

Hyper-Grace and the Consequences of Sin

In the past several months, there has been a lot written regarding grace. My goal in this article is to make clear the difference between grace, which is God's undeserved gracious actions and gifts towards us related to our salvation in Christ, and the consequences of sin that come from numerous sources and places.

It has been said that once we as believers in Christ Jesus confess our sins, God remembers them no more (Heb. 8:12; Ps. 103:12). Some have taken this to mean we can just go on with our lives, as if the sin never happened. But the reality is, based on the severity of the sin committed (yes, some sins are worse than others, according to Scripture; read John 19:11, Luke 12:47-48 and 1 John 5:16-17), there are various ramifications that arise related to God's discipline, opening a door to Satan, destroying relationships and our own heart condition.

To me, a worse thing that happens when I sin against the Lord is that I grieve the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit that lives inside of me is grieved, then I am grieved as well, and it causes great sorrow in my soul.

Regarding repentance: There is a difference between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and condemnation that leads me away from the Lord (2 Cor. 7:9-11). Godly sorrow does not just involve mere confession of sin with words but also a heartfelt searching of one's own soul so the Holy Spirit can "put the axe to the root of the tree" and transform the heart.

There are even times when our close fellowship or intimacy with God is affected. Even though we are still saved and our sins forgiven, we can at times lack that sense of closeness

and nearness to the presence of God. (I believe this is also a way God disciplines us so we will not be so quick to sin in the same manner again; He momentarily takes away our sweet fellowship and sense of His presence, while at the same time we still have an assurance that we are His children.)

Of course, sometimes not sensing God's strong presence can be another way God is dealing with our process of maturing in Christ. Some have called this "the dark night of the soul," which many saints have claimed to experience, at times not related to a conscious act of committing a sin.

After his sins of murder and adultery (2 Sam. 11), David prayed that God would not take away His Spirit from him (I believe, in this case, he was referring to fellowship with God; read Psalm 51:11). Psalm 66:18 says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart the Lord would not have listened."

In addition, Ephesians 4:30 says not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. In John 14:21, Jesus says those who love Him will keep His commandments and those who keep His commandments the Father and Jesus will love and will manifest themselves to.

Finally, 1 Peter 3:12 says the eyes and ears of the Lord are open toward the prayers of the righteous but His face is against those who do evil. (Those who do evil in this context are not unbelievers but Christians because this epistle was written to the elect, not to the gnostics or to another heretical group.) When God turns His face away from someone, it has to do with lack of intimacy, not necessarily salvation.

Fellowship is when we subjectively experience God's fellowship, hear God's voice and enjoy His companionship. On the other hand, salvation is our objective, legal-positional standing of righteousness with God based on a person's trust in the vicarious death, burial and resurrection of Christ, in which His righteousness has been imputed to us through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:21-27). Our feelings and sense of God's

presence at times varies, but our salvation in Christ depends upon His righteousness and remains firm and secure!

Sin can wreak havoc in our lives because of unrepentant sin, which opens a door to Satan. Ephesians 4:27 admonishes us not to give Satan an opportunity. The context of this passage has to do with speaking corrupt words from our mouths, holding on to bitterness, unforgiveness, acting like a thief and stealing from others.

As a pastor for almost 30 years, I have experienced firsthand the enormous spiritual warfare that is unleashed when either I or someone in our congregation opens a door to the devil, either through sin or a lack of wisdom in their actions. When Satan gets involved, he distorts, embellishes and magnifies everything so that, in addition to an individual's sin, lies are tacked on to the sin, which results in a distortion of the truth through maligning character and slander. For example, if you were caught stealing \$100, by the time Satan gets finished with the story, the story is that \$1,000 has been absconded, and it is much worse than what actually happened.

Along with this, unrepentant sin also destroys key relationships. For example, if a person commits adultery, even though they may have repented and asked God to forgive them, the trust they broke may result in divorce and the loss of family, friends and even ministry.

Even though God forgives us, there are certain qualifications He gives for those qualified to serve as a leader in His house (as shown in 1 Timothy 3:1-15). Although our sins can be forgiven and forgotten by God in the context of our legal standing as His children, the consequences of those sins follow us throughout our lives and may cause us to step aside in ministry for a time until full restoration is complete.

All relationships in life are fragile because they are built upon trust. Thus, although we may confess our sins to God and

be forgiven, this does not mean others will forget the sin. Relational sins cause wounds that can only be removed by an act of God's restorative power that sometimes, through the eyes of wounded relationships, can take years to recover.

Finally, when we sin, we run the risk of reorienting our hearts and minds away from the mind and heart of God. Proverbs 4:23 says to "keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

As a passionate person, I have intentionally attempted to fill my heart daily with the things of God as well as to avoid those sinful things that pull upon my heart. I am well aware of the fact the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick, who can understand it (Jer. 17:9)? Hence, I am afraid of my own heart's sinful desires, and I take heed to the admonition in Proverbs to guard, keep and protect my heart! In my 35 years as a Christian, I have seen many sincere, on-fire believers totally fall away from God because they allowed a sinful area of their lives to remain undealt with in the presence of the Lord.

Furthermore, certain sins are so addictive to a person that, once entertained and acted upon, it is difficult to gain back the ground lost with God because the sin has captured and reprogrammed their soul. Proverbs 2:19 is a scary warning for a young man not to follow the way of a seductress: "None who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life."

Even though the book of Proverbs sometimes engages in hyperbole to make a point, this passage should be a reality check for anyone contemplating intentionally opening a door to sin. I have seen many people recover and be restored from drug addiction, pornography, adultery and the like; but I have also seen many not restored who battle their entire lives with these issues because they allowed their hearts to experience something pleasurable in the natural that is destructive to their hearts and minds.

Finally, we need to take heed to the last words God spoke to Cain before he murdered his brother Abel: "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7).

Joseph Mattera has been in full-time ministry since 1980 and is currently the presiding bishop of Christ Covenant Coalition and the overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church in New York, a multiethnic congregation of 40 nationalities. He has hosted his own radio show, Light Your City, and a weekly cable television program, The Ekklesia. He is the author of four theological books on the kingdom of God, entitled Ruling in the Gates (2003), Kingdom Revolution (2009), Kingdom Awakening (2010) and Walk in Generational Blessings (2012).