

Two Guarantees from God for Overcoming Sin - a paper for the Gulf Coast Baptist Church 2023 Fall Bible Conference by Steve Thomas 10/7/23

Introduction

Sin is humanity's greatest problem. It has always been so. God has a plan for His people to deal with sin. He has always provided His people with means to prevent sin, or to deal with it when it happens. God's behavior towards His people in regards to sin has always been preventative, corrective, and restorative. God instituted a law for Israel to demonstrate their inability to display true righteousness (Romans 10:3). He promised them blessings and cursings for keeping this law or failing to keep it (Deut 28:1,15). Many Old Testament Saints were commended for their faith, and several of them were under this law (Hebrews 11:32). But even these men struggled with sin at various times in their lives (David, Gideon, and Samson). Paul tells the believer that law is not a tool intended to keep the Grace Believer from sin, but to lead the unrighteous to Christ (Galatians 3:15-25). The Psalmist recites: ***"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*** - Psalm 119:11. There is no guarantee here, but the believer today has a guarantee to keep him from sin. In fact, the New Testament has two such guarantees. Memorizing scripture is excellent, and should be done often, but by itself it is not a guarantee to keep the believer from sin.

God's Incentive for Good Behavior - throughout the Bible

God provided Adam with everything he needed to keep from sinning in the Garden. The only prohibition that Adam and Eve had was eating of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 1:29-30 states that God provided every fruit of a tree and green herb for meat for man and that it was good. Satan's temptation for Eve was to convince her that God was withholding something valuable from them that they needed for happiness and a full life. This was deception, in 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul explains ***"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."*** God's provision of all that is good was incentive for Adam and Eve to obey the command of God. God dealt with Adam's sin by casting both him and Eve out of the Garden and fashioning clothing for them to wear from dead animals. He also told them about a plan to "crush" the sin problem in the future.

After Adam and Eve left the garden, God used the conscience to warn men of wrongdoing. In the interaction between Cain and Abel, Cain complained to God that his perversity was more than he could bear (Gen 4:13). The conscience was not enough to keep man from sinning. This device was intended to warn men of bad behavior and reward good behavior (Romans 2:15). It was not effective to keep man from sin. Man's sinful nature was winning this war. God dealt with Cain's sin by commanding him to be a fugitive. He and his descendants instead built cities. Satan used Cain and his descendants to begin his World System. God dealt with mankind's sin with a catastrophic destruction of all humanity with a worldwide flood.

God used human government to incentivize good behavior after Noah. Civil Government is given authority from God for the punishment of evildoers (1 Peter 2:14). God told man at that time, ***"whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed"*** (Genesis 9:6). Man's

continued disobedience led to the confusion at Babel. God judged man in three ways. He separated the land, the languages, and the ethnicity of man (Gen 10:25, 32, 11:9). God's plan was just, but it revealed that man was incapable of following God's commands perfectly. Government is not the answer to man's sin. This is an important lesson for believers to remember. As active as we may want to be in politics or human government, the answer to man's greatest problem does not rest here.

At this time God chose a specific group of people to begin working with. God selected Abraham and gave him certain promises. For the first time in history, God promised to do something for a specific family and his descendants (through Isaac) rather than for the whole human race. God promised to Abraham land, that certain of his descendants would multiply like the stars in the sky and the sand of the sea, and that they would possess certain blessings (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5). These promises would govern the lives of the people for several hundred years. This group of people had an incentive to do right.

The Israelites had the opportunity to become a nation of priests who could show the rest of the nations what it meant to be a royal priesthood. In Exodus 19, they presumed to be able to follow all of God's commands. This presumption led God to instead have them become a nation with a priesthood. He instituted the law to show them that they could not depend on their own righteousness, but needed to learn about God's righteousness (Romans 10:3). This law was intended to point directly to their sin. Paul said he would not experientially know his sinful desires unless the law did not say, "*do not covet.*" The law "*wrought in me*" - worked out- in Paul all manner of lusts (Romans 7:8-9). Basically, the law which said not to lust, made me want to lust more. As God intended, the law did not keep men from sinning, but revealed the ugliness of man's sin nature to him. There was nothing wrong with the law (7:12), the law is good and holy, but it revealed to man how truly depraved he really was.

The incentive for the believer not to sin under law is based on self interest and fear. Deuteronomy 28 gives both sides to this coin. Israel was given a list of blessings and cursings as positive and negative reinforcement. God said to keep the law, or else! Those who kept the law received physical blessings and those that did not received death and dismemberment.

As Paul tells us in Galatians, this law was intended to lead men to Christ (3:24-25). Paul begins to direct the believer to an understanding of what God has for him at the end of Galatians chapter 3. The Galatians were using the law in a manner in which it was not intended. They were using it like the Israelites to manifest their own righteousness to each other. They had been "*bewitched*" (put in a trance) and suffered under the misconception that they could somehow bring themselves to maturity through their own power (3:1-3). The believer putting himself under any quality of law will not result in him overcoming sinful behavior, in fact, it will rile up or awaken that sin nature and end up destroying him, as Paul taught in Romans chapter 7.

So how is the believer to overcome sin in his life? We can see through the Bible how God intended to teach man about himself and his need for the power of the Godhead. In each different way of management, God revealed that man was unable to see His provision and choose to do the right thing. God actually gives the believer today a guarantee that he can

overcome sin. Christ conquered sin and the grave with his death and resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul uses the crosswork and resurrection of Christ to empower the believer to wake up and cease from sin (1 Corinthians 15:34). Peter tells the believer to equip himself with a certain mindset since Christ in His flesh, suffered for us. The goal of the crosswork was to have the believer cease from sin (1 Peter 4:1-2). Christ was able to discern the will of the Father and do it.

Peter gives a hint to how the believer is to overcome his sin with the phrase “*in the flesh to the lusts of men*”. Peter lets the believer know that the key to overcoming sin though the power of God is with his mind. The word used here is ἔννοια (enoyah) and means thinking or intent. The believer should be intentional about how to equip his mind to fight against sinful desires. When he is “*in the flesh*” he will have the default setting of being a slave to the sin nature. He must equip his mind against this tendency with some information. Peter walks the believer through the steps of worship (4:7), agape love (4:8), and the ministration of the spiritual service gifts (4:10-11). This pattern is also used by Paul in several different letters to believers. Peter stops short though of giving a guarantee. Paul and the Apostle John however, do give the believer a guarantee that sin will not take place if the believer does a certain thing. Peter implies it, but stops short of actually giving the same guarantee that the other two writers do.

Paul's Guarantee

As has been previously stated, Paul asked the Galatians who put them under a trance to believe that they could bring themselves to maturity through the flesh, when God declared them to be righteous based on their faith. Over the next chapter and a half, Paul shows them the contrast between the flesh and the Spirit. Why would someone who had sonship privileges want to place themselves back under a tutor? There were those in the church at Galatia who were “*zealously affecting*” them (4:17) and not in the good way. These individuals were seeking to place the Galatian believers back in bondage under the “*beggarly elements*” of observing days, months, and years. Paul uses the illustration of the bondwoman and the free woman. They were given liberty from Sinai (the law). Chapter 5 tells them to stand fast (stand firm, persevere) in this liberty (5:1). Christ had made them free, and attempting to keep the law for favor will result in a snare. Even if the goal is to love one another as the believer loves himself, it will end up in biting and devouring one another (5:15). So putting themselves under a quality of law would not result in the love that God intended, but would result in believers being ensnared. What was the answer then?

Paul gives the answer with a guarantee in verse “***[This] I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.***” (Gal 5:16) This passage contains the Greek double negative. The double negative occurs slightly less than 100 times in the New Testament (a listing of all these occurrences can be found in The Englishman's Greek Concordance, listed under μή). In these cases the negative idea is greatly strengthened. It becomes a very powerful negative. "This is the strongest way to negate something in Greek" (Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 468). The meaning is something like this: **"Never, positively not! It will**

never happen! It's unthinkable! There is not even the slightest possibility that it will ever happen!"¹ This is the guarantee, in the strongest possible terms. If a believer will "Walk in the Spirit", there will be no fulfillment of the desires of his flesh. Over the next few verses Paul gives an interesting sequence using the Spirit. *Walk in* the Spirit, *be led of* the Spirit, *live in* the Spirit, and then again *Walk in* the Spirit, albeit with a different Greek word for "Walk".

Walk in the Spirit

The word for Walk in the guarantee is περιπατέω (peripateo) and means to regulate oneself. To order one's life, or to deport oneself. Allow the Spirit to have control instead of the law, which would lead to the awakening of the sin nature, and thus a sin nature in control. In Romans 6, Paul exhorts the believer to "yield" one's members to God, instead of yielding to one's members to the Sin Nature. The believer can do this by ordering his life in such a way where it is easier to do the Will of the Father manifested in the leading of the Spirit. He can prepare his mind to be "interrupted" by leading of the Spirit in any given day. The Spirit will lead the believer to act in accordance with the Father's desirous will, but in order for the believer to get the benefit of the guarantee, he must yield to the Spirit's leading.

If the believer orders his life in the Spirit, the Spirit will lead the believer. This will never result in sinful desires being fulfilled, never. These lusts could originate in the Flesh, or with the Evil One, but they will never come to fulfillment. Paul is telling the believer that this is not accomplished through the law, but by submission to the Spirit. This is a fantastic incentive not to sin, and the author is pointing to the path for this to happen. If the believer places himself under any quality of law, it will result in believer's biting and devouring one another. But yielding to the Spirit will result in the Spirit producing fruit that matches the character of Christ.

Live in the Spirit/Walk in the Spirit

The first class condition here in the Greek would tell us to insert the word "since" for the "if". Since we live in the Spirit, since the Spirit is our source of life, we should also walk in the Spirit. This is an instance of a first class condition leading to a hortatory subjunctive. Basically a fancy way of saying, "Since this is true, we should all join together to do this...". This second use of the word "walk" however, is different from the first use back up in verse 16. This word is στοιχέω meaning, *to proceed in a row as the march of a soldier, or to keep in step with*. It is translated in a couple of places *walking orderly*.

This is where the believer's decision comes into play. He has placed himself at the disposal of the Spirit, and the Spirit responds by leading. When the Spirit leads, the believer has the choice to continue in step with the Spirit's direction, or he can be distracted by his spiritual enemies and begin to walk disorderly - or out of step with the Spirit. Many times this is when the believer experiences temptation. The believer is drawn away of his own lust and enticed, or he begins to lose sight of the Desirous Will of God because of something in the World System, or he may even have to deal with a lust that the Evil One has sent to the mind. It is incumbent

¹ <http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/egreek/egreek06.htm>

upon the believer to deal with these attacks in the manner that the Scripture prescribes, and keep in step with the Spirit. Giving in to any one of these enemies will cause him to be out of step with the leading of the Spirit. The Spirit is the source of life, and the enemies bring darkness.

John deals with this concept of walking in his first epistle. He links the believer's existence in light and darkness to the new commandment.

Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

(1Jo 2:7-11 KJV)

Loving the brethren is the visual evidence that someone is a believer. When a believer lacks this love towards another believer he walks, or orders his life (regulates himself) in darkness. John is using the word for walk that Paul used back in Galatians 5:16 where he gave his guarantee. This lack of love for the brethren will lead to sin. John is saying that a believer needs to be intentional about loving his brother. It is not the natural inclination. The “beginning” being referenced in verse 7 is the beginning of the time period John was in when he wrote his epistle. He is referring to the Upper Room Discourse where Christ gave them the new commandment to love as He loved them. The light being talked about here is connected to the “life” that Paul was talking about in Galatians. John talks about this life through his epistle and calls it the “eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13). Both Paul and John connect Life to Light to Love. Chapter 3 is where John gives the believer his guarantee.

John's Guarantee - Abiding in Him

In chapter 3 John draws the believer's attention to the fact that he is loved of God and has been given the privilege of being born into God's family. The word used here is not the word for sonship, but for “born ones”. It might be better translated children rather than sons here. John is drawing attention not to the position that has been granted, but the privilege of being in God's family and the recipient of God's love. He also draw attention to the believer's future tense salvation and the change that will occur when we see Christ. The love of God and the future benefits from being in the family of God are the incentive that the believer has not to sin. The believer will be like Christ when he sees him, so begin the cleansing process now.

Rather than allow the believer to assume that he has the ability to cleanse himself, the same problem that the Galatians fell into when they were bewitched, John guides the believer to how this cleansing process will take place.

In 1 John 3:4 the Bible defines sin as lawlessness, the acting without regard to the fact that God has placed restraints upon man. This Greek construction in this passage is to equate both of the nouns with each other. The article with both the subject and the predicate makes them coextensive and thus interchangeable. Later on in chapter 5 John does not use the article, further giving the reader information about unrighteousness and sin. “*All unrighteousness is sin...*” this beginning to verse 17 would seem to remove any doubt that there is a difference between sin and unrighteousness. However, the Greek construction gives the reader more information. The use of these Greek words **without the article** emphasizes that which has the character and quality of the other word. John is saying here that all unrighteousness has the quality or character of sin, but they are two distinct words that scripture has drawn a distinction between.

The restraint that God has placed on the believer in the Dispensation of Grace is the new commandment from John 13:34-35. When the believer acts as if this restraint does not exist, he is walking in darkness. Even though the Spirit is life, he is acting as if he is dead. John’s guarantee comes in 1 John 3:6. ***Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. (1Jo 3:6 KJV)*** The idea of abiding is “*to dwell*”, or “*to remain at ease in*”. The believer that does not love his brother is sinning. But when the believer abides or is comfortable in his position In Christ, he will not sin, he will love his brother. Some have mistaken this passage to be talking about initial salvation, but all through the book, John is dealing with believers who need to be directing love towards their “brother”.

John is saying that one who has a habit of sinning is transgressing the new commandment. But the one who is comfortable in his position In Christ will not continue to sin. The one who keeps sinning (not loving his brother) does not have an experiential knowledge of Christ. He goes on to say down in verse 24 that the relationship is reciprocal. Christ is at ease in the believer and the believer In Christ when the love of Christ is being directed at the brethren. The telling factor that Christ is at ease in the believer is the presence of the Spirit in the believer.

The Two Guarantees - compared

Paul said that anyone who will be regulated by the Spirit will not fulfill the desires of the Sin Nature. John said that anyone who is at ease in his position In Christ will not continue to sin, and in the context the sin is not loving his brother. These activities are mental. They are not based on fear, or self-interest. They are directed towards God. The Galatians were worried about advertising their own righteousness to impress other believers, and John was telling a group of believers to stop loving the world system and the things that are in the world. Both of these things led to sin. The Grace Believer should have a mentality that is submissive to the Spirit, willing for the Spirit to set our agenda. He should also be comfortable in his position In Christ. Seeing himself as God sees him is key to this process happening. This takes faith.

The sin nature will not want to submit to any authority, much less the leading of the Spirit of God. The Evil One will try to get the believer to believe anything but the truth about his identity. He will send circumstances to distract and discourage the believer. Satan, the great

Deceiver, will attempt to guide the believer to a wrong conclusion about his reality. The believer should put on the belt of truth (Eph 6) to see things from God's perspective. To the extent that the believer can do these things, he will cease from sin. The Bible guarantees these things with the strongest language possible. Any believer that is struggling with sin should Walk in the Spirit and Abide in Christ, and he will experience victory.

Conclusion

God's people have used multiple methods to keep from sin. Many believers are using the wrong method to keep from sinning today. The prosperity gospel and the message of legalism are two extremes that are examples of wrong methods. These methods produce works of the flesh and revive the sin nature to the point that the sin nature goes out of control. Only by yielding to Holy Spirit control, which is part of the pattern to overcome one's sin nature, and by abiding In Christ, can the believer cease from sin. Many of God's people struggled with sin throughout the Bible, and many believers struggle today. But God has provided the believer with the means to be victorious, if he will make use of them.

The Three Realms of the Believer: Body, Soul, and Spirit

Body

Interacts materially with the physical universe.

Physical mind (brain) receives input from the 5 senses.

Is temporary.

The 11 systems regulate the health of the individual and affect and are affected by both the soul and the spirit.

Carnal/Flesh "soma"

Is un-regenerated

1 Thessalonians 5:23,

Hebrews 4:12,

Galatians 5:24,

1 Corinthians 3:1,

1 Peter 1:8-9

Soul

Receives the input from the Body and interprets it according to emotions, feelings, memories, conscience, preferences, and imaginations.

Made up of intellect, sensibility, and will.

The Sin Nature/Flesh makes its appeals through the soul.

Soul/life "psyche"

Is un-regenerated

1 Peter 1:23,

1 John 3:9,

Matthew 26:41,

Romans 8:5,

Ephesians 3:16,

Philippians 2:5,

Colossians 1:27,

2 Peter 1:4,

Romans 12:2,

1 John 5:11-13

Spirit

Is the place of reasoning.

Is the place where the eternal life resides (the seed of the Father).

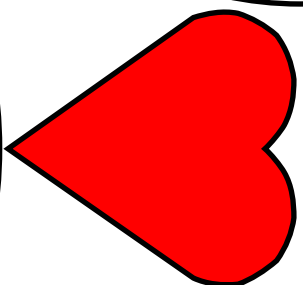
Is the place where we can access the mind of God.

Is the place where we are indwelt by the Godhead.

Is called the renewed Mind.

Is where we are partakers of the Divine Nature.

Is regenerated.



The Believer's Mind



**Distractions
from the World
System: Lust of
the Flesh, Lust
of the Eyes,
Pride of
Achievement**

1 John 2:15-17

**Know/Reckon –
Romans 6:3-11**

**Set your affections
– Colossians 3:2**

**Think on these
things – Phil 4:8**

**Renewed Mind
Romans 12:1-2**

**Mind of Christ
Phil 2:2-5**

**The believer focuses on his
Position/Possessions/Privileges
In Christ**

**Attacks
from the
Methods of
the Evil
One**

Eph 6:11

Vanity of your mind

Eph 4:17

**Imaginations/
Reasonings of the
Mind**

2 Cor 10:5 / Luke 9:46

Carnal Mind

Romans 8:7

**Sin Nature's
Sabotage**

1 Peter 2:11

