



What Should The Christian Do Whenever He Sins?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Q&A NUMBER: 45

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What should the Christian do whenever he sins? The Christian has been forgiven of his sins whenever he became a Christian. Yet, when the Christian sins against God after that time, what can he do to be forgiven again? Let's investigate.

The Christian Can Sin

In order to answer this question appropriately, you must first understand that it is possible for the one who has become a Christian to commit sin. You see, there are some who teach that it is impossible for the one who is a Christian to sin. And, there are many who teach that the one who has become a Christian cannot fall from the grace of God whenever he does commit sin so as to lose his eternal salvation. Certainly, both of these false notions will negatively impact the way in which you answer the question we are currently studying.

Instead, the Scriptures are clear in teaching that the one who has become a Christian in the past *can* sin so as to be eternally lost. For instance, as the apostle John wrote to those who were Christians in the book of 1 John, he said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Then, he said, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). In Galatians 5:4, the apostle Paul made it clear that there were some who had previously become Christians who had "fallen from grace." Then, in Acts 8:12-24, you can read about a man named Simon who had become a Christian, yet he committed sin and was in danger of the Judgment.

While these are only a few examples, they clearly demonstrate that it *is* possible for the one who has previously become a Christian to commit sin. So, given this reality, we now need to focus on what the Christian who has committed sin should do whenever he sins.

He Must Repent Of His Sin

Anytime there is sin in a person's life, God requires repentance. You see, it does not please God whenever a person who is guilty of sin continues to live in his sin. In order for there to be true change in a person's conduct and in order for forgiveness to be offered, repentance must take place.

Repentance involves looking on your past sins with abhorrence and determining to live differently in the future. Therefore, in repentance, you acknowledge the wrong that you have done and determine that you will not make those sinful things part of your life in the future. Then, the Scriptures teach that (if your repentance is sincere) your life will produce "works befitting repentance" in the future (Acts 26:20). That is, your future actions will demonstrate your repentance by showing that you are truly living differently.

As I mentioned before, repentance is required by God any time there is sin. In Luke 13:3, Jesus said, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." He then repeats the same words in verse 5. In Acts 17:30-31, the apostle Paul said that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." 2 Peter 3:9 says that God is being longsuffering and has not yet sent Jesus to return for final Judgment because God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

Now, although the Scriptures clearly identify repentance as being necessary in order to become a Christian (see Acts 2:38), we are focused on the place of repentance for the Christian who has committed sin. In Acts 8:12-24, a man named Simon had become a Christian (verse 13). Previously, this man had been a well-known sorcerer and gained much fame through his sorcery. After he became a Christian, he saw that the apostles were capable of imparting the Holy Spirit to others by the laying on of hands – and he offered to buy that ability for money. Then, Peter said, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (verses 20-23). Notice carefully that one of the prescribed steps to remedy his sin was repentance. He could not please God without turning away from his sin.

The same thing can be observed whenever Jesus addressed the churches of Asia Minor in the book of Revelation. Of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3, only two were pleasing to God. To the others, after Jesus identified their sin, Jesus instructed them to repent. For instance, Revelation 2:5 says, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...." Revelation 3:3 says, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent...." Revelation 3:19 says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." Repentance is clearly a requirement for the Christian who sins to be forgiven of his sin.

He Must Confess His Sin To God

Not only must the Christian who sins repent of his sin, but he must also confess his sin to God. At the beginning of the lesson, we considered a couple of verses about the possibility that the Christian can commit sin from 1 John 1. Now, I want to consider verse 9. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Notice the conditional statement made concerning the forgiveness of sins: “*If* we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God is faithful, just, and willing to forgive. Therefore, if the Christian who sins does not find forgiveness, it is *not* because God is incapable or unwilling to forgive! Instead, it is the failure of the Christian to confess his sins.

God wants the Christian who sins to acknowledge his sin before Him. But, “what good does it do to confess my sin to God – since He already knows the sin I have committed?,” someone might ask. First, it is not ours to question the reason why God has commanded us to do the things He requires. It is just ours to comply with what He has commanded.

Second, I believe that it is beneficial for the *Christian* to confess his sins to God. God already knows your sins (Proverbs 15:3) – so you are not telling God anything He does not know. However, confessing your sins to God forces you to specifically identify the sin you have committed – to yourself and to God.

He Must Ask God For Forgiveness

As we seek to learn what the Christian must do whenever he sins, let’s revisit Peter’s instruction to Simon in Acts 8:22. “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” Repentance alone was not sufficient for Simon to be forgiven of his sin. Peter said that he must repent “and” pray to God.

It is through the avenue of prayer the Christian will need to confess his sin to God (as previously discussed) and that the Christian will need to ask God for forgiveness. Notice what Simon was specifically told to pray to God about: “...pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” Through the avenue of prayer, therefore, the Christian is taught to petition God for the forgiveness of the sins he has committed.

A good example of a prayer to God after sin was committed is found in Psalm 51. This psalm was written by David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11-12). Now, after he had become sorrowful and repented of his sin, he acknowledged his sin to God and asked God for mercy and that God would completely cleanse him of the sin he had committed. While this passage is found in the Old Testament, I believe that it is a good example of the kind of contrite heart the Christian must have whenever he prays to God, confessing his sin and asking God for forgiveness.

He Must Confess His Sin To Those Knowledgeable Of The Sin

Up to this point in our study, we have focused predominantly on what God expects the Christian who has sinned to do in His sight. However, we also need to consider the fact that some sins a Christian commits are of a public nature (i.e. other people are aware of his sin). So, as we consider what God requires a Christian to do in order to be forgiven of his sin, we must also consider what God requires concerning public sin.

The Scriptures do teach the responsibility for the one who has sinned against another person to seek reconciliation with that person (or, those people). Consider, for instance, Matthew 5:23-24. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Clearly, God wants you to do whatever is within your ability to seek reconciliation with others.

In addition, consider the simple fact that other people will not know that you have repented of your sin unless you confess your sin to them! Particularly, the Christian who has committed public sin may have been disfellowshipped by the local church (as instructed by 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3). How will that local church know that you have returned to the Lord if you do not confess your sin to them? James wrote, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

Therefore, the Christian who has committed sin should seek to make the confession of his sin as public as the sin itself. If the sin is a private matter that is only known between the Christian and God, the confession only needs to be to God. If the sin is known to God and another person, confess that sin to God and to the other person involved. And, if the sin is known to God and a group of people, confess that sin to God and to that group of people. As much as it is possible, make the confession as public as the sin itself so that all will know that you are seeking forgiveness of the sin.

Conclusion

Yes, the Christian can commit sin. When he does, he must repent of the sin, confess the sin to God, ask God for forgiveness, and confess the sin to those knowledgeable of the sin. And, when the Christian does what God requires Him to do, he can be assured that he has an Advocate with the Father in Jesus Christ, through whom he will be forgiven of his sin!

Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series
Study Number: QA45
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