

# Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

## Developing A Biblical Sexual Worldview Chapter VIII

### The Pursuit of Holiness

A Bible Study for *Mature* Christ-followers

~by Dr. John P. Splinter

It's a very good thing that God included the full stories of Moses, David and Paul in scripture, because each committed sins of *irretrievable* damage. All three were murderers. How does one make amends to the grieving loved ones of a dead man? And David's adultery doubled his legal culpability before God. Fortunately for David (and us), that's not how God handles our sin. The writer of Psalm 130 captured the essence of God's mercy when he wrote, "*If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness....*" (Ps. 130:3-4). The notion of God offering forgiveness to sinners is a basic tenet of faith in Christ.

However, it's one thing to accept God's forgiveness for sins we've committed against him. It's another thing to forgive **oneself** for having committed sin that wounded the lives of others. And, as Simon Wiesenthal observed in his book, *The Sunflower*,<sup>1</sup> it's yet another thing to forgive a second party for sin they committed against a third party ~ as in a wife forgiving her husband for the devastation their children suffered through his use of porn. In the larger discussion of forgiveness, *someone's damaged life remains damaged*. It's one thing for God to forgive my sin against Him. But by what agency is He able to forgive my sin against my wife, or my children? Shouldn't *they* be the ones offering forgiveness? How can He forgive me for wounding them?

The Good News is that: **a)** the records of sins forgiven, of Moses, David, and Paul, give us hope for *our* forgiveness, even in the depths of our sin; **b)** the shed blood of Jesus Christ is efficacious for *all* sin ~ no matter by whom or to whom. Again, God doesn't reckon sin by determining who sinned against whom. It's *all* sin, and it *all* needs washing away; and **c)** Jesus Christ is able to heal *all* wounds from *all* sources. However, we have a responsibility to repent, and without our repentance and evidence of a changed life, there is reason to be concerned about our eternal destiny. Let's use this four-point outline as a step-by step Bible study dealing with God's Holiness.

#### A. The Record of Sins Forgiven

We've all heard card-tricksters say, "Pick a card, any card." For purposes of this Bible study, let's change it to "Name a sin, any sin." Some of the most ugly sins revolve around the general

theme of sexuality. Here are a few: Looking at pornography; masturbating thereafter as one fantasizes; bestiality; child rape; prostitution; homosexuality; trafficking; adultery. Yeuch! Yet this is our culture today. It would be nice to close our eyes and ignore it, pretending it doesn't affect us. But it does exist. As was demonstrated in earlier chapters, it's in our churches; it's in our bedrooms; it's in our children's heads. It's everywhere we look. So ignoring it is useless.

Yet God is able to forgive and cleanse even the blackest heart. One of the greatest verses in the Bible is *1 John 1:9 ~ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* Forgive and purify ~ wow ~ sounds like a cool mountain spring on a hot day. Notice also, the verse *doesn't* say, "Except for the sins of pornography, etc..." You can't out-sin God's ability to forgive. Scripture says, *"Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Rom. 5:20).*

Some people are still worried because of the numerical frequency of their sin. For example, a severely addicted person may view pornography and then masturbate five or six times in a single day. So hear the gracious words of Jesus himself ~ *"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4).* And if that process of struggle, failure, and repentance goes on for 30 years ( $30 \times 365 \times 7 = 76,650$  times), God will forgive if we sincerely repent. And He'll cleanse us from all unrighteousness 76,650 times, if necessary. Now obviously, nobody wants to remain sexually addicted for 30 years. Any form of slavery is humiliating and shame-producing. *But if you did remain addicted for 30 years,* God would forgive you when you repented.

Naturally, all sinners need to understand what of the voice of God's Enemy sounds like. He whispers things like, "You, of all people, should know better." "You've gone too far this time." "Thirty years of this!!?" One of Satan's favorite activities is slandering God's people. We see it in the first chapter of Job, where God was bragging on Job but Satan slandered him by saying, "He only loves You because You've blessed him so much." In Zech. 3:1 we see Satan slandering Joshua, the High Priest. And in the last book of the Bible there's a scene in which it is announced, Taa Daa! *"The accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (Rev. 12:10).* So don't be surprised to hear that voice, reminding you of where you've been. When you hear him whispering, remind him of where he's going, because as you have confessed your sin and repented, the record of your sin has been expunged, erased.<sup>3</sup>

## B. The Efficacious Blood of Christ

The question of God having the right to not only forgive our sin against him, but our sin against others, is actually a tough philosophical issue. In *The Sunflower*,<sup>4</sup> Simon Wiesenthal, a Jew, was asked to forgive a Nazi soldier named Karl, for the soldier's part in the mass murder of several hundred Ukrainian Jews. If you were a Jew, would you have forgiven the Nazi? *Could* you have forgiven the Nazi even if you wanted to? If so, upon what basis? Obviously you're not one of the people he murdered, so your forgiveness could not be based upon personal authority. Are you a relative of one of the murder victims? Probably not, but even if you were, would that provide the basis of your ability to forgive the Nazi?

Yet scripture says that Jesus Christ died for *all* sin. *1 John 1:7 ~ If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. John 1:29-30 ~ John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" 1 John 2:1-2 ~ He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* This is to say, there is not a sin that you have committed, that is beyond the power of Christ's shed blood, to forgive. He is even able to forgive you, for your sins against other people. This is because sin is ultimately against God. The fact that it involves other created beings is secondary to the fact that it is rebellion against God. So God is ultimately the only one who can truly forgive sin.

### C. Jesus' Ability To Heal All Wounds From All Sources

Some of life's wounds are incidental. A dance partner steps on your toes. A day later you don't even remember it. But some of life's wounds are massive. A father rapes his nine-year-old daughter. Five decades later, she still grieves the incident. So how do we deal with *these* wounds? If you've been into porn, how do you reframe your mind in a manner that the pictures no longer control you? The fact is that Jesus is able to heal *all* wounds, whether those we do to ourselves ~ wounds that enslave us ~ or wounds that we have done to others and cannot heal ourselves.

It is within our relationship with our Creator that we find peace and healing. The prophet Isaiah articulated the role of the coming Messiah when he wrote words which Christ later quoted: *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners," (Isa. 61:1).* There is hardly a more descriptive text regarding Christ's ability to heal all wounds.

The good news of Christ's healing, is that he alone is able to literally turn the lemons of our lives into lemonade ~ whether referring to our own enslavement, or to the ugly wounds others have done to us. Scripture says this ~ *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).* Speaking to his brothers who had once trafficked him (sold him into slavery) when he was a little boy, Joseph now the #2 ruler in ancient Egypt, said it like this: *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20 – NASV).*

A friend, award-winning recording artist Randy Mayfield,<sup>5</sup> wrote a song titled, "When Answers Aren't Enough." The lyrics capture the thought of the redemptive work and healing that comes often through pain, but comes only through Christ.

You have faced the mountains of desperation  
 You have climbed, you have fought, you have won  
 But this valley that lies coldly before you  
 Casts a shadow you cannot overcome

And just when you thought you had it all together

You knew every verse to get you through  
 But this time the sorrow broke more than just your heart  
 And reciting all those verses just won't do

Instead of asking why did it happen  
 Think of where it can lead you from here  
 And as your pain is slowly easing, you can find a greater reason  
 To live your life triumphant through the tears

### **Chorus:**

When answers aren't enough, there is Jesus  
 He is more than just an answer to your prayer  
 And your heart will find a safe and peaceful refuge  
 When answers aren't enough, He is there

## **D. Our Responsibility To Repent**

There's a word in Greek, μετάνοια, (metanoia) which is most often translated, "repent." The richness of this word is greater than the word. A word picture finds a person walking due South. Then they "repent." They have a change of mind that causes them to turn around and walk due North. In the life of the Christian this process involves two dynamics.

The first dynamic involves the responsibility of the sinner. It is to re-aim the mind and then apply all of the resources he or she has, to walk away from the sin. Burn the bridges. Aim every thought and action toward Jesus Christ. Apologize to God and man for past deeds that have done harm. Make recompense where possible. If you're hooked on sex and after trying scads of times you recognize you're unable to break out of this slavery, then here are three steps to take:

- 1) Take a fearless self-inventory ~ spend some time at the following website and then look in the mirror of your life: [http://www.sarr.org/addicts/me,\\_an\\_addict.htm](http://www.sarr.org/addicts/me,_an_addict.htm)
- 2) Find a Christian therapist who's trained in dealing with sexual issues, and start working with him or her. Very often, sexual issues have early childhood roots.
- 3) Get an accountability partner ~ a same-sex buddy that you can open up to, who can pray with you and help you be totally honest with yourself.<sup>6</sup> Meet with this person at least weekly, and ramp up to be TOTALLY, TOTALLY honest. No games, no mask.

The second dynamic involves God. This is undoubtedly the more powerful of the two dynamics, because according to scripture, we are all "dead in our sins" until God makes us "alive in Christ." *Eph 2:4-5 ~ Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions ~ it is by grace you have been saved.* For the man or woman who is either enslaved by sexuality, or the victim of someone else's sexual deviance, the issue of being given new life is more than mere religious rhetoric. It is life ~ healing ~ freedom ~ new wholeness ~ new purpose. And it is 100% God's doing. This dynamic happens as follows:

- 1) Confess<sup>7</sup> your sin to God and ask His forgiveness.
- 2) Repent<sup>8</sup> ~ aim your life at walking away from the sin that dogs you. Burn bridges.

- 3) Ask Jesus Christ to come into your life, to open every dark closet and fill every corner.
- 4) If you fall, confess and repent again, and then aim your life at Jesus and start walking.

Having faith doesn't mean a person will never sin again. The person who is truly addicted to sex may still struggle and fail. So here's a story that may provide a helpful mental picture. This story was told by Dr. Bob Smith, a beloved college professor who had been used by God to lead a professional boxer to Christ. The boxer had previously been a hard drinking, womanizing, hot tempered bad guy. After coming to faith, the boxer's drinking/whoring buddies taunted him and one evening, got him drunk and then had a hooker jump into bed with him.

The next morning they said, "See, you haven't changed. You're still one of us. Get rid of this religious junk and come back where you belong." According to Dr. Bob Smith, the boxer's reply was, "I am not perfect and I may still fall, but *now* when I fall, I'm leaning toward Jesus." Sometimes Christ totally heals people instantaneously. Other times he allows us to struggle, like a butterfly fighting its way out of a cocoon. But in either case, he is there with us and his objective for us is our good.

## Conclusion

This, is the pursuit of holiness. It is the formerly crazy person whom Christ has just made sane, now reaching out with gratitude to follow Jesus the rest of his life.<sup>9</sup> It is based upon the assumptions that *only* Jesus can cleanse us, that he does this *only* because of his grace, and now the *only* appropriate response we may give is a lifetime of appreciation and obedience.

Many Christians believe that the pursuit of holiness means finding a cave and setting up residence, far away from the "madding crowd" ~ reading the Bible and memorizing lots of verses ~ listening to lots of praise music ~ and going to church a couple of times each week. Wrong! Dead wrong! Jesus' personal example involved **NONE** of this form of pseudo-holiness ~ this useless religious isolationism! Rather, he was *out there*, in the hurly-burly mix with tax collectors and hookers. Yikes! He drank wine with the boozers and ate meals with the wild ones, to the point that his enemies, the religious isolationists, called him a drunkard and a glutton.<sup>10</sup> He had personal contact with people who most needed him ~ the sinners!! And when the religious isolationists tried to nail him with his "unholy conduct," he said, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*" (Mt. 9:12-13).

This pursuit of holiness is a bit like playing golf ~ we start out clumsy, playing "military golf" ~ you know, hitting the stupid ball left, then right, then left, then right. One doesn't become a Tiger Woods overnight. It's a lifetime of practice. But it *does* lead to what scripture describes as "being transformed by the renewing of our minds."<sup>11</sup> And *that* is step one of God's objective for us ~ no matter how filthy we may have been ~ no matter how wounded we may have become in this broken world ~ no matter how hopeless we may have been in our personal hell of slavery.

The pursuit of holiness is like waking up after a nightmare, opening our eyes to a fresh warm morning, with the scent of roses drifting in through the screen. For this we say, "Thank you,



Father. Now, help me live this day to bring glory to You.” The pursuit of holiness is a journey, not a destination. The destination is on the other side of the screened window where the roses are ~ it’s called eternity with Christ.

Step two in God’s plan of personal holiness, is for us to use the rest of our lives, going out into the hedgerows, finding other beggars (including family members who have strayed),<sup>12</sup> and leading them to the “bread of life.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Bible Study**

1. Did that last section dealing with religious isolationism, make you angry and defensive? Why? How would you describe personal holiness? How does your definition of personal holiness correlate with the actual life of Christ, and the kind of folks he targeted? Read Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34 as you frame your discussion.
2. Read James 5:16. Why do you think God wishes for us to confess our sins to one another? What is healing about confession? What is strengthening? What is redeeming about confession?
3. Read Mark 10:17-22. Being owned by anything other than Christ ultimately becomes a love/hate thing ~ we love the kick, or the power it gives us at the moment, but we hate the ownership and we begin to despise its ramifications in our characters. So why do people hang onto other things than Jesus, rather than letting go and leaping toward him? How is this question linked to Paul’s statement in Rom. 6:16 and Peter’s observation in 2 Pet. 2:19? What does this have to do with personal holiness?
4. Read Mark 9:20-24. Is it possible to believe in Jesus, and still have doubts that he can truly heal us or our loved ones? Can a sexually addicted man or woman cry out to Christ for help, and still fear that he or she is too sinful for God to cleanse him (or her)? If, as some in the pew believe, a person must have “full confidence” in Christ before he will act on their behalf ~ why did Christ heal this person’s child (see verse 25)? What does the father’s prayer (v. 24) have to do with personal holiness? (Link to the story of the boxer.)
5. Read Isaiah 61:1 and 2 Cor. 5:17-21. Do ambassadors ever go into prisons where they might get dirty and even roughed up, or are they only about theoretically representing their head of state? What does Isaiah 61:1 have to do with personal holiness?
6. Read Luke 15:4-7. What is the point Christ is making in this text, specifically regarding the life of the true Christ-follower? Key Question: Assuming the lost sheep was already one of the master’s herd, what did “being found” mean to the sheep? How is this metaphor linked to sexual sin, the Body of Christ, and personal holiness?
7. Read Romans 5:20 and Eph. 2:8. If the absolute bottom line of faith is God’s grace, then what is the role of the Christ-follower as regards reaching out to people hopelessly stuck in sexual sin?

## Resources

- 1, Wiesenthal, S. (1998). *The Sunflower*. Schocken Books, division of Random House, N.Y.
- 2, Leviticus 5:14-19.
- 3, 1 Cor 15:56-57; 2 Cor 5:20-21; Col. 2;13-15; Heb 10:16-18; 1 John 1:7; 1 John 2:1-2; Psalm 103:12.
- 4, Wiesenthal, S., op cit.
5. <http://www.randymayfield.freehomepage.com/>
6. James 5:16
7. 1 John 1:9
8. Luke 15:7
9. Mark 5:1-20
10. Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34
11. Romans 12:2
12. Luke 15:11-31
13. Matthew 22:8-10