

Recognizing Sin

First Day of Unleavened Bread

(Sermon Notes) by Warren Zehrung 4/4/2015

Greetings brethren on this most significant Feast of Unleavened Bread. We hope that everyone enjoyed a very nice Night to be Much Observed last evening. May our observance of this day show forth the spirit of God's Church and of the Wonderful World to Come. After all, these Holy Days are given to us so that we might better see what God ultimately has in store for us.

It is not only the Feast of Tabernacles that pictures the Kingdom of God; all the Feasts of the Lord are important in God's Plan in fulfilling the Kingdom of God. Keep in mind that we will be celebrating Passover and Unleavened bread in the Kingdom as assuredly as we are today. We eagerly look forward to that day – just as Jesus does.

Luke 22:14 And when the hour was come [for Passover], [Jesus] sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.

Luke 22:15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer:

Luke 22:16 For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, **until** it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

Just try to imagine a time when the entire world will be keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread in sincerity and truth. We are so privileged to be able to do so at this time.

1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of **sincerity and truth**.

We always begin with the theme on the First Day of Unleavened Bread of **Coming out of Sin** – just like when Israel came out of Egypt, which is a type of sin. Egypt pictures sin.

Seven days from today – on the last Day of Unleavened Bread – we will speak of coming **completely** out of sin.

We eat unleavened bread for seven days – picturing the putting on of Christ who is the unleavened bread of **sincerity and truth**. That is how we keep the Feast with the Unleavened Bread of **sincerity and truth**.

But, in order to come out of sin, we first have to **recognize** what sin is. Do we recognize what sin is? We all think that we do! If we do not **recognize** sin, there is no way that we can **overcome** sin.

Could a great many of the Church brethren be “missing the mark” when it comes to being able to recognize what sin is? One of the definitions of sin is “missing the mark.” We are given so many cautions in the Scriptures about staying the course – staying on the strait and narrow. [Not straight, but strait which means very confining and restrictive.

We tell ourselves that we are OK, and doing just fine. Of course we examined ourselves before Passover. Here is a check list based on the Ten Commandments – Let's see how I'm doing: [Tongue in cheek going through most of the Commandments.]

I didn't kill anybody this year – check! I didn't take another man's wife - check! I didn't lie to a judge - check! I didn't bow down before a graven image or cuss using God's name - check! I didn't miss Church without a good reason all year - check! I didn't forget to send my folks a card for their anniversary - check! I didn't try to beat my neighbor out of his property or animals - check! I didn't rob any banks or trains - check!

I must be **really** doing well. I've examined myself – and I'm ready to take Passover worthily!

My dad was raised a Methodist, and my mother was raised a Catholic – and they would have answered all those questions in the exact same way! Check, Check, Check!

We in God's Church are being taught to live **God's way** for a much higher purpose → and that is to become like God. Do we think somehow that we have done our duty for the week because we've sat through a sermon? How many of us think we just have to get our ticket punched and do our time – an hour or two every Saturday – like the Protestants and Catholics do on Sunday?

We think that if the Pastor is happy with us – God must be happy with us. I'm sorry; it does not work that way at all.

Are we learning? Are we growing spiritually? Is the word of God having a real impact on who and what we are? Why then does God say that He will spew us out of His mouth?

It is because we have become **complacent** and think that we are doing exactly what it takes to make it into the Kingdom of God.

We worry **more** about accidentally eating some cookies and cream ice cream during the days of Unleavened Bread – than we do about offending someone.

Are we peace makers when we speak with others – or are we fault finders – or are we measuring ourselves and comparing ourselves to others? Is the church community a matter of competition for status and pecking order – to see who's on top – up there with the Pastor?

Our faith is about **relationships** with God and man – not about rituals and ceremony. The “religious” things that we do are meant to help us have a better understanding of the mind of God. All of God's Commandments govern right relationships with God and man.

That is why we go to Church every week – in order to provoke one another to love and good works. Not to be seen with friends.

The Catholics have to do their Easter duty. If they don't go to church all year – they go on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They think that that regimen is the godly thing to do. It does not help society. It is an abomination to God – but they come away from Easter feeling all righteous – and sometimes with a new Easter bonnet to boot!

We made some **significant changes** when we were first called. Our **eating** habits changed. We stopped going to church on **Sunday** – because we recognized that the Sabbath was the Lord's Day. We fasted 24 hours without food or water – for some of us, it was the first time we ever really took part in a **spiritual fast**. We stopped robbing God of **tithes** and offerings.

We learned that Christmas and Easter were abominations to God – and we began to keep the Feasts of the Lord (Leviticus 23). We began to respect the Ten Commandments and their expanded intent as well. We became a people different from the world and its ways.

Those changes were designed by God to help us become like He is. And yet, with those changes in our lives, we found out that we were to continue to grow in grace and knowledge. (2 Peter 3:18)

A mighty tree grows a little every year – just standing there. It is not that way for members of God's Church. As we go on to perfection – to the measure of the fullness and perfection of Jesus Christ – we must delve into the deeper aspects of God-life.

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the **fullness of Christ**.

God's **rules**, His principles and **laws** are for the purpose of having peaceful, prosperous, communities – without fear, hurt or repression. We, as Christians, are to be living according to the **laws** of the Kingdom of God – even now... to the fullest of their spiritual intent. God desires that every individual **develop** into secure mature talented individuals who are able to cultivate **Godly character**. Jesus is speaking of Godly character when He tells us:

Revelation 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me **gold tried in the fire**, that thou may be rich; and white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou may see.

Here in Isaiah 58 is one of the many places we find **pure religion** and **Christianity** defined in the Old Testament. Jesus is telling us that fasting is much more than an exercise in **hunger**. There is a real purpose in fasting.

Isaiah 58:6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to **loose** the bands of wickedness, to **undo** the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed **go free**, and that ye **break** every yoke?

Isa 58:7 Is it not to **deal** thy bread to the hungry, and that thou **bring** the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou see the naked, that thou **cover** him; and that thou **hide not** thyself from thine own flesh?

Who, if anyone, violates any of these? Let's take a **closer** look at each phrase here in Isaiah 58:6-7.

Loose the bands of wickedness -> We cannot go along with abuse or mistreatment of any of the brethren.

We all know stories of brethren who have been cast aside from the fellowship of the saints – not because of sin or heresy – but for political reasons. They just didn't fit in to the changing agenda from some headquarters somewhere.

Did we come to their rescue – **OR**, did we stick with the powers that be. God says **Loose the bands of wickedness**.

Undo the heavy burdens -> Sometimes brethren come to the point where they are unable emotionally, physically, financially to keep up with what is considered to be the norm. Were we there to help them over the hump – or did we just let them sink – saying to ourselves – I'm not in charge – it is not my problem.

Brethren, God says that when He shows us a situation – it does become our responsibility. We are clearly shown that we are not to omit the weightier matters of the law, **judgment, mercy, and faith**:

We are to seek justice for other brethren – or die trying. God tells us to **Undo the heavy burdens**.

Let the oppressed go free -> How often have we seen brethren in hopeless, helpless situations? Did we step in and try to ease the pain – encourage them to hold on – did we pray with them for deliverance? Did we put it all on the line for those who were hopelessly in bondage to their circumstances – or were we busy somewhere else?

Do we judge ourselves - **easily**? God says that we are to be involved in **letting the oppressed go free**.

Break every yoke -> This is speaking of those who would enslave us to sinful practices.

When the Church went into apostasy – those of us who stood up and refused the efforts of the usurpers of our true doctrine – were called trouble makers – we were belittled, demeaned and disfellowshipped by those who are church leaders even today.

Church leaders practice a **substitute** Christianity which puts a yoke of bondage on the brethren. They teach that pure religion is a **spectator** pastime where all you have to do is show up.

Jesus, on the other hand, tells us to get heavily involved in the **practice** of our faith – even if it kills you – and it might do just that. We are to break every yoke. The Holy Scriptures tell us to:

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

God says for us to **Break every yoke**.

Deal thy bread to the hungry -> Do we close our eyes to those in need?

Not the physically hungry – there are not many of those today – but the many who are spiritually hungry. We weren't called just to be **fed** – but to feed others. We have been called for a purpose – and that object is to live a life that will impact others in a positive way. God is using **us** – individually – even now to turn **others** to righteousness by the way we live.

Daniel 12:3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and **they that turn many to righteousness** as the stars forever and ever.

Does the manner in which we live our lives encourage others to turn to righteousness?

Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house -> do we go to our brethren to gain them again. Reconciliation is for the sake of healing the breach. Jesus' desire is that His people be one.

If your brother shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. None are to be cast aside and forgotten. God says to us: **Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house**.

Clothe the naked -> If we want to let ourselves off real easy – we say, “That hardly ever comes up these days.” “The Church organization takes care of it.” “Government programs are designed to mitigate almost every one of these things.” “Nobody's naked, nobody's hungry.”

This verse is speaking **spiritually** of those who are not wearing the white raiment of righteousness. As we saw in Daniel, **the wise turn many to righteousness** – they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness;

It is a scary thing to get involved with others to so great an extent. Have we ever been bold enough to convert the sinner from the error of his way? (James 5:20) When someone is headed for the **pit** – and we cheer him on we sin.

1John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and sees his brother **have need** [especially **spiritual need**], and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?

The answerer is the love of God does not dwell in him. God says: **Clothe the naked**.

One last phrase from Isaiah 58:7

Hide not thyself from thine own flesh -> a close Godly family relationship is the very foundation of society. Family concerns and needs come before organizational activities. Even in the narrowest of sense – Church brethren are coming short of being this kind of example to their community of brethren. Do we honor the parents that God gave us? Do we make it possible for our children to honor their parents? Is there proper respect in the home? God is a **Family** – we are brothers and sisters to Jesus Christ.

On this day which speaks to the subject of the **Unleavened Bread of Sincerity and Truth** – shouldn't we begin with family?

Godly love begins at home - **Hide not thyself from thine own flesh**.

Jesus began early in His public ministry to teach us how to recognize sin.

Brethren, you have seen a lot of **different attitudes** during your time in God's Church. So have I. Jesus Christ taught what kind of **attitude** a Christian must put on.

We know them as the "**Be Attitudes**." **The way to Be** - Attitudes.

Matthew 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

Matthew 5:2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the **poor in spirit**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Do we have to be someone who stands out and gets a lot of glory – or are we willing to be a servant to all – no matter how insignificant they may seem to be to others? I know of no other place that this attitude is clearly displayed – than when David asked Abigail to be his wife.

Abigail was **poor in spirit** and:

1Samuel 25:41 And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, **let** thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.

Are we able to be a **servant's servant**? That is the way it will be in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5:3).

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are they **that mourn**: for they shall be comforted.

Are we crying, sighing, mourning and weeping for the dilapidated state of God's Church today? Do we recognize sin? Do we see why Jesus talks about spewing us out of His mouth? Are we vexed like righteous Lot? Do we grieve that the Church has fallen from the high standards required of us by God?

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are **the meek**: for they shall inherit the earth.

Do we set out to have an attitude of meekness? Moses was the meekest of men. It does not mean to slough away out of sight, or to melt away into oblivion... But gentle and **humble in a masculine** way. Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for **I am meek and lowly in heart**: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Matthew 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

If we display an attitude of meekness before men – we will be meek before God and inherit the earth and reign and rule with Jesus Christ for a thousand years.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are they which do **hunger and thirst after righteousness**: for they shall be filled.

How many today hunger and thirst for acceptance – or to belong to something larger.

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and **his righteousness**; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the **merciful**: for they shall obtain mercy.

Mercy -> is one of the **weightier** matters of the law. When we are unmerciful – do we **recognize** that we are sinning?

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the **pure in heart**: for they shall see God.

That is the hard one isn't it? Let's explore it a little bit. This is talking about our heart of hearts – our deep motivation for the things we do – Our Heart defines who we are. We say "Sweetheart" because we do not marry someone until we truly know their **heart**. The question is – Do we know the motivations of our own hearts? Do we recognize sin?

2Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

2Corinthians 10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty **through God** [spiritual] to the pulling down of [**a mighty fortress**] strong holds;)

2Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**.

That is when we become **pure in heart – able to see God**.

Because we are in the flesh, the mighty fortress of which Paul speaks is **not** a fortified fortress on a hilltop that must be conquered with the armaments of war – but the mighty fortress we battle against is **in our heart**.

We've all seen this before – but let's hear it from God's flawless perspective.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

We all say not mine! My heart is as pure as the new driven snow. God tells us otherwise... about our hearts.

Jeremiah 17:10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

God alone truly knows our hearts.

Psalms 139:23 Search me, O God, and **know my heart**: try me, and know my thoughts:

Psalms 139:24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Our warfare is spiritual in nature - and victory comes from God alone.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the **peacemakers**: for they shall be called the children of God.

Do we always seek to make **lasting Peace** – or do we always have to have our pound of flesh – that keeps a war brewing.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Are we the Children of God? Blessed are the **peacemakers**: for they shall be called **the children of God**. Do we recognize sin?

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are they which are **persecuted for righteousness' sake**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

If we are **not** being reviled and persecuted for our faith and stance on righteousness – it might be because we aren't recognizing sin – and taking the steps God asks of us.

Matthew 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Matthew 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Matthew 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Matthew 5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

The Israelites began to leave Egypt on this the First day of Unleavened Bread. They should have left **sin** behind – but they took sin with them.

They all sinned – from Aaron on down. Remember when Moses was in the Mount with God.

Exodus 32:1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

Exodus 32:4 And [Aaron] received [gold earrings] at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

Exodus 32:5 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.

Exodus 32:6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

God had reminded them of the Sabbath - but they were used to Sunday worship in Egypt.

Exodus 32:19 And it came to pass, as soon as [Moses] came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.

Exodus 32:20 And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and dispersed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.

The picture here is that each man who turned to idols was made to drink of the slurry mixture of polluted gold so that it may be turned to dung.

Numbers 14:11 And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? [Moses prayed:]

Numbers 14:19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

Numbers 14:20 And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

Numbers 14:21 But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

Numbers 14:22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

Numbers 14:23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

Numbers 14:32 But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.

Numbers 14:33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness.

Numbers 14:34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even **forty years**, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

Numbers 14:35 I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

Numbers 14:26 They fell in the wilderness for provoking God over and over.

It seems foolish to us looking back to see all the Israelites behaving in a depraved manner. After seeing the glorious deliverance from the Egyptians and the red sea parting for escape – only to rush in, flash flood-like, and drown the pursuing chariots. The **pillar of fire** and the column of cloud was guiding them continuously.

You would think there would have been a major contingent of those delivered from Egyptian bondage who would have stood for God – and not gone into idolatry, decadence and naked debauchery. They were like those little rodent like Lemmings who, bent on destruction, follow each other off a cliff into the sea. Not a one in the group to sound a **warning** of impending disaster!

But, No. There was some inordinate “group think” or “mob rationalization” to go the wrong way. I believe that is what is happening at so many of the church organizations and local congregations today. “Group Think.”

They are all going to services in the same old place - sitting in the same old chair – not rocking the boat – not provoking (Hebrews 10:24) the minister to give them spiritual meat. They think that they are safe, and that everything must be okay.

Just as Jesus said, as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of man, and where everyone’s imagination was given over to evil continually. And that is what is happening. And it’s happening even within the church, because they are not fighting the sin within. And they are not allowing the laws and commandments of God to be written in their hearts and their minds through the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

As a young man being reprimanded for some infraction of behavior – I explained to my parents –“But all the guys were doing it.” Then my parents gave me their unique parental advice – “If they all jumped in the river – would you jump in the river too? In other words – it’s time you started thinking for yourself – and not blindly following the crowd. We are given every opportunity to follow God’s lead and not perish with the foolish.

Matthew 25:2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Matthew 25:3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

Matthew 25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

Matthew 25:5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

What is the sin committed by the foolish virgins? Where does it say that a lack of oil is a sin? Which commandment covers spiritual growth? Are we too foolish also - not to be able to answer this? Certainly no one is cast out forever without serious sin???

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Matthew 25:11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

Matthew 25:12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

The parable of the **wise and foolish virgins**... tells us to live spiritual lives before it is **too late**. Recognize sin!

Matthew 22:2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

Matthew 22:4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

Matthew 22:5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

Matthew 22:10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

We can understand those who did not respond - missing out. But consider the one who did respond to the invitation. What was his sin? Did he **recognize his sin**? He certainly did not overcome his sin.

Matthew 22:11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

Matthew 22:13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

The marriage supper where a guest is not properly attired... tells us to put on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The message to Laodicea... tells us to repent, put on Godly character, and be zealous. The message to Laodicea... tells us **not** to play along with the complacent, self-satisfied and lackadaisical crowd. There is no safety there. They do not **recognize** what sin is. Some brethren judge themselves more stringently than others.

I received a Letter from a member doing Passover & Unleavened Bread self-examination. I do not know if all Christians come to this point – but I suppose that **they should**. This member writes about the life of a Christian seemingly to be **impossibly hard**. In self-examination this person says, "I see more of myself than I really care to. I must strive to see myself as God sees me."

I will share with you - some of the letter in a moment: It would be incredibly humbling if everyone taking Passover saw what a wretched bunch we all are. God says that we are a **wretched** lot in these last days:

"Wretched" is twice in the Bible. -> "miserable" and "worthless."

Revelation 3:17 Because thou say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that thou art **wretched**, and **miserable**, and poor, and blind, and naked:

Again, there is God's **point of view** of His Church brethren. His perspective is more accurate than our own. In fact, most of the brethren think that things are just fine. The apostle Paul realized how desolate the human condition is:

Romans 7:24 O **wretched** man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Romans 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now **no condemnation** to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

We must **recognize sin** before we can defeat sin – and then the battle is won only by God – and not ourselves. The answer has to do with being close to God through much prayer. That is the only way we can stop sinning. God expects us to be victorious. *{Letter from member:}*

I received a letter from one of the brethren which prompted a lot of today's sermon. This person wrote:

"I hate my own sinful nature. It is so entrenched in me. It also seems to me, that the older I get, the more obvious it seems that I am **not** winning the battle against sin. Being that it is that time of year, Passover and unleavened bread, I have been reflecting on my own walk. I don't see much progress in my life as far as overcoming. I see too much corruption **in my own heart** and it shows up all too often in my actions and habits. I hope Jesus will be very merciful to me. I believe He died for me personally. I know that God's love for individuals as well as the whole world is so unique and strong for everyone to know that they are all individually and collectively special to God and Jesus."

"Thankfully, Jesus said if a man sins seventy times against another, - that when he repents, he is forgiven. And, so it is with God when we repent, even seventy times seven in one day. God **does** know our heart, even when we struggle with sin and evil habits and attitudes, He knows when we are repentant and when we are really helpless to overcome our faults. We need His power and all that it covers to help us through it all. Without Jesus we can't do anything, especially overcoming our own sinful nature. I know the account of the prodigal son, when the son returned, after wallowing with the hogs, the father wanted to graciously **cover** His wayward son with a fine robe, **rather than** scolding and ridiculing his son for living a reckless life. That is the **heart of God** for us to see. Even though we deserve nothing short of the worst, He wants to welcome us back to Him, to be in **his everlasting family** where real love exists forever. Who will save us from this body of death, I thank God that we have Jesus Christ to deliver us from the law of sin and death." [End Letter]

Let's understand that we cannot **recognize** sin or **overcome** sin without God's help. It is necessary to draw near to God in Prayer. Our own wisdom and willpower is not enough to overcome sin. Paul wrote about this in the book of Galatians, when he chastised the brethren for trying to live the Christian life strictly "by human effort" (Galatians 3:3).

Human effort is insufficient. That is why we are eating the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth – putting on Jesus Christ. If we had power to do it all ourselves, we would **not** need God!

Recognizing Sin, and overcoming sin requires our continuous, watchful, ever VIGILANT effort — EMPOWERED BY GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT!

Revelation 3:21 To him that **overcomes** will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Revelation 3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

End: Recognizing Sin

How to Be an Overcomer

by Herbert W. Armstrong 1964 (1892-1986)

WHY are we not more successful in living up to God's standard? WHY do we slip and fall occasionally? Here is how YOU can overcome where you are weakest and hardest tempted!

Do YOU have some "besetting sin"—some point of weakness, perhaps secret, you have been unable to overcome?

Have YOU ever met temptation, struggled with it, only to wake up a little later to the remorseful fact that you had slipped, and failed to overcome?

Or perhaps you are struggling with some habit that holds you as its slave—struggling, wrestling, always fighting it, yet somehow never able to conquer it.

Only the Overcomers

These things are serious. We MUST overcome these sins, these habits, these sudden temptations—be cleansed of them thoroughly—if we expect to inherit eternal life.

"To him that OVERCOMES," says Jesus, "will I grant to sit with me in my throne." "He that OVERCOMES, and keepeth my works unto the end, TO HIM will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." (Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21.)

Not all are even called, now. Many, tho they may have HEARD the true message, have never received a conscious convicting KNOWLEDGE of the truth. This is not the time when God is calling them.

But God is now calling SOME to a life of separation—to a new and different and Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life—in order that they may be wholly CLEANSED of sin, and that they may GROW in grace and knowledge, thus being prepared, trained, fitted for a position of solemn responsibility—that of king or priest—in God's KINGDOM! And it is ONLY those who qualify by the training, the overcoming, the spiritual development and growth, DURING THIS PRESENT LIFE, who shall thus reign with Christ. Study the parable of the pounds, in Luke 19:11-27.

So the Christian life is a new and a different life—an OVERCOMING life. Sin must be torn out, root and branch. We must be made righteous, holy.

Why We Stumble and Fall

Why, then, do so many of us continually stumble and fall? Yes, even those who do strive, struggle, and even PRAY, and PRAY for help, for victory, over some vicious habit? WHY?

First, notice a portion of Paul's instruction to the Philippians.

"And be found in Him, not having mine OWN righteousness, which is of the law, but THAT WHICH IS THROUGH THE FAITH OF CHRIST, the righteousness WHICH IS OF GOD BY FAITH." (Philippians 3:9.)

Notice, it is not OUR righteousness, but GOD'S.

David was inspired to write: "All Your commandments are righteousness." (Psalm 119:172.) Yes, and LOVE is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10)

The Kind of Love Required

Right here is one trouble. Too many Commandment-keepers are struggling along, trying to keep the Commandments in their own power and strength—thinking it is THEIR own personal human love that fulfills the Law!

Too many "Commandment-keepers" have only been converted to the ARGUMENT of keeping God's Commandments, and have never really EXPERIENCED definite repentance—for a real conversion is a DEFINITE EXPERIENCE! Such people need to go to a private place, alone with God, and get to their knees, and pour out their hearts to God, and stay with it until they really KNOW they have really repented.

No wonder so many become discouraged, and feel like giving up!

We do not even HAVE the kind of love that fulfills God's law and makes us righteous! LOVE is of God, for God IS love! And it takes "the love OF GOD... shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5), to fulfill the law and give us GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The law is SPIRITUAL (Romans 7:14). We are carnal. It takes a SPIRITUAL love to fulfill a spiritual law. The Holy Spirit within us is merely GOD'S LAW IN ACTION! And since God alone can supply the LOVE that makes us righteous, it becomes GOD'S righteousness, not ours.

How to Get Faith

But how do we receive this LOVE? Note again the Scripture quoted above: "... the righteousness which is of God BY FAITH."

It comes, then, by FAITH. Now most people seem to believe that the FAITH, by which we must receive everything God gives us, is something that we, ourselves, must work up and supply, by some kind of hard effort. And it does become SUCH AN EFFORT, doesn't it, trying to strive to have FAITH?

Foolish babes in Christ! Can't we see that if WE were able to supply the faith which brings all else that we, ourselves, would earn our own salvation by WORKS? It would be the kind of righteousness that is only FILTHY RAGS to God!

Stop trying to work up faith. You have no faith. The Scripture above speaks only of THE FAITH OF CHRIST! Not YOUR faith—CHRIST'S faith. Jesus had REAL FAITH! He performed miracles! And He rose from the dead—and HE LIVES.

Here is the secret! He gives—He imparts—HIS strong faith to you and to me! Yes, even FAITH is a gift of God—one of the spiritual GIFTS. (Ephesians 2:8; I Corinthians 12:9.)

Then how shall we go about getting more of it? By yielding, submitting our desires, our purposes, our wills, to HIM, by ASKING Him in real earnest persevering prayer, and by trusting Him to give it!

Why We Have Not Been Delivered

God's Word promises: "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; BUT WILL, WITH THE TEMPTATION, also MAKE A WAY OF ESCAPE, that you may be able to bear it." (I Corinthians 10:13.)

But has it not often seemed, in your experience, that God has failed to keep this promise? Temptation has come. You have struggled, even prayed, yet you were overpowered, and you did not find the way of escape! What is wrong?

Jesus said, "I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you." "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." God's Word promises, "Sin shall NOT have dominion over you." Yet have you not found that sin has had DOMINION over you, holding you its slave? Have you not fought it desperately, even with tears streaming down your face— only to fail?

How to Apply and Use Faith

WHY? What is wrong? Simply that we have not known how to receive, apply, and use the FAITH God promises to give!

First, there is something WE must do. Some go to one extreme and try to do it all. Others swing to the opposite extreme, plead with God, make little effort themselves, and expect Him to do it all.

James says "SUBMIT yourselves therefore to God. RESIST the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Submit! Resist! This takes effort

Peter says to humble ourselves, casting ALL our care upon the Lord, and to be sober and VIGILANT; because the devil is walking about, watching for the chance to tempt us when we are off our guard: "whom RESIST, steadfast IN THE FAITH" (I Peter 5:6-9). We are to resist Satan, and do it in the faith of Christ—but HOW?

The key to it all is "BE VIGILANT." Be on your guard! Be ever watchful! Be prepared! That's where we fall down! It takes constant, continuous, vigilant effort, never letting down!

Unless we, ourselves, had to put forth some effort we could not be OVERCOMERS! But if we had power to do it all, we should not need God! So it requires our effort—our continuous, watchful, ever VIGILANT effort—

EMPOWERED BY GOD'S SPIRIT!

James continues: "Draw near to God, and He will draw nigh unto you." (James 4:8.) Now we are getting closer to our answer! When temptation comes, we ARE TOO FAR FROM GOD—and we are then unable, SUDDENLY, on the spur of the moment to get close enough to Him to get the help and the deliverance we need!

It sometimes takes TIME to get CLOSE to God—into that intimate contact with Him so that we can draw on Him for the power we suddenly need!

In other words, when temptation unexpectedly has come, we have found ourselves caught off guard—out of prayer—out of contact with God—OUT OF SPIRITUAL TRAINING!

You were entering a CONTEST with Satan. You tried to wrestle with him, but you were OUT OF TRAINING, out of spiritual condition.

Suppose a prize-fighter would suddenly find himself, untrained and unprepared, in the ring in a contest with the world's heavyweight champion!

Do you think any living man could win? How much STRONGER is Satan, by comparison! No wonder we fail! Could such a fighter, who had been dissipating, carousing, weakening himself physically, SUDDENLY summon enough strength and skill to conquer the champion of the world? Could a mile runner run a successful race, and win, unless he trains, and trains, and prepares himself carefully for the race—unless he is IN CONDITION when it comes?

We can no more win these SPIRITUAL battles when out of SPIRITUAL training. All spiritual power and strength must come from God. We can drink it in from Him, only when we are IN CONTACT with Him—close to Him—in communion with Him!

And, when the temptations suddenly assail you, no matter how hard you then try, or cry out to God for help, you are simply TOO FAR AWAY FROM HIM to get help!

Spiritual training, to get and KEEP in constant vigilant condition to meet the foe of temptation and sin requires CONTINUOUS, EARNEST, PERSISTENT PRAYER! That is why we are commanded so often to PRAY WITHOUT CEASING! To KEEP IT UP!

If we draw near to God, and then KEEP close to Him, our problem will be solved. We will then have the FAITH. We will then be continually FILLED with His Spirit—His power to overcome.

We can keep in spiritual training only if we keep our affections—our minds—our thoughts—on SPIRITUAL things. Read Colossians 3:1-10. Most of us keep our minds filled with earthly, material cares and interests, turning to the spiritual only occasionally! Seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Sometimes it takes a siege of FASTING AND PRAYER—earnest, DETERMINED, PERSEVERING PRAYER—seeking God with all our might—with weeping—staying with it, DETERMINED, until we get thru. Then we must keep in CONTINUOUS prayer. Cast ALL our cares upon HIM. We are not doing that. If you do, there will be many things a day to pray about! And it takes daily PRIVATE prayer, in real earnest, besides family or public prayer. Is eternal life WORTH IT?

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HOW TO PREVENT SIN

by Herbert W. Armstrong 1968 (1892-1986)

Do YOU realize that if it is wrong to DO a certain thing, it is wrong to harbor THOUGHTS of that thing in your mind?

"ALL have sinned," says the Scripture.

What IS sin, anyway?

Satan ought to know — and he is the invisible influence who sways the course of this world. Hollywood is considered by many as the world's mecca of sin. On the newsstands in Hollywood may be found a very worldly booklet, written in a very light, "breezy," and satirical vein, titled "How to Sin in Hollywood." It gives a very worldly definition of sin — perhaps the definition of the very Devil who devotes his time to enticing people into it. The definition is expressive, and not far from the truth. Here it is: "Sin is THINKING THOUGHTS you ought not to be thinking about things you ought not to be DOING while you are THINKING that kind of THOUGHTS."

God's definition is: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). The law of "LOVE," as defined by the Ten Commandments. Jesus said: "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, OUT of the heart of men, proceed EVIL THOUGHTS adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness [violations of the law — the Ten Commandments] ..." (Mark 7:20-22).

"ALL have sinned," says the Scripture. And what man — especially what Christian, is there who has not time and again experienced the struggle against sin described by the Apostle Paul? "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do would not, that I do." Who is there who has not LOST that struggle, perhaps many times?

Of course no man, of himself, can live above sin. "With men it IS impossible," said Jesus, "but with God all things are possible." And Paul continues (Romans 8) to show that the only DELIVERANCE from this body of death is through Jesus Christ, and the indwelling power of God's Holy Spirit — "that the RIGHTEOUSNESS of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

Yes, but we have OUR part in it, too. And it all centers in the MIND.

REPENTANCE of sin means, literally, to CHANGE one's MIND in respect to sin. If we repent, and accept Jesus Christ as Saviour, the promise is we SHALL receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ... "and be renewed in the Spirit of YOUR MIND" (Ephesians 4:23) — the presence of the Holy Spirit is the RENEWING of THE MIND.

How does sin actually happen? "... every man is TEMPTED when he is drawn away of his own lust [desire], and enticed. Then when lust [the desire IN THE MIND] hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14-15).

The TEMPTATION is in the MIND. When you THINK about the thing that tempts you — let your mind dwell on it — turn it over in your mind — whether it be a desire to GO some place, to DO something, or to HAVE something you know is wrong — that THINKING ABOUT IT finally conceives — leads to ACTION — and breeds SIN. You finally DO the thing you kept thinking about, wanting to do. If you keep thinking about it, after a while you'll be UNABLE to resist it. That's why you've lost so many of these struggles against sin — you kept THINKING about it, desiring it, wanting it.

The way to prevent sin is to let God's Spirit fill the mind. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

The way to put a thing OUT of the mind is to put an OPPOSITE thought IN the mind. So often I have noticed parents of babies strive so hard to "shush" up the baby when it is crying in church. There's something in the baby's mind that is causing its crying or fretting. Just saying "shush!" or commanding the baby to stop fussing doesn't usually get very good results. We have raised four children, and long ago I learned the trick of quieting the baby by GETTING ITS MIND ON SOMETHING ELSE. Instead of commanding it to stop crying, attract its attention with some new object — get it interested in playing with that object (I have often used my fountain pen with excellent results) — and before you know it the child will forget all about its crying. Try using this same method on yourself. But instead of material or worldly things, a mature person should use self-discipline and set his mind on spiritual things. Open your Bible. Put the study of some SPIRITUAL subject in your mind. Next time you are tempted, try it. Pray over it. Ask God to help you. See how rapidly you begin to win the victory over temptation and sin, and how marvelous will be your spiritual and CHARACTER growth.

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