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Disciplemaking 1 Abiding in His Word

IN THE WAR

"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

We are in a war against three enemies. The Christian life can be described accurately by good words such as ... comfort, contentment, forgiveness, gentleness, goodness, hope, joy, kindness, love, mercy, peace, and satisfaction. However, these words present only a partial picture of the reality of living the Christian life. Don't lose sight of the bigger picture ... you are in a war. The Bible states that you are in a war against three fallen foes ... the fallen world, your fallen nature, and the fallen angel. You have been born behind enemy lines ... born into a fallen world. Your fallen nature is a traitor ... your flesh wars against you from inside. In addition, you fight an invisible enemy ... the Devil. These three enemies present obstacles to your living to the glory of God. You must understand your enemies. You must understand your enemies' tactics. You can win your battles if you follow God's battle instructions.

The battle lines of sin and temptation. The war against your three enemies is often fought at the battle lines of sin and temptation. You need to strive against sin. You need to know how to resist temptation. Many sins are easy to identify. However, some things may be right in one situation, wrong in another ... or right for one person, and wrong for another. You need to understand how to identify sins as sins. As Christians, we will be tempted. We will go through trials and tests. The war is dangerous. Our sins are the wounds we suffer in battle. We will be wounded. We must tend to our wounds ... confessing our sins to God. Confession is a prerequisite for forgiveness. Forgiveness is a great blessing from God. Unconfessed sins have serious consequences. Believers are wounded in the battles. We need to tend to our own wounds ... and to their wounds.

We will have final victory. We fight in a war that is already won. Jesus conquered our enemies on the cross. However, we must fight our own battles on a daily basis. God is our refuge and strength on the battlefield. *"For Thou hast been a refuge for me, a tower of strength against the enemy."* Psalm 61:3. Our daily battles can be won if we fight them according to God's battle instructions. Then when our days on this earth are over, we will be able to say what the Apostle Paul said near the end of his life, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."* 2 Timothy 4:7.

OUR BATTLES AGAINST THE WORLD

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts." 1 John 2:15-17

Understanding the enemy. The world is our enemy. We were born into a fallen world. The world is not easy and it is not perfect ... it has been cursed by God. *"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."* Romans 8:19-21. We were born behind enemy lines into a fallen world that is under the control of Satan, 1 John 5:19. Our world is ruled by Satan, John 12:31. Satan is the prince of the power of the air, Ephesians 2:1-3. We are soldiers in a hostile foreign land.

Understanding the enemy's tactics. The world is busy and complex. However, it is only temporary. The world can distract us from the things that are important for eternity ... God, His Word, and people. We can be tempted to become so entangled in the temporary things of this world that we do not obey God. For many believers, the entanglements of the world can be measured by the clock. Life can be so busy and demanding that we can be tempted to have no time for the things of God. Moreover, our devotion can be misdirected from the Creator to the creation. Love of God can be replaced by love for the things of this world ... good or bad things. Many of the world's temptations are direct and obvious. However, many others are subtle and indirect. We ought to be growing to be more like Jesus ... but we live in a world of so many destructive influences. The people and things of this world can influence us directly and indirectly. We must be very careful to prevent the people and things of the world from squeezing us into their mold.

Defeating the enemy. Winning our battles against the world begins with knowing that final victory is already won. Jesus said, *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* John 16:33. We can be victorious in our daily battles against the world. *"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"* 1 John 5:4-6. Ultimate victory over the world has been won. Daily victory can be ours if we follow God's battle instructions for our war against the world.

OUR BATTLES AGAINST THE WORLD (continued)

God's battle instructions...

"Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." 1 John 3:13. Don't think that you should be accepted by the world. Jesus said, *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."* John 15:18-19. His kingdom is not of this world, John 18:36. Our citizenship is in heaven, Philippians 3:20. We are in the world ... but we are not of the world, John 17:14-18. You are an alien and stranger in this world. Don't expect to feel like you are at home. You are not home yet.

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." 2 Timothy 2:3-4. Do not be entangled in the affairs of everyday life. This does not mean that you should not be involved in life. However, it does mean that you should not allow your activities, possessions, and relationships to prevent you from obeying God. Entanglement in the world causes some Christians to be unfruitful, Mark 4:19. If you are too busy to do God's will ... you are too busy doing the wrong things. Make the most of your time, Ephesians 5:15-16. Entanglement in sin will pull you down. In addition, entanglement in good things could prevent you from doing God's best. How much surgery is needed on your entanglements? Do you need minor or major surgery? Don't be entangled. Be available.

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world." 1 John 2:15. Our devotion to the temporary things of this world can cause us to ignore the eternal things ... God, His Word, and people. A good test of this is the use of our resources, time, and money. As Jesus said, *"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Matthew 6:20-21. Loving the things of the world is very dangerous. *"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* James 4:4. Don't love the world. Love God.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2. Do not let the world squeeze you into its mold. Don't get caught up in what everyone else is doing or not doing. The world is pursuing the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. Be different from the world. Spend time in God's Word. Renew your mind. Set your mind on the things of God. Don't be conformed. Be transformed.

OUR BATTLES AGAINST THE FLESH

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." Galatians 5:16-17

Understanding the Enemy. Our own flesh is our enemy. The flesh is that inner part of each person that opposes God. When someone believes in Jesus Christ, a new nature is born within that person. However, an old nature is still there ... that is the flesh. The deeds of the flesh include *"immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousings."* Galatians 5:19-21. Deeds of the flesh come from the heart of man. Jesus said, *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."* Matthew 15:19. He said, *"That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."* Mark 7:20-23. All of these things can come from the enemy inside us ... from our flesh.

Understanding the enemy's tactics. The flesh is our inner enemy. Our flesh is a traitor in our bodies. It battles against our new nature. The flesh wages *"war against the soul."* 1 Peter 2:11. It is at war with the Spirit within us. *"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another."* Galatians 5:17. Each of our two natures, the old and the new, seeks to dominate our lives from within us, Romans 7:15-25. Our flesh tempts us to sin. Our new nature urges us to live for God.

Defeating the enemy. Our battle against the flesh is a battle that is already won by Christ. *"Our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."* Romans 6:6. That victory is reinforced by our actions as we love and obey God. Our bodies are dead because of sin, Romans 8:10. In a sense, the battle is between the dead and the living ... our dead flesh against our living spirit. In this battle we must sow to the Spirit ... not to the flesh. We have the promise and the warning that we will reap what we sow. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."* Galatians 6:7-8. We must fight vigorously against this inner enemy. God has given us His battle instructions for daily victory against the flesh.

OUR BATTLES AGAINST THE FLESH (continued)

God's battle instructions...

Lay aside the old and put on the new. *"In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self ... be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self."* Ephesians 4:22-24. It is more than demolition. It is also renovation. Tear out the old ... and build in the new, Colossians 3:9-10.

Set your mind on the Spirit and not on the flesh. *"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* Romans 8:5-8.

You must put no confidence in the flesh ... not in your body, not in your age, not in your strength, not in your heritage, not in your race, not in your ethnicity, and not in your nationality. *"Put no confidence in the flesh."* Philippians 3:3. Your confidence should be in God, Proverbs 3:26.

Stop yielding to the lust of the flesh. Run away from the lust of the flesh. *"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."* 1 Peter 2:11. *"Now flee from youthful lusts."* 2 Timothy 2:22. Put to death the deeds of the flesh, Romans 8:12-13. Crucify the flesh with its passions and desires, Galatians 5:24.

Make no provision for the flesh. Do not lay up supplies for the traitor. Don't feed your old nature. Starve it. Don't provide your flesh with friends that tempt it. Don't go to the places that provide opportunity for the flesh. Don't do the things that lead to sins of the flesh. Don't create your own temptations. *"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."* Romans 13:14. Stop presenting your body to unrighteousness ... present it to righteousness, Romans 6:11-20.

Think of yourself as alive from the dead. You were dead before you believed in Jesus. *"You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air."* Ephesians 2:1-2. Our attitude should reflect the great news that once we were dead, but now we are alive. *"Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead."* Romans 6:13. You are alive from the dead. You are alive by the Spirit. *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."* Galatians 5:25.

OUR BATTLES AGAINST THE DEVIL

"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:10-12.

Understanding the Enemy. Satan is real. He is not a creation of human imagination. He is not a mythical personification of evil. Satan is referred to as a real being by Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, all New Testament authors, and in seven Old Testament books. Satan is not an equal and opposite of God. Satan is not eternal ... and he is not infinite. He is not all powerful, all present, or all knowing. However, Satan does have power. He is *"the ruler of this world."* John 12:31. He is *"the prince of the power of the air."* Ephesians 2:1-2.

Understanding the enemy's tactics. *"The devil has sinned from the beginning."* 1 John 3:8. He is a tempter, 1 Thessalonians 3:5 ... a deceiver, 2 Corinthians 11:3 ... and a schemer, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. *"He was a murderer from the beginning."* John 8:44. *"The devil ... does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* John 8:44. Satan and his agents can infiltrate the ranks of the leadership of the church. *"Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" and "his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness."* 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. He is a source of false teaching, 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Satan battles against the Gospel. He fights to prevent people from believing in Jesus. Satan holds nonbelievers captive, 2 Timothy 2:24-26 ... he steals the Word from them, Luke 8:12-13 ... and he blinds their eyes to the light of the Gospel, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. Satan or his demons can possess nonbelievers, taking control of them, Luke 22:3, Luke 8:30. Satan is an adversary of believers, 1 Peter 5:8. He accuses us before God, Revelation 12:10. He oppresses believers, Acts 10:38. However, there is no Biblical indication that Satan can possess a believer. We are not under his control. God has *"rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."* Colossians 1:13. When you believe in Jesus you are no longer under the dominion of Satan, Acts 26:18.

Defeating the enemy. Through His death, Jesus conquered Satan, Hebrews 2:14. God has not left us defenseless in our daily battles against Satan. He has put a limit on Satan. The devil must flee when we resist him, James 4:7. And we have the great promise ... *"greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."* 1 John 4:4. Daily victory can be ours if we follow God's battle instructions for our war against Satan.

OUR BATTLES AGAINST THE DEVIL (continued)

God's battle instructions...

Resist the devil. Take a stand against him. *"Resist him, firm in your faith."*
1 Peter 5:9. Stand firm against him, Ephesians 6:11-14.

Pray! The Lord's Prayer includes, *"Deliver us from evil."* Matthew 6:13. *Evil* in that prayer certainly includes Satan. The Greek word for *evil* in that verse is in the nominative case, which often indicates a title. Christ's statement was possibly *deliver us from the evil one*. Similarly, He prayed that God would *"keep them from the evil one."* John 17:15.

Be alert. Pay attention. Watch for the attacks of the enemy. *"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* 1 Peter 5:8.

Give no opportunity to Satan. Give him no open doors. Give him no opportunity through unresolved anger, Ephesians 4:26-27. Don't let an unforgiving spirit give him an advantage, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. Sexual denial in marriage provides Satan with an opportunity to tempt ... do not deprive each other, 1 Corinthians 7:5.

Do not be involved in anything of the occult. Totally avoid astrology, black magic, divination, horoscopes, mediums, necromancy, Ouija boards, sorcerers, spiritists, spells, witchcraft, white magic, and anything occult. *"I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."* 1 Corinthians 10:20-21.

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Ephesians 6:11. Before the battle, gird your loins with the truth of Jesus and His Word ... put on the breastplate of faith, love, and righteousness ... and shod your feet with readiness to share the Gospel. In the battle, take up the shield of faith ... wear the helmet of the hope of salvation ... and use your one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, the Bible. Take up the full armor of God, Ephesians 6:13-17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Tell people about Jesus ... even if it you must give your life for the Gospel. Satan will be defeated by the blood of Jesus and by your obedience to the Great Commission. *"And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down ... the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down ... and they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death."* Revelation 12:9-11.

STRIVING AGAINST SIN

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."
Romans 6:12-14.

How can someone avoid sinning? We must be doers of the Word and not just hearers, James 1:22-25. God's Word will help us avoid sin ... but only if we obey it. Evaluate yourself by the instructions listed below. Have you been doing these things? Failure to follow His instructions can result in moral failure, in times of concentrated sins, and in habitual sin. Follow His instructions. You can overcome sin.

Pray. Pray that God will direct your path away from the people, places, and things that tempt you to sin. The Lord's Prayer includes the petition, *"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* Matthew 6:13. Pray that God will keep you from the influences of Satan. Pray that He will deliver you from all evil influences.

Know His Word. Meditate on His Word. Study His Word. Memorize His Word. More time in the Bible results in less sin. Less time in the Bible results in more sin. *"Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You."* Psalm 119:11.

Walk by His Spirit. You cannot avoid sin by living a self-directed life. You must live a God-directed life to avoid sin. *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."* Galatians 5:16.

Set your mind on things above ... not on the things of the world, the flesh, and the devil. *"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."* Colossians 3:1-2. Your life will follow the focus and direction of your mind. *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."* Philippians 4:8.

Be careful of overconfidence. Don't think that you have reached a state of immunity to the dangers of sin and temptation. *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."* 1 Corinthians 10:12. Don't be self-confident in your ability to resist sin. *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."* Proverbs 16:18.

STRIVING AGAINST SIN (continued)

Take aggressive action against any sin in your life. *"Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* 2 Corinthians 7:1. Put *"aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness."* James 1:21. Don't get involved in any immoral behavior. Are you involved in some sexual sin? Then stop! *"Abstain from sexual immorality,"* 1 Thessalonians 4:3. Don't let yourself get involved in any form of evil. *"But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."* 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22.

Abandon the battlefield. Running away from the battlefield is often the best way to win against sexual sin. Run from the people, places, and things that tempt you. *"Now flee from youthful lusts."* 2 Timothy 2:22. *"Flee immorality."* 1 Corinthians 6:18. Abandon the battlefield of idolatry. There are many idols in this world ... things that can become false objects of worship. There are the idols of false religion. Riches and possessions can become objects of worship. Even people can become idols. Worship God and God alone. God has commanded, *"You shall have no other gods before Me."* Exodus 20:3. Abandon the battlefield. *"Flee from idolatry."* 1 Corinthians 10:14.

Remember that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. When you are tempted ... imagine the Spirit saying to you, *Hey! This is My temple. Don't do that in My temple.* Keep His temple clean. *"Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"* 1 Corinthians 6:18-19.

Remember that you were bought with a price. Jesus shed His blood for you. *"If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."* 1 Peter 1:17-19. When you are tempted ... imagine that you are looking up at Jesus from the foot of the cross. Picture His bruised and battered body. See His thorn-crowned head. Imagine the blood dripping from His nail-pierced hands and feet. Imagine Him looking down into your eyes. Hear Him say, *Don't do that ... I'm shedding My blood for you. He died for you. Remember the price He paid for you. "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."* 1 Corinthians 6:20.

IDENTIFYING SIN

Is it sin? *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Romans 3:23. Sin is any nonconformity to, or transgression of, the character, Word, or will of God. However, some things are sin in some situations ... but not in other situations. Some things are sin for some people ... but not for others. God has instructed us in how to identify sin as sin. The Bible clearly identifies many actions and attitudes as sin ... and contains guidelines for determining if questionable things are or are not sin.

It is sin if ... it grieves rather than glorifies God. *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God"* Ephesians 4:30. *"Do all to the glory of God."* 1 Corinthians 10:31. Our lives should be consistent with our position as children of God. *"Walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."* 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

It is sin if ... it violates the written Word of God. *"Keep His commandments."* Psalm 78:7. *"You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep them diligently."* Psalm 119:4. The quality of your relationship with Jesus is connected to your obedience. *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* John 14:15. *"You are My friends if you do what I command you."* John 15:14.

It is sin ... if you omit doing the right thing. Sins of omission are also sins. Holiness is more than a sinless vacuum. *"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."* James 4:17.

It is sin ... even if it is done in ignorance. Not knowing the Bible is no excuse. *"Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment."* Leviticus 5:17.

It is sin if ... it damages or denigrates the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells you. *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"* 1 Corinthians 6:19.

It is sin if ... it leads to slavery. Addictive behavior and enslaving substances are wrong. *"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."* 1 Corinthians 6:12.

It is sin if ... you are committing it in your mind. It has been said that you cannot stop the birds from flying over your head ... but you can stop them from nesting in your hair. This illustrates the difference between *thought temptations* and *thought sins*. Jesus said, *"I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* Matthew 5:28.

IDENTIFYING SIN (continued)

It is sin if ... you think it is a sin. *"I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."* Romans 14:14. If you do something that you think is a sin, even if it is not intrinsically a sin, you are guilty of rebellion against God. Your doubt makes it a sin. However, the reverse of that is not true ... lack of doubt does not negate the sinfulness of a sin. A seared conscience can confuse your understanding about sin, 1 Timothy 4:2.

It is a sin if ... it is a negative influence rather than a positive influence. Build up. Do not tear down. Strengthen. Do not weaken. Help. Do no hurt. *"All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify."* 1 Corinthians 10:23. Ask yourself, "Is this profitable?"

It is a sin if ... it offends a nonbeliever. Do not offend non-believers. *"Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved,"* 1 Corinthians 10:32-33. The message of the Gospel may offend a non-believer ... but the messenger should not be the cause of offense. It is appropriate to be bold with the Gospel, Ephesians 6:19-20 and Proverbs 28:1. However, boldness without sensitivity to the listener is sin. Boldness and sensitivity are not mutually exclusive.

It is a sin if ... it puts an obstacle in a brother's way. At times, we must modify our behavior for the sake of other believers. *"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak,"* 1 Corinthians 8:9. *"Determine this - - not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way ... For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died ... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ... All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense,"* Romans 14:13-21. Use your Christian liberty carefully. Freedom, as a believer, to eat a particular food or to drink a particular beverage is not freedom to eat or drink those in every situation.

It is not sin ... to modify your behavior in different situations and with different people. Modifying your behavior to maximize ministry is not hypocrisy. Jesus took on a different form ... He became a man. Jesus *"emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men,"* Philippians 2:7. Paul modified his behavior to witness to nonbelievers. *"To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews ... so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law ... so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some,"* 1 Corinthians 9:20-22.

IDENTIFYING SIN (continued)

It is sin if ... it is obedience to Bible-contradicting rituals, rules, or traditions. Traditions and rituals can be fine ... but they are neither equal to nor greater than the Bible. Jesus said, *"But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."* Matthew 15:9. Some leaders defraud believers by teaching man-made doctrines as equivalent to the Bible, Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Following a false teacher or false teaching, does not excuse a believer from responsibility and accountability for sin, Colossians 2:8.

Obedience is unacceptable if ... it is not done from the heart. Perfunctory prayers and worship are meaningless. *"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."* Matthew 6:7. Jesus said, *"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.'"* Matthew 15:7-8. When you frequently say the Lord's Prayer, do you mean every word? Do you pray it from your heart? There are many great hymns and praise songs. Do you really mean the words that you sing? Do you sing from your heart?

Obedience is unacceptable if ... it is done to impress others. An audience can tempt us to try to impress them. *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."* Matthew 6:1. Applause may be your only reward, Matthew 6:2, 5, and 16. Do not seek the recognition of others when you give, Matthew 6:2-4. Do not pray to impress the others with whom you pray, Matthew 6:5-6. Fast ... but do not try to impress others by your fasting, Matthew 6:2-6. Practicing your righteousness to be noticed by others is not really practicing your righteousness at all.

Obedience is unacceptable if ... it attempts to cover disobedience. Ananias and Sapphira gave a significant gift ... but it was unacceptable because of their sin, Acts 5:1-11. Disobedience negates the value of religious activity, Isaiah 1:11-16, Amos 5:21-24. The Pharisees covered their more serious sins with an outer veneer of obedience to smaller things, Matthew 23:23-28. Christians often have their lists of sins to avoid ... the nasty nine, the evil eight, or the terrible twelve. Often the things on those lists are sins. But what about some of the more serious sins? What about not witnessing? What about not making disciples? Are those on many of those lists? Jesus criticized the Pharisees by calling them blind guides who strain out the gnat (a tiny unclean insect) while swallowing a camel (a very big unclean animal). In our obedience, do we do strain out gnats and swallow camels?

TEMPTATIONS, TRIALS, AND TESTS

The Hebrew and Greek words translated in the Bible as various forms of *temptations*, *trials*, and *tests* are used somewhat interchangeably. These words have the meanings of testing, proving worth, refining, revealing weakness, stretching thin, enticing to do wrong, seducing, and inducing. However, the English word *tempt* is primarily understood to mean *induce or entice to do evil*. The three sources of the temptations to do evil are the world, 1 John 2:16 ... the flesh, James 1:14-15 ... and the devil, Matthew 4:3, 1 Corinthians 7:5. God does not tempt us to do evil. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."* James 1:13. However, He does allow us to be tempted and tested, Exodus 16:4, Deuteronomy 13:1-3, 1 Peter 1:6-7. God refines us by trials, Psalm 66:10, Isaiah 48:10. Temptations, trials, and tests are not sin ... but they can lead to sin if they are not dealt with in God's way. Jesus was tempted, tested, and tried ... but He did not sin. He is the *"One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."* Hebrews 4:14. The various forms of the words *temptations*, *trials*, and *tests* are used interchangeably in the following guidelines.

Pray that you will not enter into temptation. Jesus included the request *"and do not lead us into temptation"* in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:13. In Gethsemane He said to three of His disciples, *"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."* Luke 22:40.

Know that you are not alone in your struggle. Jesus understands what you are experiencing. He can sympathize with you because He too was tempted. *"Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things ... For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."* Hebrews 2:17-18. *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* Hebrews 4:15-16. Other believers have been tempted and tried in similar ways. Your temptation is not unique. *"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man."* 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Plan on enduring. God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can endure. God limits your trials so that you can endure. You do not have to fail. *"God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."* 1 Corinthians 10:13. With the temptation, He provides a way of escape. Why? He provides a way of escape so that you can endure the temptation. That verse contains no promise of immediate escape ... but it does promise that you can endure.

TEMPTATIONS, TRIALS, AND TESTS (continued)

Look forward to the future benefits. *"In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end."* Deuteronomy 8:16.

Look forward to being stronger. *"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."* Romans 5:3-5.

Look forward to greater endurance. God is conditioning you to run faster and longer. *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* James 1:2-4.

Look forward to being able to help others. *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."* Luke 22:31-32.

Look forward to being blessed. *"We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."* James 5:11.

Look beyond temporary difficulties to eternal blessings. *"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* 1 Peter 1:6-7. *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Keep looking to Jesus. We have great examples of faith overcoming trials in Hebrews 11:1-40. Moreover, Jesus is our greatest example. Keep your eyes on Him rather than on your trials. *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* Hebrews 12:1-3.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is given to those who have believed in Jesus. *"Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."* Acts 10:43. When we believed in Jesus we were freed from the penalty of sin ... but sin is still present in our lives, 1 John 1:8. That sin clouds our relationship with God. Our sins need be confessed to God.

Confession. Confession is more than just asking for forgiveness. It is agreeing with God that your sin is sin. It is admitting to Him that you have committed specific sins. It is more than admitting that you are a sinner ... it is concurring that your particular actions and attitudes are sins. Such confession is a condition for the forgiveness and cleansing mentioned in 1 John 1:9 ... *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The blessings of forgiveness. *"How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!"* Psalm 32:1. Forgiven sins are taken away. *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* Psalm 103:12. *"You have cast all my sins behind Your back."* Isaiah 38:17. *"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins."* Isaiah 43:25.

The consequences of unconfessed sin. God knows everything about us, Hebrews 4:13. Confession is agreeing with that which God already knows ... that our sins are sins. It is futile to try to hide our sins from God. *"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."* Proverbs 28:13. God is compassionate to us when we confess. However, if we do not confess we can be filled with anxiety, Psalm 38:18. If we are silent about our sin then our health can suffer ... we can feel God's heavy hand upon us ... our vitality can be drained ... and guilt can overwhelm us, Psalm 32:3-5. God's indignation and our guilt can be a great burden. Unconfessed sin can cause illness and exhaustion, Psalm 38:4.

Forgiving others. We must not be an army that shoots its wounded. Tend to the wounds of others ... forgive and restore them, Galatians 6:1-2. God has forgiven you ... therefore forgive others, Ephesians 4:32. Do not withhold forgiveness from someone who repents, Luke 17:3-4. Peter asked, *"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"* Jesus said to him, *"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."* Matthew 18:21-22. God's forgiveness of you is tied to your forgiveness of others, Matthew 6:14-15. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, *"forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* Matthew 6:12.