

Incline My Heart

One of the ways people can tell if they're actually saved is by looking at the lives they lead. Jesus said you can know people by their fruit:

Matthew 7:16-20: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

The principle here is very straightforward: you can tell whether a person is wicked or righteous by considering their actions. People who lead wicked lives are wicked, and don't know God:

1 John 1:6-7: “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

It's true that we're not saved by our works. The Bible is very clear about that point! Righteousness is a *result* of salvation, not its cause. People aren't saved by obeying God. Instead the reason people walk in God's ways is *because* they've been saved. The reason an apple tree bears apples is because it's an apple tree. The apples reveal the tree's true nature.

This brings up an important question. How can we overcome the sin in our life? The Lord Jesus Christ is clear that He requires us to obey His commands:

John 14:21-24: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.”

Obedience isn't optional. Now that we've been saved we must not continue to live a life of sin:

Romans 6:1-2: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

I'm not saying that if we sin we will lose our salvation. I'm also not saying that we must obey God's commandments in order to maintain our salvation. The Bible doesn't teach either of those things. (We're saved by grace, not by works.) What it *does* say is that those who are saved must obey God's commandments. We must walk in His ways. But *how do we do that?*

This isn't an easy thing to do. Although God forgives our sins and gives us His grace, that doesn't mean as soon as we become Christians are never sin again. There are some sins that

are very hard to overcome, even for God's people:

Hebrews 12:1: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

Romans 7:15: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.”

Romans 7:18-19: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

Throughout the Bible we can find godly people who struggled with overcoming the sin in their life. What did they do about it? Well, sin is a heart problem. When they were faced with overcoming sin, *they asked God to change their heart:*

Psalms 119:35-36: “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.”

When the psalmist sinned he went to God and asked Him to change his heart. The psalmist understood that the reason he sinned was because of his heart. Our sin reveals the true nature of our heart. Since sin is a heart problem, the psalmist asked God to give him a heart that was obedient to His law.

Notice that the psalmist believed God was sovereign over his actions. He believed that God could cause him to obey Him,

and he prayed that God would do exactly that. He *wanted* God to change him into a person who obeyed His commands, and that's what he prayed for.

We can find this throughout the Bible. In this passage the psalmist asked God to control his words:

Psalm 141:3-4: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties."

How do we control the words that we speak? By asking God to change our heart. Our words are a reflection of our heart, so if we want to speak things that are good then we must first go to God and ask Him to change our heart. The psalmist understood that wicked actions come from a wicked heart, and so he wanted God to change him.

This psalmist prayed that God would teach him to do His will:

Psalm 143:10: "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness."

In order for us to obey God we must first know what He commands us to do. We must understand His commandments. The good news is that God is both able and willing to teach them to us. If we want to overcome the sin in our life then we can pray that God would teach us to obey Him.

The Lord is willing to grant those prayers. In fact, God promised that one day He would give an obedient heart to the Israelites:

Ezekiel 11:19-20: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and

I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

When will the Israelites become obedient to God? Once He gives them an obedient heart. When will *we* become obedient to God? When He changes our heart.

When we sin, we should repent of it and ask God to forgive us. However, we must not stop there. We must also ask God to change our heart:

Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

If God creates a clean heart within us then we will lead a clean life. The way to obtain a clean heart is by going to God and asking Him to give us one. God is sovereign over our heart, and He is able and willing to change us.

As long as you have an evil heart you won't be able to obtain a lasting victory over sin. The root problem will still exist. Evil people may be able to hide their true nature for a time, but that wicked nature is still within them.

The way to become a person who pleases God is by asking Him to change our nature. Obedience is one of the fruits of righteousness. It comes from God changing our heart and making us into new creatures in Christ. If you're struggling with sin then *ask God to change your heart*. There are many other good things we can and should do to overcome sin (such as avoiding places where we're tempted, removing wicked influences from our lives, leaning on others to help us, and so forth), but if our heart remains unchanged then our actions will as well.

This is a good prayer to pray:

1 Kings 8:57-58: "The Lord our God be with us,

as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.”