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Bonus Issue

She Reaches Out Her Hands



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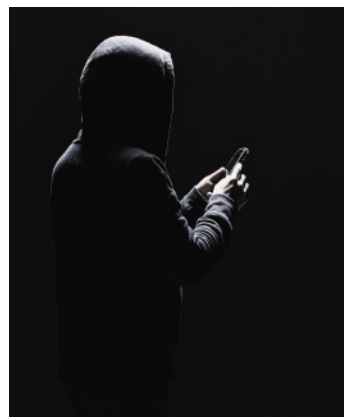
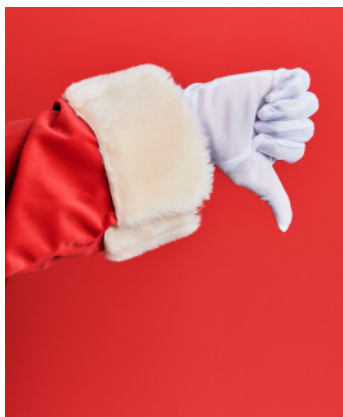
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She Reaches Out Her Hands

This experience with a homeless woman has touched my life deeply.

By Dee Kilough



A number of years ago, on the streets of Sacramento, California, a rather dowdy lady timidly approached me and softly entreated, “Excuse me, do you have any money or food? I’m so hungry. I won’t spend money on drugs or alcohol, I promise!”

She looked desperate—homeless and hungry, having obviously lost her way in life. Glad to help in the small way I could, I gave her some money and something to eat. She sincerely thanked me, promising again she wouldn’t spend it on anything inappropriate. I told her

it was her money now, and I wouldn't tell her how to spend it, but I hoped she'd use it for something good for herself. She just stood there, though, looking at me, seeming to need something *more*.

Christ's example of compassion

Maybe it was coincidence, but I had just been reading about the deep compassion of Jesus Christ. The story of how He displayed that love through touching a leper was particularly striking to me. Touching such a diseased person was taboo, and seemingly unnecessary in the healing of this man, but "Jesus, *moved with compassion*, stretched out His hand and touched him" (Mark 1:41, emphasis added). His spontaneous touch was an act of pure love and compassion.

With that in the back of my mind and seeing how she was lingering for some reason, I suddenly found myself giving her a big hug! This surprised both of us, but she melted into it, and then said something I'll never forget. In tears she mumbled that she couldn't remember the last time *anyone* had hugged her or touched her kindly. It was a deeply shocking and sad statement. She then left, smiling broadly, filled in ways money or food could never provide.

The importance of touch

Many times I've thought of her and other lonely people and how incredibly important it is to physically reach out to others. We probably all know people who spend most of their time alone. Their only possibility of being touched by another human being is when they go out into their communities and churches, or when/if someone visits them—and sometimes even then it doesn't happen.

Now I don't believe that in this day and age we should just go up to random people and hug them, but through that chance

street encounter I learned the importance of looking around and responding to those who need the thoughtful touch of another caring human.

God has given women in particular a gift, and responsibility, for the care and nurture of those around us—parents, siblings, husbands, children, friends, neighbors or *maybe* even someone we've just met in a store or on a walk. Our responsibilities for care and nurture cover multiple roles, and among those is a powerful and simple act of service—*touch*.

Proverbs 31:20 speaks of the woman who "reaches out her hands to the needy." Sometimes the most powerful way we can reach out is to *literally* reach out—through a hug, a pat, a soft squeeze on the arm, a warm handshake—and touch those who need it.

That event taught me the importance of being sensitive and making others aware of those who need the loving nurture of a caring touch. Touch can make the difference between loneliness and inclusion, between desperation and hope, between sadness and joy. Touch is a vital key for our psychological health and well-being. It would be great if we could each make it our personal goal to search for those who are rarely touched and, with love and following Christ's example, "reach out our hands" warmly to those who need it so much.

Someday, another hug

I didn't see this woman again until nearly a year later. As I went out for lunch one day I spotted her lying on a bench across the street from my workplace. She didn't respond to my efforts to wake her, and a nearby shop owner called the police. Later, I found out she had died on that bench.

I hope to see her in a happier time, give her another *realllly* big hug and let her know how our meeting changed my life and opened my eyes for the better. I can't wait for her to realize she will never have to suffer hunger and loneliness again and will live a life of hope, joy, love ... and compassionate touch! ☺

When I Told My Family I Wouldn't Celebrate Christmas

I had learned about the pagan roots of Christmas and decided I could no longer celebrate it. But what would happen when I told my family?

By Bill Palmer



It was an exciting time. I had been learning biblical truths that challenged my assumptions and compelled me to reexamine long-held beliefs. God was drawing me to Him.

One of the issues I confronted was Christmas. It was a day I had never kept religiously, but one that my family held dear as an opportunity to express our love for one another.

What I learned, however, is that Jesus wasn't born in December, and God never told us to celebrate His birth. I came to realize Christmas is actually pagan in origin and repugnant to God. (For more on this topic, see our blog post "[Is Christmas a Pagan Holiday?](#)")

I decided I could no longer participate, but I worried about what would happen when I told my family I wouldn't celebrate Christmas.

Poor choices

It was this worry that resulted in my making some very poor decisions. My choices about how, and

especially when, to tell my family I wouldn't celebrate Christmas anymore caused unnecessary stress for me and for my family.

I had my reasons. They were all based on worrying about what my family might think in light of current trends during the mid-1970s, when I had left home to attend college in Oregon.

That decade witnessed the appearance of quite a few cults, and at that time Oregon was known for several. Those cults included Marshall Applewhite's Heaven's Gate, famous for its later group suicide in San Diego.

During that time, families worried about their loved ones being "brainwashed," and the cultural phenomenon of cult deprogramming arose. Cults and deprogramming were big topics in the news. Almost everyone knew about these trends.

It was against this background that I began considering how to explain my new beliefs to my parents, my sisters and my brother. Even though I knew God's Church isn't anything like those cults, I worried about what would happen when I told my family I wouldn't celebrate Christmas.

Facing an uncomfortable truth

I planned to be with family during the Christmas break. It was something we always did. So, how and when would I tell them about my beliefs?

There were three options.

First, I could write letters to everyone. There was no email back then, and writing letters would be time-consuming. On top of that, letters would not allow my family members any opportunity to ask questions. I reasoned that this option wasn't right for my situation.

Second, I could telephone each of my family members. But long-distance phone calls were expensive. I envisioned long, drawn-out conversations as I attempted to answer each question. Also, I had no desire to face the same uncomfortable situation so many times.

Again, I reasoned that this option didn't seem to be the right approach.

Telling family in person

The third option was to tell my family members in person after we had gathered in one place. Unfortunately, I did not arrive until late Christmas Eve. Several of them had already gone to bed.

That meant I would be telling them on Christmas morning, the very time we had always come together to exchange gifts. Not yet knowing my new beliefs, my parents and sisters and brother had all bought presents for me.

Needless to say, I was quite uncomfortable. Waiting so long to tell my family about my decision not to celebrate Christmas had brought me to this point. Even so, I finally told them.

What about you?

Perhaps you are in a similar position now. Here are some principles I learned. You might find them to be useful guidance as you prepare to tell your family and closest friends about why you no longer celebrate Christmas:

1. Put God first.

Obedying God does not come naturally, especially when we find ourselves facing difficult circumstances. Our natural reaction in these situations might be to justify

disobedience, perhaps relying on the idea that "God will understand."

Scripture argues against this justification. The very first commandment makes this clear: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). That means putting God first in our lives, even when we face difficult challenges.

Knowing that Christmas has pagan origins is not enough. Knowing that God abhors pagan rites (Deuteronomy 12:29-31) is not enough. We must choose to come out of those traditions and practices.

We must consciously decide that God comes first, no matter the cost to us personally. It's not an easy choice, but it's the only one that leads to life.

2. Timing is important.

One lesson I learned from my mistakes is that timing is important. I had yielded to my fears about how my family would react to my decision, putting off the unpleasant task as long as possible.

That was an extremely poor choice. Christmas morning, for obvious reasons, is not the right time to let loved ones know that you won't be celebrating with them. There was a stack of unopened gifts in front of me when I finally explained my beliefs.

Because of my delay, I was not only explaining why I would no longer celebrate Christmas, but also rejecting their gifts—gifts that represented their love. In hindsight, I can see that I should have handled things differently.

First and foremost, I would have let my family know long before Christmas that I would no longer take part in the festivities. If I had still been unable to contact some of them, I would not have compounded my error by rejecting their gifts on Christmas morning.

I could have accepted those gifts graciously, explaining that I was not participating in Christmas, but merely accepting what they had so lovingly prepared for me. At the same time, I could have explained that I would not be accepting Christmas gifts in the future.

I should have spent more time thinking through the timing and considering their feelings and perspective to a greater extent than I did. I put off a difficult task, convincing myself that I had good reasons, and then chose to reject my family's gifts on Christmas morning, causing unnecessary pain.

3. Be careful not to offend.

Standing up for the truth is important, but it is also important how we make our stand. What seems obvious

to us may be difficult for loved ones to grasp, so we must choose our approach very carefully.

Causing unnecessary offense is wrong. The apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, warning him to avoid foolish disputes that generate strife (2 Timothy 2:23).

He then went on to explain that “a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient” (verse 24).

It’s appropriate, for instance, to explain that Christmas has pagan origins. On the other hand, it is not appropriate to tell those who celebrate Christmas that they are pagans. Such labeling gains nothing and can unnecessarily offend those who might otherwise listen.

4. Don’t try to convert anyone.

Closely related to the preceding point is the recognition that it is not our place to convert other people. That is the prerogative of God the Father. In fact, Jesus proclaimed that “no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44).

I had already learned this, but my experience that Christmas morning reinforced it. After telling my family that I wouldn’t celebrate Christmas anymore, I attempted to answer all their questions.

What sticks out in my mind to this day is that, try as I might to answer a question thoroughly, someone else would ask essentially the same question—in different words—as soon as I had finished. It was exasperating, but I could see that the minds of my family were not open to what seemed clear to me.

5. Prepare to answer questions.

Although we cannot convert anyone, we should be prepared to answer questions. The apostle Peter encouraged first-century Christians to “be ready to give a defense” (1 Peter 3:15).

That means knowing the origins of Christmas and how it came to be considered a Christian holiday. It means understanding why the holiday is repugnant to God. These things I understood when I explained my beliefs to my family.

What I had not anticipated were questions that—in the minds of family members—sidestepped the religious issues. Our family met as family, celebrating family and exchanging gifts in love. We did not attend church, and we attached little religious significance to the day.

I did my best to answer their questions, but realized that I could have been better prepared. One way that would have helped is to have asked other Christians who had been down this path for their suggestions.

We shouldn’t be afraid to ask for help and advice.

6. Ask God for the right words.

An important point is recognizing our own inability to anticipate every potential question. We must instead look to the unlimited Almighty God for help. We can pray to God for wisdom (James 1:5; see our article “[If Anyone Lacks Wisdom](#)”). Jesus said when we persistently ask, seek and knock, God will answer (Luke 11:9-10).

This doesn’t mean we should not do our part in preparation, such as searching the Scriptures. What it does mean is that once we have prepared, and once we have asked God for His help, we can be confident.

7. Trust God.

Ultimately, we must trust God. He knows our fears and concerns, and He knows what lies before us. More than that, “the Father Himself loves you” (John 16:27).

Things may not happen as we hope, but God is always in control.

In my case, that Christmas morning was difficult, more difficult than I had hoped. The discussion was intense, full of passion, going on for a couple of hours. At times I felt besieged by my own family.

What happened after hours of emotional back-and-forth surprised me. One of my sisters stood up, walked over and hugged me.

Her simple act ended the discussion. At the same time, it let me know my family still loved me. It also reminded me that God is in charge.

Don’t make the same mistakes

If you’ve just learned the truth about Christmas, trust God as you prepare to tell your loved ones that you will no longer celebrate the day.

Think through how and when you will tell your family and friends. Put God first, but also be careful to consider how your decisions will affect the people you love.

You can learn more in the article “[Christmas: Should Christians Celebrate It?](#)” and related articles. ❷

The Dangers of Hidden Sexual Sin

Hidden forms of sexual sin are getting easier to engage in without the need for anyone else to know. What is the danger of these hidden sins?

By Zach Smith

Trapped. Alone. Weak. Worthless. Beyond repair. This is how hidden sexual sin can leave its participants feeling. They may not have even started out with an intent to sin. Human beings are curious by nature, and some are led into sinful behaviors by simply not recognizing the dangerous path curiosity can lead them down.

Others head into sin knowingly, casting off restraint in the moment because the pull of “the passing pleasures of sin” is so strong (Hebrews 11:25).

Regardless of the pathway, the result can soon become a habitual pattern of sin, guilt and shame that feels impossible to break—especially if you feel it has to be done alone.

Even when the destructive pattern formed is recognized as unhealthy—mentally and morally—and a determination is made to break the habit, it is often accompanied by some internal chatter: “Okay, it’s time to stop. But you can’t tell anybody about this. Do you know what they would think of you? You’d be labeled as a pervert. Nobody would understand, and your



reputation would be ruined. Nobody would want to be around you if they knew what you were really like. You *have* to keep this a secret. You can overcome this on your own, *just don't tell anybody.*”

Sexual sin is nothing new

The book of Genesis alone records numerous forms of sexual sin that plagued the earliest days of human history (9:20-24; 19:4-5, 30-36; 34:1-2; 35:22; 38:9, 13-16; 39:7; etc.). And this is all just in the book of beginnings!

Similar sins and their damaging consequences continue throughout the record of Scripture, even affecting righteous people like David (2 Samuel 11:1-4).

Sexual sin is nothing new, and it does not discriminate based on age, sex or marital status. It can have a pull on even the most morally strong if they let their guard down (1 Corinthians 10:12).

But something is new

What's new—or at least different—about sexual sin in our modern age is the ability to engage in it in much more hidden forms.

In previous eras, most sexual sins required someone else to know about it. With the exception of lust in the privacy of one's mind and masturbation, most sexual sins involved a partner or some form of human interaction to purchase sexually charged materials such as pornography or erotic literature.

Not so anymore. With the tap of a smartphone that fits in a pocket, one can engage in a plethora of sexual sins that require *nobody else to know*.

Hidden forms of sexual sin

And therein lies the first danger of these forms of sexual sin. They *can* be easily hidden, engaged in privately and anonymously. This is possible in forms such as online pornography, erotica, anonymous sex chat rooms, voyeurism via live streams—and the list goes on.

Endless curiosities can be explored and lust and sexual fantasies fueled by the ability to do a search for *any* topic, regardless of how taboo it may be. The advancement of technology has effectively taken away the need to blush. And because this sin can be so easily hidden, it can be easy to *keep* hiding.

Sexual sin thrives on secrecy

The nature of sin itself is that it does not want to be found out. If it is brought to the light, it may need to be corrected and changed (John 3:19-20). And therefore, when we sin, we hide. That was the very reaction to sin from its inception among mankind—sin resulted in Adam and Eve hiding from the God who created them (Genesis 3:8).

We hide to avoid guilt and condemnation, but there is also a desire to continue in sin. The internal dialogue that says, “Nobody else can know,” often feigns preservation of reputation while actually promoting preservation of behavior.

That's important to recognize. The fleshly mind does not want to overcome sin because of its passing pleasures. The works of the flesh want to be ignored. If not ignored, justified. If not justified, then minimized. If not minimized, then kept hidden in a private battle.

Why? Because the private battle is so often lost.

The danger of staying hidden

Sexual sin is more likely to remain unchanged when it can hide in secret. Many who have sought to “white knuckle it” on their own have experienced a pattern something like this:

- A determination to leave sexual sin behind and no longer engage in it.
- A period of success and stability.
- A trigger due to exposure to sexual content or an emotional experience that fires up neural pathways in the brain telling you this sexual behavior is what you want and it can help you cope.
- A period of resisting—like gripping a steering

wheel so tightly to prevent a crash that your knuckles turn white.

- Followed by an eventual crash of relapse into sexual sin.

Then come those familiar feelings that accompany guilt and shame. Trapped. Alone. Weak. Worthless. Beyond repair.

You might clear those thoughts eventually, and maybe even start again. But the *cycle* often starts again too. When the struggle with sexual sin stays hidden, so does the need for help to truly overcome.

Many who *have* overcome unwanted sexual behavior (habits they formed over time, want to change, but keep finding themselves repeating), have done so only when their secret life was found out by a spouse, family member, employer or friend. These “hidden” sins often don’t stay hidden forever.

But the hiding doesn’t have to end in such a traumatic and relationship-damaging way as being “found out.” It can also be the result of a direct and purposeful choice to disempower secrecy by sharing your struggle with a trusted adviser or friend.

Sexual sin can be overcome

Let’s be clear: sexual sin *can* be forgiven and it *can* be overcome. In fact, it must be overcome and not accepted as a normal practice or lifestyle in order to inherit eternal life.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you.* But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, emphasis added throughout).

Some Christians in Corinth had previously engaged in patterns of sexual sin, but they were washed, sanctified and justified in God’s sight through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They were forgiven of these sins, and encouraged to overcome and not go back to these lifestyles that they were previously known for.

Just a few verses later, the same brethren were told, “Flee sexual immorality.” The need to keep fleeing from sexual immorality and continue overcoming its pull doesn’t end instantly at conversion. Even the forgiven may need to *keep* fleeing in an effort to overcome. And that fleeing might need to include *coming out of hiding* by seeking help to change.

Listing the dangers

In summary, the dangers of hidden sexual sin include:

- 1. Ease of engagement due to its private nature.**
- 2. Ease of continuation because nobody else knows.**
At least physically—God certainly knows since “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).
- 3. Increased feelings of helplessness and being alone in the battle.** Because of disgust with your own hidden sin, you keep hiding—telling yourself you have to deal with this alone because it’s just too ugly and embarrassing to share.
- 4. Increased isolation as a result of self-degradation and comparison.** Because you don’t know others’ secret sins, you assume nobody respectable struggles with similar things. You are left feeling like your sins are worse than those of all others. So, you hide in isolation, in fear you might be found out or with a belief that you are unworthy of meaningful connection. That distancing of self carries over into further disconnection from God.
- 5. Increased hopelessness that you can be forgiven.**
Sure, others can be, and maybe even you have been

in the past. But you feel you've exhausted God's mercy due to your repetitive failure to change.

Hiding is what the enemy wants

These effects of hidden sin in the sexual realm build and expand until they feel unbearable and inescapable—even though our helplessness is built on faulty thinking rather than Scripture. These dangers can keep you stuck in a pattern of hiding not only your sin but hiding *yourself* from God, friends and family.

Hiding in solitude feels like the only option. But it actually leaves you most vulnerable—because alone is right where the enemy wants you. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Your adversary is aware of your weaknesses and seeks to prey on them. What easier target could there be for a lion on the prowl than one isolated, wandering on his or her own in despair?

You can't wander on your own and expect to survive spiritual attacks. Instead, Peter encouraged: “Resist him, steadfast in the faith, *knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world*” (verse 9).

“The same sufferings? No . . . not these,” might be your thought. But the Word of God is sure. If you are suffering under the sway of temptation and the web of hidden sexual sin, there are others who have been there who can help.

Help for the hiding

God wants us to come to Him to seek forgiveness. He makes it possible for us to repent and wants to help us change. And that help may involve other people. Ask Him for the guidance and courage to get the help you need.

There are some burdens God does not expect us to carry alone and some battles that we *need* outside help to win. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass,

you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2).

When we are *overtaken* in a trespass—meaning we just can't seem to escape its grip—spiritual restoration can be aided by a strong (yet gentle), understanding (yet wise) friend, mentor, pastor or professional. Of course, you would want and expect that person to hold anything you share in the strictest confidence.

There *are* other people who have been where you are and are no longer feeling trapped, alone, unforgivable or beyond repair. And there are others who might not have personal experience with sexual sin, but who compassionately understand the pull of sin in general and the help needed to escape addictive patterns.

There *are* people who have helped themselves and others take on a personal view as washed, sanctified, justified and on the continual path of fleeing sexual sin. And they want to help you get there too.

You don't have to be alone in the battle against unwanted sexual behavior—if you are willing to come out of hiding. Fleeing from sexual immorality for good may depend on the help of a counselor or friend to help keep you accountable with a concrete plan to change. Not everyone will have the experience or compassion to handle this topic effectively. But you *can* find others who will handle it with grace and help direct you on a path of overcoming the sins you are sick of hiding. Others can help you bear only what you are willing to share.

Are you tired of hiding? Then it might be time to stop viewing sexual sins as “the sins nobody else can know about” and start treating them as the sins someone *has* to know about so you can find a path to freedom and lasting change.

For further study and practical suggestions, read [“Freedom From Addiction,”](#) [“You Can Win the Battle Against Pornography Addiction”](#) and [“Overcoming the Temptation of Sexual Alternatives.”](#) ①

Are Some Sins Worse Than Others?

Are some sins deadly and others not that bad? How can we tell?

By Rod Williams



The apostle Paul tells us that evil men will grow worse and worse at the end of the age (2 Timothy 3:13). What makes these men worse? Are their sins worse than other people's sins?

How can we know if one sin is worse than another sin? If some sins are worse, does that mean other sins are okay?

Religions have invented classifications, such as venial sins, mortal sins and the seven deadly sins. Yet much confusion remains about which sins are worse. Most people think murder is a worse sin, but is a "little white lie" also a sin? Is stealing from the rich a minor sin, while stealing from the poor is a major sin?

Intolerance is often judged as a worse sin. Being judgmental is also often condemned as a worse sin.

Are we truly left to ourselves to discover which sins are worse than others?

What is sin?

God does not want us to be ignorant about sin. God defines what is right, and He knows what is wrong and harmful. He does not want us to suffer.

God defines sin as the transgression of His law (1 John 3:4, King James Version). What does that mean? To sin is to go outside the safe boundaries of the law of God.

God created His law so that we can know when we cross the line into sin. Jesus summarized the law as loving God with all our heart and loving our fellow man as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). If we love God, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). The law of God is expressed in the

10 Commandments and defines the way to eternal life (Matthew 19:17).

Great men like Abraham kept God's laws (Genesis 26:4-5) and are among the faithful who embraced God's way to eternal life (Hebrews 11:13-14, 39-40). God created the law, and by comparing our lives to His law, we can know if we are on the path to eternal life or another path. See "[What Is Sin?](#)"

How does sin work?

The path of sin begins in the mind. James explains the mechanics of sins in James 1:14-15:

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

Temptation draws people away from God's law toward sin. Clever advertising, alluring images and dreams of a big payoff draw people toward sin. At this point, people with an educated conscience will start thinking, "This is wrong" "I should not do this." "What will others think of me?"

But often additional enticements come to mind. Excuses are next: "It's not that bad." "No one will know." "It's not hurting anyone." "Be true to yourself." "Are you a chicken?"

Enticements draw the sinner toward choosing to sin. The decision to sin is made, followed by the act of sinning. And all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23).

Where does the path of sin lead?

The path of sin does not lead to eternal life. Christ called the path of sin the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13). Choosing to sin is going down the path to eternal death (Ezekiel 18:4; Matthew 10:28). The Bible calls this the second death (Revelation 21:8).

The Bible shows that no matter what the sin is, its ultimate penalty is death. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). And James 2:10 tells us: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."

Breaking any point of God's law is the same as breaking the whole law. God does not see any sin as minor or insignificant. But the further we go down the path of sin, the worse the sin becomes. We are moving away from God and the path to eternal life.

Does sin have to lead to our death? No

God loves us and gave His Son so we do not have to die eternally for our sins (John 3:16). God offers us eternal life if we believe in Christ and follow His narrow path, but God will not force us to choose His path. We can reject God's path in favor of our path. If we decide not to believe Him about the one narrow path, we are choosing the path to eternal death.

Once we sin, we have a choice to make: continue sinning or repent. Repentance is changing course—away from sin and toward God and His way. The decision to seek God’s help is ours alone to make. We must surrender our will and seek God’s way.

The Bible tells many stories of redemption from horrible sins. King David committed adultery and attempted to cover it up by murder. Yet, when David realized His sins, he deeply repented and asked God to cleanse him from his sin (Psalm 51). Likewise, Rahab the harlot changed her ways and is included in the list of overcomers like Abraham and Moses (Hebrews 11:31).

God does not want us to perish eternally, but wants us to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). He is eager to help us overcome sin. He wants us to turn from sin and live (Ezekiel 18:32). For more information, see [“The Narrow Path: God’s Highway of Holiness.”](#)

This article focuses on the spiritual and eternal effects of sin. But we should note that sins have natural consequences and often human penalties as well. Though God’s forgiveness is most important, repentance does not automatically remove physical consequences or penalties. Broken relationships, prison sentences and even capital punishment are stark reminders of the results of sin and the benefits of obedience.

The physical effects of some sins can certainly be more drastic and damaging than others, and human penalties do rank some sins as worse than others.

Unrepented sins are worse

The consequences of any sin become worse if we refuse to repent. The Bible refers to this

as “sin leading to death.” If we choose to turn away from sin—to repent—that sin does not lead to eternal death (1 John 5:16-17). For more information, see [“What Is the Sin That Leads to Death?”](#)

Unrepented sins become habits, which become a lifestyle, defining the sinner’s identity. Sin grows progressively worse over time. People whose lives are defined by sin will not inherit eternal life (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

The further we go down the path to death, the worse the sin becomes. If we do not repent, we remain slaves to sin, heading toward death (Romans 6:16). For more information, see [“The Meaning of Hebrews 10:26: What Does It Mean to ‘Sin Willfully’?”](#)

What makes sins worse? When sin causes others to sin

The Bible records the lives of kings who were not only sinners themselves, but who also led others to sin.

Jeroboam caused the nation of Israel to sin (1 Kings 16:26). He invented his version of religion to keep people from observing God’s festivals in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:26-33). Jeroboam also set up his own priests and golden calf worship. The Bible condemns Jeroboam’s sins over 20 times, calling his sins the way of Jeroboam. Yet he was not the worst king.

King Omri did evil in the eyes of God and was worse than all who were before him (1 Kings 16:25). He took idol worship to a new low (verse 26). And Omri’s son Ahab was even worse (verse 30). Ahab married the wicked Jezebel and set up altars for Baal with 450 priests. He and Jezebel also supported 400 priests of Asherah (1 Kings 18:19).

Ahab and Jezebel killed Naboth for his vineyard (1 Kings 21:7, 14). What is worse than one murder?

Multiple murders. Jezebel killed the prophets of God (1 Kings 18:13). What is worse than multiple murders?

A religion that practices human sacrifice as worship is worse. King Manasseh raised altars to Baal like Ahab. He killed his son in the fire. God said he was worse than the pagan nations like the Amorites (2 Kings 21:3-21).

What made these kings worse? They went further and further in the wrong direction, leading the nations of Israel and Judah into more and more sin.

The unpardonable sin—the worst sin

Any sin can become unpardonable if we refuse to repent. The sin becomes willful after we understand the truth and refuse to try to overcome (Hebrews 10:26-29). Willful sin is a rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus.

Jesus also warned that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (Matthew 12:31). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit involves rejection of God's attempt to save us. People who blaspheme are rejecting God's way to eternal life. See [“What Is the Unpardonable Sin?”](#)

Overcoming sin and choosing life

Although some sins are worse than others, that is not the message God wants us to focus on. *All* sin separates us from God. Sin starts us on the broad way to destruction. We need to avoid

all sins. If we stumble into sin, we need to ask God to help us overcome and stop sinning. See [“Go and Sin No More.”](#)

We need to be careful not to judge others (Matthew 7:1). When the tower of Siloam fell on 18 people, Jesus said the point was not that they were worse sinners, but that we should repent of our sins so we will not likewise perish (Luke 13:4-5).

God has given us His perfect law of liberty so we can know what sin is (James 1:25). The law is a guide to direct our steps away from sin. Jesus explained that the law goes beyond actions and should guide our thoughts and intentions (Matthew 5:21-22).

The Bible records the great faith of overcomers like King David and Rahab. It also records names that have become tarnished with evil, like Ahab, Jezebel and Judas. The Bible speaks of the way of Cain, the way of Balaam and the way of Jeroboam that caused others to stumble into sin.

God sets before us the stark choice: life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19). If we overcome sin, our future can be glorious as a child of God. If we choose the sinful path to death, our names will come to be associated with evil.

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:7-8).

God is pleading, urging and commanding us to choose life. Will you choose life?

For more information, see [“What Are the Deadly Sins?”](#) ①

Who Was Delilah in the Bible?

It was through Delilah's persistent efforts that Samson, the amazingly strong man who judged Israel for 20 years, met his tragic end. Who was Delilah?

By Bill Palmer



Mention the biblical hero Samson, and before long Delilah, the woman who orchestrated his capture, will also come to mind. Few female names in Scripture are as well known, and yet Delilah appears in only one chapter of the Bible.

How did she achieve such name recognition? Just who was Delilah?

The legacy of Delilah

Delilah has been the inspiration for movies, television shows and songs, though the plots are rarely, if ever, true to Scripture. One of the best-known movies—released in 1949—is the classic Cecil B. DeMille film *Samson and Delilah*.

This interest has continued. Why such fascination with Delilah? After all, as noted above, she appears in only one chapter of the Bible.

It seems that the story of Samson and Delilah has resonated with people through the centuries. In fact, the online Britannica asserts that “her name has since become synonymous with a voluptuous, treacherous woman.” Similarly, Bible Hub’s *Topical Encyclopedia* labels Delilah as “the archetype of the femme fatale.”

Who was the Delilah of the Bible?

Unfortunately, the brevity of the biblical account leaves some unanswered questions, making it difficult to be sure who Delilah was. Was she a harlot? Was she a Philistine? We don’t know.

Many readers have assumed that Delilah was a harlot because Judges 16 begins by telling us that “Samson



went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her” (verse 1). The harlot mentioned in this verse, however, is not the same woman, nor is she connected to Delilah.

We know this because the biblical account divides the two events in Samson’s life with the words, “Afterward it happened” (verse 4). In addition, verse 3 ends with a description of Samson taking the city gate of Gaza to the top of a hill facing Hebron, a city deep in Israelite territory.

Whether Delilah made her living as a prostitute makes no difference to the story. She and Samson clearly shared an intimate relationship, yet there is no mention of a marriage as there was with the unnamed woman of Timnah identified earlier as his wife (Judges 14:1-2; 15:6).

We are not told Delilah’s ethnicity. Unlike Samson’s deceased bride, who was explicitly called a Philistine, Delilah is described only as “a woman in the Valley of Sorek” (Judges 16:4). But it is likely she was a Philistine.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary states, “Her proximity to the Philistine-occupied area and her close contact with their leaders indicate that she probably was one of [the Philistines]” (Vol. 3, p. 475).

What we do know about Delilah

Although the Bible leaves some questions unanswered, it does provide some illuminating details about Delilah. One of the most important is the place where she lived, the Valley of Sorek.

She would have lived closer to Samson’s hometown of Zorah than to Gaza, an important Philistine city on the Mediterranean Sea, farther to the south. It was this city to which Samson’s captors later took him (verse 21), and where he died.

Her home was also much closer to that of Samson’s unnamed wife, a Philistine woman who had lived and

died in Timnah (Judges 14:1-2; 15:6). Like Samson's hometown of Zorah, Timnah bordered the Valley of Sorek.

This valley may well have been rich in vineyards since the word *sorek* means "choice vine." *Expositor's Bible Commentary* also points out that the mention of this valley by name was "perhaps a hint that the Nazirite vow [under which Samson lived] was in grave danger."

The Valley of Sorek separated the Philistine-controlled territory from the Israelite-controlled territory, though the exact boundary undoubtedly fluctuated with the fortunes of war. It was, in many ways a borderland and probably home to both Israelites and Philistines.

How did Delilah defeat Samson?

Even though Delilah does not appear in Scripture until Judges 16, Samson's story starts in chapter 13, which describes the miracles leading up to his birth. The intervening chapters describe his marriage (chapter 14) and his victory over the Philistines (chapter 15).

To the Philistine kings and their armies, Samson was invincible. With God's help, he had killed 1,000 Philistines by himself with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15).

How, then, did this woman succeed when so many Philistines had died trying to overcome Samson? The answer to this question is the key to unlocking Delilah's character.

"He loved a woman"

When the biblical narrative introduces Delilah, we are told that Samson "loved a woman" (Judges 16:4). That love would be better labeled attraction or even lust.

The narrative tells us nothing that would lead us to believe that the two were married. Whether Delilah was

a harlot or not, and whether she was a Philistine or not, she and Samson entered into an illicit relationship.

Although Samson had feelings for Delilah, the biblical record leaves it up to us to discern her feelings about him. The very next verse provides a basis for making that determination. It describes the Philistine lords offering Delilah a substantial bribe, one that she accepted.

An enormous sum of money

Each of the lords promised to give her 1,100 silver pieces. The total would have been 5,500 pieces of silver, which would be close to 140 pounds! In contrast, Judas betrayed Christ for only 30 pieces (Matthew 26:14-15).

This enormous sum of money offered by the Philistine lords pointed to their desperation. It also reveals their recognition that they could not attack Samson directly and expect to win. Instead, they would have to rely on subterfuge.

Delilah took up this task. Whatever her feelings for Samson were, the silver was more important to her. Using Samson's lust against him, she would induce him to reveal the secret of his strength, effectively laying the groundwork for his own destruction.

Knowledge of the past

It may be that Delilah had heard about what Samson's Philistine wife had done some 20 years earlier (Judges 15:20). At the beginning of their seven-day wedding feast, Samson had posed a riddle to the 30 Philistine men assigned to be his companions (Judges 14:11-12).

These men could not solve the riddle, so they threatened Samson's new bride (verse 15), demanding that she obtain the answer for them. She asked him for the answer repeatedly, and he finally gave her the answer (verse 17).

This betrayal initiated a chain of events that resulted in the death of Samson's wife and father-in-law, as well as his revenge by slaying 1,000 Philistines (Judges 15). The story likely circulated among the Philistines and would have given them insight into Samson's character.

Delilah lived in the area where Samson had so spectacularly defeated the Philistines. She had probably heard the story more than once.

Parallel betrayals

When enticing Samson to reveal the secret of his strength, Delilah seems to have followed the pattern set by his deceased wife 20 years before.

Both women repeatedly asked Samson to reveal his secrets (Judges 14:16-17; 16:6, 10, 13). Both women questioned Samson's love for them (Judges 14:16; 16:15).

Finally, both women persisted, nagging Samson and wearing down his resolve. He gave the riddle answer to his wife because "she pressed him so much" (Judges 14:17), and he gave the secret of his strength to Delilah because "she pestered him daily" (Judges 16:16).

Samson put his life in Delilah's hands. Unlike his wife, who acted out of fear, Delilah betrayed Samson's "love" for riches.

Delilah as a symbol of sin

Delilah was a real person, but in some respects, she has come to symbolize sin itself. That's because the manner in which she attacked Samson demonstrates the way sin works in our lives. Here are three ways she represents sin.

1. **Lust.** Samson was first drawn to Delilah through his "love" for her. True love, godly love, is appropriate, but Samson was drawn by an inappropriate "love" that falls outside the boundaries God had established.

In the same way, we are drawn to sin by illicit desire. The apostle John wrote: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16).

Delilah is justly described by Bible Hub's *Topical Encyclopedia* as "symbolizing the seductive power of sin."

2. **Deceit.** Delilah also practiced deceit to entice Samson to his own destruction. In the same way, sin often seems to be a pleasant choice.

It is this "deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13) that sometimes leads us astray. What the world offers, though, is an illusion of happiness. It can never satisfy.

3. **Fatigue.** Delilah wore Samson down by repeatedly asking him to reveal the secret to his great strength. Along the way, she accused him of mocking her (Judges 16:10, 13, 15), and she questioned his love for her (verse 15).

In the same way, sin challenges our commitment to God's way of life, and it can wear us down. That's why the apostle Paul exhorted Christians not to "grow weary while doing good" (Galatians 6:9).

What Delilah teaches us

Delilah had little concern for the man who loved her, instead placing great value on the bribe offered to her. She was greedy, deceitful and manipulative, betraying the trust of her lover.

It is no wonder that she is remembered as "the archetype of the femme fatale." The story of Samson and Delilah is a warning to us about unbridled desire as well as the "deceitfulness of sin." In addition, this story reminds us that we must be ever vigilant, never allowing fatigue to compromise our commitment to God. 🕊

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