

#47 “The Believer’s Internal Agony from Sin”

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There are many ways to know for sure that we are in Christ, destined for heaven (1 John 5:13). When we see good fruit (Matthew 7:20), when we obey (John 14:21), when we love our brothers and sisters (John 13:34-35), and when we love God rather than the world (1 John 2:15) are just a few of the ways whereby we can know if we are saved. Yet there is another way that, as believers, we will all inevitably experience, though we don’t want to have to learn this way. When we let sin go unconfessed and continue to resist the conviction of the Spirit and the truth of the Word of God, we can expect to experience internal double-mindedness, instability, joylessness, and agony.

David was a man after God’s own heart, yet he sinned, committing adultery and murder on one occasion. After he committed these grievous sins, he hardened his heart and covered up his sin, refusing to acknowledge it until he was confronted by the prophet Nathan. Perhaps he felt that he had gotten away with his sin in terms of keeping up his image and reputation, but deep down in his heart, he was in agony. His sin probably brought him some short-term pleasure, but the Spirit of God within his heart was working agony in him. Certainly, the sin was not worth the pain and the destructive results, including the punishment God would bring upon him and upon his newborn child who would die as a result of his sin (2 Samuel 12:10-14).

In Psalm 32 and 51, David recounted his internal feelings and experiences while he kept this sin in his heart. In Psalm 32:3-4, he says, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.” David says that his body was literally wasting away day and night because of God’s hand of conviction upon him, which he had to willfully resist. His sin caused him to lose his strength and groan. There are severe mental, emotional, and physical consequences to sin for unbelievers and believers, but it is believers in particular who must deal with God’s heavy hand of conviction. Unbelievers tend to be more callous to sin given that their consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15-16). Believers, on the other hand, are indwelt by the Spirit of God who will be relentless in convicting us of sin. In a positive sense, this demonstrates that we are indeed God’s children, but it also means that we will have a heavier burden to bear. The bottom line is that this agony should be a strong incentive for us not to sin or to hide sin in our hearts.

In Psalm 51:12-13, David says, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You.” David had lost the joy which accompanies being a saved child of God for as long as he hid this sin in his heart. His will to do right had grown weak, and he needed God to strengthen him and sustain him so that he could do right and be used of

God. Once he finally confessed his sin, he would be able to powerfully and effectively teach others about God and evangelize them. But before God could powerfully use him, he needed to empty himself of his sin and let the Spirit have full control of his heart and life (Ephesians 5:18). Hiding sin in our hearts not only brings internal agony but a loss of spiritual effectiveness.

As Christians, we are ashamed of the sins that we used to take pleasure in (Romans 6:21), and unconfessed sin will bring shame and guilt once again. It is possible that we could self-justify and be deceived such that we develop a certain spiritual dullness when it comes to caring about sin. However, the Spirit will make us uncomfortable with our dullness, for He will never stop convicting and working in our hearts.

If we have sinned against God, we need to ask His forgiveness. If we have sinned against others as well, we also need to ask their forgiveness. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed." God will always forgive us when we ask, but He wants us to confess our sins to those whom we have sinned against as well. This is part of the spiritual healing process, and it is important for restoring relationships and putting ourselves in a position to be fully empowered by God to do His work.

God is in the business of restoration, forgiveness, compassion, and the giving of joy. Thus, in His mercy, He will work to lead us to brokenness over our sin, allowing us to experience the agony of guilt and shame in the face of a holy, loving God. The upside of this is that it reminds us that we are His and that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:39). The downside is that sin has consequences, and it does us and others great harm. So let us be spiritually healed this day, confessing our sins to God and to those who need our apologies so that we might be restored. Why continue in agony when God wants to replace our sorrow with gladness?