

The Death of Sin through Life in Christ

Oh, how I hate sin! Let me count the ways.

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live,” Romans 8:13.

The Christian life is one at war with sin. Prior to my conversion, Scripture says that I was literally, “...Free in regard to righteousness,” Romans 6:20b. That is, I simply did not care to live holy. Now that I’m a Christian I care. I’m no longer my own, and I desire to live holy above all else. I was bought by God (1 Corinthians 6:20) and am now a slave of Jesus Christ by the miracle of regeneration, Romans 6:18; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23. Because of my newfound desire to live right before God I’m engaged in a ceaseless war with my old self. That old self is often referred to in theology as my “Adamic nature.” It is the part of me that’s not yet been perfected, and what I’d most closely define as my mind. Part of me (the old me) still wants sin; the new me does not. My Adamic nature still persists in this life, and is to be put to death progressively by the Spirit of God. This is the ongoing process of sanctification. The Apostle Paul was perhaps the most advanced of believers. After years and years of God’s sanctifying work in his heart even he said he’d still not been perfected, Philippians 3:12. We only get perfection in the end. Until then we war.

My main fight today is with sexual sin. For more than ten years before I was converted (which is longer than I’ve been in the faith) I fully gave myself to nearly every perversion that came my way. Fornication and pornography were daily rituals with me. As I write this letter, the temptations toward these sins are at the forefront of my reflection. It’s not just sexual sin that I’ve fought, but again, this has been *the main front* of my battle. Your main fight may not be in this area. Perhaps it’s with anger, pride, covetousness, laziness or gossip. No matter what, we’ve both got the same sanctification to perfect if we’re in Christ so I pray this letter will bring you strength.

Throughout the years that I’ve been engaged in this fight I’ve had numerous grounds upon which to war with my sin, and I’ve grown much. In becoming ever more aware of my weakness I know that I’ve grown stronger. Diverse motivations have inspired me along the way as a believer, and each in their own way. God has used diverse things and knowledge with me in great patience, and, I trust, even used the times that I’ve sinned to change me and break me for the better. Like slogans that encompass the energy of a new political pundit, motivations seem to have come and gone to fight my sin. Truths have been set before me that have inspired me like a new commander’s mission statement in an enduring campaign. *Such is the Christian life.* As we sit under good teaching it

changes us, reinvigorates us, and helps us to repeatedly sharpen the axe so that we could strike afresh at sin's branches. Christ pulled out the tree of our sin by its roots; it's dead because of Him alone. To beautify the landscape we now work to put it through the chipper. Everything we learn well in Scripture culminates to teach us about grace, and each individual truth, if we're in Christ, delivers us to God. Truth(s) under God do this. Each of these truths has had its proper place in my growth.

In the end this letter is about two things: 1) bringing you joy as you read it seeing that your struggles with sin are common to another, and 2) to tell you about what I think the thing is that will help us to really kill our sin in this life. It is this last truth that I pray will quicken and sustain all of the rest.

I want to talk about a few of the truths that have helped me to kill my sin. When I talk in this letter about truths that have been set before me, what I'm referring to are some lessons in both life and doctrine that have instructed me as a believer throughout the years. Some have impacted me more than others and all have become a part of my growth. By obedience to each truth from God's word we turn more and more *from sin to* Christ. Some of that changing is in direct conflict with the known sin in our lives, and other parts of it are what could be termed as general growth and maturity. Each passage of Scripture affects us in such ways and work together for our sanctification.

Here's an example of such "a truth" that I'm talking about: As I jogged at a high school track today in June in the blazing Florida sun I listened to a sermon that mentioned Matthew sixteen and Jesus' declaration that Simon's name was henceforth to be changed to Peter. Jesus was going to refer to him from that revelatory point on as Peter or Cephas, a name that had great significance. The name in Greek means, "rock" and is representative of the fact that Peter had received divine instruction from God the Father regarding God the Son. Peter came to see a bit of who the Son was, and *the revelation of Christ is the rock upon which the church is built*. Peter, not too long after this, however, betrayed his Master repeatedly and in no way lived up to the title of "rock" that his name represented. After Jesus was Resurrected, He met the disciples on a beach as recorded in John 21. Jesus did not call him Peter in this restorative conversation. Instead He called him by his old name, Simon. Peter would indeed later act as a rock and live up to the name (ex. Acts 3:12-26) but he was not doing so at that point. In his betrayal he'd acted like anything but a rock. Jesus therefore did not refer to him by his new name.

This truth brings me encouragement and teaches me a great deal. Even one of Christ's twelve struggled with sin and doubt. Surely he loved Jesus, but he was not able to live as he wished. This would not be the last time he needed grace (more to follow later). Once I understand this truth in Peter's life I can apply it to myself. The Apostle Peter teaches me that as I sin I too can have hope in the grace of God. This truth, alongside all others of the Bible, motivates me in and instructs me about the grace of my God. It can motivate me to war against my sin afresh. I can see from this passage that just like Peter, I too need a compassionate Savior. In this I'm spurred on to fight my sin in the

remembrance of the love my Savior showed Peter. I'm brought to ask myself how I could willfully sin against one so lovely and graceful. I want to love Him better in remembering His great sympathy for sinners. This truth motivates me and it's good.

In my life I could say that I'm motivated to fight sin *today* by seeing an example of the compassion of my Savior recorded here in Matthew's Gospel. This lesson is a good motivation for me to fight sin. While it's good, I don't think it brings the same joy as the one I'll mention last.

Such truths change us, remind us, instruct us, edify us and ultimately converge in the grace of God in our growth and maturity as believers. Learning God's word rightly *always* does that. As we grow, we become more aware of our sin and are more thoroughly equipped to fight against it.

It is only the grace of God the Holy Spirit that enables Christians to live godly lives. Without Him the Scriptures would remain powerless to change us. There are a lot of hell-bound people in the world today who know the Bible very well, yet they are not taught it by God. *Unless the Holy Spirit teaches a saved man* then there's no hope for the obedient life which is only by and through His word. Not only do we grow by God's word, we come to first perceive it as God's word by a similar gift of grace. Section 1.5 of the 1689 [London Baptist Confession of Faith](#) confesses this as it reads: "...Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth of Scripture and its divine authority, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." This is God's gift and we are dependent on Him for it. He shows us that the Bible is His word, and leads us to trust in it by His goodness. If we are sure that the Bible is God's word then each lesson of our lives that follows bear witness of this more and more.

Growth as a believer is not a "quick fix" kind of thing. It's a walk. Walks are always one step at a time. There are a lot of cultists around that exploit people by offering them a quick harvest, a miracle, or a breakthrough for only \$20.00 or some other form of trash, but such gimmickry is only for those dominated by their sin. Such externals will do nothing against the sinful appetites of the flesh. For the believer, growth is its own reward. The believer isn't looking for the quick fix. They don't need the overnight promises of hucksterism. God's call upon them to count the cost, lay down their lives, abide in truth, and walk after the Spirit while denying themselves are not burdensome commands. For the faithful, it's about a disciplined lifelong study, exercise, and ongoing progress in holiness that moves them toward the image of Christ.

Moving toward that image is comprised of individual steps. Each individual step coincides with things learned and time or discipleship in the Spirit. This discipleship is through Bible study, prayer, fellowship, works, failures, testimonies, etc. As I write in this letter about the externals that have motivated me it's important that I stress that it's nothing external, ultimately, that I believe changes me. Paul says in Colossians 2:23 regarding the external false practices imposed upon the faithful of their day that, "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and

neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” We have externals today as well that make people *seem* Christian. This is why time and fruit can be the only determiners of true faith. Some of the things I write of here today, if taken as mere externals, would be no different than the useless practices Paul rebuked in Colossae. The externals are merely what God, by the Spirit, uses in our discipleship. Christ comes alongside me in them to affect my salvation.

If sinful behavior is merely suppressed it does not die. Christians are not told to “Suppress the works of the flesh,” but rather to put them to death, Romans 8:13. That happens as the work of God through the word. Behavior modification is the reason why Christians can fluctuate in their lives and seem to do good only for a time, then fall, do good for a time, then fall again. The Spirit comes not to suppress but to kill sin. Maturity learns to welcome this in wonderful ways. That’s what this letter is about. Each of the ideas I speak of today have worked externally as rallying cries for the fight, but are not alone the weapons of the warfare. I have succeeded against sin only by the mercy of my God within me. It is by the Spirit that we can put to death the sin in our lives. I want to talk about some of the truths that have helped me to do this, and bring me to a place of real change and proof of the realities of the Christian faith. Some may seem silly to you, others may only loosely resemble lessons in your own life, while others may be exactly what you face on a daily basis.

As Christians then, we long and strive for holiness. Paul’s words to Titus in one place encapsulate this well. He says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” Titus 2:11-13. There are three things that I want to break down from this passage briefly. 1. It is because of the grace that has appeared to us that we strive (vs. 11). 2. Because of this grace we now have godly instruction that we’re called to heed (vs. 12). And 3, that grace *and its resultant teaching* should produce an expectation in us to look ahead to the end (vs. 13). It’s mainly because of point two that I’m writing this letter to you today. God primarily changes us through the application of good Bible teaching. Living righteously is the process of killing sin. *I want to share with you what I think is the best truth to motivate us to fight that good fight.* There are no shortcuts to holiness. You can’t get it by the laying on of hands, being slain in the Spirit (not of the Bible anyway) speaking in gibberish, or paying an indulgence. I don’t have five steps to do it. It is time, learning, failing and truth that sets us free. I pray you’re instructed well here as I examine a few outward motivators to help make sense of the internal motivator that I believe all Christians must come to appreciate to be mature in the faith.

As a believer, Scripture gives me a clear description of what God is about in my life in several places. In Romans 8:29-30, for example, I read, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...Moreover whom He

predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Salvation’s end is glorification *every time*.

Glorification is the resurrection of the physical body, and is the promise made to *all* true believers. God, for His glory and the Christian’s joy, is about producing white hot eternal worshippers, John 4:23-24. The eventual glorification of the body is that to which any Christian was redeemed in the first place. Foreknowing equals step one; glorification equals step five. God does *not* execute step one without the power, ability *and intention* of executing the last step in anyone’s life. God doesn’t save and then lose anyone. All those that the Father fore-loved, He made Christian with the eternal objective of forever conforming them to the image of Jesus Christ. He fully counted the cost for the salvation of the lost, and finished the redemptive work of Calvary once for them all. Glorification is what’s in view in the following verses: 1 Corinthians 15:53; 1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:11; Luke 20:35. It is the resurrection of a body made fit to stand before the fullness of the triune God, which is something that no eyes have yet been enabled to behold.

Glorification is the promised end of the Christian life. Everything between our initial salvation and that time is what I’m writing about here. Christians are about the process of becoming holy before God. That is their life! It is the Spirit who now reveals Jesus to Christians through the Bible. This new instruction and life invariably produces a conflict with someone’s old self. Scripture speaks often of the struggles of those like me that were converted later in life and must now endure conflict between who we once were and who we are now, 1 Peter 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 3:7, et al. Everything is changed in us now, and that from the inside out. The mind goes second and at all costs must be renewed. It must think new thoughts, love God and others, process biblical insights, have new affections, lose old affections, counter falsity, break old habits, form new habits, react in new ways to trouble, seek new objectives, talk different and more, Romans 12:2. This process is not overnight. In fact, my glorification alone will mark the end of it. Throughout my life, I have had many reasons for warring against my sin. *None of them are necessarily bad in and of themselves*. They all have had their place. Some I think are more natural to us when we’re really young in the faith; others often only come with time.

I want to list some of the reasons that motivated/motivate me still to strive against sin, talk about them from Scripture, and then list the main reason behind them that I’ve learned since being made alive together with Christ. I hope this all helps you. I will move loosely and somewhat arbitrarily from what I feel was perhaps the most juvenile motivation to the best.

Reason # 1 why we don’t sin as Christians: It ruins our dreams.

We all want things in our lives. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this. Homes, careers, kids, callings, spouses, locations, etc.; we all have desires and we all ask God for these things. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." I think that God, with His delighted ones, *along with all their spiritual gifts*, also graciously gives us what we are to do in life. I do believe that God calls some to be janitors, principles, lawyers, managers, maids, doctors, soldiers, etc., according to His secret counsel. What functions we're to perform in the body of Christ is a larger part of this (1 Corinthians 12:18) but I think most of us intuitively grasp that God alone takes care of this, and that it's really not up to us. What I'm mostly thinking of here are the secondary or peripheral things that we ask God for. I think God gives us our desires; that He lets us know what they are. I could metaphorically communicate this by envisioning it as a letter that each believer receives from the Lord at some point in their lives. That letter contains the desires of their hearts. They read it and discover that its contents are exactly what they want or need. Since full service to God is the only life that can truly please those who serve Him, this is good of God to do. God *gives to us* the desires of our hearts because He knows our hearts better than we do.

Whatever our desires may be, we sort of instinctively understand that sin can stop them. We have some precedent for this in Scripture. Scripture says, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight," 1 John 3:21-22. If we fail to do the things that please God (i.e. sin) we know not to expect many affirmations from Him when we pray. I think that the Spirit communicates this well to us even early on in the faith. God disciplines His children in this like a parent training a child because this is a very good way for us to learn, Hebrews 12:9. Sin inhibits our prayers and petitions with God, and we don't want that.

We see in Scripture that Peter, who was married (1 Corinthians 9:5) writes to men that their prayers can be hindered if they sin by not loving their wives properly in the Lord, 1 Peter 3:7. There are consequences on our prayers and petitions, whatever they are, as a result of our sin. The desire to not want to sin because of this is a good thing.

We know that God is not pleased with the lives of unrepentant sinners, and hypocrisy is not an option for the believer. We know that we can't continue asking God for things unless we let go of what we know is sin, and so, sometimes almost like reluctant children, we lay down our sins because we know that they will get in our way. Especially as youths in Christ, it's almost like we instinctively imagine ourselves as a type of Jonah. We say that Jonah's sin of disobedience got between him and what God had for him to do. Similarly, on the third day of another Mediterranean tempest off Crete Paul reminded the sailors that they should have listened to him, and *not* sailed away as they did, Acts 27:21. They now had to run aground Paul said (vs. 26) but none would be lost if they now heeded his second warning.

The actions of these men did *not* stop the plans and purposes of God. Quite the contrary actually! The whale was a mercy on Jonah, Nineveh was still delivered, and Paul stood before Caesar. God got to demonstrate His mercy all the more in their trials. It was their sin and disobedience that God used to show His mercy and sovereign plans. Similarly, if we look to the book of Job we see that Job's friends did not have chapter one of the book they're in. They didn't see the dialogue between God and the Devil. They did not know that Job's sin was *not* the root cause of his calamity. They repeatedly said wrong things against Job like, "Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice? If you were pure and upright, surely now He would awake for you, and prosper your rightful dwelling place," Job 8:3, 6. Job, like us all, had sinned and come short of God's glory, but they were wrong in assuming Job's guilt was the reason for his present trials. We have the distinct advantage of seeing the lives of Job, Jonah or Paul from a New Testament vantage. We see that their sin was not larger than God. In this I invite you to see a truth in Romans 8:28 and God's sovereign work in the lives of, "...Those who are the called according to His purpose."

We still sin just like those we see in Scripture. What does our sin do in our lives? How does it hinder our lives in regard to those things we may be asking God for? As we grow in Christ, how should we view it? Now that we have heard the gospel, how should we see ourselves and our relation to sin from Christ's vantage? We've been given the mind of Christ, 1 Corinthians 2:16. Sin does hinder our lives under God, but it cannot stop God. That's not a contradiction. Sin is always sin, and it's always bad. It affects our lives for the worst every single time. God, however, will still have His way. We can take both of these truths and by them see more clearly the God to whom we must repent and seek the righteousness of. We can see the divine and human balance between the hidden fact of God's providence and the clear teaching of God that we are to obey His commands. Jesus said clearly that obedience to His commandments prove whether one loves Him or not, John 14:15. If you love Him you will not seek after sin. You must continually repent. Do it remembering that 1) you don't have all the details, and 2) that God is bigger than your sin. Of course, such teaching could be used by the unwise and twisted to their own destruction. I hope it doesn't for you. Those who love God do not make peace with sin just because they know that God is bigger. You must repent and fight your sins. All I hope is that when I sin I keep in mind the unswaying and eternal nature of the God I serve by remembering His word and the example of those who've gone before me. As you do this, I hope this truth and letter in its totality will help you see more about what exactly the weapons of your warfare are.

Sin is never good! As Christians, however, we should have a new perspective on them in light of the cross because we're no longer under its jurisdiction. *Our relationship to sin is wholly different than that of the non-believer!* We died and it has lost its hold on us, Romans 7:1-6. We must constantly remind ourselves of the gospel of Jesus. Try and wrap your head around this: if you're truly in Christ then God saved you with the full

knowledge of all the sin you'd ever commit. In fact, if you're truly in Christ then He knew you fully and chose you before you committed any of it, Ephesians 1:4-5. Just like Jacob, none of your good or bad works played *any part* in God choosing you, Romans 9:11. Charles Spurgeon, in his own inimitable way, once quipped that, "God must have chosen me from before the foundation of the world because He never would have chosen me after!" This is very humbling. If you're in Christ, then He bought you knowing you better than you knew yourself. He knew what He was getting in the deal. You cannot ever be un-bought. God has no return policy on your eternal life; that's why it's called eternal life. It is God's conditional love made unconditional towards you by His own free will. God came into covenant with you knowing the number of every one of your sinful little hairs. Knowing this should change what we do when we sin, friends! We should fight against it, but remember that the God we serve is much larger than it. God disciplines us in our sin, but He does not cast us off. If our desires are genuine then through God they will be realized. God still wants you even though you sin.

Think of it like this. I have a five year old daughter (this month) that I delight in greatly. She is my little sweetie. When she's around me, I want her to feel accepted, loved and welcome. It's not just that I have to have her around and so I tolerate her; I delight in her greatly and she knows it. Boy does she ever! It's the same with my other daughter, and my soon-to-be other daughter. I delight in her, yet there's not been one single day, since obedience was hers to give, that she's obeyed me completely. Yet I still completely delight in her! Dare I liken our relationship to God with that? Yes, I can. Such knowledge is for the child and more so for the mature and obedient of the Lord. God delights in His children! He adopted us and loves us with a love greater than I could ever have for my daughters, Matthew 7:11; Galatians 4:6; Zephaniah 3:17.

Sinning will stop our communion with God. It will hinder our prayers. God is good to teach us about its consequences in such ways. We should die for it (Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4) but He is merciful in more ways than we could ever recall, and so we live. The New Testament shows us this in spades! His mercy in removing our peace when we sin is very kind of Him. This should motivate us to stop. Our hearts will condemn us in our prayers, and we can expect silence from heaven when we live in what we know is sin. This motivation, however, is not the best motivation for killing sin. It is only one of many. It can even be selfish, but it does indeed still have its place. I hope you've seen it in your life. It has its place, but I don't think it will take us all the way home. Ultimately we cannot grow due to mere externals like this; we need internal change. We need God. He uses externals to spur us along, but as He grows us, I think He reveals far more. All of the external seeds of the word of God are planted in the believer to produce a harvest.

Reason # 2 why we don't sin as Christians: a fear of hell.

Christians must grow up in the understanding of all things regarding truth by study, 2 Timothy 2:15. What precisely is one's relationship to hell in Christ? Fears of eternal punishment are inappropriate for the mature believer so we must learn to think rightly about hell. Hell is only for those *not* in Christ and if you could lose your salvation you would! Early on in our walk, we may feel that we're on "shaky ground" with God. This is because we don't understand who Christ our Savior is and what He's done for us. We need to apply ourselves to the word to understand the power of the gospel and the hope of His calling, Ephesians 1:18. I believe that understanding the eternal nature of God's predestination is the only way we can truly grasp the gospel in full maturity, but this letter is not centered on that discussion. Please feel free to see my [15 part audio series on predestination](#) for more in depth information on that subject. In spiritual infancy we often feel we had something to do with saving ourselves and so we fear that we can un-save ourselves by a similar act. This is immaturity. We fear that hell is still a possibility for us when we sin. We see God as quick to blot out our names from under heaven.

The truth is that Christians must change. If they're saved out of a sinful lifestyle they must not remain the same, Romans 6:1-2. They must not pursue sin any longer, 1 John 3:6. They must not live in sin or else they show that they are not in fellowship with God, 1 John 5:18. The looming fear of on-going sin revealing one's hypocrisy is an ever present danger in the church's new converts. God can use this to help us fear sin. There should be evidences of good things in a believer's life from day one, but sin does not disappear from them. When it comes, learning its consequences and its effects is another matter of learning and maturing. How should Christians fear God when they sin? Is hell still a possibility for us? Did Jesus merely give us a clean slate that can again be polluted and destroyed in the forfeiture of His love?

Often such ideas become so troubling that we avoid the issue and try to soothe our consciences with works or busyness in the hopes they'll subside. In such things we can in effect put a veil on the Bible and beg God not to speak to us any longer in it. We seek out dead religion and mere externals instead. As we grow, if we're being disciplined well, we see that salvation is a sure foundation to stand upon *because it's based entirely on Jesus' work*, Ephesians 2:8-9. It is only when we trust in Him alone as Savior that we can find all our assurance and hope, John 3:16.

Our fear of hell as we come to learn about grace can produce forms of legalism even today. It may not look like Judaistic legalism, but it's a legalism or legalistic ideology nonetheless. As long as we're not taught to trust in Christ alone this can happen and often in very subtle ways. It is in a legalistic attitude that we often attempt to make our own way out of our guilt for sin. We can quickly develop a, "I'm doing good enough" mentality. We'll make up rules and rules for our rules so that as long as we're keeping some of our rules then we're good. Or maybe we'll seek to establish some unspoken scales with God so that so much good will work to counter so much bad. Sometimes this becomes going to church. Sometimes our "works of penance" can include

giving money. Sometimes it's Bible reading. Sometimes it's prayer. Sometimes it's being extra nice to a spouse or kids or co-workers. We feel that in some karmatic way we can work off our sin, or at least the guilt that's associated with it, and that this makes us right with God again. All of this is mere mind games. The danger here is that religion can then quickly become completely external. We may begin to study God rather than love Him. All of this stems from immaturity if we're in Christ. We must learn how our sin was removed. It was not and is not a result of *our* doing. *We are saved by works they're just not our own!* Ephesians 2:8-9. Unforgiven sin damns a man to hell. So what of a man whose sins have been forgiven? How this works is what we must learn. We will not play religious games in the fear of judgment if we biblically grasp and love the gospel. John Piper writes that in counseling with his parishioners he often quickly realizes that their problems stem directly from a lack of what he calls, "grace esteem." We must understand the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do we esteem the cross rightly? If we do then our theology with regard to hell must change.

No one is perfect. Christians, through faith and patience, come to learn that God is completely aware of this reality. Paul said of himself that prior to his conversion he was, "Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," Philippians 3:6. What this means is not that he actually felt himself perfect, but that when he sinned, he offered what the law prescribed. He gave his burnt, grain, peace, sin or trespass offerings in accordance with the law. Added to this he had rules upon rules upon rules handed down to him from his fathers. He said that their system(s) missed the heart of God's law, and was therefore rubbish. The law could have brought them to an understanding of life (Romans 7:10) but it didn't. The law was to make the Old Testament saint hope in the promise of God's mercy as much as it makes the New Testament saint observe the Lord's Supper, but it did not do so in the unfaithful. Paul, like most of the Pharisees, was using it unlawfully, Romans 9:31-33. He was therefore condemned by what he approved. This is no charge against the law. It is only weak because of the weakness of men, Romans 8:3. Once the law became internal to Paul it did its job. God became his teacher when He revealed Himself to him on the road to Damascus, Acts 9:1-8; Galatians 1:11-12. It became the schoolmaster with Paul that it was with all the faithful and did its part in the impartation of life to him in Christ. It taught him not to trust in himself, but in Jesus alone, Galatians 3:24. Paul never mentions hell in his letters.

Christians must learn that when Christ is called Savior, that it's because that's exactly who He is. He's not a God on the shore throwing ropes to those redeemable enough to grab hold! He's a resurrector who calls countless people from their tombs to show mercy. We must not think that our systems forgive sin. They don't! Our works in no way ever contribute one iota to the forgiveness of even a single lesser sin. Works merely prove we're on the forgiven path; they don't show that we're on the path at the end of which sits our forgiveness. Christ alone through His death on the cross takes *complete care* of our sin. In Christian living, we can set up the law and our sin against it

in ways that are not intended, and condemn ourselves according to our own systems. Don't do that. Let the law kill you completely. Yes, hell was at its heels. Yes, you needed Jesus because you were dead under it. Christ delivers people from the power of sin which is energized by the law, Colossians 2:13-15; Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 3:13-14. Surrender to Christ because the law has shown you its completely impossible standard. Complete surrender to God's mercy on the cross is our victory over sin and death. Christians need not fear the law's condemnation any longer. For them, observing the law, in a very real sense, is like walking in front of a canon that's been fully disarmed. It can't kill us any longer. If we miss this we miss the power of the cross. We should not fear God *like the pagan should*. When we sin, instead of preaching the gospel to ourselves and coming to God we do our best works and think that it makes everything ok. This is dangerous. Remember also that most of the time we'd never admit this out loud. We'd never say it, but it's exactly what we do. We don't have to play games before a once bloody cross. We can come to Jesus knowing that He knows who it is who approaches. His yoke is easy, Matthew 11:29. He takes away the burden of sin. There is a world of difference between working for Jesus because you think you can repay Him, and working for Him eternally knowing that you can't! If you're striving in your life to make up for your sins, please stop. Stop trying I implore you. You can't do it! You're going to be really disappointed in the end. You will never succeed. God does not want you to "fix yourself up" so that He can receive you; come to Him as you are. Repent and believe the good news. Trust me, He'll change you.

We must understand these things. It is a sign of immaturity that says, "I will get clean, and then come to God." No, He knows you. Don't think that you can clean yourself up. Read again from Romans 8 with me please. It's the second half of the following passage that I want to call your attention to. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh," Romans 8:3. Christ came to do for us what we could *never* do for ourselves. He came to fulfill the law and to condemn sin. He offers you *His* perfect righteousness. That righteousness delivers from death, Proverbs 11:4; 10:2. When you begin to understand this, the Christian faith becomes something wholly different than the wisdom of men. It is not rules, it's life! Unregenerate men always think they're doing enough. They're not. Their best works offend God. He requires perfection. You can have grace, but don't insult it by attempting to improve upon it. You need a perfect righteousness. Christians know they don't have it or merit it. By faith, they see that Christ alone can give it. They know there's nowhere else that mankind can go but to Jesus for righteousness, John 6:68; Acts 4:12. If we've received it then we now have a perfect standing before God. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Understanding even the verb tenses here helps us to see that Paul wrote this sentence as a categorical promise to all believers showing us that the past tense reality of

salvation produces a present and eternal reality before God. Peace with God means that that which brought hostility is now gone! That's exactly what happened when Christ's payment for sin on the cross is applied to the repentant criminal by faith, Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:11-13. This is a firm foundation that produces a true humility utterly free from the fear of hell. It is an esteem of the cross that produces it!

In reaction to this grace there is only one good response from us: a heart that seeks to honor the Savior for so great a salvation! *The knowledge of complete pardon for all sins, past present and future does not produce an attitude of flippancy in the hearts of those who've received it.* On the contrary, it produces the battle. How could I sin before such a loving God? The fact that hell is not in my future doesn't send me out to sin. Christians want to be near Jesus to be like Jesus. It is the reason they run their race. They have a hope within them that sits like a prize at the end of the marathon. Scripture says, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure," 1 John 3:2-3. *Everyone* (every single Christian) who has this hope in Him purifies himself, Romans 6:1-2; 8:1-2; Colossians 1:9-10. We look forward to the end of our faith because we have already received complete pardon for sin. We are not waiting for forgiveness; we are waiting for perfection.

Sin does condemn people to hell. The reason people go to hell is because of it. God has been merciful to only make an extremely small amount of us a demonstration of what we all deserve for it throughout history. Sin is the very worst of things. Always has been; always will be. Even for the believer sin is still very bad for many reasons. Sin condemns anyone not in obedience to Christ to eternal hell. For the believer, however, this is no longer possible. There is no wrath left in God for the believer! For the believer, sin has been totally judged already *in Christ*. This changes everything, folks. It's not that we don't fear hell in arrogance or in pride; rather, we don't fear hell because we appreciate the cross. We cannot and we dare not tread lightly here. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." Romans 8:1. No condemnation is because that which condemns us, which is our sin, has been totally pardoned. There is no more work to be done either by us or by God to forgive our sin outside that which was already done on the cross. "**It is finished!**" John 19:30. We actually enter the true Sabbath rest in complete trust of Christ. The Christian faith is what it is because the believer is brought to totally rely on the works of Jesus Christ *alone*. The righteousness by which we're changed is what we call *imputed righteousness*. Hebrews 10:14 tells us that, "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified," Hebrews 10:14. Do you believe that? If so, I'm hoping you'll esteem it rightly and look at hell in the light of it. Continuing on after Romans 8:3 (cited here several times) we read that Christ did what He did so that, "The righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us..." Romans 8:4. *In us* it says. That means the law no longer condemns us before

God. Our problem has been remedied. That's why Paul can declare boldly, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us," Romans 8:31-34. That's a man who knows he's been securely bought.

It is God who is responsible for sending all those to hell who go. Jesus told His own that it is Him alone they should fear, in one immediate sense, because of this, Matthew 10:28. If God is the decider of those who live and die, and He has saved us then we must not think Him indecisive. Again, if we understand this it will not produce high mindedness! Rather, this knowledge should only produce trust in the purity and surety of the gospel of grace. Be humble! The only hope you have is the hope made fully known in you, Christian! Thousands of years ago Moses was not only shown God's works, that's something many saw who perished. Moses wasn't only shown God's works, but God's ways, Psalm 103:7. We have such examples written for comfort and insight, Romans 15:4. Let's understand God's ways in His self-initiated works. Moses once asked God an interesting question. He asked, "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'?" Exodus 32:12. Ask yourself why would God deliver the Israelites by such miracles only to kill them all later for their sin? Answer: God would not do this. Moses came to see this in His ways. Do you not now see this in the gospel, a greater deliverance than the Exodus? The Exodus, the greatest Old Testament event, was only a type of the gospel. Do you not see now that this gospel was so great a deliverance that even death itself was consumed by it? Have you seen the cross and what God did to bring it to pass? God will not save you and then consume you! Why should the pagans have such a boast? The Exodus gives us this worthy picture of the gospel from Scripture.

Christians should not fear hell any longer when they sin. They should remember hell and let their sin remind them of the grace of the gospel. If they move to seek after sin in some type of pretend religion then it shows that they've never truly believed. If their love of truth and Christ brings them back to God then they'll only be an example of grace in the end. They should fear God, not His hell. If they do, it is an improper albeit often honestly motivated fear. Men go to hell because of sin. Sin is the problem. If Christ has removed the penalty for our sin then it's no far leap in logic to be sure that Christ has taken away all of the punishment of hell along with it, Hebrews 10:17; Psalm 103:12. Fearing hell is a good motivation to turn from sin. I hope you've seen it in your life and growth. It's good to fear judgment. In Christ, we come to reverence and esteem the cross in such ways.

Reason # 3 why we don't sin as Christians: it dishonors our calling and separates us from fellowship.

Identity with the people of God is very important. We're called to be members of the body of Christ which has many members. We're not called to go it alone. In the body, we want to feel welcome. We want to feel accepted. If we're truly in Christ (not false converts) then we become keenly aware from Scripture of the need to walk worthy of our calling, Ephesians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Colossians 1:10, et al. This should be seen by others in our lives. There is an outward component to our walk whereby we seek as is fitting the endorsement of those around us who know Jesus better than we do. We want to be affirmed in Christ by His people, and sin can separate us from that. We fear sinning so that we would not be separated from our brothers and sisters in Christ. We don't want to suffer humiliation and separation. I think that this fear is good. Just like the other two motivations for striving against sin already mentioned here, I think this one truly does have a place in bringing us to understand Christ. I think it has its place, but again I don't think it's a motivation that'll take us all the way home.

All of us in the church are nothing but forgiven sinners. I want to be very quick to affirm this. In all our dealings together as believers we're to remember this. There is a difference, however, in regard to sin in the lives of the faithful. When we see sin in the church we are to act to honor Christ and each other.

I first wish to establish the fact that sometimes separation is indeed needed for sin. By separation I mean private counseling, public rebuke or even kicking someone out of a church or group. This is called church discipline, and serves as one of the sure and necessary [marks of a true church](#). Excluding pure infancy or perhaps doctrinal error, when someone's sins are made known to another person it's almost certainly because the perpetrator, in their own life, has not put it to death despite the private and personal leadership of God the Holy Spirit. The church is then called to help each other out. Hopefully we all have small groups within the body where this takes place and is resolved. We are to judge. Anyone who says there's to be no judgment in the house of God from one person to another is a poor student of Scripture. Discipline helps Christians kill sin or eliminates sinful influences in the church. All discipline is done for the benefit of the whole and should always be enacted to this end. It's not always in response to those we feel may be hypocrites. Even Christians must sometimes suffer public shame for sin because sin is what it is. Sin has no eternal consequence for the redeemed (again see Romans 8:1; Romans 5:1; and reason # 2 here) but it does still bring temporal punishment in this life. For the child of God this is the discipline of God their loving Father, not eternal wrath from God the righteous judge. While sin may not necessarily indicate the heart of someone who's not in Christ, it is still sin and cannot be excused. If it's not repented of when confronted then it may quickly become a real problem. All sin is also *not the same*. A man who says that he gets angry too easily is not the same as the

man who confesses that he's cheated on his wife. The woman who says she's envious of another woman's position in life is not the same as the lesbian. Some sins call for swifter punishment. They are all equal in that even what we may call a "lesser sin" is still infinitely offensive to God, but Scripture clearly speaks of a difference in degree of sin, Mark 6:11; John 19:11. A person's position in the body may also necessitate stricter discipline from the church, as we see this greater level of judgment spoken of in the eyes of God, James 3:1. Some sins may be dealt with privately and never need to see the light of day. Others require something else. All sin is to be dealt with in reverence to Scripture, while giving the sinner the same benefit of the doubt that we'd ask for ourselves, in light of their eternal well being, and in honest self examination before God because none of us is God, 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Satan is the one who sows the tares (or hypocrites) in the church, Matthew 13:38. In Matthew 13, Jesus cautions us to be watchful in how we judge among the brethren and not to go about things haphazard in our discipline. Scripture also shows us what we must do with those who are hypocrites among us having been made known to us by their sin. A hypocrite is actually an imposter, a pretended believer, a false convert. Just like anything false, we can only judge them by their fruit. *False doctrine is often the sure indicator here.* If someone is confronted on account of a certain heresy (such as teaching that Jesus is not fully God) and does not repent having been instructed from the Bible, then they're to be put out of fellowship as idolatrous, and their sin is to be made known to all, 1 Timothy 5:19-20; Galatians 2:11-16. The punishment among us will fit both their crime and position among us. False doctrine is not usually dealt with in the same way as sins in the lives of believers. False doctrine, especially with teachers, must be quickly and severely dealt with. Sin of the rest is often a bit more difficult to deal with.

God once killed a married couple to make them an example to us all of what we all deserve for lying, Acts 5:1-11. Even this was for the benefit of the church.

Persistent sin may sometimes show someone as a false convert, or it may just show a Christian who is sinning and needs to repent. This is a fact because even believers, at times, can behave like non-believers, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Their response to correction is often crucial in determining which type of person someone may be. Whenever we see sin we must learn to treat each other appropriately while honoring truth above all personal favoritism. We cannot say, "Oh, well, God loves my son so He won't send him to hell just because he's gay." That's loving someone more than truth and Christians don't do that. We can't say, "Oh, well, I just caught the pastor embezzling money from the church, but he is the pastor and I love him too much to turn him in to the elders." We must consider both people *and* sin in the church.

Seeing this may help many of you. Don't dismiss discipline. It's very biblical. There's so much junk being taught today. So much feel good rhetoric on the bookshelf. There's just so much fakery that any sort of judgment is considered un-Christian and now many in the church don't know how to process discipline. *Showing how the Bible does*

indeed call for separation at times may go to show the proper place of this motivator for killing sin in the Christian life. If you sin, the church must take action if they know of it. You should want them to! Who wants an unholy church? Certainly no Christian does. Yes, it may be made known and you may suffer for it, but if you're in Christ, you hate sin more than your church's correction for it. This will always be done for the good of the people. New believers are not judged with the same level of accountability as someone who claims to have followed Christ for some substantial period of time. Judgment amongst us helps us to turn from sin. In showing that it's a proper motivation, I want to again move to show that while it may motivate us, it is not the best motivation.

The judgment of the church (by that I mean of any mature believers) is different than the judgment of God, but not entirely. The church's judgment should always be in agreement with the judgment of God. I think of it like a policeman on the street who's looking for speeders. He does not have the authority to take your money. He does, however, know full well the judgment of the court. We are like that before others. We are not the judge, but we do know His judgment completely. That's why we can say what we say with certainty. Jesus spoke a lot about judgment among men. Don't twist Matthew 7:1. There is true and false judgment. Jesus, in speaking specifically of the righteous judgment we're called to perform (as mentioned in John 7:24) said, "**Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them,**" Matthew 18:18-20. This is part of the work of the church.

Some parts of writing on this subject of discipline are tough and other parts are simple. Pastors know that they should always air on the side of grace because while we have some things given to us really clearly in Scripture, others are not so easily seen. We know that God has ordained rebuke for our good. We also know that God uses it with everything else, Romans 8:28. We further know that all Christians will sin. 1 John 1:8 applies in ways both before and after we're saved. All Christians will sin every day. Sometimes Christians can even sin grievously. There are many examples of this between Jesus' calling of His disciples and the times prior to His Resurrection. There are also clear examples of this post the Resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit. I cited one example earlier in Galatians 2:11-21 where the Apostle Peter's wicked conduct, according to Paul, had literally betrayed the gospel! Galatians 2:14. Here Paul withstood his brother to his face *in front of everyone* in that largest Gentile church of the known world. Notice what I said. Paul withstood *his brother* to his face. Peter had all but outwardly committed apostasy in his repetitious error of hypocrisy. In short, he acted as if the Gentile Christians were less than the Jewish ones. By this he denied what Scripture reveals that the Apostles (especially Peter) knew full well about the gospel, cf. Ephesians 2:13-18; Acts 10:15; 11:9; 15:6-9. Peter, by his position, required high levels of

accountability. Sins committed by those who are mature and in leadership require swifter action, but Paul's confrontation of him was not as with a pagan. He never called him a pagan for his sin in any place. Instead, Peter was called to repentance through Paul's loving action. Paul regarded truth more than he regarded Peter. This is the sign of any good teacher today as well.

There was a man mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:5-10 who had been punished by the church for sin, but was now, after that punishment, to be received back into fellowship, and reaffirmed by brotherly love. This is certain. I believe it was the same man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 who'd committed sexual sin and was told to be put out of fellowship and committed to Satan. I believe that he had repented and was now to be restored after their public rebuke and separation.

It may actually be that a person commits sexual sin as a hypocrite, is put out of the church, and only afterward, for the first time, is granted repentance from God and actually saved. How could we ever discern this except to say that we know it's possible? They may even have been in church for 50 years and so their present conversion may become difficult to discern, but again, we simply don't know God's timing. All we know is the fruit that follows a person's genuine profession in light of their doctrine. Whenever anyone is restored we can see their openness about their sin, their repentance, and their submission to the church who loves them in their correction and be encouraged. If that person were a pastor they could not return to the pulpit, but they would be welcomed back into fellowship with open arms.

Sometimes Christians might commit sins that falsely identify them as non-Christians in the same way that hypocrites might outwardly perform things that resemble faithful works. The bottom line here is that we as men must always remember that we cannot see as God sees. That's why we're to judge, when the situation requires it, in numbers, Proverbs 24:6. Christians can sin in horrible ways. This should be very rare, but if we take seriously the fact that God redeemed those that He redeemed in full knowledge all of their sin then we dare not confess anything else and still profess trust in Christ alone! God knows it all and so if He truly saves then it's not in ignorance to a person's sins whether we're talking about their past, present or future ones. If we then should have to counsel a true believer during one of them we should not act as if God was caught off guard by it.

Our cautious ability to judge between the one dead *to* sin and one dead *in* sin (in the sins hard to diagnose) will be things like their response to discipline, their position in the church, their time in the faith, the difficulty of the execution of the sin itself, the clarity with which the Scripture speaks against their sin, the number of repetitions, the flagrancy of their sin, the time over which the sin was committed, etc. Some things here are harder to unravel than others. For example, if someone murders we don't need to spend much time struggling with whether or not they're converted. If you pull out a machete and go after your pastor, you're pretty easy to diagnose as a hypocrite. There

was premeditation and the resistance of every Christian (not to mention moral) safeguard. If you commit the sin of pornography, it becomes harder to diagnose hypocrisy vs. sinful disobedience. The murderer would be judged clearly, and the pornographer would be told that he should have no confidence of his salvation so long as he would continue in such a sin. Of course this mention here of sin doesn't include those civil or moral responsibilities that people in the church may have to turn a person over to the authorities. The Christian will repent; the sinner will make excuses or otherwise justify himself and continue on in the sin. The Christian will war; the sinner will surrender. The difference between the man who commits adultery who is in Christ and the one who commits adultery that's not in Christ is that one will suffer wrath for their sin by the judge, and the other will suffer discipline from the hand of their Father in heaven. It may be too that the hypocrite, by his sin, is exposed completely in time. It took me a long time to be able to write this. It's not because I have committed the sins I would condemn. I'm always hesitant to say such things because I don't believe the church is called to play in gray areas. We're not called to say things like, "Well, brother John's been in the Lord for twenty years. He's led missions. He's committed the sin of adultery against his wife, but he might be saved so let's just call him to restoration." No, according to a course of action that's proper for him, we should rebuke that man *as if he were a non-believer* and lovingly tell him to be completely suspect of his salvation because such things do *not* accompany a holy life, Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. If he repents, we would not put him out, but he would lose his leadership role if he had one. Depending on the level of it, that role may never be restored. This is no game we play. Such sins do not accord with a godly life. We'll deal severely with him, committing all to the grace of God, and let his response help us see what God will do with him in time. We'll hold him accountable. We'll do this knowing that our knowledge is limited and that his sin is *not* greater than the mercy of God.

Scripture calls those *not* behaving carnally to restore those we trust are in the faith when they sin. This is dealt with in many places in the Bible. One such place is here where Paul writes, "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," Galatians 6:1. Because we are not God and do not know the heart we must retain many things in our minds when disciplining others for sin: 1) who they are, position, etc., 2) we don't know their hearts, 3) that certain sins are evidence of more than others. Both are called to Christ and will be treated as those in need of true grace. God will sort it out in the end, and time alone will tell their hearts among us. For example, let's say that a layman has cheated on his wife. He repents, she forgives him. He now, five years later is a leader in the church counseling young men and women on the dangers of lust and sexual immorality. By his willingness to confess his own sins and work in the body of Christ it shows that his heart is open before others. He is likely not then still committing that sin. It would show that he'd repented. While this too is not a sure

evidence, it would go far to show his true repentance over a man who, in the same situation, remained only a layman in the church. He knows those who are His. We can only identify them by their works.

The church is called to discipline its own. Separation in Scripture is always to be done in compassion. It is to be done, if at all possible, with that person's restoration in view. The Bible says:

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person,” 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. This is said to be done *in the church*. If a person is “put away,” which means booted, ousted, cut off, excommunicated or given the right foot of fellowship, then it's always in response to a failure on their part to repent. Sins that separate us are to be dealt with in this way because if they go unchecked or un-embattled they may be indicators of a false faith. We dare not tread lightly with sin. We don't want people going to hell that we helped lull into a false assumption of actually being saved. Jesus gave the church parameters for the proper escalation of force against sin in Matthew 18:15-20. Other places in Scripture do the same. We always attempt to settle issues at the lowest level. If a person will not hear Biblical rebuke then they must be put out for the safety of the whole, and the honor of the church.

So we don't want to sin because we know, in varying measures in our lives, that our sins might be made known in the church. What can be dangerous is that in knowing this we would only attempt to hide them. We may run from the idea of being accountable to others, and end up putting on a show for people. This is both very dangerous and very easy to do, especially in a big church. The moment we start pretending to be something we're not, we set our feet on a very dangerous road. Don't do it, beloved. Be accountable to people in your life and you'll do well. While not everyone needs to know the sins of everyone, we should always be accountable to someone.

Don't hide your sin. Confess it. This is given to help keep us in check. Scripture says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,” James 5:16. In Matthew 18 Jesus speaks about the possibility of winning a brother over *after* we've confronted their sin, Matthew 18:15. Be accountable with people. If you're in the faith, you need to understand that all saints, even on their best day, are nothing more than pardoned wretches. Joel Beeke said it well when he said that “The best of men are MEN at best.” We are all saved because of Jesus' righteousness and not our own. We should

seek to be gracious with anyone else who is sinning in remembrance of that. We would want this for ourselves and so we're told to do it for others, Luke 6:31.

How would you handle rebuke? Proverbs 7:25 says, "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed." If someone loves you enough to tell you your fault, might it be the mercy of God...even if they stunk at it? Don't get hung up in our modern flattering of ourselves that says it's never *what* someone said, only *how* they said it. The vast majority of the time, all we're looking to do with such ideology is to excuse something. Even Jesus, some would say, would have had little trouble communicating His message in His day if He'd only packaged it better. Scripture says that discipline is a requisite part of sonship with the Lord. "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons," Hebrews 12:5-8. *All of God's children without exception*, in some way or another, have endured discipline directly from the Lord. Church discipline is one of the primary ways this happens. Yeah, it hurts, but it's for our everlasting joy and growth in Christ.

You may be separated from fellowship. Maybe you're reading this and that's you. If you have a sound church, your church did this because they love you. They did it, more importantly, because they love the Lord. *They were told to*. To not do it would be sin on their part. Do you know that what you've done is sin? Have you seen it in Scripture as they showed you? Then repent. Your sin may just be a fault you have between you and your Savior. It may also show that you're still dead in it, but we hope not. If you've sinned and you know it, repent. Your church will likely rejoice to have you back.

This motivation has helped me a lot. When presented with certain sins, I've often thought of how it would affect my life and testimony if found out in the body. This has helped me to resist it. I'm ashamed that sometimes I'm more concerned about what others would say about my sin than God who sees it all, but the external motivator is still a truth that has become real in my life, and I'm grateful for it. Sin separates us from the flock. Even if no one knows of it, hypocrisy in non-repentance separates us from a pure conscience and the ability to praise God openly. We don't sin because we want to be welcome among both God and His people. Often, what the pastor would say about a sin keeps many from sinning. This is not altogether a bad motivation, but it also is not the best.

Reason # 4. The simple realization of the fact that I don't have to.

Todd Friel said it well one day. It was so simple and yet so profound. Regarding whatever sin it is you may be facing in your own life Christian, you don't "have to" do it. For the believer, there's been a partial restoration of the freedom long ago lost in Adam. The freedom that Adam had was to live righteously. He was able to love God freely as he was created to. He forfeited that ability, and we, being represented by him, lost it in him. All of mankind, post the fall of Adam, now lives in an *unnatural* state. In Christ, that nature has been partially restored. In this life, Christians alone now have the ability to live right before God in fellowship with the Spirit. This is part of the privilege of a "New creation," Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17. The outworking of the reality that Christians are new creations is again what establishes the battle lines between the old and new natures dwelling within them.

When Todd Friel then says how, no matter the sin, the believer does not "have to" do it, there's a conviction behind it that's a confession of a lot of powerful and wonderful things. The non-believer "has to" sin! By nature, he has no desire to choose otherwise, and so never will. Even his good works are sin before God because his heart is corrupt, Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; Psalm 58:3; Mark 7:21, et al. Sure, at times he can do what's proper or right, but his very nature will not allow him to live righteously in honor to Christ. Even blind squirrels find nuts at times. Living righteously before God is not just about what one does; it's as much about the Spirit in which he does it. The believer, by virtue of his new nature, can now choose between right and wrong because he, in Christ, has conscious recall or access *within himself* of both natures, 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22. Choices made then can truly either be a display of true righteousness or of sin. There is the option of righteousness now for the believer.

Understanding this new creation reality is compelling toward righteousness. The believer is called to live righteous. He knows now how he can. When the choice to sin is placed before him he should choose what's right. It's the new nature at work within me that allows me to say this as well. Remember, Paul said, "What I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do," Romans 7:15. What I will to do (in my new dominant nature) is live right, and to choose what's right according to it. What I do sometimes, however (being that I still retain my old nature) is wrong. As I've grown towards heaven, I've learned more and more, through the application of the word, to live right before my Father. I've learned to choose what's right. My very senses have been exercised to discern what's good and what's evil, Hebrews 5:14. By practice and effort I the faith I'm more aware of the tactics of my enemy, and can even spot his approach from longer distances, 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 2:11. More and more this must become a reality in the believer's life. Understanding how, 1) we now have the option of living in a way that's pleasing before God, and 2) we now find within ourselves a joyous desire to live out that righteousness is compelling. Christians want to live rightly before God. They want to with all they've received. They hunger and thirst after righteousness, Matthew

5:6. Righteousness and holiness then, even through their struggles, is as natural to them as breathing.

The problem with the vast majority of Christians in the church today is that they're not Christians. They have had bad teaching, or ignored the good teaching in their lives and just think they're Christians. They don't know how to test themselves, 2 Corinthians 13:5. In every generation there are many people in the churches who claim to obey Christ, but don't. They merely live according to religious systems, external patterns or outward principals of conformity. They are false converts. They've never repented, never been born again. They've got no sense of their sin or the grace of God yet they are associated with the body of Christ. This is a truth found in many parables: Mark 4:1-20; Matthew 25:1-13; Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 25:31-46. The fact that most people in the church are not in Christ also explains those spurious pretenders addressed in Hebrews 6:4-6 who draw back. The true believers addressed in Hebrews 6:9 are *not* mere actors. Though we can unfortunately act carnally at times, we conform to standards without because Christ has already conformed us to His standard of righteousness within. Many people feign a submission to Christ without being forgiven for their sin. They obey patterns because it profits them for a season. So long as those patterns or systems bring them pleasure they'll obey them. The moment sin makes them happier (should the devil move in that way with them) they'll abandon such things in a moment because there was never any inward motivation towards them anyway. In Ephesians six, Paul talks a bit about submission. He mentions its propriety and describes it in the lives of kids, slaves and masters. In it there is a key phrase that can help us rejoice as we find it treasured within ourselves. I'd like to apply it here. He writes to slaves that they're to obey their masters, "Not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God *from the heart*," Ephesians 6:6. (Emphasis mine). How do we truly obey a master "from the heart?" We are not to assume before God that there's no distinction between one who merely obeys his master for some external reason, and one who obeys him from the heart. The one who submits to a master because of his submission to God (cf. 1 Peter 2:19) stands open before God and has entered into the meaning of the thing, rather than just the shell of it. If a person recognizes that his willing submission to any earthly authority is based on his submission to the heavenly authority then he will find yet another indication of the wonderful outworking of the new heart he's been given. He submits "from the heart" and does so before his God because he loves to. This is a wonderful part of assurance. This is something we can only test ourselves in because no one else really knows our motives other than us.

Jonathan Edwards wrote that, "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections." He wrote this in his book *The Religious Affections*. Edwards attempts to help Christians diagnose their own hearts and realize why they see so much corruption in the church amidst such wonderful truths and preaching. The reasons for such things are too numerous for any but God to know for sure. It can be due to the fact that there are non-

believers mixed in with the faithful. That we know. It could be because a Christian is acting in disobedience. This we know as well. It could be because there's confusion on an issue and no one really knows what's going on. In our lives as individuals it comes down to knowing who you love and why. Christianity is a religion of the head and the heart. We should know what we believe and why we do what we do. Paul writes, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" Romans 6:16. St. John echoes the exact same sentiment in his epistle when he says, "Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil," 1 John 3:7-8. I have been saved from sin. I now submit myself to Christ willingly as a result. The evidence that my salvation and subsequent submissions are valid is twofold: 1) It's based on sound truth, and 2) I stop sinning more and more with each year. Throughout my time here, as I become aware of new sin in my heart, I repent again and turn from that. I must be at war with everything that I know is sin within. No soldier is ok if only one enemy gets into the camp. He fights to keep all his enemies out.

I want to keep the enemy out. Doing this is my goal in life. I strive to do this in a way that accords with the faith. I have to invite the Holy Spirit in again and again to what I know is sin within me. I have to be open before Him completely. I will only rush to do this if the fruits of righteousness are mine, and I have to remind myself of the gospel constantly so that I remember my position before God. I will only work to cultivate that fruit if I'm beholding Christ aright in the faith. I must continuously be washed by the word. I must listen, read or meditate on the Bible to live, John 6:63; John 3:5. This is what I'm doing in my life. All along are the works. I want to prove my inward faith outwardly. I want to know why Christ's commandments are not burdensome to me, 1 John 5:3. I want to know that they are not a burden to me because Christ has lifted the burden from me. That He is the true burden bearer. His commandments are a joy to me. They are life to me. Keeping His commandments will always prove genuineness and falsity, Revelation 22:14; Proverbs 6:23. It's life to love God with all I am and to love my neighbor as myself, Luke 10:27. It's life and joy to me to be water baptized, Matthew 28:19; Matthew 3:15. It's life and joy to me to evangelize, Matthew 28:19; Luke 10:2. It's life and joy to me to love my wife, Ephesians 5:28. It's life and joy to me to study the Scriptures, Matthew 4:4. The fact that it's life and joy to me is proof of a true motivation. Furthermore, my life and joy is in line with the historic Christian faith. The first test of true faith is its foundation. If the foundation is true then it becomes a matter of right living to test ourselves *and one another* by the truths we profess. It's first our orthodoxy, and then our orthopraxy. It's first what you believe, and then how you live.

There are many systems out there. Obedience to Christ has many external things and standards to which, even the believer at times, is compelled to obey even without understanding. As we grow, however, if we're disciplined well by the word, we will come to know and appreciate the reasons behind what we do more and more.

There are many more motivations to fight. Some will be more powerful than others to different people. Some of those other reasons for our wars, in no particular order, should include:

1. *The love of God.* 1 John 2:5. How should your knowledge of the love of God and your desire to not dishonor Him cause you to turn from sin? There's not much that needs to be said to the saint in regard to this. If you love God, you will love to love what He loves more and more.

2. *The drive for righteousness and its beckoning graces.* 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Though by sin, holiness is masked in this life as delightful, it remains nonetheless the very thing that would make all of us the most satisfied if found. But how does one ever perceive its glories having been born with eyes that cannot see it? The answer is only through new sight, John 3:3. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) wrote to God in his book *Confessions* that, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." This is true. Augustine battled many sins in his life. His main sin was sexual immorality. John Piper, in his excellent biography series called *Men of Whom the World Was Not Worthy*, speaks about the struggles of the man and quotes Augustine from his own writings. Thousands of years ago Augustine wrote about his struggles against sexual sin. He was brought to a place of tearful and physically evident conviction. He was made to see holiness and wanted it despite his sexual temptations. He was turning to God and personified both sexual temptation and chastity saying, "I was held back by mere trifles...They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, "Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever."...And while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me." Augustine wanted holiness. To perceive holiness and a life without sin is truly only the desire of the born again. Do you desire holiness before God as Scripture defines it? Do you hate what's between you and that holiness? If so, you have been made fit for the kingdom. Rejoice!

3. *A recognition of the staying power of the historic faith.* Jude 3. To identify with men like Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Spurgeon, Calvin or Edwards is a powerful thing. When we see that they were enraptured by the same truths that enrapture us it's exciting and motivating. It shows us that truth has no shelf life, and that God is truly the same yesterday, today and forever. The church has been invited to dine at one table. In every generation that same table has been set.

4. *A hatred of self.* Romans 7:24. This is a great motivator. We should hate ourselves. In and of ourselves, that is, in our flesh, *even now in Christ*, no good thing dwells, Romans 7:18. What we have that is good is alien to us, 2 Corinthians 4:7. Sidebar: This is often what identifies the false prophets in every generation. The false prophets will avoid sin in any real detail or tell you good things about whatever doesn't break the law of men. True prophets, however, along with their proclamation and love of the truth, will always be seen as counter-productive, judgmental and divisive. This is because most people are not faithful to God, and are thus motivated ultimately by Satan.

5. *A hatred of evil.* Proverbs 8:13. Such is a byproduct of a love of God. I hate sexual sin not only for what it is, but for what it does to people. Just think naturally with me for a moment of what the world would be without a misuse of sex. No unwanted pregnancies, no broken hearts, no sexually transmitted diseases and no homosexuality. Sounds great doesn't it? I hate lying. Think of what the world would be if no one did it. Even by the effects of sin I'm made to hate it.

6. *Wanting to see heaven.* Philippians 1:23. This is a great desire. Trying to consider the glory of seeing God can motivate us to fight and strive to the end that we might see it. Others, who unlike me, have been given a godly legacy, may strive for heaven to one day be reunited with those they know that have gone before them.

7. *A desire to see God.* Matthew 5:8. As mentioned in number six, this promise is one given to the pure in heart on the Sermon on the Mount. What a blessed eternity that will be! What will it be to see Him! We know that sin does not dwell with God, and so we should not want to dwell with sin now. When we think of our lives in light of fully standing before God one day, it shines heavenly light on our sin. It should help us to see it properly and to turn from it in war.

8. *A desire to please God.* 2 Timothy 2:4. Wanting to bring Him the reward of His suffering has been a righteous motivation for countless efforts in the faith. There is no loving child that doesn't seek the approval of a good and loving father.

9. *Love for a spouse.* 1 Peter 3:1-2. There are many who've been brought to faith by the profession of a spouse. Honor to them then has been a strong motivation against any sin in one's life. Love of another can help us to overcome sin. It is an external motivator. When you sin, consider what effects it will have on your spouse, your kids, grandkids, great grandkids, etc. Will you dishonor that noble name by which you're called by making peace with what He hates?

10. *Love for a child.* Ephesians 6:4. God has used children to turn the hardest of hearts. Having a child, even among the heathen, can cause a man or woman to examine themselves according to things they've never examined themselves against. They want to make good decisions, and live better as a result of becoming a parent. How many of us first think about saving money because we have kids? Parents are to be the most important teachers in the lives of their children. Ensuring that you know the faith ensures that you can communicate it to the next generation. This is no light responsibility, and

should spur us to learn and fight against sin. Children have also brought the gospel into homes. God has used their little minds to change the hearts of hard hearted parents for centuries.

11. *Respect for a parent.* 2 Timothy 1:5. The legacy of a godly parent, while sometimes a slow and creeping motivator in our culture, sometimes proves to be a strong motivation toward holiness. I want to leave such a legacy for my grandchildren so that they would not sin in remembering that they're my grandkids.

12. *Happiness in our lives as a result of resisting sin.* Proverbs 10:22. It is a wonderful thing for the soldier to rest after coming through the day's battle. Proving God's faithfulness in winning battles against sin brings great contentment. For the believer, to know that your life is fully pleasing to God is nothing short of thrilling. This has been true even in the lives of those on the way to their execution.

13. *The honest desire to be an example for others to imitate?* 1 Corinthians 11:1. The fact that we do this through faith and patience is a great motivator to fight against our sin. Others are watching. None of us are perfect. Recognizing this is a fruit of the faith. Everyone knows it. Understanding this, with time each one of us should become examples of faith. If we're not, then something is wrong.

The truths of Scripture communicate all of these motivations to us topically. There are, of course, many more reasons that we fight that I've not listed here. And again, all of these truths can certainly have their place in our struggles against our sin. There may be pitfalls to avoid with each, but none could be called bad motivations in and of themselves. They can all be supported well in holy writ. Ultimately, however, Christians are not saved by truths or motivations; we're saved by Christ. When we come to see this it is truly life changing. We are not people with faith in faith. We have faith in Christ. He is the truth. He Himself is not the written sentence; He gave the written word. He is a living God. His word, the Bible, is what He gave us to know Him. The Bible is the only way that we come to know God rightly. When truth is given to us by God through His word it becomes living and active. The Scriptures, through all of its culminating truths, bring us to appreciate Him and His many saving graces. Each has its place under the God we serve. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God, Ephesians 6:17. Through it, He teaches us to wage war as we, by the power of the Spirit, become more like Him.

The #1 reason to war.

I will never forget being at the gym one sunny day at the University of South Florida around 2005 when an elderly lady who I'd met there and witnessed to approached me as I was leaving for counsel. She poured out to me that her eighty-five year old husband wakes up nearly every day, takes Viagra, and spends hours online looking at

internet pornography. It broke her heart. I was stunned. I mean, think of it. An eighty-five year old man still acting like a young pervert! Still hooked to this sin! Eighty years old! I guess I'd always thought of it as a young man's sin. I vowed to God that I'd not end up like that. I vowed to kill my sin. I never did meet him. He would not speak to me despite her requests.

It is the expulsive power of a new affection that will give us victory over sin, and that to the end. Do you love Jesus? We're told to look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith, Hebrews 12:2. As we look to Him something amazing happens in time. Seeing it is the main weapon I'm writing about here.

To repent means to turn away from sin. To turn *from* something we must have something to turn *to*. We are called by God to turn from self to Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. The main reason why I don't sin is one that it took me eight years to be able to write with conviction and no condemnation in my heart. *I can now say that sin has become less a part of my nature! It doesn't please me any longer.* It literally afflicts me to my soul when I sin. Yes, that means, to varying degrees, that I'm afflicted daily. Nonetheless I love God and am coming to love the things He loves more and more. I have real fellowship only with those who love him. Oh, I tell you, true happiness for me will be sitting at the table with Paul, Timothy, John the Baptist, John MacArthur and my friends in this life and being with our Lord. That prospect literally, at times like now, gives me butterflies. The reason why sin now afflicts me is wonderful. Let me try to articulate this great and all-encompassing weapon.

Romans seven was written by the Apostle Paul during his Christian life. Of this I have no doubt. The struggle he articulates there reflects perfectly the life of every Christian and the struggles of my life today. The chapter focuses on the struggle between the new "I" and the old "I" that was crucified on the cross with Christ, Galatians 2:20. The mind of the believer is ever renewing; his spirit man is totally perfect. In it all I'm being conformed to the image of Christ. The internal motivation to be conformed to the image of Christ is why there's a war against sin at all.

Since I was first converted, as I've mentioned often here, I have warred mainly with sexual sin. The world does not want to help me here. It wants me to consider sex everywhere other than with my wife. The way many women dress today *even in church* doesn't help. Older ladies, where are you in this? We need your help. I digress. I was a fornicator for ten years and physically addicted to sex and pornography. While I stopped with the outward sin of fornication roughly two years before day one of my salvation (my time in the [word of faith cult](#)) my struggle against sexual perversion and internet pornography had only just begun. Lust, for me, is like a deceitful harlot. She has never left. I used to physically react to the temptations of internet pornography. When faced with the temptation many years ago my heart rate would literally increase, I would sweat, and not be able to control the thoughts of temptation that swirled in my mind. I would try to quote the Scriptures, do pushups, yell, write, pray, walk away, whatever. These too

were minor external motivators, but they could not deliver me. I would quickly feel as if I was sinking into that warm, dark, nasty place all over again; and all of this nearly every time I was online alone. I had to avoid being alone on a computer period. I had to use internet filters and take whatever precautions I could to shield me from myself. Such things do not happen any longer! I'm very pleased to quote Lewis on the subject of temptation knowing full well exactly what he meant. C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* wrote,

A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German Army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by walking against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know so very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in.

I have most definitely had numerous Augustine-like experiences as a result of my temptation. I'm proud to say that I've proven that under God, you grow stronger in resistance to sin with time. I have felt the great weight of this sin's temptation, but God has delivered me from it. I can sit on a computer alone and not face one ounce of the physical reaction I used to have. Not one bit. I simply don't want it any longer.

I remember with joy some of the victories I've had against this sin. I hope you're encouraged by this if you're warring here. I know that this is truly every man's fight and so I feel it prudent to focus on it to a great extent. One time I was in Iraq on my second deployment. I was doing some pull-ups at a roadside station. During a rest period, I watched a man walk in and out of a porta-john. I didn't think anything of it at the time, and ended up going into that same porta-john myself soon after. The man had left several pornographic DVDs on the seat. This happens often as "men" depart from theater. They dump their filthy payloads for others since they're now leaving. The top disc was covered with the filthy images they contained. I saw them and though I didn't look at them for more than a millisecond I was immediately tempted. The lying harlot instantly promised her pleasures. She beckoned me sweetly. My heart rate shot up. My anger against my sin quickly rose up in me. But was it only my anger? I hurriedly crushed them and threw them into the porta-john water below then urinated (for effect) on the murky water that now concealed them from sight. Say what you will, I left that porta-john in great joy. My love for God and desire for holiness before Him had compelled me to overcome my desire for the sins that could have been mine with no one knowing about it for many months.

On my last deployment to Afghanistan I moved into a new hooch. Someone had left a stack of filthy magazines out for the next tenant of the little eight by twelve

plywood shack I was to occupy. I had just arrived there on a twelve month rotation two weeks prior. Within one second of seeing the pile on the bunk, thoughts swirled in my head with dancing delight like sugarplums. Images danced, and reminded me that my wife would never know. The old me reasoned that because I was deployed my legitimate sexual needs could not be met by my wife for many months and so this sin was justified. I then reasoned that while I would not keep the filthiest of the magazines, that perhaps I could just keep the swimsuit type ones. That's not the same as pornography, right? Wrong. All of these thoughts must have gone through my carnal mind, no kidding, in less than a second. And at the same time my redeemed heart was pounding. This was years after Iraq, and it was years before Iraq since the last time I'd sinned with pornography. My anger against my sin rose up, I ran at the pile, punched it (yeah, I guess it again was just for effect) crumpled it all up in a rush *without looking at it*, and immediately moved out to the dumpster that was about forty meters down the alley. *I do not leave such things for anyone else either*. On the way to the small dumpster I began to "reason" within myself again about the sin. My paces slowed as I did so. I began to reason that perhaps there were some good articles to read in the Maxim or Playboy magazines if there were any in the stack. Or maybe I should take one and see if my desire for their filth has gone. Then I could rejoice, right? That stupid test is what got me the last time I fell by the way. Oh, how tricky the whore is. All this again must have occupied no more than two or three slowing paces. Once I realized it I picked up the pace again, and literally began a slow run. This is fleeing from the sin. I would have looked like a fool had my troops or leaders seen me. I got to the dumpster, lifted the lid and threw the trash in all without looking at it. I slammed the lid and left it with a sense of joy like in Iraq. My peace only really returned, however, only the next day after the trash was hauled away by the local workers. I thought of it out there all night. I felt like Augustine in that garden all over again.

Such victories can be motivations for war against sin. Victories always rally troops. I would never have resisted such things years before. I wish I could say that I had resisted every temptation before that, but I didn't. I have not committed such sins since years before Iraq as I mentioned. I was changing. On such days, because I'd grown in faith, I was able to win. Soli Deo Gloria! Temptation will never stop being temptation. I don't think I'll ever look at a loose woman and genuinely think she looks ugly. I won't ever go into a strip club because I think I'm immune. A man cannot take fire into his bosom and not be burned, Proverbs 6:27. Satan has only needed three things to destroy man since the fall. Those three things are sex, power and money, and they go in that order I think. I know that of all the sins I'm taught to fight, fornication (or adultery) is *not* one of them. Concerning sexual sin I'm told to flee, 1 Corinthians 6:18.

I share all this because I know that internet pornography is a scourge on us today. I don't want this to be a letter only on this sin, but I know that this is every man's battle. I

would like to highly recommend to you Mr. Todd Friel's sermon called *Slaying the Dragon: Putting Pornography to Death Once and For All*.

I write about these things in some detail so that you can see, sir or ma'am, that your struggles with sin are not your own. Every single man or woman of God shares in such struggles, 1 Corinthians 10:13. In it we're to look to Jesus and remember that He is on our side, Hebrews 2:17-18. I want you to know that you can have hope. If you're about killing your sin, your sin will not be killing you. Fight and know your weaponry well. God changes those He loves. Whatever is sin in my life (which is mainly the temptation of lust) I do not want to make peace with. I don't want to watch the commercials that entice. I refuse to watch films with nudity. I don't want to entertain the random evil thoughts that buffet me. You must war, you must fight and strive against sin, but you do it waiting on God's internal work to be seen and proven in you. Christians are told to "work out" their salvation, Philippians 2:12. John MacArthur comments on this saying how we're not called to work "at" our salvation or to work "up" our salvation. We're called to work it "out." God has placed a new heart within us. It has changed us from the very core of our being. That internal change, through obedience to truth, finds itself worked out in such things as our struggles and wars. Along the path to eternal victory there are many tactical defeats. We will sin. We will take our eyes off Jesus and fall.

I have not written in detail about my two sins in the area of internet pornography, both of which occurred early on in my walk while married that led literally to tears, long walks around my neighborhood in Tampa, FL with a fear of the loss of my salvation, or a complete lack of the ability or joy to witness to others. *Everything* was wrong in the cosmos when I sinned on those occasions. I now know why. Such days were dreadful. Thank God! I have lusted after the wives of my brethren and of strangers. I have looked at a woman too many times to be safe. I have sinned and allowed myself to be tempted with movies I know that I shouldn't have watched. The outward battle, truly, was the easy part. I suppose it always is. The inward battles are the hard part. There are so many loose women. I must love God more than my sin or the sin will always win. If I only suppress my sexual sin and modify it outwardly it will spring up again. It's only a matter of time. Oh, I've had these and other nights of sin. I thank God for those nights though! I learned by them to hate my sin. I have learned with Martin Luther that, "I cannot stop the birds from flying over my head, but I can stop them from making a nest in my hair." By His grace, I will never again have such a night. Nothing that comes at me defiles me. It's what comes out of me that does, Mark 7:20.

I must constantly be on guard against my besetting sin. I have even just recently left places literally physically exhausted from the mental gymnastics of where I put my eyes, what room I'm in, how I bend down to throw away my plate lest my sightline catch hers, what thoughts bombarded my mind, where she sat, etc., and all this because of an immodest woman far too willing to show off her body. As my wife and I discussed my

sin and troubles, I felt terrible. She has helped to hold me accountable in many ways. I trust that in years to come even my troubles in this area will be different. I will do whatever it takes in the meantime, however. I will fight and wait on God. I will cut off my hands and gouge out my eyes (figuratively speaking) if required of me, Mark 9:43-48. I have repented from my sin. I have turned from them and I hate them. I hate them because of the expulsive power of my new affection. I love Jesus of Nazareth more than my sin.

I don't remember everything external that has motivated me throughout the years to fight against my sin. Looking back now I think these few truths here could well summarize some of the main truths that have motivated me most. When I first came to faith, I didn't want sin because I knew it would get in the way of what I felt God had for me. This motivation, again, was not all bad. I could then see that my motivations against sin might well have been summarized under the heading of being afraid of hell. I've learned that that is not to be my fear lest I doubt the promises of God. I then moved to a desire to please God by my outward conformity and affirmation in the faith, etc. All these things have their place when part of a sincere faith. In all that I've written to you here I've not tried to condemn any one of the truths mentioned. I'd rather hope to communicate them so that you could relate to them and, by our common confession, both come to rejoice that by them we've learned only to trust in God. He has been so patient with us both! I pray that we've seen that through it all it was God at work in us through His word. I pray that we would observe ourselves justified in Christ. That we would fix our gaze on who we are in regard to the perfect law of liberty and not forget who we are being made like unto, James 1:25.

The English theologian John Owen long ago summed up the joyous realization I'm writing about now when he said, "Sin in the believer is a burden which afflicts him rather than a pleasure that delights him." Because I'm afflicted by sin I'm thrilled. I'm thrilled because, like all those who love Jesus, I see that He is mightily at work in me. He has been for some time now. His word is changing me as I behold Him in it. I see that His word has changed me from who I was like night to day. The invisible is becoming more visible with each passing year. I can hardly contain my joy. I am drawn close to God in this and I'm ecstatic to consider the next ten years should He give them.

What I can say now about my war with sin is where I've been brought. I can now say that I've become like Christ so very much more that my very nature has changed with regard to sin. Sexual sin, though still tempting, would not be pleasing to me any longer. This should be the same for you if you put any of your sin in this light. We cannot enjoy it. I cannot take pleasure in sin because I'm becoming more and more like my Father. My Father is not pleased with sexual immorality (fornication, adultery of the eye, or lustful masturbation) therefore I am not pleased with it. My Father is not pleased with pornography (which is sexually immoral) and so I hate it. I am seeing what Jesus said in my own life that, "**A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is**

enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master...” Matthew 10:24-25a. I want to be holy as He is holy. Becoming like Jesus, however, is what the whole of the Christian life looks like. As much as someone who is only man can become like someone who is both 100% Man and 100% God, I should be. I am not the thief on the cross; I have been given more time than he was. King David once sang, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness,” Psalm 17:15. This is my hope as well. This is what I’m striving towards.

It is a wonderful thing to know that the truth of God’s word can change you so much that what you want to do changes. I no longer want to sin. I am now a daily seeker of righteousness. I want holiness. I am a Christian. I am a forgiven wretch. I am what the word of God produces. If you think it’s proud to say that then shame on you for thinking the Bible’s a sham. I’m not sounding a trumpet. In all my weaknesses I’m boasting in what Christ has produced in me through the word. We must affirm that the Scriptures work in us. We do this by our changed hearts and steady lives. We should all be examples of Christian faith and piety to others, right? I’m not claiming to be anything special. I only claim that I’ve been redeemed. This is in light of the sound doctrine of the historic Christian faith. I want to stand before God and my brothers and sisters and have nothing hidden. This is not just an outward conformity I desire. I don’t want to remove myself from sin simply because it’ll get between me and my wishes. I don’t want to restrain myself from sin because I’m afraid of hell, or just because someone in my church might find out. The real reason that I don’t want to sin is because I love my Father, and find now that the things that displease Him also displease me. *All good motivations are found in their place here under this.* I want His holiness. I want His righteousness. I want His favor in study. I simply want Him, Jeremiah 9:23-24. It is this truth and hope that I have within myself that I pray is that solid motivation that’ll take me all the way home. I want to be like Him. I see Him at work in me as I’ve asked Him to be and I’m thrilled. I want what I’ve asked of Him, yes. Of course I don’t want to dishonor my church. All of these things are fine. What thrills me to no extent, however, is that I genuinely delight in righteousness because He does, Hebrews 1:9. He has made me to delight in such things by His Spirit. This proves the work of God in me in an everlasting way. Though I’m certain that they will, I don’t need anyone else to see this, only Him. Jesus said, “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled,**” Matthew 5:6. Amen. I want to be washed by the Bible’s truth completely and know my God more and more. I treasure the passage of David where He said, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple,” Psalm 27:4. Oh, to hear the word! To have my soul opened up to God is all consuming. Psalm 119 is the life I want.

I used to be what’s called a “head banger.” I used to go to heavy metal concerts, take off my shirt, jump into a mosh pit and get beat up. I did this for a rush. I used to find my identity in it. Now I find my identity in Christ, and I’m thrilled about that. What

happened some ask? People who know me best have described me as different as night and day. I now hate what I once loved and love what I once hated. A sign of genuine conversion is aversion to sin. Aversion to the world and to all things of it is seen in the lives of the faithful. I now love the things of God because it's in my very nature to do so. This, by grace, I pray will never change. It's not a passing motive. It's a motive that'll last right up to my dying day. I'll never be Christ, but I will become more and more like Christ, Lord willing, right up to the day that I'm with Him. In Hebrews 12:2 we're told to look to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. He's right there, Hebrews 13:5. He's our pace Man.

Has your nature been changed in regard to your sin? If so, rejoice with me! Maybe your experiences have been wildly different than mine in your life. Even if that's the case, you've struggled with your sin as well if you're saved. I met a Chaplain in Afghanistan who always used to say, "Most of us are like the rest of us." Beloved take comfort; you truly are just like the rest of us. We all struggle against sin that love God and are the called according to His purpose. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it," 1 Corinthians 10:13. Amen. If you've struggled with sin then you're just like the rest of us. If you've not then you're just like the world. When we struggle we're to remember that we have a great high priest who became like us in struggle, Hebrews 4:15. He did this to be faithful as an intercessor. Look to Him. He is the sinless intercessor alive today. Having resisted the full weight of temptation, He knows of its power more than us all. He will make you like Him. Believe me, but this takes time. There are no shortcuts. It's a walk. A step by step disciplined growth. In your growth you will come to see that all external motivations only moved to help you understand your true motivation, who is the true motivator, God the Holy Spirit Himself. He has done it. He has taught you in many ways. His word is changing you. Seek Him in it. Grow by the word. A good pastor is a necessity. Christ's words are spirit and life to you and you will come to love that fact more and more. I love preaching and teaching. I love it! It's my idea of fun to study the word under a great teacher. I look inward and I find Christ more and more through my life and that's just thrilling. I see Him in the truths of the word of God and that is thrilling. It is the truth that produces this. Such is the essence of obedience that is not burdensome, 1 John 5:3. The only true evidence of a saving knowledge of God is a life lived in wisdom. It's a personal application of wisdom in the fear of the Lord that proves all things.

In your struggles, remind yourself of the gospel. Jesus did, "**Not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance,**" Luke 5:32. Christ came knowing full well for who He was to die. "When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly," Romans 5:6. Don't fool yourself, God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows He didn't get a righteous person when He bought you. He didn't even

look upon a living person. For His glory and joy He gave you life. He came to restore an image bearer. He knew that He was purchasing a sinner. He bought you, made you a saint, and now wants to change you for the better. You are not your own solution, and no one has betrayed you more than you have betrayed yourself along the way. Take measure of yourself. Consider what you would be worth if God had not had mercy on you. You would be a hell bound wretch with nothing but the prospect of eternal fire before you. Consider your every sin, and that behavior that condemned you. The good news is that God knew all this very well too. He knew it full well and He loved you despite it. That's grace.

Have you seen your nature change in regard to righteousness over time? Do you love the things of God? Is your heart ablaze with the truth of God? Is Jesus precious to you? If so, then in maturity I hope you'll come to see that it's because He's making you more like Him. You will war and win against sin by that new nature that now seethes in your veins. St. John once asked, "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John 5:5. If this is you then this is you. By faith you have overcome the world. That's the kind of faith that saves. Guzik cites Poole in his commentary on 1 John 5:5 and says, "Knowing who Jesus is – not just as a matter of facts or information, but as food for life - "fills the soul with so great things concerning him...as to easily turn this world into a contemptible shadow, and deprive it of all its former power over us." - Poole. Amen to that. Are you beholding Jesus aright in the Scriptures? There's only one true Jesus. He is God. He is not the Jesus of the cults- a spirit brother of Lucifer, an archangel, a good teacher, etc. He is God the Son. We must behold Him in truth.

What turns us toward God is when we behold Christ aright in the Scriptures. When we see Him rightly, we are changed into what we see. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Holy Spirit makes Jesus known to us. Before Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples once asked Him how He was going to make Himself known to them if He was going away. "Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you," John 14:22-26. Those first hearers received this promise in full. Through their teaching we now know that it's by the same operative work of the Holy Spirit that we too now come to know of Jesus.

Right doctrine turns us, and is the primary task of all true preachers. Our prayers then turn us. Our warring then turns us. Our evangelism then turns us. And on and on it goes. All these things are turning us more and more into what God would have us to be. All of our works are our means of grace. They are all secondary motivations or means that God uses to change us into what He wants us to be. It's by obedience to the truth that we purify ourselves, 1 Peter 1:22.

In all of this, it's not to say that I always act how I should. I know that I fall far short still. I have sinned today. It is as Newton said, however: "I am not who I will be, I'm not who I want to be, I'm not even who I ought to be. But this I know; I'm not who I was." It's about direction, not perfection. Part of the promise of the new covenant is a new heart, Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33. That new heart comes with new desires. I see it in myself. Whatever else has motivated me in Scripture it is second now to this. I will again quote Owen: "Sin in the believer is a burden which afflicts him rather than a pleasure that delights him." Like St. John, Owen and others I've come to learn that I cannot delight in sin any longer because of my new nature. I now wish to pursue righteousness. My sin, because I am turning from it from the inside, is not what marks my life. My life instead is marked by a pursuit of holiness.

I want God to look within me and see no hidden thing. With David, the Christian cries out, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," Psalm 139:23-24. Some may want to be great leaders. Others may want to open their own businesses and have all that this world can offer. Me, I want to be a man with no wicked way inside. I want to be a Christian. John Calvin wrote, "I offer you my heart, Lord, promptly and sincerely." That's my honest cry. I love Jesus Christ. I can say it and the Holy Spirit bears witness that I'm not lying. There's nothing and no sin that I love more than Him! I want to be able to stand before God unashamed. God turns us through His word to make this possible for eternity. St. Paul knew that there was no un-confessed sin in his life. He knew it and was thus able to write, "For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord," 1 Corinthians 4:4. He was an open book before God and he knew that God intimately knew all things about him. Despite this I'll remind you that it was he who wrote Romans seven in the midst of so great a salvation.

Here's Paul's example for us all: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," Philippians 3:14. This is the example that every single Christian should be able to model before others. That's what I'm calling you to today. In all this reading, I hope you'll find within yourself a similar cry and example of grace being produced in your worship. There's great consolation when you learn that others have suffered just like you. I too have suffered against sin. I have played games

with my sin when I shouldn't have. I have lost so many fights because I fail to listen to the Lord. I have gone through dark nights of the soul where I've walked the streets in search of God only to find Him gone. I have wept aloud over my sin. I'm ashamed in fact that I've not cried more. Those nights often preceded the greatest days of mercy. It was His kindness to remove His presence from me, Psalm 119:71. It made me hate my sin all the more. I know that while there have been many ideas or motivators in my mind that have moved me over the years, that it is only His grace underneath it all that has made me change. It is by His grace alone that we are changed. It's by His grace alone that we, like Israel, are not consumed! Malachi 3:6. God has been gracious to me. He knows just how to build me, when to throw me from the nest, and when to coddle me. Like a gardener who knows a rose needs different attention than a tulip, God has cared for us individually in more ways than we'll ever know.

It's nothing but love for God in all of this that takes us home. A person may change outwardly for a hundred reasons, but a true worshipper changes from the inside out, Romans 2:29. It will be seen because it's the outworking of salvation. God's made me clean, made me fit, and made me ready. I, like any soldier, am engaged in warfare to please the one who enlisted me, 2 Timothy 2:4.

Here's the test: Do you love God? Do you love your salvation in accordance to the faith given in the Scriptures? Is it/He precious to you? Do you love this?

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy," 1 Peter 1:10-16.

May the grace of God sustain you in your walk! May you find a never ending supply of refreshment on this great journey to Christ! You are not alone, friend. I and many others are right there with you. There are many things that motivate us to live the Christian life. Ideas on the subject come and go year by year, and are of great help. Many truths in Scripture teach us how to fight sin. The one consuming passion of glorification and union with Christ, however, will never change. It is this that we're called to in maturity. It is this image beheld rightly in Scripture that will change us forever. We all

fight, “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,” Philippians 1:6. Oh, what a day that will be!

Thank you for your attention to this letter.