

**The Way  
Fighting Against Ourselves  
James 1:12-15**

*<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. <sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

**James 3:16**

*For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*

**Introduction:** Christ proclaimed that He was the way. Christianity proclaims that it is The Way. It is not a way. He is not a way. What is professed here is that Christianity, Jesus Christ... his life, his teaching, his commands... are great enough and powerful enough to embrace the whole of our existence. Christianity and God's revelation given to us from His Word grips everything and everybody, everywhere in every circumstance of life and can make of it a complete, a single, meaningful whole. **Christianity is not the Way simply as a theological or intellectual idea. It is the way as the very pathway of life itself.**

**1<sup>st</sup>** - If there is one way which is the way then there must be only one universe.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** - If all creation is made by Christ and for Him then we His creatures must work for Him or work against ourselves.

**3<sup>rd</sup>** - If the Way of Christ is consistent with His work in all Creation then this way should not only be imposed upon us by His command but it should also be something inherent with us by His creating.

**4<sup>th</sup>** - If the Way of Christ is the Way then we should be made for His way physically, emotionally, socially, morally, economically, spiritually.

**5<sup>th</sup>** - If the Way of Christ is the Way then there should be positive results when we follow that way and there should be negative consequences when we choose not to follow that way.

**6<sup>th</sup>** - If Jesus is the Way and His way is the Way then you are free to choose a way for yourself but you are not free to choose the results of your choosing.

**7<sup>th</sup>** - If the Lord Jesus is the Way and His Way is the Way then He can find for us a way back when we fall away.

**Let us now consider this falling away... The Bible calls this SIN...**

**I. Sin is stepping out of the Way of God.**

The common word for sin in the Greek 'hamartia.' It means 'to miss the mark.' The idea here is that a mark is set for life, a direction is set for us and that sin is stepping away from that direction.

- That mark is set in the commands of God. Exodus 20 give us the basics of God's commands in ten imperatives.
- That mark is set in the character of God. This ten commandments find their basis in the character of God. They show us how we are to give expression to the moral holiness of God in our day to day choices and actions. They are stated as negatives but they are backed up by the positive truth of who God is...

**1<sup>st</sup>** We are have no others gods before Him, because God is one and God is God alone. We are to have no other gods before Him because God has given us himself. We are to have Him.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** We are to not make graven images of God because God is a spirit and He is ever present with us... It is an insult to bow to an idol representing God when He is right before us. That would be like me having breakfast with my wife and whipping out a photo of her and talking to it anytime I wanted to address her.

**3<sup>rd</sup>** We are not to take the name of the Lord our God in vain... because God has given His name to us to take as an ever-present help in the time of trouble, as One who has a real, invested, severe interest in our lives. We are not invoke His name in falsehood or in flattery because He knows and He is and He is awesome.

**4<sup>th</sup>** We are to remember the day of rest and set it apart as holy because God has sovereignly called us to rest in Him and to learn to rest in Him by this discipline. He is our sustenance and we are to discipline ourselves to rest in that sustaining presence that is God.

**5<sup>th</sup>** We are to honor our fathers and mothers because they represent the providential care that God has over our lives as our life giving father.

**6<sup>th</sup>** we are not to Kill because God is the sovereign one who gives life and the one who take it away... not us.

**7<sup>th</sup>** We are not to commit adultery because God is a God of relationship and promise and adultery is the breaking of the highest human relationship and promise.

**8<sup>th</sup>** We are not to steal because God is our provider. He provides through the gifts of meaningful labor or gifts of direct love... stealing is a repudiation of the gifts of God.

**9<sup>th</sup>** We are not to lie because God is the truth.

**10<sup>th</sup>** We are not to covet because God is enough...

**You get the point... the moral law God has commanded is set in the moral nature of all that God is... it is a reflection of His character.** Now we have been made in the image of God which means that this moral law is also set at the 'core of our being.' The mark is set in God's commands, in God's character and also...

- That mark is set in the core of man. Our own consciences confirm that in us is this internal guide of the moral law giver etched in our own beings. **So when we sin we go off from the mark of God's commands, God's character and from the mark of our own true selves...**
- That mark is finally set in Christ... He kept all the commands because he was the commander. He has all the character of God for He is God in the flesh. And He was the perfect man to the very core. Christ is the mark... His life is the Way of Life. **Sin is not stepping away from moral rules. Sin is stepping away from Christ.** It is stepping away from God. It is stepping away from what God made you to be. When you sin you go against God's law... you go against God... you go against Christ... you go against yourself. You are fighting against yourself.

God has made our world to be governed by **physical laws** and **morals laws**. Take the law of gravity for example... and **I want point out that you cannot break the law of gravity.** You can prove it. You jump off a ten story building and you will not be breaking the law of gravity... you will be proving it. In the same way you cannot break the moral laws of God that govern His creation. You can only prove that law and the proof will be devastating to you.

**Sin is stepping out of the Way of God...**

**II. Sin starts when you go out of the way/miss the mark of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment...**

**Ex. 20:3 “You shall have no other God’s before me.”**

**James 1:14-15** gives us the route of sin. Here is the route of Sin; desire with a small ‘d’ becomes Desire with a capital ‘d.’ That Desire brings us to Sin. Sin brings us to death. You see when, little ‘d’ desires become capital ‘D’ Desires then our Desires become our gods. We have another god before us.

**Desires with a small “d” are not wrong but capital “D” Desires are.** One way to tell if your desire has grown beyond its value is if they become ends in themselves for you. Desires are God’s gift to us and if we use them according to His will, they are actually the means of glorifying Him, by enjoying His gifts and His provisions.

**What are these desires?** Really there are two categories for all of our desires. There are desires that are Self-regarding and desire that are Other-regarding. We have urges to please ourselves and we have urges to please others.

These urges are obviously not always wrong? What did Jesus say was the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest command? *“It was to love our neighbors as ourselves.”* It was to match our self regarding activity with other regarding activity. You see it is not wrong to be self regarding or other regarding. These desires are not in themselves wrong.

**So when do these urges for ourselves and others become sin?** They become sin when they trump and overwhelm what the Lord Jesus said was the 1<sup>st</sup> great commandment to, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul and with all your strength.”* When our regard for ourselves and others...our desires for self and others... expand beyond our regard/ our desire to live for God and His good pleasure it is sin. When that happens we are no longer worshipping God but we are worshipping the objects of distorted desires... we are worshipping images of ourselves or others.

So Peter listened to his desire for self preservation over God’s desire for truth and loyalty and Peter denied Christ...

And Pilate gave into his desire to please the crowd instead of God’s desire that we serve justice and so He turned Jesus over to their cries for crucifixion.

In both cases what is a legitimate desire when regulated by a love for God became the pathway to sin... It is always that way...

**III. Stepping out of the Way of God is a striving against the moral law of nature; is a striving against the moral law that governs your own nature**

**1 Peter 2:11** *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”*

Whatever is against God’s moral law is ultimately against you... it is that thing which wars against your own soul. You were made to worship God. Your soul was made for God and for the enjoyment of God. When you make something else god; when you, in sin, make your desire for yourself or others greater than your desire for God, you act in a way that is not consistent with your nature. This cannot ultimately satisfy you.

In the Screw Tape Letters C.S. Lewis has a senior Demon saying to a subordinate demon, “*We work under a cruel handicap. Nothing is naturally on our side. Everything has to be twisted before it is of any use to us.*” The twist that Satan gives from nature to sin is to make our little ‘d’ desires become big ‘d’ Desires. It is turning our lives against ourselves and our ultimate purpose which is to worship God and to make us bow to worship ourselves or others instead of God. This is not the way of life...

**2 Cor. 7:1** “*Cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates either flesh or spirit.*” Listen if sin is natural to life why should it contaminate us?

**James 3:16** *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*

**Remember that the word evil is live spelled backwards. Evil is life attempting to live against itself. It doesn’t work.** Sin is common and consistent with the sinful nature but it isn’t natural. If it was it would contribute to happiness, symmetry, harmony and effectiveness. But in the end, it doesn’t.

**Listen: Even when it seems that a person is getting away with murder, or getting way with pure self interest it is only an illusion... Remember there is a God who is taking notes...** and all people will answer before His judgment/His Way for the Universe. The **Psalmist** speaks of being jealous of those individuals who are rich and live well and yet deny God in **Psalm 73:3-5**, *I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind...* **He even says to God in verse 13**, “*Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure...*” Then the Psalmist is brought by God to recognize the ultimate end of those deny God and their judgment and he says, “*Then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.*”

#### **IV. Striving against your nature brings unhealthy results**

Now Lord Jesus said in **John 4:34**, “*My meat is to do the will of him who sent me and finish the work he gave me to do.*” He said this as the perfect man who was living in accord with the core of his human purpose and created intent. **At the core we are made to thrive on our obedience to the will of God.**

If God’s will is our meat, then when we live contrary to God’s will we are starving ourselves and/or poisoning ourselves with false foods.

**Ex.** It is allergy season and this year is one of the worse. Some of us are allergic to tree pollens and grass pollens and spring molds, some of you aren’t. But all of us are allergic to sin. Jones “*Sin in the mouth is as sweet as honey. In the beginning sin tastes good; seems good. But when life tries to assimilate it, it can’t. It turns bitter. For life does not and cannot assimilate or digest sin. Sin and the body are not made for each other. They are allergic to each other.*” Eventually it shows on our faces... often you can see the person run down by sin.

What is the right thing morally is also the healthy thing physically. What is the right thing morally is also the healthy thing socially. What is the right thing morally is also the healthy thing economically. What is the right thing morally is also the healthy thing educationally and politically and psychologically. **In other words there is no dualism in life. All things are connected to righteousness.**

Sin has consequences that are ultimately destructive. Some of these consequences show up in short order... some show up through generations. **Ex.** Father and Aunt who died of Cancer and the thought is that somewhere they played in a contaminated sandbox. That is what sin does as well. It sets us up in a contaminated world that plagues our natures and saps us of our life.

**Concluding Question:** If sin is unnatural then why is it so naturally in people? For example **Eph. 2:3** says, *we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind?* **Answer:** The sin is in humans as an unnatural cancer or substance but it was not our intended state and it actually turns us against the natural reality of God's moral universe.

Now what we can say is that person is sinful and that sin is his or her habitual (though not natural) pattern. **E. Stanley Jones** points out that humans have become naturalized in the unnatural. Like an alcoholic that finds the taste of water sickening... they are like a person who has become so accustomed to walking with one pocket full of rocks that if you suddenly emptied that pocket they would tip over the other way... so sin has become our custom but it is not natural to us.

We are sick in sin. Our sin sicknesses psychologically, emotionally, socially, economically etc. is really a demonstration that man is home sick. Man's consistent feelings of uneasiness are a sign of his home sickness. He is strangely unsound until he finds his way back to God. "*God is my home. When I am in him I am at home. When I am out of him, I am away from home – I am home sick.*"

But there is a way back home. And after all we have said, you will be surprised to hear that Christianity doesn't say the way back home is through a renewed effort to follow the moral laws of God. No. Instead it is to put your life into the life of the one who set the Mark and kept the Mark perfectly. It is to put your life into the Life of the Lord Jesus. He has born in your place the full consequences of missing His mark and His offers you the sweet results of a sinless life... His sinless life. Remember... **If the Lord Jesus is the Way and His Way is the Way then He can find for us a way back when we fall away.**

**Now the Christian is in Christ and by His power is led to live life in the Way... led to live life in obedience to the will of God. We are offered the grace of forgiveness when we stumble out of the way and the grace of a renewed, internally led pursuit of the way... this internally driven pursuit of the way, for the Christian, is not driven by the faint echo's of our own human impulses but now is it led by the driving compulsion of Christ living and abiding within us... Christ gets us back on nature's true path... He puts us in the Way. He puts within us the Way.**

**Tertullian** wrote, "*The soul is naturally Christian.*" Jones quotes the testimony from radiant 82 year old who came to Christ, "*I knew that this was the Way, for the moment I put my feet upon it I was no longer fighting with myself.*"