

# Tools For Overcoming Sin

By David Phillips

The struggle against sin is one that is common to all men. That sin is difficult to overcome is true because it is real and it is constant. In this great struggle, however, we can take comfort in the fact that God helps us to overcome sin through Jesus Christ. Though we do not have the power within ourselves, Jesus shows us that it is not so with God, *“for with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 10:27). Therefore with God on our side Paul exhorts us saying, *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We have this promise in hand, but in order to succeed in our fight against sin (in order to find that way of escape) we must realize that God does not remove our temptation. He simply gives us the tools, the weapons and the strength to overcome. Therefore any person who desires to overcome sin must expect to spend a great deal of time, effort, and perseverance with constant prayer. If you are struggling to overcome sin in your life consider the following tools that God has blessed us with to help us on our way.

## Developing the Right Attitude toward Sin

In the first phase of our battle we must strive to develop within ourselves the same understanding and opinion that God has toward sin. The Holy Spirit refers to this as repentance (Luke 13:3). Know therefore that **God hates sin**: *“The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates”* (Psalm 11:5). *“These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren”* (Proverbs 6:16-19). Just as God hates sin, so we must also hate every evil thing as we are commanded in Psalm 97:10, *“You who love the Lord, hate evil!”* We sin because our affections are directed toward things that are contrary to God. We desire sinful things, that desire gives way to temptation which in turn leads to sin. We may also have compassion on sinful characters, thus our compassion leads us to approve of sinful practices (being entertained by the vulgarity that fills the media). Therefore if we do not turn from these things and develop a righteous hatred toward sin, then that is sin in itself. *“An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked...he does not abhor evil”* (Psalm 36:1, 4).

Only when we developed the proper attitude toward sin can we truly put it to death as it says in Galatians 5:24-25, *“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires...”* When we have this attitude then we will be willing to go to any length to remove sin from our members. When such is the case we will show meekness in submitting to God's word and love toward those who have joined in our fight (Matthew 5:3). We will mourn over our sins because we understand what a burden they are to us and to God (Matthew 5:4). When we have developed this attitude then we can set righteousness as the greatest desire of our hearts (Mat. 5:6; 6:33) and, like the Corinthians, our sorrow can result in our active and diligent determination to clear ourselves of our sin (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

### **Seek knowledge of God and of His ways.**

Our attitude can only take us so far in our fight. Many people hate what they do, but do not know how overcome it. Therefore know this, that *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23) and that it is our transgressions that separate us from God (Isaiah 59:2). So long as we remain separated from God, from His grace and from His revelation, we cannot overcome sin! Therefore the only way to accomplish our goal is to seek knowledge of God and of His ways and to put into practice ALL that He says. *“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your (God’s) word”* (Psalm 19:9). *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You”* (Psalm 19:11). *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper”* (Psalm 1:1-3).

### **Cast off every weight that ensnares you**

With the knowledge of God we can develop a clear picture of the sin that we must overcome. Having that understanding the Hebrew writer exhorts us in Hebrews 12:1, *“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* In short, he says that we must find those things that pull us away from God and away from our fight against sin and cast them away from us. Just as a distance runner cannot run the race in galoshes, neither can an alcoholic overcome his addiction with alcohol sitting around the house. Therefore we must cast off every weight that threatens to drag us down in our battle against sin. If you smoke burn your cigarettes. If you have sexual problems stay away from the movies and spend time with modestly dressed people If you use foul language stay away from people who use that same language or ask them to refrain from using it while around you. Learn what it is that is tempting you in your life and get rid of it! *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell”* (Matthew 5:29-30). If you love God and desire to overcome your sin then you will count all things loss (Philippians 3:8). Consider the rich young ruler who Jesus commanded to sell all that he had and follow Him (Luke 18:22-23). Because of his love for his riches that young man went away sad. What will your response be?

### **Replace Old Habits With New**

The only way to fully cast off our bondage of iniquity (Acts 8:23) is to replace it with service to God. Therefore Paul wrote, *“...For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness”* (Romans 6:19). However, this type of action does not happen spur-of-the-moment. With diligent study and prayer a person must develop a plan for replacing their old habits with new ones.

In Proverbs 14:22 we are told, *“Do they not go astray who devise evil? But mercy and truth belong to those who devise good.”* Therefore let us devise good; let us develop a plan to work on for the rest of our lives. To accomplish this we must determine what it is that we are striving to overcome. Then, after studying to know what God says about it, we make a checklist for what we must do to overcome it. When we rely on God’s word for our guidance in this then we fulfill the proverb which says, *“A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps”* (Proverbs 16:9). Perhaps the best place to start in this endeavor is 2 Peter 1:5-11, *“But for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith...for if you do these things you will never stumble...”* All of these things may seem

complicated and difficult to do; some may doubt their ability to find the right information in the Bible. Understand that this is what the brethren are for. We are here to help one another where we may be lacking. Therefore God gave us the proverb which says, “*As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend*” (Proverbs 27:17).

### **Prayer**

Perhaps the biggest mistake men make who fail at their attempts to overcome sin is that they rely too much on their own strength and not enough on God. God is the only one capable of giving us the wisdom we need to endure trials and temptations. Therefore when we face manifold trials James exhorts us saying, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*” (James 1:5-8). For this reason we ought to pray without ceasing, asking forgiveness, strength, wisdom, and a right spirit; thus relying on God’s strength by which we can overcome all obstacles.

### **Help From The Body**

Those who seem to be weaker (struggling, or new to the faith) can rely upon their brethren for strength, encouragement, instruction and correction. “*...that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). It is for this reason that we are commanded to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*” There are many who refuse to rely on their brethren because they are afraid that their sins will be used against them. Sadly, this fear is justified in many cases, but it ought not to be so! We are brothers and sisters, fellow heirs of the kingdom. But when we use another Christian’s sins to beat them over the head then we are no better than Satan who uses our guilt to drive us away as he did with Judas Iscariot. Rather, “*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever*” (1 Peter 2:22-23). Therefore, just as Jesus died to forgive us, so should we have compassion on our brethren who struggle at our side in this war against sin! Then we can gain strength from one another.

### **Coming to Christ Jesus**

The things that we have studied thus far are merely a glimpse, a starting point if you will, of what God has to offer to help us overcome sin. It is the responsibility of every Christian to begin with these then, as they grow and exercise their senses to discern good and evil, they will be able to increase more and more. Before any person can even begin using these tools, however, they must understand their need to turn to God in repentance and commit themselves to serving Him. Our struggle against sin began when we forsook God in disobedience. But He offers to help by forgiving us in Jesus if we turn and obey Him. If you are tired and weary because of the sin in your life; if you are searching for a new beginning then you have a new life in Christ Jesus. Jesus is calling, “*Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest ...*” (Matthew 11:28-29).