



# Gratifying Yourself or Glorifying Your Savior

Presentations dealing with the subject of sin can make many people uncomfortable. Sin is not a comforting subject, so any aversion to that topic is understandable. On the other hand, everyone is affected by sin, so knowing how to deal with sin is beneficial and should be welcomed.

The motivation behind any teaching or discussion about sin is two-pronged: (1) to heighten awareness of the subtlety of sin and its devastating consequences and (2) to encourage believers in Christ to faithfully obey God's Word so they can live wholeheartedly for His glory. With that motivation in mind, this study will specifically deal with the three primary enticements to sin and how to overcome them.

## SIN'S ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD

The allure of sin is powerful. The opening chapters of Genesis describe sin's entrance into the perfect world that God created. Adam and Eve, our ancestors, were fooled by sin's diabolical allure and, as a result, experienced severe consequences. (See the first study in this series: [The End of the Beginning ... The Fall of Adam and Eve](#)). Through the self-centered choices of this couple, sin's devastation began its march through human history.

The most devastating consequence for Adam and Eve was the ruptured relationship between them and their Creator God. After their purposeful sin, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God because the relationship with their Creator had changed dramatically. The joy and openness they had experienced with God Almighty had vanished. In addition to this monumental loss, the first human inhabitants of earth—along with all people since that time—lost clarity on two other perspectives of life: one's self and others.

With regard to one's self, all of us naturally follow Adam and Eve's pattern of not taking responsibility for personal wrongdoings. Because of our natural self-centeredness, all of us can easily, but erroneously, blame another person or circumstance as the cause of our personal sin(s). In the natural, we reject the truth of James 1:14-15 that says each person is responsible for one's own sins.

**James 1:14-15**, But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed *by his own desire*. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death [*Emphasis added*].

In addition, like Adam and Eve, a self-centered person typically evaluates a relationship according to personal benefits that accompany the relationship. If perceived benefits cease, then the relationship is altered, often weakened, and sometimes terminated.

Thankfully, God—who, by nature, is totally independent—does not base His relationship with us on benefits we supposedly provide Him. If He did, all of us would have been discarded long ago. Instead, God initiates and oversees His relationship with redeemed sinners who believe, by faith, that the Lord Jesus Christ provided atonement for sin by His sacrificial death on the cross.

Before examining the consequences of original sin and the on-going allure of sin, let us briefly review biblical basics for a Christ-honoring life.

## BIBLICAL BASICS FOR A CHRIST-HONORING LIFE

God's Word explains how a person comes to Christ (See [Life's Most Important Decision](#)). The Bible also tells how a believer should respond to sins committed *after* coming to Christ. According to the Scriptures, a person living a Christ-honoring life will:

1. Recognize and believe in God's sacrifice for sin that is provided through the Lord Jesus Christ. . . **John 3:16**, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*
2. Die to self-centered desires and plans . . . **Luke 9:23**, *And he [Jesus] said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

3. Demonstrate love for Jesus by being obedient to God's Word . . . **John 14:15**, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*
4. As a believer in Christ, confess personal sin(s) to God and receive His forgiveness and cleansing. . . **1 John 1:9**, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

These basics for growing in Christ are not difficult to understand, but followers of Christ may yield to temptation and purposefully sin in spite of these clear directives. Why is it so easy to sin? Hopefully, the remainder of this study will help answer that question.

### **EVERY PERSON INHERITED THE SINFUL NATURE OF ADAM AND EVE**

When a person believes in Christ (see John 3:16 above), he/she becomes a new creation.

**2 Corinthians 5:17**, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Why does a person need to become a new creation in Christ? What was wrong with the original? The problem with the original was that it contained a duplicate of the sinful nature of Adam and Eve *after* their Fall. As a result, prior to believing in Christ, every person is under the wrath of God because of a common orientation to sin and self-gratification. The Apostle Paul reminded the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers in Ephesus of this reality

**Ephesians 2:1-3**, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

### **A NEW CREATION IS ORIENTED TOWARD THE SAVIOR, NOT TOWARD SIN**

As a new creation in Christ, a believer is to cultivate the practice of dying to self and remaining obedient to Scripture in order to grow in Christ (*Luke 9:23 and John 14:15, printed earlier*). This process toward Christ-like maturity will continue throughout a believer's lifetime.

**Romans 12:1-2**, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Colossians 3:1-17**, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.<sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.<sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.<sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming.<sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.<sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him [*Underlining added*].

As the passages above demonstrate, God's Word clearly establishes the biblical pattern for a believer's life in Christ. In spite of this clarity, however, Christians may sometimes choose to sin. Believers in Christ face the same hooks of temptation as did Adam and Eve, and these hooks of sinful enticement are as powerful today as they were in the Garden of Eden.

## THE THREE HOOKS OF SINFUL ENTICEMENT

The enticements to sin in the Garden of Eden are the same temptations that we face today, as the following verses indicate.

**Genesis 3:6**, So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

**1 John 2:16**, For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

There is a similarity between the enticements to sin in these verses. In Genesis 3:6, Eve looked at the forbidden tree of life and saw that the tree was good for food. In other words, it appealed to her physical desires or as 1 John 2:16 describes, “the desires of the flesh.” Second, the tree was a delight to the eyes of Eve, which parallels what John calls “the desires of the eyes.” Third, the tree was desirable to make one wise, a reflection of what John calls the “pride of life.”

In 1 John 2:16, the desires (or lusts) of the flesh can also be described as “sinful desires for self-gratification.” The desires (lusts) of the eyes can be described as “covetousness.” The pride of life is described in Vincent’s Word Studies as “vain boasting” or “an insolent and vain assurance in one’s own resources or the stability of earthly things, which issues in a contempt of divine laws.”<sup>1</sup>

A person does not have to succumb to all three hooks of temptation before sinning. There are numerous examples in Scripture of people who sinned due to succumbing to just one temptation. For example, Achan succumbed to covetousness (lust of the eyes) and stole items that God specifically forbid anyone in Israel to take (Joshua 7). Amnon succumbed to the desires of the flesh and committed fornication with his sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Jezebel succumbed to the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life and instigated the murder of Naboth in order to steal his land (1 Kings 21). King David fell to all three hooks of temptations with regard to Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-4), starting with “he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful,” which was an appeal to the lust of the eyes. Although he knew she was another man’s wife, he took her for himself (the pride of life) and committed adultery with her (the lust of the flesh).

## THE CONSISTENT PATTERN OF COMMITTING SIN

Since the temptations to sin in the Garden of Eden are the same throughout history, each of us has followed the same sinful pattern of willful sin as did Adam and Eve in committing original sin.

- You investigate what God forbids.
- You desire the self-centered gratification that sin promises to provide.
- You selfishly decide to please yourself instead of following God’s plan of obedience.
- You commit sin.

## THE PRIMARY REASON BEHIND WILLFUL SIN

Adam and Eve committed sin because they opted for the *immediate satisfaction of self-oriented desire* instead of *loving obedience to God’s command*. That pattern continues to this day. Basically, when a person sins, self-centered desire wins over God-honoring devotion.

**James 1:13-16**, Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.<sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.<sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.<sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

The attraction of sin appeals to the gratification of our desires outside of the God-ordained channels in which they are designed to be satisfied. With this in mind, a believer should make decisions regarding thoughts, words, and actions by contrasting potential gratification of selfish desires as opposed to bringing God glory. Unless a believer can bring glory to God in a particular choice, that choice should be rejected.

**1 Corinthians 10:31**, So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

For example, God made us with a desire for food. Our problem arises when we make food the focus of our lives and, instead of “eating to live,” we “live to eat.” God has also placed a sex drive in most of us. Our problems result when we pursue sexual gratification outside of the channel God gave for us to express this desire which is between one woman and one man who are faithful to each other in marriage. Our problem with pride often focuses on the achievements or possessions God has allowed us to have. Instead of responding as a thankful steward, we glorify the gifts instead of the Giver and claim honor at the expense of humility. On the other hand, we may not receive much attention or have much wealth but believe we are deserving of both and will dishonor God in trying to obtain them.

As should be expected, Satan emphasizes “gratification with no limitations.” God, on the other hand, tells us in His Word of the limitations He has designed for us to be satisfied and protected. God says, “Obey my limits.” Satan says, “There are no limits.”

In addition to bringing glory to God, a believer’s behavior is also to honor Christ, as Colossians 3:17 states, “*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”

### **The constant battle of two options**

Sin is a continual battle between two options. The self-centered option says, “I will live according to my fleshly desires.” The God-glorifying option says, “I will live according to my faith in God and honor the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- The two options have two different sources of authority: “self” or God’s Word.
- The two options have two separate goals: temporary pleasure or lasting joy.
- The two options highlight the two masters: Satan or God.
- There are two ways of dealing with sinful choices:
  - (1) The self-centered response is to indulge in sin, run away, cover up, lie, and shift blame.
  - (2) The God-honoring response is to flee temptation or, having sinned, to confess, speak the truth, assume personal responsibility, ask for forgiveness, and renew a walk of biblical obedience.
- The two options produce one of two results:
  - (1) Spiritual weakness for believers in this life and loss of eternal rewards in the life to come; and sinful bondage in this life for unbelievers and eternal loss in the life to come, or
  - (2) The safety of God-ordained limits that lead to lasting joy.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they were abandoning the commandment-oriented life of love for the gratification of self-centered desires.

- The *lust*-motivated life is oriented toward self and Satan’s deceitfulness.
- The *love-oriented* life is focused on the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s glory.

Do not think that God is opposed to pleasure and good feelings. He ordained that we have pleasurable feelings. He knows the best ways for us to express them and, simultaneously, not sin. Psalm 16:11 says this about God: *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* Notice that these benefits are from God, last forever, and are found by staying in His presence. That fullness of joy is insured by continually obeying God’s Word.

More than one observer has noted, “Christians make more bad decisions on the basis of self-oriented feelings than perhaps for any other reason.” The Apostle Paul spoke to this issue in Romans 6:12-13 when he wrote, *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* <sup>13</sup> *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

### **CHOOSING SELF OR CHOOSING CHRIST**

When one chooses a way of life based on immediate self-gratification instead of the biblical pattern of loving obedience, two opposing questions surface. A self-oriented person makes his decisions by asking, “What do *I* want?” On the other hand, a person committed to Christ makes decisions by answering the question “What does *God* want?”

In fulfilling one's self-centered desires, a person chooses current pleasure while minimizing or disregarding consequences. In choosing to obey God, believers opt for present discomfort, if that is necessary, in order to experience long-term joy.

Do not accept the self-centered lie that says, "I can't do what God requires because I don't feel like it." Do not accept the excuse that says, "I can't stop myself from giving into strong cravings." People who are self-centered have a clarion call that proclaims in no uncertain terms, "Be happy at all costs." Self-oriented people fail to understand that feeling oriented happiness is *not* the issue. Delighting in the Lord through loving obedience to God's Word *is* the issue. The apostle Peter reminds us of benefits of living by faith instead of living by feelings in one of the most well-known passages in the Bible.

**1 Peter 2:9-12**, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

### **PRACTICAL STEPS FOR REJECTING SATAN'S HOOKS OF TEMPTATION**

According to 1 Corinthians 2:14, a person who has rejected Christ cannot understand the things of God.

**1 Corinthians 2:14**, 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.

It is impossible for an unbeliever to overcome the three predictable hooks of sin listed in 1 John 2:16—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. In order for anyone to have power that can consistently overcome sin, a person must first receive the Lord Jesus Christ into one's life (Review [Salvation Explained by the Romans Road](#)). It is fruitless to depend on one's self or associated good works to earn a right standing before God (See [Good Works are not Good Enough and do not Work](#))

As a believer, you have God's wisdom and strength available to you as well as His encouraging promises that equip you to have an overcoming life in Christ. For example:

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

**2 Timothy 2:21-22**, Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. <sup>22</sup> So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart [*Emphasis added*].

The previous verses emphasize that all temptations are common, and God's strength is available for you to withstand them. Your best response to any temptation is to flee from it and to pursue Christ-like growth in fellowship with other believers. The following verses also emphasize Christ-like development and remind us to dwell in the Word of God, to submit to God, and to resist the devil.

**Hebrews 5:12-14**, For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

**James 4:7**, Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**2 Peter 2:9**, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment

As a believer, your primary goal in life is to love the Lord Jesus Christ, a reality that is demonstrated by obedience to God's Word. Faithfulness in this matter will result in your personal growth in Christ. Specific steps of Christ-honoring growth are listed below.

- Meet with God each day through His Word. Read portions of Scripture and determine how God’s truth is to impact your life.  
**2 Timothy 2:15**, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.  
**2 Timothy 3:16-17**, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.  
*If you have not read much of the Bible before, read through the Gospel of John, available at <http://www.livingwater.org/booklet/index.html>*
- Take time to memorize specific verses in God’s Word, especially those that deal with personal challenges. Memorizing verses allows you to meditate on them throughout the day (See [The Easy Way to Memorize Scripture](#))  
**Psalm 119:11**, I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.  
**Psalm 119:97**, Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.
- Continually rely on the Lord Jesus Christ to strengthen you and help you understand biblical truth. Take specific steps of obedience in accordance with God’s Word. Even though you may not know a lot about the Bible, obey what you do know. In areas of disobedience, start calling sin “sin” and do not excuse your sin by blaming other people or circumstances..  
**James 1:22-25**, But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.<sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.<sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.  
**John 15:5**, I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.  
**Romans 6:16**, Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?
- Confess your sin(s) to the Lord whenever you recognize them.  
**1 John 1:9**, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- Meet God joyfully and thankfully every day in prayer, typically many times throughout the day.  
*(See [A Prayer Pattern to Help Structure Your Life](#)).*
- Pray in faith and with perseverance concerning specific needs in your life and in the lives of others. (See [Prayer: A Viable Option or an Absolute Necessity](#) and [God Always Answers Prayer but Not As We Think](#))  
**Colossians 4:2**, Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.  
**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**, Rejoice always,<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,<sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- Prayerfully and faithfully commit that you will continue to make changes in your life to bring glory to God and to demonstrate the difference Christ has made in your life. (See [You Can Change ... One Step at a Time](#))
- Pray for the Lord to guide you to other believers with whom you can meet for the purpose of building up one another in Christ. Ask for biblical guidance as needed from fellow believers and be prepared to provide biblical counsel to others as well. Do not give or ask for advice based on personal preferences; anyone can do that. Instead, seek God’s truth to discover His will on every aspect of life.  
**Proverbs 11:14**, Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.  
**Ephesians 4:15-16**, Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.  
**Hebrews 3:13**, But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**, And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

When you know the biblical basis from which to act, obey God's Word ... no matter how you feel. When you are unsure of what the Bible says concerning a specific matter, do not proceed until you know what God wants you to do in obedience to His Word.

To bring glory to God and to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, you are to reject choices linked to self-gratification and, instead, live according to God's plan that is revealed in His Word. (Review [Your Way or God's Way ... Your Choice](#))

As you continue in your walk with Christ, refer often to the hope and assurance that is presented through the Apostle Paul in the last part of Romans chapter 8.

**Romans 8:26-39**, Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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1. Vincent's Word Studies at <http://www.studylight.org/com/vnt/view.cgi?bk=61&ch=2>