

# Sin Not a Necessity

by Thomas Cook

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*Through the power of Christ, Christians can live without sin and experience uninterrupted victory over temptation.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 19:26, Romans 6:1, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Philippians 4:13, 1 John 2:1

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Overcoming Sin"

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## Description

Thomas Cook preaches about the possibility of holy souls, even those entirely cleansed, to still be capable of sinning, emphasizing the need for constant vigilance, self-distrust, and carefulness to avoid falling into acts of sin. While holiness provides the safest condition on earth, absolute security is not attainable in this world. The sermon highlights that Christians have the capacity not to sin, although the capability to sin remains, and that salvation provided by Jesus includes grace to live without sinning. The ultimate goal is to achieve uninterrupted victory over sin through continuous trust in God, as He empowers believers to overcome sin and live in triumph.

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## Transcript

As explained in our last chapter, holiness does not bring exemption from temptation. It follows, therefore, that it is always possible for the entirely cleansed soul to sin. Holiness secures the safest possible condition on earth, but absolute security does not belong to this world.

Some assert that the doctrine of entire extirpation of sin from the heart puts the soul beyond real temptation. "There can be no real temptation," they say, "to a soul which has nothing in its nature responsive to solicitations to sin." But such an assumption is much too broad. It renders angels in probation, Adam in Eden, and our Lord Himself, incapable of real temptation. But the fact that some angels fell, that Adam sinned, and that Jesus Christ "was in all points tempted as we are," should be sufficient proof that holy souls are capable of temptation.

If angels and Adam fell, we shall need to watch and pray, and keep our hearts with all diligence. Though it be true that we are less likely to sin when our hearts are pure, our attitude must always be one of self-distrust, of vigilant observation of our spiritual foes, and of unceasing carefulness lest we become "entangled again in a yoke of bondage." Eternal vigilance is the price of safety. Grace never induces presumption. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

But while inability to sin does not belong to Christian experience, to be able not to sin does.

Capacity to sin is involved in the idea of accountability, but capacity does not involve necessity. There is grace available by which every regenerate soul, from the moment of regeneration, may go on in a career of victory, never falling into acts of sin.

Scripture, in revealing the future kingdom, tells us that here, in the earth-life only, shall we encounter sin. When all things are made new, and the Jerusalem, which is from above, becomes the home of the holy, into it shall in no wise enter anything that defileth. Therefore with earth ends, for the Christian, the conflict with sin. How strange, if during this one awful solitary season of temptation, our Father should design for us a long, drawn-out, continuous, miserable defeat. Commanded to depart from all iniquity, yet in this sole arena of trial left hopelessly saturated with it! How opposed to such pessimistic thought is the experience which exclaims, "Thanks be unto God who always leadeth us in triumph!"

Living without sin are words which shock many excellent persons, but how otherwise can the grand purpose of Christ's mission into the world be accomplished? He came "to save His people from their sins;" but if Christians cannot be saved from sinning, if the teaching of the Westminster Catechism is correct, "No man even by the aid of Divine grace, can avoid sinning, but daily sins in thought, word, and deed," then the plan redemption is a failure.

The New Testament distinctly teaches that the salvation which Jesus has provided includes grace to live without sinning. What says St. Paul: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" And again, in writing to the Thessalonians, he says, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." These were strong words for a mortal man to use -- but they were true. The life he lived was declared by the Holy Ghost to be holy, and just, and unblameable. St. John's teaching exactly coincides with that of St. Paul. The purpose of his Epistles was to warn believers against sin, and to keep them from it. "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." To any unprejudiced reader the whole teaching of the third chapter of his first Epistle is to the effect that as certainly as we may be saved from the consequences of sin by faith in Christ, so may we be kept from sinning by abiding in Him. Because they need not, Christians must not sin; the possibility involves the obligation. The difference between Christians in a lower and higher state of grace is not that the one sins and the other does not. That is the essential difference between a sinner and a saint. "In this," says the apostle, "the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil," Some say, "This means habitual sinning," but the Scripture does not say habitual sin. St. John spoke in God's name when he said, "He that committeth sin," that is, knowingly and willingly, "is of the devil." No state of grace permits the committing of voluntary sin. Even the lowest type of Christian does not continue in sin.

Another point is also made clear in this chapter, viz., that permanent sonship and continual sinning are contradictions which cannot be combined in the same character. A person can no more remain born of God and continue in sin, than he can remain honest and steal, or truthful and tell lies.

When a soul is born of God, a new principle (the love of God) is admitted, and takes up its abode behind the will. The attitude of the will can never be hostile to God's law, so long as it is swayed by love to the lawgiver. This interprets the declaration, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him (this new principle of love) and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Such "cannot sin," in the sense that a dutiful son says "I cannot" when he is tempted to do his parents, to whom he is under deepest obligations, some great wrong. He cannot because he will not; the impossibility is not physical but moral. There is truth in the saying

If we will we may, but if we won't we can't.

We recognize, of course, to some extent, a difference between sin committed as the result of momentary weakness or unwatchfulness, and that which is committed deliberately, with set purpose. In an unguarded moment, the best Christians may be surprised into some single act of sin; but for this there is merciful provision in our High Priest above. But even these "surprise sins," as they may be designated, are not a necessity. The if clearly implies they are not. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." What nonsense it would be to use this word if there were no room for a condition! How absurd it would be to say, "If any man sin, for every man does sin!" And how directly contrary to the tenor of the Epistle!

The Scriptural doctrine is undoubtedly this: Christians need not, and do not sin, but capability to sin remains. Should one be overtaken in a fault let him not despair. God, in His mercy, has made sufficient provision in Christ for his forgiveness and cleansing again, if he confesses the wrong he has done.

Much controversy about sin results from the want of accuracy in the definition of the term. We do not in this chapter understand by sin involuntary deviation from the law of absolute right, but willing transgressions of the known law of God. What is commonly meant by committing sin, in the New Testament, is a willing and known transgression of a known law. We deny that unconscious and involuntary breaches of the Adamic law are sins. To a superficial observer they may seem like sins, but in lacking volition, they lack sin's essential characteristic. Sin is in the will and purpose rather than in the act. Ethical writers insist that guilt always involves a knowledge of wrong, and an intention to commit it. The moral sense of mankind pronounces innocent the inadvertent doer of an act wrong in itself. It discriminates between a sin, and a weakness or an error. And when we look into the Word of God we find this distinction always recognized. On the great day of Atonement, the errors (ignorances) of the people were put away through the blood which the High Priest offered for himself, and the errors of the people. (Hebrews ix. 7.) But where sin had been committed by the individual Hebrew, he needed to offer a special victim for himself.

Sins demand a personal confession and personal resort to the blood of sprinkling, and an act of reliance upon Christ; but involuntary transgressions, so-called sins of ignorance, are covered by the blood of Christ without any definite act of faith on the part of the believer. In speaking of such involuntary transgressions, Mr. Wesley says, "You may call them sins if you please, I do not. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law. But is all transgression of the law sin? Prove it who can."

Evils arising out of unavoidable ignorance are certainly not sins in the sense of attaching guilt to the perpetrator. They are his misfortune, not his fault. Their penalty may be suffering, but it is not condemnation. If it were condemnation, we should always be in bondage, because we come short of God's absolute standard of right every moment of our lives.

It is true that all ignorances, infirmities, and mistakes need the atoning blood as much as sin does. However holy a man may be, if he thinks he can live a moment without the Atonement he is a mistaken man. To say that because our hearts are cleansed from all sin we do not need the Atonement, is as absurd to say because it is noon-day we do not need the sun. Even our best actions are so far short of God's absolute standard of right that we could not stand a moment if tried by the law as a covenant of works. We stand in grace alone -- accepted only in Christ -every moment needing, and every moment enjoying the merit of His death. Apart from vital union with Him, we are required to keep the law of perfect obedience, as Adam was; but when in Him, so far as we come short, because of our imperfect moral

organization, His merit meets our demerit. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." It is in view of this truth that the holiest soul on earth will always find that petition in the Lord's prayer appropriate, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Mistakes, infirmities, and involuntary offenses are inevitable so long as we are in the body. Sins, by the keeping power of Christ, are avoidable throughout every hour of our regenerate life. He will so energize the will, that it shall be able to stand as flint against every suggestion to act contrary to the will of God. No power on earth or in hell can compel a man to sin who relies upon God to be kept from it. Christ came not to cover over, make excuse for, or give liberty to sin, but to give us uninterrupted victory, to teach us that by continuous trust in Him we need never know defeat. There is almost excess and extravagance of victory implied in the word which the apostle coined to express his experience, "We are more than conquerors." Dr. Rendel Harris says: "We should render it exactly by saying, 'we over-over-conquer'." Coverdale gives the sense of it well in his translation, "We conquer far." This is in exact harmony with the assurance, "Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound."

If man were left to himself we should all admit the thing is impossible, but it is not a question of what we can do, but of what He can do. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Cannot we, by the grace of God, live one minute without sin? If a minute, why not an hour? If an hour, why not a day? If a day, why not a year? Shall we limit "the Holy One of Israel"? There can be no continuous victory over sin unless such victory is expected, and no Christian will expect what he believes cannot be experienced. We are weak, but "through Christ strengthening" us, "we are able to do all things."

"All things are possible to him that believeth."

The most impossible of all,

Is, that I e'er from sin should cease

Yet shall it be, I know it shall;

Jesus, look to Thy faithfulness!

If nothing is too hard for Thee,

All things are possible to me.

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