

The Anatomy of Sin



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The Anatomy of Sin

By Sara Ronnevik

Introduction

Jesus said in Matthew 7, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, *but the one who does the will of my Father* who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ (21-23)

The surprised unbelievers had believed a false and incomplete gospel. They were condemned as ‘workers of lawlessness’ which means that after verbally confessing a faith in Jesus, and even becoming involved with Christian ministry, they continued to live in unrepentant sin and their actual work was in promoting lawlessness rather than righteousness.

Romans 6:16 says, “you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.”

The surprised unbeliever habitually submits to sin while quieting and setting aside the objections of the conscience, the voice of the Holy Spirit and the clear teachings of Scripture. The true believer submits to God and his Word while daily putting to death the desire to sin and the desire to affirm sin. There is an either-or orientation. God knows who your master is. You are either a slave to God or a slave to sin. Understanding how the devil tempts and deceives is vital to becoming free from sin.

This book is for believers in Jesus who want to grow in obedience. If you happen to be picking up this book with no Christian background, I would encourage you to read a few books of the Bible first (Genesis, Matthew, Mark, Luke,

John, and Romans). However, if you are the sort of person who likes a good cold polar plunge, feel free to dive right into “The Anatomy of Sin.” You will find all the basic tenets of the Gospel in this book.

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Scriptures used in this book are from the English Standard Version (ESV) when not noted otherwise. Scriptures from the New International Version will be noted as NIV.

Everyone who comes to me and
hears my words and does them, I
will show you what he is like:

he is like a man building a house,
who dug deep and laid the
foundation on the rock. And when
a flood arose, the stream broke
against that house and could not
shake it, because it had been well
built. Luke 6:47-48



Part I
The Origin and Pathology of Sin

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Genesis 4:6-7 NIV

The Outbreak

Sin is crouching at the door of every soul. It will deceive and lie to us. It will steal, kill and destroy. Some will die eternally from this disease. Others will be saved by Jesus. Sin desires to consume us, but Jesus has come to heal us.

In the beginning of time, God created a perfect world. He created a man and a woman to care for his creation and enjoy it. Their first home was a garden with everything they needed. All of their food grew on trees – fruit and nuts and seeds of all kinds. They did not need to work hard in order to eat. But in the middle of this garden, God placed the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God made it clear that they must not eat from this tree. He warned them that if they ate from it, they would die. Everything else was theirs, just not the fruit from that one tree. Genesis 3:1-7 records what happened next:

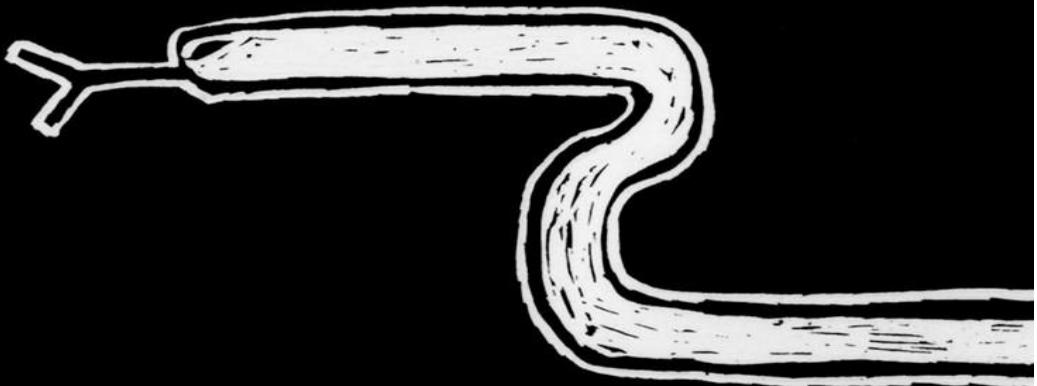
The Fall of Man

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of

both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.
And they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths.

The record of Eve's temptation is a template that can help us understand every sin from the most secret individual sins to the most blatant and corporate atrocities. For its many varieties, sin is a predictable disease.

- 1) There is a lie at the beginning of every sin.
- 2) All sin is born of evil desires.
- 3) Every sin involves a cover-up.



The Three Evil Desires:

Appetite, Materialism and Deity

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. James 1:14

The origin of sin is our own evil desires. Jesus never sinned because he had no evil desires.

An evil desire is when you want something that is not for you, even though the object in and of itself may not be bad. Adam and Eve had all the fruit trees to choose from, except one. But they wanted the one that was not for them. That is the essence of coveting. There are three types of things that we covet and Eve was enticed by all of them in her desire for the forbidden fruit.

Appetite: We want physical pleasures that are not for us. (Eve saw that the fruit was good for food).

Materialism: We want material things that are not for us. (The forbidden fruit was pleasing to the eye).

Deity: We want glory, power, knowledge, fame, and worship that are not for us. (Eve was told that the fruit would help her gain a God-like knowledge).

Our evil desires are not harmless thoughts. They are the deadly seeds of sin. The old saying, “it is not wrong to be tempted, it is just wrong to sin,” is true, but can be misleading. There is a difference between temptation (the offer of something desirable), and our inner evil desires that cause us to reach out and pluck that temptation off the tree. If we fail to distinguish between the two, we can end up wallowing in our evil desires rather than disowning them.

All Sin is Coveting

An evil desire is a covetous one.

Coveting is wanting and longing for something that is not right for you.

If you reduce the fractals of sin to their most basic element, every sin is a sin of coveting.

Sins against God and his name and dishonoring the Sabbath come from our desire to enthrone ourselves over God rather than submitting to him.

Dishonoring our parents comes from a desire for personal autonomy rather than submitting to God-ordained authority.

Lying is coveting a reputation (or some type of reality) that is not real.

Stealing has its root in coveting material things that are not rightfully ours.

Adultery originates in coveting someone else's spouse.

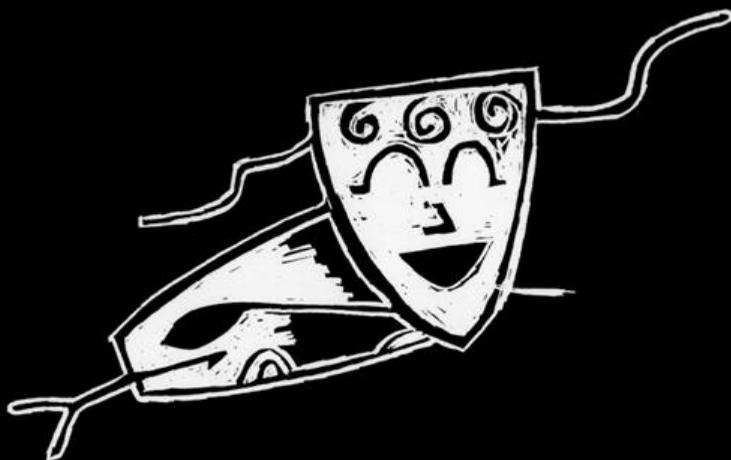
All other types of sexual immorality (sex outside of marriage, cohabiting, pornography, casual hook-ups, homosexuality etc.) come from desiring sexual pleasures that are divorced from God's holy design for marriage and family.

Transgenderism is rooted in coveting a different type of body from the one God created for us.

Cowardice comes from coveting a peace or safety that is not right for us. Cowardice happens when we are called to stand up for the truth, but shrink back, or are called to protect someone vulnerable but are unwilling to put ourselves in harm's way. When we act in a cowardly way, we are preserving a peace or safety that we desire. If we stand for

what is right, there will likely be conflict and we will make enemies. The Bible lists cowardice with other sins that we would like to think are much worse (Revelation 21:8). This is because cowardice is far more harmful than we realize. Evil advances and holds its ground in individuals, churches, families, and nations when there are not enough courageous people to stand up against it.

All sin has coveting at its core. So, the first place where we must exercise courage is in defending the territory of our own hearts from being overtaken by covetous desires. We can begin to do this by unmasking each evil desire that lies at the root of our own sinful tendencies.



The Life Cycle of Sin

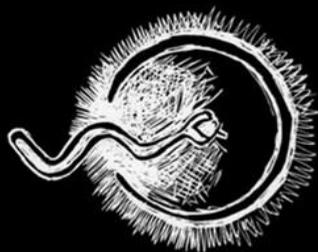
Stage One: Conception

Sin begins its life cycle when you give an evil desire a safe harbor in your soul.

You might give yourself a moral pat on the back as you allow the desire to settle in, saying, “It’s just a temptation, I’m not actually going to act on it.” But do you cozy up to it in the secret thoughts of your mind? If so, that is stage one, a desire conceived. It will continue to grow.

Often, we are deceived by a superficial benefit of the temptation. But if we dig deeper into the reasons why God has put something off-limits, we can see the ugliness of our desire. Sin is not the empathetic friend it pretends to be. It wants to have us. The devil will always show us the sweet face of a sin. As Christians, we must identify the disordered and evil desire that hides behind it so that it will not take root.

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. James 1:15



The road that leads to sin is wide, attractive, and paved with lies. Sometimes the lies are just a few degrees off from the truth. Often the lies are a clever mix of true and false entangled together. Other times the lies are egregious and blatant. But the types of lies are always the same.

- 1) A subtle questioning of whether or not God really has forbidden a certain thing:

Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?

- 2) The lie that no one will get hurt, nothing bad will happen:

You will not surely die!

- 3) The lie that God is not fair in putting it off limits, he's holding back something good:

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

These lies begin to whisper to you *before* you allow a sinful desire to take root in your heart. Your heart will not allow a sin inside until you have believed some kind of lie to justify it.



Stage Two: Birth

In this stage the sinful desire becomes an action. An evil desire can be dealt with and put to death before it hurts someone. But a sinful action will always steal, kill and destroy some actual thing.

At birth, a lustful desire can become the act of adultery. A promise is broken, trust is destroyed, often two marriages and two families are broken as a result. Children stand at ground zero for the painful fallout of divorce, but the fractures extend outward to friends, community and extended family.

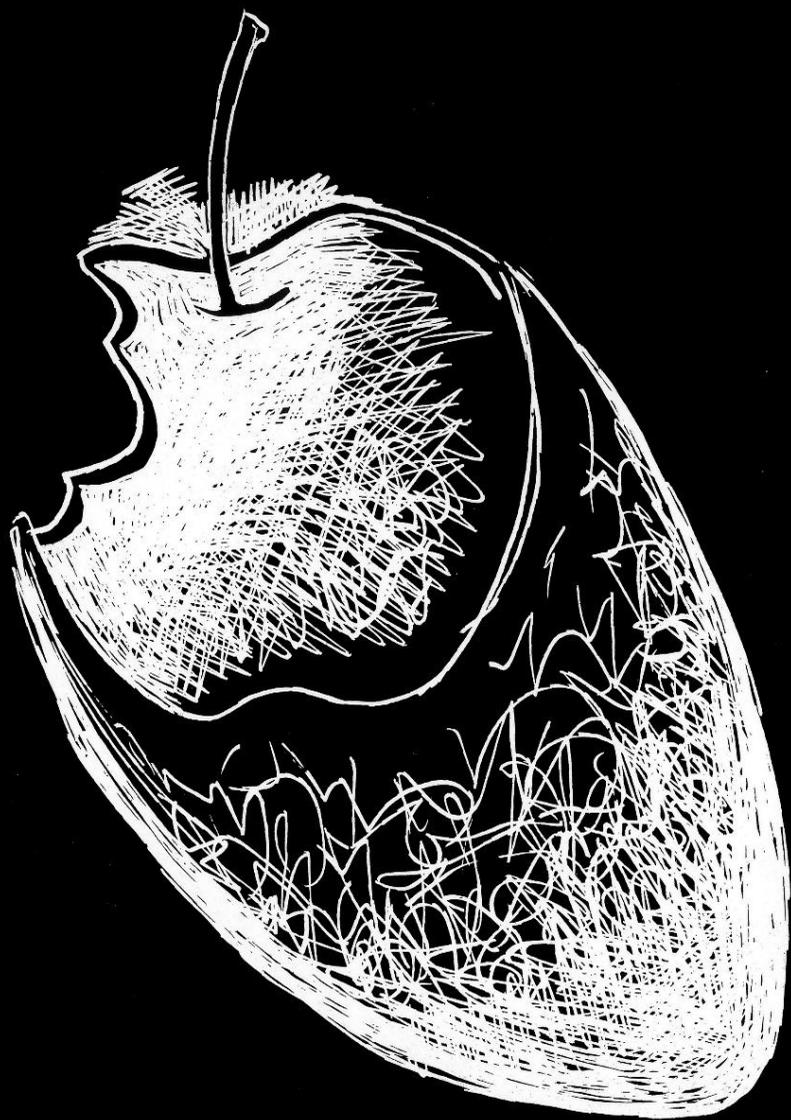
At birth, inward coveting becomes actual stealing. Someone is deprived of their rightful property. Trust is shattered, a feeling of violation sets in.

At birth, a disordered desire for approval can become a quest for power, fame or achievement. The self is enthroned where only God should be. Often this desire plays out in subtle ways such as, just wanting people to like you. If this desire rules your thoughts and actions, it is disordered.

At birth, a desire for moral autonomy can become an open rejection of God such as atheism. But the desire for moral autonomy most commonly wraps itself in some kind of spirituality. We may profess faith in God, but have actually recreated God in the image of who we want him to be. This is the age-old root of idolatry. We are very good at making gods in our own image.

At birth, hatred becomes oppression, slander, physical violence, emotional abuse, dehumanizing of another person, or murder.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. 1 John 2:1



Stage Three: Death

For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. Romans 7:11

There are many kinds of death that come after sin.

One type of death is the immediate destruction of something good that God has created. For Adam and Eve, this was the realization that they were naked and ashamed. Their relationship with each other and with God was broken. They began blaming each other and they hid from God. A curse came upon all Creation and the whole physical world was run through with cracks and decay.

Another death is that of the human soul. We are unable to see, hear, sense or know God. We indulge in the things we covet because each little desire satisfied makes us feel a flash of life. We mistake this for living, not realizing that we are enslaved.

Next there is the physical death of the human body. The serpent lied when he said, “you will not surely die!” The Bible records in Genesis 5:5 that “Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.” This was not the original design. The human body was created to live and repair and renew. Only when sin brought a curse did the natural world start to break down. Some people today look back with skepticism at the long lives of men recorded in Genesis. That generation would look on us with horror. A 95-year-old woman was a young beauty in the first age of the world. Noah fathered his three sons at around 500 years old and lived another 450 years after that. Jacob married for the first time when he was in his eighties and all of his children were born after that. These ages only sound unbelievable to us because we have gotten used to our own decay. Not only do we die. We die fast.

The most serious death of all is called “The Second Death” in the book of Revelation. This is the *final* and irreversible death when those who have not turned to God in repentance and faith will be separated from God forever.



The Second Death

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. Revelation 21:8

Sin has made us all deserving of God's wrath, the eternal judgment and separation of the Second Death. When we can grasp the seriousness of this outcome, we are able to understand God's goodness in providing a way of salvation.

We must continue to acknowledge that those outside of Christ are in great danger. And we need to be alert and awake to the condition of our own souls. People who appear to be Christians will wander away from the faith by falling for lies and following a path of sin. We must stay vigilant so that we do not find ourselves standing before the throne of God as surprised unbelievers.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23*

Part II
Sin and the Body

A Bloodborne Disease

*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man,
and death through sin, and in this way,
death came to all people, because all sinned.*

Romans 5:12

We will now look at the role of blood in the disease of sin. This will help us to better understand the historical event of Jesus' death on the cross and why it was necessary.

Sin is a fatal disease that is inherited and passed through infected blood from a father to his children. Every human ever conceived by a man and a woman is infected with this deadly disease. It is both physical and spiritual. Sin is not just symbolically in our blood. It really is in our blood. But this does not make us innocent victims of circumstance.

We sin on purpose, with a passionate love for forbidden things. We sin naturally and unconsciously, hardly aware of the thought patterns that drive our actions. No one has ever had to teach a child to be bad. In every generation, this willful love of sin is reborn.



A Flesh Consuming Disease

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. Romans 7:5

Sin is inherited through our blood and desired by our flesh. Many sins have some kind of physical comfort as their end goal. Others appeal to our desire for power and control.

The apostle Paul describes our helpless condition in Romans 7: 18-21.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

Throughout the New Testament, Christians are instructed to live according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh. Our flesh will lead us to sin, but the Spirit will lead us to obedience.

The physical world is a manifestation of spiritual realities and spiritual truths. The two are always intertwined. Our decaying flesh which is subject to disease, accidents and death, is displaying the spiritual disease which has afflicted our souls. This does not mean that every individual sin results in a specific physical ailment. Rather, sin has subjected our bodies, and all of Creation, to the general pattern of decay.

The Body and Blood of Jesus

Jesus was born without sin in his blood. The virgin birth of Christ was not just a magical sign to the world that Jesus was God's son. The virgin birth was required because humans inherit sinful blood from their father. The blood of the mother never comes into contact with that of the baby in the womb. Jesus lived a sinless life because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and was therefore, truly, God in human flesh. His pure and undefiled blood, which came wholly from his Heavenly Father, was the legal requirement for **substitutionary atonement**.

Substitutionary atonement means that when Jesus died on the cross, it was to take the punishment of all people, for all sin, for all time. The substitute had to be perfect, and so, Jesus' blood had to have no inherited connection to Adam. The body of Jesus came from Mary via her family line of David, Judah, Abraham, Noah and Adam. But Jesus' blood was divine.

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ – The Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2 NIV



The substitutionary atonement is the healing, blood-based, cure for sin. During his life on earth, Jesus healed diseased flesh to demonstrate that he was also the healer of sin. Before Jesus healed the paralytic he said, “Your sins are forgiven.” The scribes who were in the crowd began thinking to themselves, “This man is committing blasphemy! No one but God can forgive sins!”

Jesus knew what they were thinking and said,

“Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” ...“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”
Mark 2:8-11

Substitutionary atonement as two parts.

First, Jesus took our place as sinners and paid the debt that we owed for our own sin. At the crucifixion, God the Father separated himself from his Son. He then poured out his righteous and holy wrath until the punishment was justly equal to the debt owed by our sin. No ordinary human being could have accomplished this. It was only possible because the body of Christ contained the fullness of the Eternal Creator God. Colossians 2:9 (NIV) says, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” Jesus experienced his suffering on our behalf in infinite dimensions that are beyond our ability to imagine.

This act legally erased the record of sin that stood against us.

In Paul’s letter to the Colossian church, he describes the transaction this way:

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the

record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Colossians 2:13-15

Second, when we repent of our sins, Jesus clothes us with his righteousness so that we can be reunited with God as his children.

The prophet Isaiah wrote:

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness. Isaiah 61:10*

Imagine that someone stole your car, drove recklessly and totaled it. The first part of atonement would be like someone else paying for the damage and replacing the car. Although that would make you feel like the wrong had been made right, you probably would not want to be friends with the thief. The second part of atonement would be as if the mediator also did something that would make you love the thief and truly want that person to become a close friend. It is hard for us to imagine wanting reconciliation with someone who has hurt us. But in reality, we are the thief and our sins against God are much greater offenses than anything anyone has done to us.

Jesus' blood paid our debt. Through faith, his righteousness is put on us like a garment. God now sees us as if we share the perfect, sinless nature of Christ and he wants us as sons and daughters. This transaction is called **Justification**. It is God's way to declare us "Not Guilty" when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Christian faith is smeared with blood from Genesis to Revelation. We depend on Christ's finished work on the

cross for our salvation. In Holy Communion we partake of the body and blood of Jesus in remembrance of his sacrifice for us. This is not an easy doctrine to accept. Jesus lost scores of followers after he taught that they would have to drink his blood and eat his flesh (John 6). He was thinning the crowd. If they were not going to listen to what he had to say about his blood, they were not going to want to have anything to do with his actual blood that was spilled on the day of his crucifixion.

Coming to terms with Jesus' violent, bloody death requires that we admit that it should have been our own. And when we have the humility to do that, a revolution begins in our hearts. Instead of loving sin, which is our natural tendency, we begin to hate it. This is why obedience to Jesus is the natural fruit of salvation. This does not mean that a Christian never sins. But if someone is not at war with the sin in his or her heart, it is evidence that there has not been true repentance.



Part III
Overcoming Temptation

*Or do you think Scripture says without reason
that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?
But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the
proud but shows favor to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God.
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will
come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners,
and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

James 4: 5-8 NIV



Resisting Temptation

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

When Jesus was tempted by the devil, he put a divine spade into the deepest roots of our sinful tendencies. By exposing them, He helps us to trust in God's provision instead of the devil's false promises.

In contrast to Eve's temptation in Eden where she had no unmet physical or emotional needs, Jesus was tempted in a situation of extreme deprivation of basic human needs. Just as was his tactic in the Garden, the devil tried to seduce Jesus with distortions of God's Word. Each time, Jesus answered with a true knowledge of God's Word. We also must know God's Word so that we can recognize when it is being distorted as a license to sin.

As we look closely at the Temptation of Christ, we will see that this event was set up to display Jesus' absolute moral perfection. There never was a chance that he would fail because Jesus had no evil desires. He could not desire what God the Father had set off limits for that time and purpose, even in a situation of extreme poverty, hunger and humiliation.

The Temptation of Christ

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

The First Temptation

In the wilderness, Satan's first tactic was to try to get under Jesus' skin by appealing to human pride. You can almost hear the mocking in his tone, asking Jesus, "if you are the Son of God....?" He then asked Jesus to do something that was well within his power to satisfy a very real and intense physical need. So why wouldn't he do it? Jesus knew that it was God's will for him to face these temptations while he was suffering. Even in extreme hunger, Jesus declared that he lived not by bread but by "every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus' reply refers to a time in Israel's history when God allowed his people to be hungry in order to show that he was their Provider.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know *that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

When God allows us to experience the pain of a physical or emotional need, he is always working out a redemptive purpose. Will we trust him to provide for us? If we become impatient and try to satisfy our needs in our own way, we will be trading an eternal inheritance for a quick and easy meal.



Hebrews 12:15-17 says, “See to it...that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.”

In this passage, sin is compared to Esau’s willingness to exchange his birthright (a double portion of his father’s vast wealth) for one meal. A sinful act often satisfies only one desire that will return again and again. Waiting on God refines our character and teaches us to trust and obey him. This sets us apart from the world and marks us as his children. We can patiently endure suffering because we know that we are sons and daughters of God and someday we will share in the inheritance of his Kingdom.

In the first temptation, Jesus demonstrated his perfect trust in his Heavenly Father as the One who would provide for his needs. He showed us that life comes from the Word of God, and not from eating food or satisfying a bodily desire.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Romans 6:20-22

The Second Temptation

Next, the devil took Jesus to the top of the highest tower of the Temple and urged him to jump off and let the angels save him. He recited words from Psalm 91 as a justification for this stunt which would reveal Jesus' glory without the pain of the cross. Satan and those who serve him often disguise themselves as 'angels of light' and 'servants of righteousness' (2 Corinthians 11:14). You will likely find Satan and those who do his bidding standing behind pulpits and quoting Scripture as they entice people to follow a path of sin.

Jesus replied to this temptation with another passage from Deuteronomy 6:16, **"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."**

These words came from Moses' admonition to the Israelites as he reminded them of their failure in the wilderness 40 years earlier. The Israelites had been led to camp in a place with no source of water. This was a real problem. They were a nation of millions of people plus flocks of animals. They became so angry about the situation that they were ready to stone Moses for leading them to such a desolate place. But by this time, they should have known that God would provide for them.

They had already seen with their own eyes:

- ❖ Ten plagues against the Egyptians, which never touched the Hebrew people.
- ❖ Miraculous deliverance through the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army.
- ❖ God's presence with them every day in a miraculous column that was a cloud by day and a fire by night.



- ❖ The provision of daily manna, which appeared on the ground each day as naturally as dew. It required no processing, no grinding, no baking. It was truly bread from heaven.

The Israelites had seen all of these things, and yet, they fell to pieces when they came to a place with no water. Instead of waiting patiently for help, they nearly killed the man that God had appointed as their leader. For this reason, Moses called the place “Massah” meaning “Testing” because “They tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

In the second temptation, Jesus referred back to this event, and resisted the impatient impulse to put God to the test. He did not ask God to prove that he was there. He did not try to prove himself to the devil. He was not enticed by the suggestion to go for easy fame. He knew with absolute certainty that God’s way was better. And so, he was able to turn towards the path that would lead to the suffering and pain of the cross. Jesus was able to choose God’s way because he was certain of the joy that was waiting for him on the other side of the cross.

*“... Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**” Hebrews 12:1-2*

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

The Third Temptation

In the last temptation, Satan took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory. This must have been quite the cinematic masterpiece. He promised to give all of this to Jesus if he would only bow down and worship him. Jesus again answered with words from Deuteronomy 6:13. **“You shall worship the Lord and serve him only.”**

After giving up the opportunity to temporarily rule over all of the kingdoms of the earth on Satan’s terms, Jesus went on in his ministry to teach a great deal about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven was not likened to great armies, vast treasuries overflowing with wealth, impressive man-made walls, art, culture, music or any of the wonders that the devil must have used to try to attract Jesus’ worship. When Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of Heaven, it was

a mustard seed,
a farmer sowing seeds in a field,
a single pearl of great value,
a treasure found buried in a field.

Every time that Jesus taught about the Kingdom of Heaven, he toppled the earthly glory that the devil promises. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of Heaven was of such great value, that it was worth trading all wealth, honor, prestige, safety and security in this world in order to gain it. Its value is not in what things are there for us, but in Who is there with us. To be with God forever, is the single pearl of great value.



Be Healed

Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Hebrews 12: 12-13

Sanctification is how we are made holy and become more like Jesus by obeying God's Word. Obedience is ultimately about showing that we trust God. Mistrust of God will always result in doing things in our way, in our time, and by our own means. The devil will always be pulling us towards this path because he knows it leads to death. In obedience we do things in God's way, in God's time, and by his means. His way often feels very difficult and burdensome. But His way is the only one that leads to everlasting life.

Our holiness does not earn salvation. But growing in holiness will bring life and health to our bodies, minds, and to our relationships. Each day we need the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, lead us to repentance and help us to live according to God's Word.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?
Romans 6:1*

Loving the Right Things

My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

Psalm 119:20

In Sanctification we should be learning to love the right things, most importantly, God and his ways. Sin becomes less and less tempting the more we cultivate a genuine love for that which is true and good.

Many Christians get stuck at a point where they have become convicted of sin in their lives, but their desires are still oriented towards sin. This can be very depressing. We are designed to be driven by our passions. But if we are stuck in sinful passions, we need to identify that our desires are disordered and ask God to help us grow in loving the right things.

A new believer once shared with me that she knew that she needed to stop going to the bar that had been the center of her social life and the gateway into a lot of sinful behaviors. But she still really wanted to be there. She missed the people and all the fun she used to have! A few days later she learned that the bar had burned to the ground. She was relieved to know that her old temptation was not even an option anymore.

We do not have to have our temptations literally burn down, and in fact, even if they do, we will find other 'bars' to love. Our evil desires must be dissolved from within so that we can genuinely love the right things. This happens differently for different people, but it is certainly a life-long process. To begin growing in love for the right things, we must start by denying ourselves and our sinful desires. Then we must take up our cross daily and follow Jesus in obedience.

Loving God's Law

The Law of Sin is death. It steals, kills and destroys. The Law of the Lord is good and it gives life abundantly.

Psalm 119 is composed of 176 verses expressing passion for God's Law. After experiencing the consequences of sin, the Psalmist was overcome with love for the life-giving goodness of God's Law.

When we talk about God's Law, we are speaking of his moral laws and every law that governs the universe. In other words, the scope of the Psalmist's subject in Psalm 119 is all of the Works of God, from Creation to Salvation and everything before, between and after.

The Law and the Gospel are not opposites. The Gospel is the richest, most glorious, most benevolent, most perfect display of God's Law. For in it, God maintained perfect justice and righteousness, and perfect wrath against sin, while creating a perfect way for sinners to be saved.

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Psalm 119:18

Clearing a New Path

The questions in this section can be helpful in rewiring the way we think about sin. First, we must understand the insecurities that have led to a certain behavior. Then, we can go to God's Word to find out how he provides for the longing that we are experiencing. It is so important that we learn to view our sin as a short-lived, unsatisfying meal compared with the vast inheritance that is ours as children of God.

You can use these questions in quiet devotions with yourself, or in helping your children understand the roots of their sins. You can also use these questions to talk through stories in the Bible or current news stories that involve sin. These questions will help you to become well-trained in recognizing the foolish patterns of sin. They will also prepare you to think quickly and biblically when you face temptations.

- ❖ Did you question whether or not God really had a 'thou shalt not' for that issue?
- ❖ Was there a lie you believed that led you to think that this action was good? Was there a lie that was partly false but partly true so that it was confusing and easier to believe?
- ❖ What evil (disordered) desire(s) did the sin appeal to?
- ❖ How did you try to cover-up the sin afterwards?
- ❖ What negative impact did this sin have on you and those around you?
- ❖ What does God's Word tell us about how he will provide for the need or desire that you are

experiencing? What are some stories from the Bible of God's deliverance and provision for his people?

- ❖ How can we know that God will provide for our needs? Start with Philippians 4:19 and work on building your own list of God's many promises to provide for our needs.

Psalm 119:1-8

Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord!
Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways!
You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
Oh, that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!
Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me!