

INTRODUCTION

As Christians we deal with a constant dilemma. Are we truly saved, or are we still sinners? We know that Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross. When we accept Jesus by faith all of our sins are washed away. It includes the sins of our past, present and future. We should not have any doubt about this truth. But the fact is that we still sin every day. Therefore, are we truly saved, or are we still sinners? I hope that I can have a long life. Although I maintain a healthy diet and exercise often, I have no guarantee how old I can live. However, I have full confidence that if for any reason I will not get up tomorrow morning I will be with the Lord. If there is any trace of sin that has not been dealt with then I will go down instead of go up. The apostle John wrote his letter to make sure his readers understood that they were saved. However, they would still struggle with sin for the rest of their lives. The same is true for us. We live in a fallen world under the influence of Satan. He continues to use various tricks to lead us astray from the truth. Sin cannot cut off our relationship with God once we are in Christ. That is another wonderful promise God gives us. However, sin will impact our fellowship with the Lord. But we are never alone or even hopeless in our battle with sin. It is God who enables us to be obedient to Him. In today's passage, John urged his readers and us to live out a holy life. He told us that God's love motivates us to live out His righteousness.

EXPLANTION

1. 過去的敗壞 Our Heinous Past

Let us first review our heinous past when we were lost in sin. John said in **verse 4**: Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. When we were sinners, we violated God's law. By "the law" John was not talking about the Old Testament Law. We can understand it as God's universal commands. In other words, it is His requirement of perfection. We could not live up to His standard of holiness. In Ephesians chapter 2, Paul has a detail description of our heinous past. It is a relatively lengthy passage. Please pay attention to the words. **Verses 1-3** say: 1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Paul told us that we indulged in sins before we knew Christ. We sinned in our actions, words and thoughts. Paul described that we were "objects of (God's) wrath" and destined for God's judgment. But while we were neck-deep in our sins, there was a 180-degree change. Continue to read **verses 4-5**: 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. One Bible scholar said the word "but" is a critical conjunction in the Bible. We were doomed for condemnation, BUT because of God's wonderful love He sent His Son to die for our sins. Notice in verse 5 Paul repeated the same phrase of "dead in transgressions" he used in verse 1. God saved us when we were hopeless in sin, when we did not know Him nor could we use anything to exchange for His salvation. That is God's grace! By His death, what

did Jesus actually do to our sins? Let us go back to the 1 John passage and look at **verse 5**: But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. The word “he” in this verse refers to Jesus, just like the Chinese Union Version indicates. The verb translated as “take away” means to remove. In this context, it means to forgive. In both chapters 2 and 4, John depicted Jesus as the atoning sacrifice to take away our sins. By dying on our behalf, Jesus suffered the death penalty we deserve. In doing so, God removed the judgment on those who put their faith in Jesus. Besides, John mentioned the second effect of Jesus’ death on our sins in the second half of **verse 8**: ... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. The verb “destroy” means to cut loose. Jesus’ death broke the bondage of sin on believers. Satan can no longer drag Christians to commit sins. In Christ, we are freed from the captivity of sin, and we can freely choose to obey God. Our old self as a sinner does not exist anymore. After we have examined our heinous past, we need to ask ourselves: do we look at sin from God’s perspective? Do we see the seriousness of sin? Do we truly realize that sin separates us from God eternally? If it is not because of the salvation grace of Christ, we will forever be condemned. Do we hate sin as much as God does, to the degree that we say to ourselves: “I don’t want to go back to how I use to be!” The good news is, God did not only save us from sin, He also enables us to not fall back in sin. God’s power over sin will work in us when we rely on Christ. We will talk more about that later.

2. 將來的榮耀 Our Glorious Future

Having looked back at our heinous past, we now look forward to our glorious future. John told us in **verse 2**: Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. The word “he” in this verse refers to Jesus. At the second coming of Christ, believers will be like Him. Unlike what I mentioned last week about the Mormons’ belief, we will not become gods. We will only be like God. In **1 Corinthians 15:42-44**, Paul told us that we will live forever like God: 42 ... The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... Christians will receive a new body at the return of our Lord. Paul told us that this new body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. The physical body we now have will grow old and weak, and it will not last forever. Jesus will receive us into heaven in our new body. When we reach heaven, we will no longer need to take any supplement, we will not need to go to the gym, ladies will not have to put on makeup and even doctors will be assigned other duties. We will all look like 25-year-old. I may get my hair and 28-inch waistline back. Okay, the Bible does not give us so much detail. I am just making some reasonable guesses. My point is, everyone looks forward to heaven because everything will be the best. Many of you may have heard of the name Joni Eareckson Tada. She is a famous artist who sits on a wheelchair. When Joni was 17 years old, she fractured her neck at a diving accident. Ever since then she has been paralyzed from the neck down. But God changed her heart. Later she learned to paint by holding brushes with her teeth and she also wrote over 40 books. Besides, she started her own Christian ministry to help disabled people worldwide. Joni has been restricted to her wheelchair for over 60 years. She once said that she could not wait to get to heaven when she will receive a new body. Then she can regain her freedom to leap and bounce. Our eternal home is a beautiful place not only because everything will be new. It is also because there will be no more sin. **Verse 26** of the Corinthians passage reads: The last enemy to

be destroyed is death. The penalty of sin is death. Since Adam and Eve rebelled against God, death became a reality. When Jesus returns, Satan will be eradicated, sin and death will cease to exist as well. Do you look forward to this glorious future? If so, then you need to start preparing today. If you have to relocate to another city you will research about the area. You may gather information like climate, safer locations to live, school district, tourist attractions, Chinese stores and restaurants, etc. I am sure that you will look for a new church too! The apostle John told us that we need to get ready for heaven now. He said in **verse 3**: Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. If we prepare to live with the holy God forever, then we should begin purifying ourselves today. If we do not quit sinning now, then we may find it uneasy to adapt to the life in heaven. After all, we will be moving to a place where there is no sin. From this verse we can derive the eighth proof to verify that we are Christians. Believers are those who **hope for the glory of heaven**. God's intent is not for us to just sit there and wait for our turn to go upward. If our salvation is all about getting a ticket to heaven then we are not enjoying all the blessings God has in store for us, and we are wasting all the opportunities God gives us. I said many times before that according to the Bible, our eternal life begins at the moment when we accepted Christ. God wants us to share in His holiness as we grow to be more like Him. He urges us to stop sinning. He wants us to know Him and serve Him, and to make Him known to other people. If we do not love God in this life and do not have a desire to imitate after His holiness, then it will be an eternal torture when we get to heaven!

3. 今天的得勝 Our Victorious Today

As Christians, we should never forget how God saved us from our heinous past. We should always bear in mind the glorious future we will reach. Thirdly, God promises us a victorious today. In **verse 6**, John encouraged us to purify ourselves: No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Sin contradicts our new nature in Christ. We can see the ninth proof to verify that we are Christians based on this verse. Believers are those who **restrain from living a sinful lifestyle**. We can never attain perfection in this life. Even though we will not be sinless, but we can sin less and less. John further elaborated the truth in **verse 9** when he said: No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. John said that a believer will not continue to sin because God's seed is in him/her. That seed can be understood as the Holy Spirit. God gives us the freedom to choose not to sin when our mind is submitted to the Holy Spirit. Then John also said that a Christian cannot go on sinning. That points to the ability. God will empower us to avoid sin. The difference between deciding to sin or not to sin depends on whether we rely on ourselves or rely on God. We often fool ourselves into thinking that we can overcome temptation by our own strength. We think that we can do it if we just try harder. Satan surely knows how to attack our weaknesses. We can learn from the apostle Paul to rely on God to live a victorious life. He shared his personal testimony in **Romans 7:18-19** – 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do, no; the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Brothers and sisters: will you say “amen” to that? That was from the great apostle Paul, who wrote 13 books of the New Testament. If even such a saint had struggles over sin, then there is nothing we can take pride in ourselves. But Paul showed us that we can win this battle. Keep reading **verses 24-25**: 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ

our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. In essence, whenever we submit ourselves to God then we can have victory over sin. Paul put it this way in [Galatians 5:16](#) - So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. When we rely on the Holy Spirit living in us, we will not crave after our sinful desires. In the subsequent verses Paul listed some of the sins that we may commit if we yield to our sinful old-self. In contrast, when we follow God's guidance, we can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We can display godly virtues like love, joy and peace to benefit ourselves and others. Brothers and sisters: what kind of fruit are you bearing in your life? If your harvest does not consist of good fruits that please God, then you should check your connection. Do you find yourself fall back to sin over and again? For example, you notice that it is hard not to criticize people or gossip behind their back; you love to boast about your accomplishments, rather than humbly giving God the glory; you cannot stop watching certain things that you clearly know is not edifying to your spiritual growth. We can only conquer sin if we rely on the Holy Spirit. The Bible never says that living as a Christian is an easy path. Yes, there will be God's blessings. However, there also has to be sacrifice. We have to deny what our sinful nature loves to do. We have to work against the nature of our old self to embrace God's holiness and righteousness. Spiritual growth requires self-discipline. It is a day-by-day commitment to read God's Word and put it in practice. We learn to discern the prompting of the Holy Spirit and ask Him for strength so that we can do things His way. As we learn to obey God's will there will be peace and joy, and we can freely choose not to sin.

CONCLUSION

How should we put everything together? We have to go back to [verse 1](#): How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! Ultimately, it is God's love that motivates us to live out His righteousness. What a privilege we have to become children of God. You are not redeemed sinner number 12345. If Jesus Christ's is your Savior and Lord, you are a beloved son or daughter of the Heavenly Father. Many people think that since God loves them anyway, then it does not matter even when they sin. No, it does matter to our Heavenly Father when we sin. Our disobedience grieves His heart. We smear mud on His glory. We are just like the main character in the parable of the prodigal son. He hit bottom after he wasted all his father's money in pleasure. He decided to go home and be a servant rather than to starve to death. He figured that he did not deserve the title "son" anymore. The fact is, he never ceased to be a son even when he was rebellious. However, he must confess his wrongdoings to the father. In doing so, his privilege as a son was restored. The fellowship with his father interrupted by sins was repaired. We are just like the prodigal son. We will still struggle in sin. It is by God's love that He called us to be His sons and daughters. It is also by God's love that He always gives us an opportunity to turn back from sins. Still remember the song the Mandarin group presented two Sundays ago and again at the Chinese New Year banquet? Let us look at the lyrics of one of the stanzas: Lord Jesus, you are my beloved. Although I have been stubborn and disobedient, I now surrender everything. Just like how you come to serve me, I desire to be selfless as you are. I eager to live for you, obey God's will and not my own will. Align with your heart, as long as you are pleased. In doing so my struggle will stop, but rest in peace. Our response to God's love is simply to love with back in submission.