

## Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

### Know Thy Enemy

Scripture: Romans 8:12–14; Colossians 3:5

Code: B110209

Are you ready to kill?

That's a stark question, and it demands qualification, but killing is a regular part of the Christian life. There's an aspect of being a Christian that's downright violent.

You see, God commands us to hunt down and kill all remaining sin—to terminate it with extreme prejudice. Want proof? Here's what Paul said in Romans 8:

*So then, brethren, we are under obligation. Not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God* (Romans 8:12-14)

Or, how about Colossians 3:5?

*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

So, there you are, Christian. Paul didn't say, "Negotiate or bargain with sin"—this isn't diplomacy; there's no call for making threats or shooting sin in the leg. God calls you to identify, locate, attack, and execute the enemy, the sin in your members. Put it to death. Period.

Your objective is clear, and your enemy has been identified.

But do you really *know* sin? You'd better. Being ignorant of the adversary is inexcusable because God has revealed everything you need to know about it—its nature, its strategy, and its goal.

Only a fool would engage an enemy he doesn't understand, whose strengths and tactics he doesn't know. Try that approach in sports, you jeopardize the game; try it in business and watch your revenue plummet. But those losses are petty compared with the health of your soul (Romans 8:13). In the relentless war against sin, ignorance isn't bliss. It's suicide.

Think of it like this. If it was your job to track down and eliminate a dangerous group of insurgents, what would you need to know to accomplish your objective? You'd want to know their background, identify their leaders, understand their goals, and learn their strengths and weaknesses. You'd familiarize yourself with their allies, technological sophistication, weaponry, tactics, and a whole lot more.

Now take that approach with sin. What do you need to know about sin to put it to death? Let me give

you three things to think about:

## The Nature of Sin

John Owen was a pastor-theologian of the Puritan era who understood sin. He *really* understood it. In his little book, *The Mortification of Sin*, a tremendous gift to the church, he wrote, “It is to be feared that very many Christians have little knowledge of the main enemy that they carry about with them in their hearts.” Owen had pastoral concerns for the Christians in his day who were ignorant of sin’s nature, and thus poorly equipped to combat it.

What about you? Do you know the nature of sin?

Above all else, sin is deceptive. It entices its victims with lies, lures them away from safety, and kills them. Sin promises pleasure, and delivers pain, sorrow, and death (James. 1:14–15). Sin is crafty and subtle, like the serpent in Eden. Sin presents itself as a trusted ally, offering friendly counsel and whispering sweet promises, but it will always deceive. Sin can never be trusted.

When you look back on its history, you discover a track record of treachery.

- Sin deceived Eve with a piece of forbidden fruit, and weakened Adam to turn away from God’s clear command, plunging the human race into ruin.
- Sin deceived Achan with a forbidden mantle, and his whole family suffered death by stoning.
- Sin deceived David with a forbidden woman, leading him into adultery, deception, murder, and a conspiratorial cover-up; David’s family and kingdom never recovered.
- Sin deceived Solomon with foreign wives, leading him into idolatry; it tore his kingdom apart.
- Sin deceived Judas with a meager 30 pieces of silver, for which he committed the most notorious crime in history—betraying the Son of God.
- Sin deceived Ananias and Sapphira with the deadly combination of money and prestige, leading them to lie to the Holy Spirit, for which they forfeited their lives.

In every case, sin allured its victim with some delectable, promising what was desired. Like bait on a hook, sin offered wisdom, pleasure, wealth, respectability. It delivered death.

It’s just as Puritan Thomas Guthrie once said: “Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? What fair siren is this who seated on a rock by a deadly pool smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray and flings her arm round our neck to leap with us into perdition? Sin.”

That’s the nature of sin. It’s deceitful and crafty.

## The Strategy of Sin

The main strategy of sin is to excite lust, tempting you with an opportunity to fulfill it. When you take the bait, it yanks the hook and you’re caught. That’s exactly the picture James painted: “Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives

birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14–15).

The temptation may come from the outside, but for the strategy to work, there must be a cooperating attraction on the inside. And there is—the internal lusts, betraying thoughts, and sinful impulses. James revisits the concept in chapter 4:

*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel (James 4:1-2).*

Notice the progression? You want, you need, you demand, and finally you take, whatever the cost.

Sin is treacherous. Pride, resentment, bitterness, and unbelief are choice weapons in its arsenal, and it'll work through your dissatisfaction, jealousy, fear, sorrow, or anger, taking advantage of multiple entry points. It'll ambush you at the point of a recent accomplishment, a spiritual milestone, or even a season of victory over other sins. Sin's strategy is to find and target your most vulnerable spot. Again, here's Owen on sin's strategy:

*Sin is always acting, always conceiving, and always seducing and tempting. Who can say that he has ever had anything to do with God or for God which indwelling sin has not tried to corrupt? . . . There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails, or is prevailed upon. It will always be so while we live in this world. Sin will not spare for one day. There is no safety but in a constant warfare for those who desire deliverance from sin's perplexing rebellion.*

## **The Goal of Sin**

At the end of the day, what is sin's goal? What's its objective, what does it want?

First, sin wants to master you. Consider the Bible's first description of sin, provided by God Himself. He warned Cain in Genesis 4, “If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” I can't think of a more eerie description of sin than that. “Its desire is for you” means sin *wants* you, it's coming after you! God compares sin to a savage beast, poised to attack yet patiently waiting for the victim's weakest, most vulnerable moment. Sin isn't necessarily *hiding*, but *waiting*. Sin wants to dominate you. That's its goal.

If you remember, sin triumphed over Cain. Sin took control of his thoughts, mastered his emotions, and governed his behavior; and it resulted in Cain's demise. Cain was the first person God cursed in the Bible; now he's in hell. In Cain, sin accomplished its goal, and here's the path: deceive, dominate, destroy.

A second goal of sin is to defile and corrupt. In a message titled, *The Ugliness of Christmas*, John MacArthur said this:

*Sin is defiling. We need to understand that its nature is that it defiles. It is to precious metal what rust is. It is what scars are to a lovely face, what stain is to silk cloth, what smog is to an azure sky. It is a defiling thing. It makes the soul red with guilt and black with evil. In 1 Kings 8, the sin of man's heart is compared to oozing sores of a deadly plague. In Zechariah 3:3, compared to filthy garments. It is a*

*defiling polluting staining thing. It stains the soul and blots out the image of God . . . sin pollutes and defiles and stains and mars everything it touches. And it touches everything in the human realm.*

Sin is like a cancerous disease. It is entrenched deep within the heart, undetected but not inactive. If it's not rooted out, it will grow, infect other areas, and eventually take over to the detriment and destruction of the entire body. Sin corrupts and defiles everything it touches—families, governments, churches. Sin seeks the ruin of its host, always.

A third goal of sin is to diminish the glory of Christ and dim the hope of the gospel. Sin produces despair, tempting you to abandon any hope of forgiveness. Sin wants you to feel perpetually unworthy and *never* look to Christ. It wants to hide God's face (Isaiah 59:2) and distort the gospel. Sin wants to paralyze the sinner with fear and condemnation, and then hide the remedy.

Sin seeks to do all those things because, if successful, it will destroy your soul. That's its ultimate objective. Sin wants you in hell.

Make no mistake. Sin is a fierce enemy and has devised your ruin. From the very beginning God has warned us about sin's cunning and treachery. Sin entices, masters, and then kills (Genesis 4:7; James 1:15; Hebrews 12:1). It cannot and *will* not be ignored, so it must be executed.

So, *what* do we do? That's for next time...

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