

The Reality of a Believer

RESPONSE TO A LETTER SENT TO BEHOLD THE LAMB

John, The “freedom from sin” that I preach is a work of grace, and not of works. Jesus promised to give “rest” to those who come to Him. The apostle Paul said, “For we which have believed do enter into rest” Hebrews 4:3 and “He that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works” Hebrews 4:10. When Paul says, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest” Hebrews 4:10, he is not speaking of our works. The word “labour” was translated from the Greek word “spoudazo,” which means “to use speed.” Don’t hesitate! Be quick to believe what God has said in the gospel of Christ and cease from your own works!

It is a common error to believe that we are “saved by grace,” but “kept” through our own works or efforts. Jude closes his short epistle saying, “Now unto him that is able to **keep you from falling, and to present you faultless** before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...” Jude 1:24-25. The words “from falling” were translated from the Greek word “aptaistos,” which means “not stumbling, that is, (figuratively) without sin.” John, it is a mistake for anyone to think they can “keep themselves” from sinning through their will power. Only Christ can keep us, which He does absolutely as long as we abide in Him.

You wrote, “I do have victory over sin more than ever before because the truth is setting me free from faith to faith.” We must understand that our wonderful salvation is not based upon “victory over sin,” but “freedom from sin.” “Victory over” is an “active” term, which requires our effort. “Freedom from” is a passive term, which requires our rest. I realize this is hard to comprehend, but I illustrate as follows;

A man-eating lion is loose in my house. If I am to live in that house, one of two things must happen; **1.** I must have power over the lion, which means I must be a trained lion tamer. If I have that power over the lion, I can keep him at bay. I can make him lie down, roll over, sit up and beg, but there is one thing I cannot do. I cannot rest in sleep, because if I am not “ever vigilant,” the lion will kill me. **2.** I am not a lion tamer. If I must live in the house with the lion, I will soon be devoured, but I know a “lion killer.” So I bring Him into my house and he kills the lion and takes his carcass away. Now, I can rest without fear of the lion, because the lion is dead. Christ did not come into the world to tame the lion (sin), but to kill the lion. In fact, He came into the world to destroy Satan Hebrews 2:14 and nail sin to His cross I Peter 2:24. He did this for “whosoever” will believe and trust in Christ who did it through His death on the cross.

John, you also wrote, “...reality shows me that we don’t ‘abide in Christ’ 100% of the time, and so we make the foolish choice to sin.” We must have a correct view of what “reality” is. The apostle Paul says, “...we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” II Corinthians 4:18. We look at the things around us, and think they are the “reality” because we can see them with our eyes, touch

them with our hands, smell them, hear them, etc. These are not the reality, however, because they will all pass away. The “reality” is that which is eternal. The “new heavens and earth” will be the reality of which the present heavens and earth is only a fallen image. The new man in Christ Jesus is the reality, and the gospel of Christ is the reality. If our experience does not match the word of God, the “word of God” is still the “reality,” and our experience is the lie.

When God first began teaching me the “truth as it is in Jesus” Ephesians 4:21, I argued with Him. Concerning I John 3:9, “Whosoever is born of God doeth not commit sin...,” I said, “I know by experience that those who are born of God do sin.” The Spirit of God rebuked me sharply; “You do not know anything by experience; you only know by my word.” We must “...let God be true, but every man a liar” Romans 3:4. As long as we judge what reality is by our experience, we must continue in sin, because we will never be free. I made a choice over thirty years ago to “believe God” even when I did not understand. It was when I believed without understanding, and without “experience” to prop me up, that God gave me understanding, and with that understanding came glorious freedom from sin.

John, again, you wrote, “...so we make the foolish choice to sin.” When Christ has taken our sin away, which condition is received by grace through faith, and not by works Ephesians 2:8, we do not have the “choice” to sin, because our hearts have been “purified by faith” Acts 15:8-9. Jesus told us everything that defiles a man “comes out of the heart.” “For from within, **out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man**” Mark 7:21-23. All these evil things are in the heart of man until such time that Christ, who “came into the world to make an end of sins” Daniel 9:24-25, takes sin out of the heart of those who believe and trust in Him to do it. Those “evil things” Jesus spoke of in this text are not in the heart of those who “know the truth” John 8:32 and “trust in Him” Ephesians 1:12-13.

I come to the part of your letter that asks how long since I have sinned. On pages ten and eleven of the booklet “Is a Christian also a sinner,” which I have sent to you, I go into some detail concerning what the apostle John called “sin unto death” and “sin not unto death.” When sin is taken out of the heart of man, it is impossible for that person to “sin a sin that is unto death” unless they have been moved away from Christ. John told us to pray for those among the believers who “sin a sin not unto death” I John 5:16. He continued to say “There is a sin unto death; I do not say that you should pray for it” (verse 16), and in the seventeenth verse, “There is a sin not unto death.”

The sins that are “unto death” are clearly listed; “Be not deceived: neither **fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,**

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nor **thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God**" I Corinthians 6:9-10. These are the sins that are impossible for the children of God to commit, because these things are not in the heart of those who are "born of God." Sadly, I did commit some of these sins after I was "born again," but I was first "moved away from Christ" before any of these things were possible. I was backslidden and lost during that horrible time which came into my life over forty years ago. If I had died during that time, I would have been eternally damned. It was after I was forgiven and even restored to ministry that I began a desperate search to find the answer for the sin problem that is in the heart of man. My mind was sometimes tormented by the horrible sins I had committed and even though I was not sinning, my mind was still troubled with sinful thoughts. It was in the spring of 1991 that the understanding of Hebrews 9:13-14 shone into my heart as a great light. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: **How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**" In a moment of time, the Spirit of God came upon me and the filth that troubled me at nights turned off like you would turn off a faucet. I can honestly say that since that day, I have been free.

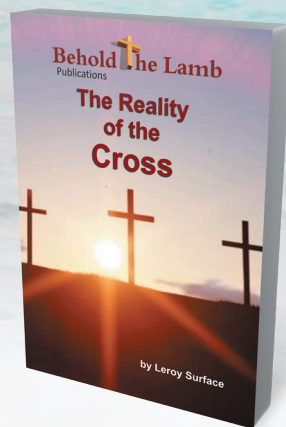
Have I sinned since that day? Not a single sin "that is unto death." Those are the sins that require sin in the heart to commit, and those whose heart is pure cannot commit them. "Sins not unto death" are a different story. These do not consist of the "evil fruit on a corrupt tree," but of "lack of fruit on a good tree." The apostle Paul says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law**" Galatians 5:22-23. A lack of any of these in a child of God's life is what John calls a "sin not unto death." Certainly, there have been many times that I have not shown enough love, joy, peace, etc. Oftentimes not gentle enough or patience enough, and sometimes not meek enough. These are the things John told us to pray for one another concerning. If a person "dies in sin" they will be eternally lost because of those "sins unto death" which are still in their heart.

Concerning the "works of the flesh," Paul says, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; **Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings,** and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that **they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God**" Galatians 5:19-21. How many times must the apostles tell us these things before we believe them, and how many times must they tell us that Christ died to take these things away before we will believe the truth and trust in Christ?

John, you said that your friend is a skeptic. Remember "doubting Thomas?" When he was told about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, **I will not believe**" John 20:25. Thomas did not believe, but he was willing to believe. Jesus did not thrust him away, but appeared again on the eighth day especially for Thomas' sake. Seeing Jesus, Thomas fell before

Him crying, "My Lord and my God." If skepticism is an honest doubt in a person who is willing to believe, Christ will reveal Himself to them. If their skepticism, however, is because they "love unrighteousness," the apostle said they will "believe a lie" and "be damned" II Thessalonians 2:11-12, which millions are doing in this generation.

It is hard for people to believe the truth when they first hear it because it is foolishness to them. They know they are not "strong enough" to live free from sin, so their first inclination is to believe that it is only the "self-righteous" who would believe such a thing. It is a wrong understanding of "grace" that actually blinds the people. They think we are "covered by grace," or that we "go to heaven by grace." Neither of these is true. The truth is that we are "made free from sin" by grace. It is not by works. In my early experience I went to extremes trying to "sanctify myself," and "crucify my flesh." I fasted more days than I ate for three years straight. During the same time, I gave over 50% of my income to the church, and tried to pray several hours a day. Many of those around me thought I was the most consecrated young man they knew, but they didn't know the struggle that was in my heart. This intense disciplined lifestyle actually helped in my backsliding, because a person can maintain such a lifestyle only for a period of time. Before I was "made free from sin," which is the promise of the gospel of Christ, I had to cease from my own works Hebrews 4:10. I had to "believe God," which is to "believe the record that God gave of His Son" I John 5:10. God gave His record through the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament. It is called "the testimony of Jesus." John, the "glorious liberty" you seek is the gift of God to fallen man. It must be received as a gift, which means it is "by grace" and "not by works." Believe and trust in Christ, who has already done the work. Spend time in His presence every day until you live "in His presence." Very soon, you will say with the apostle Paul, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me..." Galatians 2:20.



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