

The Sin Bug

Mark Greenwood

There is such a concern for a 'pure' church among many leading Christians that works has been added to grace in order to sift out the tares from the wheat. Now we are told that before we can even think about trusting in Jesus we must renounce all sin and turn from sin. We must confess all sin and obey God in everything.

This is not the pure gospel and neither will it produce a pure church but rather a hybrid church, one that Christ will reject when He returns.

In Matthew 7:21-23 we read of religious people who were rejected by Christ yet were doing many mighty works in Jesus' name. Some interpret this as these people losing their salvation. This cannot be right because salvation is by grace and is obtained by believing in Jesus and not by anything else we do. There are two possible interpretations to this scripture and either one could be correct: one view is that these were saved and had eternal life but were kept out of the millennial kingdom reign of Christ because they hadn't submitted to the Lordship of Christ, the other viewpoint is that they were not saved in the first place, they had never put their trust in Christ alone, they just had a form of religion. When Christ rejected them all they could point to was their works; they thought they were doing His work, yet they had no idea what the true work of God was. Christ said that He never knew them: the actual Greek word which is translated 'never' is a definite negative statement and means 'never at any time' (see *Vine's 'Expository Dictionary of Bible Words'*), it would seem that they were not even saved. They had mixed grace and works; not once did they mention what Christ had done for them, only what they had done for Christ. Jesus Christ said that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must do the will of His Father (v21). So what is the will of God and what works must we do?

The Bible says: 'And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another' (1 John 3:23). Jesus also said, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29 & see also v40). Ephesians 2:8 says that it is 'by grace' we are 'saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.'

Salvation is by believing on Jesus, trusting Him to save us, not by trusting in any works we do. When we believe on Jesus He gives us His life in order that we might love one another. Once we have believed on Jesus we have eternal life—eternal life is a free gift, therefore we cannot earn it by good works. However, once we are saved then Spirit-led works are important as a witness to our faith and also as regards our position in the millennial kingdom of God. We are rewarded in the coming kingdom according to our works here and now.

Many people do not understand the difference between eternal life and kingdom life. We receive eternal life by faith alone in Christ alone, if we add anything to faith in order to be saved this is classed as works (not grace) – which is unbelief and will make our faith of no effect.

The kingdom, on the other hand, is obtained by overcoming—which can be seen in a changed attitude as a result of suffering. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (*Matthew 5:3*). Paul the Apostle said “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (*2 Timothy 2:12*). It is the poor in spirit who will inherit the kingdom of heaven and suffering without murmuring is an expression of that spirit.

The poor in spirit are those who recognise their true position before God, they know they don’t deserve anything, they are humble and contrite before Him. They realise that without Him they can do nothing, all their hope and trust is in Him alone. They have become as little children completely dependent on God, their confidence is only in God. Suffering may be the tool that God uses to bring us to the place of a humble and contrite spirit which looks to the Lord for His leading. Our response to God when we are suffering has to be with thanksgiving and praise in Jesus’ Name; this is God’s will for us and is an expression of our faith.

Before becoming a Christian the biggest problem in a person’s life is sin. Sin will keep us separated from God and out of heaven. There is nothing that we can do of ourselves to change our sinful nature; can a leopard change its spots? The Bible says that Jesus has come to save us from our sins. The question is, do we want saving from our sins?

Sins are enjoyable to our carnal nature; we get much pleasure from our sins. What about the benefits we get from sinning? Do we really want Jesus to save us now from our sins? Perhaps on our death bed so we can go to heaven but not now when we are enjoying ourselves. If this is how we think then we need to change the way we think.

Do we really want to receive His life now, to have our sins taken away now, to be made into a new person where all the old things have passed away and all things become new? If we really want to be saved now then first we need to acknowledge that we have sinned and recognise that we need a Saviour; that we cannot save ourselves.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has died to pay the price of our sins and to free us now from the power of sin. The Bible calls us to ‘repent’ which is to reconsider our thinking, change the thoughts of our heart and ‘come to the knowledge the truth’ if we want to be free (*see Acts 8:22, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 2:25*). The truth is that we have sinned and cannot save ourselves; salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ, not

in our good works or in anything we have done but in believing in, and trusting in, Christ alone.

Many people say that 'repent' means to turn from sin and confess all sin. The dictionary definition means to be sorry or to grieve for sins committed. The problem is that where the word 'repent' is used in the Bible in the context of salvation it is a bad translation of the original Greek word. In fact, A T Robertson (a famous professor in New Testament interpretation) quotes JA Broadus as saying it is the worst translation in the New Testament. Robertson says that the actual meaning of repent is 'to change (*lit. 'think afterwards'*) their mental attitudes' (*'Word Pictures in the New Testament', Volume 1, p24*).

In other words repentance means to change our mind and attitude with afterthought. For salvation we need to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God who has died to save us from our sins. We need to realise that our good living or good works is redundant as far as salvation goes; only absolute trust in Jesus Christ, excluding any works of our own, can save us. It is by God's grace that we are saved, through faith; nothing to do with ourselves, it is all God's gift to us, not by our works but by faith in Christ alone.

If we put our trust in Christ alone we will receive forgiveness of sins. Another word that is sometimes used in the Bible is 'remission' of sins. These two words 'forgiveness' and 'remission' are a translation of the same Greek word, the actual meaning of that word is that God forgives our sins and sends them away never to be remembered any more. When we believe on Jesus, God forgives us and removes our sins far from us but we have to receive that forgiveness by trusting that what He has said He will do (*see Acts 10:43, Acts 26:18, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14 and Colossians 2:13*).

The Bible says: 'As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us' (*Psalms 103:12*), and 'will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea' (*Micah 7:19*). 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (*Jeremiah 31:34*). Acts 3:19 says, 'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out'. The word 'blotted out' means, according to Vine, 'In the sense of removal, to wipe away, wipe off, obliterate' (*see also Isaiah 43:25*).

All these words, remission, removed, blotted out are all saying the same thing that God has taken our sins away. He did this when Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree (*see Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 2:24*).

God has justified the sinner who believes on Him by taking his sins and putting them on Jesus, then punishing Jesus for them. When we believe on Him our faith is counted for righteousness. I'll repeat that, when we believe on the Son of God then God takes our sins and puts them on Jesus, and our faith in Jesus is counted for righteousness. It is by believing on Jesus Christ that He is the Son of God who died to save us that one becomes a Christian. If we try to do anything to save ourselves it shows that we do not understand this truth; therefore we need to repent and believe.

Man will always try to be independent of God, but God wants us to be absolutely dependent on Him like little children with their Father. To put their trust in Him for everything.

Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins; how can He save us from our sins if we refuse to let them go? Why would anyone want to hold their sins in their heart when God wants to take them far away from us never to be remembered anymore? It is because they believe they have to do something in order to have their sins removed; to just believe in the finished work of Christ and the cleansing blood of the Lamb is not enough for them.

God has forgiven us of all our sins, past, present and future but we need to receive that forgiveness.

If, after we have received Jesus as our Saviour, we sin, Jesus is our advocate, telling the Father He has taken our sins away and we have put our trust in Him (*see 1 John 2:1-2*).

The Difference Between Sin and Sins

Someone once said to me that they feel like they have a bug inside that is causing them to sin. That is right, except the bug has no power if, having believed and trusted in Jesus, we are led by the Spirit.

Let me explain. If we read the book of Romans, up to chapter 5 verse 11 our sins (*plural*) are in view; these are our deeds or actions that fall short of God's glory. From verse 12 onward sin (*singular*) is in view. Sin is the lust that lives in the flesh and causes us to commit sins. When Adam sinned he lost God and lust came in causing us to sin. For the sake of clarity many call this the sinful nature, in the book of Romans, Paul just calls it 'sin'; he tells us that 'sin' 'reigned' as king (*Romans 5:21*). In Galatians (*5:16-21*) Paul now calls it the 'lust of the flesh' and gives a whole list of the works which are manifested when lust is reigning, such as fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strifes, jealousies, angers, contentions, disputes, schools of opinion, envy, murders, drunkenness, revels, etc. James tells us that lust, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin (*James 1:15*). For the sake of clarity I will call this lusts of the flesh, the 'sin bug' that causes us to commit sins.

Now we have been redeemed and our sins have been dealt with on the cross; however in our flesh dwells lust or 'the sin bug'. Our bodies have not yet been redeemed, only our spirit, our bodies will be redeemed when Christ returns.

So here we have a problem, the sin bug in the flesh. Why has God left us this thorn in the side? I believe it is that we might grow in God by learning how to overcome, live by faith, and gain the victory in our walk. Basically it is by faith that the sin bug is dealt with. We have to believe what God says about our position in Christ. We have been crucified with Christ and must reckon ourselves dead to sin (that is, the sin bug) and alive to God in Christ Jesus (*see Romans 6:6-14*). Not only that, but Christ has freed us from the power of sin (the sin bug) (*Romans 6:22*). We need to recognise and believe what the Bible says. We must recognise that we are 'dead' with Christ and our 'life is hid with Christ in God' (*Colossians 3:3*), the sin bug has lost all its power over the spiritual man.

That is our position as far as the sin bug is concerned. However we are still both flesh and spirit, the Bible tells us to 'walk' 'in the Spirit' and we will not 'fulfil the lust of the flesh' (*Galatians 5:16*). Now the sin bug would prefer us to live a religious life by the power of the flesh. To be religious the flesh needs the law of God to rule over us, however the whole point of the law is to expose sin in our lives then bring us to the place where we realise we are not able to keep the law and we need a Saviour. The sin bug loves us to keep under the law; you see, the sin bug gets its 'strength' from 'the law' (*1 Corinthians 15:56-57*), 'but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ', and this victory is our faith.

Faith says we are not under law but under grace; all our sins have been forgiven and removed from us, we are dead to sin (*the sin bug*) and alive to God. Christ has freed us from sin therefore we should mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit. Now we should give ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, offering the parts of our body as instruments of righteousness for His service. If we do commit sins now, then the blood of Jesus Christ is continually cleansing us from all sins that we commit.

Now a word of warning. When we are resting in our position in Christ, our walk or conduct needs to be an expression of God's life in us. The good works we now do are the ones that God has prepared for us to walk in (*see Ephesians 2:10*).

The danger to any born again Christian is to listen to the mind of the flesh; the carnal mind is enmity to God. We are in a conflict between flesh and spirit until Christ returns, therefore we need to mortify the deeds of the body. The Bible says 'Let not sin' 'reign in' our 'mortal' bodies that we 'should obey it in the lusts thereof' (*Romans 6:12*).

If we live after the flesh we will die. Don't sow to the flesh.

We should be constantly watching and praying. We should know that without Christ we can do nothing. Without Christ we will fail.

Finally when sin is dealt with there is still the bigger matter of 'self' to deal with. That monster that exalts itself, instead of abhorring itself, that boasts in its knowledge and achievements instead of the cross of Christ.

Deny self and take up the cross daily until Jesus returns. It is natural to justify self, especially when falsely accused, the problem is that this could easily result in exalting self. In the Bible we read that Job kept himself from sinning until his friends came with accusations and then he naturally justified himself. When God appeared to him he realised his insignificance in comparison to God's righteousness and said he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes.

God will justify those who believe in Jesus Christ. We must decrease and Christ must increase in our lives, keeping our eyes off self and onto Jesus Christ.

Above all keep humble and contrite.

© Mark Greenwood

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'Old' AV words have been replaced by more current ones, i.e. 'you' instead of 'ye' and 'has' instead of 'hath'.

W E Vine's Expository Dictionary of Bible Words is a classic and has been used by scholars of the Bible for many years.

A T Robertson Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 1