

When Sin Plays Dead

Scripture: 1 John 1:9

Code: B110304

Have you ever watched an opossum escape from a predator? They use a defense mechanism distinct to only a few animals—*playing dead*. When faced with a threat, an opossum will often fall on the ground, close his eyes, extend his limbs, and lie very still. He appears lifeless—and harmless. But when the danger passes, he revives and scurries away. You can almost hear laughter as he makes his escape.

Playing dead seems to be an effective means of survival, but opossums aren't the sole practitioners of that strategy.

Our sins often "play dead" too, especially when faced with the threat of execution. They *fake* death in order to *escape* it. While you may think you've slain a particular sin, sometimes life still pulses within your enemy and it secretly takes its leave, stays quiet, and waits on danger to pass.

We've all been tricked by sin's craftiness, haven't we? How many times have you sheathed your sword, convinced sin was *finished*, only to suffer a violent retaliation a few hours later? How does that happen, and what can you do to stop it?

You may already know this, but John MacArthur has preached more than 3,000 sermons, written more than 150 books, and spent the last 50 years feeding God's sheep from God's Word. Much of that material relates directly to how you and I combat sin. John has a unique ability to equip, clarify, and warn, especially when he's dealing with sin in the life of a Christian. One message in particular stands out to me in which John listed what killing sin is *not*.

I'd like to introduce you to my expansion of that list and end this series by addressing an important issue—What do you do when sin *plays dead*? In other words, how do you know if you've *successfully* slain sin? To answer those questions, I'll share what I've learned biblically from John MacArthur and John Owen about what killing sin is *not*.

Killing sin is not covering it up. You may *appear* successful at covering up your sin. You can easily deceive your friends, family, and pastors. For awhile, you may even deceive *yourself* (Jeremiah 17:9). But hiding sin is not killing it—you'll reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7). When you paint over sin like graffiti on a wall, that's not putting it to death, it's practicing hypocrisy. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper. But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

Rather than *conceal* your sins, *confess* and forsake them. That's how you kill sin (1 John 1:9). Merely covering up your sin obscures the problem from plain sight, which keeps it secret. You can't hit a target you can't see. Sin doesn't die in those conditions—it *thrives*.

Don't be deceived. Achan hid his sin and silenced his conscience until it was too late. He even brought sin's treachery into his own home (Joshua 7:21). His deception cost him his life—and the life

of his entire family (Joshua 7:24-25). Don't cover up your sin, kill it.

Killing sin is not internalizing it. When you stop your tongue, body, hands, eyes and ears from sinning, don't make the mistake of assuming you've killed sin. Stopping the action is *part* of the process (as we noted last post), but binding your hands is not the same as keeping your heart (Proverbs 4:23). Sinful actions are driven by sinful attitudes (James 4:1-2)—you must kill *both*.

Some imagine that ceasing sinful activity equates to gaining victory over sin, yet they often continue ruminating on the pleasures of previous sins in their mind. John MacArthur said this:

Perhaps you reason with yourself, "I'm not going to entertain myself by going to movies that parade immorality," and so you stop. But maybe you allow the vivid imagery of those past sins, the experiences of seeing those movies, to creep back into your mind and relive the pleasures of those sins over and over. That's not killing sin.

Killing sin is not forsaking some sins while tolerating others. Don't imagine you've slain sin when you merely forsake one glaring sin while you tolerate others. Remember, even the minutest transgression of God's holy law carries enough guilt and offense to cast you into hell for all eternity (Romans 6:23). What good could come from trading the lust of the flesh for the lust of the eyes, or the lust of the eyes for the pride of life (1 John 2:16)? The lust hasn't died; it merely changed forms. That would be like drinking a *less-deadly* poison—the result is the same. Likewise, forsaking sexual immorality but tolerating greed and covetousness is futile and puts you at greater risk of being hardened by sin's deceit (Hebrews 3:13).

Remember when Simon Magus *appeared* to forsake his sorcery in Acts 8? Time revealed the truth—his repentance was a sham. He apparently put away his spells and incantations, but his sinful ambition was alive and well. When Simon's un-slain sin sought expression, the apostle Peter called him out:

You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours . . . for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity. (Acts 8:21-23)

Don't engage in selective sin-forsaking, and then imagine you've progressed spiritually. To trade sins is simply to prefer one sewage over another.

Killing sin is not repressing it. Some people repress sin with drugs and alcohol. They drink themselves into oblivion or take drug-induced trips away from reality. But there are even *Christians* who suppress their guilt with movies, music, and worldly entertainment. They find distractions to eclipse the misery sin brings. If that doesn't suit them, some will even consult counseling professionals who attempt to manage the person's guilt by elevating his self-esteem.

People seem to become very lazy, almost indifferent when it comes to contending against sin. Even the *thought* of fighting against temptation wearies them. So they don't fully commit to the battle. Instead, they repress their sins with work, the gym, or tragically, even ministry—*anything* to resist full engagement with the enemy. But that's not killing sin. David wrote:

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day

and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. (Psalm 32:3-4)

Keep in mind, that confession came from a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). David testified to both the deceit and misery of sin. He was able—for a time at least—to suppress his guilt, until God came and announced His glorious work of putting David's sin away (2 Samuel 12:13). David slaughtered God's enemies by the tens of thousands (1 Samuel 18:7), but the enemy within his bosom proved too elusive for him.

Killing sin is not enjoying occasional victories over it. I'm going to let John Owen make this point:

Occasional conquests of sin do not count as killing sin. When a person faces some sudden invasion of sin in his life—such as a scandal or some evil tragedy—and becomes all stirred up about it, he may feel he has killed sin. He reacts to sin as fervently as the Corinthians did in 2 Corinthians 7:11. But when the lust dies down for a time, he forgets about it. Yet the lust is like a thief that has only lain low in order to start its felony once more.

Likewise, when a sinner faces the affliction of some calamity, or the exposure of some sin, he deals with the problem by resolving never to do it again. It appears that the sin is gone, whereas it is only concealed, waiting to come back later on.

Killing sin is not ignoring your conscience. Part of the process of killing your sin is working through the issue of guilt. Until your conscience is quiet, and fully appeased, sin is still alive and active. If you truly want to know those areas of your life where sin thrives, listen to your conscience. Like sonar on a battleship, it can detect enemy presence hidden beneath the surface, in places you can't immediately see or hear. To ignore the presence of the enemy is to hasten death.

If you want to kill sin, don't ignore your conscience. Inform it with biblical truth so it functions accurately, flooding your soul with knowledge like a skylight brings light into a dark room.

You and I live in a culture that counsels us to run from guilt and kill our conscience. But it's not wise to throw away your shield in battle, nor is it safe to ignore your conscience. Pain tells you something is wrong in your body; guilt tells you something is wrong in your soul. Listen to your conscience, Christian. If you silence the pangs of your conscience, you're not killing sin—you're accommodating it.

So the next time your sin drops to the ground before you, closes its eyes, and appears dead, don't sheathe your sword. Review the points we've covered, examine your heart, and make sure you've done the grueling, Spirit-empowered work of completely executing your sin.

Kill your sins God's way, or die sin's way. Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.

Tommy Clayton
Content Developer and Broadcast Editor

COPYRIGHT (C) 2024 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).