

Cycles of Sin

Preview

Have you ever said to yourself, “I thought I conquered this last year! Why does it keep cropping up? Why can’t I kick this?” One of the devil’s biggest tricks is to make you believe you are stuck in a sinful cycle with no way out.

During World War I, the military used trench warfare. At the officer’s command, troops would swarm over the top of the trench, bayonets fixed to their rifles, shouting the battle cry. Unfortunately, they often were charging into a barrage of machine gun fire and other explosives, and casualties were high. The men were often trapped in the trenches, sometimes as long as eighteen months at a stretch, under nearly constant bombardment. Many of them suffered from shell shock (now known as PTSD). Conditions were unsanitary, and disease was widespread: typhoid fever, cholera, even a type of gum infection labeled “trench mouth.” You could say they were like rats stuck in a maze full of twists and turns, and the only way out was to face enemy bullets. Thus, for many soldiers, the trench was their grave.

Praise

Read Romans 8:31–39 and summarize the passage for the students. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger . . . nothing on this list can overcome us because Christ has made us more than conquerors. To this list we can add one more item: we can conquer ourselves as well. We can break out of the sinful cycle. We can swarm out of the trench (rut) and overcome the enemy with the help of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Parable

Do you know what a rut is? It is a grave with both ends knocked out. If we are not careful, we can spiritually die in the trench—it is a sinful cycle we cannot overcome.

Present

Satan’s greatest pleasure is to keep us trapped in the

trench. He enjoys taking advantage of our weaknesses and tendencies and actions, and every time we cycle, we dig ourselves in deeper. How does he know what our weaknesses are? Simple. He watches and waits, like a lion sizing up its prey. He’s been studying mankind a long, long time—ever since Adam and Eve—and is familiar not only with the common human weaknesses but also with your individual set of weaknesses. He studies you as diligently as a student cramming for a test. He takes his job seriously; he wants to score.

The song “Cycles” by Jonathan McReynolds states, “The devil learns from your mistakes, even if you don’t.” What a simple yet profound truth! Satan has watched and waited so long that he can tell when you’re going to do “it” again and moves in to take advantage. But it doesn’t have to be that way; according to II Corinthians 2:11, you can watch and wait too. You can learn from your mistakes! “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (II Corinthians 2:11).

It’s a basic war tactic to study your enemy. You can find out what Satan’s devices are by studying the war manual—the Word of God. Become aware of Satan’s tactics so you can anticipate them and shore up your defenses.

Return to Romans 8:37. How can people abstain from certain things? How can they keep from making the same mistakes over and over again?

In addition to the battle plan in the Word of God, you can obtain strength for spiritual warfare through the Spirit of God. His Spirit can make you strong enough to conquer the enemy and break out of the sinful cycle.

The main battlefield is in your mind. This means learning to control your thoughts, because thoughts, when dwelt upon, become actions, and when the thoughts are sinful, the actions will be sinful. Therefore, you must constantly make sure you are putting Jesus first in all things as well as evicting the things that should not be in your mind and heart.

A practical way to address cycles of sin is when you are in a sober frame of mind. Maybe it’s the morning after the sin or maybe it’s when you have hit rock bottom and there’s nowhere else to turn. In moments like these, you clearly know that you have done wrong. It should be a time of

repentance and a shoring up of defenses. It should be a time of putting on the armor that God provides and also spending time with Him to receive spiritual strength. Then when the temptation comes again (which it surely will), you will be prepared to meet and conquer it. Employing these tactics will help you to break out of the cycle.

Practice

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor” (Ecclesiastes 4:9, NKJV).

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV).

By now you are aware that you can't conquer these sinful cycles alone. Just like a vehicle that needs help to be pulled out of the ditch, you need a friend that will help pull you out of the rut and keep you from falling into future ones. This individual can be called an accountability partner; he or she will help you to stay on the straight and narrow. Don't try this journey alone—you are better when united together!

However, be sure to choose your accountability partner wisely. This partner needs to be spiritually strong and worthy of your trust, because he or she will be confronting you with your own mistakes. If you respect and trust your partner, you will be willing to listen. And if your partner is trustworthy, he or she will not reveal to anyone else the things you have confided in them.

Pray

God, give us the strength to break these sinful cycles and the wisdom we need to navigate around the pitfalls the devil has set before us. Give us boldness to ask for help when we need it the most, and above all, let us decrease so You can increase.

Plus

Listen to the song “Cycles” by Jonathan McReynolds.