

What Does the Bible Teach About Greater and Besetting Sins?

Trilacoochee church of Christ
Indepth Bible Class - 6/18/20

Four Lessons On Sin

- Greater and besetting sins
- Intentional, deliberate sins
- Secret sins
- Sins committed inadvertently and in ignorance

The Bible Speaks Of Various Kinds Of Sins

- Secret sins; known only by God and the sinner
 - Psalm 19:12 - “...Cleanse me from secret faults.”
- Besetting sins; constantly attacking, ongoing temptation
 - Heb. 12:1 - “...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us...” (KJV)
- Presumptuous sins; shameless, irreverent, and careless
 - Psalm 19:13 - “Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.”

The Bible Speaks Of Various Kinds Of Sins

- Willful sins; deliberate, voluntarily, without consideration of others or consequences
 - Heb. 10:26-27 - “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”

The Bible Speaks Of Various Kinds Of Sins

- Weakness, ignorance, and inadvertence - sin that overtakes the vulnerable
 - Gal. 6:1 - “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”
 - 1Tim. 1:13 - “Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

The Bible Affirms Greater Sins

- John 19:11 - “Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’”
- While we may judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must trust judgment of persons and their sins to the justice and mercy of God

The Bible Affirms Greater Sins

- It takes advantage of the weak and vulnerable
 - Amos 5:12 - “For I know your manifold transgressions And your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor from justice at the gate.”
- It dismisses consequences
 - Lam. 1:8 - “Jerusalem has sinned gravely, Therefore she has become vile. All who honored her despise her Because they have seen her nakedness; Yes, she sighs and turns away.”

The Bible Affirms Greater Sins

- It publicly defies God
 - 2Kings 17:21 - “For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them commit great sin”
 - Ex. 32:21, 30-31 - “And Moses said to Aaron, What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them? ... 30 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. 31 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold!”

The Bible Affirms Greater Sins

- It involves and harms many others
 - 2Sam. 24:10 - “And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”
 - 1Chron. 21:8 - “So David said to God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

The Bible Affirms Greater Sins

- Committed by those with greater responsibility
 - John 19:11 - “Jesus answered, You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”
 - James 3:1 - “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

There Are Distinctions In Bible Words For Sin

- Hebrew “pasha” - “great transgression, rebellion; transgression against individuals, nations, or God; it is recognized by the sinner; it is addressed, punished or forgiven by God” (Strong’s H6588)
- Hebrew “chata” - “to go wrong, incur guilt, forfeit, an uncleanness; to miss the goal or path of right and duty; to bring into guilt, condemnation, or punishment” (Strong’s H2398)
- Hebrew “avon” - “perversity, depravity, iniquity, guilt or punishment of iniquity; guilt of condition” (Strong’s H5771)

There Are Distinctions In Bible Words For Sin

- One may unintentionally “miss the mark” (chata); one may have a weak, depraved nature; and, though these are still sins, it is not as if one had rebelled against God (pesha). In the latter case, one is guilty of “the great transgression” - Psalm 19:13

Bible Principles Regarding Greater Sins

- This does not mean that some sins are consequential and others are not
- What do the scriptures teach?
 - Eve only ate one piece of fruit
 - Lot's wife only took a single gaze backward
 - The Israelite only picked up a few sticks on the Sabbath
 - Achan only took a small wedge of gold and a robe
 - Uzzah only put one hand on the Ark of the Covenant

Bible Principles Regarding Greater Sins

- All sin, whether large or small in Bible description or our own estimation, will keep one out of heaven.
 - Heb. 2:1-3 - “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him”
 - John 8:21 - “Then Jesus said to them again, I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.”
 - Rev. 21:27 - “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.”

Bible Principles Regarding Greater Sins

- Any un-repented sin is enough to render one a sinner, cause him to be lost, and to void all the good things he did toward an eternal reward
 - James 2:10 - “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”
- Humans presume to classify sins on behalf of God
 - Murder, adultery, and stealing are big sins, great evils
 - Jealousy, random dishonesty, and gossip are little sins, character flaws

Bible Principles Regarding Greater Sins

- Was the prodigal son worse than the older brother? - Luke 15:11-32
- “There is no little sin, because there is no little God to sin against.” (Matthew Henry)
- “There is no distinction between big and little when talking about snakes. They are all snakes.” (Indian proverb)

What are “Besetting Sins”?

- In the life of every individual, there is a besetting sin that persistently stands between him and God.
- It differs from person to person. What is a besetting sin to one may not tempt another.
 - With Moses it was anger
 - With David it was desire for women
 - With Abraham it was fear for his life

What are “Besetting Sins”?

- It is a sin that one finds particularly hard for him to resist and often finds himself easily tangled in it
- The Hebrew writer insists that these sins in particular must be overcome or we will be unable to make progress in our journey to heaven

Defining Besetting Sins

- Easily beset - “εὐπερίστατος: easily ensnaring, obstructing, constricting; that which easily surrounds as a garment that winds around and hinders, clinging closely; easily encircles or entangles, like a loose flowing robe”
(International Critical Commentary)
- Euperistatos - “a competitor thwarting a racer in every direction; figuratively, of sins that tangle and hinder” *(Strongs)*

Defining Besetting Sins

- Besetting sins are those which cling close to us and are easily committed by us.
- Besetting sins may be those indulged before obeying the Gospel; easily falling back into old, familiar patterns.
- Besetting sins may be those we are drawn to due to temperament, such as pride, laziness, skepticism, or stubbornness.
- Besetting sins may be those to which we are exposed by our profession.
- Besetting sins may be those we are particularly vulnerable due to weakness, by nature or nurture: smoking, drinking, drug abuse, stealing, bigotry, gossip, attention, pornography

Besetting Sins Of God's People

- Peter had a weakness for impulsive, inconsistent behavior - Matt. 26:33-75
- Moses was beset with impatience - Num. 20:7-12
- James and John were beset with anger and harshness toward others - Luke 9:51-56
- Simon the sorcerer was beset with covetousness - Acts 8:18-21
- David wrote a confession Psalm after succumbing to his own besetting sin - Psalm 51:1-3, 7-12

Psalm 51:1-3, 7-12 - <<A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.>>
“Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me... 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.”

Besetting Sins Can Be Overcome

- 1Cor. 10:13 - “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”
- Gal. 5:16 - “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Besetting Sins Can Be Overcome

- The Corinthians overcame their besetting sins
 - 1Cor. 6:9-11 - “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. 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. 11 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.”

Besetting Sins Can Be Overcome

- The Colossians overcame their besetting sins
 - Col. 3:5-7 - “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them”

Besetting Sins Can Be Overcome

- Paul overcame his besetting sins
 - 1Tim. 1:12-13 - “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man...”
 - 1Cor. 9:27 - “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

Besetting Sins Can Be Intensified

- By returning to former associates in the besetting sins
 - 1Cor. 15:33 - “Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits”
- By returning to places that facilitate the besetting sins
 - 2Peter 2:20 - “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.”

Besetting Sins Can Be Intensified

- By failing to fill the void left by besetting sins
 - Luke 11:24-26 - “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, I will return to my house from which I came. 25 And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. 26 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

How To Overcome Besetting Sins

- Make no opportunities for besetting sins
 - Rom. 13:14 - “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”
 - 2Tim. 2:22 - “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”
 - Gen. 39:12 - “She caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.”

How To Overcome Besetting Sins

- Cultivate a mind that is unfavorable for the besetting sin. Keep your mind saturated with spiritual things
 - Isa. 26:3 - “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.”
 - Rom. 8:5-6 - “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

How To Overcome Besetting Sins

- Overcome the besetting sin through Christ
 - John 15:5 - “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”
 - Phil. 4:13 - “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
 - Heb. 12:2 - “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”

All Sins Are Resolved By The Same Means

- Just as all sin will bring death...
 - Rom. 6:23 - “For the wages of sin is death...”
 - James 1:14-15 - “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”
 - Ez. 18:20 - “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

All Sins Are Resolved By The Same Means

- ...So will any sin, repented of scripturally and from the heart, be blotted out and forgiven, including greater and besetting sins
 - 1John 1:7-10 - “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”
 - Mark 3:28-30 - “Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; 29 but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation”

All Sins Are Resolved By The Same Means

- Sins are greater or besetting because of the condition of the heart from whence they are committed
- Sins are greater or besetting in that they are greater in their temporal consequences and by the number of vulnerable persons impacted by them.
 - 1John 3:15 - “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

All Sins Are Resolved By The Same Means

- Sins are greater or besetting in that the punishment is often proportionate to the sin and the heart of the sinner
 - Luke 12:47-48 - “And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. 48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

All Sins Are Resolved By The Same Means

- The punishment in eternity will not be less in duration, only in degree and extent of sorrow over regrets
 - Matt. 25:46 - “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
 - 2Peter 2:20-21 - “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.”
- We are not just punished for our sins; we are punished by them

All Sins Are Resolved By The Same Means

- God is waiting to forgive us of all sins, even the greater and besetting ones
 - Matt. 18:11-14 - “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”
- “When we stray from His presence, He longs for us to come back. He weeps that we are missing His active love, protection and provision. He throws His arms open, reaches toward us, gathers us up, and welcomes us home.” (C. Stanley)