

The Ensign

of the Christian Israelite Church

‘And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.’ Isaiah 11:12

Overcoming Sin

by Trudy Adams

The Origin of Sin

Christian Israelites believe that the redemption of the body can be achieved in the end times through overcoming the power of sin (see *What Do Christian Israelites Believe About The Faith of the Church*). Sin is the act of straying from, disobeying, or defying God’s will. It first came into the world through the devil or Satan, who ‘sinneth from the beginning’ (1 John 3:8). Satan was one of God’s chief angels in heaven until he decided he wanted to become more powerful than God, saying, ‘I will exalt my throne above the stars of God’ (Isaiah 14:13). This sin led to a great battle, after which Satan was cast out of heaven and to the earth (see Revelation 12). Having failed in his attempt to overpower God, Satan then became determined to drive God’s greatest creation – man and woman – to death through sin.

Unlike Satan, God is inherently holy (without sin) (Isaiah 6:3). As such, he is unable to tolerate anything impure or unholy in his presence:

‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.’ Romans 1:18.

Created in God’s image, Adam and Eve were initially perfect and without evil or sin, and God was therefore able to commune with them in the Garden of Eden. They were holy, but only until they disobeyed God’s instruction to not eat of the tree of good and evil, after which they were separated from God’s spiritual presence (symbolised in their removal from the Garden of Eden) (see Genesis 3). Sin always leads to our separation from God (Isaiah 59:2) and it was what made Adam and Eve subject to death for the first time:

‘For the wages of sin is death.’
Romans 6:23.

Christian Israelites believe that through Adam and Eve’s sin, evil entered their bodies, or what the Bible sometimes calls ‘the flesh’, thereby causing them and their descendants to forever struggle with sin:

‘By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.’ Romans 5:12.

The Bible tells us that God is the God of the living, not of death (Mark 12:27), and death was not part of his original plan – Adam and Eve would have lived forever had they not been corrupted by sin. Death, however, is part of Satan’s plan. While it was Adam and Eve’s choices that led to sin entering the world, it

was Satan who gave them the idea to sin in the first place:

‘And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’
Genesis 3:1.

Satan caused Eve to question God’s will, which led to her then disobeying God’s will. He drew her and then Adam into sin. He is continuing to do the same with God’s people today, often with the help of his demons, as his main purpose is still to draw us away from God and to tempt us towards sin and death:

‘The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.’
John 10:10.

God has called us to stand against Satan (see the article, *The Value of the Armour of God*), and thankfully has provided us with help to do so as ultimately he wants us to be ‘cleansed from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9).

Absolution in the Old Testament

To help his people, the Israelites, remain in his holy presence, God outlined a series of laws through Moses, which are documented in the first five books of the Bible (including the Ten Commandments). These laws taught the Israelites right from wrong, and how to live according to God’s will. To break these laws was to sin:

‘Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.’
1 John 3:4.

God recognised that the Israelites wouldn’t be able to maintain the laws perfectly, so he gave them a way to absolve themselves of such transgressions and receive soul salvation, i.e. through the sacrifice and offerings of certain animals that were perfect and without blemish (see Leviticus 16:24, 27 and Deuteronomy 17:1). The sin was transferred to the animal, which was then slaughtered, signifying the

death of that sin. It was the shedding of blood that was particularly important:

‘And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.’ Hebrews 9:22.

God provided this system so his people could become holy again and thereby able to return to his presence, as ultimately he loved them and wanted to maintain a relationship with them:

‘O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity ... I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.’ Hosea 14:1, 4.

Overall, the Bible makes it clear that God wants us to forsake evil and return to a relationship with him:

‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.’ Isaiah 55:7.

‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways.’
Ezekiel 33:11.

One of the main themes of the Old Testament is that of the Israelites straying from God, leading to their persecution, and God then rescuing and redeeming them, only for them to stray again soon after. Humanity is not so different now and, like the Israelites, if we don’t make changes or repent, we too face the consequences of sin.

The Consequences of Sin

Adam and Eve showed us that we face consequences when we disobey God.

Throughout the Bible, God continually gives us choices and makes the consequences of those choices clear, most notably in Deuteronomy:

‘Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God.’ 11:27-28.

Following and obeying God’s commandments is good for our health:

‘Let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.’ Proverbs 3:1-2.

Sinning is not:

‘When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.’ James 1:15.

While this doesn’t necessarily mean we will face immediate death if we sin (just as Adam and Eve didn’t), it does mean that sin invites death into our lives, e.g. in our relationships with others, ourselves, and with God, as well as in our physical and emotional health. God set up the laws to protect our well-being, and breaking them brings pain and suffering not only to us, but often to those around us as well. All aspect of our lives can be and usually are affected. Christian Israelites also believe that sin ultimately prevents the body from being saved of physical death in the end days.

The Great Wrestle

Sin is a choice with consequences, but sometimes we struggle to make better choices even when we want to, sinning when we would rather do good. Paul tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), while John says that if we say we have no sin, we are actually deceiving

ourselves (1 John 1:9). Sin is a problem every person faces.

As mentioned, Christian Israelites believe that Adam and Eve’s sin led to evil entering their flesh. Paul tells us that it is the flesh that causes us to sin:

‘For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.’ Romans 7:5.

As Galatians 5:19-21 explains, there are many sins that result from the ‘works of the flesh’ and that stops us from entering the Kingdom of God. It is our fleshly desires that draw us away from God’s path and prevents us from dwelling in his presence:

‘But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.’ James 1:14.

Our flesh makes sin *feel* good, at least for the short-term, which is why it is often difficult to resist. We may want to do the right thing, but our flesh drives us towards that which brings instant satisfaction or reward instead (Romans 7:25), even if we know it’s not good for us in the long-term. This then causes a struggle within us, which then brings torment – and that is exactly Satan’s plan.

Paul most famously recorded his wrestle with sin in Romans:

‘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. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.’ 7:18-20.

Paul makes an important distinction here – that when we want to do the right thing, but fail to do so, it’s actually not us but the sin within our flesh that causes us to fail. Sin is

not who we are nor who we were created to be. It is not part of our identity, even though Satan would like us to believe it is so we feel badly about ourselves. It's more accurate to think of sin or evil as a separate entity within us that Satan uses to lead us away from God's will and towards death. It is our job to overcome that entity and to 'crucify the flesh' (Galatians 5:24). We don't have to do so alone, as God provided us with help and a way for us to be totally free of sin and death. It was what gave Paul hope amidst his struggle:

'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'
Romans 7:24-25.

The Greatest Sacrifice

Having watched his people struggle with and fall into sin for generations, God knew that we needed a powerful way to be free of sin once and for all, and to commune with him in the personal way he originally intended. Previously the Israelites had sacrificed animals without blemish to receive absolution from sin; God now provided his own son, also without blemish, as a sacrifice:

'Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us ... How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.' Hebrews 9:12, 14-15.

Jesus Christ was born into the earth without evil and hence was able to obey all of God's

laws and dwell fully in God's presence. As Jesus' blood was without sin, it was offered and accepted as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind and, as a result, we no longer need to make animal sacrifices for atonement.

It's important to note that God didn't wait for us to be perfect before he provided Jesus:

'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us.'
Romans 5:8 (emphasis added).

Jesus' death and resurrection was a direct victory over the sin and death Satan had brought into the world:

'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.'
1 John 3:8.

Through Jesus, humanity was given another option. Rather than continually sinning and seeking salvation from that sin, Jesus' sacrifice gave us the power and freedom to overcome sin entirely:

'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.'
Romans 8:2.

Sin remains a part of our world and we still have to make the choice as to whether we will take part in it or follow God's laws. Jesus himself explained that while his death fulfilled the law of transgression or sacrifice, it did not do away with the other laws, which he said would continue until his second coming:

'For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called

great in the kingdom of heaven.’
Matthew 5:18-19 (see also verses
20-48).

This means that breaking God’s laws and acting contrary to his will remains a sin. The difference is that before Jesus came, we only had ourselves to rely on to follow God’s commandments, and therefore frequently failed. Now, in Jesus Christ we have the help we need to obey the laws and thereby remain continually in God’s presence.

It’s true that our souls are no longer saved through following the law or animal sacrifice, nor indeed through anything we alone can do as it is received by grace and faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, all efforts to obey God’s laws will be rewarded at Jesus Christ’s return, and works are just as important as faith (see James 2:14-26). Christian Israelites believe that for those who accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah and seek his strength to obey God’s laws, there is the reward of immortality:

‘In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.’ Proverbs 12:28.

Paul says that ‘the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good’ (Romans 7:12). It is therefore important that we continue to abide by it.

The Help of the Spirit

While asking for and receiving God’s forgiveness when we sin is a great privilege (explored in the article *Understanding Forgiveness*), Christian Israelites believe the greater freedom is to work towards not sinning at all and to thereby become more and more like Jesus Christ – without blemish and able to dwell more and more deeply in God’s presence. To enable us to do this, God provided us not only with Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit:

‘I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the

flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.’ Galatians 5:16.

‘For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye *through the Spirit* do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.’ Romans 8:13 (emphasis added. See also verses 8:10).

However, this is a life-long journey and we all fall short from time-to-time. While we are told to keep working towards perfection (Matthew 5:48), God provides us with forgiveness for when we fail and a promise that we don’t have to live condemned for our mistakes:

‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Romans 8:1.

‘But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.’ Romans 5:20.

‘In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.’ Ephesians 1:7.

The first step in overcoming sin is to acknowledge our sins through repentance and confession to God (as David did in Psalm 51) and, where necessary, to others:

‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.’ 1 John 1:9.

Confession is an important part of being freed from sin as it allows it to be brought out into the light, rather than hiding it, for as Jesus Christ said, it’s the truth that makes us free (John 8:32).

We then need to receive God's forgiveness and refuse to listen to Satan if he continues to cause thoughts or feelings of condemnation within us. These are lies; the truth is we are made anew, as if we had never sinned:

'Though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow.'
Isaiah 1:18.

Once we have done this, we can then begin to work towards stopping the cycle of sin altogether.

No Longer a Slave to Sin

To prevent sin from reoccurring, we must firstly rely on God rather than our own striving to make the changes needed within us:

'For it is God which worketh in
you both to will and to do of his
good pleasure.' Philippians 2:13.

'Looking unto Jesus the author
and finisher of our faith.'
Hebrews 12:2.

While we work towards perfection, it's important to realise that perfection can only be achieved through having God's spirit within us. Until then, evil will always continue to be present within our mortal bodies to some degree. If we could be perfect within our own strength or through works without faith, we wouldn't need God. This is why the Lord says that 'my strength is made perfect in weakness', and why Paul concluded that he can take pleasure in his infirmities as 'when I am weak, then am I strong' (in Christ) (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). While we must do our best to overcome sin, we must also realise that it is God who perfects us in his own time and through his own power. Condemning ourselves when we fall short can lead to unnecessary self-judgment and general unhappiness. Rather, we need to partner with God on our journey and realise that our weaknesses provide God with space to fill with his spiritual presence, much like water running into a jar of marbles.

With God's help, our goal is to slowly become 'dead' to sin – i.e. completely impervious to its temptations:

'Likewise reckon ye also
yourselves to be dead indeed unto
sin, but alive unto God through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin
therefore reign in your mortal
body, that ye should obey it in the
lusts thereof. Neither yield ye
your members as instruments of
unrighteousness unto sin: but
yield yourselves unto God, as
those that are alive from the dead,
and your members as instruments
of righteousness unto God. For
sin shall not have dominion over
you.' Romans 6:11-14.

We can do this by spending time in the Word:

'Thy word have I hid in mine
heart, that I might not sin against
thee.' Psalms 119:11.

Sometimes, we need to physically flee temptation:

'Flee fornication ... Know ye not
that your body is the temple of
the Holy Ghost which is in you,
which ye have of God, and ye are
not your own? For ye are bought
with a price: therefore glorify
God in your body, and in your
spirit, which are God's.'
1 Corinthians 6:18-20.

Often it's helpful to, like Jesus, go 'about doing good' (Acts 10:30) through helping other people. Doing so pleases God and helps us to focus on others rather than on our own problems:

'Be not overcome of evil, but
overcome evil with good.'
Romans 12:21.

'But to do good and to
communicate forget not: for with
such sacrifices God is well
pleased.' Hebrews 13:16.

The main way to overcome sin, though, is in the field of our thoughts.

The Power of Thoughts

Paul tells us that Satan corrupted Eve's mind (through causing her to question God's will), which is what led her to sin (2 Corinthians 11:3). It was also evil thoughts that led to the world's destruction at the time of Noah:

'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.'
Genesis 6:5.

David faced many wicked people who sought his destruction. He saw the connection between such people and their thoughts:

'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.'
Psalm 10:4.

Solomon also indicated that thoughts and character are interlinked, when he said that 'the thoughts of the righteous are right' (Proverbs 12:5). Paul explained that the kind of thoughts we entertain can determine whether we invite life or death (or God or Satan) into our lives:

'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'
Romans 8:5-6.

Jesus Christ himself taught that sin begins with a thought:

'I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'
Matthew 5:28.

'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man.'
Matthew 15:18-19.

It is therefore clear that evil thoughts lead to sin, or that if we don't entertain evil thoughts, we won't sin. Thankfully, the Bible is full of suggestions as to how we can improve and protect our mind. Firstly, we need to fix our thoughts on God, which Isaiah says brings peace (26:3). We also need to ask God to give us the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and to renew our minds:

'Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.'
Romans 12:2.

We need to actively and quickly close down thoughts that don't agree with God's Word:

'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'
2 Corinthians 10:5.

Paul tells us to focus our mind on whatsoever is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). Doing so naturally forces out evil thoughts.

Prayer is also important in keeping our mind (and body) holy, and is something Jesus Christ instructed us to do for that very reason:

'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'
Matthew 26:41.

Being thankful and grateful is another strategy to maintain a Christ-like mind:

'In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ

Jesus concerning you.’
1 Thessalonians 5:18.

We also need to spend time with others who share our faith, as doing so gives us the opportunity to talk with others about what’s on our minds. They can help us to be accountable for our thoughts and the actions that follow:

‘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.’ 1 John 1:7.

But Remember, We Need Help

While all this is significantly helpful in the quest to overcome sin, we must remember that we only have power to do so through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, which we need to fully abide in if we are to truly eradicate the evil in our flesh:

‘He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.’ John 15:5.

We must never forget that it is through Jesus Christ that we have the victory (1 Corinthians 15:57). Remember, overcoming sin and walking in God’s commandments brings us blessings and allows us to live life as Jesus Christ intended:

‘I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’ John 10:10.

God promises that he will save Israel from all sin (Romans 11:26-27). Through abiding in the Holy Spirit and focusing our minds on God, Christian Israelites hope to gradually overcome the evil within us, and save not only our souls, but also our bodies from death and destruction:

‘And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.’
1 John 2:17.