Drawing near to God (and forsaking sin) Reading: Romans 6:1-14

Christian Life Disciplines No. 3

Children of God, those who have received Jesus and believed on Him (John 1:12), will want close fellowship with God, their heavenly Father. Unfortunately, there can be disturbances in that close fellowship with God, disturbances caused by sin. *Cf.* James 4:8. By grace believers are declared righteous in Christ, but that is no excuse to sin (Romans 6). We are to consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). Never-the-less we do struggle with sin, which leads us to two practical questions.

I. ***What do we do, when we have sinned?***

1. In John 13 we read how Jesus gave a picture of God's provision for His children when they sin. Jesus compared His washing of the disciples feet with the provision of spiritual cleansing from daily sins (cf. John 13:10-11). The child of God was washed or bathed in the new birth (Titus 3:5). Jesus also freely cleanses us from subsequent sin, just as the bathed person needs (only) to wash his feet after traveling on dusty roads.
2. As children of God our response to sin should be to go to Jesus to get our feet clean, i.e., to ask for forgiveness and spiritual cleansing. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 NIV) To confess sin means to admit to God what we have done wrong and agree with Him that it was wrong. As we acknowledge our sin and agree that it is wrong, we demonstrate that we know God and are His children. Jesus speaks in our defense when we sin. Because His blood cleanses us from all sin.
3. Our sin does not remove us from the family of God, just as the bathed person need not bathe again, but merely wash the dirty feet. The Apostle Paul confirms this in Romans 6-8. Though the child of God died to sin (Rom 6), there is the frustration of continued sin (Rom 7), but ultimate triumph even over death (Rom 8).

What do we do when we realize that we have sinned? We confess it to God, thanking Him for the forgiveness which we have in Christ, and strive to stop sinning.

II. ***What do we do in order to stop sinning?***

1. *The good news for the child of God:* God is at work for us. (a) He gives His Spirit to those who come to Him through Christ. Hence, the child of God is no longer controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit. We are free not to sin. God by His Spirit convicts of sin and strengthens to stand against sin. (b) God controls the circumstances around us (1 Cor 10:13): No temptations are unique. God limits them according to our ability to withstand them and always provides a way to endure through it without sinning.
2. *The responsibility of the child of God to work against sin in our lives:*
   In Ephesians 4:22-24 Paul essentially lists three parts in our fight against sin: put off the old self, put on the new self and be renewed in the attitude or spirit of your mind. Other terms used elsewhere include such concepts as flee evil & pursue good, don't yield to sin but to righteousness, setting our minds on the right things, and considering ourselves dead to sin but alive to God.

   "Put off the old self" speaks of an active avoidance of sin and the temptations which lead to sin. We should head away from sinful temptation. Avoid places, activities, situations, etc. that give rise to temptation. It may take drastic action, but it is important to flee sinful desires (*cf.* Matthew 5:29-30).

   "Put on the new self" refers to the new righteous practices which replace sinful practices. It is pursuing righteousness. (See examples in Ephesians 4:25-32; James 1:19.) Such negatives and positives are often paired in the Bible (e.g., works of the flesh vs fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-23; quick to listen, slow to speak in James 1:21; earthly vs heavenly wisdom in James 3:14-18).

   "Be renewed in our minds" points to a change of heart and mind rather than merely behavioral modification. All the evil thoughts and actions which make a person unclean come from out of the heart (Mark 7:20-23). God must give us a new heart, a heart of flesh rather than stone, which is soft towards God. The change of heart is a work of God which results in transformation (cf. Romans 12:2). The change which should occur in our lives comes about when God changes our hearts and the way we think. God works this change by His Spirit using His Word. Truth is the basis for changed thinking and changed behavior.

Flee evil desires. Put off the old self. Put on the new self. Pursue righteousness. Be renewed in our hearts and minds. Think differently so that we might live differently.

Living a transformed life is an excellent goal. We should want to draw near to God. And that requires forsaking sin.

Failing to forsake sin is a serious matter. (1) We cannot get away with sin, but will reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). (2) Children of God can expect God's discipline (Hebrews 12:4-8). If there is no discipline, then our relationship to God as children is brought into question (Hebrews 12:8; 1 John 3:6). We are making a dangerous statement if we continue down a path of sinful living. (3) Our fellowship with God is hindered by sin.

When we sin – and we do sin – then we should confess our sin and ask forgiveness. Turn from sin and pursue righteousness. Let God change us, starting with our minds and hearts as His Word takes root and produces fruit in us.

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