

Transcript 185

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. This is the final episode in our series of commonly asked questions about sin. So invite you to listen to the previous episodes because what we're talking about today builds on a lot of that. But today is by far the most practical of the episodes. And today we'll be focusing on, how can I, as a Christian, gain victory over sin? Or how can I overcome sin in my Christian life? Or how can I overcome an habitual sin? Those are the type of questions that were most frequently asked at Got Questions about sin in the terms of how it impacts us in a practical sense. So joining me today is Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. And Jeff, the administrator of bibleref.com. So gentlemen, thank you for joining me again. Look forward to our conversation today because this is obviously something that every Christian struggles with and every Christian has asked this question at one time or another. How do I overcome this? And how do I stop doing the sin? You look even at like Roman 7, where the apostle Paul is talking about I know what I am not supposed to do, but I keep doing that. I know what I am supposed to do, but I'm not doing that. Oh, who's going to rescue me from this body of death? That's kind of what we're going to be talking about that struggle that we all experience.

Shea Houdmann

I remember very early on in my Christian life coming to faith in Christ like late teens, it seemed like all the advice I received on how to overcome sin was just pray more, read the Bible more, and stay away from sinful activities. It it seemed overly simplistic. Looking back, I completely understand why that advice was given to me. But just praying, just reading the Bible, just staying away from bad influences, that's not in and of itself enough because ultimately sin is a matter of the heart. I can eliminate all bad influences. Well, I can't actually do that. Even if I were to, I would still have the sin inside of me, a sinful heart that still desires, still craves to commit acts of sin, to have sinful thoughts, sinful desires. So for me that was a struggle, and that I could not pray enough. I could not read the Bible enough to suddenly suppress or get rid of the sin of my life. So there's more to it than that. So obviously encourage you to pray, ask for God's help, ask for God's strength, ask for the spirits empowering to overcome sin. Read God's word, absolutely. Knowing what God's word says about sin and how to overcome it is is key in this. Stay away from sinful impulses, influences as much as you possibly can, but there's more to it to that, and that's we're going to be talking about today. So Kevin, why don't you start us off, what in your experience in your ministry as a pastor is key in gaining victory over sin?

Kevin Stone

I will just share 3 W's here from Scripture that will help in overcoming sin and being victorious over it. God wants us to be victorious over sin, doesn't want his children to be stuck in the mire. He wants us to be climbing higher. So the three W's are wheeled your sword, watch and pray, and walk in the spirit. So first of all, wield your sword. And of course I mean the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. John, 17 and verse 17, Jesus prayed to the father, sanctify them, the disciples, sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. And so we are sanctified by the word of truth. And it is so important to be using the word of God. Matthew, Chapter 4, when Jesus faced his temptations in the wilderness He uses scripture every time he is fighting one of those temptations. Jesus had the sword out. And you've got to

bring got to bring your weapon to the battle, you. It it, it would be foolish to go into a battle with no weapon. And we know as believers that we are in a spiritual battle. We've got to bring our sword with us. And so it really pays to memorize scripture, and especially if you have a besetting sin to memorize a portion of Scripture that's going to help you to fight that particular sin. So for example, if you have a besetting sin of lusting with your eyes, you might memorize something like Matthew 5 and verse 28 where Jesus says I tell you that whoever looks on a woman lustfully is already committed adultery with her in his heart. And so when you're going through your your day and you are tempted to look lustfully at a woman, you can bring this verse out, bring out the note card and read it just if you memorized it then then bring that to mind. Say it out loud if you need to. But bring that particular passage to the point of of battle. Make this your determination that you're going to follow this scripture and not follow what what your feelings are at that particular time. So I'm gonna, I'm gonna make this my guide this Matthew 5 verse 28.

Kevin Stone

Secondly, watch and pray. Jesus gave his disciples this command in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he says in Mark 14 and verse 38, watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. So watch, because you know sooner or later there's gonna be a battle and pray because that's how you get the help. That's that's how the help comes through prayer. Hebrews 4 and verse 16, we're encouraged to approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. There's a promise right there that when we pray to the father in our time of need, we'll receive grace, we'll receive mercy, because now this is how God has set it up. He wants to hear from his children in their time of need. So we apply prayer to that point of need as well. So you have a besetting sin such as a sin of the tongue, such as gossip. And so every time you're tempted to speak some gossip or listen to some gossip, you probably need to stop and pray. Lord, help my tongue right now. I know that gossip and slander do not honor you and I want to be, I want to be honoring Christ with, with the words that I speak. So help my words to be uplifting and full of grace right now, at this moment. Just to, you know, a quick little prayer, a little popcorn prayer, sometimes they're called, where you just, you just take a moment and just pray for power in that particular moment when you're being tempted. Go to that throne of Grace. You can go anytime.

Kevin Stone

And then walk in the spirit, Galatians 5 and verse 16. So I say walk in the spirit. You will not gratify the desires of the flesh. So the flesh and the spirit are working against each other. They're contrary to one another. And so you choose to walk in the spirit. Romans 13, verse 14 says clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not think about how to gratify the desires of your flesh. So often it's a it's a battle in the mind. It's a battle for the mind as we needed just stop thinking about how to gratify the flesh and instead think about how we can clothe ourselves with Christ, how we can be more like Jesus. So we live in accordance with the spirits leading. We follow our conscience, our God-given conscience. To walk in, the spirit means that we are yielding to his control. We are following his lead and we're allowing him to exert influence in our lives. And remember that to walk is to make forward progress. We're not standing still. We're not going backwards, but we are walking forward, we're making progress step by step. So for example, you have a besetting sin like of grumbling or complaining, something that does not honor the Lord. Then admit the sin, confess it to the Lord, then lay that sin aside, cast off that sin of grumbling and

complaining. And then replace it with speaking what is useful and edifying to your hearers. In other words, just be more like Jesus. If you walk in the Spirit, Lord Jesus will be honored every day in your life.

Jeff Laird

It's good advice. That there's a tendency sometimes I think, to either under spiritualize or over spiritualize our approach to sin. Sometimes we want to take an overly passive approach and say I need to just sort of go wherever I'm blown around and pray that God will do the rest. And that's never been the way he's worked almost in any circumstance in our lives. He gives us some tools. He gives us some abilities. You know, book of Romans talks about being transformed by the renewing of your mind. There is a sense in which you have to make a choice. You have to make a decision. If it wasn't possible for Christians who are saved believers to make wrong decisions about sin, the New Testament wouldn't spend a lot of time warning us not to make those wrong decisions. So it is possible, but we also need to remember that Scripture tells us there's no such thing as a temptation that is impossible, truly impossible to overcome. First Corinthians 10:13 says God's always going to give some means that we can get through a situation without committing a sin. Now in other podcasts we've talked about things like addiction and in circumstances like that, there's a lot of struggle in how much choice a person has, but even then, people still have the ability to make the choice, and they're still held accountable for it. And Kevin, I think you had some more insight on that.

Kevin Stone

Well, just when you mentioned that passage from First Corinthians chapter 10 that's something else that I really think is important is to always be looking for the way of escape. God said it was there, be looking for that way of escape. You don't have to fall into sin.

Jeff Laird

Right. Yeah, that's exactly it is. We were never forced into that circumstance. And this is where we have to understand that we are all created in the image of God. And that includes every single person, whether they're a Christian believer or not. The Bible does tell us that our primary means of fighting against sin is through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that's only truly accessible to those who have a saving relationship with Christ. And yet, it is possible in a sense, for people to overcome certain things, certain sins and tendencies and habits without having an actual relationship with Jesus Christ. And the reason for that is because we're created in God's image. We have a moral nature. We have a rational nature. He's created a lot of these systems and these concepts for us that will work just through that renewing of our minds, so to speak, in a sort of a secular sense.

Jeff Laird

What's important to remember though, is that when we don't have that relationship with Christ that to some extent what we're doing is we're just replacing one idol with another one. Or we're replacing one kind of sin with another. And sometimes that means we're just turning away from sin and we're turning into self-reliance. And we're always sort of floating on this edge. So we want to be careful that we don't speak as though it is literally impossible for somebody to set aside a habit, or a sin, or a personal problem unless that person is a committed Christian believer. That wouldn't be accurate. That's not exactly the way that things work, because that's not the way that God wired us spiritually. However, real victory, lasting victory, meaningful victory, only comes when you have that relationship, because that's

how we really get access to that level of power. And part of what the Holy Spirit does is he does help to provide us with those reminders.

Jeff Laird

So the practical steps that are really good that you were talking about, Kevin, include things like make good choices when you can make good choices. If if I know for example, if I'm riding a bicycle on a steep hill and I can only control myself on that hill so much, it makes sense for me to stay away from places that are too steep, where I'm I'm going to go out of control. I can push it, I guess, and sometimes maybe I'll push my luck and I'll be OK. But the problem is, once I get to a point where I'm not OK anymore, it's too late to make a decision. Now I don't have I. I can't just say, OK, this was a mistake. Now I'm in trouble. And the vast majority of times when we sin, when we commit a sin, it's because we didn't watch those warning signs. We looked, went, thought, acted, said somewhere where we could have kind of seen how that was going to go beforehand and we didn't make a good choice. So one of the things that God does is he gives us that First Corinthians 10:13. He will always provide a means for escape. And sometimes the escape is just getting off an exit or two early then you would have intended to. And that's something that we can't ignore.

Jeff Laird

The other thing that's helpful with that is other Christian believers. So when we're in fellowship with other Christians, when we have relationship with them, then we have people who can help to give us some of those points and those pointers. Hey, I've been there. I've experienced this. This is what's worked for me. Or they can be the one grabbing me by the collar and saying hey, it looks like you might be moving in kind of a bad direction. Can I can I talk to you about this? Can I pray with you about this? So we don't ever want to treat sin like hey, the Bible says that I can't be sinlessly perfect and we can't. The Bible says if we say we don't have sin, we're a liar. So I'm just going to have to go well, if God wants to keep me out of sin, he'll keep me out of sin and I can't do anything about it. That's not biblical, but neither is it biblical for us to say that sin is all about my own willpower and my own ability. We need to use the tools that God has given us as rationally as we can and as reasonably as we can, but we also need to rely on him knowing that the ultimate power to overcome that sin is always going to be through him and by him.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, I love the toolbox illustration. That God has provided multiple tools. If we're even looking at First Corinthians 10:13, the way of escape is not going to be the same way of escape in each situation, or even for each person. I'm just for an example. I mean, one of the most frequent sins, specific sins we're asked about at Got Questions is the sin of pornography. How do I stop looking at porn? It's a studies show that overwhelming number of men and a surprising number of women struggle with this issue. So people ask, well, how can I stop doing this? Like, well, I can. Here are some tools for your toolbox. Here are I don't know you, I don't know your personality. I don't know your background. I don't know how you've gained victory over this in the past. I don't know what works, but here principles. So the concept is always there are multiple ways, find what what works for you. I've heard people who, when they're tempted to look at pornography, they sing a hymn. And for them that's resets their mind and suddenly they're no longer interested. Or they go read the Bible. Or they pray. Or they just literally have to remove themselves from their cell phone and from any access to a computer. They they go for a walk,

they find company, they call someone on the phone. Hey, I'm struggling. Can we go hang out? People who like their their mind is just craving like the visual stimulation, so they they go and they watch a movie or they read a book. It's anything. Don't the only way to do this is just to fight it in my own willpower is like no. Take advantage of the resources both the spiritual ones and the practical ones. Do everything you can to find a way to refocus yourself, to begin the process of renewing your mind, to refocusing you on something that is good, pleasing, holy rather than the sin that you're tempted by. Don't focus all I have is a hammer, which which to smash the sin. No. Sometimes you need a screwdriver. Sometimes you need to wrench, sometimes you need you need a a plunger. I mean, take advantage of all the tools you have access to, because not everything is going to work the same way for the same person, or even in every situation. So it's recognize all the different tools that God has given us in his word, and even in our lives to overcome sin. And don't be so reliant on just one that if that one doesn't work you, you give up hope or you give into the sin. Have multiple tools in the toolbox ready at your disposal so that you can access them in the time of need, because who knows what will be the way of escape in that particular instance, in that particular temptation.

Jeff Laird

There was a time when I did some work with martial arts. And one of the things that we would bring up is that there's there's kind of a difference between fighting and self-defense. And we would remind people that good self-defense doesn't wait until somebody's throwing punches or you're on the floor. Sometimes it's about that situational awareness. And you would be surprised at how many times a person who might be aggressive will get put off by somebody who doesn't look like they're an easy target. You know, the way you carry yourself and the way you're looking. If you're aware of your circumstances and they can tell that you're looking around, they might be more like, I don't know if I'm If I'm up for that, you know. If you seem very timid and very weak, then it gives them encouragement to go forward. And the Bible says if you resist the devil, he'll flee from you. And it's important to remember that when we feel those first little bits of temptation, we're not forced to sin. I mean, we are slaves to sin unless we are slaves to Christ, but we are never forced to sin. We are always in that position where we can say I can make a good choice right now. And it doesn't have to be some colossal, massive work of the will. It can be just as simple as saying you know what I know if I watch that particular movie that's going to get my mind on this, and then that's going to lead me to this, and that's going to lead me to that. So you know what? Just for right now, I'm just going to make that decision right now. You don't have to tell yourself I'm never going to do this again because you will. I'm never going to say this again or think this again. But that's where God provides us those tools and that level of resistance, it seems small, and it seems petty, but it's resistance. And when you just you don't give the devil a little crack to move into, you don't give him an inch that he can get in there. It is surprising how over time you do develop the ability to be more resistant to those things. So resisting temptation, overcoming sin does not have to be about intense willpower. It can just be about making good decisions in the moment.

Kevin Stone

Yes, very that's very true. And I can't give you the reference for this, but I know there's a a Proverb in Scripture that talks about how the wise man foresees the evil and hides himself. It's all about taking precautions like you're talking about Jeff. Making good choices now when you have your wits about you so that you make things easier down the road. And God always gives options. We have that way of escape.

Kevin Stone

It is a battle for the mind many times, and I think it's so important to have a proper mindset. And I've got three, I got three points for this as well. I'm feeling like a preacher here today. I've got three points. Again something to know, something to count, and something to offer, all from Romans chapter 6 as Paul deals with this subject. First of all, something to know, in verses 3 and nine, he says, don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. So Jesus Christ died, and then he was buried. He was raised from the dead, and he cannot die again. He lives forevermore. Death has no more claim on Christ. So Paul makes a theological point with that fact. When we were placed into the body of Christ, we were baptized by the Holy Spirit, placed into the body, we died, as it were, and we were raised with Christ. So sin and death have no more claim on us either. When we are right now united with Christ, by faith in him, he has victory over sin and death, and so that means so do we. Victory over sin and death. So we need to know this.

Kevin Stone

And then there's also in Romans 6 something to count. Verse 11, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. The word count here means to reckon or to consider. So consider this to be true and then act accordingly. The old life is dead and you are new in Christ. You are alive to God because you are dead to sin. There's really no way you can go back. Why? Why would you go back to that old life, the dead life? And we really need to reckon ourselves as being in that state of being dead to sin. That's that's dead and gone. It's the old life. I'm not going to go back.

Kevin Stone

And then we have something to offer. In Romans 6 verses 12 and 13, therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. And offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. So every part of us is to be dedicated to God as an instrument of righteousness. God gave me these parts of my body to serve him in righteousness. That old children's song that we sing at our church with the kids, you know, be careful little eyes which you see. Be careful little ears what you hear, mouth what you speak, feet where you go, hands what you do. That's packing this truth into that, into that song. And it is, it's a wonderful truth that we have been given these things as gifts from God, to be dedicated to God, and to honor Christ. Verse 19, also of Romans 6, says just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. So in your spiritual past, you were a slave to sin, but your present state is that you're a slave to Christ. And you've been freed from that slavery of sin, which sin is a hard taskmaster. Jesus is a much better master, and I'd much rather be a slave to him. So we need to decide that we're going to love God more than more than we love sin and submit ourselves fully to Christ.

Jeff Laird

That analogy of slavery, and so on and so forth is really important. We see a lot in Scripture that talks about things like slavery, and chains, and bondage, and so on and so forth. And I think one of the one of the key things that we see very often when it comes to sin and victory over sin, is this failure to

recognize that we are not actually bound by sin anymore. We are not forced to do that. Now I know it's anecdotal and you hear it sometimes in movies and books about how you know, once a person has been enslaved or in captivity for a certain point of time they become so used to it that even if you open the doors and let them go, they would still just stay where they are. And I don't, I don't really know how much truth there really is to that. I know sometimes we see that with animals. That once they get used to a certain level of training or captivity, that's just what they do. On the cute side, you see videos of dogs all the time where they're standing outside on the front porch wanting to come in and the doors open, but they won't go anywhere until their owner walks up there and waves their hand in front of the door, because they're just convinced that they can't get through that door until that happens.

Jeff Laird

And there's so many times where we have this defeatist attitude about sin and it's worth remembering that we don't ever have to do those things. I don't have to follow that urge. I don't have to obey that base instinct. I can take advantage of what Christ has said and said. You know what, right now, just here, just in this moment, I'm going to choose to do something different. I don't have to do this right here and right now. And when we do that, that's us taking advantage of the power Gods given us. And the alternative to that is to act like victims and to say, well, I'm still permanently and forever captured. And that's how you wind up with people who are basically living like prisoners in open cages when they have the ability to be free. But they're just so ingrained in it that they think that they're not. So it's good for us to remember that freedom, chains, slavery, the Bible is using those as euphemisms for a reason.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent points both of you. Being a slave to sin versus a slave of righteousness, can be a bigger contrast in terms of the practical outworking of our lives. Like what? What are you choosing to be a slave to, something that is going to destroy you and others, or something that's going to honor God that's going to result in an abundant life. It's going to result in you being a positive influence on people's lives. It's such a huge contrast, but as we've talked as Jeff, Kevin and I have discussed, I hope you hear and see two things. One, this is a universal struggle. It still amazes me when we receive questions, I'm sure I'm the only person who's ever asked you this question about this particular sin, and we're like you are the 47th person today to ask us that question. So there's no sin that's taking you except what's common. That's something we all struggle with. So the body of Christ, other believers, accountability, encouragement can be huge in this process. Then also the multifaceted approach to overcoming sin to avail yourselves of the many different tools that are out there.

Shea Houdmann

And maybe just to conclude this episode, I'd like, I didn't prepare Jeff and Kevin for this one, so I'll give, I'll go first to give them a little time to think to through what they want to say. But maybe just one more practical point of advice that you have found that's been helpful and your ongoing battle with sin? For me I remember, I wish I could remember who actually gave me the advice, but the advice was when you're struggling with the sin, when you're tempted to engage in that sin, to indulge in it. Ask God to help you see that sin as He sees it. And often, I expected God to give me, like a hatred for that sin, just like loathing of it. Like ohh the disgust of it. And typically what's happened when I pray that prayer God gives me a sense of sadness, like remorse, pain and what that sin does both to me and what it does to others. And to me just experiencing that, having that feeling of well, not only is this sin is gross, it is

horrible. I don't want anything to do with it. But just recognizing the damage that does, sometimes permanent damage and how truly sad that is that people are engaging in that, indulging in that and reaping the consequences. That's truly a sad state of affairs and I don't want to go there. So that's something that's been very helpful for me. So, Kevin, why don't you go ahead and you can give the next little practical point of advice.

Kevin Stone

Yes, I've kind of going along with what you what your procedure is there, Shea. OK. Is just when when I'm tempted to sin and a lot of times I just want to, I want to focus on the cross. I want to, I want to remind myself of what Jesus went through to pay for this sin. This is part, you know, when I sin that's that's part of what put him on the cross. That was part of the agony that he experienced. And so it helps if I can get out a Bible and and read through one of the crucifixion passages. But if I don't have that available, I just I do, I I conjure up a a mental picture of Christ on the cross and his suffering there for sin. As he had that burden of sin placed upon himself and he was judged in my place for my sin. And when I when I see it that way, sin loses a lot of its appeal, because I don't want to be a part of that.

Jeff Laird

A lot of different topics and tips that we've brought up and you know we've talked about things like avoidance. I think for me that's one that's very important. Sort of leaning back to that sort of martial arts or self-defense analogy. I am, I am not a powerfully built individual. If you've ever seen me in person, I'm I'm. I'm not built like a linebacker. So I'm not the kind who's going to stand there and trade haymakers and and right hooks with somebody. For me, by far the best way to endure an attack is to not have my face be there when it shows up. So that means recognizing where those weaknesses might be. So I think a very important thing is to remind people that when you know what your weakness is and you know what your circumstance is, the thing that's probably going to lead you to that temptation, be ready to tell yourself in advance I'm going to stay away from that. I'm going to avoid it. As soon as I see it start to show up, I'm going to move in the other direction. And the the secret of that that you start to find is that as you learn to avoid experiencing that temptation when you can, you start to become stronger against that temptation when you can't avoid it. Because there will be times where things will just throw themselves in our faces and we can't do anything. But if we've got sort of a well developed sense of saying, I know what triggers me and I'm going to make an effort to stay away from that, then it makes it much easier over time to build up that reserve of strength in the spirit in order to stay away from that sin when somehow it hits us when we can't avoid it.

Kevin Stone

You know, when we battle against sin and we're striving for the victory, sometimes there will be defeats. Sometimes we will lose ground. And if I could just offer a word of encouragement here that the and and I read this somewhere here this past week. Can't tell you who who wrote it, but the quote is, the victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings. And that's very encouraging I think, because God's mercies are new every morning. And so when we stumble and we fall, when we fail, we need to confess the sin, get back on track, take God at his word that he will forgive that sin. He delights in mercy is one of the themes of of the Book of Psalms. And we need to just take it to the Lord and look for that new beginning.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, Kevin. And well said and be encouraged. This is a seeking victory over sin is something that every Christian should have a desire to do. And it's it's also something we all struggle with. So you are not alone. Keep studying God's word. Keep looking to God's word for the answers for how to overcome sin. Keep keep praying. Keep seeking the Lord's help. Keep relying on him. Keep availing yourselves of the other tools that God has provided us, whether that's other believers, whether that's literally escaping, physically escaping the temptation, whether it's recognizing it ahead of time so you don't put yourself in a situation where you'll be tempted beyond what you can bear, those sorts of things. So many principles. So I hope this conversation on how to achieve victory over sin has been encouraging to you. And as always, if you have any specific questions you can ask us. That's what we're here for at gotquestions.org. So this has been the Got Questions podcast on how to achieve victory over sin. Got questions Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.