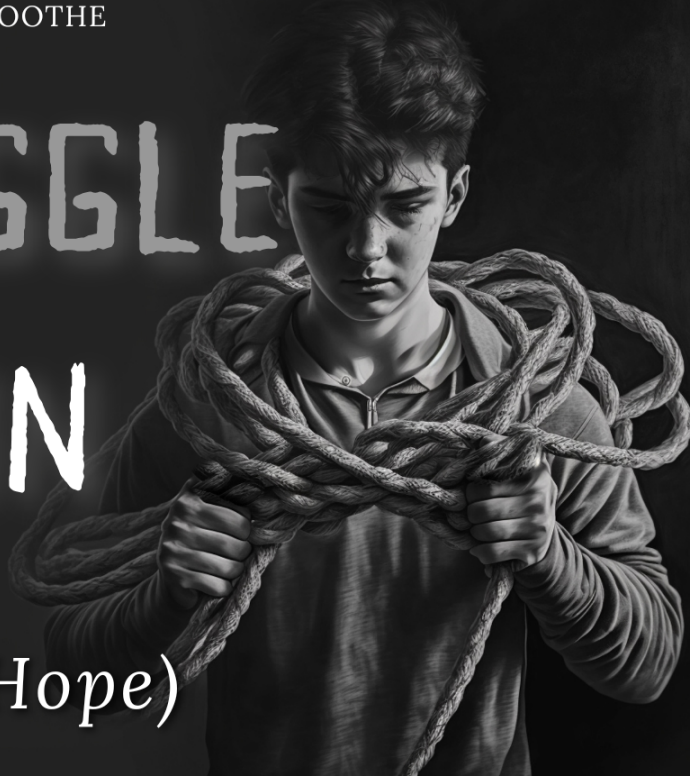


JASON K. BOOTHE

THE STRUGGLE WITH SIN

(and Why There's Hope)



The Struggle with Sin and Why There Is Hope

One of the questions that often arises when someone first hears the true Gospel is this: *If Christ has already forgiven all my sins and clothed me in His perfect righteousness, how should I think about the sins I still commit every day?*

This question rarely develops in a vacuum. More often than not, it is born from years of hearing a message that mingles God's grace with human effort. Countless people have sat under preaching that says, in one form or another, "God has done His part. Now you must do yours." Although presented as biblical Christianity, this message shifts the believer's confidence away from Christ's finished work and onto his own imperfect obedience.

The result is predictable. The conscience is continually driven inward. Instead of looking to Christ, it is taught to measure itself by its own performance. The inevitable questions soon follow: "Have I repented enough? Have I forsaken enough sin? Have I followed Christ faithfully enough?"

For the honest soul, there is only one answer.

No.

Even the most mature believer knows that his battle against sin is imperfect, his obedience is incomplete, and his love for Christ falls far short of what it ought to be. If peace with God depends in any measure upon the believer's performance, assurance can never be found. The soul is left in a cycle of fear, self-examination, and despair, always wondering whether enough has been done to remain in God's favor.

What a heavy burden false doctrine places upon weary sinners!

By the abundant mercy of God, many are delivered from this bondage. I count myself among them. When the Holy Spirit reveals that salvation rests entirely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, the Gospel becomes sweeter than the honeycomb. The believer discovers that Christ has done everything necessary for his acceptance before God. His righteousness is complete. His sacrifice is sufficient. His intercession is continual. His grace is free.

Yet the question remains, and it deserves a careful biblical answer.

If Christ has truly forgiven all our sins and secured our standing before God forever, how should believers understand and respond to the daily sins that still trouble them?

It is an honest question, and one that Scripture answers with both transparency and comfort.

The Apostle Paul anticipated this very question when he wrote, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" (Romans 6:1-2, ESV). Paul was not asking whether Christians would ever sin again. He knew they would. Every believer knows the painful reality of remaining sin. Rather, the question is whether a believer should continue in sin *for the purpose of* obtaining more grace.

The answer is a resounding no!

Grace is not a commodity that increases according to the amount of our rebellion. The grace that saves is the grace that has already been lavishly poured out upon us in Jesus Christ. At the moment God saved us, He united us with His Son. Christ bore our sins in His own body upon the cross. His righteousness was credited to us. His death became our death, and His resurrection became our life. We do not seek additional grace through sin because we have already received the fullness of saving grace in Christ.

Paul therefore exhorts believers to "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11, ESV). This is a call to believe what God has declared about everyone who belongs to Christ. Our standing before God has forever changed. We are no longer condemned sinners awaiting judgment. We are beloved sons and daughters who have been accepted in the Beloved.

Yet anyone who has walked with Christ for any length of time knows that the struggle against sin remains very real.

There are days when our failures seem to confront us from every direction. We see impatience in our conversations. We discover selfishness in our motives. We recognize pride where humility should have flourished. We mourn over neglected prayer, wandering thoughts during worship, a lack of compassion toward those around us, and the countless ways we fail to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

The mature Christian does not become indifferent to these realities. Quite the opposite. The nearer we walk with Christ, the more sensitive we become to the presence of sin within us. The light of His holiness exposes what we could never see apart from His grace.

Yet, this growing awareness of sin should never lead us to despair.

John writes these precious words to the church: "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1, ESV). Our hope has never rested upon our ability to achieve sinless perfection in this life. Our hope rests entirely upon the finished work of our perfect Savior.

When we sin, we do not run from Christ. We flee directly to Him.

We come confessing our sins honestly because there is no need to hide what God already knows. We come with broken hearts because sin grieves us. We come with confidence because Christ's blood has fully satisfied divine justice. We come knowing that our acceptance before God has never depended upon our performance, but upon the obedience and sacrifice of His Son.

There is something deeply freeing about living this way.

The believer does not pretend to be better than he is. Neither does he define himself by his failures. He acknowledges both realities at once. He is a sinner by experience who has been declared righteous by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

That confession produces humility. It also produces gratitude. Praise God for Christ's work!

By God's grace, He restrains us from becoming all that our fallen nature would otherwise desire to be. His Spirit faithfully works within us, conforming us to the image of Christ. Sometimes that growth appears dramatic. Often it is quiet and gradual. Day by day He teaches us to love what honors Him and to hate what dishonors Him. Even our grief over sin is itself evidence of His gracious work within our hearts.

The Christian life, then, is not a life of carefree indifference toward sin. Neither is it a life of hopeless striving to earn God's favor. It is the joyful pursuit of Christ by those who have already been loved, accepted, forgiven, and redeemed in Christ.

As long as we remain in this fallen world, we will know the conflict Paul described in Romans 7. We will find ourselves crying out for deliverance even as we rejoice in the certainty of the gospel. We will confess our sins with honesty while resting in the assurance that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1, ESV).

This hope steadily lifts our eyes beyond the present struggle.

There is a day coming when faith shall become sight. The battle with sin will finally cease. Every temptation will be forever silenced. Every lingering corruption will be removed. We shall see our Savior face to face, no longer seeing "in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV). The redemption Christ purchased will be fully realized in glorified bodies that will never again know sin, sorrow, or death.

Until that glorious day, we continue walking by faith. We confess our sins. We trust our Advocate. We rejoice in the grace that has already saved us. We rest in the righteousness of Christ alone.

With every passing day our hearts increasingly echo the prayer of the church through the ages:

"Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

He is our wisdom. He is our righteousness. He is our sanctification. He is our redemption. In Him we possess every spiritual blessing, and in Him our hope is secure forever.

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