

10/1/23 Christ Fellowship

The Sin Test – 1 John 5:18

We always say we don't have any rules around here and since I wanted some brownies, I just made some and I'll share them with you if you want some. Nice and warm. Who wants one? Now, I'm trying to watch my weight so these are reduced sugar, reduced salt, reduced strychnine brownies. I hope they taste ok. I know they would be better with the full amount of salt, sugar and strychnine but I'm trying to reduce the amount of poisons I eat. You know?

Oh, don't worry. There is only a little bit of strychnine in there. Very little. You won't taste it a bit. Go ahead and have one. Make sure to drink plenty of water. You'll probably be fine. What? You don't want one? You don't want any of my brownies? Is it because they don't have the usual amount of sugar? Oh, the strychnine. There's just a real small amount. Oh, sure, it will kill you but probably not today! You'll probably live several more days if you get to the hospital in time. But it sure makes the brownies taste good so it's worth it. Right?

That's the dumbest thing ever, isn't it? Nobody would actually eat brownies that have poison in them, even if it was just a little bit. And yet, **Romans 3** says that sin is like the poison of vipers on their lips. Then it says that the wages of sin – what we deserve for our sin – is death, eternal death in Hell. But thankfully, Jesus died on the cross to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins so we didn't have to pay that price. So...thinking about your sin putting Jesus on the cross; your sin being the reason those spikes were driven into His hands and feet; your sin being why Jesus died that horrible day, tell me again just how much sin is okay in your life.

I ask that because I hear people often say, *"Well, we all sin every day."* Do we? Is that okay now? Is it just accepted that we're all going to sin and it's no big deal? Is it okay that we ingest just a little bit of poison? We need to think of sin as poison. Sin is the absolute worst thing that can happen to us. It is worse than cancer, worse than divorce, worse than prison, worse than loneliness or depression. It is poison and it puts a barrier between us and God.

The little Our Daily Bread booklet some of you get said one time that a little girl had accepted Jesus and wanted to be a member of the church. The pastor asked her, "Were you a sinner before you received the Lord Jesus into your Life?" "Yes, sir," she replied. "Well, are you still a sinner?" "To tell you the truth, I feel I'm a greater sinner than ever." "Then what real change have you experienced?" "I don't quite know how to explain it," she said, "except I used to be a sinner running after sin, but now that I am saved, I'm a sinner running from sin!"

I think that should be a picture of all of us if we are true believers. And the longer we are believers, the faster we ought to find ourselves running away from sin. In fact, that is the final test we are

going to take in this sermon series to be able to prove to ourselves that we truly are believers – the sin test. Turn to the New Testament book of **1 John** way in the back nearly to Revelation. Turn to the fifth chapter and let's take one more test. We have taken the faith test, the life test, the love test and the growth test, all from 1 John and we have just one more.

I started to say this is the hardest test of them all but, as I have said before, all these tests are literally impossible to pass...on your own. That is the whole point of these tests and really the whole point of living a Christian life. You can't do it but you can do all things through Christ who gives you the strength to do it.

I want to read just one verse again this week and it is **1 John 5:18**. John is concluding his letter. He is starting to land the plane and he uses a familiar phrase in this verse, "born of God." It is his favorite phrase to describe a Christian, a believer, a follower of Jesus or whatever you want to call someone who has put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So, let's read that 18th verse.

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.

Do you remember when you were a little kid, maybe in elementary school, that somebody might say, "**Oh! You're going to Hell for lying!**" Remember that? Is that true? Do we go to Hell for telling a lie? Well, technically...yes and no. While that is a crude understanding of how God works, the fact is that any sin, all sins, even just one makes us fall short of the glory of God and we then deserve to go to Hell.

But when we become true believers, nothing we do can send us to Hell. So, does that give us a free ticket to sin town? Of course not. When we sin, as believers, sin ought to hurt us. It ought to pain us to know that we have pained God and so we don't continue to sin like we used to. And when we do, we immediately go to God in prayer and ask His forgiveness.

John starts out here with a very confident statement. "We know..." It's very bold to say "We know" instead of "probably" or "I believe" or something like that. And what he knows is that true believers don't continue in sin. Some versions say it other ways but the way the original Greek word is used, its tense tells us John means that we don't continue in a lifestyle of unrepentant sin. He is not saying that we never sin. But we don't continue in it without asking God for forgiveness.

John is really repeating himself here from **chapter three, verse nine** where he says, "*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him. He cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God.*" When we are born of God as John says; when we are born again, accepting Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5** that we

are new creations. We have changed. We are no longer slaves to sin like we used to be. We are now slaves to God.

Let me give you an illustration. Here's the scenario. Let's say you have one child – a 12-year-old boy. I'm sorry but in this scenario you do. And let's say he's outside practicing hitting a baseball and just as you go outside to check on him, you walk around the side of the house just in time to see him take a big bat swing and hit a ball right through the window of your house. So, you step back and kind of hide and watch to see what he does.

Well, you can see he is panicking. He picks up all his balls and his bat and starts to go inside and then you go ahead and walk around there where he can see you. So, you ask him what happened. You know what happened. You just want to see what he says. You aren't really mad at him. Yes, it was irresponsible, but you know he's twelve and it was an old window anyway. And lo and behold, he tells you it was the neighbor boy who did it.

Well, now you are kind of upset but you hide it. You want to see how far he will carry this. So, you act like you are mad at the neighbor kid and you act like you are going to give his parents a piece of your mind. But you actually go over there and talk with the husband about the ballgame for a few minutes and then you go back home.

When you get home you tell your son that the neighbors have agreed to ground their son and make him pay for the window out of his allowance. *"Does that sound about right to you?"* you ask. And your son has the guts to say that sounds right!

Now, how does that make you feel? Do you hate your kid? Do you kick him out of the family? Do you wish he was dead? Of course not! But you are disappointed. It's frustrating. You know he has such great potential but the lying and the covering up the lying is just very disappointing. You still feed him. You still let him wear the clothes you bought him and you still take him to school, but there's a barrier between you now. You don't feel like taking him to get ice cream after school today. And when he calls you to help him with his homework, you don't really hear him, do you?

Isaiah 59:2 says, *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."* God knows what you have done and when you are a true child of God – born of God as John says – you don't want to hurt Him or disappoint Him and so, when you do sin, you immediately ask God for forgiveness and then repent or turn away from that sin.

And just like that 12-year-old boy grows up and realizes he doesn't want to hurt his father, you grow up and start to sin less and less. The big, fancy word for that is sanctification which is the process by which we become more and more like Jesus as we spiritually mature.

Now, when we are tempted to sin, is it always Satan who tempts us? No. Does God ever tempt us? No. James 1 tells us that very plainly. God cannot be tempted and He does not tempt. But sometimes it is Satan. We know that he lies and is the father of lies. He may do us physical harm like he did to Job. He may try to use pride like he has done to, well, everybody. Or he may even use your humility, believe it or not. Have you ever been so humble, you are proud of it? Score one for the devil. And we know he is prowling around looking to see who he can devour so we have to always be watchful of him.

But sometimes we get tempted by the world itself. Satan doesn't even have to do anything and we can be tempted just from the atmosphere around us. Am I the only one that has ever had this happen? I'm driving down the road, got the Christian tunes cranking, thanking God for the beautiful day, so grateful for all that God has done for...oh, look at that billboard. And my mind goes right in the gutter. That's probably just me.

So, we are tempted by Satan and by the nasty old world around us. But we are also tempted by what scripture calls "our flesh." It's not talking about flesh and bone physical flesh. It is talking about that old nature that we all still have even though we are true believers. Yes, we are new creations and we have a new nature as believers but we don't always yield to that new nature. That old man inside of us raises his ugly head and reminds us of that stuff we used to do and all the good times we had. But it rarely reminds you of all the hurt and all the consequences that went along with it.

So, that's a whole lot of temptation and proves that even if you became a hermit and never dealt with other people, you would still be tempted sometimes. And for a believer, that can be so frustrating because we want to do the right thing. More than anything else we don't want to sin. So, how can we keep from it? You may be asking, like the psalmist did in **Psalm 119**, "*How can a young man keep his way pure?*" And do you know what the answer is. The psalmist answers it immediately. "*By living according to your Word.*"

The answer is found in scripture, all of scripture. It is found by spending more time in the Word of God than the word of the world. In fact, this is how you pass all these tests; by spending more time in the Word than in the world.

When I was in high school, we had to take a foreign language and so I chose French. I don't know why. But anyway, on the first day of school, the French teacher handed out these

workbooks for us to use all year long. And the first thing she did was tell us to turn to the back and rip out the perforated pages that had all the answers. So, we did that and we all passed them up to the front where the teacher collected them and immediately put them into a storage closet there in the classroom.

But right after that, she got called away for something and left the room. When she did, my buddy Kevin who was sitting right next to me turned to me and said, “You want your answers back?” And I said sure so he just walks up to the front, opens the closet and grabs two answer sheets and sits down. Nobody said anything.

So, all year, Kevin and I made one-hundreds on every daily work we turned in. Awesome, right? Except that every Friday, the teacher gave us a test that was not in the answers we had. So, we both bombed every test. Well. It took a while but the teacher finally saw a pattern there and we both got in trouble of course. And we deserved it. Especially him, right?

Well, did you know that if you want to not just pass the faith test, the love test, the growth test and this sin test but also thrive in these tests that it is an open book test? All the answers are here. In fact, God insists you use it. It is how you know the truth and the truth will set you free from the slavery of sin. And once you have become a slave to God, He will give you the strength, the power, the grace and the motivation to pass all these tests through Jesus our Savior.

Now, the question for all of us here today is, are you seeing all these things being lived out in your lives more and more? Are you seeing God do work in and through you that was impossible before you met Him? Are you becoming more loving and more giving, more forgiving and more generous as you grow?

That is God’s power at work in you and if you don’t see that it’s because you don’t have His power, which means you may not be a true believer. You may have gone to church all your life. That does not save you. You may have been baptized. That does not save you. Maybe you tithe to the church and you pray and you are a real good person. Nope. Doesn’t save you.

We are only saved by God’s grace and our faith in Him – the faith that God gives you. And when you exercise that little bit of faith that He gives you and accept Him to be your Lord and Savior and commit your life to Him, then He will powerfully come into your life and give you that freedom over sin as you become a slave to Almighty God.

Have you ever done that? If not, do it right now as the music plays.

