

14. Become Guilt-Ridden by Sin

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

(1 John 3:19–20)

For believers one of the greatest hindrances to consistently walking in close fellowship with God is that of being guilt-ridden when we commit sin. This is not to be confused with legitimately feeling a sense of guilt when we sin.

Rather, it is an illegitimate guilt that paralyzes us spiritually so that we remain distant from God and often feel heavily

Becoming guilt-ridden by sin can result in a state of ongoing “spiritual despair” leaving us defeated in our relationship with God and unable to serve him with joy, peace, and feeling of harmony.

burdened and shamed even after we confess our sin to him. This is especially true with particular sins that easily and frequently entangle us over and over again.

Thus, this entry is not about how to overcome sin, of which the Bible says, “*We all stumble in many ways*” (Jas 3:2). Instead, it concerns how to immediately continue on in our walk with the Lord by quickly confessing our sin, without becoming guilt-ridden by it.

The process by which we as believers can become guilt-ridden by sin often goes like this. Instead of promptly

confessing our sin after we commit it and *immediately* moving on in our walk with God as we should, we adopt a sense of self-loathing and view God as possibly angry, disgusted, or extremely disappointed with us.

This then causes us to distance ourselves from him while being burdened with a feeling of guilt. We can then often remain in this state until these feelings have subsided or an urgent need for his intervention in our lives draws us to seek him. Hence, we have great difficulty in acquiring a consistent “momentum” of walking with the Lord in joy, peace, and feeling of harmony.

What causes us as believers to become guilt-ridden in this manner?

Becoming guilt-ridden from sin is often because we do not have a basic understanding of the depth of our own sinfulness, unlike the Apostle Paul who clearly did, when he said, *“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”* (Rom 7:21–24).¹

We often feel that sin’s power to draw us should be completely vanquished or at least greatly limited after salvation. We can especially feel guilty over continued failure with particular sins that we have struggled with for a long period of time.

¹ Cf. Gal 5:16–21.

Another reason we become guilt-ridden is because we often do not grasp the truth in our hearts that God still deeply loves us in spite of our sin and even in the midst of it.

Finally, the timing of our moral failure can lead to a greater sense of guilt. It seems that committing sin immediately after, or in the middle of, great blessing can make our sense of guilt for committing it feel far greater.

Here are a few tips to help us avoid becoming guilt-ridden by sin.

Know the Struggle with Sin Will Never Cease in Our Life. We will struggle with sin throughout our lives. The Bible says, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8).² However, through the power of the Holy Spirit we can have victory over it. Paul informs us, *“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh”* (Gal 5:16).³

Knowing that we will always struggle with sin should encourage us to seek God’s strength to have victory over it in our daily walk without being overcome with guilt when we fail.

Quickly Confess Our Sin after Committing It and Immediately Move On With God. When we confess our sin, God immediately forgives us our sin. The Apostle John declares, *“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).

Because God forgives us so readily when we confess our sin, we should rapidly move on in our walk with him when

² Cf. Rom 7:7–25; Gal 5:17; Jas 1:13–15.

³ Cf. Rom 8:4; 13:14; Gal 5:24.

we do. However, this does not mean that God takes our sin lightly because, on the contrary, he is infinitely holy and hates sin.⁴

It also does not mean he is unjust in forgiving our sin for the Bible says, *“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus”* (Rom 3:25–26).

Therefore, since God does not treat sin nonchalantly then neither should we for the Bible says, *“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”* (Rom 6:1–2).⁵

God Still Loves Us When We Sin.

It is very easy to feel that God does not love us as much when we sin. But nothing could be further from the truth. Paul says, *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 8:38–39).⁶

It is important to remember that one act of sin needs only one act of confession to return to fellowship with God.

Thus, if we do not tire of truly confessing sin, God will not tire of immediately forgiving it.

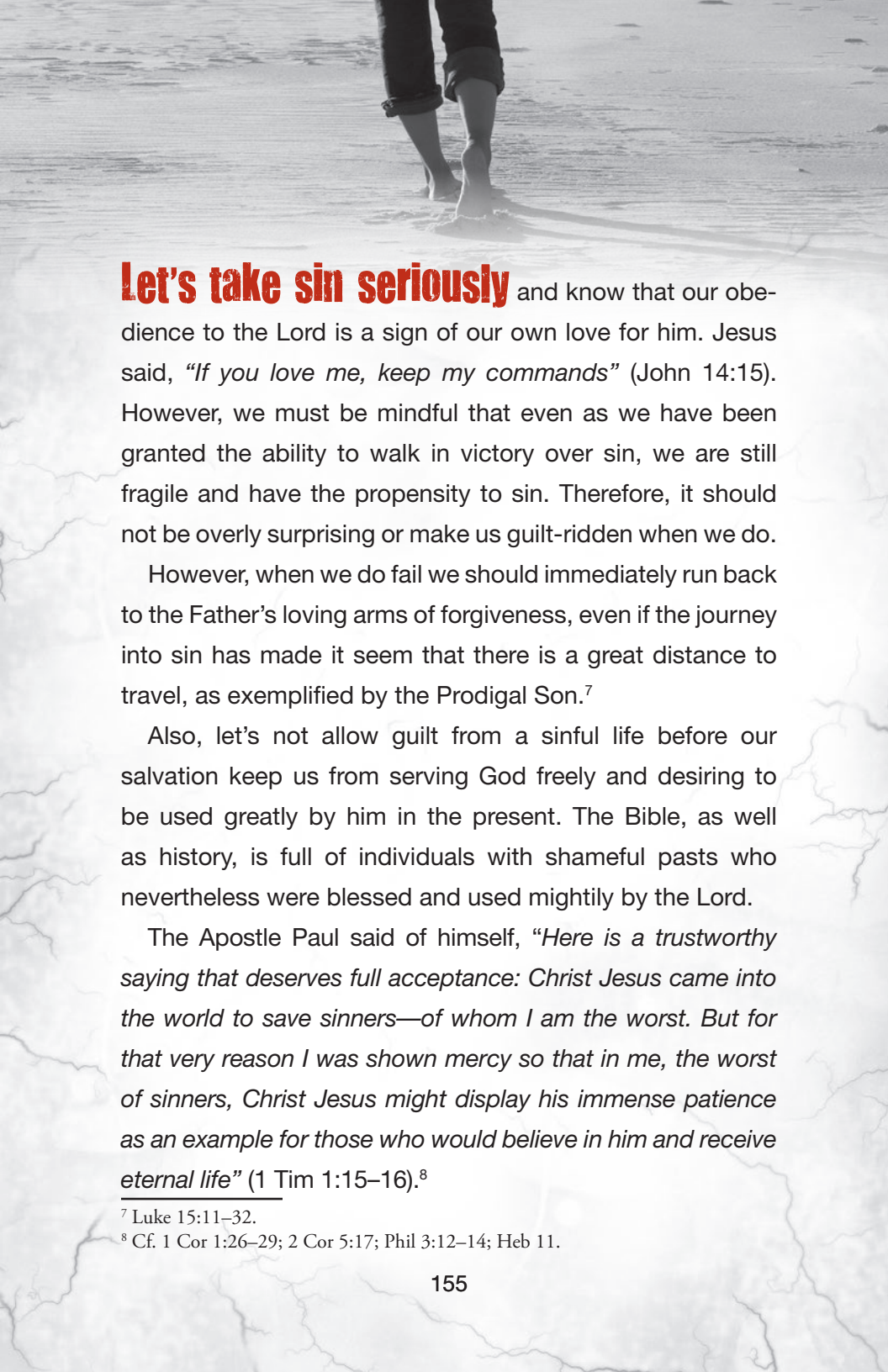
⁴ Rev 4:8.

⁵ Cf. Titus 2:11–13.

⁶ Cf. Eph 3:17–19.

It is important to note that God's love for us did not just begin when we received Christ. Rather, it was his great love that sent Christ to die for us even while we were sinners. The Bible says, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8).

Therefore, since God greatly loved us even when we were still "sinners" before receiving Christ, he certainly does not love us any less when we sin after we belong to him.



Let's take sin seriously and know that our obedience to the Lord is a sign of our own love for him. Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commands"* (John 14:15). However, we must be mindful that even as we have been granted the ability to walk in victory over sin, we are still fragile and have the propensity to sin. Therefore, it should not be overly surprising or make us guilt-ridden when we do.

However, when we do fail we should immediately run back to the Father's loving arms of forgiveness, even if the journey into sin has made it seem that there is a great distance to travel, as exemplified by the Prodigal Son.⁷

Also, let's not allow guilt from a sinful life before our salvation keep us from serving God freely and desiring to be used greatly by him in the present. The Bible, as well as history, is full of individuals with shameful pasts who nevertheless were blessed and used mightily by the Lord.

The Apostle Paul said of himself, *"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life"* (1 Tim 1:15–16).⁸

⁷ Luke 15:11–32.

⁸ Cf. 1 Cor 1:26–29; 2 Cor 5:17; Phil 3:12–14; Heb 11.



HOW TO DESTROY YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

It's legitimate to experience a feeling of guilt after committing sin. But the least you can do is keep a little distance from God until such feelings completely go away. Otherwise, you may end up becoming desensitized to the enormity of sin (if it hasn't happened already). This will also prove to the Lord that you're serious about fighting against it in your life.

Now there are some believers who feel that after they have sinned they can simply say a brief prayer of forgiveness and immediately be on their way with the Lord again—almost as if nothing ever happened. Make sure to stay away from these people as this mindset may rub off on you. After all, the Bible says bad company corrupts good morals (1 Cor 15:33).

Besides, what kind of witness do you think this activity demonstrates to unbelievers? Don't you think it gives them the impression that it doesn't matter what you do as long as you are "saved"?

Finally, if you've had a pretty immoral past before coming to Christ, it's great for you to freely accept his forgiveness and have a desire to serve him. But one thing you should avoid is trying to do anything too significant. Imagine if you end up in a prominent role of some sort and then details of your former life come to past. This will only end up bringing embarrassment to you and ultimately hinder the cause of Christ as both believers and unbelievers gasp in shock as well as revel in the juicy details of your seedy past.