

Respectable Sins

Jerry Bridges

Exercises for the Saints

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Lesson 1: Saints

Saints – that is what we are

The church of Corinth in the New Testament contained by far the most sin-infested Christians known to us. Yet, based on the following verses, how did Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, refer to them spiritually?

1 Corinthians 1:2

2 Corinthians 1:1

According to the rest of the New Testament, what qualified a person to be called “saint”?

Romans 1:7; 16:15; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; 4:21-22; Colossians 1:2

Saints – that is how we are to live

According to the following verses, how should the knowledge of already being a saint change us?

Titus 2:14

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Galatians 5:25-26

Lesson 2: Sin, and Sanctification

Sin, has it disappeared?

The opposite of living as a saint is living as a sinner. Yet the notion of “sin” has disappeared from our society, and even our own lives as “saints”. For all the following “respectable” terms, write down the Biblical term that we should restore to our vocabulary. Think of other terms that are often used instead of a clear Biblical term.

“have an affair”

“commit fraud”

“irritated/frustrated”

“upset”

“being gay”

“bend the truth”

“good self-esteem”

“stressed”

“impulsive”

“just human”

“On the contrary, as God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy, so sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful.” —Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, Banner of Truth, 1965, 31.

According to 1 John 3:4, why is sin a problem?

“... believers in the Puritan era ... had a different view of themselves. They feared the reality of sin still dwelling in them. ... pastors of that era [entitled their books] ... *The Sinfulness of Sin, The Mischief of Sin, The Anatomy of Secret Sins, The Evil of Evils or The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*. ... Ralph Venning ... uses especially colorful [sic] ... words to describe sin. Over the space of only a few pages, he says that sin is vile, ugly, odious, malignant, pestilent, pernicious, hideous, spiteful, poisonous, virulent, villainous, abominable, and deadly.” — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 25-26.

Christ, the way to sanctification

At the end of his life, John Newton, the author of the hymn “Amazing Grace” said to a friend “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour”. According to the following verses, what is the remedy for sin?

1 Timothy 1:15

Romans 4:7-8

Romans 8:13

Colossians 3:5

1 John 3:2-3

Lesson 3: Saints and Sin

Dramatic change at your conversion

How do the following verses explain a saint's relationship with sin?

Colossians 1:13

Galatians 5:17

Continual change for the rest of your life

How do the following verses explain a saint's relationship with the Holy Spirit?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Ephesians 4:30

John 16:7-8

Begin a daily habit to "Preach the Gospel to yourself every day." Use the following verses as content for your daily sermonette. Add your own selection of verses to remind yourself daily of the truth of the Gospel that saved you and is sanctifying you.

Psalm 103:12	Isaiah 43:25	Isaiah	53:6
	Romans 4:7-8		
Romans 8:1	Psalm 130:3-4	Isaiah	1:18
	Micah 7:19		
Ephesians 1:7	Colossians 2:13-14	Hebrews	8:12
	Hebrews 10:17-18		

Lesson 4: The Discipline of Dealing with Sin

1) Remember the Gospel

According to Colossians 2:13-14, what truth should be first on our mind when we think of a specific sin?

According to Romans 3:22-24, what is our standing before God in spite of our sin?

2) Depend on the Spirit

According to Romans 8:13, what should replace sheer will-power in our fight against sin?

3) Recognise your responsibility

In light of the Spirit's work in us, how does Philippians 2:12-13 instruct us in our pursuit of holiness?

4) Identify specific sins or areas of sin

It not enough merely to pursue spiritual maturity in general. We must also identify specific sins and work on them. Look at how specific the following passages are. Putting it all together, write out a list of sins or areas of sin to help you discern your own sins.

Ephesians 4:25-31

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Galatians 5:19-21

Ephesians 5:3-5

5) Find specific verses for those sins

What lessons does Psalm 119:9-11 teach for pursuing purity in your spiritual walk

6) Practise praying

What two different kinds of prayers must characterise our prayers regarding our own sin?

Matthew 6:13

Luke 22:40

7) Involve other believers

From the instructions in Galatians 6:1-2 and the picture in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, what do you learn about struggling alone in your battle against sin?

“remember, your heart is a battleground between the flesh and the Spirit”
— Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 51.

Lesson 5: The 'Respectable' Sin of Ungodliness

"Ungodliness and wickedness is not the same Ungodliness describes an attitude toward God, while unrighteousness refers to sinful actions in thought, word, or deed." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 53.

Note the distinction made between ungodliness and unrighteousness in Romans 1:18. What will God do to both of them? ***Judge them***

Definition: "Ungodliness may be defined as living one's everyday life with little or no thought of God, or of God's will, or of God's glory, or of one's dependence on God." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 53.

Ungodliness is "un-God-liness" – living, as though, without God.

How do the following verses help you identify and remedy the sin of ungodliness in your life?

James 4:13-15

Colossians 1:9-10

Colossians 3:22-24

1 Corinthians 10:31

Matthew 5:16

Psalm 42:1-2

"I believe ungodliness is our most basic sin, even more basic than pride."
— Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 53.

According to 1 Timothy 4:7, what spiritual exercise should be part of our daily routine?

Lesson 6: The 'Respectable' Sin of Anxiety

How often is anxiety, worry, fear, or frustration, your response to the difficulties of this life?

From the following verses, observe the things that are common anxiety triggers in our life, but that are forbidden as triggers to worry.

Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 10:28-31

Philippians 4:6

Why is anxiety so wrong?

Matt 6:26 and 32

1 Peter 5:7

What is the remedy for anxiety?

Psalm 34:8-10

To overcome anxiety, worry, fear and frustration, take Psalm 139:16, and insert the circumstances occasioning this 'respectable' sin into the verse to build your trust in God.

"Your eyes saw my _____; in your book were written, _____, _____, when as yet there was none of them. "

"How happy are they who can resign all to Him, see His hand in every dispensation, and believe that He chooses better for them than they possible could for themselves." — John Newton, *Letters of John Newton*, Banner of Truth, 1960, 137.

Lesson 7: The 'Respectable' Sin of Discontentment

Whereas worry is about uncertainty, discontentment is the sin we entertain when there is certainty, but certainty of unfavourable conditions. We do not fear the unknown (that is anxiety), instead we dislike the norm (discontentment).

Think through all the things you get anxious about, and all the things you are discontent about.

Anxiety issues

Discontentment issues

How does the example in Philippians 4:11-13 help you think through your discontentment issues?

How does the example in Job 1:21 help you think through your discontentment issues?

*Lord, I am willing to —
Receive what You give,
Lack what You withhold,
Relinquish what you take.*

— — —

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 75.

Lesson 8: The 'Respectable' Sin of Unthankfulness

What are some of the more 'respectable' words for the sin of unthankfulness?

"Taking for granted all the temporal provisions and spiritual blessings that God has so richly bestowed on us, and so failing to continually give Him thanks, is one of our "acceptable" sins." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 81.

Read Deuteronomy 8:11-14 and 17-18.

- 1) When we prosper we tend to add the success to our list of life accomplishments. Why is this sin?
- 2) When is the best time to work on the sin of unthankfulness?

According to Ephesians 5:20, what is characteristic of a Spirit-filled believer?

According to Romans 1:21, what is characteristic of those who have sunk to the depths of depravity?

"... unthankfulness is a serious matter. It may seem like a small sin to us, but God takes it seriously." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 82.

According to Romans 8:28-29, 38-39 and Psalm 119:68 what should inform our faith on a daily basis?

According to Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18, how will such faith produce thankfulness in us?

"...in your time with God each day, spend part of the time giving thanks for specific temporal and spiritual blessings." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 86.

Lesson 9: The 'Respectable' Sin of Pride

If you despise the man in Luke 18:11 you are no doubt guilty of the same. According to James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, what does God do with those who revel in pride?

How does Luke 18:9 define the sin of pride and self-righteousness?

How does Psalm 51:5 define your own righteousness and spiritual origin?

When you see moral degradation and wickedness around you in society, how will the example of Ezra in Ezra 9:6 keep you from pride?

Why does 1 Corinthians 8:1 give a warning when discussing strong Biblical convictions (see the rest of the chapter for answers)?

How does 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 and 4:7 balance your thinking regarding your own personal talents and accomplishments?

Submission is the opposite of pride. According to the following verses, how can we use daily submission as a means to stop pride in our lives?

Isaiah 66:2

Hebrews 13:7

Romans 13:1-2

Lesson 10: The 'Respectable' Sin of Selfishness

“We can be very learned in our theology or very upright in our morality and yet fail to display the gracious qualities of Christian character that Paul called the fruit of the Spirit. ... I believe that all of us have “blind spots”...”
— Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 101.

What areas of selfishness do the following verses address? Jot down some specific things in your life that might be addressed by each verse.

Philippians 2:4

Galatians 6:2

1 John 3:17

Romans 12:10, 17

How does the picture of a “blind spot” help you to identify selfishness in your life?

Lesson 11: The 'Respectable' Sin of Little Self-control

Read Proverbs 25:28. Think of the implications of this ancient word-picture.

“...a person without self-control is vulnerable to all kinds of temptations.”
— Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 109.

What do the following verses teach about the importance of self-control?

Galatians 5:22-23

2 Timothy 3:3, 5

Titus 2:11-12

1 Peter 4:7

“What is self-control? It is a governance or prudent control of one’s desires, cravings, impulses, emotions, and passions. It is saying no when we should say no. It is moderation in legitimate desires and activities, and absolute restraint in areas that are clearly sinful.” — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 110.

What areas of life can we use to practise self-control?

1 Corinthians 10:31

Proverbs 16:32

Ecclesiastes 2:10

What other areas of daily life can you use to cultivate self-control?

Lesson 12: The 'Respectable' Sin of Impatience

What things all 'make' you impatient or irritated?

According to James 4:1, what is the true *cause* of impatience?

According to 1 Corinthians 13:4, what is the fix for impatience and irritability?

"Impatience is often expressed verbally in a way that tends to humiliate the person who is the object of the impatience." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 116.

Adopt the following phrase as a way to renew your mind regarding the sin of impatience:

"A harmonious relationship with _____ is more important than _____"

How does Proverbs 19:11 and 1 Peter 4:8 help with a replacement for irritability?

"May we be as severe with ourselves over our won subtle sins as we are with the vile sins we condemn in others. May we not be like the self-righteous Pharisee in the temple who prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men" but may we continually have the humble attitude of the tax-collector who said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:11-13)" — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 119-20.

Lesson 13: The 'Respectable' Sin of Anger

"We get angry because we don't get our way." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 123.

How does the principle in 1 Peter 2:18-20 help you respond better when you don't get treated the way you want?

According to Ephesians 4:31-32 and Colossians 3:13, what attitudes towards others make it easier to stop your angry responses? How would you describe each of these attitudes?

When others intentionally sin against you, how will the following verses help you overcome the sin of anger towards them?

Genesis 45:8; 50:20

Matthew 18:21-35

James 1:20

Lesson 14: The 'Respectable Sin' of Judgmentalism

“The sin of judgmentalism is one of the most subtle of our “respectable” sins because it is often practised under the guise of being zealous for what is right..” — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 141.

Romans 14:4 gives the governing principle for judging others on things not clearly forbidden in Scripture. What is it?

How does Matthew 7:3 help with humility regarding matters in which you judge others?

What kinds of issues can we clearly judge (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-5)?

How does 1 Corinthians 4:5 help you overcome a critical spirit?

Although 2 Peter 2:11 discusses something very unique, there is still a principle for us to overcome being overly judgmental. What is it?

Lesson 15: The 'Respectable' Sins of Envy and Jealousy

"*Envy* is the painful and oftentimes resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by someone else. ... *Jealousy* is ... intolerance of rivalry." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 149 and 151.

According to Romans 1:29 and Galatians 5:21 and their contexts, how bad is envy

The story in 1 Samuel 18:7-12, what sins tend to accompany jealousy?

How does 1 Samuel 2:7 help us think about the blessings enjoyed by others?

Romans 12:4 and 10 gives us some tips to fix jealousy and envy at church. What are they?

How does 1 Peter 5:5 help us temper an overly-competitive heart?

Jealousy and envy often fuel a desire to control. How does Ephesians 5:20-21 help us overcome a controlling attitude?

Lesson 16: The 'Respectable' Sins of the Tongue

What specific 'respectable' sins of the tongue can all be categorised by Matthew 12:36? Which sins of the tongues are most 'respected' in society?

When we verbally expose the inadequacies of others, what, according to Matthew 12:34 are we really exposing?

According to James 3:7-8 and Psalm 19:14, what kind of help do we need to stop using our tongues like the world does?

What is the truly respectable standard for our tongues (Ephesians 4:29)?

The book of Proverbs has dozens of verses on the tongue. Scan through Proverbs and write down a few that you will use in your sanctification of your tongue.

Examples:

15:2 I will only speak what I know to be true, and not perpetuate the spread of rumours

16:19 I will now longer excuse untruths with humour

Lesson 17: The 'Respectable' Sin of Worldliness

What does 1 John 2:15-17 say about worldliness?

Colossians 3:2 is the replacement for worldliness. What is it?

What does Proverbs 27:20 teach about the "desire of the eyes"? How does it help you overcome worldliness in your desires?

What is the irony of worldliness according to Romans 6:21?

Worldliness is "a preoccupation with the things of this temporal life" and "accepting and going along with the values and practices of society around us without discerning if they are biblical." — Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, Navpress, 2007, 174-5.

Lesson 18: Review

Although we, along with the rest of the world accept many sins, even respect some of them, God does not. We need to restore to our spiritual senses the Biblical terms for such sins.

“sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful.”
—Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, Banner of Truth, 1965, 31.

The list

1. **Ungodliness** – living with no thought of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)
2. **Anxiety / worry** – considering the trials of life greater than the goodness of God (Philippians 4:6)
3. **Discontentment** – complaining about the circumstances we do not like (Philippians 4:11)
4. **Unthankfulness** – not giving thanks for the things in life which we do like (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
5. **Pride** – criticising others for their failures while self not submitting in all to God (1 Peter 5:6)
6. **Selfishness** – considering our interests over than of others (Romans 12:10)
7. **Little self-control** – Absolute restraint when needed; moderation in all else (Proverbs 25:28)
8. **Impatience / irritability** – a loveless attitude when not getting your way (1 Corinthians 13:4)
9. **Anger** – a loveless response when not getting your way (James 1:20)
10. **Judgmentalism** – when personal zeal replaces God’s standard (Romans 14:4)
11. **Envy and Jealousy** – wanting what others have/are or at least wanting them not to have it (1 Samuel 2:7)

12. **Sins of the Tongue** – talking too much; talking too little; gossip; slander; lying; verbal teasing; hurtful jokes; critical speech; harsh words; insults; sarcasm;, ridicule; mockery; deceit; self-promoting storytelling (Ephesians 4:28)
13. **Worldliness** – allowing the desires for earthly things to influence us more than the desires for eternal things (1 John 2:15-17)

The plan

1. **Remember the Gospel** (All sins are forgiven; God’s righteousness is ours)
2. **Depend on the Spirit** (We are able to put off all sins)
3. **Recognise your responsibility** (Holiness doesn’t come without deliberate effort)
4. **Identify specific sins or areas of sin** (Use the list and those closest to you)
5. **Find specific verses for those sins** (See the lessons, and add your own)
6. **Practise praying** (Make every step a matter of praise – both praising God for the Gospel and pleading for His help in the work of growing in holiness)
7. **Involve other believers** (Seek their rebuke, counsel, prayers, and encouragement)

John Newton expressed the true balance between sin-awareness and joyful Christian living in these words: *“I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Saviour”*.