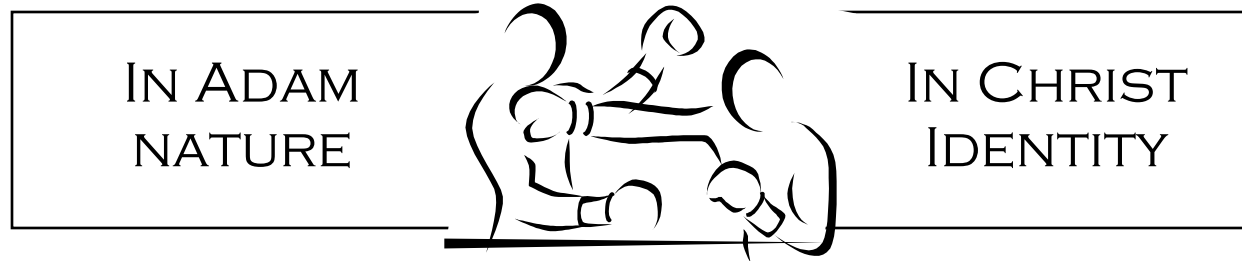


CHAPTER 12

Reigning Grace AND PERSONAL SIN



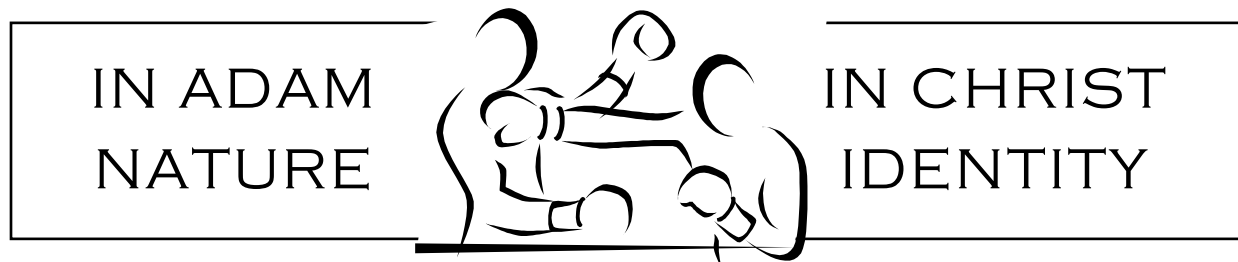
Patrick J. Griffiths @ 2009

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in the Storyline of the Bible. She is determined by design to have a God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching focused on personal discipleship through intentional and systematic instruction; a Global-impacting mission that resolves to be a church planting church; and a Grace-based fellowship where disciples are invited to live under a reigning grace characterized by a Gospel-driven sanctification that celebrates a divine monergism to the Christian life.

CHAPTER 12

REIGNING GRACE AND PERSONAL SIN

¹ “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1, 2).



AN INITIAL COMMENT

In 1 John 2:1-2, John addresses sin in the life of the believer with this statement of fact:

¹ “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1, 2).

God’s declared will is that we do not sin. Yet despite this clear statement, our experience shows us to be contrary. We do sin. What is to be a biblical response to known sin in the believer’s life? I mark it as known, because if the sin is unknown or we are ignorant of it, then there can be no real response to it.

I am personally convinced the Christian life is NOT to be one of frustration, but victory. This does not mean life will be easy or that everything will now work to our immediate comfort or circumstantial happiness. However, it does mean that in the midst of our greatest defeat we can still have the confidence of God's unconditional acceptance and efficacious empowerment as conquerors. Throughout John's writings, he notes how our Lord's intent is that we have joy (John 15:11; 16:24; 17:13; 1 John 1:4).

"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and **that your joy may be made full**" (John 15:11).

"Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, **so that your joy may be made full**" (John 16:24).

"But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world **so that they may have My joy made full in themselves**" (John 17:13).

"These things we write, **so that our joy may be made complete.**" (1 John 1:4).

As those who are now living in Christ and thus "under grace," what does such a relationship look like in the life of the believer on a moment-by-moment basis? Should grace impact the way I currently live the Christian life? Does grace matter?

I. What Place Does Sin Have In The Life Of The Believer Under Grace?

A. The Reality Of Sin In Me

1. Sin is always present in this body of flesh

Because of your old nature sin is always with you. There is a side of you that is always acting carnal, natural, and unregenerate. Such a thought is clearly presented in such passages as Romans 7, 1 Corinthians 3 and Galatians 5.

It is necessary to define what is meant by, "this body of flesh." The body is morally neutral. It is the vehicle used by the immaterial part of man to express itself. It is in this way we are using it in the expression, "the body of flesh." Yet the Scripture also speaks of the flesh being sinful and antithetical to all that is spiritual. This is

man's fallen nature or what the Scripture refers to as, "the old man."

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22).

"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9).

Romans 6:6 tells us that our "old man" has been crucified with Christ. This is an aorist passive indicative. Here the aorist is punctiliar in action. It speaks of a completed past action. The passive voice identifies the object as being the recipient of the action. This completed past action now makes it possible for "the body of sin" to be destroyed. This is an aorist passive subjunctive; speaking of its potentiality. **To have something judicially true does not mean it will be experientially true.** For one to *enjoy* the "old man's" destruction there must be the knowing, reckoning, and presenting process of Romans 6. It is vital we see the one as being certain and the other being inevitable though not automatic.

The second aorist middle infinitive of Ephesians 4:22 is functioning as an imperative. The demand to put off the old is because it is always corrupt (present passive participle). There is no hope for its "salvation." Colossians 3:9 continues this thought by stating "the putting off" as being something done in time but has abiding results.

No matter how long you have been a Christian or how godly you may appear to be you still have residing within you your "old man." There is always a tension within you or what some have called, "the war within." It is for this reason one will often hear of an older Christian who has fallen prey to their "old man." Such events are sad and sorrow filled, but they are not surprising. Every Christian is always capable of committing the most grievous actions and heinous events. The Scripture is clear that such acts should not characterize the life of God's people. No believer should be living in a pattern of sin (1 John 3:9). Yet sin in the life of the believer still happens.

The potential for such events is always there but as one matures in

their knowledge of Jesus Christ and the embracing of Him the actuality of such things happening should be greatly reduced. It is possible to have daily victory over “the flesh” by learning to practice the reality of one’s position. Such a truth will be examined later in the study.

2. Sin is a temporal foe in this body of flesh

While in this body, the flesh and the Spirit will always have contention. Neither one can exist in harmony with the other (Gal. 5:17). Yet the flesh is only temporary. The demise of the “old man” is certain because of Calvary. The final blow experientially in the losing of the old man will happen in the unfolding of either death or the rapture and the Bema seat judgment. It is at the Bema seat judgment that we will have the “official” eradication of sin’s presence in the believer. Thus in the midst of our current struggle with our “old man” we should never lose sight that it is not eternal and will be finally lost at the Bema seat judgment.

B. The Relationship Of Sin To Me

1. Sin is a defeated foe (the penalty of sin)

The death of Christ has defeated the foe of sin. Sin’s defeat is viewed as a past fact.

“Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered” (Rom. 4:7).

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13).

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake” (1 John 2:12).

Romans 4:7 tells us our sins have been forgiven us (aorist passive indicative). In Ephesians 4:32 God Himself has done the action of having forgiven you (aorist middle indicative). Colossians 2:13 the action of forgiveness is an aorist participle. Such an action is a past fact with ongoing present results. I am standing in a forgiven state. This same truth is emphatically stated in 1 John 2:12 with

the perfect passive indicative. God's forgiveness to me is a one sided agreement. I sin and He brings His forgiveness.

The sentence against sin has been pronounced and the execution of the sentence is certain. In the death of Christ sin has been defeated. The weight of sin against me has been abolished. God will no longer credited it to my account (Rom. 4:8).

2. Sin is judicially dead (the power of sin)

Sin and its allies will no longer have dominion over me (Rom. 6:9, 14; 7:1-5). **I am no longer a subject within a kingdom over which sin rules.** I no longer have to obey its dictates. It no longer has control over me. I may chose to sin and thus to place myself under its authority, but such does not have to be the case.

Yet in light of its reality within my life I understand that though sinning is not automatic for the believer it is in a certain sense inevitable. John tells me that what he has written he wrote in order that I might not sin (1 John 2:1). However, he adds, "but if any man sin" showing the potential inevitability of sin in the life of the believer.

All of the necessary requirements for me to have victory over the power of sin in this life have been provided.

3. Sin will be permanently removed (the presence of sin)

The joy of this truth has already been noted. As believers who live lives of constant struggle and longing, it is essential we realize that victory has already been secured and we are now only waiting for its full implementation.

C. The Rule Of Sin Over Me

1. I am dead to sin

Because of my standing in Christ I am dead to sin. This is the truth claim of Scripture. What does it mean, "to be dead to sin?" I am no longer legally obligated to obey sin's dictates. No longer does sin hold sway over me. I now have the right and power to say no to its sinful demands.

2. It no longer has dominion over me

Sin has no legal right to tell me what to do. Sin has no authority to make demands on my life. Because I am dead to sin and alive in Christ it no longer has reign over me. I am the subject of a new master.

D. The Implications Of Calvary For Me

1. I am in Christ

Often we fail to understand what it means to be “in Christ.” Such a truth communicates a new position and identity. Because I am “in Christ” I have a new life (Rom. 6:5), a new hope, and a new master. By being “in Christ” all that is His is now mine. I am a joint-heir with Jesus. The Father has imputed to my account the very righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:6). Because of being “in Christ” I now have immediate and direct access before the Father (Rom. 5:1). Whereas there was once animosity and wrath there is only peace and satisfaction (Rom. 3:24, 25; 5:1). By being in Christ I am a beloved Son in whom He is well pleased (Eph. 1:4-14).

2. I am the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit

It will often stagger the mind when one considers that God the Holy Spirit has chosen to reside within these jars of clay (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 4:7). Such condescending on His part is an act of indescribable grace. How the infinite has chosen to reside in the finite, the creator within the created, is truly an expression of the inexhaustible riches of grace. Yet I have within me all that God is in the totality of His being. What a shocking truth. We have gone from Emmanuel, “God with us” (Isa. 9:6; John 1:18) to God in us.

3. I am a sure work of the Father

This is the hope we now live with. God is going to complete the work He alone has begun. The work of God in me and through me will not fail (Phil. 1:6; 2:12, 13; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24). **What I could not merit nor maintain God Himself in grace will finish.** The consistent message of Scripture is that the work of God in me will not be disappointed. The Bema seat is a universal declaration of God’s success and faithfulness in bringing to pass that which He had begun.

4. I am a heaven dweller

The life I currently experience is not my reality. I have been deceived by the tangibility of the temporal and the appeal of my

senses into believing that what I currently am in this world is my reality. Yet the Scripture tells me that what Christ was I currently am in this world (1 John 4:17). The Scripture tells me that I have been crucified with Christ nevertheless I am alive in Him (Gal. 2:20). The Scripture tells me that I am currently seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Col. 3:1-4). Jesus Christ *is my life*. I do not deny what I am in this world but such must be seen through the grid of the Christ reality. We have been deceived into drawing too sharp of a distinction between what I am in Christ and what I am in this world. The truth is that what I am in Christ is what I am in this world. This world does not dictate the reality of my condition. Such a statement has already been established in Christ. This world is the platform or stage for the reality of my position in Him to be played out and seen. Moreover, at the end of the performance He will receive all of the accolades and glory.

5. I am an overcomer

John consistently describes the Christian as an overcomer. Such a truth is not a future hope but is to be a present reality. I am an overcomer. It is not something I hope to enjoy. It is something I am enjoying. I can be called an overcomer because of my position in Christ. How tragic many have allowed the devil to rob them of this joy. In so doing we have chosen to live lives of defeat. I cannot be robbed of what is mine in Christ. I can fail to enjoy it, but it cannot be taken from me. I am to enjoy all that God has provided for me as His child. We must never let anything rob us of this satisfaction.

II. What Does My Sin Do To Me?

This question is always intriguing. When I hear someone say, “What happens when I sin?” My immediate response is to ask, “What does not happen when you sin?” In answering that question, the rest has a tendency to answer itself.

- A. There is a providential judgment against it which is corrective

God has chosen to establish natural laws against sin’s expression. There are natural laws established by God that determine the reaping of what is sown (Gal. 6:7, 8). There is an inherent demerit to all sin. The Scripture tells us, “that the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) and that “the soul that sins shall die” (Ezek. 33). No one can sin and get away with it. Everyone shall pay the consequences for sin whether in this life (for the believer and

unbeliever) or in the life which is to come (for the unbeliever).

- B. There is a sense of disappointment for failed responsibility

With reference to the believer, there is a sorrow that happens in the failure to meet divine expectations and in the committing of any sin. In the believer, sin always brings remorse. All believers recognize the innate inability to perform the good (Rom. 7:18). For those who see the cross and Christ clearly there is a daily reckoning of human inability either to perform well or abstain from evil. The reality of human inability causes those who see Jesus to offer themselves up to Christ's work and that of the Holy Spirit to empower them for obedience on a daily basis. No one who knows their flesh ever puts any confidence in it to live the Christian life. Whatever hope the Christian has lies solely in Christ and His grace dealings with them.

- C. There is an initial straining and potential severing of human relationships from expressions of sin

There is always a straining of relationships between believers when one has sinned against another. Such offenses need to be dealt with immediately. Each is to act toward the other in a gracious manner. Never should such a condition exist long term. The offending party needs to make sure that any necessary restitution has been made. Whether it is as simple as saying your sorry or where physical harm has been committed then restoration needs to be offered; with the offended party immediate and unconditional forgiving and forgetting needs to take place (Eph. 4:32). To act toward another in this fashion is to treat him in grace and to depend on God to meet the necessary needs (1 Cor. 6).

- D. There is the potential for unnecessary bondage to a pattern of sin

Christians are not to live in sin (1 John 3:9-11). Such is completely incompatible with their position in Christ. Yet some out of weakness to the flesh or because of Scriptural ignorance have fallen prey to a pattern of sin (Gal. 6:1). I say such bondage is unnecessary. No Christian need live in bondage to sin. Sin will always take you further than you wanted to go, cost you more than you wished to pay, and keep you longer than you wished to stay. No believer "living in sin" wishes to be there. Victory is not only possible; it is your right. How to gain victory over daily sin will be discussed later.

III. What Does My Sin Do To God?

A. God hates sin regardless as to its source or kind

God hates sin. Such a simple statement can cause us to overlook the gravity of such a statement, but nonetheless God hates sin. Regardless as to where it is found God always hates sin. In the unbeliever he is the object of God's present wrath and is simply waiting His future wrath. In both the unbeliever and the believer there is a providential price tag to all sin. Though the believer will never experience the wrath of God against sin it does not mean it is any less serious.

The omniscience of God demands His knowledge of all sin. Yet because of the believer's standing in Christ God the Father will never credited to his account sin and thus cannot deal with him in any other way than that of one who is as righteous as His only begotten Son.

God no longer 'sees' either our deliberate disobedience or our marred performances. Instead He 'sees' the righteousness of Christ, which He has already imputed to us.¹

Nothing you ever do will cause Him to love you any more or any less. He loves you strictly by His grace given to you through Jesus.²

B. There is a rebuking that comes through the Word by the Holy Spirit

As a believer is exposed to the Word of God the Holy Spirit will take that Word and rebuke him for the lack of conformity to the revealed Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 4:2). Such a rebuking is intrinsic to the Word. God is not imputing such sin to the believer but the Holy Spirit through the medium of the Word is working in the believer to put off the old man and put on the new through the renewing of his mind (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23).

IV. What Should I Do With My Sin?

A. Acknowledge your sin by agreeing with God concerning it (1 John 1:9).

Through the instrumentality of the Word the Holy Spirit is working in the believer for the acknowledgment of sin. Such an

acknowledgment is an agreement with God concerning sin in the believer's life. No believer can avoid such an acknowledgment of sin. The confession of sin is to be seen as any other fruit of the Spirit. This is the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of all true believers. There are several erroneous views concerning confession. **First**, is a casual or flippant mouthing of or verbal assent to a sin. This confession does not recognize the gravity of it. Confession needs to be daily only if sinning (premeditative and quantifiable) is daily. To make confession a part of every prayer session is to pray like a Gentile (Matt. 6:7). **Second**, is a morbid introspection that belabors the point of seeking to be exhaustive in the listing of any known, unknown, potential, or otherwise expressions of sin within the human heart. **Third**, is to see the confessional act as somehow necessary to securing the forgiveness and good favor of God. Such a view sees such an act as man-centered and self-motivated.

- B. Repent of it and thus put off its presence and pattern (Eph. 4:22).

The validity and veracity of acknowledged sin is the turning from it and the putting off the old man. The integrity behind the confession of sin is seen in what follows. Confession is a fruit of the Spirit but also produces a fruit. True confession is intricately wrapped up in repentance. No one has truly confessed who is not also genuinely repenting.

- C. Make no provision for its future manifestation (Rom. 13:14) by mortifying its deeds (Col. 3:5).

Another area where the Spirit's work is seen is in the absence of premeditated sin. All true believers are persistently doing battle with their fallen nature. Everyone needs to realize that the flesh will take every possible advantage provided in order to regain mastery over its host body. Though it is impossible to be sinless, it is equally impossible not to be sinning less.

- D. Seek to live in newness of life (Rom. 6:5) by knowing, reckoning, and yielding.

Victory can only be experienced as one is practicing the reality of Romans 6. This is the classic passage on implementing one's position into one's practice. How do I walk in newness of life? How do I live the Christ life? There appears to be three "steps."

1. Know The Biblical Truth Of Your Union With Christ

(v.6).

It is a present active participle. Do you have the fact of your union with Christ squarely planted in your mind? Do you understand sin no longer has power over you because you are dead? This is information oriented. You are gathering facts.

2. Reckon yourself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ (v.11).

Both the exhortation (reckon) and the prohibition (let not sin reign) are present active imperatives. Secondly, you must reckon or consider yourself to be dead to sin, but very much alive to God in Christ. This is the truth of Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3:1-3. Consider the information you know to be true, to be true! If you have died with Christ, then you are dead to sin. If you have been raised with Christ, then you can walk in newness of life. However, there is one more "step" you must take.

3. Yield Your Body As An Instrument Of Righteousness (V.13).

It is a present active imperative. Finally, you must yield or present your body to God as a living sacrifice. You must place yourself at His disposal. You must trust Him for everything. Just as you came to Him for salvation, now you must come to Him for sanctification. You cannot yield yourself to sin, to feed its appetites and desires (Rom. 13:14). You must abstain from fleshly lusts (2 Pet. 2:11).

Consider the progression of thought in sitting down in a chair. You see the chair (know), you see someone sit in the chair (consider) and now you sit (yield). This is what we must do daily. Paul gives one final reason as to why we must not live in sin.

ILLUSTRATION:

Making the idea of yielding or walking as conditions to be met is like telling someone to go to sleep. You can understand what sleeping is, but it is not necessary to sleeping. You can command someone to sleep, but commanding him will not put him to sleep. You can only go to sleep when you simply relax. Once you relax, you go to sleep. You go to sleep without trying to go to sleep. Therefore, it is with yielding, walking, or being led. When you try, you make it something that it is not. It is only when you rest in Him that it takes place.

- E. Since you are living in the Spirit, now seek to be led by Him (Gal. 5).

It is unfortunate that many feel as if they must resign themselves to the power of the flesh. We have made the flesh our reality when it should be the Spirit. We are called upon to live our lives in this earthen body according to our position in Christ. Such a call has validity because of the present impact of positional truth into this current realm. As Christians, victory is indigenous to walking in newness of life.

There is a true sense in which we have “heaven on earth” in the believer.



As I consider who I am in Him and what He is for me, what should be a biblical response toward my sin? Here are **six short statements to keep in mind as we press ahead in grace.**

First, (**Second** is on page 223) we are invited to recognize that God’s love for, acceptance and “opinion” of you is based on your standing in His Son. It is because of Christ’s merit that we are accepted before the Father (Eph. 1:3-6). Romans 8:28-39 is clear. First John 2:12-14 equally emphasizes this glorious truth. There will always be frustration when we allow the old nature to manifest itself, but do not throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. Hold fast to this glorious truth. If the devil can succeed in making you think you have fallen out of God’s favor, he will have won the day.

This does invite us to ask the question, “Does the sin of the believer separate the individual from God?” Inside of this question flows the idea of “not being right with God,” “of falling out of fellowship with God,” and “of God not answering your prayers because of unconfessed sin.”

There is a sense in which one can become “battle weary” with having to answer every question or resolve every tension. The possibility of doing such is an impossibility. No one is capable of answering every question or resolving every tension. However, enough can be known to provide liberty and life. It is the truth that sets us free (John 8:38). One does not have to treat every “nook and cranny” in order to enjoy who they are in Him and what He is for them. Nonetheless, it is necessary to attempt such an undertaking. For too long we have allowed ourselves to be dictated by what we feel and then run to the Scripture to find support for our feelings when we should be interpreting our feelings and experiences by what we

can exegetically prove from the text of Scripture. When experience dictates meaning, then proof-texting reigns as supreme in the interpretation of the holy text. It is with this in mind that I desire to seek an answer to the question, “Does the sin of the believer separate the individual from God?”

As we consider the idea of an integrated or connected grace, a grace that sees positional truth dictating the present and controlling one’s experiences, it is necessary to examine those verses that are often used to place the believing in a mind-frame of bondage to a performance base acceptance before God. We have been conditioned by our upbringing to believe that our sin can create a barrier between God and us. We have pulled selected passages out of their immediate context and theological backdrop and have taught as truth an untruth. In so doing, we have replaced bondage for liberty and death for life. Yet there are certain truths that must form a theological backdrop for understanding those passages that would appear to be less than clear. Two statements summarize our relationship before God as it relates to our identity in Christ. **First**, I cannot undo by my actions what He has done. **Second**, what I merit by grace, I cannot maintain by works. Think about what this is implying.

- He declared me right in justification.
- He restored relational hostility through reconciliation.
- He removed all wraths through propitiation.
- Every action He has done made it possible for me to have fellowship with Him.

This is not an exhaustive listing, but it does begin to show us how far we have fallen in practicing our position as it relates to the renewing of our minds. All that we have before the Father is merited by grace. All that He has done through the incarnation and substitutionary sacrifice, I cannot undo through my actions. If these things are true, which I have no reason to believe otherwise, then how does this work in the area of my sinning?

It is my desire to look at the various verses as they are seen in their immediate context and see if they mean what they have traditionally meant. In lieu of a better approach, I will simply cite them as they are found canonically.

- Regarding wickedness in my heart (Ps. 66:18).

Through the years, I have heard Psalm 66:18 quoted as a call to repentance and confession in order for the believer “to get right

with God” and “to restore broken fellowship.” Personally, I have never heard Psalm 66:18 quoted with verses 19 and 20. It is always quoted independent of its context and always used in a dark, foreboding manner.

¹³ “I shall come into Your house with burnt offerings; I shall pay You my vows, ¹⁴ Which my lips uttered And my mouth spoke when I was in distress. ¹⁵ I shall offer to You burnt offerings of fat beasts, With the smoke of rams; I shall make an offering of bulls with male goats. Selah. ¹⁶ Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will tell of what He has done for my soul. ¹⁷ I cried to Him with my mouth, And He was extolled with my tongue. ¹⁸ If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; ¹⁹ But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. ²⁰ Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer Nor His loving kindness from me” (Ps. 66:13-20).

The psalmist calls on all people to praise God, for his sovereign power over the whole creation (vv. 1-7). He also speaks of God’s special favor to his people in verses 8-12. Verses 13-15 speak of the worshipper bringing offerings to God and verses 16-20 speak of God’s goodness to the worshipper. Stuck inside of this thought is verse 18, “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” What exactly is the Psalmist thinking? I wish to offer four observations.

(1) Perhaps he thought, “Had I cherished iniquity I would not have brought a burnt offering and God would not have listened.” However, the entire context speaks of an experience that was contrary to what he stated. In the Old Testament, had the individual did not come through the sacrificial system God would not have listened to him. By way of application, we would say, had the individual not come through the finished work of Christ, God will not listen to him.

(2) The exact phrase, “regarding wickedness,” means, “to see iniquity with pleasure.” This sounds familiar to 2 Thessalonians 2:12, “But took pleasure in wickedness” and Romans 1:32, “And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.” Both of these verses speak directly of the unsaved individual. What is prohibiting us from concluding the same of the individual’s statement in Psalm 66:18?

(3) Verse 18 appears to be a simple statement in the context of a more glorious, celebratory truth. Yet we have managed to make verse 18, outside of its context, something that is dark and threatening.

(4) There is still something to be said for the statement in the context of the Old Testament economy that is pre-cross versus a New Testament economy that is post-cross and in Christ. The question still remains, “Does my sin keep God from hearing and/or answering my prayers?” (1) Regardless as to what your experience might dictate, God always hears your prayers. Omniscience demands as much. (2) The Psalmist is not saying God is not listening, but rather God is not answering. So why is God not answering when I am taking pleasure in wickedness? Could it not be because I have an unbelieving heart, the heart of an unsaved person? This would seem to drive us into Proverbs 15:29.

- The LORD is far from the wicked (Prov. 15:29).

“The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29).

The contrast throughout Proverbs, and the Old Testament, is between those who are wicked and those who are righteous. The wicked are the unbelieving and the righteous are the believing. In the Old Testament there was no provision made for something in between those two. It is true the Old Testament law operated on a theocratic level and on a spiritual level. For example, you could be unconverted and keep the law thereby remain within the commonwealth of Israel. Such an inclusion, however, was non-salvific. Nevertheless, the categories used to depict any individual were almost exclusively between the wicked and the righteous.

This same thought is paralleled in verses 8 and 9 of the same chapter.

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight” (Prov. 15:8).

“The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But
He loves one who pursues righteousness” (Prov. 15:9).

This same idea is expressed in Proverbs 28:9:

“He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even

his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9).

Because of the theocratic nature of the Law economy, the issue would appear to be far more complex than the simplistic understanding we have attached to it. The contrast is not between two believers but between an unbeliever and a believer. If this holds true here, why would I think different in Psalm 66:18?

- We know that God does not hear sinners (John 9:31)

The context of John 9 is between the believing individual and the unbelieving religious leaders. Here the man who was previously blind quotes a commonly held belief that was concluded from Old Testament theology, "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him." The contrast is not between one who is saved, but out of fellowship and one who is saved and in fellowship. The contrast is between the saved and the unsaved. What is interesting is in The English Standard Version the editors cross-reference this verse with Psalm 66:18!

- You ask and do not receive (James 4:2, 3)

² “You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:2, 3).

James gives us at least two reasons as to why God does not answer our specific prayers. First, we do not ask. Second, we ask with wrong motives. This is, in principle, found in John 16:24 and Matthew 7:7, 8.

- Your prayers will not be hindered (1 Pet. 3:7)

⁶ “just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. ⁷ You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:6, 7).

The immediate context speaks of the husband and wife relationship. The wife is to be submissive and obedient and the husband is to

dwell with his wife in an understanding way as a fellow heir of the grace of life.

Not to live according to the stated paragraph could put an obstacle before the couple as it relates to prayer. The word, "hindered" means, "to chop down, to frustrate."

What I always find fascinating is how much "baggage" we attach to the statement, "prayers will not be hindered." Consider with me if the following statement does not describe how this thought often runs. The wife is told that by not submitting to her husband and calling him "lord" her prayer life could be hindered. Why, because she is harboring sin in her heart and thus she is out of fellowship with God and until she confesses her sin, God will not forgive her and she is out of fellowship with Him.

What exactly is this verse teaching? **If I am not dwelling with my wife in a way that is grace fueled, I hinder my prayer life. Why is this so? Because I am asking for the wrong thing with the wrong motive.** What do I mean by this? A grace philosophy fuels all relationships by understanding two fundamental truths. **First**, the absolute sovereignty of God and secondly, the penetrating reign of grace. When you understand that God is in control and works in and through the will of people, you will stop trying to make your wife be something she is not. **Second**, when you understand grace, you will stop trying to conform her into your image and perceived expectations and you will accept her for who she is instead of for what she could become.

It is my contention that when God is acknowledged as unstoppably reigning in grace over His people, everything changes. There is another way of looking at the various verses. It is the way of grace. Perhaps you think all this is way off. If nothing else, my desire would be to offer you another alternative. Perhaps we would all do well, if we took the time to reconsider what we have always heard and believed to be true. I believe what God has done in and through His Son is far more than I can either comprehend or imagine. The whole idea of me being able to undo what He has done places far too much ability in me. To think that my relationship with Him depends on my performance or faithfulness is depressing. I love God and I am willing to rest in the simplicity of this relationship believing that He will keep His word to finish what He has begun.

As always, I am simply inviting you into the journey of a lifetime. Despite all of the misgivings you might have as you push aside the "rubbish" of past thought, may the Lord give you His joy so you

might rest in this moment.

Second, we are invited to focus on the richness of Christ. The songwriter was correct when he wrote, “turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” The key to having “success” over daily sin or temporal failure is focusing on the beauty of Christ (Heb. 12:1, 2). When we begin to catch a clearer vision of Him, then the shallow husks of sin will lose their temporal and deceptive satisfaction.

Third, we are invited to make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). We must learn that our flesh (“the old nature”) is not our friend. In fact, it is warring against our soul (1 Pet. 2:11). It is for this reason Paul tells us to put it to death (Col. 3:5), and to buffet our bodies (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He also exhorts us to put off the old man in Ephesians 4:22. John tells us to confess or acknowledge such acts of rebellion as sin (1 John 1:9). Any time you see sin rear its ugly head you must learn to throw yourself into the arms of God (Rom. 6:13). We are not to yield to sin. Only in Him can we enjoy the victory that is already ours. I have listed several truths that I believe will enable us to enjoy His victory in any situation.

Fourth, we are invited to learn what the Christ-life is. Several passages bring this out. Galatians 2:20, Romans 6:1-14 and Colossians 3:1-4 are primary. The key here is to know (Rom. 6:6), reckon (Rom. 6:11) and then yield or present (Rom. 6:13; 12:1) yourself to this truth. It is because of Christ that we no longer have to have sin dominate our lives. We now have the power to say “no” to sin. I am no longer a slave to sin (1 John 3:8-9).

Are you ready for a maverick thought? Once we truly grasp the freedom grace brings, we can spend lengthy periods of our lives without sinning or feeling ashamed. Yes we can! To tell the truth, most Christians have been better trained to expect and handle their sin than to expect and enjoy their freedom. That isn't heresy, it's the healthiest kind of theology imaginable.³

Perpetual sinlessness (theologians call it ‘sinless perfection’) will not be ours to enjoy until we are given glorified bodies and we are at home in heaven. But the good news is that we don't have to sin on a constant, day-after-day basis. Grace has freed us to obey Christ.⁴

Fifth, we are invited to remember that we cannot, but Jesus can (John 15:5). You must remember that you are as helpless now as when you were first saved. You are no more able in yourself to have victory over sin as you were before you were saved. The difference now is that you know you cannot, but fully recognize that JESUS CAN.



CONCLUSION

Recognizing that it is His working in me and through me, I choose to stand in His Son; I choose to live in the fullness of His forgiveness; I choose to live in His limitless love; I choose to accept a more than abundant grace. I desire to live the Christ life.

I am free from condemnation because Jesus through His death condemned sin. If you and I face His wrath then the death He died was insufficient. The law is powerless to condemn sin in the flesh. It is powerless to liberate the sinner from the power of the flesh. The incarnation enabled Jesus to condemn sin in the flesh.

The sacrificial death of the Son of God, therefore, was the means by which sin was condemned. He took upon himself the punishment that those who violated God's law deserved.⁵ The work of Christ on the cross freed believers from both the penalty and the power of sin.⁶

He sees me in Christ risen, forever beyond the reach of condemnation. And though we are often slow to hear, and our spiritual vision is most defective, the blessed fact remains that God has pronounced the believer free from condemnation whether he fully rises to the glorious fact or not.⁷

In spite of the fact that the Christian is in a continuing struggle with the law of sin in his members, there is no verdict of condemnation against him. There is no charge, no indictment, no judgment, and no penalty - because he is 'in Christ Jesus.' As Robertson comments, 'This is Paul's Gospel.' This freedom from condemnation means freedom from past sins and pardon for future sins.⁸

If this pardon from condemnation does not reach into my current practice, then I do not understand what it does mean.

Consider the life described and prescribed above. It is a life that is marked by Christ. This is attractive. In addition, this is the kind of

life that will pull the unsaved to the person of Christ. Until we see the shallowness of life lived apart from Christ, we will never see the sufficiency and satisfaction of life lived in Christ. May we hunger after all that God has already secured for us in Christ.

¹ Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, (NavPress:Colorado Springs, 1991), 39.

² Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, 73.

³ Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 109.

⁴ Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, 137.

⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 403.

⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 404.

⁷ H. A. Ironside, *Romans* (Neptune NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1979), 95,96.

⁸ Clifton J. Allen, *The Gospel According to Paul: A Study of the Letter to the Romans* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1956), 86.