

When You Fall

What do you do with sin??

By Steven L. Pogue

The IRS received an anonymous letter:

Gentlemen:

Enclosed you will find a cashier's check for \$150. I cheated on my tax return last year and have not been able to sleep ever since. If I still have trouble sleeping I will send you the rest.¹



Each of us wants to feel forgiven for the wrong things we have done. The question is, where does this forgiveness come from?

As a Christian, all of your sins are forgiven. You probably believe that from the Bible. But how do you respond to it? A friend who counsels many believers commented: "Some Christians don't really believe they have sinned; others don't believe they are forgiven."

I would like to help you appreciate both the reality of your sin and the reality of Christ's forgiveness.

What Sin Is

Ernest Hemingway once said that if something is moral, you feel good afterwards; if immoral, you feel bad afterwards. That's a popular view of sin – many have lived by it. But it's not a biblical view. Biblically, sin is an attitude of wanting your way instead of God's way.

How much does sin matter to God? He cannot tolerate it. "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." (Habakkuk 1:13a) "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5a)

That may seem unimportant. Hasn't Jesus paid for all your sins? Why be concerned about sin when God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life? Perhaps you should view sins as mistakes, mere miscues in life.

God never views sin as such. Because of one sin, Adam and Eve were exiled from paradise. Because of sin God brought a flood upon the earth's inhabitants in the days of Noah. He brought fire upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their blatant immorality. Sin kept the original children of Israel in the wilderness for forty years.

God hates sin. Yet to us, sin feels good, and we do it. Like Adam and Eve, we think we can know evil and yet not be overcome by it. But we do not become like God.

God knows of the existence of evil, yet God is not evil nor does He give in to evil. We, on the other hand, are attracted to it, and we give in to it.

The Guilty Party

Whenever you sin, God's Spirit inside you is grieved. Sometimes He'll cause you to feel guilty. In sinning, you are choosing at that instant to live independently of the Lord's will for you. That doesn't cause God to hate you. He still loves you. But it saddens Him: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Ephesians 4:30) To understand how sin does affect you, let's look at the difference between your relationship with God and your fellowship with God.

Your **Relationship** With God

Began when you received Christ (John 1:12)

Everlasting (1 Peter 1:3,4)

Maintained solely by God (John 10:27-29)

Never changes (Hebrews 13:5)

Your **Fellowship** With God

Began when you received Christ (Colossians 2:6)

Can be hindered (Psalm 32:3-5)

Maintained in part by you (1 John 1:9)

Changes when you sin (Psalm 66:18)

Sin does not affect God's eternal **relationship** with you – that was established when you trusted in Christ's payment for your sins. Christ died for all your sins – past, present, and future. At that time, your entire life was in the future. Because of your faith in Jesus, you are totally forgiven. Your relationship with God is secure.

However, sin affects your **fellowship** with God. (Fellowship means your earthly, moment-by-moment association.) Sin affects your communication with Him and your usefulness in doing His will. Sin dulls you to the things Christ wants you to be thinking about and to be doing.

Psalm 32:3-5 says: "There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, 'I will confess them to the Lord.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."

This is the correct response to sin. He didn't deny sin. He didn't become preoccupied with it. He confessed it.

Confessing Sin and Repenting

What does it mean to confess sins and repent? First, confession means to agree with God. He already knows you've sinned, so you might as well be honest! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Confession means freely admitting our sin and accepting God's attitude about our sin.

Confession does not mean begging God for forgiveness. Christ already paid the penalty for all of our sins, and God's forgiveness is available automatically when we confess. The reason God can make this forgiveness available to you instantly is Christ's death on the cross, not the strength or humility with which you confess your sin.

Repentance means to change your actions concerning your sin. It involves agreeing with God that you were wrong and that you do not want to continue to commit that sin.

But I Still Feel Guilty!

There will be times when you still feel guilty even after you've confessed your sin. It somehow seems spiritual to berate ourselves for committing such an awful sin, and we think that if we can lower ourselves in our own eyes, God will be pleased with our humility.

But that's not the way God sees us. Part of confession is thanking God that all of our sins have been paid for by Christ. On that basis God says, "I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 9:12) Thanksgiving involves faith because you are responding to what God's Word says is true about you instead of how you feel. To berate yourself focuses on your sin rather than on Christ and His forgiveness.



Sometimes we mistake temptation for sin. But keep in mind that everyone is tempted. Even Jesus was tempted...but He didn't give in to His temptations – He didn't sin. If you are being tempted, don't chastise yourself. You can choose not to dwell on tempting thoughts and you can ask God for the strength to avoid the sin. Don't feel guilty about being tempted. A great verse to learn, to bring to mind when you battle temptation, is 1 Corinthians 10:13.

God has completely forgiven you of all the things you have done. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) He doesn't look back now on your sins or your failures with condemnation, and neither should you. Again God says, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." (Hebrews 10:17) The cloud of guilt is gone! Accept God's complete forgiveness.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." (Romans 8:2) The Christian life is a life of freedom: freedom from guilt and freedom to live as God intends, which is ultimately the most satisfying life. It is a process of growth, of becoming like Christ and reflecting Christ. And it takes time to grow!

1. Charles Swindoll, *Come Before Winter* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1985), p.89.

*This article is an excerpt from Steven L. Pogue's book, **The First Year of Your Christian Life**. If you would like to purchase a copy of this book, you may do so here: www.campuscrusade.com/books.*