

Ceased From Sin **(Living To Do God's Will)**

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I: Introduction

In his first letter Peter declares that Jesus bore our sins in his body so that we may cease from sin and live for righteousness. He followed that by saying that some people had ceased from sin.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, **that we may cease from sinning** and live for righteousness. (1 Peter 2:24)

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh **has ceased from sin**, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for corrupt human desires but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1-2)

Peter says that there were people who had ceased from sin. Moreover, he tells how they became people who had ceased from sin: they suffered in the flesh. He also gives us a glimpse into how such people lived: no longer controlled by corrupt desires, but by God's will.

The real possibility of ceasing from sin should be of great interest to those who

- love Jesus (John 14:15, 21, 23, 24)
- seek to be controlled by God's will (1 Peter 4:1-2)
- seek to live for righteousness (1 Peter 2:24)
- seek to be free from sin
- seek the spiritual growth and fruitfulness that comes with being free from sin
- seek eternal life (Matthew 5:29-30, 18:8-9, Mark 9:44-47)
- seek fellowship and union with God (John 14:15, 21, 23)

Satan is interested in keeping people from ceasing from sin. He is seeking to rob Jesus and us of the results of his sacrifice through one of the greatest deceptions in history: causing people to believe that it is impossible to cease from sin.

To overcome Satan's deception we need some help: God's armor and his Spirit of Truth.

God has made his armor available to us so that we may be equipped with the power we need to overcome Satan and his deception.

Be furnished with the capacity for strength through your union with the Lord and the fullness of his immeasurable strength. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be

able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, having shod your feet with the sure footing of the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Ephesians 6:10-18)

So, following God's instructions, given through Paul, we put on God's armor.

Father, we thank you in the name of Jesus for your armor and we put on your armor: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the sword of your Spirit.

God has also sent the Spirit of Truth to guide us into all the truth: to guide us into the truth of how to cease from sin.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, (John 16:13)

If we ask God, he will send the Spirit of Truth to guide us into all the truth.

Father, we thank you in the name of Jesus that you send forth your Spirit of Truth to guide us into all the truth. We ask that you send your Spirit of Truth to guide us into all the truth and show us things to come. Fill us with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so we live a life worthy of you, fully pleasing to you, and bearing fruit in every good work.

Father, we pray that you send your Spirit of Truth to guide us specifically into all the truth about ceasing from sin: including whether it is possible and, if it is, how to do so.

My first book, *The Guiding Into Truth Work of the Holy Spirit* covers the work of the Spirit of Truth: how he guides us and how we hear him. It lays the foundation for following the guiding of the Spirit rather than leaning to our own understanding to discern what is true. That foundation is highly recommended for discerning the truth in this book. Reading this book without the foundation provided by *The Guiding Into Truth Work of the Holy Spirit* significantly increases the risks of rejecting the truth of this book as error and accepting error and deception as truth.

Part One: Sin and Man

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I: Sin and Man

If we are to cease from sin, it would be helpful to know how sin works so we can align our lives resisting it. James gets us started.

Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then corrupt desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

Each person is tempted with bait matched to that person's corrupt desires. The Bible gives us two accounts of temptation that help us see the process more clearly and more completely: the case of Adam and Eve and the case of Jesus.

Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and sinned. Did they have corrupt desires? If so, where did they get them from? Were they created with corrupt desires? It seems unlikely that God created Adam and Eve with corrupt desires. It seems even more unlikely that he did so and called their creation, "very good" (Genesis 1:31). If they were not created with corrupt desires, where did they come from? Before we try to answer that, let's look at the temptation of Jesus.

Jesus was tempted by Satan and did not sin. Did Jesus have corrupt desires? This we can answer, "No." Then Jesus was tempted, but not with bait matched to corrupt desires.

Now the Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in every measure as we are, yet without sin.

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)

So the temptation of Adam and Eve and the temptation of Jesus were of the same manner: the same power and process was used in an attempt to cause them to sin. The temptation succeeded in causing Adam and Eve to sin, but failed to cause Jesus to sin. Going back to James helps us understand.

When **corrupt desire** conceives it **brings forth sin**.

Sin is produced by corrupt desire and corrupt desire is the result of seed planted and conceiving in a person's heart. Temptation, therefore, works in two different ways. In the first way temptation is the sowing of seed into a person's heart in an attempt to cause

corrupt desire to conceive. In the second, temptation offers satisfaction of a corrupt desire that has been conceived.

Adam and Eve and Jesus were tempted according to the first way temptation works. Satan tried to sow seed into their hearts and have that seed conceive corrupt desire. Jesus rejected the seed and no corrupt desire was conceived. Adam and Eve failed to reject the seed and corrupt desire was conceived in them. Adam and Eve allowed corrupt desire to conceive and it brought forth sin.

Corrupt desires bring forth sin. To cease from sin a person must overcome these corrupt desires and prevent them from conceiving again. Peter says that those who ceased from sin did this.

Whoever has suffered in the flesh **has ceased from sin**, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh **no longer for corrupt human desires**, but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1-2)

Part Two: The Flesh and the Spirit

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I: The Flesh and the Spirit

When Adam and Eve failed to reject Satan's temptation, corrupt desire was taken into their being (conceived) and began bringing forth sin and death. The nature of their being was changed and they became sin-producers – sinners. This part of their being was passed on to their children.

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

Through the disobedience of the one individual (Adam) the mass of mankind were constituted (made) sinners. (Romans 5:19)

So all people have a part of their being, inherited from their parents, that brings forth sin. To cease from sin a person must deal with the part of their being that brings forth sin. What part of our being brings forth sin? Jesus reveals the answer to us.

A: The Heart

Jesus says that only the heart can produce sin.

Whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart. (Mark 7:18-19)

The only part of man's being that causes him to sin is his heart.

From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. (Mark 7:21-23)

What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. (Matthew 15:18-20)

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. (Luke 6:45)

When we look at what the Bible says about our heart, we see that it is not talking about the bodily organ that pumps our blood. It is talking about the innermost part of our being.

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (Matthew 15:18-19)

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. (Matthew 13:19)

The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in (where the word was sown – the heart) and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Mark 4:19)

With our hearts we believe (Romans 10:10). Some doubt in their hearts (Mark 11:23).

What comes out of our mouth does not proceed from the bodily organ that pumps our blood. Thoughts and intentions, faith and doubt, do not come from our bodily heart.

B: The Flesh

The word translated “flesh” in the Old Testament comes from the word basar. In the New Testament it comes primarily from the word sarx. In both the Old and New Testaments the word “flesh” is used with a number of different meanings. We must look at the context of how it is used to determine the meaning.

It is used to mean “mankind” in Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17, Isaiah 66:23, and Genesis 6:12. It is used to mean “all living things” in Genesis 6:17. In Genesis 37:27 and Romans 11:14 it is used to mean “kinsman.” In Romans 4:1 it means “genealogy or lineage. It means “body tissue” in Genesis 2:21 and Luke 24:39. In Genesis 9:4 and Revelation 19:18 it means “meat.”

One of the ways the New Testament uses the term “flesh” is to contrast “the flesh” with “the spirit.” This usage is a little more complicated than the other uses of the term “flesh.” We need to be diligent about looking at how it is used and not lean to our own

understanding in order to correctly perceive what “the flesh” is. This a good spot to ask God to send his Spirit of Truth to guide us into the truth of “the flesh” and “the spirit.”

Father, in the name of Jesus, I ask you to send your Spirit of Truth to guide me into the truth of “the flesh” and “the spirit.”

Here are some examples from the New Testament.

The desires of the flesh are against the desires of the spirit. (Galatians 5:17)

You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, **gratifying the desires of our flesh** and following its will and thoughts. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from the **desires of the flesh**, which war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

Thoughts and desires are attributed to “the flesh.” They are, however, also attributed to the heart.

The flesh is also said to have works.

The works of the flesh are evident: **sexual immorality**, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **envy**, drunkenness, orgies, **and things like these**. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Jesus attributes works like these to the heart and says only the heart brings forth sin.

What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, **sexual immorality**, theft, false witness, slander. (Matthew 15:18-19)

From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, **sexual immorality**, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, **envy**, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. (Mark 7:21-23)

When the New Testament uses the term “the flesh” in connection with corrupt desires, corrupt works, and sin; and in comparison to “the spirit” it is using it to refer to the portion of man's heart that has taken Satan's corrupt seed into its being. It is the evil treasure of an evil person's heart. It is the portion of the heart with corrupt trees bringing forth corrupt fruit.

C: The Spirit

The original New Testament Greek was written in uncials – all capital letters. Translators used the context to determine when some words – like spirit – should be capitalized as a title, or not. In many of the comparisons between “the flesh” and “the spirit,” the comparison better fits the spirit of man, rather than the Spirit of God.

For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other. (Galatians 5:17)

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

Some of the fruit of the spirit is associated with the heart.

Put on hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

“The spirit,” in contrast with “the flesh,” is the portion of a man's heart that has not accepted Satan's corrupt seed into its being. It has accepted the Word of God into its being. It is the good treasure of a good man's heart. It is the portion of the heart with good trees bringing forth good fruit.

Part Three: Suffering In the Flesh

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I: Suffering In the Flesh

As described in earlier chapters; Satan tempted Adam and Eve. They failed to reject the temptation and accepted corrupt desires into their being where it began producing sin. Jesus tells us that the heart is the part of our being that brings forth sin and that corrupt desires are found in our hearts. The Bible uses the term “the flesh” to refer to the portion of our hearts that contains corrupt desires. The flesh is corrupt-desire, corrupt-tree, heart. The spirit is do-God's-will, good-tree, heart. The spirit is the portion of our hearts where we have accepted and taken God's incorruptible seed into our being.

We know that those who have suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin. We also know that they no longer live their lives controlled by corrupt desires, but rather live to do God's will.

The corrupt desires of the corrupt-desire heart – the flesh – cause us to sin. Like the nature of the life in an apple tree impels it to bring forth apples, the nature of the “life” in corrupt desires impels them to bring forth sin in and through us. But Jesus tells us how to deal with sin and the corrupt desires that bring it forth.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell (Matthew 5:29-30)

Corrupt desires bring forth sin (James 1:15). Jesus commands us to remove them from our being so we won't be thrown into hell. How do we do that? How do we remove the corrupt desires, corrupt trees from our hearts? Jesus shows us the way again.

If you have faith like a grain of a mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea,” and it would obey you. (Luke 17:6)

Jesus isn't talking about landscaping. He is talking about the kingdom of God and changing the nature of our being.

What happens if we do what Jesus tells us to do? What happens if we command the corrupt desires within us to be plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea? They will leave. They will no longer be in us. We will no longer live our lives controlled by them – they are gone. They are no longer in us impelling us to sin – we cease from sin by removing that which brings forth sin from our being.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its affections and desires. (Galatians 5:24)

A: Removing Corrupt Desires

But wait, how long is this going to take? How many corrupt desires do I have? How will I know that I've gotten all of them – that I haven't missed one?

If we examine corrupt desires we see that all of them have a common element: what I want. Individual corrupt desires are like the countless branches on the corrupt tree. They all share the common root of “what I want.” It isn't necessary to cut off each individual branch. All of the branches will be removed if we lay the ax to the root of the corrupt tree.

- What I want to have.
- What I want to do.
- What I want to consume.
- What I want to be.
- What I want others to think I am.
- I want to live my life to please myself, to direct and order my steps to satisfy my desires.
- I want to live my life according to my own understanding.
- I want to determine for myself what is real, true, good; what to desire, what to believe.

So, if we remove all our “what I want” desires, every thing we want, from our being; we will remove all corrupt desires – we won't miss any.

We must not imagine that we must, or even can, cast away all of our desires by our own strength and ability. We need to trust God, love God, and hate sin. These, and the will and power to remove all our desires, come from the power of the Word of God working in us.

B: Sowing to the Spirit

It is not enough to remove the corrupt desires that cause us to sin. Those who cease from sin live no longer controlled by sin – they have removed the corrupt part of their being, but they also live to do God's will. That must be added. We must add to our being that which causes us not to sin and causes us to will and do God's will.

God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do his will. (Philippians 2:13)

Just as we accepted the seed of Satan's word and made it a part of our being, we must now accept the incorruptible seed of God's Word and make it a part of our being. We must sow God's Word into our hearts. God's Word must dwell in our hearts in abundance to produce the will and power to do God's will. Here are some key things we need God's Word to make part of our being.

- Fear of the Lord (Proverbs 8:13 – the fear the LORD is to hate evil)
- Love (is selfless, the opposite of the “what I want” corrupt desires)
- Trust (we must trust God to provide for us)
- Discernment (we must discern truth and error, good and evil, temptation and sin)

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For **if you do these things, you will never stumble**, (2 Peter 1:3-10)

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I: Measuring Ceased from Sin

How do we measure whether we have, or have not, ceased from sin? How do we measure whether we have, or do not have, corrupt desires that will cause us to sin? What evidence do we use? To what standard do we compare that evidence?

We should treat sin and that which causes us to sin in much the same way as if we had had cancer. We would regularly examine ourselves for any evidence that looked like cancer or like something that would cause it. We would not, however, just rely on our own examination. We would also go to a specialist who is able to discern evidence we are not able to discern.

In the same way we should examine our behavior and our desires for evidence of sin or that which would cause us to sin. We should go to God for confirmation of evidence we perceive. We should also go to God regularly and ask him to reveal to us what he sees when he examines us. Just like we would get a regular physical exam, we should go to God and get a regular spiritual exam.

When we ask God we must be faithful to listen honestly. We need to hear the truth. There is no profit to us to deny sin if it is there.

He who conceals his sins doesn't prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces (abandons, ceases permanently) them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

A: Sin

If we are to perceive that we have sinned and if we are to cease from sin, we need to have a representation of sin that is sufficiently accurate and complete.

In the fourteenth chapter of Romans, Paul discusses how different people may have different understandings of what God approves of. In this discussion he gives us the best representation of what sin is.

If you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. Anything not based on trust is a sin. (Romans 14:23)

Paul says that the essential element of sin is living in a manner disregarding what God approves of. A person who isn't reasonably certain that God approves of something – eating meat for example – and does it, demonstrates a lack of regard for what God

approves of. That person is self-willed, living to satisfy their own desires and not living to do what God approves of. Two people could do the exact same thing – one in submission to what God approves of and the other not in submission. To the one in submission it is not sin. To the one not in submission it is sin. A person could do something God approves of – say picking heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-2) – but if they do it not in submission to what God approves of it is sin.

Whatever is done without regard to God's approval is sin: it is self-willed and not submitted to God.

Sin is dependent on the state of our submission to God. If we are not submitted to God we are sinning.

God helps us measure whether we are submitted to him, or not. He tells us what he does not approve of. If we are doing any of those things we are not submitted to God. Those things are:

- Things he has commanded us not to do.
- Things he has cursed.
- Things he hates.
- Things that are an abomination to him.
- Things he resists.
- Things Jesus pronounced woes on.
- Things Jesus told his disciples to avoid.
- Things Jesus said were evil.

He also tells us the things he does approve of. If we are submitted to God we will be doing the things he has commanded us to do and at least some of the other things.

- Things he has commanded us to do.
- Things he has blessed.
- Things he loves.
- Things he is pleased with.
- Things he says we must do to have eternal life.

The words God spoke in the past help us measure our state of submission and we need to submit to those words. We also need to submit to the words he speaks to us today by his Spirit that he has sent to guide us. Failing to submit to what the Spirit tells us to do, or tells us not to do, is just as much sin as not submitting to God's written word.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. (Hebrews 3:14)

B: Temptation

There are things that look to us like sin, but they are not. Satan tries to use them to convince us that we have sinned and cause us to give up resisting sin and trying to overcome it. These false sins usually involve thoughts that look like sin.

Adulterous desires in a person's heart will produce thoughts of adultery. We hear those thoughts. When Satan tempts a person to accept adulterous desire into their heart, they will also hear the temptation in their thoughts. This temptation is not sin. We are to do as Jesus did when he was tempted and resist the temptation: rejecting the thought and not accepting the desire.

Note: We should be vigilant about the content of our dreams as well as the thoughts we hear when we are awake. Jesus says that Satan sows his seed while we sleep (Matthew 13:25). Dreams may reveal corrupt content of our heart, or they may contain temptation to accept a corrupt desire.

Temptation from outside of us and corrupt thoughts coming from our hearts look very much alike to us. They are spiritual issues that must be spiritually discerned by asking God to guide us into the truth of whether the thought is temptation or sin.

Temptation to sin works exactly like the temptation to doubt. We may have doubting thoughts come from our hearts – they will hinder our prayers. We may also hear a temptation to doubt in our thoughts. We are to cast the tempting thought down and reject it the same way we are to reject temptation to sin.

C: Corrupt Desires

In addition to measuring our state of submission and discerning temptation, we need to discern whether we have any corrupt desires. We must be vigilant about guarding what we desire and accepting only those desires that God approves. Any desire can be, or become, a corrupt desire if we will not submit the satisfaction of that desire to God. We must submit to God's means and timing in satisfying our desires – or be content with what God provides us even if he does not do anything to satisfy a desire. If a desire becomes so intense that it changes our state of submission, it has become a corrupt desire and will cause us to sin.

D: Ceased from Sin

While it is helpful to examine ourselves for evidence that we may have sinned, we should not rely solely on our self-examination. If we do, we increase our risk of thinking we have ceased from sin when we really haven't. The most reliable thing to do is ask God to reveal to us the results of his examination of us.

In *The Elijah Task*, John Sandford wrote that he asked God to reveal his sins so that he could confess them. God gave him a list of scriptures, each describing a particular sin.¹ This is a good example of the spiritual examination we all should seek.

We have to hear God honestly to receive his witness of us, but as believers we should want to know so we can be cleansed and remove the corrupt desire causing sin from our being. Jesus told us to remove that which causes us to sin from our being. There is no better way to measure our need to remove something and what to remove than by asking God to reveal it to us.

We should ask God to reveal to us any unrepented sin or anything in us that would cause us to sin. If he reveals sin we should ask him to forgive us and cleanse us. If he reveals something that would cause us to sin we should remove it and sow God's Word into our hearts to grow strong in the opposite direction.

We need to ask, deal with anything God reveals, then ask if there is more. We need to keep asking until God says there is no more.

Jesus gave his life for us, shed his blood for us, so that we could live a life without consciousness of sin – without being conscious of ever having sinned (Hebrews 10:1-4). We must receive the cleansing of our conscience by faith, yet we must remain vigilant and seek to be keenly aware of any active, unrepented sin. We need to seek God regularly to detect any sin if it should occur and be assured of its absence when he says there is none. We need to honor Jesus' sacrifice and live with no consciousness of sin, yet always be confirming its absence. This is much like a person who has had cancer who seeks to be free from the painful memory of having had it, but needs to regularly confirm its absence.

¹ Sandford, John L. *The Elijah Task*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2006. 196. Print.

Part Five: Life Ceased from Sin

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I: Life Ceased from Sin

What is life ceased from sin like? Is it a state of mystical perfection where no further growth is possible, as some imagine it? How does it fit with the life of a believer? At what point in the spiritual growth of a believer does it occur?

A: Spiritual Growth of a Believer

The Bible tells us a number of things about the spiritual growth of a believer. When we see how these things fit together we can then see how a life ceased from sin fits with them. The following outline gives us an overview of spiritual growth and a framework to organize discussion of some of the details.

1. Birth
 - 1.1. Hearing
 - 1.1.1. Current condition and current fate (sin and judgment)
 - 1.1.2. Way of escape from current condition and fate (righteousness)
 - 1.2. Fear of the Lord
 - 1.3. Entering into the new covenant
 - 1.3.1. Acknowledging
 - 1.3.1.1. Condition and fate
 - 1.3.1.2. Jesus is Lord
 - 1.3.2. Pledging
 - 1.3.2.1. Clean conscience
 - 1.3.2.2. Baptism
 - 1.3.3. Repenting
 - 1.3.3.1. Removing things that cause one to sin
 - 1.3.3.2. Adding (sowing) that which causes one not to sin
 - 1.3.4. Receive Holy Spirit
2. Growth
 - 2.1. Sowing
 - 2.2. Exercising
3. Maturity

B: Hearing

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). The life of a believer necessarily begins with hearing.

We must hear the truth of

- our current condition: we have accepted corrupt desires as part of our being and they are working in us to make our path a path of death
- our current fate: because of the corrupt desires in our heart we will live a temporal life of loss, death, and destruction followed by an eternal life in everlasting fire, separated from God.

That is the bad news. We must also hear the good news.

We must hear that God, through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus, has created a way for us to escape our current condition and our current fate. God offers us access to this way of escape by entering into a covenant with him.

Hearing and believing that these things are true, we must then enter the covenant that God has offered us.

C: Fear of the Lord

We may hear the truth of our current condition, fate, and the way of escape by God's covenant from other people, or from God. When we hear them from other people we hear a representation of reality. When we hear them from God we hear the reality of them directly. It is much more powerful. Hearing from God that our current condition will result in loss, death, destruction, and eternal fire is the fear of the Lord.

Fear of the Lord is necessary if we are to enter the new covenant with God with our hearts and not just our lips. Hearing the truth of our current condition from other people is truth, but it is by precept of men. It is necessarily limited by their perception, understanding, and articulation of the truth. Hearing the truth from God is true fear of the Lord, articulated by God to fit our perception and understanding.

This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is taught by the precept of men. (Isaiah 29:13)

We need to enter God's new covenant with all our heart. Fear of the Lord helps us do that. It is something that God used to help Israel as they entered the first covenant.

Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you do not sin. (Exodus 20:20)

D: Entering Into the Covenant

1: Acknowledging

To enter the new covenant with God we must satisfy the terms and conditions he sets for it. The first of these conditions is acknowledging the truth revealed to us by God. Acknowledging is done by confessing. In the case of the new covenant we begin by acknowledging / confessing

- our current condition – we have accepted corrupt desires as part of our being and they are working in us to make our path a path of death
- our current fate – because of the corrupt desires in our heart we will live a temporal life of loss, death, and destruction followed by an eternal life in everlasting fire, separated from God
- that God has provided a way to escape our current condition and fate through his new covenant

God has made his new covenant with us through his Son, Jesus. God has made Jesus Lord: he has given him all authority in heaven and on earth. He is the mediator of the new covenant. To enter the new covenant with God we must acknowledge / confess that Jesus is Lord.

When God made Jesus Lord he made everything in heaven and earth obligated to obey him. Acknowledging / confessing Jesus is Lord necessarily includes acknowledging / confessing our obligation to obey him in everything he tells us to do. Entering the new covenant continues with our acknowledging / confessing our obligation to obey Jesus in whatever he tells us to do. This is essentially the same pledge that Israel had to make to enter the old covenant with God.

Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “**All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.**” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:7-8)

2: Pledging

If we understood the Jewish roots of baptism, we would understand that it contains a similar, but stronger pledge. Baptism involves a pledge to completely leave our old life, our old condition, and move to a new life. A bride and groom would be baptized as part of a sign of their pledge ending their old lives and starting a new one together.²

As a part of entering the new covenant, baptism is a sign of our pledge to leave our former condition with corrupt desires bringing forth sin and death and move to a new condition with the zoe life in the Word of God working in us to impel us to do God's will. It is a sign of our pledge to cease from sin – a pledge to live before God with a clean conscience.

God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes **baptism** that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but **the pledge of a clean conscience toward God**. (1 Peter 3:20-21)

Of course we cannot hope to keep this pledge in our corrupt-desire condition. God knows this and one of the key provisions he gives us in the new covenant is the power to remove the corrupt desires we have accepted: power to reject new corrupt desires, and power to will and to do his will. So our pledge is a pledge to use the power God gives us to remove from our being that which causes us to sin and to sow his Word into our hearts so it will produce the life and nature of God in us. This is the process of repentance and is a necessary part of entering the new covenant.

At this point of spiritual growth a believer has removed the corrupt desires that cause them to sin – they no longer live according to corrupt desires – and they live according to their pledge to do God's will. This is what Peter describes as the new life of those who have ceased from sin. This is where ceasing from sin fits in the spiritual growth and life of a believer.

John, writing in 1 John, gives us a trustworthy way to measure when the spiritual birth process is completed. He agrees that by the end of the birth process a believer has ceased from sin.

The one doing the sin, of the devil he is, because from the beginning the devil does sin; for this was the Son of God manifested, that he may break up the works of the devil;

² "Messiah 101—Immersion, Beit Avanim Chaiot." Messiah 101 – Immersion, Beit Avanim Chaiot. Web. 27 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.bac2torah.com/Messiah101-Immersion.htm>>.

Every one who has been begotten of God, sin he does not, because his seed in him does remain, and he is not able to sin, because of God he has been begotten. (1 John 3:8-9)

To paraphrase:

Every one who has been born of God has ceased from sin, because the Word of God remains in him and causes him not to sin.

The one who has not ceased from sin has not completed the birth process.

The birth process is now completed, but far more growth is ahead.

E: Growth

Birth is followed by growth and we need a lot of spiritual growth. James 1:3-5 and 2 Peter 1:5-7 list some areas of spiritual growth.

- Faith
- Goodness (Virtue)
- Knowledge
- Self-control
- Steadfastness (Patience)
- Wisdom
- Godliness
- Brotherly affection
- Love

Paul lists righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, steadfastness, and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:11). Some of these are listed as fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: love joy, peace, perseverance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control.

Central to spiritual growth and walking in the new covenant is growth in hearing. If we are to keep our pledge to do whatever God says, we must hear him saying it.

When we grow in hearing we grow in faith, perceiving, measuring, and discerning. Discerning is very important in spiritual growth. We need to grow in discerning truth and error, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, what is good and what is evil, what is and what is not God's will, what God's Word says and what it does not say.

Spiritual growth springs forth from hearing and hearing springs forth from the Word: so all spiritual growth springs forth from the Word. This is a key part of the new covenant.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33)

God writes his Word in our hearts as we sow it into our hearts. Through his Word he gives us spiritual growth – and eternal life – one seed at a time. We grow our spiritual growth by sowing the seeds of the Word into our hearts and guarding them from being taken away or choked.

Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

Therefore, rid yourselves of every kind of evil and deception, hypocrisy, jealousy, and every kind of slander. Like newborn babies, thirst for the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow in your salvation. (1 Peter 2:1-2)

F: Maturity

Growth is completed in maturity. Spiritual maturity is the expected result of the spiritual growth of a believer.

One of the key characteristics of someone who is spiritually mature is discerning. The person who is spiritually mature perceives and discerns spiritually in addition to physically. They do not lean to their own understanding, but seek God to guide them into truth. As a result, they discern spiritual things, truth and error, good and evil, and what the Word says and what it does not say.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to discern good from evil. (Hebrew 5:14)

In 1 Corinthians 3:1 Paul writes that the immature are not able to discern spiritual things. and in Ephesians 4:14 he writes that they are tossed to and fro by every wind of

doctrine – they have not yet grown to the point of being able to discern truth and error, what the Word says and what it does not say.

Another key characteristic of a spiritually mature person is self-control: specifically they control their tongue.

If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body. (James 3:2)

Man cannot control his tongue by his own power or ability, but by the abundance of his heart, the mouth speaks. The spiritually mature person has removed from their heart that which causes them to speak inappropriately and has filled their heart with God's Word. The Word in abundance in their heart produces the fruit of self-control.

The manner in which the spiritually mature person discerns and controls their being highlights another characteristic of spiritually mature persons: they are spiritually minded. The spiritually mature person does not wrestle against flesh and blood using flesh and blood processes. They overcome hindrances using spiritual power and spiritual processes.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus told us that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us and he said that this was a part of being mature, even as our heavenly Father is mature. (Matthew 5:43-48) This is using spiritual power and processes to wrestle against the principalities and powers that are manipulating our enemies and those who persecute us. The immature do not discern this and wrestle using flesh and blood processes against the flesh and blood enemies and persecutors.

A believer must cease from sin before they can become spiritually mature. A person who has not ceased from sin lacks the self-control of a spiritually mature person.

A person must also cease from sin before they can discern in the manner characteristic of the spiritually mature. Jesus says we must remove the beam from our own eyes before we can perceive clearly. (Matthew 7:5) The corrupt desires that cause us to sin corrupt our perception and discerning. We must remove them from our being so that, through the Word producing in our hearts, we can discern clearly.

G: Cannot Sin

One question about a life ceased from sin is whether a person can reach a state where they cannot sin: where they are unable to sin. The answer is no.

Our state of being is dynamic and contingent upon the nature of the seed sown in our hearts. Good seed maturing into a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit. The seed of the Word of God cannot bring forth corrupt fruit. Moreover, it is incorruptible. God also gives us his armor and the assistance of his Spirit of Truth and his ministering spirits.

We cannot sin when we are in the state of being where we

- have removed corrupt desires that cause us to sin from our hearts
- filled our hearts with the Word of God
- put on the armor of God to resist temptation to accept corrupt desires
- ask God to send the Spirit of Truth to guide us and help us discern
- ask God to send his ministering spirits to strengthen us against accepting corrupt desires
- are thankful

Such a state will last as long as we continue doing the things needed to maintain it. If we lapse enough in doing those things, then we not only can, we will sin.

Part Six: Sin, Death, and Eternal Life

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I: Sin, Death, and Eternal Life

Earlier we looked at Jesus' command to us to remove that which causes sin from our being. At that time we did not look at the consequences he declared would result from our obeying, or disobeying, his command.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. (Matthew 18:8-9)

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell. (Mark 9:44-47)

It is really important that we hear clearly what Jesus is saying here. The person with corrupt desires causing them to sin has not entered into life – they are spiritually dead. We cannot enter life – zoe, eternal life, with corrupt desires causing us to sin. If we do not remove the corrupt desires which cause us to sin, we will remain in death and suffer eternal fire in hell. We must remove all the corrupt desires causing us to sin in order to enter zoe, eternal life.

Part Seven: Is It Possible to Cease from Sin?

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I: Is It Possible to Cease from Sin?

It should be clear that Satan will oppose ceasing from sin. The best place for him to try to prevent someone from ceasing from sin is to cause them to believe it is not possible. Once a person has been persuaded that it is not possible they will not try to cease from sin and they will oppose those who say it is possible. We should be especially cautious before we accept any belief that something is not possible: especially something God has commanded us to do. God says that all things are possible and nothing is impossible. (Matthew 17:20, Mark 9:23)

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.

All things are possible for one who believes.

We cannot cease from sin by our own power and understanding. That does not mean, however, that there isn't a power and a process available to us that will cause us to cease from sin.

A: Not Only Possible, But Easy

I had prayed for and received the fear of the Lord. (See my testimony of God's answer for my prayer for fear of the Lord on page 80. I then learned about putting on God's armor and discerning the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. One night, as I was thinking about God's armor and discerning the spirit of truth, I realized that they were commands to obey: put on the armor and discern the spirits. I had read over them repeatedly, but when I finally obeyed them they produced a great change in my life. I wondered how many other commands I had been overlooking. I resolved to read looking for commands to obey. I started reading in the book of John, chapter eight. When I came to John 8:11 I recognized it as a command.

Go and sin no more. (John 8:11)

Yes, Jesus had spoken that command to a woman almost two thousand years ago, but it seemed clear that the Spirit was speaking to me. When I asked if this was so he answered, "Yes."

Me: I don't know if it is possible to go and sin no more. I've tried before and failed.

Spirit: You failed because you tried using your own power and understanding. If you will seek out my power and how to use it, you will find that it is not only possible to sin no more, but it is easy.

Me: Easy?! Is that true?

Spirit: Is it hard or easy for an apple tree not to bring forth pears?

Me: It is easy.

Spirit: Then it is easy.

B: Addressing Scripture-based Objections

Those who believe that it is not possible to cease from sin base their belief on a few verses of scripture.

1: 1 John 1:8, 10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

John was confronting a group of Gnostics. The Gnostics were in the acknowledging phase of spiritual growth. They, however, refused to acknowledge that they had accepted corrupt, sin-producing desires into their beings. They refused to acknowledge their need of a savior from sin. They refused to acknowledge that Jesus had come in the flesh and that he is Lord. John is not saying that we cannot cease from sin.

2: James 3:2

Some read James 3:2 to mean that James said that we all sin and that this proves it is not possible to cease from sin.

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a (spiritually) mature man, able also to bridle his whole body. (James 3:2)

There are two problems in understanding what James is saying. The first is his use of the word all – is it literal, i.e. every single individual, or figurative? All is frequently used figuratively in Hebrew thinking to “the majority, or the essential part, or even a significant or highly visible component possibly much smaller than a majority.”³ Sometimes such figurative use is followed by a list of exceptions. This is the case in James 3:2. James immediately follows the statement that all stumble in many ways with the exception that if anyone does not stumble in what he says.

The second problem is how we understand the word πταίω translated stumble. James use here is clearly figurative rather than the literal stumble or trip. Figuratively such a stumble could be anything from a simple mistake like a factual error, sin, or completely falling from salvation. What we know is that at least a highly visible number of people “stumble” and that those who are spiritually mature do not “stumble” in what they say. The context in which James uses stumble is important. In the preceding verse James says,

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (James 3:1)

This is helpful. In Timothy Paul writes of a problem with spiritually immature people seeking to become teachers.

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. (1 Timothy 1:3-7)

Certainly a highly visible part of the early church stumbled into vain discussion. Judaizers taught the Galatians they must be circumcised. Gnostics claimed to have no sin. Others taught regarding eating of meat and observing holy days. Teachers teaching without understanding what they were saying or the things about which they were making confident assertions. Stumbling and causing others to stumble. Too many teachers and not enough truth. Too many teachers teaching when they had need for someone to teach them the basic principles and without experience in applying the word about righteousness.

³ Stern, David H. Jewish New Testament Commentary. Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., 1989. 422. Print.

Doctrinal stumbling – stumbling in applying the word about righteousness – better fits the context of James warning about becoming teachers and fits the known problems of the time. It also better fits the nature of the spiritually mature person who have their senses exercised to recognize good and evil and are no longer tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Assigning the meaning of sin to the figurative use of stumble in James 3:2 is not warranted by the context and especially not when doing so results in a meaning contrary to scripture that says that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has made us free indeed free from sin. Such a meaning is also contrary to 1 John 2:10:

The one loving his brother, in the light he does remain, and a cause for stumbling in him there is not. (1 John 2:10)

1 John 2:10 uses the word skandalon and it is more correctly understood to refer to a cause for error or a cause for sin. In this case John is saying that those who are loving have nothing in them that causes them to stumble (sin).

3: James 3:8

James 3:8 is understood by some to say that we are unable to keep from sinning in what we say.

No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. (James 3:8-12)

James says that no man can tame the tongue and that from the same tongue comes praise and cursing. He says that this should not be. **He also says that if we do not tame our tongue we deceive ourselves and our religion is worthless.** (James 1:26) Using the power of man it is impossible to tame the tongue, but using the power of God through faith all things are possible and nothing is impossible – including taming the tongue. If we seek God about why we are unable to use our power and ability to tame the tongue and how to overcome, then we find the power and means he has made available to us to tame the tongue.

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes

picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for **out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.** (Luke 6:43-45)

The tongue will speak according to the content of the abundance of the heart. We tame the tongue not by trying to exert our will over the tongue, but by using the power of God to fill our heart with the abundance of God's Word and pluck up and cast out the content that is causing us to produce corrupt fruit.

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. (Matthew 12:33)

James is describing a double minded or double heart-ed condition: out of the same mouth comes praise and cursing, blessing and cursing, fresh water and salt. This is the result of some fruit being produced by a good tree in the heart and some fruit being produced by a corrupt tree in the heart. When we command the corrupt tree to be plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea and fill our hearts with the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, then we will speak from the abundance of the Word of God in our heart. One tree, one fruit, one speech from our tongue.

4: 1 Timothy 1:15

So here is a statement that you can trust, one that fully deserves to be accepted: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am protos. (1 Timothy 1:15)

Correctly understanding what Paul wrote requires that we correctly understand how he viewed Jesus saving sinners. Paul taught that through Jesus sinners were freed from sin and made righteous. They were made new creatures with a new life. When Paul says he is protos, he is saying he is protos of those Jesus saved, not protos of sinners. This becomes even more clear when we understand what he meant by the word protos. Protos means first or foremost. Foremost means most visible or most conspicuous. Paul's salvation – his being made a new creature with a new life – was, and in many respects still is, the most conspicuous conversion. This understanding is confirmed in the following verse.

But this is precisely why I received mercy – so that in me protos (the most conspicuous), Christ Jesus might demonstrate how very patient he is, as an example to those who would later come to trust in him and thereby have eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

Paul was, and still is, a conspicuous example of a person saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, who died to his old life and lived a new life unto Christ as a new creature.

In Judea, the assemblies didn't even know what I looked like – they were only hearing the report, “The one who used to persecute us now preaches the Good News of the faith he was formerly out to destroy,” and they praised God for me. (Galatians 1:23)

5: Philippians 3:8, 10-12

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.

The Greek text translated perfect doesn't talk about being perfect in the way we think about being perfect today.

Paul uses one Greek word translated perfect in verse 12 to describe what he had not yet attained – τετελείωμαι and a different one translated perfect in verse 15 – τέλειοι.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded. (Philippians 3:15)

In verse 15 Paul is addressing a group who he says has attained τέλειοι. English fails us here by translating both words as perfect. τελειοι describes spiritually mature, of full age. It is the same word used in Hebrew 5:14 and translated as spiritually mature of full age. In Philippians Paul is addressing those who had attained spiritual maturity – they were no longer babes needing milk.

τετελειωμαι is used to describe consummation. Paul is saying that he has not yet reached the consummation, the final stage of being.

6: Romans 3:10

As it is written, “There is no one righteous, not even one!” (Romans 3:10)

Paul certainly says this, but we have to look at it in context in order to correctly understand what he is referring to when he says it.

In the letter to the Romans Paul outlines what God called him to do: promote trust-grounded obedience to God. He states this in Romans 1:5. At the very end of Romans he states again that his effort in the letter is to promote trust-grounded obedience and that the Good News of what God has done through Jesus has been communicated to them to do that. This Good News of what God has done through Jesus is the focus of what Paul writes. He explains why in 1:16-17.

The Good News is God's powerful means of bringing salvation (freedom from sin) to everyone who keeps trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile. For in the Good News is revealed how God makes people righteous (makes people new creatures created in true righteousness) in his sight (according to God's measure of the person against the standard of true righteousness); and from beginning to end it is through trust (trust-grounded obedience). (Romans 1:16-17)

From 1:16-17 Paul makes the case why the Good News is God's means of making people free from sin and making them righteous. To make his case Paul presents the following:

- all people are in bondage to sin
- all people are unrighteous
- The Law is not God's means to free people from sin or make them righteous
- righteousness comes from trusting obedience and not legalistic rule keeping

From 1:18 to 3:20 he makes the charge that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are controlled by sin and are unrighteous and stand in need of means to be made free from sin and made righteous. In the process of making this case he makes an allusion to Psalm 14:1-3 and 53:1-3 and this is where he writes that there is no one righteous, not even one. Paul is proclaiming the bad news of man's current condition to those who need to hear it. He is also proclaiming the good news that God has provided a way of escape from man's current condition.

7: Romans 7

In Romans 7 Paul appears to be saying that he was unable to cease from sin. He isn't, but again we have to look at it in the context in which it was written.

In Romans 3:20 Paul states:

In God's sight (according to God's measure of righteousness) no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of the commandments of The Law, because through The Law is the knowledge of sin.

Having made this point Paul has to explain it. This is what he is doing in Romans 7. In verse 7 he repeats his point that the function of The Law is to make known what sin is. In verses 14 through 23 he gives his personal testimony of how The Law worked in his life to expose sin working within his being and how The Law does not provide the means to be made free from sin and made righteous: it reveals the current condition, but does not provide the means of escape from it.

But, in making his case in verses 14 through 23, Paul uses present tense verbs. This is what makes it appear that he was saying that he was unable to cease from sin.

What are we to make of Paul's use of the present tense verbs in verses 14 through 23? What happens if we understand his use of the present tense to refer to his present state of being?

It would still demonstrate how The Law worked in his life to expose sin working within his being, but it would also make a case against the Good News Paul was proclaiming as the means God used to free people from sin and make them righteous. If Paul, trusting in the faithfulness and work of Jesus Christ to free him from sin and make him righteous was still under the dominion of sin within him, then he had no case to make with regards to the Good News.

Such an understanding would also be contrary to what Paul wrote in Romans 5, 6, 8, and much of the rest of the New Testament.

Some have suggested a means of reconciling Romans 7 with the rest of what Paul wrote by suggesting that Romans 7 describes Paul's actual condition with respect to sin and the rest of what he wrote describes his "positional" condition. The effort to reconcile what he wrote is commendable, but "positionally" free from sin, but actually sold under sin is not free indeed and fails to fully reconcile.

So why did Paul use present tense verbs in verses 14 through 23?

Present tense verbs are usually used to describe one's present actions or state of being, but not always. One common exception is the use of the present tense in legal testimony. The use of present tense in legal cases is advanced as a more effective way to persuade a judge or jury.

This means of jury persuasion was established in Rome by Cicero and is still taught in law schools today. Cicero was a famed Roman attorney and orator who lived in Rome from 106 BC to 43 BC and was the proconsul of Tarsus (Paul's home town) from 51 to 50 BC. He established Six Maxims of Persuasion, the fourth of which is:

Draw the audience into the story. Tell the story in the present tense as if the jury was watching the events unfold in front of them, rather than hearing a narrative of something that happened in the past.

Paul was attempting to persuade the congregation at Rome that righteousness does not come by The Law. Giving his personal testimony of The Law and sin in the present tense is completely consistent with his effort to persuade the congregation to trust. Paul was using the best practices of persuasion of his day, and ours, to demonstrate that righteousness does not come by The Law.

Paul's conclusion of Romans chapter seven adds additional evidence that links Paul's writing in Romans 7 and Cicero. In his conclusion he alludes to a famous quote of Cicero.

O wretched man that I am! (Romans 7:24)

O wretched man, wretched not just because of what you are, but also because you do not know how wretched you are! (Cicero)

C: Other Scripture

1: Commands and instructions to cease from sin

Remove from our being that which causes us to sin. The result of this is ceasing from sin.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better

for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. (Matthew 18:8-9)

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell. (Mark 9:43-47)

Go and sin no more. This is equivalent to cease from sin.

One man was there who had been an invalid (impotent) for thirty- eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, " Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, " Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed. ... Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, " See, you are well! **Sin no more**, that nothing worse may happen to you." (John 5:5-9, 14)

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery ... And Jesus said, "... **go, and from now on sin no more.** (John 8:3, 11)

(The impotent man and adulteress are types of all sinners: spiritually impotent and adulterers.)

Come to your senses! Live righteously and stop sinning! (1 Corinthians 15:34)

Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:34 RSV)

Live righteous lives, and cease to sin. (1 Corinthians 15:34, Weymouth New Testament)

Now he (God) commands all people everywhere to repent (cease from sin). (Acts 17:30)

Do not let sin rule in your mortal bodies, so that it makes you obey its desires; and do not offer any part of yourselves to sin as an instrument for wickedness. On the contrary, offer yourselves to God. (Romans 6:12,13)

For God's grace, which brings deliverance, has appeared to all people. It teaches us to renounce godlessness and worldly pleasures, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives now, in this age; (Titus 2:11-12)

Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from (cease) iniquity. (2 Timothy 2:19)

These commands of God are not burdensome (difficult to do) (1 John 5:3). Attempting to do them in our own ability or power is impossible, but all things are possible if we do them using the power God makes available to us.

With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God. (Mark 10:27)

All things are possible for one who believes. (Mark 9:23)

If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20)

If we use the power God has given us – his Word sown into our hearts, it will work in us to will and to do what he commands us to do and it will produce abundantly beyond what we can even imagine.

God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. (Philippians 2:13, New Living Translation)

God ... is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20)

2: Statements about ceasing from sin

In addition to God's commands to us to cease from sin, the Bible also contains some statements about those who cease from sin, and those who are unable to cease from sin.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh **has ceased from sin**, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1-2)

Those who follow corrupt desires ... presumptuous and self-willed, ... **that cannot cease from sin** ... For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. (2 Peter 2:10,14, 17)

(Do we really think that Peter, with a clean conscience, could write these verses if he had not ceased from sin?)

3: Statements about our nature being changed in relation to sin

Before we remove that which causes us to sin from our being we are sinners: those who sin and have in their being that which causes them to sin. After we remove that which causes us to sin we cease being sinners. We were sinners, but after removing that which caused us to sin we ceased being sinners. Those who also confess, are forgiven, and are cleansed from sin are made righteous. We see statements in the Bible that are consistent with this; statements saying that we were sinners, were slaves to sin, but are now made righteous, and free from sin.

God shows his love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, **we have now been justified by his blood**, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For **if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God** by the death of his Son, much more, **now that we are reconciled**, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:8-10)

How can **we who died to sin** still live in it? (Romans 6:2)

Our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:6-7)

You who **were once slaves of sin** have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18)

When **you were slaves of sin**, you were free in regard to righteousness ... 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)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is

coming. In these **you too once walked, when you were living in them**. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that **you have put off the old self** with its practices **and have put on the new self**, which is continually being renewed in fuller and fuller knowledge, closer and closer to the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:5-10)

As people who obey God, do not let yourselves be shaped by the **evil desires you used to have** when you were still ignorant. (1 Peter 1:13)

4: Jesus' sacrifice so we can cease from sin

Jesus bore our sins in his body that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, **that we may cease from sinning** and live for righteousness. (1 Peter 2:24, NET Bible)

The blood of Jesus cleanses our conscience to remove consciousness of sin – to remove remembrance of sin.

The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:14)

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

Jesus has freed us from our sins by his blood. (Revelation 1:5)

I tell you that everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. ... So if the Son frees you, you will really be free! (John 8:34, 36)

5: If this scripture is correct as it appears to be then

The prophecy of Luke 1 is true.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us ... that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1:68-69, 74-75)

The statements about being set free from sin are true.

Jesus commands to cease from sin are honest and God gives us the power to do them.

God's Word does work in us to produce in us the will and the power to do God's will (Philippians 2:13). It works in us to produce exceeding abundantly beyond what we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Jesus' sacrifice accomplished its goal: purify our conscience and take away consciousness (remembrance) of sin.

D: Conclusion

Jesus says that all things are possible and nothing is impossible. Jesus has commanded us to remove that which causes sin from our being and declared that the consequences of failure to do so is eternal fire. Is it conceivable that he would command us to do this if it were not possible to do?

Jesus commanded the impotent man (John 5:14) and the adulteress (John 8:11) to go and sin no more. All men are commanded to repent – cease from sin.

God has commanded us. He has given us the power to produce the result. He has given us the process through which to use his power. Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we may cease from sinning. He shed his blood so we may have no more consciousness of sin.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. ... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. ... Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. (John 14:21, 23, 24)

Peter said there were some who loved Jesus and ceased from sin. They no longer lived according to corrupt desires which caused them to sin, but for the will of God.

Appendix A: Testimony

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I: Prayer for Fear of the Lord

In late September of 1983 I prayed for the fear of the Lord and God answered. Here are the details.

I was divorced. I decided that I had to live my life according to the Bible, possibly more completely than I had ever witnessed. I had begun dating a young lady and had reached a point in my life where I consciously wanted nothing more than for her to love me. I would have given up my job and every thing I had. Nothing else mattered. In the midst of this a co-worker loaned me a tape on fear of the Lord by Joy Dawson. She described the benefits of fear of the Lord and it was clear this was something I needed to pray for. So I did. Ironically I found it much easier to believe that God would answer the prayer for fear of the Lord than any other prayer I might ask.

Within a week of my prayer the young lady invited another guy to an outing. I was devastated and, if that wasn't enough, I got sick with a cold and sore throat and didn't see her for the next couple of days. Suicide crossed my mind as did having myself committed. Somewhere in the midst of my pain I found myself talking to God. In my thoughts I heard him speaking to me.

"I didn't make you sick. I took my hand of protection from you and allowed Satan to make you sick. He made you sick in an attempt to destroy you. I protected you from destroying your relationship with the young lady and then destroying yourself. If you take one more step living your life your way instead of being led by me you will destroy yourself."

On my knees and crying out I answered, "Whatever you want me to do I'll do it."

Again in my thoughts I heard him, "Will you give her up?"

The thing I wanted most - the only thing I really wanted. I didn't understand because he had just said he had protected me from destroying the relationship. I thought of Abraham and Isaac. "I don't understand. You just told me that you protected me from destroying the relationship. But I have to be able to trust that you will never hurt me. Yes, I will."

Author's Comment: There is much that happened in this prayer that I am still learning about. After writing the material in this book I can see where God revealed to me my current condition – living my life my way and not being led by him; my current fate – one more step and I would destroy myself; and his way of escape – live being led by him.

This revelation prompted me to do exactly what I needed to do to enter his covenant – pledge to do whatever he wanted me to do. After I made the pledge he immediately tested whether I was willing to trust him and to give up all I desired. Not long after that he commanded me to “go and sin no more.”