

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Sin Shall Not Have Dominion

By Sharon K. Griffiee

When Jesus learned that John the Baptist had been arrested and put in prison, He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. The time had come for Jesus to begin His public ministry, to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, which was to bring light into a gloomy darkened world.

(See: Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:14-16)

Matthew 4:17 (NKJV) – *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

If a person wants to be a part of the kingdom, he must repent. To enjoy fellowship with Jesus a person must come to grips with a basic kingdom principle; sin and righteousness clearly do not mix. Double-minded people cannot presume to be following Jesus, because they will pick up the cross and then drop it at the first sign of trouble – pick it up and drop it again. Jesus is not searching for those who express only temporary loyalty to Him while riding on the top of a wave of emotion.

Ask any “born-again” Christian, who is serving time in prison, and they will tell you the truth. The pathway of sin pays lousy wages! The pathway of righteousness brings new life; a life that is filled with gratitude, inspired daily by what God has done for them through Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:8-12, 14 (NKJV) – *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lusts...*

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

(Bold emphasis is mine)

Apostle Paul emphasized that those who are alive to God in Christ Jesus would not allow sin to reign in their mortal body. Sin shall not have dominion,

because they are no longer under the law, but under grace. (See: Romans 7:6) The benefits of grace are astounding. Believers, alive to God, are not helpless when sin comes knocking to tempt them. Because Christ has broken sin's power, believers know how to stand against it. They are now free to live their lives in accordance with a higher law, the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ. To live by grace, instead of the law, is to allow the Holy Spirit to lead.

Galatians 5:18 (NKJV) – *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

The Old Covenant Law between God and the Israelites is what we know as the Law of Moses or the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; 34:27-28). God's faithful servant Moses was very privileged in the giving of the Law in the old dispensation. However, when John, the Baptist came on the scene, he specifically came to prepare the way for Jesus' new dispensation of grace and truth. Apostle John said,

John 1:17 (AMP) – *For while the Law was given through Moses, grace (unearned, undeserved favor and spiritual blessing) and truth came through Jesus Christ. (See: John 1:14)*

What was life like under the Old Covenant Law?

God gave the Israelites a rigid set of laws to follow. These laws consisted of performances and ordinances they were to observe strictly from day to day. In addition to the Ten Commandments, Moses taught the Israelites many sundry laws of how to act and to treat each other. He taught what offended God and the penalties they would receive if they did offend God.

Why would the Israelites enter into this covenant if it were so strict? One of the most important reasons is that they looked upon God as their protector. They remembered how he had saved them from their bondage in Egypt by sending Moses to lead them out of that country, while providing protection from their enemies (Exodus 20:2). Because God had protected them in the past, they understood if they kept God's commandments, He would show mercy to them.

The reason the Israelites had such strict laws is that the people were *very slow* to remember God and their responsibility toward Him. The Old Covenant Law became their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, to teach them what God expects from His children. (See: Galatians 3:23-26)

In the Old Covenant, the high priest went once every year into the tabernacle to offer the blood of goats and calves for his own sins and for the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:7). However, even though the high priest made these offerings continually, year after year, the people could not be perfected, made righteous, through these external sacrifices. It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could clear their conscience (Hebrews 9:9-10). Though they observed these outward ordinances, the Israelites misunderstood the intent of the law. They developed the mistaken idea that they could earn God's favor through their own righteousness, their own works, just by keeping the letter of the law. The Holy Spirit makes it clear, through Paul; no one can attain perfection through observation of the Old Covenant Law.

Romans 3:20 (AMP) – *For no person will be justified (made righteous, acquitted, and judged acceptable) in His sight by observing the works prescribed by the Law.*

Brothers and sisters, we must understand that our perfection, *our righteousness is in Christ*, not in our works. Praise God for the New Covenant of Grace that came to us by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Romans 3:23-25a (NIV) – *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith.*

Caution – Grace is not God's soft approach to sin!

Grace is trusting Jesus, through faith, to provide a way of escape when tempted with evil. Given that the Holy Spirit leads His children, God fully expects us to avoid the traps of sin when it presents its ugly face.

I Corinthians 10:12-13 (NKJV) – *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not*

allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

The message of this scripture is profound. If we think we can stand in our own strength against sin, we are wrong. We must heed the promptings of the Spirit and resist the devil at the onset of temptation. The devil is sly. He will even play upon God's Grace to get you to fall. When you feel down and think your situation is hopeless, and you want to take something or do something, anything to ease the pain, the devil will whisper, "*Go ahead, man, you need relief from your suffering. Jesus understands – go ahead, He will forgive you.*" Sin now and repent later is not an enticement from God. It is an evil enticement sent straight from the devil.

James 1:13 (NKJV) – *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*

As we heed the Holy Spirit's leading, taking the way of escape provided, we prove that "sin shall not have dominion". We faithfully experience our new life in Christ, upholding and honoring God's Grace.

James 1:12 (NKJV) – *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

Questions for Personal or Group Study

1. With what key message did Jesus begin His public ministry? (See: Matthew 4:17)
2. Whose prophecy was Jesus fulfilling when He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum? What was the significance of the prophecy?
3. A double-minded person cannot presume to be following Jesus. Explain.
4. How did Christ Jesus break sin's power at the cross? (See: Romans 6:5-11)
5. Summarize what life was like under the Old Covenant Law. In what way did the Israelites misunderstand the intent of the Law?
6. What are the benefits of living by Grace? How does trusting in Jesus help you stand against sin?