

## “THE SIN OF SLOTH”

### Sinning Like a Christian #5

Ecclesiastes 1:1-4, 12-18, Proverbs 6:1-11, 24:30-34, Matthew 21:28-32

October 2 & 3, 2021

When we hear a title of a series called *Sinning Like a Christian*, it baffles us a bit. Our first thought is “Wait, aren’t Christians supposed to be perfect? And if not perfect, going on to perfection?” That’s what we like to think about ourselves, however, **when we become Christians, it is true that we are forgiven by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it does not eliminate us from being sinners.** The Scriptures of the Bible give us this truth; “*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). “*There is no righteous person, no not even one*” (Psalm 14:1-3, Romans 3:10).

But why lift up the sins of the Christian? Why expose the sins of those who are believers of Jesus Christ? Well, this series helps us to identify the problems we have with sin in an attempt to get us to evaluate our lives and to stop sinning so that we might become more like Jesus. Jesus was sinless, and gave us a model of how we could live to please the Lord our God. Yet we live in a sinful world, dominated and ruled by the enemy of God, Satan. Satan desire is that we all turn away from God and go our own separate way, so he tries to get us to think that our ways are best and that God’s ways are outdated, archaic, and useless for our world today.

**Only as we grow closer to Jesus Christ in a personal relationship with Him do we find how sinful we really are.** Compared to Jesus, even our very best deeds become filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), and our best intentions fall way short of bringing glory to God. Without a relationship with Jesus as our Savior, there is no hope for us to find reconciliation with God and forgiveness for our sins. We cannot do enough, we can’t work hard enough, we can’t pay enough, or say enough, or be good enough to earn our own forgiveness for the sins that we commit against God or one another. Only faith in Jesus as our Savior provides us with that capability. Only Jesus saves!

However our world today has disregarded the ways of God. The people have turned their backs on the laws and commandments of the Lord and they choose to do whatever their hearts desire. The concept of sin is empty to them, and they do what is right in their own eyes. And as we see throughout

the Old Testament, whenever the people turned to do their own thing, to do what was right in their own eyes, that nation quickly fell into occupation from another country. When we fail to follow the ways of the Lord God Almighty, when we go our own ways, our sin causes God to turn His back upon us, and He removes His hand of blessing from us. So we are left to ourselves, and it is not long before anything goes and our nation collapses from within.

So it is the Christian faith that exposes this sinfulness, and it is the Christian church that calls sin a sin, and it is the people seeking to follow God's commandments who are calling all people to turn away from their sin and return to the worship of the Lord God Almighty only. The Christian faith exposes the sins of the people to help us to see the error of our own ways and guide us to repentance.

So we look at the sin of Pride, the sin of Envy, the sin of Anger that are so prevalent in our society today, to help us to become aware of the dangers that they hold upon our lives. These are things that we are all guilty of, so when we become aware of them in our lives, we have the opportunity to confess our sins to God and find His forgiveness, as well as to encourage each other to do the same. When we recognize sin as Christians, then we are able to do something about them to find forgiveness. But without recognizing our sins, even as Christians, we find ourselves limited in the blessings from God.

Today we focus on the fourth of the Seven Deadly Sins lifted up by the early Church Fathers, the sin of Sloth. But we live in a nation of hard-working, achievement driven, I'd rather-do-it-myself people. We are among the purpose driven, the "I gotta get it done yesterday" crowd who often are over worked and under paid. So how could Sloth be a sin in such a highly active country?

Well, **in the eyes of the world, "Sloth is an offense against time, a sin against our potentiality, a sin against ourselves, a failure to get out there and grab what we deserve – in other words, our failure to become gods unto ourselves."**<sup>1</sup> And unfortunately, the pandemic of Covid19 exposed this sin vividly to the eyes of many. While everything shut down to "protect us from getting the

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<sup>1</sup> (William Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005] pg. 79)

disease,” the continued support of the government for those not working has produced a national crisis of plenty of work being available, many jobs needing to be filled, but people staying home because they can make more on the government handouts for unemployment than if they were to get back out into the workforce. People have gotten so use to being at home that they are reluctant to return to their work. It is a classic example of Sloth where people would rather get paid for not working, yet demanding to receive just payments at the same time.

Well, the Apostle Paul has a remedy for that, but it flies in the face of what many in our nation believe. Paul tells us, *“For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now we command and exhort such persons in the Lord Jesus Christ to work peacefully and eat their own bread”* (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

But certainly Sloth could be seen way before Covid19 affected us. **The invention of the TV, the internet, cell phones and other technologies encourage Sloth**, where we become so wrapped up in doing nothing, the day is wasted away and a nation of couch-potatoes is produced. We have gotten so use to watching sporting events that we prefer not to participate in them. According to surveys taken lately (February 2021), U.S. adults logged **7 hours and 50 minutes** on smartphones, desktops and other devices per day, watching digital content and engaging with online apps in 2020. Almost 1/3 of the day spent being absorbed by electronic devices. Is it any wonder then that currently, 83 percent of men and 72 percent of women are overweight or obese in the world today?

**Our indulgence to Sloth is contributing to serious health consequences like developing heart disease, strokes, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, joint problems, and sleep apnea.** Billions of dollars are being spent trying to find cures for these diseases, yet there is little outcry about our Slothful practices. Think of the money we could save if we would but put away our devices and get outside and become active again?

At this, many will think that I am being horribly judgmental. But folks, I fall into this same

condition that I am describing. I am over weight. I am a Sloth when it comes to activity. I am in need of repentance of this sinful lifestyle as much as anyone else. But it is essential that we come to understand the sin and begin to do something about it.

And it's not just about the body that I'm talking about. **Sloth shows up in a variety of ways throughout our lives, affecting us mind, body and spirit.** We find that our minds don't work like they use to because we aren't using them like we use to. We find ourselves using the calculators on our phones to do the math rather than using our minds to calculate the problem. We let computers do the solving of our problems rather than our working them out mentally. We have resorted to using technology rather than our own minds to sort out the various struggles we face. Sloth dulls the mind. And the saying is true, "If you don't use it, you lose it!"

And then, too, we fall away from our relationship with Jesus and our faith wavers because of Sloth. When we first receive Jesus as Lord and Savior of our lives, we are very interested in growing closer to Jesus. We are excited to keep daily devotions, we study the Bible, we spend time in prayer and our desire to know Jesus is high. But as time goes by, as we begin to grow lazy in our devotions, we lose the drive to know Jesus and we begin to get lazy even in our faith, thinking we know enough to get us into heaven, but not realizing that as our faith wanes, so does our lifestyle, and we find ourselves doing and believing and condoning things that are outside of God's guidelines.

Will Willimon says it this way, "It is one thing to have a dramatic, life-changing conversion experience. It is quite another thing to keep it going over the long haul. **Sloth eats away at the soul, extinguishes faithful fire, and thus takes its toll, wearing down the soul by slow degrees.**

"Sometimes Envy can be a prelude to Sloth, for the Seven tend to be interconnected. [Thomas] Aquinas, recalling the words of Cassian, says that Sloth arises 'from the fact that we groan about not having spiritual fruit and we think that other, distant monasteries are better off than ours.'" He elaborates a bit then by saying, "When I, as a beginner at the game of tennis, went to see Billy Jean King play an exhibition match, I quit tennis. Why humiliate yourself with failure to reach a goal that someone

else so wonderfully masters?”

And he goes on to say, “In my pastoral experience, what people sometimes call doubt is more often, more properly called Sloth. Faith requires active response, engagement with God, a willingness to be formed and transformed by God’s work in us. The Reformers were concerned not to make ‘faith’ into a new form of ‘works righteousness,’ in which we attempt to save ourselves by ourselves. But today I wonder if the greater spiritual danger is that gradual dissipation of faith that comes from a simple unwillingness to take the trouble to believe.”<sup>2</sup>

Sloth affects the whole body when we begin to relax, thinking that we don’t need to do any more to be proficient in life. We give up taking care of our bodies, we grow weak in using our minds to figure out problems, and we fail to remain what I call FATCATS: Faithful, Available, Teachable, Christians After Training. Instead, we become feeble, anemic, thankless Christians abetting toward Sloth.

Again, this can sound pretty harsh, but when we really stop to think about it, it is very real. **Sloth calcifies our bodies, it petrifies our minds, and it fossilizes our spirits.** Sloth destroys us to the point that we begin to rationalize with the Philosopher in Ecclesiastes when he says, “*It is useless, useless ...Life is useless, all useless. You spend your life working, laboring, and what do you have to show for it? Generations come and generations go, but the world stays the same...It is like chasing the wind. You can’t straighten out what is crooked; you can’t count things that aren’t there*” (Ecc. 1:2-4, 14-15).

And with that mindset, we give up trying, we stop striving to please God, and we slowly melt into nothingness. Depression, Envy turned inward, causes us to lose all ambition to do anything because it will all be taken away from us when our life here ends. So why work ourselves to death trying to gain the whole world while we lose our soul at the same time? We are told that it is best to take time out of our day to smell the roses and enjoy the beautiful blue sky, but when we get so that we give up doing anything, we lose even what we have, and everything disappears. This sadness within us causes apathy to the point that we just don’t care anymore, and we give up. That sadness comes from Envy of not

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<sup>2</sup> (Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 82-83)

having what others do, and the apathy surrounds us to the point that we can't even enjoy what we do have.

You see, "behind the rather gray face of apathy lays a spiritual monster: despair. The great goal of life – communion with God – is forsaken by diving into a sea of triviality. The end of life is forfeited, and the means toward the end seem unrealistic and pointless. Failing to avail oneself of God's appointed modes of gracious ascent, we fall victim to malice and spite toward spiritual things, ridiculing the ways of the Spirit as we sink back into the ways of the flesh."<sup>3</sup>

But let's heed the warning in Proverbs 6:6-11. "*Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.*" Slothfulness brings about destruction to our whole selves, and yet our world seems to encourage us to get all we can without working for it. It's the mindset of getting all we can, from whomever we can, in any way that we can, for as long as we can, with as little effort as we can. It's the reason that the gambling industry is proliferating so abundantly. It's the hope of striking it rich without having to work anymore. And so we risk our resources and end up supporting someone else's lifestyle. **Indeed, we need to learn from the ant to work for our keep.**

But the opposite of Sloth is joy. Joy delights the spirit and enlivens the soul. Joy gets us looking around at all the blessings we have received from the Lord God and allows us to relish in even the small details of what God has done for us. It's taking the time to enjoy a sunrise or a sunset. It's sitting at the beach listening to the waves cascade onto the beach and smelling the delicious scent of a lilac tree nearby. It's taking the time to have a tug-of-war with your dog, or throwing a used tissue for your cat to chase. It's listening to children giggle as they experience the antics of a clown, or groan as they remove the "guts" of their first pumpkin carving. Joy is watching a butterfly immerge from its chrysalis and

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<sup>3</sup> (Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 86)

then flit from flower to flower in search of nectar. It's going outside on a clear night to watch the stars and catch the sight of shooting stars that fall into our Earth's atmosphere. **Joy changes our perspective and enables us to begin to appreciate all that we have and savor all that the Lord has given to us.**

But for many of us, joy is lost to the pain that we have here on the earth. Sloth comes as we try to protect ourselves from that pain, and we retreat into our own little world, and we lose the big picture of life. And even then, we are surrounded by so many distractions, overindulging in way too much on our minds that it develops a massive attention deficit disorder. This preoccupies our minds with unimportant things and so we cannot focus on anything worth having in our life. And that breeds even more apathy which leads to greater Sloth.

And this side of Sloth is what the church has called excessive self-pity, a sad self-centeredness of the heart all curled up in itself. It affects us socially to the point where we can walk past a homeless man with his hand outstretched, looking for a handout, without helping him. We walk on by with little to no twinge of conscience, because we're so wrapped up into ourselves that we don't even see him, and if we did, we don't really care.

**This is the sin of Sloth, to become so wrapped up in ourselves, despairing of what we don't have, so tired of having the door slammed in our face, that we just give up caring about ourselves or anyone else.** We even give up on God's provision to bring us joy, and we become empty, mindless, desperate people without any vision or ambition or purpose to change our situation. We have become content with the way things are because we believe we cannot, and that God cannot, change anything. So we wallow in our apathy, we drown in our despair, and we close our eyes to any possible resurrection from the death we have surrounded ourselves with.

The gospel lesson gives us a peak at the two options we have before us. Listen to Matthew 21:28-32. (READ Matthew 21:28-32)

This parable of Jesus gives us hope, if we but have the eyes to see it. Two sons were both asked by their father to go to work in the family vineyard. The oldest first replied, "*I don't want to,*" but then

changed his mind and went to work anyway. He realized the value of obeying his father and going out to keep the family vineyard going. Though initially he responded with apathy, he then looked at the larger picture and saw the need to get up and go do the necessary work so that he could receive the benefits of his faithfulness.

The second first replied, “*Yes, sir,*” but then failed to go. He gave his father the answer that he wanted to hear, but then sat around and did not do any work to benefit the family business. His sin of Sloth encompassed him to the point that he believed that he didn’t have to go to work to benefit from the family business. So he decides to stay put and let others do the work while he enjoy the produce.

Yet it was the older son who pleased his father, because even though he initially said no, he came to understand the value of working. The idea of joyfully serving his father overcame his Sloth and got him to become productive.

**So for each of us, there is hope for us as we replace Sloth with the joy of the Lord in our hearts.** Once we understand what brings delight to our Heavenly Father, we are able to begin to work for Him and find even more joy in our lives. That joy dissolves the stiffness of our bodies, it relieves the hardness of our minds, and it rejuvenates our spirits so that we are able to look beyond ourselves to see the work that God the Father has for us to do while we are here in this world. Joy erases the apathy from our conscience, and it provides hope to disintegrate any despair. Joy produces new life within us as we exalt in all that the Lord Jesus has provided and will provide for us as we actively serve Him. Joy in the Lord helps prevent the sin of Sloth, and gives us a new outlook on life. Let’s pray.

Father, with all that is around us, it is so easy to fall into Sloth. The hardships and pains of this world enslave us into thinking that there is no more hope, no more joy and no more life. So we tend to give up. However You have graciously provided Your Son, Jesus, to encourage us, to inspire us and to guide our hearts and minds so that we might have joy in our lives, even in the midst of hardship. Give us such joy in Jesus that we are able to escape Sloth so that we can accomplish Your work in our world today. This we pray, in Jesus’ holy Name. AMEN.