

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Something that has been on my heart for quite some time now, is the disunity among believers. “Christianity” has so many different groups, denominations, and beliefs that it is honestly laughable. Even non-believers scoff at us and say “Why should I believe you when you can’t even agree amongst yourselves?”. And that is a fair question. Why should they? We have a system of, if you don’t agree with one church, denomination, or message, just go down the street to another one. But here’s the problem... They can’t all be right. They can’t all be teaching the truth because almost every church teaches something slightly different. Doesn’t this bother anyone else? It’s painful to see the disunity and division, and it’s even more painful to see so many people still in bondage, and until we come together in *one* faith and in *one* mind, we will never be truly fruitful. In an outcry for unity and freedom, this is my thesis on the gospel, and on the topic of “freedom from sin” specifically.

What Does it Truly Mean to be Free From Sin?

I’ve heard many different definitions of what “freedom from sin” means, but again, they can’t all be true. I’ve heard people say things like “Being free from sin means you are free from the chains of sin,” “Freedom from sin means you are free from the punishment or penalty of sin.” But what does that even mean? Free from the chains of sin? We have gotten so “wordy” in the way we talk and it leaves so much room for misunderstanding. We desperately need to start being very clear about what we mean and what the Bible says.

What is Sin?

The first topic I want to address is the question of “What is sin?”. I have also heard a wide variety of answers to this question, and it seems that many people do not agree on this either. This is an incredibly important foundation to lay, because without a solid and clear understanding of what counts as sin, people can (and do) call anything they personally don’t agree with, or that they find uncomfortable, sin.

It’s interesting to discover that there is an Old Testament definition of sin, and a New Testament definition. Here’s the Old Testament definition:

Leviticus 5:17 (AMP): Now if anyone sins and does any of the things which the LORD has forbidden, though he was not aware of it, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment.

In contrast, here is how the New Testament defines sin:

James 4:17 (AMP): So any person who knows what is right to do but does not do it, to him it is sin.

Interesting comparison, no? I have not found anywhere that Jesus ever referred to the Old Testament definition. So, it appears that the definition of sin under the New Covenant of Jesus is doing anything that you **know** to be wrong. Or, worded another way, refusing to do what you **know** to be right. And how do we know something is right or wrong? Besides certain things in Scripture that we are clearly told to avoid, like in 1 Corinthians 6:9, God writes it on our hearts.

Hebrews 8:10-13 (NIV): This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹²For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." ¹³By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

Interesting to note that in verse 13 it says He made the Old Covenant obsolete. When God writes the law on our hearts, it is a very personal thing. He may put one thing on someone's heart, while someone else may not have that same thing written on his. This is the only way we can have "disputable matters." There are many things that the Bible does not directly address; that's why Paul talked about disputable matters in Romans 14.

Romans 14:1-5 (NIV): Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵One

person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. ***Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.***

"Being fully convinced in their own mind." This is why it can be a sin for one person to drink alcohol, while for another, it is not. If someone believes it is a sin to drink alcohol, for whatever reason they have, yet chooses to do so anyway, he has just gone against his own conscience, and has sinned against the law that was on his heart. The other person, who has no such law on his heart, can enjoy an alcoholic beverage and continue to stand before God with a clean conscience, as he has not done anything he knew to be wrong.

Romans 14:23 (NLT): But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. ***If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.***

Since it does not appear that Jesus ever referenced the Old Covenant definition of sin, and in Hebrews 8, it called the Old Covenant "obsolete," I will continue to build on this foundation of sin being what we *know* to be wrong, or a *willful* choice, and not ignorance.

I keep hearing teachings that really minimize sin and its consequences, but the Bible seems pretty clear throughout the Old and New Testament about the consequences of sinning against God:

Isaiah 59:2: "But ***your iniquities have separated you from your God;*** and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV): ⁹Or do you not know that ***the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*** Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

V. 10, MSG: ...***don't qualify*** as citizens in God's kingdom.

How do we just skim over these passages and not hear what they are saying? They "don't qualify as citizens in God's Kingdom." And in case someone wants to try to say "It's talking about people who *live* like that, who habitually do those things, *they* won't inherit God's kingdom. But everyone slips up once in a while." But it doesn't say that, does it? It says ***anyone*** who does these things will not inherit the kingdom. We have a

bad habit of adding or changing words to make Scripture fit our doctrines, instead of making sure our doctrines line up with Scripture.

Another thing I hear a lot is “We are righteous by the blood of Jesus, so it’s okay to make mistakes.” There are two points to this. One thing being implied here is that a mistake is the same as sin. The issue is that the very definition of a “mistake” is that it is an *unknown* wrong, due to inadequate knowledge.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary entry: *Mistake: 2 :something that is not correct : a wrong action or statement proceeding from faulty judgment, **inadequate knowledge**, or inattention.*

This, plus our foundation from the beginning that sin is a *willful*, or *known* choice, tells us that a mistake is not the same as sin.

Rev. Asa Mahan wrote a book titled *Christian Perfection*, and he states something quite profound...

It will readily be perceived, that perfect holiness, as above described, does not imply perfect wisdom, the exclusive attribute of God. The scriptures, speaking of the human nature of Christ, affirm, that he “increased in wisdom.” This surely does not imply that his holiness was less perfect at one time than at another. So of the Christian. His holiness may be perfect in kind, but finite in degree, and in this sense imperfect; because his wisdom and knowledge are limited...

So, yes, “everyone makes mistakes,” but that is not the same as “everyone sins.” We are using softening words like “mistake” to minimize sin.

1 Corinthians 15:34 (NLT): Think carefully about what is right, and **stop sinning**.

Another thing that people often take from the above sentence is “Even when you sin, you are still righteous, because of the blood of Jesus.”

But that directly contradicts 1 John 3...

1 John 3:4-10 (HCSB): ⁴Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law. ⁵You know that He was revealed so that He might take away sins, and there is no sin in Him. ⁶Everyone who remains in Him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen Him or known Him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you! **The one who does what is right is righteous**, just as He is righteous. ⁸The one who commits sin is of the Devil, for the Devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the Devil’s

works. ⁹**Everyone who has been born of God does not sin**, because His seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰This is how God's children—and the Devil's children—are made evident.

How can we say “even when we sin, we are still righteous” when the Bible clearly tells us “He who does what is **right** is righteous, and he who **sins** is of the Devil”? Again, we have a very bad habit of changing words to make Scripture fit our doctrines, instead of changing our doctrines to fit Scripture.

It is also interesting to note that in 1 John 3:10, it tells us how we can know the children of God, versus the children of the devil. *By sin*. This throws the “Everyone is a child of God” theory out the window, unfortunately.

There are many, very sobering verses concerning this topic, however 1 John 3:4-10 is one of the most heavy, and sobering ones, in my opinion.

Once Saved, Always Saved

Another thing I would like to address is the question of “Can we lose our salvation?”. Because if we can't (i.e., the “once saved, always saved” idea), then anything we do after being “born again” doesn't really matter. Think about it for a minute: if it is impossible to lose your salvation, and Jesus already forgave your past *and* future sins, then why does doing right and being “good” matter? Why fight temptation? Why grieve for your friends or neighbors and continue to tell them they need to stop doing some “bad” thing they are doing? Because the Bible says not to do it? But, if they're “saved,” and if “once saved, always saved,” why waste your energy? They are going to heaven anyway. Why bother changing your ways, behaviors, or mentalities? I have heard the argument “Well, fighting temptation and doing good is the proof that someone is truly saved. So, if they're doing bad things and are unrepentant of them, they probably aren't actually saved yet.” This is true. However, here's a heavy passage from Hebrews that addresses the topic of losing your salvation after becoming “born again:”

Hebrews 10:26 (HCSB): For if we deliberately sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries.

v. 26, CEB: If we make the decision to sin after we receive the knowledge of the truth, there isn't a sacrifice for sins left any longer...

If we sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth... This is pretty clear that we **can** lose our salvation. This should be pretty sobering to all of us... Hebrews 10:26 makes it pretty

clear that we cannot sin (i.e., do what we *know* is wrong) and maintain our position in Christ.

Perfection

At this point, some might say, with some level of snarkiness, “But no one is perfect! Are you trying to say that you are perfect?” This is usually said as a trap to the person speaking. To this, I would like to refer to Matthew 5.

Matthew 5:48 (HCSB): Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Whoa. It has been so ingrained in us to believe and say “No one is perfect” and it would be considered blasphemous to say otherwise. But here is Jesus literally *telling* us to be perfect! As *God Himself* is perfect! And I would like to remind you that this is a command from God, and any command God gives is completely obeyable, or else He would be unjust to give us that command.

At this point, I would like to bring back to memory what Rev. Asa Mahan said.

It will readily be perceived, that perfect holiness, as above described, does not imply perfect wisdom, the exclusive attribute of God.

Being perfectly holy does not imply we will know how to handle every single situation perfectly. That would require perfect wisdom, which as stated, is the exclusive attribute of God.

The Problem In the Garden

In Genesis, we read about the Garden of Eden and of the Tree of Life. From the very beginning of creation, God’s plan was for us to be able to eat from the Tree of Life and live eternally with Him. But because of *sin*, we have been cut off from it.

Genesis 3:22-24 (HCSB): The LORD God said, “Since man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever.” ²³So the LORD God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.

God cut us off from the tree because when Adam sinned, something inside of us changed. We became corrupted with a sinful nature, instead of God's nature. If He let us eat from the tree with the sinful nature, sin would live forever.

But in God's mercy, He has given us—and every person—the opportunity to repent from our sins, come back to God, be washed and made **new**, and eventually eat from the Tree of Life and live forever, like He planned from the beginning.

One time in prayer, God asked me "What was the original sin?". After a little pondering, I said "Rebellion." "Right," He replied. And what is rebellion? Knowing what is wrong and *choosing* to do it anyway. So, tell me, if the original reason we were cut off from the Tree of Life was because of rebellion, why in the world would He allow us to eat from it when He returns, if we still have that same problem? And what did Jesus really do for us if we still have sin? If we can't stop sinning until we die, then death becomes our savior, not Jesus.

We've all heard, many times, the quotes of "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" and "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." But what is the context here? Free from what? Reading vv. 31-36 in context makes it very clear that Jesus was talking about setting us free from sin:

John 8:31-36 (NIV): To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "***If you hold to my teaching***, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, ***everyone who sins is a slave to sin***. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶***So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***"

So if everyone who sins is a slave to sin, and Jesus can set us free, the context demands the meaning to be He will set us free from sin. Then He reinforces the point by saying that "a slave"—which He just defined as *one who sins*—"has no permanent place in the family." But notice in v. 31, there is a condition attached to being set free: "If you hold to my teaching..." What does it mean to "hold to" His teaching? Simply this:

CEB: "...if you remain faithful to my teaching."

CJB: "If you obey what I say..."

CEV: "If you keep on obeying what I have said..."

EASY: "Continue to obey the words that I have spoken to you."

EXB: "If you continue to obey my teaching..."

That is, we will be free from sin if we simply obey Him.

Another thing we quote frequently is “There is no guilt, shame, or condemnation in Christ Jesus.” But at the exact same time we say “The guilt and shame you feel when you sin is the proof that your conscience is working and that He’s made you alive.” What? There’s no guilt or shame when you’re in Jesus, but it’s also the proof that you are? How contradictory is that? You want to know how you can truly walk free from guilt, shame, and condemnation? *Stop sinning!* Seriously. Stop doing what you know is wrong. It’s as simple as that. Jesus gives us a new start to life, a clean slate, and we are expected to walk in it and live like it, not go back to our old, sinful ways. The only way to be truly free from guilt, shame, and condemnation, is to stop sinning against God. If you do not feel guilty when you do something wrong (i.e., sin), your conscience is seared. We **should** feel bad when we do wrong!

At the beginning of this letter, I said we need to start being very clear on what we mean when we speak, and clear on what the Bible says. So, let me be crystal clear...

- Jesus suffered and died to actually *remove* the sinful nature from us and give back God’s Holy nature (2 Peter 1:3-4), not just “cover it up” with His blood.
- Sin is different than a mistake (James 4:17).
- We are only accountable to what God has written on our own hearts, not someone else’s convictions (1 Corinthians 10:29).
- Perfection is actually attainable, and is commanded (Genesis 17:1, Deuteronomy 18:13, 1 Kings 8:61, Matthew 5:48).
- It is possible to completely stop sinning (Psalm 4:4, 1 Corinthians 15:34, Ephesians 4:26, 1 John 2:1)...
- And it is necessary to completely stop sinning (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21).

After continuing to study this topic, I am completely convinced that if we claim to be born again, yet still sin, we do not know God and we do not currently have any share in His Kingdom. I believe that many who claim to be believers are not actually saved yet; however, I also believe that there are many, very genuine people, who have just simply never been told anything other than “You will always sin.” There are people who believe they sin every day, but can’t even tell you what sins they’ve committed. But because they’ve been taught that it’s impossible to completely stop sinning, they believe they must have sinned *somehow*. How sad.

I highly encourage anyone who reads this to also read two other books that go into great detail and discussion on this topic.

Is It Possible To Stop Sinning?, by Dave Arns

Christian Perfection, by Rev Asa Mahan

These two highly knowledgeable authors discuss and explain the topic of freedom from sin very well and shed a lot of light on the fallacies of traditional teachings, and mainstream Christianity.

Let's start asking more questions. Let's get hungry for God and for truth. Let's finally come into unity.

Blessings.