
Words of Truth

Is It Impossible Not To Sin?

By: Brian A. Yeager

I have noticed a troubling trend of teaching amongst supposed churches of Christ. That trend is, preachers who are teaching that it is human nature to sin. They teach that the Bible shows us that we are all going to sin. Some have gone on to say this is a daily occurrence. Back in April I listened to a sermon where the man speaking said that Romans 3:23 teaches we are all sinning. He said: “There is no one who does not sin. We’re all going to do it... There is no such thing as a person who cannot sin or do not sin. Good people sin” (<http://www.wildercroftcoc.org/player/1311>). The Eagle Rock Road church of Christ says this: “Here at the Eagle Rock Road church of Christ, we are simply sinful people” (<http://www.eaglerockroadchurchofchrist.org/about.html>).

There are verses in the Bible that are misunderstood to reach this conclusion. Amongst those verses, there is one in particular that comes up often. Notice this verse: “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). People ignore that PAST TENSE of the verse. People also ignore the fact that you must understand this Scripture in light of other Scriptures. For example, I know that the word “all” CANNOT include every person on the earth for some people never did sin. Christ is the obvious example (Hebrews 4:14-16, I Peter 2:21-22, and I John 3:5). We also know that young children and the mentally disabled are incapable of sin (Ezekiel 18:20, Matthew 18:1-4, and James 4:17). Thus, you cannot conclude that all includes everyone, but that all includes all who reach a point of accountability and choose to sin. You also have to keep that Scripture in its context. This type of error in Bible study is what causes people to make claims that it is impossible not to sin.

Biblical Ignorance Is The Reason For This False Doctrine

Some people obviously want to be false teachers and choose to pervert God’s word (II Peter 2:1-3). Others end up teaching error because of their own ignorance that causes them to twist the Scriptures (II Peter 3:15-18). Ignorance certainly is not an excuse nor will it remove God’s judgment on these teachers (Matthew 15:14 and Acts 17:30-31). We have to have a working knowledge of the truth so that we do not become false teachers (II Timothy 2:14-18).

An example of biblical ignorance on this matter is found when someone uses Ecclesiastes 7:20 to teach that everyone is sure to sin. Solomon, throughout the book of Ecclesiastes is talking about the vanity of life in this world (Ecclesiastes 1:14, Ecclesiastes 2:1, Ecclesiastes 2:11, Ecclesiastes 2:15, Ecclesiastes 2:17, Ecclesiastes 2:19, Ecclesiastes 2:21, Ecclesiastes 2:23, Ecclesiastes 2:26, Ecclesiastes 3:19, Ecclesiastes 4:4, Ecclesiastes 4:7-8, Ecclesiastes 4:16, Ecclesiastes 5:7, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Ecclesiastes 6:2, Ecclesiastes 6:9, Ecclesiastes 6:11, Ecclesiastes 7:6, Ecclesiastes 7:15, Ecclesiastes 8:10, Ecclesiastes 8:14, Ecclesiastes 9:9, Ecclesiastes 11:8, Ecclesiastes 11:10, and Ecclesiastes 12:8). The ignorance of using Solomon’s words to teach that all are bound to be sinners is that under the Old Law

there was no remission of sins (Hebrews 7:19 and Hebrews 10:1-18). It was a hopeless law (Ephesians 2:11-17). The promise of eternal life through Christ was not fully known or understood (I Peter 1:1-12). Without knowledge of the resurrection unto eternal life, life was vain (I Corinthians 15:12-13). When Solomon, through inspiration, concluded the vanity of mankind through sin it was true at that time. Christ had not come. Ignorance of these things is what has led some to use Old Testament Scriptures to conclude all people sin all of the time.

Another common Scripture that is abused on this subject is I John 1:8. People forget that John is writing to Christians. “Having sin” is a fact for all of us who have obeyed the Gospel. If you are a Christian, you have sinned at some point and obeyed the Gospel to have those sins remitted (Acts 2:37-41). That is the contextual point that John was making (I John 1:10). It is right to conclude that all Christians HAD sin in their lives at some point. It is Scripturally inconsistent to conclude that all Christians will sin.

Consistency Of The Scriptures Must Be Applied

Three verses after I John 1:8 we read this: *“My little children, these things write I unto you, **that ye sin not**. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (I John 2:1). Did you notice that John commanded, by inspiration, Christians not to sin? Did you notice that he used the word “if” rather than the word “when”? If you find a verse that appears to say one thing you have to be sure that conclusion is consistent with the entirety of God’s word (i.e. Luke 20:39-44). We know that people find verses that say you are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5-10) and twist those verses to teach grace only. We always point out to those people that we are saved by grace, but not by grace only, for there are other Scriptures to consider about salvation (Romans 10:17, I Corinthians 15:1-4, James 1:21-25, I Peter 2:1-2, John 8:32, Romans 1:16, Hebrews 11:6, John 8:24, Luke 13:3; 5, Acts 3:19, Acts 8:37, Romans 10:10, Luke 14:25-33, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:47, John 8:31, Colossians 1:23, James 2:10-26, II Peter 3:10-14, etc.). Therefore, we KNOW we cannot come to a conclusion without considering all that God says on a matter.

We are expected not to sin (I Corinthians 15:34, II Corinthians 7:1, and II Timothy 2:19). For those of us who have sinned in the past, our Lord demands that we sin no more (John 5:10-14, John 8:1-11, and Romans 6:1-2). We are commanded to be perfect (Matthew 5:48, II Corinthians 13:11, and James 1:3-4). We are commanded to be holy [pure; clean] (Ephesians 4:24, I Thessalonians 4:7, Hebrews 12:14, James 4:8, and I Peter 1:13-16).

Conclusion

To summarize the truth on this matter, notice these Scriptures: *“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother”* (I John 3:8-10).