

“How to Overcome Sin”  
(Galatians 5:16-17)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation: We’ve been considering the blessings we can know are ours if we are walking with the Lord in holiness.

1. Last time, we saw that walking with the Lord in holiness is the evidence that you have been freed from the power of sin.
  - a. You were born dead in sin, a prisoner of sin, and an enemy of God.
  - b. When you see yourself walking in holiness from the heart (because you want to), that is the evidence that the Lord has freed you.
  - c. Being freed from that slavery is no small blessing.
2. If you know you’ve been freed from the power of sin, you can also know you’ve been freed from its guilt.
  - a. One doesn’t happen without the other: those the Lord justifies, He sanctifies.
  - b. If you know you are being sanctified – that the power of sin is broken in your life – you can also know that you are justified/saved/safe from hell.
  - c. This too is no small blessing – it makes all the difference between heaven or hell as your final destination.

B. Preview.

1. There is one thing you need to realize about sanctification though – it doesn’t happen automatically.
  - a. Unlike the new birth (regeneration) and justification which are monergistic (God alone working), sanctification is synergistic (we work together with God).
  - b. That means sanctification requires cooperation on our part: there’s something we must do.
    - (i) The more we do, the more we’ll grow in sanctification – in our love for God.
    - (ii) But the less we do, the less we’ll grow, the less love we’ll have and zeal, and the more we’ll constantly be struggling with sin.
2. So what I would like us to do this evening is consider what our part is in sanctification – what we need to do to cooperate with the Lord, so that we will grow in our love, in holiness, in spiritual strength.
  - a. Paul tells us, “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” (Gal. 5:16-17).
  - b. There is a spiritual battle going on in your soul; but if you will walk by the Spirit – by the strength He supplies – not according to your flesh – the sinful corruption that’s still in your soul – you will not carry out the desires of your flesh, but you will be able to do what’s right.
  - c. This evening, let’s consider two things:

- (i) First, that you are in a spiritual battle.
- (ii) And second, what you can do to win this battle.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, you need to realize that you are in a spiritual battle with three enemies – the devil, the world, and your flesh or sinful nature – and all three want to destroy you.
  - 1. Peter tells us that the devil prowls about as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8).
    - a. He wants to devour you, to destroy you, and he would if he could.
    - b. The Lord won't let him destroy you, but He will use him to test and strengthen you.
    - c. You need to be aware of the way he works – consider reading *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* by Thomas Brooks.
    - d. And though it's true he may not concern himself with you personally, he has plenty of demons who will.
  - 2. Satan not only has an army of demons that are sworn to destroy you, he also has a world full of people – that's why he's called "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4).
    - a. He is the spirit that dominates the people of this world – virtually everyone who is born into this world is born into his kingdom – which is why they also need to be redeemed.
    - b. What are they like? Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 – they're the same way we used to be – "And 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, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (vv. 1-3).
    - c. What are their driving principles? John writes, "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" (1 John 2:16).
    - d. What's going to happen to those in the world? John continues, "The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (v. 17).
    - e. That's why you shouldn't be a part of it.
    - f. This is another thing the devil will use to destroy you – he will use those who are of the world to draw you away from the Lord, to ensnare and corrupt you, and ultimately to destroy you, if he can.
  - 3. Finally, there is the most dangerous of the three: your flesh.
    - a. This is your most dangerous enemy because it makes you susceptible to the other two.
    - b. It's the devil's internal ally – one that works from within, that makes you stumble at the temptations Satan will place in your path.
    - c. This is the one *you must defeat*, if you are to have victory over the other two.
    - d. That's also why the Spirit specifically targets and fights against it: "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” (v. 17).

B. What then can you do to win this battle? How can you walk by the Spirit – cooperate with Him – so as to overcome the flesh?

1. First, you can submit to the Spirit’s influence in your life to cut off the things that make your sin stronger and give it an advantage.

a. Keep away from the things that tempt you to sin.

(i) Don’t go to the places you shouldn’t go.

(ii) Don’t hang around the people who will try and influence you to do bad things.

(iii) Don’t allow your imagination to indulge in things that are sinful.

(iv) It’s far better to stay away from your enemy than to walk right up to him where you will have to fight.

b. When you are tempted, *don’t give into it*.

(i) A temptation is an opportunity to disobey the Lord.

(ii) Don’t allow sin as an option.

(a) Don’t allow yourself to believe that it doesn’t matter if you sin because God will forgive you anyway.

(b) Consider what sin will cost you.

(1) It will waste precious time – time is infinitely precious; the amount you have is extremely limited; you don’t want to lose any more of it through sin.

(2) Sin will hurt you in some way – it will wound your conscience, if not public; your reputation, if public; it will hurt others in some way; it will offend God.

(3) God will discipline you for your sin – He is a faithful parent; it’s true He will work good through it, but that doesn’t make it pleasant to go through.

(4) Even though you may be better and stronger on the other end – as oftentimes the Lord will overrule your sin for your good – it doesn’t always work out that way.

(A) David – because of the seriousness of his sin – never fully recovered from the Lord’s discipline.

(B) There were consequences for him personally and on his house – the baby that was conceived by Bathsheba died, his son Amnon raped his daughter Tamar, Absalom killed Amnon, rebelled against David and tried to kill him, and was finally killed himself.

c. If you’ve entered into temptation, don’t give up the fight.

(i) Once the hand of temptation grabs hold of the hand of the corruption that’s in you, it will be difficult to break that grip.

(ii) But you must still resist.

(a) Remember that it quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit – the precious gift of God in your soul.

- (b) Remember that Jesus gave His life on the cross to cleanse you of your guilt – to go on sinning knowing what it cost Him is to spite His sacrifice.
- (c) Remember that it offends the Father who gave His Son to save you.
- (d) Resist it with all your might; call on God for strength.
- (e) And move as far away from that sin as you can.

2. Second, use the means the Lord has given you to strengthen the Spirit's work in your soul.

- a. As a believer, you have a principle of new life in your soul.
  - (i) That principle is the Spirit – as Paul tells us in our text. He is the One who resists the sin inside you.
  - (ii) He does this by creating another principle that opposes sin: love, more specifically, love for what is good and right, love for God.
    - (a) Sin is love – or lust – for what is evil.
    - (b) Grace is love for what is good.
    - (c) Their very natures cause them to oppose each other.
      - (1) When it comes to a fight between them – the stronger will win.
      - (2) That's why it's vital that your love for the Lord be stronger – much stronger – than your love for sin.
      - (3) The stronger your love for the Lord and His ways is, the less you'll be tempted and the less likely you will be to fall into sin.
- b. And so what can you do to strengthen it? You need to use what the Lord has given you to get more of the Spirit's influence. You know you can have more than you do because He commands you through Paul to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). How can you be filled?
  - (i) First, by cutting off the things that quench and grieve His work – or sin – as we've seen.
  - (ii) But second, by using the means of grace.
    - (a) You need to read the Word more.
      - (1) Read it prayerfully, read it submissively, read it in faith.
      - (2) Receive its warnings; obey its commandments; embrace its promises.
      - (3) Apply what it says to your warfare against the devil, the world and your flesh.
      - (4) Grow in your ability to remember it and apply it.
    - (b) You need to pray more.
      - (1) Pray that the Lord would give you more of His Spirit.
      - (2) Pray that He would break and weaken the sin in your soul.
      - (3) Pray that He would give you the ability to do what's right.
      - (4) When Peter and John were released by the high priest, they prayed with the other disciples for boldness and the Lord filled them all with His Spirit and with power (Acts 4:31).
    - (c) You need to worship more.
      - (1) You need to worship alone with the Lord.

- (2) You need to worship in your families.
  - (3) You need to worship with your brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - (4) The more you worship, the stronger the Spirit's influence will be in your soul.
  - (5) The more you worship, the more it will weaken your flesh.
- (d) In your worship, make sure that you are ready to participate in the Lord's Supper.
- (1) Remember that by faith His death was your death – your old man has been crucified with Christ.
  - (2) Remember that the Lord's Supper is a communion in which the Lord gives you His blessings – primarily, more of His Spirit.
  - (3) Remember too what your baptism means – it's a symbol of your baptism by the Spirit into Jesus and all of His benefits.
  - (4) When He was buried, you were buried with Him; when He was raised, you were raised with Him to live for His glory by the Spirit.
- (e) Remember not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together (Heb. 10:25).
- (1) When you have opportunity, meet with your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ for worship, Bible study, prayer and Christian fellowship.
  - (2) Every time you miss those opportunities, you're grieving the Spirit and giving your sin the upper hand.
  - (3) When you do meet with them, you gain strength by each others' faith.
- (iii) Use these means to strengthen your grace and faith, and then in that strength, press forward with all your might.
- (a) Temptation can more easily grab onto an object that isn't moving.
  - (b) The slower you are moving forward, the easier it will be to pull you off course.
  - (c) Make sure you're moving forward with the kind of energy and commitment the Lord calls you to have.
  - (d) You can only press forward in this way if your love for the Lord is strong.
  - (e) And so seek to love Him with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your strength.
  - (f) If you do, you will not be an easy target for your enemies; but will likely escape the snares they have laid out to destroy you.
  - (g) May the Lord give each of us His grace to do so. Amen.