

Session 1: Still Sinning After All These Years

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2 Corinthians 4:7 We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

I. Evaluating truth claims

- A. Is it scriptural?
- B. Does it map onto your experience?
- C. Does it exalt God and humble man?
- D. Does it encourage you toward love and holiness?

II. Popular notions of sanctification

- A. Better and better
- B. Cooperative effort
- C. If God commands it we can obey it
- D. Repentance = change
- E. Newton's view of sanctification: Growing humility and dependence

III. Biblical theology of sinful failure

- A. All things equally easy for God
- B. What God could have done
- C. What God has done
- D. New Creation and Old sinful flesh
- E. Understanding our depravity
- F. Why would our Loving Heavenly Father leave so much sin?

IV. God and sin

- A. God hates sin
- B. God teaches his children to hate sin and war against it
- C. God cannot be tempted by evil
- D. God never tempts anyone
- E. We can never blame our sin on God in any way
- F. God tolerates sin
- G. God ordains sin
- H. God is sovereign over man's sin
- I. God uses man's sin to accomplish his will

V. Stages of Christian Growth

- A. Baby stage – DESIRE
- B. Maturing stage – CONFLICT
- C. Adult stage – CONTEMPLATION
- D. What God teaches his children
- E. How God teaches his children

VI. Implications

- A. Focus on what God is doing
- B. Besetting sin (Rom. 7; 2 Cor. 12:7-10)
- C. Confidence in Holy Spirit
- D. Ability to be honest about indwelling sin
- E. Suffering from our indwelling sin
- F. Accurate expectations of ourselves and others
- G. Avoid calling evil good or good evil for the sake of compassion
- H. Patience and gracious allowances
- I. Glory stealing and the problem of boasting
- J. Our union with Christ means the following:
 - a. It is finished – past, present, future
 - b. God began a good work, he will finish it
 - c. God cannot be stopped
 - d. Our sin can grieve him but not paralyze him
 - e. No choice but to change – in his time, on his agenda
 - f. Even our sin is used for our benefit
 - g. Some of God's best work is done in our worst moments
 - h. Holy Spirit is at work in us 24/7
 - i. God gets his way, every day, every moment
 - j. We are never out of his will
 - k. We are exactly where God wants us to be
 - l. God is never angry or disappointed with us
 - m. God looks at us and sees the righteousness of Christ, always.
 - n. Our worst moments become greatest opportunities for worship

Yet I Sin

(Adapted from The Valley of Vision)

Eternal Father,

*You are good beyond all thought,
But we are vile, wretched, miserable and blind;
Our lips are ready to confess, but our hearts are slow to feel,
and our ways reluctant to change.*

*We bring our souls to you;
break them, wound them, bend them and mold them.
Unmask to us sin's deformity,
so that we will hate it, be horrified by it, and run from it.
Our faculties have been a weapon of revolt against you;
as rebels we have misused our strength and health,
and served the foul enemy of your kingdom.*

*Give us grace to grieve over our mindless foolishness.
Help us to remember that the way of the sinner is hard,
that evil paths are full of pain and suffering,
and that to depart from you is to leave all that is good.*

*We have seen the purity and beauty of your perfect law,
the joy of those in whose heart it reigns,
the calm dignity of the walk to which it calls us
yet we daily violate and despise its precepts,
Father, forgive us.*

*Your loving Spirit strives within us,
brings us Scripture warnings,
allures us with secret whispers,
floods our lives with undeserved blessings
yet we grieve your Spirit day after day.*

*We confess our many sins and ask for continual repentance.
Thank you for Jesus, who paid for all our sin, past, present, and future, and gave us his perfect
obedience as a free gift. May our tears of repentance help us to see the brightness of his glory
and fill our hearts with loving gratitude and fresh desires for holiness.
In his name we pray, amen.*

John Newton quotes:

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and vile imaginations; but this evil is present with me! My heart is like an open highway—like a city without walls or gates. Nothing so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid—but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's Table—exempt me from their intrusion.

But if this awful effect of heart depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature—yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes, I find something within me, which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to be horrified by, and flee from—as I would if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed. Ah! How vile must the heart (at least my heart) be, that can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency. Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affectation of humility (however fair his outward conduct appears), subscribe himself less than the least of all saints, and the very chief of sinners!

A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit, but it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is springtime with 'A'. He is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly Farmer, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees, and feels, and does those things which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to God, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small, but it is growing every day. If he is not a *father* or a *young man* in grace, he is a dear *child*. The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desires supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for, is approaching, when, by a farther discovery of the glorious Gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the Gospel, burdened with sin, and perhaps beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom," is pleased at times to favor him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to His mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But before long he feels a change: his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and perhaps Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at his wits' end; thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow: he sees not the harmony and glory of the Divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner: he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him.

However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin: his conscience is tender, his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capable of giving him much disturbance.

'A', like Israel, has been delivered from Egypt by great power and a stretched out arm, has been pursued and terrified by many enemies, has given himself up for lost again and again. He has at last seen his enemies destroyed, and has sang the song of Moses and the Lamb upon the banks of the Red Sea. Then he commences 'B'. Perhaps, like Israel, he thinks his difficulties are at an end, and expects to go on rejoicing until he enters the promised land. But, alas! His difficulties are in a manner but beginning; he has a wilderness before him, of which he is not aware. The Lord is now about to suit his dispensations to humble and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart, that he may do him good at the latter end, and that all the glory may redound to his own free grace.

By a variety of these exercises, through the overruling and edifying influences of the Holy Spirit, 'B' is trained up in a growing knowledge of himself and of the Lord. He learns to be more distrustful of his own heart, and to suspect a snare in every step he takes.

The dark and disconsolate hours which he has brought upon himself in times past, make him doubly prize the light of God's countenance, and teach him to dread whatever might grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw again. The repeated and multiplied pardons which he has received, increase his admiration of, and the sense of his obligations to, the rich sovereign abounding mercy of the covenant. Much has been forgiven him, therefore he loves much, and therefore he knows how to forgive and pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil; but his own experiences teach him tenderness and forbearance. He exercises a spirit of meekness towards those who are overtaken in a fault; and his attempts to restore such, are according to the pattern of the Lord's dealings with himself.

A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord who has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature. But that we are so totally depraved is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only told it. Indeed if we could receive, and habitually maintain, a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in scripture, it would probably save us many a mournful hour; but experience is the Lord's school, and they who are taught by him usually learn, that they have no wisdom by the mistakes they make, and that they have no strength by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new corruption which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words, "Without me you can do nothing."

For many reasons, we can never be competent judges of each other, because we cannot be competently acquainted with the whole complex case. But our great and merciful High Priest knows the whole: he considers our frame, "remembers that we are but dust;" makes gracious allowances; pities, bears, accepts, and approves, with unerring judgment. The sun, in his daily course, beholds nothing so excellent and honorable upon earth as 'C', though perhaps he may be confined to a cottage, and is little known or noticed by men. But he is the object and residence of Divine love, the charge of angels, and ripening for everlasting glory. Happy 'C'! his toils, sufferings, and exercises, will be soon at an end; soon his desires will be accomplished; and He who has loved him, and redeemed him with his own blood, will receive him to himself, with a "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter you into the joy of your Lord."

(from *Select Letters of John Newton*, Banner of Truth)