

**June 23, 2011**

## **Avoiding the Sin That So Easily Entangles**

***"You are to [offer sacrifice] on the seventh day of the month for anyone who sins unintentionally or through ignorance..."*** (Ezekiel 45:20).

We who have been born from above in Christ have been made holy by His atoning sacrifice. However, we've encountered so many in Christendom over the years who don't believe they're guilty of sin if they don't *realize* they've sinned. They find it hard to fully appreciate Jesus as their *Savior* because they don't really think they've *sinned* much, especially when they compare themselves to "real" sinners. But what does God consider to be sin, whether deliberate or unintentional?

We wrote this account in our June 1998 Newsletter:

"It hurt my heart to see God's name so thoughtlessly taken in vain. Contact every Christian organization you know to make them aware of this blasphemy!" These words were spoken to us by an unbelieving neighbor who had come to our door one night after fleeing the movie *Titanic* 20 minutes into it. He was mortified by such callous treatment of God's name! Yet, everywhere we travel, so many Christians tell us they didn't see anything wrong at all in the movie. That frightens us...

Our neighbor's words have haunted us. Another friend who teaches at a Christian school shared with us her pain as she listened to the students discuss that same movie. Many of their mothers had taken them to see it, perceiving no discrepancy between youthful fornication on the screen and parental admonition for purity in their own children's lives. For weeks we wondered, how hard has the spiritual callousness of God's people become in this country? What was He going to have to do to intervene and get our attention?"

Our desire for all who read our materials echoes Paul, "*asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding*" (Colossians 1:9). When we talk about applying God's commands to your life, we're emphasizing what you *should do* in order to develop the character of Jesus as well as what you *shouldn't be doing* that defames His holy Name. Our ongoing response of *yieldedness to His indwelling Spirit* determines if we're intentional in pressing on in our journey of transformation into His likeness.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews issues a warning to those who are in the midst of their journey heavenward. Even a Christ follower isn't exempt from temptation and sin's allure! "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and **the sin that so easily entangles**, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us*" (Hebrews 12:1).

Out of love for our Lord, we need to discern from His Word if we are sinning against Him and thus bringing down His holy Name by our actions and attitudes. Those who have yet to encounter Jesus as their Lord are watching His followers closely to see if He's "the real thing." If we're His representatives, our sins make a mockery of Him. We aren't trying to justify ourselves before Him in our self-examination. Jesus already justified us by dying on the cross for our sins. But out of love for our Father we purpose to remain free from deliberate ongoing sin so that we may enjoy fellowship with Him. Our Father affirms the righteous standing of fellowship with Him by hearing and answering prayer:

- *"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil"* (1 Peter 3:12).
- *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"* (James 5:16).
- *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Repentant confession is how Father restores fellowship with His children.
- *"We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will"* (John 9:31).

Consider how the Scriptures below may apply to your life, and discuss the questions with your family and your fellowship family:

*"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name" (Exodus 20:7). "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).*

- Is it a sin to watch a movie or TV show that uses our Lord's name as a curse word? What if it displays lust and sexual immorality? Are you unintentionally leading your children astray by your personal viewing habits when you think they're asleep?

*"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (James 2:8,9).*

- Do you give unfair preferential treatment to one person or group at the expense of another? Do you have any innate prejudices toward others that you haven't confessed in repentance? Do you speak disparagingly of any group of people, especially those whose religion differs from yours?

*"Do you not know that the wicked **will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers **will inherit the kingdom of God**" (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).*

- What does this passage mean to you? Does it apply to unbelievers, believers, or both? What are the consequences of "not inheriting the kingdom of God"?

*"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with*

*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Colossians 3:12-14).*

- How well are these Christ-like character qualities deepening in your life? Cite recent incidents in which you've had to exercise these traits knowing that your sin nature was inclined to rebel. What was the response of the person(s) involved? What does it mean to you to "forgive as the Lord forgave you"?

*"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).*

- How might you be inclined to "forget" sharing with others? Why is doing good to others a "sacrifice" in God's sight? Are you willing to sacrifice on behalf of someone needy He makes known to you?

*"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).*

- Why do you think entertaining strangers is a command in God's Word? Is anything keeping you from showing kindness to someone you don't know? What will you do about it?

We encourage you to use God's Word this way: Stop and think with a heart that's willing to follow through! In other words, use headwork to decide how His commands should govern your attitudes and actions. Do this with one or two others and Jesus promises to be with you (Matthew 18:18-20). Tolerated sin among self-proclaimed Christians will incur God's forthcoming chastisement as much as the sinful indulgence of unbelievers will. Living in the righteousness of Christ and being quick to repent when we do stumble in sin will indeed make each of us shine as light in the darkness! (Daniel 12:3; Philippians 2:15).

**Mike & Sue**