forgotten Me, said the Lord God" (Ezekiel 22:12-15).

What did Jesus Christ say about usury?

Luke 6:34-35 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

He shows that if we loan to someone on personal basis, maybe because they are in need, that even if they are in the world, that we should not charge them usury. God is kind to both the

unthankful and the evil.

Christians should resist debt. Sin is like bad debt, which enslaves. We must reject sin in our Christian homes just as we should reject the debt economy. We must shun debt and usury, putting our trust in God. When an emergency or unforeseen and dire circumstance makes debt necessary, it should be on the shortest term possible and paid in full in the appointed term.

Perpetual debt is prohibited. All that we have is God's. We are His servants, His stewards. We not only have financial care of what He has let us use, but also we have the responsibility of not letting our minds and bodies which He owns to remain in debt to sin.

What we have is to be used for Him. We are not free to serve God when we mortgage ourselves, our work, and our property to others. Of course, in this day and age the way it is set up, it is almost impossible not to have a mortgage. But whatever that mortgage may be it should be as short as possible. We must not become slaves to others because we are servants to Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul reminds us of the one approved debt:

Romans 13:8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Such a debt is always due and payable, as is the greatest debt of all—our forever debt to Him who died for our sins, so that we might have eternal life.

The fourth, sin, is like an unsightly indelible stain.

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord,
"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

That is a promise that God gives us. If we will work with Him, submit and obey Him, He will cleanse the sin from us.

Scarlet was a more permanent color than what is mentioned under the word crimson; and white is a symbol of innocence. Of course, sins would be represented by black—the opposite of white. For this reason, we speak of crimes as black, or deep-dyed, and of the person as stained by sin.

Also, anciently, scarlet was a fixed color. Neither dew, nor rain, nor washing, nor long usage, would remove it. Therefore, it is used to represent the permanency of sins in the heart. It is humanly impossible to wash them out.

No human effort, no external rites, no tears, no sacrifices, no prayers, are of themselves able to wash the stain of sins away. They are deeply fixed in the heart, as the scarlet color was in the web of cloth. Only a pure, holy, and innocent Almighty power can remove them.

A stain is a discoloration that distinguishes itself from the material on which it is found. It can be unintentional, in the case of domestic stains on fabric, cloth, or other material, or it can be

intentional. Sins are the same way.

There are many types of stains: protein, beverage, fruit, personal care products and perfume, mud, syrups, greasy stains including adhesive tape and gum, dyes, ink and foods, ballpoint and felt tip pen ink, fabric softeners, grass, foliage, flowers, mildew and scorch, perspiration, rust, yellowing, dinginess, and hard water. I am sure that you could add to that list. Nevertheless, the point is there are many things that stain—and stain permanently. These are usually unintentional stains. Similarly, we do make mistakes in our lives.

Intentional stains are such things as wood stains and clothing dyes. Similarly, people do sin intentionally.

Not only does this verse teach us that God cleanses us from all sin, He also removes the faintest of stains sin leaves behind. Sin is like a permanent, ugly stain; if not physically on the body of a person (like STDs) then, always mentally or psychologically, as with lying.

Fifth, sin is like a death sentence

The connection between sin and death is emphasized in Moses' writings by the often-repeated provisions for sin offerings involving blood sacrifice.

The costliness and deadliness of sin are bound together in Paul's familiar words, "The wages of sin is death." To be a sinner is to be dead in your transgressions and sins. Paul goes so far as to personify sin as a killer or an executioner.

Romans 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

The deception of sin urged him to follow his desire, and then impulsively into more mistakes. In this sense, all sinners are deceived. There is always deception in sin. The Apostle Paul warned that sin deludes a person.

Sin misleads us in at least three ways:

1. We are deceived regarding the satisfaction found in sin. No one ever took a forbidden thing without thinking that it would make him happy; and no one ever thought that it did.
2. We are deceived regarding the excuse that can be made for it. Everyone thinks that he can put up a defense for doing the wrong thing; but no one's defense ever sounded anything else but like a lame excuse when it was made in the presence of God.
3. We are deceived regarding the probability of escaping the consequences of it. No one sins without hope that he can get away with it. But it is true that sooner or later our sins will find us out.

Unchained human passions urge us on, deluding us, and leading us ever further from happiness. No being in the universe is more deluded than a sinner in the indulgence of evil desires. This is what Solomon wrote about in:

Proverbs 7:21-23 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield,

with her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would cost his life.

That is pretty final. Sin that is not forgiven costs a person his life. It is the mother of all death, because when it is full-grown, it gives birth to death. A variation of this is the way it is portrayed as a disease that we must get rid of—a death will result.

Proverbs uses the words 'death' and 'die' twenty to thirty times, and in other places refers to the grave. Yet among all these references few limit their meaning strictly to literal death. The Old Testament looks at the subject in depth. Death is a whole dominion in conflict against life, rather than a single and merely physical event.

Death throws its shadow over the living, in forms of sickness, tragedy and above all, sin. Ideally, life is existence in its fullness (that is, it is more than just breathing or not breathing). On the other hand, any weakness in life is a shadow of death.

Jeremiah 13:16 Give glory to the LORD your God Before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble [because of pride, I should add there, because that is what the subject matter is here] on the dark mountains, and while you are [I will add, fruitlessly] looking for light, He turns it into the shadow of death and makes it dense darkness.

Living under the shadow of death equates to living in spiritual darkness. A sinner (in this case a prideful person) stumbles around wandering aimlessly through life. He is so blind that he does not see the pitfalls and hazards in the wrong path he has chosen.

The real downside of the shadow of death is that the sinner is missing true life. That is, the spiritual fruit a Christian's life produces: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We have been looking at some of the things sin is like. It is like: a form of bondage, stumbling down a path, a bad debt, an indelible stain, and a death sentence.

Now I want to shift gears a little bit and briefly look at eight reasons why we must not sin!

First, sin is condemned and hated by God, something that is absolutely opposed to Him and His holy nature. Or, if you like, simply put, because He said so! That really should be enough for us. There is no arguing about that He said so. We must not sin because God has said we must not; it is abhorrent to Him.

Second, sin is wrong in and of itself, and in its own nature. Often we are so involved in the process of sin and we are always out to excuse ourselves and to explain away what we have done. But it is important that we look at sin objectively, look at its ugliness and its filth. Look at the misery and wretchedness it produces, and look at the chaos it makes.

If we could really see the real nature of sin, we would hate it. It is of benefit for us to look at it

and examine it. It must be avoided because of its twisted and perverted character.

Third, sin is the terrible and filthy thing that caused such suffering to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and brought the Son of God from heaven to earth. The thing that humiliated, shamed and dishonored Him was the problem of sin.

Sin made Him endure the contradiction and persecution of sinners against Himself. It was the problem of sin that caused that Him to sweat blood. It was sin that drove the nails into His hands and feet. It was sin that produced the agony and suffering to death.

That is what sin produces!

Fourth, sin is dishonoring to the word of God, to its claims and to its power. The word of God with the teachings of Christ tells us that it can give us power. It is a gospel that offers us life and renewal of strength. Therefore, if we sin, we are denying the gospel and bringing it into disrepute.

We should not simply spend our life just trying to surrender ourselves, trying to yield ourselves up, trying to let go so that God can give us the victory. We have to reason it out. We have to be convinced that we must not sin because God condemns it, because it is wrong in itself, because it caused Christ's suffering, and because it is dishonoring to the gospel.

The apostle John admonishes us to 'reason it out'—"I write to you, so that you may not sin." Moreover, we must know why that is the reason.

It makes no sense to say we walk with God and then deliberately sin. The moment we sin we separate ourselves from God and fellowship is broken. It is of the utmost importance to maintain our fellowship with God.

We do not know exactly what awaits us. We may be tried, we may be persecuted, there may be war and calamity, there may be terrible things awaiting us. We know that there will be martyrs in the end. The one thing that matters is that we are right with God. That being said, do not sin because sin breaks the fellowship.

Fifth, sin is utterly inconsistent with our calling. It is totally inconsistent with our professed hatred of sin and with our professed desire to be delivered from it. We realize and know that sin is the central problem in life. We therefore say that we want to be delivered and emancipated from it, like a slave wants to be freed from the chains.

So if we continue to sin, we deny what we profess to believe. Then we are hypocrites! Such a position is completely inconsistent and self-contradictory.

Sixth, sin leads us to an evil conscience. When people sin, they are under a sense of condemnation, they are unhappy. Look at your own life—when you did something you should not have done, did you not become miserable with yourself and irritable with everyone else?

Was it not because you were unhappy; you knew you were wrong and yet you did it? There you were, miserable and ashamed. Sin will always rob you of long-term happiness and joy, and will give you a sense of condemnation, disapproval and blame.

Seventh, sin leads to doubts. It will, at times, make us feel uncertain of our relationship to God.

It will make us feel we have no right to pray. We do something we should not do and we get this sense of condemnation. Then something happens and we feel we need strength from God so we say, 'I will pray about it.'

But often the thought comes to us that we have no right to pray because we have sinned against God. We feel like a jerk to rush to Him just when we want Him. When everything goes well people do not want Him and they forget Him—this can be a major interruption to prayer. That is why we must not sin!

When we face the future, we wonder what is going to happen. There are so many things that may happen to any one of us—a terrible illness, loss of money, the illness of a dear one, death, and war—who knows?

Well, these things may happen. We may be totally helpless. We see that the world cannot help us with all its wealth, its education and its knowledge.

We are left face to face with one of these trials and crises of life. So we are about to pray and then comes this sense of condemnation. Somehow we feel we have no right to approach Him. That is a major reason why we must not sin.

If we want to enjoy fellowship with God, and if we want to be able to pray in the hour of crisis, we must keep the line of communication clear—keep the pathway open, avoid these obstacles that hinder access to God.

Eighth, sin always leads ultimately to a sense of utter hopelessness. That is why the New Testament epistles were written. People in a state and condition of hopelessness and despair sometimes have sinned for so long that they feel that they can do nothing. They have this sense of devastation and of being forsaken. Hopefully, being in God's church, we have not habitually sinned in a way for so long that it has set in permanently.

It is a deadly thing to have a defeatist attitude, because the pessimist has already defeated himself, even before he has attempted to conquer the enemy.

As a great encouragement, Isaiah provides hope by illustrating what God does with our forgiven sins.

Isaiah 38:17 Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

God turns His back on them as if to shun and ignore them.

If we repent of and overcome our sins, God removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. He cleanses and removes sin. That cleansing removes or cancels the need to keep the guilt on the books or in the record.

Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

God no longer needs to remember the penalty. He does not forget that it happened—He forgets about the infraction like a father who forgives his children for things that they are sorry they did. He blocks it out of His mind but He keeps it in the back of His mind so that He can help raise His children. That knowledge of the weaknesses that tend to be in His children helps Him in His childrearing later. So it is the penalty, the infraction of the penalty or the breaking of the law that He blocks out of His mind, but He does not forget that we have actually done that.

What God remembers no more is the guilt of the sin and the required penalty for the sin. He forgets about the guilt and penalty that are required by law because of what we have done. Once we accept Christ's sacrifice and are genuinely repentant, then, we receive His free gift of forgiveness because Christ shed His blood, which cleanses us. He paid the penalty by sacrificing His own life.

Micah prophesied the effects that Christ's sacrifice would have.

Micah 7:19 He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

That is a far distance from us. Micah was inspired to write that it is in the nature and the heart of God to forgive. God finds joy in doing this, and so He is endless in His will to forgive. He is always willingly looking for an opportunity to show His untiring love.

In the events of the Exodus, God overwhelmed the enemies of His people in the waters of the Red Sea. In a sense, He trampled them under His feet. When the children of Israel went through the Red Sea, it was a symbol of water baptism. Therefore, in a similar imagery, Micah confirmed, "*You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*"

First, God subdues our iniquities by treading them under foot—trampling any remaining breath out of them. Then He sees to it that they are buried in "the depths of the sea," out of reach, out of sight, and (as far as God is concerned, anyway) out of mind. Jeremiah 31:34 informs us of God's attitude: "...I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

It is certainly worth overcoming sin to receive this forgiveness and to have it wiped from our slate.

The "depths of the sea" appears to be a reference to the drowning of the Egyptians when they were pursuing the Israelites in the depths of the Red Sea. Sin, as did the Egyptian system of slavery, always leads ultimately to a sense of utter hopelessness. In contrast, righteousness always gives hope.

The essential quality of hope is that it is oriented to something in the future that one expects but does not yet possess. When the children of Israel were leaving Egypt they were flying high on the hope of a better life. When we begin to live righteously, and then, continue to produce spiritual fruit we enjoy the hope of better things to come in God's kingdom.

How much has God already spent on our training and education?

He has made a supreme investment in us through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, who

paid the penalty for our sins. Without that price, none of us could be given the high-ranking positions God has waiting for us. But God does not stop there. He invests in us daily through His guidance and correction, and through the continuous outpouring of His Holy Spirit.

In fact, God owns us—free and clear—completely and unequivocally!

The apostle Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 6:20, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

We do that by overcoming sin and producing the fruit of righteousness.

Our Creator expects to see a profit, in other words, fruit produced from all of His time, effort and sacrifice. If we who are called now work with God in qualifying us for positions of rulership, we will in turn be able to help God with millions of others that He calls in the future to become part of His Family.

All Christians are capable of making costly mistakes, and sometimes we may feel like God has given up on us. Sometimes we feel that we are wasting His time. Nevertheless, God has promised something else regarding this:

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ";

God will never give up on us, unless we give up on Him. He is investing in us with every intention of producing something wonderful.

Our merciful Father sees our potential. He knows our capacity to grow and develop. He is also well aware of our weaknesses, and is ready to help.

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

We humans make a lot of mistakes, even those of us in God's church. Our ability to learn from our mistakes is part of what God uses to build character in us. In the book of Revelation, we read that it is the overcomers, the conquerors, those who will not be defeated, those who do not resign from serving and obeying God and who ultimately are given eternal life in God's Family.

Revelation 22:12 cautions us, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

God is ready and willing to forgive us for our mistakes. But He expects us to learn our lessons well, "...For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

God demands a great deal of obedience and submission from us. He requires our victory over sin. In reality, He gives us that victory. He guarantees us that victory, if we work with Him by fulfilling our responsibility to conquer sin.

Yes, we have all made costly mistakes, but the costliest one of all is to ignore God's promise —"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."