

SIN IS NO JOKE

By Danny Tunnell

Things don't go well with us when we're not walking in God's ways. Sin shuts the door on God's blessings in our lives. It robs us of joy, peace, and real happiness.

Sure, sin can give us pleasure for a little while, for a season. Moses endured trouble with the people of God, rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. (Hebrews 11:25.) Sinful pleasures are not like the pleasures of God that last forever; the sinful pleasures of the world quickly fade.

Sin also has terrible side effects. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23.) "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Romans 8:6.)

God's ways don't change with the times. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and what He said is still true. He said, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will

inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11.)

In our current world culture those verses aren't considered politically correct. Especially when it comes to sexual behavior, society these days thinks anything goes. It claims that things like fornication, adultery, and homosexuality are all just fine. Those on television even laugh and make jokes about them.

Immorality is no joke! It's a deadly form of darkness that tears up people's lives. That's why the devil is trying so hard to promote it.

We live in a society that promotes detestable things and tells us that they are acceptable.

When it comes to sinful behavior, each person needs to take personal responsibility. He or she needs to own it! An individual who "comes clean" is on the way to a restored life.

Don't try to justify sinful behavior. The Old Testament King David sinned greatly, but was still a man after God's own heart. He left us a wonderful example on owning our sins. In Psalm 32:5, David said, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." In the 51st Psalm David wrote, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight." (vs. 3,4.)

Certainly David had sinned against Bathsheba, and Uriah, the nation, and even himself. "He who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." (1 Corinthians 6:18.) But ultimately all sin must be reckoned as against God.

If we judge ourselves, we won't be judged. (1 Corinthians 11:31.) The sooner sin is acknowledged and repented of, the sooner restoration is possible.

— Miami, OK

REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

By Joe Slater

In His matchless "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus made a shocking statement that really serves as the theme of the whole sermon: "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20.) What was He talking about? What was it about the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees that was deficient? How are we to exceed their righteousness?

I've heard people say that since the Pharisees gave a tithe (10%), we must give at least 11% to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Let me say it kindly but firmly: They Have Missed The Point! In fact, that sort of thinking demonstrates that they have fallen into the same trap that ensnared the Pharisees: thinking that a right

relationship with God depends merely on rote obedience to commands.

The sixth commandment forbade murder. The Pharisees thought that as long as you don't murder anyone, you're covered. But Jesus taught that the unjustified anger and hatred leading up to murder offends God, not just the physical act of murder. (Matthew 5:21-26.)

The seventh command forbade adultery. Don't have sexual relations with another's spouse and you're good, so the Pharisees would say. But Jesus taught that the lust leading up to the physical act was sin. The heart is important, not just the physical act. (Matthew 5:27-30.)

The rest of the Sermon on the Mount continues to emphasize the heart, not just rote commandment-keeping.

God's commandments are important! But God has ever and always wanted obedience from the heart, not mere mechanical compliance.

— Justin, TX

"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it." (Psalm 139:1-6.)

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

TOO LATE TO STOP THE TRAIN

By Bobby Dockery

A public service TV ad, urging caution when approaching a railroad crossing, notes that a train traveling 30 mph takes half a mile to come to a full stop. Many tragic accidents result from careless drivers approaching the track when it is already too late for an oncoming train to stop.

The Old Testament story of King Josiah provides a striking parallel. Josiah was not the wisest, or richest, or strongest king militarily - but no other King ever matched his wholehearted devotion to God. Josiah was a reformer dedicated to purging his land of false religion. He began repairs to the temple which was in a ruinous state. During this work, the Book of the Law of God was found in the ruins. When it was read in the King's presence, he tore his clothes in grief! He realized his people had been guilty of appalling violations of God's law because they had lost sight of God's Book! God's spokesman declared that Jerusalem would be destroyed because of its sinful neglect of His word. Destruction was coming and nothing could stop it. The reforms of Josiah came too late! God had already set in motion the events by which Jerusalem would be overthrown!

The lesson is clear: There is a point of no return in God's dealings with man.

1) This is True of Nations. Man in the 21st Century has tried to remove God from history. We seek to confine God's sphere of operation to the church house, while assuming that the affairs of state are directed by congresses and parliaments. We talk glibly about the "separation of church and state" as though such a thing were even possible! God cannot be separated from the State because governments rise and fall at His will. Acts 17:26 proclaims that it is God who determines the appointed times of nations and sets the boundaries of their habitation. History is nothing but the record of God at work among nations! God has repeatedly overthrown nations when their cup of iniquity became full. (cf. Romans 1:8.) What of America??? Is it too late to stop the train?

2) This is True of Families. Many families are failing to provide spiritual training for their children. They make no attempt to attend church or study the Bible regularly. Life's spiritual dimension is totally neglected. Perhaps they promise themselves: "Someday we will find time for God!" But Solomon warned that we can wait too long! "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you shall say, 'I have no delight in them.'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1.) We can wait too long to provide spiritual guidance for our families.

3) This is True of Individuals. We can wait until it is too late to escape the consequences of sin in our own lives. It is possible to remain so long apart from Christ that no place is found for repentance. (cf. Hebrews 12:17.) Hearts can harden in neglect; We can become so entangled in sin that we find it impossible to leave! There is a point of no return for the soul!

Though most people try not to think about it there is a coming day of reckoning with God. The time to prepare for that coming day of Judgment is now! Then it will be too late!

— Fayetteville, AR

"HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE?"

By Bobby Key

Have you ever known a person to be pronounced healthy at a medical checkup only to be dead of a heart attack within 24 hours? Death comes upon some of us quite suddenly, and with little apparent warning, and yet with others the tell-tale signs are there sometimes months or years before the departure comes.

God has been generous to His people in that He has always given ample warning. Before destroying the world by water, he gave notice 120 years in advance. The Jews were adequately warned before they were taken into captivity and finally destroyed as a nation; however they paid no heed to God's prophets and went right on sinning.

The wise king said, "Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." (Ecclesiastes 7:29.) The people of God have never been faithful to the old paths for very long.

Too many today are wanting something new and different. The errors that are being propagated by some and innovations that are being urged by others, as bad as they are, are not nearly as disturbing as the apathy of the brotherhood in general toward such things. We are in great danger of losing our identity as the New Testament church and most don't even know it. Perhaps some of our people are like Samson; the Lord departed from him and he knew it not! (Judges 16:20.)

Some of our people are openly declaring the church to be just another denomination; they say that it doesn't matter what a Christian believes or teaches about premillennialism, instrumental music, fellowship or even baptism for remission of sins. And all the while, many others see no problem, no dangers, and no warning signals, seeming to say, "We hear no evil, we see no evil, why bother? Let's just love everybody, criticize nobody, and live in peace."

Ephraim ignored the gray hairs. Hosea said, "Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it." (Hosea 7:9.) Because of neglect and evil associations, the once proud nation had its strength sapped. Without realizing it, Ephraim had become like the heathen about him. Israel had grown old in iniquity and the time of captivity was at hand, yet they were aware of no danger. They were in the state of a silly old man, who through age and infirmity had become nearly bald, and with the few remaining hairs of the head turning quite gray, yet not realizing or acknowledging the situation. How pathetic.

"Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (Mark 8:18)

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

By Dalton Key

How long has it been since you slowed down, sat down, turned off the television, and spent some quality time with the Bible?

You say you just can't fit Bible reading into your busy schedule? You'll have to invent a better excuse than that. Did you know an average reader can complete reading the entire Bible in a year's time, by reading just fifteen to twenty minutes a day? Many of the Bible's books can be finished, from first to last, in less than ten minutes. Surely you can find a few minutes each day for the instruction and protection of your soul.

You say the Bible is "over your head" and too difficult for you to read and understand? Believe it or not, the average word in the Bible contains fewer than five letters. Most translations use language at about a fourth-grade reading level. Heaven has designed this marvelous book so as to be available and understandable to all of us, highly educated or not. Isaiah wrote of the "Highway of Holiness," concerning which "whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray." (Isaiah 35:8.) If fools, which Albert Barnes identified as "the simple, the unlearned," can grasp the clear message and meaning of the Bible, I'm sure you'll be able to get something out of it.

You say you have no interest in the Bible? How could you not be interested in the world's most reliable source of information regarding your origin, your purpose for living, and your existence beyond this life? As the very word of God, the Bible is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12.) The Psalmist should be speaking for all of us in proclaiming, "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver . . . How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:72, 103.)

Don't you think the time has come for the excuses to stop and for regular, quality time with the Book of Books to begin?

If not now, when?

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of sinners, But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1,2.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

WHAT ARE YOU AIMING AT?

By Dalton Key

C. S. Lewis once said, "Aim at heaven and you'll get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you'll get neither."

He couldn't have been any more on target!

Ask any sportsman. Ask any athlete. Ask the Apostle Paul. They'll all tell you the same thing: aim is everything. Note Paul's words to the brethren at Philippi: "Brothers, I do not consider myself to have laid hold, but I do one thing: forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, I press toward the goal, toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13,14.)

The apostle knew what he wanted, knew where he was headed, and took definite aim in that direction. A few verses later he wrote, "Our citizenship is in heaven." (Philippians 3:20.)

With this in mind, these further words from the inspired Paul seem especially worthy of our attention: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on the things on the earth." (Colossians 3:1,2.) "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Romans 8:6.) "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." (Galatians 6:7,8.) "While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18.)

This is in perfect agreement with our Lord's directive: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also . . . But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . ." (Matthew 6:19-21, 33.)

Dogs anxiously scour the ground looking for odd scraps and crusty crumbs. They care nothing, they know nothing of higher things. But we are not dogs. Those of us created in the very image of God have been made for more; we have been blessed with the capacity for looking up, to heaven itself, and laying our treasures up there.

What are you aiming at?

**WASHAWAY BEACH**

By Caleb Boggs

In the year, 1884, North Cove, Washington became a community intended to be a luxurious beach destination. Dozens of homes, a schoolhouse, a lighthouse, a Coast Guard station, and many other brick buildings were erected alongside North Cove's Cape Shoalwater. These structures have since been swallowed up by the sea.

Washaway Beach, as the strip has come to be known, is the fastest-eroding place on the West Coast. For the past century, coastal erosion has stolen a yearly average of 100 feet of shoreline. Over 150 homes have been claimed by the water. Even to this day, the homes and livelihoods of many North Cove residents are threatened by the waves of Washaway Beach.

Recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:24-29: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does

them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Where have you built your house? Wherever it's been established, rain will find it. (Matthew 5:45.)

In spite of this, you have reason for peace of mind if you hear Christ's words and do them. If your house is built on the Lord Jesus Christ, if your faith is founded upon the rock, it is stronger than any storm.

However, if you hear Christ's words and do not put them into

practice, grab a raincoat. A person whose faith is founded on anything other than obedience to Christ is doomed to witness their housing fall with a great crash.

"On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand."

— Neosho, MO

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25.)

"I DO NOT PRAY FOR THESE ALONE"

By Milton Smith

One of the most intriguing chapters in the Bible is the seventeenth chapter of John. It is in this chapter that we read Jesus' magnificent prayer to the Father for his people. Over the years, this prayer has been referred to as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" and "The Real Lord's Prayer." I've always liked that latter title because, technically speaking, this is indeed the Lord's prayer. The other prayer that we often refer to by this title could probably be more accurately called "the disciple's prayer" or "the model prayer."

In this amazing prayer in John's seventeenth chapter, Jesus pours out His heart to the Father and includes you and me in his requests! While praying for the apostles, Jesus quickly adds, in verse 20, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."

What an amazing thought! It encourages me to know that Jesus prayed for me two thousand years ago. And he prayed for you as well, because our Lord prayed for all who would believe on Him through the

inspired words of the apostles. I do not profess to fully understand the Divine mind, but I rejoice to know that Jesus included you and me in that wonderful prayer to the Father. Before the world began, Jesus loved us, and 2000 years before we arrived in this world, He prayed for us. This is truly an amazing thought.

You and I belong to Jesus in a very unique way via the new birth. It is a very personal relationship that we share with our Savior. Jesus loves all the world, but He has a special love for those who make the choice to become a member of His spiritual family.

How could Jesus love us before we were ever born? The same way parents who are anticipating the birth of a child already love that child before he/she is physically born into this world. When parents pick out a name for a yet-to-be-born child, they already love that child! Jesus already loves the future sheep of his fold.

As Paul pondered so many years ago in his Roman epistle, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the

wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" (Romans 11:33, 34.)

— Tulsa, OK

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