

Righto: Pop-quiz. True or false...

1. Every single person in this world, is a sinner in need of a Saviour. **True.**
2. To become a Christian, a person must:
 - stop sinning;
 - make restitution for all their previous wrong-doing; and **then** they will be good enough to be accepted by Jesus...**False.**
3. To become a Christian
 - a sinner repents of sin;
 - submits to the Lord Jesus Christ; and
 - as they confess their sin to Him, they are forgiven... **True.**
4. Repentance is a one-off event – and so, when you become a Christian, you repent once at the beginning, and you never have to repent again... **False.** And we're going to see that in today's reading.
5. When you become a Christian, you are set free from sin, and that means that you won't sin anymore... **False.**
It' would be good if that was true, hey...

Over the last few weeks, we've been talking about how the Kingdom of God has come, and so we no longer live by a whole bunch of written rules and regulations.

Disciples of Jesus, are now filled with the Holy Spirit, and so we begin to "live by the Spirit". (That means, the Character of

God, begins to develop within us.) And the big theological word that we pastors like to use, (to make us sound really knowledgeable), is “sanctification”. (which simply means “being made holy”).

But the thing is, this side of eternity, (I don’t know about you, but for me), the work of God transforming me into the holy person He wants me to be, is nowhere near complete. And if you don’t believe me, all you have to do is ask Robyn, and she will tell you just how unholy I am.

And the frustrating thing is, the closer I come to God, the more I realise, “I have a very long way to go.”

And so, this side of eternity, even the most Godly person you know (which is definitely not me), I can assure you, that even the most Godly person you know, has a daily battle against sin.... So, I want you to be encouraged:– you’re not the only one.

And because the church is filled with people like you and me – people who mostly don’t want to sin, but we still do – because there **is** sin, tainting the church (corrupting the body of Christ), how then, as a church, do we deal with that?

How do we deal with it personally, and how do we deal with it as the body of Christ?

Different churches, and different groups of Christians, all seem to have entirely different ideas about how to deal with sin. In some churches, it's almost be like the "inquisition", where the slightest flaw in one's character; or the most minor offence, is seen as cause for the meting out of very harsh and unyielding church discipline.... *"You said a swear-word – Excommunication for you..."*

Other churches like to see themselves as being "non-judging" – They promote themselves as being "a safe place". *"We're a safe place. There's no judgment here. You can be who you want to be, and you can do what you want to do (because that's the way God made you, and we want to affirm you in that)..."*

And in some cases, certain sins are now cancelled, and they might teach "that's not sin any more". Some may even **celebrate** these things (as an expression of their "diversity")... And they believe that they are "being loving" by **celebrating**, what God has identified as "sin"...

So, that's sorta like the 2 extremes...

- One end: Judgmental rejection;
- Other end: Sin? What sin? Nothing to worry about here.

But today, we're going to cut straight through all that, and we're cutting straight to the truth of the matter. If you ever have any doubt on any topic, go straight to the Word of God. We cannot argue with the word of Jesus."

Righto: Let's set the scene.

A couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus tell His Disciples, that
¹⁶ **"The Law and the Prophets were until John;: And**
that now something new has come. And that's what I was
saying before – we now live by the Holy Spirit. But then He
went on to say that "The Law" has not become void. He said
¹⁷ **... it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away**
than for one dot of the Law to become void.

And what I'm getting at here, is if we the people of God, are
to live by the Spirit of God, we will be naturally
(supernaturally) wanting to fulfil what The Law requires...
Because The Law, is an expression of the Justice/love/mercy
of God (It was God codifying these things, for His people to
live by)... And so, if we live by the Spirit, we will be
fulfilling these things.

And that's all good... **But** there is something that disrupts our
obedience to God: Temptation.

*A pastor once said to a very self-righteous young man, "Have
you been entertaining any impure thoughts lately?" "Oh no,
Pastor, but they sure have been entertaining me."*

Jesus said: V17 ... **"Temptations to sin are sure to
come, but woe to the one through whom they come!**

Where do "temptations" come from?

- Well, we certainly know where they **don't** come from. They do **not** come from God. God allows us to be tempted, but He does **not** do the tempting.
- **Sometimes** we might blame all our temptations on the Devil. But that's not really fair. Yes, sometimes the Devil does tempt us. But I suspect (that for most of my temptations), I don't **need** any help from the Devil.
- Many of our temptations, are a product of our own sinful nature.

It was James who said:

James 1: (ESV)

¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Alright, I get lured and enticed by my own desire. The sinful nature (in me), is at war with the nature of God (also in me). And when we give in, and begin to follow the sinful nature, **that** gives birth to sin. Do you understand this? “**Temptation** (in itself) is not sin”. **Jesus** was tempted,,, but He didn't sin. It is when we give-in to temptation, and when we follow the sinful nature – that is sin.

But here in today's reading, Jesus is talking about a very specific type of temptation.

The original Greek word here is σκάνδαλα (skandala) It actually means “stumbling block”. And when you are a Christian, to fall into temptation, and to sin, is to stumble. And Jesus is saying:

“[Stumbling-blocks] (temptations to sin) are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!

Let me explain that:

Living a holy life, is a big deal. Some Christians try and down-play this, and say, “*If you **try** to live a holy life, that’s legalism, and therefore a denial of the Gospel.*” What a load of codswallop... Striving to live a holy life, is something that we do together, being in step with the Spirit... Never in Scripture, does God say “Don’t strive to live a holy life”... And yet some Christians do... How crazy is that...

For a Christian, living a holy life, is really important. And there are some folk, who are going to make that easier for you (to live a holy life), and some folk are going to make it harder.

And when it comes to a “church” level, there will be individuals within a church, who make it easier for you to live a holy life,, and there will be individuals within a church, who make it harder for you to resist the temptations you have. These are people we call “stumbling-blocks”...

Picture yourself, walking with Jesus; keeping in step with the spirit... Yes, you’re being tempted, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, you are victorious over your temptations... But

then another person, disrupts your obedience to God... They cause you to stumble...

And Jesus is saying: “That’s going to happen”. **[Stumbling-blocks] are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!**

And these “stumbling-blocks” might be individuals. Sometimes the worst stumbling blocks, are leaders and teachers in a church – Maybe people who introduce a new idea/teaching/belief, that somehow downgrades the offence that sin is.

Let me give you two examples:

The first example, I choose this one, because this is what Jesus has been addressing over the last few weeks: Jesus has been condemning, “the love of money”. Everything you and I have, belongs to God. And what is His, is to be used for His Kingdom purposes.

Think:

- provision of our daily needs;
- provision for those who preach the Gospel and go out on mission for the Lord;
- mercy for the poor, and caring for those who are unable to care for themselves.

And I don’t know about you, but for me, the fleshly part of Michael, wants to hold on to stuff for himself, while the spirit is saying “be generous”...

And I suspect that many of us will have that same temptation, where the Spirit is saying “be generous”, but the flesh is saying:

- “It’s someone else’s turn”;
- Not yet. I’ve got this goal, and once I get to this goal, then I can afford to be generous;
- God’s purpose for me, is to be successful, and my success will give Him glory.

And so, you might already have this battle going on inside of you... But then there’s a stumbling block put in your path...

In this case: It might be a prosperity teaching... *God wants you to prosper. God wants you to do well. God wants you to have stuff...*

Or it might be a message that tells you that *the desire you have (to build an empire) is **God** telling you to do it. So it’s OK. Leave the giving to other people. God’s going to make you successful first, and then you can give...*

What has happened? A stumbling-block has tripped you up. You’ve heard a new teaching – a teaching that ‘spiritualises’ the temptations that you’ve battled with all along. And so you **don’t** listen to the Spirit, because now it sounds like you have “spiritual justification” to love money...

A second example:

Years ago, I was a member of a church in another town. Unbeknown to me, a good friend of mine (a young man), was tempted in his sexuality. He had a girlfriend, but his thoughts were drawn in lust toward men. He knew it was wrong. The

Spirit told Him it was wrong. The Scriptures told him it was wrong... And he was tempted, but he didn't sin, because he followed the leading of the Spirit (which was confirmed by Scripture)...

But then a new teaching came into the church. That's not sin any more. The ancient people just didn't know what they were talking about – we now know better... It was a teaching that said "God made you the way you are, and that's how He wants you to be."...

And over the next few months, he totally changed. A stumbling-block caused him to fall. It wasn't long and he fell away from the church; We tried to keep him close as a family friend, but he cut himself off; And the more he embraced the homosexual lifestyle, the more broken he became, and by all indications, he fell away from Jesus altogether...

And oh how terrible it will be, for those who put a stumbling-block in front of my friend by introducing a teaching that is not of the Spirit, and not of God...

"[Stumbling-blocks] are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!

God's concern for His children, is so great... God's concern for you and I, is so great...

I pray that I will never become a stumbling-block to another – That that nothing I ever say or do, will ever cause a person to stumble into sin.

- Woe to those who "normalise" sin.

- Woe to those who “cancel” sin.
- Woe to those who say, “It doesn’t matter”.
- Woe to those who say “That’s the way God made you. Celebrate it.”

Woe.

And Jesus is quite blunt. It would be better for me to die, than to cause another Christian to fall into sin.

² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

You see, Jesus didn’t remove the “offence” that sin is. And that’s why He says: **³ Pay attention to yourselves!**

And there’s 2 aspects of paying attention to ourselves.

Firstly, It’s paying attention, so that I (myself) do not stumble – that I will recognise a stumbling-block for what it is, and not get caught-out by it.

So, how do we recognise a stumbling-block? A stumbling block, will be contrary to Spirit. But, how will I know if something is contrary to the Spirit? Well, it will be something that appeals to “the flesh”, and it will be a teaching that negates or twists Scripture.

So, **³ Pay attention to yourselves!** – recognise a stumbling-block for what it is. It is trying to get you to fall into sin, so do not trip...

And the **second** aspect of “paying attention to ourselves”, is to watch out for our brothers and sisters in Christ...

Many of you will be aware of a thing called “Duty of Care”. In the world of, (it used to be called WPH&S, it’s now called) OH&S, there is a concept called “Duty of Care”. If you know that there is a danger in the work-place, you have a “duty of care”, to inform your fellow worker of the danger...

Guess what – that’s not a new concept. You see, in the Christian church, we are not all individuals; We’re not merely responsible for ourselves – we have a “duty of care” for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And I’m going to be quite open now: This is a “tough teaching”, because we generally don’t want to be seen as a person who “meddles” in other people’s business. It’s usually easier for us to “turn a blind eye”, or “let sleeping dogs lie”...

But what Jesus is teaching us here, is “If you truly love your Brother and Sister in Christ, you will be watching out for them”. And sin, is something that is so offensive to God, it cannot be overlooked – it needs to be called out for what it is... And that’s why Jesus says: **If your brother sins, rebuke him...**

But the thing is, we don’t rebuke another, to be harsh/critical. We don’t call-out sin in another, to hurt/belittle/demean

them... We do it, because we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and when one of them stumbles, we want to help them to their feet again, so they can follow the Lord like they once did...

And we need our brothers and sisters in Christ, just as much as they need us. We need them, to watch out for us, to help us to identify stumbling-blocks that might trip us up. And we need them to help us to our feet when we do stumble...

³ Pay attention to yourselves, Jesus says. If your brother sins, rebuke him...

Here's something we need to understand: A Godly rebuke, is the best kind of love, that you can ever give to your Brother or Sister in Christ.

BTW, does this give you a bit of a hint as to how close our relationship should be with each other?

If a stranger rebukes me, "Well, who are you? Who do you think you are? You don't know me. What are you to me???" But when a person who is near and dear gives me a rebuke – when it is a person who I know loves me and cares for me – when it's someone who loves the Lord and is concerned for my position with the Lord... That's the sort of person I'll listen to.

And that's the sort of relationship we should have with each other.

If your brother sins, rebuke him Not to put him down;
Not to finish him off; But to restore him.

You see, that is the purpose of a rebuke: Repentance and forgiveness.

Here's a spiritual truth for you: Without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sin.

- Sin cannot be overlooked;
- Sin cannot be covered over;
- Sin cannot be cancelled...

Sin can only be forgiven.

And forgiveness has 3 parts to it:

1. The penalty paid by Jesus Christ on the Cross
Jesus died, to pay the cost of our sins;
2. The grace of God and the mercy of God, that is ready to forgive
God is ready, able, and keen, to forgive our sins; and
3. Repentance of sin – a turning away from sin, and a turning toward Christ, that opens up the floodgates of forgiveness.

“Without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sins.”ⁱ

Jesus said: **If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,**

A common scenario, is when a person says to me, “I can never forgive so-and-so for what they have done...” And I usually reply, “Have they asked for your forgiveness?” “No”... Well, what if they did repent, and apologise, and ask you for your forgiveness? Would you forgive them then?” “Well, actually, I probably would” ...

You see, “repentance” changes everything. The Lord forgives me, when I repent. And so for me to **give** forgiveness **before** the other person repents, isn’t God-like...

But let me clarify something here, otherwise we might find ourselves descending to having an unforgiving heart (and that’s a different matter altogether)...

If a person has sinned against you or I, that doesn’t mean that we can stop loving the person. And we should always have a heart of forgiveness – a yearning – desire for reconciliation. And that’s why Jesus said that awkward word “rebuke”.

Why do we rebuke?

“To give them a piece of my mind?”

No. *Are you sure that’s an offering you can afford to make...*
We rebuke, in the hope there will be repentance, and then we can forgive. You see, it is Godly, to yearn for there to be an opportunity to forgive.

BTW, to rebuke a person, clarifies in my mind, whether the other person has actually sinned, or whether I am simply offended over something that is not sin. Are you with me?

Sometimes a person may do something that I don't like. It might be something that offends me... It might be something that throws my plans and hopes and dreams into chaos and out of order... And so I'm deeply offended by them...

But have they actually sinned?

- Have they dishonoured God?
- Have they broken a commandment?
- And do they continue in sin; or
- did they just stumble and now they're walking with God again???

You see, I need to be really sure of this, before I rebuke a person... If I am offended, and the other person didn't actually sin, **my offence** is the sin, and it's **me** who needs to be rebuked.

And let me tell you, within the Christian church, way too many people feel offended by something that another has done, but isn't sin. And we need to repent of that offence.

And so,

If your brother sins, rebuke him (not because you've been offended, but because you are concerned for their walk with God, and because by Scripture, you can show them how they have sinned), and if he repents, forgive him,

I don't know if you realise this or not, but the peace-making/building process that gets deployed in all sorts of

situations (commercial / social / international relations / family), is all based on this scriptural principal...

But the problem is these peace-building processes often fall down, because they are usually hijacked by a quest for restitution and payback, rather than reconciliation. And so we hear words like “truth-telling”; “Peace-building”; “Reconciliation”... But they miss “Grace”; “Love”; “Mercy”; “Sacrifice”... And even the concept of “truth” itself, is not a search for the whole truth, but “a truth” that fits a narrative of offence/resentment...

But I want to tell you, “In Christ Jesus, it is very different.” Reconciliation is genuine. It **must** be genuine, because God has reconciled us to Himself, and therefore **we** must be reconciled to one another.

Cool...

But hang on a minute, Michael: What if they do it again. I mean: *“Do it to me once and I might forgive, but what a fool I would be, if I were to forgive them (for the same thing) a second time”...*

You know what: Jesus said: **⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."**

Why? Because that's what God does for us.

If I only got one chance at repentance, I would be lost. And so would you BTW.

Whenever I genuinely repent, the Lord forgives me. And so, whenever another person recognises their sin, and they repent and ask for forgiveness, how can I not forgive **them**???

And so Jesus not only reveals the **offence** of sin, and our need to **repent** of sin... He also reveals the necessity of “forgiveness”, and how it is Godly, to forgive again and again and again... But it’s not a shallow forgiveness.

This is how the Christian church, becomes an expression of the Kingdom of God. We are not only reconciled to Christ – we are reconciled to one another.

We offer grace and mercy to one another, but not cheap grace.

- Always be ready/eager to forgive;
- In love, Rebuke with the hope of repentance;
- Repent of sin – turn away from it;
- Forgive;
- Forgive again;

- And be reconciled.

Let’s pray:
Heavenly Father,

We give You thanks for Your mercy and Your forgiveness.

We come to You as Your desperate children.
We acknowledge that we are totally unable to atone for our sins.

And so we are so thankful that Your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
died on the cross, to pay the penalty of our sins.

And Lord, we thank You,
for your Heart of Mercy, Grace and Forgiveness.
You have done all that is required.
You just wait for us to repent of our sins,
and Bow to The Lord Jesus as our Lord,
So that the floodgates of forgiveness
and reconciliation can be opened.

And Lord we do this now.
We turn away from our sins;
And we acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.
We confess our wrong-doing,
and seek Your forgiveness.

And Lord, to honour You,
help us to live Holy and Godly lives.
"Lead us not into temptation".
Help us to recognise every stumbling-block –

To recognise every thing and every one,
that would cause us to stumble into sin...

And Lord, we pray for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ.
Help us to lovingly restore the repentant sinner.
Give us hearts, that yearn forgiveness and reconciliation.
- something that we've already experienced from You.

Thank You, Jesus...

Amen.

ⁱ 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Luke 13:3 (ESV)

³ **No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**