



# *Foundations of*

# FAITH

## Overcoming Sin

### Lesson 17

Truth is often found in apparent contradictions. For example, John writes, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (I John 1:10) Yet a few verses later he adds, “Whosoever abides in him sins not.” (I John 3:6) The apparent discrepancy disappears when we discover that two different tenses are used in these verses in the original Greek in which John wrote. The second passage may properly be translated, “Whosoever continues to abide in him, does not keep on sinning.” What John is saying is not that it is impossible for the Christian to sin, but rather that the one who lives the Christian life will not live a life of sin, even though he may occasionally slip through human weakness.

Whether we will be forgiven of our sins depends upon our motive in sinning. The faithful Christian who through weakness or ignorance transgresses the will of God may receive forgiveness by approaching God through Christ as John explains, “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:1, 2) If, on the other hand, we rebel against God and intentionally sin, he will not forgive us until we have a change of heart. Thus we read, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaining no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” (Heb. 10:26, 27) By sinning wilfully we have rejected the only sacrifice for sins, Jesus Christ,

and until such time as we sincerely repent there is no means of our attaining forgiveness. Of course, the rebel can be forgiven, but only by submitting his will to that of God and in so doing he ceases to be a rebel.

In this lesson we are interested in ways in which the Christian may overcome sin. That it is not impossible to overcome sin is shown by Paul when he said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. 4:13) Certainly this includes resisting temptation. The following things are desirable if we are to be successful in overcoming sin.

**(1) RECOGNISE THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.** The devil works in devious ways. He is sometimes “as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he might devour.” (I Peter 5:8) Sometimes he is a tempter. (I Thess. 3:5) But perhaps as often as not, Satan is “transformed into an angel of light.” (II Cor. 11:14) He dresses himself in such a way as to make evil appear good and is thus able to trick Christians into sinning. The Christian must, therefore, carefully study the nature of sin and determine in his own mind in advance how he will act should he be placed in a questionable position. By thus anticipating the manoeuvres of the devil he may be able to avoid a situation in which he may be led to sin.

**(2) ACKNOWLEDGE OUR WEAKNESSES.** “Wherefore seeing we also are surrounded about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Heb. 12:1) There are certain sins which beset us more than others. One person’s besetting sin may be the

improper use of the tongue; another's may be drunkenness. What is one person's strong point may be another's weak one. Each Christian should be honest with himself and frankly admit his own weaknesses. The organisation known as Alcoholics Anonymous teaches that one cannot overcome alcoholism until he admits to himself that he is an alcoholic. So it is with the Christian and sin. He cannot overcome it until he freely recognises his own weaknesses.

**(3) DETERMINE TO MORTIFY SIN (PUT IT TO DEATH).** James teaches that the Christian in his petitions to God should "ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." (James 1:6) As in our prayers, we must resolve in overcoming temptation that we shall not fail. There can be no room in our resolutions for "ifs" or "buts." The one who begins to defeat sin by saying, "Maybe I can do it," is bound to fail, because he has faith neither in himself nor in God. Or, as James concludes his thought, "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." (James 1:7, 8)

**(4) TRY OUR BEST TO RESIST SIN.** "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) The word implies sincere, conscious effort. If we are to resist the devil, and hence temptation, we must put forth every bit of effort at our command that we may conquer. Paul says, "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight as, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected." (I Cor. 9:26, 27 A.S.V.) Notice that Paul uses the words "fight" and "buffet" to express his efforts to overcome his weaknesses. These words indicate a maximum of effort on Paul's part. Certainly if this great man of God was afraid that by not exerting himself to the fullest he might be lost, Christians today cannot expect to overcome sin and win eternal life if they give the Lord less than their best. "And if the righteous **scarcely** be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear." (I Peter 4:18) Even with his very best the Christian will have nothing to spare in the day of judgment.

**(5) LOOK FOR THE WAY OF ESCAPE.** One of the most blessed of all promises is expressed in I Corinthians 10:13 (A.S.V.), "There is no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you

are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Notice that we are not told that we will not be tempted, but rather that the Christian will not be tempted beyond what he can bear. Furthermore, with each temptation God has provided an escape. It is up to the Christian to find that way and that requires searching on his part. Sometimes the way of escape is found in the next suggestion for overcoming sin.

**(6) AVOID TEMPTING SITUATIONS.** A skilful car driver is not always a good driver. Although he may have the ability to react quickly and efficiently in difficult situations, he may through pure carelessness sometimes be placed in circumstances from which his skill cannot extricate him. In the same way, the Christian who overcomes sin is not the one who tries to get as close to it as possible without succumbing, but the one who cautiously stays as far away from it as he can. Therefore Paul warns, "But you, O man of God, flee these things." (I Tim. 6:11)

**(7) BE VIGILANT.** "Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12) The devil does his most effective work when we become complacent. It is then that we relax our guard and he is able to place before us a temptation for which we are no longer prepared. Constant vigilance is the price the Christian must pay for overcoming sin.

**(8) FILL OUR LIVES WITH GOOD.** It is an old cliché that an idle brain is the devil's workshop. If we succeed in rooting out sin from our lives, we cannot keep it out permanently unless we fill the void created with that which is good. The ex-gambler, for example, will be overcome by an overwhelming urge to return to his previous way of life unless he fills the time formerly used for gambling with something profitable. One advantage that the Christian has over the non-Christian is that in overcoming sin the disciple of Christ has more worthy objectives and may therefore more easily fill his life with that which is good.

**(9) SECURE HELP OF OTHER CHRISTIANS.** Paul admonishes, "Bear you one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2) Our burdens are not all physical. The assistance a Christian receives from the counsel of a brother in Christ often spells the difference between success and failure in overcoming sin. Even the very act of telling a brother our troubles often helps to bring the solution into proper focus.

“But just to feel you have a friend,  
 Who will stand by unto the end,  
 Whose sympathy through all endures,  
 Whose warm handclasp is always yours,  
 Although there’s nothing he can do,  
 It helps somehow to pull you through,  
 And so with fervent heart we cry,  
 ‘God bless the friend who just stands by.’ “

- J.M. McCaleb.

**(10) PRAY.** The closest friend of all is God. He is attentive to the petitions of his children. Therefore Jesus tells us, “Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you ...If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:6,11) This includes asking for wisdom and strength which we need in resisting temptation. And when shall we pray to him? At all times, but especially

when we feel that we are being tempted. A silent prayer to God in the midst of temptation will be heard by him quite as quickly as one offered in the solitude of our closet.

**(11) TRUST GOD.** Prayer implies trust, yet it is possible to utter a prayer to God without fully placing our confidence in him. Saving faith is trusting faith. We are not just to believe that God might or could deliver us from temptation, but rather that he will. When we place our hand in that of the Lord, there is no room for doubt.

Success in overcoming sin depends upon both God and the sinner. One who is not a Christian may make some progress on his own, but he can never conquer without divine aid. Therefore these suggestions for overcoming the temptations of the devil are based on the supposition that one is first a disciple of Christ.

TEST ON LESSON 17

After each of the following scriptures write the suggestion for overcoming sin which most nearly matches the thought of the scripture. Each suggestion is used once. The suggestions are: **(a)** Recognise the deceitfulness of sin; **(b)** Acknowledge our weaknesses; **(c)** Determine to mortify sin; **(d)** Try our best to resist sin; **(e)** Look for the way of escape; **(f)** Avoid tempting situations; **(g)** Be vigilant; **(h)** Fill our lives with good; **(i)** Secure help of other Christians; **(j)** Pray; **(k)** Trust God.

1. Luke 22:40 .....
2. 1 Corinthians 10:12 .....
3. James 4:7 .....
4. Hebrews 13:5, 6. ....
5. I Corinthians 10:13 .....
6. Colossians 3:5 .....
7. Romans 7:18, 19 .....
8. I Thessalonians 5:22 .....
9. Colossians 3:12-14 .....
10. Hebrews 3:13 (end of verse) .....
11. Romans 15:1 .....

**Fill in the following blanks:**

1. Three ways in which the devil works are: .....  
..... and  
.....
2. If we bear one another's burdens we are fulfilling the law of .....
3. Whether one succeeds in conquering sin depends upon both ..... and  
.....

**Write true or false after the following statements:**

1. John teaches that it is impossible for the Christian to sin. ....
2. God will forgive a rebel who does not repent. ....
3. One may sin through ignorance. ....
4. One who has a spiritual weakness should not admit it. ....
5. The faithful Christian does not have to try hard to overcome sin. ....
6. The Lord has always provided us a way of escape from temptation. ....
7. He will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. ....
8. Once we have been quite successful in overcoming sin we can relax. ....

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### Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – 1 (j)  
2 (g)  
3 (d)  
4 (k)  
5 (e)  
6 (c)  
7 (b)  
8 (f)  
9 (h)  
10 (a)  
11 (i)

Section 2 – (1) (Order not important) a roaring lion, a tempter, an angel of light.  
(2) Christ.  
(3) God, sinner.

Section 3 – F, F, T, F, F, T, T, F.

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