

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

SOUL-SAVING LESSONS **“How to Overcome a Sinful Past”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

Jesus said, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21). Welcome to the lesson in our Soul-Saving Series on “How to Overcome a Sinful Past.” The Bible is God’s message on how to overcome sin. In Genesis 3 when sin entered the world, God, from that point forward in Scripture, began to reveal His plan to overcome sin through His Son, Jesus Christ. It is wonderful to know that the Bible is the greatest “how to” book. Men have written “how to” books on everything you can imagine. I recently heard it said that there are over 3,200 “how to” books written by men. Yet God wrote one “how to” book on “how to overcome sin.” In 2 Peter 1:3 we are told that God, according to His divine power, has “given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” The Bible is our “how to” book on living the best life and being a godly person. In fact, the Bible tells us not just how to get by, how to survive, or to barely make it, but instead tells us how to overcome. It takes us to victim to victor. We go from losing the battle of sin (in Genesis 3) to ultimately reigning with God in Heaven (in Revelation 21). I love the words of 1 Corinthians 15:54 where Paul, by inspiration, illustrates how we can have the ultimate victory over death: “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’” What a wonderful thing it is to know that as we obey the Gospel, live a Christian life, and strive to overcome sin, death no longer can haunt us. It can be “swallowed up in victory.” “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4). Our victory is made possible because “He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4). It is God Who always leads us in triumph and victory in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14).

We must understand that we are in a serious battle against the devil and against sin. Yet, in the Scriptures we clearly are told how to overcome the devil and sin. In the Scripture it says that first-century Christians overcame the devil “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” How did those first-century Christians defeat the devil? How can we do that today? Through the blood of Christ, Scripture, and self-sacrifice. If we are going to win the battle, we must contact the blood of Jesus. If we are going to stay faithful, we must commit to the Scriptures. And if we are going to win, we must be convicted of the need to sacrifice ourselves daily for the Cause of Christ. We can be sure that if we will do those things, then we will have the victory! Notice the beautiful words of 1 Corinthians 15:57—“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul said that we have the victory through Jesus. So yes, we can overcome, be victors, and win the battle.

But we must realize that each of us has a past with which we must deal. This lesson is practical because each of us has to deal with a past of sin. Like the woman at the well in John 8 who was caught in sin, so today we also have sin with which we must deal. If we

are amenable to God's law by having an accountable mind and age (Is. 7:16), we must make sure that we deal with the sin problem. The important thing to realize is that there are some things that we can and must do to overcome sin. Yes, God has done His part. In Matthew 1:21 the Scripture tells us that Christ's name was to be "Jesus," which is translated "God with us" because He would deliver His people from their sins. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). God has done His part, so now we must do our part.

Part of overcoming sin is realizing that God says it is possible for us to do that. We are not to be defeatists because the Scriptures teach us that overcoming sin is a possibility that can turn into a reality. We can overcome sin! In Genesis 4:7 God said to Cain who had murdered his brother, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." One version says, "You shall master it." God has not created us to be **mastered by** sin. God has created us to **master sin**. We have the power through Jesus Christ and the Word of God to prevent sin from ruling our lives, but to instead rule over sin. This is something we can achieve.

If that is the case, what must we do to overcome a sinful past? First we must recognize and admit the sin in our lives. Someone has said, "To know your disease is half the cure." There is an important truth that we need to learn. We never will overcome sin until we realize that it is personal to each of us. We must be able to say, "I have sinned." In Luke 15: 17-20, as the prodigal sin was dealing with his wasteful ways and being in a pig pen, he comes to his senses and says, "I will go back to my father's house and say, 'I have sinned. I'm no longer worthy to be a son. Make me a servant.'" He went to his father and said, "I have sinned!" Each person who is going to deal with sin must recognize and admit that sin. This is a universal problem, as Romans 3:23 makes clear when it says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." From that we can learn the following truth. "If 'all,' then 'I.'" If "all have sinned," then "I" have "sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous; no, not one." Ecclesiastes 7:20 says that even the most righteous person has to deal with sin: "There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and does not sin." We must recognize that we have a sin problem, and that we must deal with it. We must be big enough to admit sin in our lives. There are examples in the Bible of people who did that. Some admitted it too late, while others did not. In Luke 18 we see the example of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee goes up to pray at the temple, and says, "God, I thank You I'm not like other men." As we read the context, we see that he is a prideful man. But the publican will not even so much as look up to Heaven. Instead, he beat his breast and cried, "God, be merciful to me—a sinner." We need to realize that sin is something with which we all have to deal. Saul said, "I have sinned. I have erred exceedingly. I have played the fool" (1 Sam. 26:21). David said, "I have sinned." Achan said, "I have sinned"—but he was too late, and he and his entire family were burned. We must admit sin if we are going to deal with the problem. We can say, "Sin is a universal problem." But we need to make it personal by saying, "I have sinned. I have a problem, and I need God's help in dealing with it." Notice the words of 1 John 1:7-10, and how they apply to our recognizing and admitted our sins:

"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

How does this apply? Not only do we have to recognize sin, but if we are going to be faithful to God, we must admit our sin, repent of it, and take steps to deal with the sin problem.

To overcome a sinful past, we must recognize our sin and be big enough to admit that we have sin in our lives with which we need to deal.

Second, to overcome a sinful past we must be ashamed of sin because of what it does to God. In Ezekiel 6:9 we are told that it breaks God's heart. It is something that will cause people to be lost. Jesus said that there is a place "where the worm never dies, and the fire is not quenched" (Mk. 9:48). God does not want anyone to go there, and neither do we. But people will go there if they are not ashamed enough of their sin to turn from it. Does the Scripture teach that we should be ashamed of sin? Or does the Scripture teach that once we have dealt with our sins, we can brag about them as if we are "really big and bad"? Romans 6:21 tells us, "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." Are we ashamed enough of sin to put it behind us? I've heard Christians (even parents) speak of sin as if they almost were bragging about it. They say to their children, "You ought not to do this, but when I was your age I did such-and-such" or "I was really good at this (even the best there was) at this sin." That is not the mindset we should have about sin. Sin ought to cause us to blush. In Jeremiah 6:15 we read, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush." What happened to those people who were not ashamed? God said, "If you do not change your ways, you are going into captivity." They did not change their ways, and they went into Babylonian captivity. For people who refuse to be ashamed of sin, there is a great captivity coming than that of the Babylonians. God has promised that they will spend eternity in Hell bound in the chains of darkness with the angels of the devil and with the devil himself. We need to be ashamed of sin because it is against the will of God, because it breaks God's heart, and because it makes a mockery of what Jesus did for us. Hebrews 10:26ff. speaks of how those who, after they have obeyed the Gospel, continue in a life of sin, are in essence trampling the body of Jesus Christ. Such makes a mockery of what Jesus did on the cross. We must recognize and admit our sins, and then be big enough to be ashamed of those sins so that we will want to put it behind us.

Then, third, we must be ready to deal with sin in a God-approved way. There were some people mentioned in Scripture who tried to deal with the sin problem but were unsuccessful because they did not do it God's way. Here are some ways in which we should not deal with sin. We cannot run from our sin problem. It does not matter how fast or how far we might be able to run, we cannot run fast enough or far enough to get away from the sin problem. Look at Jonah. God said to him, "Get on a ship and go to Nineveh so you can preach to those people." Jonah hated the Ninevites. So he got on a ship and went the opposite way. He thought he could get away from God. And it wasn't until he found himself in the belly of a great fish that he realized he could not run from God. We must realize that we cannot run from sin. No matter how fast we might be, or how far we run, sin will always be with us. We also cannot dismiss sin flippantly. There was a man in Scripture who tried to do that. In Acts 25:12-13 Felix said, "Go away. When I have a more convenient time, I will call on you." We must not dismiss sin flippantly. It is the most serious matter we could ever imagine! We cannot justify it by and say, "Everything's going to be OK." We must realize that sin will cost us our souls. We cannot deal with sin by living it and acting as if it does not exist. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 we are told that people who live in sin (such as idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, the immoral, and the ungodly) "will not inherit the kingdom of heaven." If we have sin in our lives, we will not go to Heaven.

But how do we deal with sin. Initially we deal with sin by obeying the Gospel. We hear the Word of God, and admit that the Bible tells us how to deal with the sin problem. Whatever the Bible says, we must do. In Matthew 17:5, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the voice of God spoke from Heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Hear Him!" We must hear the Word of God. We then must believe that Jesus is God's Son. Without belief we cannot be saved. Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We must have faith to be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6). In Acts 8 we see the Ethiopian eunuch traveling down the road. Philip is teaching him the Gospel. They come to water. The eunuch says, "You've been talking about it. Here's water. What hinders me?" Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may" (Acts 8:37). We then must repent of sin to be right with God. In Luke 13:1-5 certain Jews came to Jesus to tell Him about some people who, it appeared, had committed some heinous sins, which caused the judgment of God to come against them. Certain people had their blood mingled with sacrifices. They said, "Weren't these worse sinners than all others?" Or, what about the eighteen people who were walking down the road and the tower of Siloam fell on them? Weren't they worse sinners than everyone else? But Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Jesus' point to these Jews was that they needed to stop thinking about the sins of others so they could deal with their own sin problem. To be saved, a person also must confess the name of Jesus. In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus said, "If you will not confess Me before men, neither will I confess you before My Father in heaven. But if you confess Me before men, I will confess you before My Father in heaven." Once a person has made that good confession, he then needs to be immersed in water in order to have his sins washed away. So many people think that they have dealt with the sin problem, yet they have not because they haven't had their sins washed away. Notice Acts 22:16, which says, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." What did Saul have to do to have his sins washed away so that he could deal with his sinful past? He was told, "Get up and be baptized." What happened at the point of baptism? His sins were washed away as he called on the name of the Lord. A lot of people say, "All you have to do is call on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21). It is true that we must "call on the name of the Lord." But how do we do that? Acts 22:16 is a divine commentary that answers that question. We get up, obey what God said concerning baptism. Baptism is the point at which we contact the blood of Jesus, which washes away our sins.

But what if a person is a Christian, and therefore has had his sins washed away? How does that person continue to overcome a sinful past? We must learn from our past. If we are going to continue to overcome sin, we must learn from the past. What do you think the prodigal son learned? He learned that he did not ever want to go back into a life of sin because it is always better to be in the father's house. How true that is! The Book of Hebrews is all about making sure that we do not "go back." Hebrews 3:12 tells us that we must encourage one another daily "lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." We must not go back because we have it so much better right now as Christians. We must never go back to lives of sin. It is always better to have past sins as a teacher than present sins as a master. We must learn from the past so that we will never want to go back into sin. Romans 6:17-18 says, "God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." We used to be slaves to sin, but we learned our lesson and obeyed the Gospel. It is always better to have past sins as a teacher than present sins as a master. Have you learned the lesson from your past sins? Perhaps you used to use alcohol. Have you learned how hard of a life that is? "The way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Have you begun to realize the mockery that sin makes of your life? Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Prov. 20:1). Maybe you used to use language that was ungodly. Have you learned the damage that did to your reputation or to your purity of life? Maybe you were caught up in religious error? Do you realize how destructive

that error is, and how important it is to make sure that we always stay with the Bible and do only what God has told us to do? We need to learn from our past sins and never go back to them.

Here is the key. If a person is a child of God because he has obeyed the Gospel, and if that person has learned from his past sins, what must he do now to overcome his sinful past? Sometimes I talk to Christians, and they have the blessing of being a Christian, yet they still are struggling with their past of sin. We must learn to forget the past. Sometimes it is hard to do that. David, in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, committed adultery with Bathsheba. He had her husband murdered. The son from their ungodly union died because of their sin. David realized how hard it is to forget the past. In Psalm 51:3-4 he said, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge." David knew he had sinned against God. And he wanted to make it right. Yes, sometimes it is hard to forget the past. But we must realize that if God can forgive and forget, then we must we. Paul had done some really bad things in his life. In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul said, "I am the chief of sinners" because he knew he had done heinous things against the cause of Christ and against servants of God. In Acts 7 he held the coats of those Jews who stoned Stephen to death. In Acts 8 he was wreaking havoc on the church. In Acts 9 he was headed out to drag Christian men and women into prison. Yet he could say, "I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). Paul's mindset was to forget those things that were behind him. You may have done things that were ungodly, immoral, or against the law. But if you have repented and changed your will, then you have been forgiven. In Micah 7:19 tells us that God will "cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Psalm 103:12 tells us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Jesus, when He instituted the Lord's Supper, said, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). The Bible says that for the Christian who has changed his life by repenting, all things are new. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we are told, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." It is as if the chalkboard has been erased. If we repent and obey the Gospel, the slate is wiped clean. We no longer can be haunted by those past sins. In John 8:32 Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." We are free from sin, and free from the consequences. This is important because those who live in the past are often doomed to repeat its mistakes. If we live in the past and never overcome it, we may be dooming ourselves to lives of misery. And we may eventually repent those same sins. We must tell ourselves, "If I have obeyed the Gospel, I have changed my life. God has forgiven me. Thus, I must forgive myself and forget those past sins."

Are you sure today that you have overcome your sinful past? Have you been willing to recognize and admit sin in your life? Have you decided to deal with sin in a God-approved way? Have you obeyed the Gospel? Are you a Christian? The Bible teaches that you must hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). You must believe that Jesus is God's Son (Jn. 8:24). You must be willing to repent and turn from sin to God (Lk. 13:3). You must make the good confession that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 10:10). And you must be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). If you have done those things, then you can know that you are a child of God. If, after becoming a child of God, you sinned, do like Simon in Acts 8:20. Repent and pray, and God will forgive you as you change your life. May each of us make a determined effort to overcome sin. We can master it. The question is: Will we overcome a sinful past?

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

**607 McLish Ave.
Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “HOW TO OVERCOME A SINFUL PAST”

1. What is the key word (representing the main thought) in Revelation 3:21 that pertains specifically to this lesson?
2. According to 2 Peter 1:3, what do we possess within the Bible that can help us overcome a sinful past??
3. According to 1 Corinthians 15:54, what does “death” represent for faithful Christian?
4. What important point is contained in 1 John 4:4 that can help every Christian overcome a sinful past?
5. What three things, according to Revelation 12:11, helped first-century Christians overcome the things with which they were dealing in their lives?
6. What two opposing contrasts are found in the statement from Genesis 4:7 that God made to Cain after he had murdered his brother Abel?
7. According to Romans 3:23, “all have sinned.” What does that say about each one of us?
8. If a person says that he does not sin, what, according to 1 John 1:7-10, does that make him?
9. This lesson uses the account of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to make the point that there are two important lessons to be learned from a life of past sin. What are those lessons?
10. What was wrong with the people mentioned in Jeremiah 6:15?
11. This lesson spends considerable time on the point that we must deal with sin in a God-approved way. According to the points made in that section of this lesson, what is the God-approved way of dealing with sin?
12. Acts 2:21 teaches us that to be saved we must call on the name of the Lord.” How, according to Acts 22:16, does a person do that?
13. What terrible mistake did Felix make in Acts 24 that we must be careful not to make?
14. What important point does Proverbs 13:15 teach us?
15. What important point do we find the apostle Paul making in Philippians 3:13-14 regarding past sin?
16. According to 1 Samuel 26:21, what first step must a person take in order to eventually rid himself of past sin?
17. What important (and comforting) point is found in Romans 6:17-18 that deals with past sins in a person’s life?