

## DEALING WITH THE SPIRITUAL DISEASE CALLED SIN

### 11 Ways that sin can impact our relationship with God, others and ourselves

#### Five things to remember about sin and repentance

#### Four suggestions for overcoming a sinful habit

In a famous passage in Romans 7:14-21, Paul speaks about the mysterious presence of sin in his life and how it causes him to do things that he hates to do and to neglect the things that he wants to do. Looking at sin as a sort of spiritual disease, the following are some ways that it can impact our relationship with God and others.

1. *The presence of sin may make it difficult for us to believe in God's unconditional love.*
2. *Sin may cause us to be fearful of God.* We may think that "if we allow God to get too close, he will ask us to change our lives in ways that we don't want to, e.g., to live more simply, to forgive certain hurts, to cut back on pleasures we enjoy a lot, to pray more.
3. *Sin clouds our minds in distinguishing between what is morally right and wrong.* For example, I may steal stuff and think that it is really okay; I may miss Mass for no good reason and think that it's not serious; I may have no problem spending a lot of money on pleasures in a world where there are so many people starving and hurting.
4. *Sin weakens our will.* In the abovementioned passage from Romans, Paul speaks about this issue. Because of the power of sin in our lives, we sometimes find ourselves saying and doing nasty things. We find ourselves being stubborn and hard-hearted, and failing to do the good we want to do (sins of omission), e.g., reaching out to someone in need. We have good intentions but we are weak-willed.
5. *Sin causes us to blame others for our sinful habits.* Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the devil.
6. *The disease called sin causes us to be dishonest with ourselves.* Fr. Miller writes: "Our dishonesty with ourselves about our sin allows evil to remain within us, to settle into us, thus making it easier for us to do wrong the next time. By refusing to admit that it is evil or that it is mine, I allow sin an ongoing place in my life. It can become a habit, can "nest" in me, it can become more comfortable."
7. *Sin makes it difficult for us to face our sins.* We may have a problem with alcohol, pornography, or shopping, and be in denial about it. Or we may find a way to rationalize our sinful habit.

8. *One of the worst results of the presence of sin in our lives is the hardening of our hearts*, of our spiritual arteries. For example, sin can cause us to lose compassion for the poor, to lose all desire to forgive certain hurts, to shut down our desire to be open and honest with God about our lives.

9. *Sin, if not dealt with, will disrupt or even kill our relationship with others*. We become uncommunicative, defensive, manipulative, jealous, promiscuous, etc.

10. *Sin steals our peace and joy*.

11. *Sin causes us to be spiritually lazy*. Our lives become centered on ourselves. We fail to do the things that will keep our relationship with God alive and active. Our prayers are rote.

If you know of negative impacts of sin in your lives, please let me know.

Fr. Eamon

### **FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT SIN AND REPENTANCE**

1. Remember that sin—even the worst sin—cannot diminish in any way God's love for us. God's love for us *is* in no way dependent on our behavior.

2. Remember that God wants to use our sin to make us better people. For example, Peter's denial of Jesus led him to experience Jesus' awesome mercy. Our own sin can help us to be more understanding and compassionate towards the failings of others. The devil seeks to use our sin to separate us from God. For example, the devil uses our sin to discourage us, to isolate us from our Church family, to make us believe we are no good and, worst of all, to end our lives, e.g. Judas.

3. Remember that making a sincere confession on a fairly regular basis helps to keep us spiritually healthy, just like regular visits to the dentist help to keep our teeth healthy.

4. Remember that *repentance* or *contrition* is a wonderful grace. It causes us to be sorry for our sins. Many people are not. Some couples spend thousands of dollars on counseling when all they need is the grace of repentance, the grace that will enable them to say: "I was wrong; I am sorry; Forgive me"—the grace that will help them to stop using abusive language or being selfish.

5. Remember that it is a good practice to ask the Holy Spirit to help us see the root cause of a particular sin. For example, the root cause of impatience and anger may be a need to be in *control*. The reason our prayer has flattened out may be that we are upset with God or because we refuse to forgive some hurt.

## **FOUR SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING A SINFUL HABIT**

Confessing the same sins over and over is like an addiction. Our sins take a hold over us. They cause some of us to quit going to Confession because 'we feel we have to repeat the same old sins.' The following are four concrete suggestions to conquer a sinful habit.

1. Pray for a sincere desire to break a particular habit. Successful athletes are highly motivated. If you have little or no desire to break a bad habit, you can be sure you will not succeed.
2. Once we have a desire, begin each day with a prayer seeking Jesus' help. For example, "Jesus, I feel powerless in this area (N.\_\_) of my life. Please help me today to say 'no' to the temptation to \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., express anger in a destructive way.)"
3. As you go through the day, make a determined effort to say 'no' to your particular temptation.
4. At the end of the day, do an examination of conscience. For the times you were successful, say "Thank you, Lord." For the times you failed, ask for forgiveness. Prepare to start the battle again the next day.

If you are really intent on getting rid of a sinful habit, follow the above steps with persistence and sincerity of heart. With God's help, you will most likely witness a partial, if not total, victory in a few weeks.

Fr. Eamon Tobin