

How can anyone who calls himself a lover of Jesus knowingly continue in sin? As followers of Christ, we claim to be delivered from sin's power. We testify that the cross has fully redeemed us from the bondage of iniquity. Yet multitudes of believers today continue to cling to lusts, habits, grudges, bitterness.

Where are these Christians, you ask? They're all around you. You find them worshipping in churches every Sunday. They raise their hands in praise to God for delivering them. They witness to others of Christ's power to break all bondages. But they won't let go of their bosom sin.

Sadly, many such Christians believe nothing can break sin's grip on them. They try every known method to get free of their bondage, but no amount of prayer, counseling or convicting sermons seems to help. Their sin just keeps entwining itself around their heart like a serpent, until it has full control of their life. And they end up carrying an agonizing burden of guilt and condemnation.

Paul asks, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* (ROM 6:1-2). Paul wonders, "We have received such incredible blessings in Christ. We have been baptized in Him, buried and resurrected with Him, conformed to the likeness of His death. So, how can we continue to sin?"

The fact is, the longer we indulge our besetting sin, the stronger its hold on us becomes. It's a cancer that spreads throughout our entire

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being, defiling all our thoughts and actions. Its decaying power wreaks destruction in every area of our lives - from our walk with Christ, to our relationships, to everything we touch.

Furthermore, sin never dies of itself. If it isn't uprooted and destroyed, it takes over the very throne of your life. First it affects your conscience, causing you to lose all discernment. The difference between right and wrong becomes clouded and fuzzy. Then, sin's voice gains your ear. Slowly, it begins to justify your lust to you - even giving you scriptural arguments to support it. Finally, you become "sermon proof" - meaning, you no longer respond to Holy Ghost conviction.

You may know Christians in this horrible condition. They get defensive whenever they're confronted about their bosom lust. They claim, "What I'm doing isn't wrong. I've prayed about it, and the Holy Spirit has told me I'm not sinning." Yet you know very well that person's behavior contradicts God's Word.

According to God's covenant provision, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live victoriously over the devil. He gives us all the resources we need to overthrow his dominion in our lives. He even causes us to "will to obey" the Lord's commands.

Yet God's New Covenant promise to break every bondage and set

every captive free is meant only for those who are sick of their sin. Why would the Holy Ghost release His power in anyone who doesn't see his sin as a serious matter?

If you think the Holy Spirit is going to free you from sin's grip without your full cooperation, you're mistaken. God forbid that any Christian should sit back and indulge his lust while waiting for the Holy Ghost to pluck it out of him. Such teaching not only comforts Christians in their sin - it misrepresents God's New Covenant.

Why Do Believers Continue Clinging to a Sinful Practice?

To answer this question, I need only to look in my own heart. More and more, as the day approaches, I imagine standing before the judgment seat of my Lord, when His loving eyes fall on me. In that moment, I'll have to give an account of my every deed and thought. And, as a minister of the gospel, I'll also have to account for the messages I preached to others but didn't live up to myself. As Paul wrote, *"...lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away."* (1.COR 9:27).

The very thought of this scene brings a holy fear to my heart. I cry out every day, "Lord, if there is any sin in me, please - deal with it. I don't want to hear the trumpet sound, and then find myself standing before you with a lust entwined around my heart."

What will you say to Jesus when you stand before Him? What excuse will you give Him for clinging to a root of bitterness, a grudge, a lust, a sinful habit? Will you say, "Lord, I didn't know you would take this one sin so seriously. I thought you'd be patient with me, that your grace would abound toward me in it. I've always believed your New Covenant promise. I just kept waiting for your Spirit to remove the sin from me."

Beloved, our Lord is coming soon, and this is no time to trifle with your sin. I know many upright believers who at one point in their lives grew careless and were overcome by their lust. So, don't think it can't happen to you. **"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."** (ROM 3:23). You need to ask yourself: "Why do I continue in my sin? Why does this evil bondage still hold me? Why am I not free?"

I believe the Holy Spirit has revealed to me several things on this subject:

We Continue in Sin Because We Do Not Have the Fear of God.

Many Christians today haven't had the fear of God planted in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. The writer of Proverbs declares, **"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil."** (PROV 16:6). **"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil."** (PROV 3:7). **"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."** (PROV 14:27).

The "fear of God" referred to here indicates much more than reverential awe and respect. The Psalmist tells us we can't receive the full revelation of God's covenant until His fear is deeply rooted in us: **"The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant."** (PSALM 25:14). This verse connects an understanding of the covenant with the fear of God. In short, all revelation is tied to His holy fear.

I'm convinced that without the fear of God, we cannot experience lasting deliverance from sin. Yet, in many churches the fear of the Lord has become a taboo subject.

When was the last time you heard a sermon preached on the fear of God?

One reason for this is that society's permissiveness has invaded God's house. In recent years, the term "grace" has come to mean a cover for sin. As the Psalmist writes, **"There is no fear of God before (their) eyes."** (PSALM 36:1). Moreover, corrupt ministers avoid certain passages on the fear of God. They usually preach only from the following verses: **"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."** (2.TIM 1:7). **"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear."** (1.JN 4:18). **"Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear."** (ROM 8:15).

These are all wonderful passages - yet they refer to fearing man or satan, not fearing God. The same word used for "fear" in these verses is also used in this one from Hebrews: **"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."** (HEB 13:6).

The New Covenant Contains What I Call a "Precedent Work of Grace."

I believe God has to accomplish a certain work in us before we can lay claim to any covenant promise. What is this "precedent work," upon which all others depend? Jeremiah tells us: **"...I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."** (JER 32:40). God's precedent work of the covenant is to put His fear in our hearts.

Jeremiah is speaking of the provisions of God's New Covenant, not the Old. And God tells us here how this first work of the covenant will be performed: "I will put my fear in their hearts." He's letting us know we can't work up a holy fear by ourselves. We can't obtain it by having people lay hands on us or by manipulating our flesh. The only way this holy work can be accomplished in us is if God's Spirit performs it.

God is telling us, in essence, "I'm going to do marvelous things in you. I'll send my very own Spirit to you, who will abide in you and give

you a new heart. He'll empower you to mortify all deeds of the flesh. And He'll guide you into total freedom from sin's power. Finally, He'll cause you to will and do my good pleasure.

"But there is one work my Spirit must perform in you before any of these others. He'll put in you a holy fear concerning sin. Then you won't depart from my commands. Unless you have my fear in you, your sin will always lead you away from me."

Very simply, the Holy Spirit changes the way we look at our sin. He knows that as long as we continue to take our lust lightly, we'll never be set free. So He shows us how deeply sin grieves Him and provokes God's wrath. How does the Holy Ghost do this? He uses the convicting Word of God - the piercing arrows of holy truth.

If you're sick of your sin, and you hunger to walk in righteousness, then be prepared: God is going to shoot "gospel arrows" of conviction into your heart. These arrows will seek out every hidden area of your heart, exposing every lust. And once they hit their mark, you'll feel their flames of truth burning deep into your conscience.

Many flesh-driven Christians try to shake off the guilt that God's convicting arrows produce. They constantly claim the verse, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..."** (ROM 8:1). But they neglect to read the last part of this verse: **"...who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."** If you continue in sin, you're walking in the flesh - and you have no claim on God's promise of "no condemnation."

The guilt we feel under Holy Ghost conviction is actually a work of God's grace. It is meant to expose the deceitfulness of sin in us. Therefore, we should ask God's Spirit to continually load up our conscience with the guilt, fear and condemnation of sin - until its exceeding sinfulness is completely exposed.

The Fear of God Includes a Full Understanding of the Danger and Consequences of Sin.

Many Christians are not aware of the terrible danger they're in when they continue in sin. Only the Holy Spirit's flaming arrows of truth can awaken their souls to the godly fear they need to shake off sin. Let me share with you a few of the flaming arrows of reality the Lord has used to pierce my soul:

1. God considers hidden lusts and sins in Christians to be more wicked, dangerous and hateful to Him than the most vile, evil, open sins committed by the unsaved.

Most believers think their hidden sin isn't serious simply because they don't act on it. But God sees the heart - and the sin He sees within us far outweighs that of wicked sinners. Let me explain.

Try to think of the vilest act ever committed by an evil, unsaved man or woman. Immediately, my mind turns to an article in one of New York's newspapers from last year. A man married a woman who had always longed to have a baby. He allowed her to get pregnant right away, and when the woman finally had the baby, she spent the first few weeks bonding with the child. But suddenly, out of nowhere, the man took the baby from his wife and killed it. Why? It was an act of revenge. Apparently, he was angry with the woman because she hadn't attended his father's funeral before they were married. He reasoned, "She didn't comfort me when I needed it. So I'm going to make her suffer." This has to be one of the most cruel, wicked, horrible acts ever perpetrated.

Humankind today has seen more murders, genocides and flaunted acts of sin than any previous generation. Yet, here is God's perspective on it all: nothing compares to the clinging lusts in our hearts. Our evil habits, hatreds and bosom sins are more vile in His sight than anything humankind has ever perpetrated.

We see an example of God's perspective in Revelation. He tells the Laodicean church, "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot.*" (REV 3:15). He's saying, "You're not what you profess to be. You tell yourself, 'I'm in need of

nothing.' But I say you're getting lukewarm. Everyone else sees you as upright and prosperous. But I see your heart - and I know that the zeal you once had for me has dried up."

Proverbs tells us, "*Out of (the heart) are the issues of life.*" (PROV 4:23). Likewise, "*As (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" (PROV 23:7). These verses are sharp arrows of the Holy Ghost. They pierce our hearts, telling us, "You can't hide from God's sight. Everything you've secretly hidden in your soul is going to be brought into the open. It doesn't matter if you act on it or not. God won't excuse your secret lust."

2. The longer you continue in sin, the more you're in danger of hardening your heart.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (HEB 3:12-13).

Perhaps at one time you trembled at hearing God's Word. You melted whenever you heard a fiery-hot sermon you knew was meant especially for you. You had an ear to hear the Spirit's voice. But for some time now, you've been flirting with a bosom sin - toying with it, rolling it around in your mind. And now, because sin has worked its deceit in you, you can sit unmoved through any sermon, no matter how anointed it is.

If you had godly fear, it would quickly reveal to you that your heart is slowly growing hard. You'd realize that every day you continue indulging in sin, you get closer to searing your conscience. But instead, day by day, your sin becomes less and less obvious to you. Soon you'll end up totally blind, with a false peace. And, finally, your sin will spill over the boundaries you set for it, flowing wildly into every kind of evil act.

I've seen firsthand the horrors of a man of God who allowed his heart to grow hard. He was a minister friend of mine who pastored a large church. God blessed this man mightily, anointing his sermons with Holy Ghost fire and

power. But the minister harbored a secret sexual lust. Over time he began to indulge it - and eventually he was caught in the act of adultery.

God was merciful to my friend. Godly elders and church leaders disciplined the pastor, and in time he was restored to the ministry. Whenever lust arose in his heart, the Holy Spirit was faithful to deal with him about it. But this man never took his sin seriously. He never inclined his heart to hear the Spirit's voice.

I was there the night he was exposed again. Five women came forward and confessed to having an affair with him. Some said they even had sexual relations with him just moments before he stepped into the pulpit to preach.

A friend of mine later asked this pastor, "How could your conscience allow you to do that? How could you conduct an affair with a woman and then purport to preach from God's Holy Word?" The pastor answered with a laugh, "You have to be a good actor."

That is a hard heart. Nothing moved this man. He had become so hardened, he could indulge in adultery, open his Bible and preach the gospel without a trace of guilt.

3. If you continue in sin, you'll face the rod of God.

The Psalmist writes the following about one of God's prime covenant promises: "*If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.*" (PSALM 89:30-34).

We rejoice as we read this wonderful New Covenant word. God promises never to remove His loving kindness from us, no matter how badly we may fall. Yet many believers skip lightly over the heavy warning in this verse: If we forsake God's Law and refuse to keep His commands, He'll visit our transgressions with His divine rod.

There simply isn't any way to soften this Word. God is telling us plainly, "If you continue in sin, I'm going to deal with it severely. I'll pardon you and forgive you. But I'm going to take vengeance on your sin. And you'll feel my stripes on your back."

The Bible tells us that whomever the Lord loves, He chastens. We see this truth illustrated vividly in David's life. Consider how the Lord dealt with this man, a faithful servant who enjoyed God's favor. At one point in his life, David sinned awfully - justifying it and keeping it hidden for months on end. Finally, God said, "Enough" - and he sent a prophet to expose David's sin. Nathan used an analogy to tear apart every excuse David had, until finally the king admitted, "I've sinned - I'm guilty."

But simply admitting sin isn't enough. God not only exposed David - He also laid His divine rod across His servant's back. Of course, we know the Lord always applies His rod in love. But David's life clearly shows us that feeling God's rod of correction is no light thing. The stripes it causes are painful and agonizing. And often the rod falls not only on us, but on our loved ones and those near us as well.

Consider the direct results of David's sin on those around him: The illegitimate baby he sired with Bathsheba died. Thousands of Israelite soldiers were killed in battle. He brought scandal to his country, making Israel a laughing stock in the eyes of its enemies. And as if that weren't enough agony, David endured endless personal pain because of his sin: He lost the throne of Israel to his rebellious son, Absalom. He was hunted down by Absalom's army like a wild animal. He had to flee into the wilderness from the son he loved so much. And he wept uncontrollably when Absalom was killed.

David knew all of this could have been avoided. Every painful event was an agonizing reminder of the consequences of his sin. He expressed his unending pain in the Psalms, writing that his soul was in constant torment, that he was cast down in confusion, that his

couch was a bed of tears. He cried out in agony, "God, why have you forsaken me?" And he wept in fear, "Holy Spirit, don't depart from me."

God's rod of conviction brought David to the very brink of his sanity. And, as you'll see next, it also brought him to the very brink of the grave.

4. If you continue in sin, you'll experience a constant drain of peace and strength.

David wrote, "*My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.*" (PSALM 31:10). Like a hole in the oil tank of a car, your sin will slowly drain you of all resources. Your peace, joy and strength will literally drip away until they're gone completely.

David confessed, "*Neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.*" (PSALM 38:3). He was saying, "All my strength is gone because of my sin. My body has become weak because of what I've done. My iniquity simply won't allow me to rest."

David was experiencing God's piercing arrows. He wrote, "*Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.*" (PSALM 38:2). Yet this beloved servant was being taught the fear of God. And part of his painful lesson was that he had lost the peace of the Lord. Now he cried out, "*He weakened my strength.*" (PSALM 102:23).

I know Christians who lead lives of utter confusion because they continue to indulge in sin. These hollow souls are always downcast, weak, forever struggling but getting nowhere. I also know ministers who can't sit still because of their sin. They're constantly busy, working, never entering into the Lord's rest.

It doesn't matter who you are - if you harbor a secret sin, you'll experience continual disturbances in your life, your home, your family, your work. Everything you touch will be out of kilter. You'll become increasingly restless, confused, tossed about by endless worries and fears. And all your peace and strength will be drained from you.

5. If you continue in sin, you'll lose your usefulness to God's kingdom.

I have seen men mightily used of the Spirit who were later put on the shelf by God. The Lord simply told them, "I'm sorry, son. I love you, I forgive you, and my mercy will come through for you. But I can't use you."

To me, this is one of the most awful things imaginable. Yet it happened to King Saul. The Bible tells us, "*Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commands of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue.*" (1.SAM 13:13-14).

What awful words. God told the king, "Saul, you could have had my blessing in your life continually. I was on the verge of establishing your kingdom in Israel forever. I had great plans for you, plans to use you mightily. But you wouldn't deal with your sin. Instead, you became even more bitter and hardhearted. So, now I'm through with you." Immediately, God's Spirit left the king - and in that moment, Saul was no longer of use to the kingdom. From that point forward, everything Saul did was in the flesh.

In the past several years, we have seen God's Spirit blow grievously on the ministries of fleshly pastors, evangelists and TV preachers. God removed His blessing from them overnight, causing their work to wither before the world's eyes. And right now, God is on the verge of telling others in the church they no longer have a place of usefulness in His kingdom. I think of professors in Christian colleges who delight in robbing students of any faith they possess. These teachers' spirits have withered, becoming hollow, empty and fruitless. Now their only goal is to escape hell.

That is where it all ends when you continue in sin: you become absolutely barren and fruitless, of no more use to God's kingdom.

There Is Good News for Us.

Is the Lord dealing with your sin right now? Has He shot arrows of conviction into your heart, causing you to feel guilt over your sin? Don't fear - that is the gift of God. He is planting His divine power in you, teaching you, "Only through my holy fear will you depart from your sin."

Once you're convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of your sin, you'll be ready for the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Acts tells us, "*Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and*

were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (ACTS 9:31). As these first-century Christians walked in the fear of God, they received the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

So, what exactly does it mean to walk in the fear of the Lord? It means reminding yourself of His warnings. And it means allowing the Spirit to load up conviction in your heart, bring your sins out into the open, and cast them far away from you. In doing this, He's laying

the foundation to fulfill every one of God's covenant promises to you.

Then, when the fear of God has fully laid hold of you, you'll dread the danger and consequences of sin. And you'll walk every day in this holy fear. Finally, you'll see that all along God has been mercifully at work in you, doing what He promised - delivering you from the dominion and slavery of sin.

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March 20, 2000

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