

The Sin Which No Believer Can Commit

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Philippians 3:1-14

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Sometimes when we read a Scripture like I read this morning...turn to Numbers again, chapter 12 and read about the sins and the failures of some of God's choice people like Moses, others. We are inclined to be a little harsh and a little critical. That is what Miriam and Aaron did over here in Numbers 12.

You know, Moses married this woman. She wasn't an Israelite. She wasn't of the people of Israel. She was an Ethiopian. Why he did that I do not know, neither did Miriam and Aaron and they got out of sorts about it. That is what it says here in Numbers 12 verse one. "And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses harshly, critically, because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married for he married an Ethiopian woman, not an Israelite, not one of the people who journeyed with them, but a stranger." That is strange, isn't it?

But I read some time ago this statement, "Speak tenderly and carefully of the sins of the saints of God recorded in the Word of God."

While God in his Word does not hide the sins and failures of his people as most biographies do. Most biographies that you read, they are very careful to make the person appear to be much better than he really is. But not the Word of God. The Word of God does not hide the sins and the failures of his people. But when we read about their sins and their failures, let's remember three things. And here are the three things to remember.

Remember, number one, they are his people. They are his children. And he will deal with those who mistreat his children like he did with Miriam and Aaron for mistreating Moses.

Turn to Matthew chapter 18. In Matthew chapter 18 it says here that...I want to begin with verse four, Matthew 18. Our Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child," that is, one of his little children. He is not talking about receiving infants, but receiving one who has been converted and becomes as a little child, one of God's children, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones," one of his little ones, "which believe in me, a person who believes in me, it were better for him that a millstone

were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.” Don’t mistreat God’s children. That is what he is saying.

Miriam learned that. God turned her into a leper because she spoke so harshly against Moses. So remember, number one, they are his children.

Number two, that even their failures will serve God’s purpose and be an example to us.

Turn to Romans 15. This is what he is saying here in Romans chapter 15. All of these things that happened unto them, even the unbelief of Israel in the wilderness, all of these things that happened to them in Romans 15:4, well, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” These things that are written back here, whatever they might be are for our example and for our learning and for our instruction either to avoid or to follow them.

And then, thirdly, turn to Galatians chapter six. “Speak tenderly,” the author said, “speak tenderly and carefully of the sins of the saints and the Old Testament believers because they are God’s children.” And, secondly, all of these experiences through which God brought them were for our learning, our example.

Thirdly, our Lord exhorts us by his apostle to be careful how we treat the fallen believer considering ourselves lest we be tempted. Look at Galatians six, verse one. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fall you that are spiritual, you that are mature, restore such a one, how? In the spirit of meekness and humility considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. And bear ye one another’s infirmities and failures and so fulfill what law? The royal law of Christ, the law of love. Love one another as I have loved you.”

So we have in the Lord’s Word the sins and infirmities of some of his choice servants vividly described, serious offenses. And while we do not understand them, yet still God was pleased to record them. For example, Jacob conspired with his mother to deceive his father and steal his brother’s birthright.

Abraham was willing to give his wife to another to save his own life. This is a man of faith. This is the man who believed God. This is the man who left his own country and went out not knowing where he went.

Lot greedily—and the Scripture calls him righteous Lot—righteous Lot greedily chose the plains, the well watered plains of Sodom and left the mountains for Abraham. And when he went down to live among those people—and this is something that is amazing—he called them brethren. When they came in to take the angels out of his house he said, “Brethren, don’t do this.” Isn’t that strange?

Jonah rebelled against God’s command to go and preach to people and fled to Tarsus rather than preach God’s warning to Nineveh.

David sacrificed a friend to cover his own sins. He had him killed.

Solomon built temples to idols to keep his pagan wives happy.

Peter sat by the fire and even denied that he knew Christ.

And not only are these open failures recorded in God's Word, but our Lord exposes the little things, the little foxes that spoil the vines, the little things that are the greatest weaknesses of his people.

The apostle Peter could walk on water, at least attempt it, but he couldn't stand up under the accusations of a little girl. Isn't that something? He could step out of a boat and walk on water, at least attempt it. Fearless. But one little girl said, "You are a disciple." He said, "No I am not."

Job, think about Job. He could endure the loss of all his possessions, the loss of all his children and yet when these three men gathered around him and accused him of various things he couldn't stand up under that kind of pressure. He wilted and defended himself.

When they came and told him his children were all dead and everything he didn't charge God with foolishness, he put on sackcloth and ashes and worshipped God. And then these fellows started hitting at him and he fought back, he fought back. "Thou he slay me I will trust him." But when they started accusing him of false things, false accusations, he got angry.

Elijah could face 300 false prophets and destroy them. And he ran from the wrath of one lone woman. He ran up to the hills.

David could face and defeat a nine foot giant, but he couldn't handle his own fleshly lust.

Jonah could face death in the sea. They said to him, "Somebody is responsible for this."

He said, "I am the one. Throw me overboard. Throw me overboard."

And then he sat down under a gourd that had provided him with shade and during the day the sun came out and the gourd died and he got mad at the gourd.

And God said, "Are you right to get mad at a gourd?"

This is a man that says, "Throw me overboard." And yet he got mad at a gourd.

It reminds me of folks getting mad at a bowling ball because it goes in the gutter or a golf ball that goes in the woods or something else, you know. We can handle big things, but we just have an awful hard time with little things. And that is just it. That's sin.

John Newton once said, I want you to listen to this. If you don't pick it up right away, chew on it a little while, but think about it. We have been talking here about the sins of the saint in big things, serious matters. Also their courage in great matters and their failure in little matters, mountains and valleys. But John Newton said, "The grace of God, the grace of God is as much needed to create in me a right attitude over the breaking of a dish as over the death of a child. The grace of God is as much needed to create in me the right attitude over the breaking of a dish as over the death of a child."

Actually, sometimes we can handle big things a whole lot easier than we can handle little things. And that is what makes us say, "Oh, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Turn to Acts. I want to show you something over here. I'm sure you have seen it before. But here is the apostle Paul, a giant of God, illustrious apostle, planter of churches, receiver of revelations, had a dear friend called Barnabas. They were...they went out the first missionary journey. They went out from Antioch.

"Separate unto me Paul and Barnabas," God said, "For the work whereto I have called them."

These men went out among the heathen and preached the gospel. Came back and reported what God had done for them and through them and with them. Now they were getting ready to leave on another missionary trip. Acts 15, verse 36. "And some days after, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let's go again, now, and visit our brethren in every city where we preached the Word of the Lord and see how they do.' And Barnabas determined to take with them John whose surname was Mark." Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. "But Paul thought not good to take John Mark with them." John Mark departed from them from Pamphylia and went not with them to the work. Something happened there. He left them.

Paul just never got straightened out over it. And you would think, now, here are two giants, I mean giants. I mean men who knew God, men who walked with God.

The apostle Paul, the greatest apostle who ever lived, bar none, a man of God, a man who saw the Lord, a man who had his gospel straight from God. It looks like he and Barnabas could work this thing out. Wouldn't you think so? Wouldn't you think so?

Nope.

And the Lord doesn't hide these things. "And the contention, the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from another."

Isn't that true? Barnabas took Mark with him. That is what he was determined to do to start with and sailed to Cyprus. And Paul chose Silas and departed being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. God greatly used Paul and Silas. And he greatly used Mark and Barnabas. And later on Paul was in prison and he said, "Come see me

and bring John Mark with you. He is important to me.” That’s right. That’s what...bring John Mark.

So this is what I am saying .I am saying this to me. I am addressing myself and I am addressing the Lord’s people here tonight. Speak tenderly and gently and kindly concerning the infirmities or failures or flaws or diversities or whatever of the Lord’s people because they are his people. They are his children and he loves them and he is not going to let us mistreat him or anybody else. Just like you are jealous for your children.

I know my children’s faults. And you know your children’s faults. But don’t crowd them. You know, isn’t that right? Don’t crowd them because they are mine. They are mine. And I tell you. What we would be with out faults. If we didn’t...if we didn’t have to weep we would be so proud and arrogant and lifted up we would never pray. We would never beg God’s forgiveness, never would say, “I’m sorry.”

And then let’s consider ourselves lest we be tempted and fall.

All right. But now here is my subject tonight. But I am convinced, I am convinced that while we are at home in this body and we are absent from the Lord and we are subject, we are subject to faults and failures and infirmities and flesh and we are subject to these things just like these men about whom we have been reading, but there is one area and one sin that a believer does not commit and cannot commit. There is one area in which a believer cannot err. He cannot err here. He cannot. He will not. He must not.

That is, he cannot and will not deny the efficacy and sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. He cannot and will not do that, by no means. And he cannot and will not trust his own righteousness before God. He cannot, he just can’t do it. God will save a sinner, but not a Pharisee. God will save a sinner, but not a self righteous man. God will save a murderer, but he won’t save a man who trusts his own righteousness.

So I am saying with all of the faults and failures and infirmities with which we are plagued, there is one that the believer cannot commit. He cannot trust his own righteousness. He cannot deny the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a song in our book. There are about three of the verses, but I found some more and it says this. I am talking about his blood and his righteousness now, his blood and his righteousness.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold I stand now and in that day
For who ought to my charge shall lay
Fully forgiven through these I am (blood and righteousness)

From sin, from fear, from guilt, from shame.

And this spotless robe, the same appears,
When ruined nature seeks in years
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.

When from the dust of death I rise
To take my dwelling in the skies
Even this, even then shall this be all my plea,
That Jesus lived and died for me.

I cannot deny that. I will not deny that. It is impossible to deny that. It is impossible to trust my righteousness and his. It can't be done.

Oh let the dead now hear thy voice,
Bid, Lord, thy people all rejoice,
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus thy blood and righteousness.

All right. Let's look at Philippians three. And this is what Paul is saying here, Philippians chapter, Philippians three.

He says, "Brethren," I want to begin with verse one. "Finally brethren, my brethren, the theme of this book, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you..." What are these same things? The grace of God in Christ, the mercy of God in Christ, the blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ. That is these things. This theme I am on tonight is a theme I have been on 44 years. Jesus they blood and righteousness. "And to write these same things to you to me that is not tiresome. That is not tiresome. That is not grievous. For you it is safe. Now beware of dogs." That is false prophets in general. Beware of dogs, all sorts of false religious leaders.

Take a moment. Turn to Isaiah 56. Here is the Scripture that Paul is referring to there, Isaiah 56. Beware of dogs.

You say, "That's a harsh statement."

I know it. But I know it, but folks who compromise the truth of God deserve it. Isaiah called them dogs. He said in Isaiah 56, verse 10, "His watchmen are blind. They are all ignorant. They are all dumb dogs." They are supposed to be watch dogs, but they don't bark. They sleep, lying down, loving to slumber. They are greedy dogs which can never have enough. They are shepherds that cannot understand. They all look to their own way, everyone for his own gain from his own quarter. Beware of these dogs, covetous, self serving, self seeking preachers. Flee from them. Beware of evil workers. Who are these? Folks in Matthew seven, preaches and religious people who use the name of

Christ for their own works and their own glory. They said, "Lord, we preached in your name. We did many wonderful works in your name. We cast out devils in your name."

He said, "Depart from me ye evil workers." Workers of iniquity. That's who they are. Beware of them. Beware of them.

And then, thirdly, beware of the concision. Here are three kinds of preachers here. The general covetous, self seeking, self serving preachers, the workers of iniquity, religious iniquity, using the name of God for their own advantage. And the concision here, they are the flesh merchants, the circumcisers, the legalists, the law preachers, those who want to bring you out of your freedom back under the bondage of the ceremonial law; days and diets and doings and duties and all these things. Beware of them.

For he says, verse three, "We are the circumcision. We are true Israel." And he gives three marks. Number one, we worship God in the spirit, not in form, not in tradition, not in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in the spirit. That is what our Lord says. He told that woman at the well, "You worship...you don't know what you worship."

"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain. You Jews worship in Jerusalem."

He said, "The day is coming when men shall worship God neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem. God is spirit. We worship him in spirit."

Listen. We rejoice in Christ Jesus, only in Christ. He is our Messiah. He is our Redeemer. He is our righteousness. And we have no confidence in the flesh.

Ah, the apostle Paul believed what Roland Hill said, "No sermon should be preached with out 'ruined by the fall, redemption by the blood and regeneration by the Spirit.'" And here it is just reversed. Regeneration by the Spirit, we worship God in the Spirit; redemption by the blood, we rejoice in Christ; ruined by the fall, we have no confidence in this flesh."

Now, then, verse four, "Though I might have confidence in the flesh. If any other man think that he hath whereof he might trust in his works or in his righteousness or in his flesh...is anybody...does anybody anywhere," Paul says, "feel like that he has any right to trust in his own righteousness? Well, I more. If it could be so." For he says, verse five, "I was circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel. Of the tribe of Benjamin, the beloved, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As touching the law a Pharisee, concerning zeal persecuting the Church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

Ah, but, but, "What things..." And here is the testimony of every believer. "What things I knew, what things I had, what things I boasted of, what things I possessed, what things I trusted, what things I experienced, all these things that were gain to me and important to me and...I count them loss. Put them in the loss column."

You people who have businesses. You have your assets and liabilities. You have got your gain column and loss column. Paul said, "Take everything that you are, know, have, believe, trusted in back yonder under your own righteousness and put it in the loss column. Put it in the loss column. I count it but loss for Christ."

That is the believer's testimony. Yea, and without a doubt, watch this, now, "Yeah, doubtless..." I am saying that a believer cannot, will not, cannot plead his righteousness to God. He cannot. The blood and righteousness of Christ is his very life, hope and foundation and in that area he will not fail.

"Yea, doubtless..." Where have you see that word before? Doubtless, without doubt. John wrote in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us because they weren't of us. If they were of us they what? No doubt, no doubt. It is impossible. It is impossible. A believer cannot quit believing. He can't do it.

"Doubtless I count all things, all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and I do count them..." Boy, I'm going to tell you something now. I count them but garbage. This man, Paul, was brought...his mother and daddy were Hebrews. Back yonder Miriam found fault with Moses. He married a Cushite. He married an Ethiopian and that bothered them, I mean, dreadfully. It would have bothered Paul, too. He said, "My momma was a Hebrew. My daddy was a Hebrew. I was of the tribe of Benjamin. I grew up under Gamaliel. I grew up under the strict law, the diet laws, the sabbath laws, the feast laws, the sacrifice laws, the Levitical laws. And I kept them to the letter."

But he said, "I count all that but garbage, garbage." That is a believer's confession. And that takes an act of God to make a man take all his religious upbringing and pride and heritage and accomplishments and doings and duties and say, "Garbage. Take it out and put it in the truck and haul it down to the dump. And I will never look at it again."

Listen. For he says that, "I count it but garbage that I may win Christ and be found only in him, not having...not having...not having my own righteousness, not having any. My righteousness is a filthy rag."

That is a theme through this Bible.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy."

"Not of him that willeth, not him that runneth, but of God."

"For by grace are you saved through faith. That not of yourselves, not of works."

That old hymn writer said, "Not for the works that we have done or shall hereafter do hath God decreed on sinful worms salvation to bestow. The glory, Lord, from first to last is due to Christ alone. Ought to ourselves we dare not take or rob thee of they crown, 'Tis

not by works of righteousness which our own hands have done. But we are saved by his sovereign grace abounding through his son.”

The true believer can never, never, never, never, leave out this knot fight here. “And be found in him not having my own righteousness.” He can’t do it. He can’t do it because that is his very foundation, not having my own righteousness which is of the law. But that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

“Come ye weary, heavy laden.” Now, watch this song. “Come ye weary, heavy laden, bruised and mangled by the fall if you tarry till you are better you will never come at all. For it is not the righteous. It is not the righteous, it is sinners Jesus came to call. Let not conscience make you linger nor of fitness fondly dream, all the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him.” And this he gives you. This he gives you.

Somebody said, “But didn’t you repent?”

Yes. But the goodness of God led me to repentance.

“But can’t you say you did something? Didn’t you believe?”

Yes, I believed. But he enabled me to believe.”

Faith is the gift of God.

“You did something. You repented.”

Yeah, I know I did. But his goodness led me to repentance.

“But you believed.”

Sure I believed. But he made me willing to believe.

“But you were willing.”

But he made me willing.

“But now don’t you love Christ?”

I sure do because he first loved me. It God’s...it falls right back on him. I repented because his goodness led me to repentance. I believed because it was given to me not only to suffer, but to believe on him. I am willing, but he made me willing. I love him because he first loved me.

“Yeah, but you labor. You preach. You...you sat in your study and prepared this message and got it all ready for us. You labored.”

Paul said, "I sure did, more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but Christ in me."

I didn't do it. He did it. It wasn't...I am what I am by the grace of God. I don't have one spot, atom, inkling of any righteousness or holiness whatsoever that is not Christ in me. You don't either. You don't have one thing that even the piercing eye of a sovereign holy God can find in you that is worth...that's worth anything unless it is Christ.

"Yeah, but you witness."

I am his witness. I am just telling what he did. That is my whole witness. I am telling who he is. I am telling what he did. I am telling why he did it. I am telling where he is now. I had nothing to do with that. I am just telling what I saw. And he opened my eyes and let me see. It just all comes back to me. That's right. Let's look at this verse here and then I will let you go.

Verse 10 says, "Oh, my that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable to his death."

The believer has three goals right there in that verse, that I may know him; commitment to Christ, commitment to Christ, that I may know him. I know him because he knew me. Secondly, fellowship, communion with Christ, communion, sons of God, fellowship of his sufferings. Thirdly, conformity. One day I am going to be perfectly conformed to his image, perfectly conformed. That is what he is talking about in verse 11, "That if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as though I have already attained. I haven't. I am not already perfect, not by a long shot. Now I will tell you this. I follow after."

And I want you to write in your margin right here. The word "apprehend" means "lay hold, lay hold." That is what it means. Lay hold. "That I may lay hold upon that for which I am laid hold of Christ Jesus." See, that even goes back to him, "That I may lay hold on eternal life, that I may lay hold upon the inheritance of the saints because he laid hold of me for that purpose."

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, to have laid hold of these promises and blessings, but I will tell you one thing I do. Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Wouldn't you agree? Wouldn't you agree that while in my flesh dwelleth no good thing and old wretched man that I am and the infirmities of this flesh have to be hedged about by God's sovereign, sovereign power and restraining grace, but I will tell you one thing. No true believer can ever deny that his blood that makes us clean and his righteousness that makes us holy.

My hope is built—we are going to sing this—on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Blood. I dare not trust even the sweetest frame, I wholly lean on Jesus' name.