

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Growth
Week 5 - The Sinful Nature

Introduction

God's will for our lives is fruitfulness (John 15:5,8).

1. The primary cause of your lack of fruitfulness is YOU

(Watchman Nee) "Anyone who serves God will discover sooner or later that the great hindrance to his work is not others but himself . . ."¹

(Watchman Nee) "If you have a very clumsy servant and he just sits still and does nothing, then his clumsiness does not appear. If he does nothing all day he will be of little use to you, it is true, but at least he will do no damage that way. But if you say to him: "Now come along, don't idle away your time: get up and do something," then immediately the trouble begins. He knocks the chair over as he gets up, stumbles over a footstool a few paces further on, then smashes some precious dish as soon as he handles it. If you make no demands upon him his clumsiness is never noticed, but as soon as you ask him to do anything his awkwardness is apparent at once. The demands were all right, but the man was all wrong. He was as clumsy a man when he was sitting still as when he was working, but it was your demands that made manifest the clumsiness which, whether he was active or inactive, all the time were in his make-up.

We are all sinners by nature. If God asks nothing of us, all seems to go well, but as soon as he demands something of us, the occasion is provided for a grand display of our sinfulness. The Law makes our weakness manifest. While you let me sit still I appear to be all right, but when you ask me to do anything I am sure to spoil it, and if you trust me with a second thing I will as surely spoil that also. When a holy law is applied to a sinful, man, then it is that his sinfulness comes out in full display.

God knows who I am: he knows that from head to foot I am full of sin; he knows that I am weakness incarnate; that I can do nothing. The trouble is that I do not know it [last week's topic: [our new identity](#)]. I admit that all men are sinners, and that therefore I am a sinner; but I imagine that I am not such a hopeless sinner as some. God must bring us all to the place where we see that we are utterly weak and helpless. While we say so, we do not wholly believe it, and God has to do something to convince us of the fact."²

2. Your sin involves more than isolated acts of disobedience

(Mark 7:21-23) For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, (22) deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

¹ Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit* (Cloverdale, Indiana: Sure Foundation Publishers, 1965), p. 9.

² Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), pp. 157,158.

3. Mature Christians have a growing awareness of their sinfulness

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(Gal. 5:17*) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

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Examples

Peter

(Luke 5:4-8) And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break; 7 and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Paul

(1 Cor. 15:8-10) And last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (9) For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. For I am the least of the apostles, who is not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

(Eph. 3:8) To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

(1 Tim. 1:15) It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

C.S. Lewis

(C.S. Lewis) "Burrowing into his past, he was appalled at what he found...I have found out ludicrous and terrible things about my own character. Sitting by, watching the rising thoughts to break their necks as they pop up, one learns to know the sort of thoughts that do come. And, will you believe it, one out of every three is a thought of self-admiration: when everything else fails, having had its neck broken, up comes the thought "What an admirable fellow I am to have broken their necks!" I catch myself posturing before the mirror, so to speak, all day long. I pretend I am carefully thinking out what to say to the next pupil (for his good, of course) and then suddenly realize I am really thinking how frightfully clever I'm

going to be and how he will admire me.... when you force yourself to stop it, you admire yourself for doing that. It's like fighting the hydra... There seems to be no end to it. Depth under depth of self-love and self-admiration...Pride...is the mother of all sins, and the original sin of Lucifer." (Green and Hooper, *C.S Lewis: A Biography*. p. 105).

Isn't a "growing awareness of sin" a negative and unhealthy way to view yourself?

(Richard Lovelace) "Christians whose spiritual lives are grounded and nurtured only on self-esteem and positive thinking, without a vision of the depth of sin, are going to be lacking in depth, reality and humility . . . If we cannot face the bad news about the depth of sin . . . we cannot fully grasp the good news of salvation and the transformed life in Christ . . . Christians who are sensitive to the depth of their own sin are a lot easier to be with, because they are not as inclined to be judgmental." (Richard F. Lovelace, *Renewal As A Way Of Life* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985], p. 70).

Qualifications:

- 1.
- 2.

Biblical Terminology & Definition of Sin Nature

"Flesh"

(Gal. 5:17) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

"Body of sin"

(Rom. 6:6) . . . knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our **body of sin** might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin . . .

"Body of the flesh"

(Col. 2:11) . . . and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ . . .

"The sin which indwells me"

(Rom. 7:17,20) So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me . . . (20) But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

"Heart"

(Jer. 17:9) The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart . . .

"Outer man"

(2 Cor. 4:7,16) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves . . . Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

Definition of sin nature:

Other Definitions:

(John Owen) "It adheres as a depraved principle (in) our minds (as) darkness and vanity; (in) our affections (as) sensuality; (in) our wills (as) loathing of and aversion from what is good; and is constantly putting itself on us (through) inclinations, motions, or suggestions to evil . . . (it) is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet . . ." (John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*, p. xx,xxi).

(J. I. Packer) ". . . a perverted energy within people which enslaves them to God-defying, self-gratifying behavior, and by distraction, deceit and direct opposition weakens and overthrows their purposes of righteousness. (It is) the moral equivalent of a wolf in sheep's clothing, presenting itself to us again and again as good, desirable and a necessity of life, thereby corrupting our conscience so that we lose the sense of its guiltiness and cherish it as if it were a friend rather than as enemy." (J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* [Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1992], p. 107).

(Richard Lovelace) ". . . the structure of sin in the human personality is far more complicated than the isolated acts and thoughts of deliberate disobedience commonly designated in the world. In its biblical definition, sin cannot be limited to isolated instances or patterns of wrongdoing; it is something much more akin to the psychological term complex: an organic network of compulsive attitudes, beliefs, and behavior deeply rooted in alienation from God. Sin originated in the darkening of the human mind and heart as man turned from the truth about God to embrace a lie about him and consequently a whole universe of lies about his creation. Sinful thoughts, words and deeds flow forth from this darkened heart automatically and compulsively, as water from a polluted fountain." (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979], p. 89).

(Larry Crabb) "Many pastors preach an 'iceberg' view of sin. All they worry about is what is visible above the water line. Like a naive sea captain steering his vessel around the tip of the iceberg with no awareness that there is a mountain of ice beneath the surface that could wreck his

ship, Christian (leaders) are too often satisfied when their people turn from church-defined sins of behavior." (Larry Crabb, *Understanding People* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987], p. 129).

(C. H. Spurgeon) "In the Lateran Council of the Church of Rome, a decree was passed that every true believer must confess his sins, all of them, once in a year to the priest, and they affixed to it this declaration, that there is no hope of pardon but in complying with that decree. What can equal the absurdity of such a decree as that? Do they suppose that they can tell their sins as easily as they can count their fingers? Why, if we could receive pardon for all our sins by telling every sin we have committed in one hour, there is not one of us who would be able to enter heaven, since, besides the sins that are known to us and that we may be able to confess, there are a vast mass of sins, which are as truly sins as those which we lament, but which are secret, and come not beneath our eyes...The transgressions which we see and confess are but like the farmer's small samples which he brings to market, when he has left his granary full at home. We have but a very few sins which we can observe and detect, compared with those which are hidden from ourselves and unseen by our fellow-creatures." (C.H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David* [McLean, : MacDonald Publishing Co.], p. 274).

Discovering our Sinful Nature

Area 1: Temperaments

Definition: A collection of personality traits that show up as we respond to situations

(Gordon Allport) "The characteristic phenomena of an individual's nature, including his susceptibility to emotional stimulation, his customary strength and speed of response, the quality of his prevailing mood, and all the peculiarities of fluctuation and intensity of mood, these being regarded as dependent on constitutional make-up, and therefore largely hereditary in origin." (G. W. Allport, *Pattern and Growth in Personality* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961]. p. 34).

Warning: Don't use temperaments carelessly.

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Active Temperaments

Sanguine Strengths	Sanguine Sins	Choleric Strengths	Choleric Sins
Talkative	Poor Listener	Strong-willed	Angry Outbursts
Outgoing	Weak-willed	Determined	Cruel Sarcasm
Enthusiastic	Unstable	Independent	Domineering
Warm	Undisciplined	Optimistic	Inconsiderate
Personable	Restless	Practical	Resists Correction
Friendly	Undependable	Productive	Self-sufficient
Compassionate	Exaggerates	Decisive	Cold
Carefree	Fearful	Leader	Manipulative
		Confident	Messiah Complex

Reflective Temperaments

Melancholy Strengths	Melancholy Sins	Phlegmatic Strengths	Phlegmatic Sins
Creative	Unhappily self-centered	Calm	Stingy
Analytical	Moody	Easy-Going	Fearful
Deep Emotions	Negative	Dependable	Indecisive
Perfectionist	Theoretical/Impractical	Efficient	Spectator
Artistic	Unsociable	Conservative	Self-Protective
Idealistic	Critical	Practical	Lazy
Loyal	Vengeful	Diplomat	Self-Righteous
Sincere	Rigid	Dry Humor	Traitors

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- Besetting sins (deeply ingrained sin habits) often run along temperamental lines.
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Area 2: Close Relationships

(Matthew 7:3-5) And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? (5) You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Anger & Bitterness

(Eph. 4:26,31) Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger . . .(31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

What does it look like to be angry and yet not sin?

Critical Spirit

(Eph. 4:2,3) . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Envy & Jealousy

(James 3:14,15) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. (15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

Inconsiderate & Insensitive

(Titus 3:2,3) . . . to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

Hyper-sensitive

(Prov. 19:11) A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.

(Prov. 12:16) A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

Ungodly Controlling

(Luke 10:38-42) Now as they were traveling along, he entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. (39) And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's word, seated at his feet. (40) But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." (41) But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; (42) but only a few things are

necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Autonomy

(Prov. 18:1) He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom.

(Prov. 12:15) The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Omission

(James 4:17) Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Area 3: The World System

Definition: The system of values used by Satan to stimulate our sinful nature and blocks people from coming to Christ or serving him.

Key Components of the Kosmos:

(1 John 2:15,16) Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the **lust of the flesh** and the **lust of the eyes** and the **boastful pride of life**, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

The kosmos takes areas that are potentially good, but twists them into idols that distract us from coming to Christ and/or neutralize us as Christians. These are the "things of the world" mentioned in vs 15.

"Lust of flesh" (Hedonism):

Definition:

There is nothing wrong with physical pleasure in itself. God gave us bodies with the capacity for enjoying pleasure.

It includes not only obvious things like drug and alcohol abuse and sexual perversion. but also things like comfort (indolence as higher priority than serving Christ), gluttony, cigarette smoking, etc.

"Lust of eye" (Materialism):

Definition:

See Achan in Josh. 7:21.) There is nothing wrong with owning and even enjoying material objects. But this easily becomes a form of idolatry so that we derive our sense of meaning, significance, security, etc. from owning and enjoying them.

Materialism includes not just wealthy big spenders. It is also a crucial part of the American dream (see Luke 12:13-34 or Francis Schaeffer on “personal peace and affluence.”)

We do not need to have a lot of possessions to be materialistic. Materialism is a mindset. We find ourselves consumed with thoughts of wanting more rather than considering how thankful we are for what we have and how we can use our resources to serve others.

Remember that materialism is competitive for many. It's not important to have a nice car, but to have a nicer one than the next guy. For others, it is the pursuit of comfortable living (the absence of material suffering) that drives it.

"Boastful pride of life" (Egotism):

Definition:

There is nothing wrong with having a healthy sense of self and knowing that you are a significant person who can accomplish valuable goals and impact others. But Satan twists this into something very different (Lamech in Gen. 4:19-24).

As Christians we are significant because we are forgiven, adopted and gifted by God. Instead of living based on these realities, we try to attain significance based on other humans' approval.

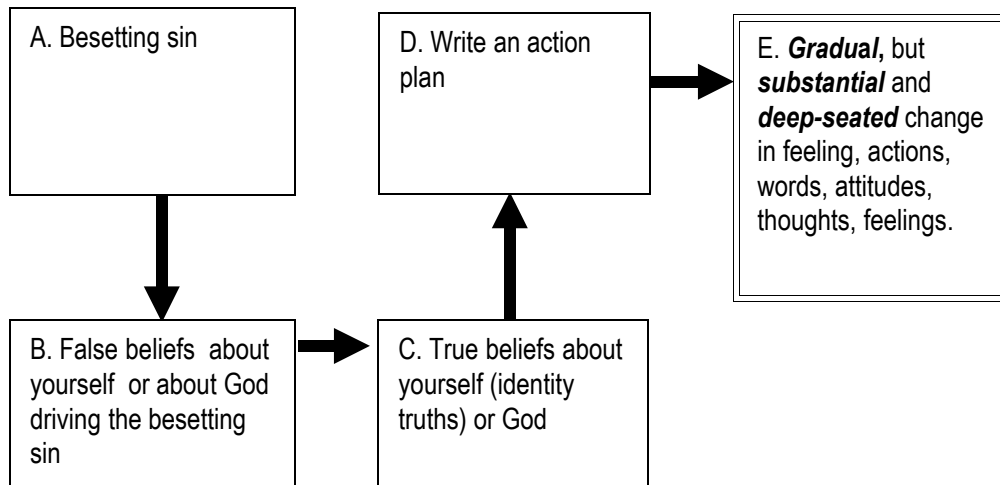
Manifestations of the boastful pride of life: corporate ladder climbing, extravagant celebrity lifestyles, craving other's respect, stay at home mothers who feel insignificant..

When we are into this lifestyle, we are enslaved to the opinions of others. Do you want the final verdict on your life to be, "people really admired me"?

Cooperating With God

(2 Tim. 2:19-22)** Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness." (20) Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. (21) Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. (22) Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Overcoming a Besetting Sin:



Box A: Identify your "besetting sins" by praying for insight (Ps. 139:23,24), reviewing temperament weaknesses, and asking Christians who know you well (are you ready to listen?). See Unit 3 "Encouragement and Admonition".

Box B: Ask God to reveal to you the lies you believe that drive your besetting sins. Sample lies might include:

- e.g. All that exists is what I can see and feel.
- e.g. The person I want to be with can meet all of my needs.
- e.g. I will be fulfilled to the degree that I get what I want for myself.
- e.g. I am successful when the people in my life approve of what I do.

Box C: Prayerfully reflect on and thank God for what he says is true. This should include an identity truth (what he says is true of you). You might also include a promise (what God says he will do), or an aspect of God's character (he is loving, compassionate, just, etc.) or God's perspective on life (this world is passing away, Jesus will return, etc.). Focus specifically on truths that combat the lies that drive your besetting sin. This will help you deal with the root problem behind many of your symptoms.

Box D: Write an action plan which may include:

1. Things to stop doing (resist) and things to start doing (replace)
2. Passage(s) to memorize and reflect on.
3. Books to read?

Don't forget that the power of sin over your life is greatly reduced when you confess your sin to other people (1 John 1:7).

Memory Verses

Gal. 5:17* - It is healthy and normal for Christians to experience a battle between sinful nature and Spirit.

2 Tim. 2:19-21** - There is an intimate connection between our personal sanctification and our ability to impact others for Christ.

Assignment

1. Read *Walking in Victory* -- Chapters 7-9.
2. Complete the assignment *Overcoming a Besetting Sin*.
 - **Identity one besetting sin** by reviewing three areas in which the sinful nature reveals itself (temperaments, relationships and the world system.). **Develop a plan for overcoming your besetting sin** as instructed on the handout.
 - If you get stuck on identifying the underlying identity issue, consider using the “Key Aspects of our New Identity” chart from the last class. Look at symptoms of not knowing, considering or presenting and see if your besetting sin is mentioned there.

Week 5 Exam Review Guide

- Be able to distinguish between "old self" (old identity now destroyed) from "body of sin" or "flesh" (sin nature which still exists).
- Be able to define the sin-nature (the deeply ingrained drive to rule our own lives and rebel against God)
- Be able to define “besetting sin” (special areas of vulnerability to sin *or* deeply ingrained sin-habits).
- Know the definition of temperament (a collection of personality traits that show up in different situations).
- Be familiar with three different areas which reveal our sin nature (temperament, personal relationships, and the world system).