

Th224 Sin and Atonement: The Restoration of Relationship

Lesson Th224-12 Sin becomes Habit

Budi could hear the ocean beyond the trees. The road he was walking on was not too far from the sandy beaches of his island. But along the road from Budi's farm to the village school were tall palm trees and thick bushes. The heavy undergrowth blocked the cool ocean breeze. It was hot. Very hot. Every day Budi had to walk many kilometers from his home on his parents' farm to attend school in the village. He was miserable. He was hot and his feet hurt from walking. The sound of the waves gently coming ashore teased him. But there was no way to get through the thick underbrush and reach the cool water of the ocean. Suddenly, a wild pig ran across the road in front of him and then darted into the bushes. Budi ran up to the place where the pig had disappeared. To his surprise, he discovered a very small path that seemed to lead to the ocean. He knew that he should continue walking to school. It was what his parents and teacher expected from him. But it was so hot. He thought, "If I could only make it to the ocean to cool down."

So Budi pushed his way into the thick underbrush and began to follow the path. Down near the ground the path was clear. Animals had followed this path before. But Budi was much taller than an animal and he had to fight his way through the thick brush. The sound of the ocean became louder and louder. Budi's excitement grew in anticipation. He was now sweating profusely. His arms and legs were covered with scratches from the bushes. Finally he pressed through the last bit of undergrowth and found himself facing the ocean. Off went his school clothes as he ran and dove into the refreshing cool waves. He had only meant to spend a few minutes, but the minutes turned into an hour, and then the sun was high in the sky. Budi realized that he had missed the entire day of school. Out of the water, back into his school clothes, and back along the path to the road he went. It was time to go home.

Each day as he walked to school, Budi faced the temptation to follow the trail and spend the day swimming in the ocean. The hotter the day, the greater the temptation. He resisted the temptation all that week. But one blistering hot day he stopped at the path to the ocean. He heard the waves calling to him. He knew he should go to school, but he gave into the temptation. This happened again and again and again. Soon the game trail that he had struggled to push through had become a well-worn path. The branches of the bushes that had caught on his clothes were all broken and pushed aside. Over time the path became so wide that Budi could now run to the beach with nothing to hinder or resist him. What had started as missing school once a week had become a habit. After all, why would someone want to sit in a hot classroom, when he could be swimming and fishing?

Sin is habit forming. The first time one tells a lie, it is difficult. They might have feelings of guilt afterwards. But each additional lie becomes easier to tell. Eventually, lies just pour from the person's mouth.

Most habits begin with a temptation. In the case of lying, the temptation is to lie to avoid embarrassment or trouble. When the lie is successful, the individual feels rewarded. Every temptation has some form of perceived reward. For Budi it was escape from the heat. Each sin has its own reward, whether it is the feeling one gets from alcohol and drugs, or the momentary euphoria of sexual gratification. In each case, the temptation's reward is the root of the temptation. We are tempted to sin because of the reward that is offered.

God has placed within every person a conscience. Our conscience is like the trees and bushes that grew along the road Budi traveled. Our conscience resists the temptation to sin. But we can choose to push aside our conscience as we give in to temptation—as we seek the reward of sin. At first our conscience resists us. But each time we give into temptation we cut a pathway through our conscience. Eventually, the path becomes a road and our sin is no longer from being tempted, but rather has become a habit.

Other people, just like Budi, justify their sinful behavior. There are many excuses. Many claim that their sin does not hurt anyone. They never realize that their habit of sin is destroying themselves and often impacts those that love them. In Budi's case, he spent so much time at the beach that he wasted his education and never completed school. All of his friends would use their education to improve their own lives and that of their families. But Budi would never achieve what he could have. There was a man in the Bible who had great potential, but squandered it because of a sinful habit.

It was in the days before Israel had kings and the people were led by judges. Samson was one of the judges of Israel. His birth was an answer to his mother's prayer. She dedicated him to God as a baby. He would live his life according to the Nazarite vow, meaning he would drink no wine nor ever cut his hair.

God had chosen Samson to deliver the Israelites from the tyranny of the Philistine kings. Samson was careful to never drink wine nor have his hair cut. For him these things held no temptation. The power of God would come upon Samson and he would exhibit incredible strength. But there was one temptation Samson had great difficulty with. He was fascinated with the beauty and urban polish of Philistine women. He tried marrying a Philistine woman to satisfy his temptation. But that did not end well. One might think that he would marry an Israelite girl. After all, that is what the Jewish law required of him. But the temptation of forbidden Philistine women was something that he struggled with. Imagine how he must have struggled with his conscience the first time! He walked to a Philistine city and had sex with a prostitute. He knew it was wrong. He knew it was sin. But it wasn't long before he had worn a path. The path led from the village where he lived, down to the cities of the Philistines and their prostitutes. His temptation had led to sin and the sin had grown into a habit.

In spite of his sin, God continued to fill him with power when it was necessary to fight. The Bible teaches us that God is patient and longsuffering. But the Bible also teaches us that eventually everyone will be judged.

Samson began to regularly visit a prostitute named Delilah. She was approached by the Philistine rulers to betray Samson. Four times she pleaded for him to reveal to her the source of his great strength. Samson lied to her three times. But the fourth time, he revealed to her that he was under the Nazarite vow. After Samson fell asleep, Delilah called for someone to shave his head. Then the Philistine rulers rushed into her bedroom with soldiers. Samson awoke and tried to resist them. But the power of God did not come upon him. They seized him, gouged out his eyes, and led him away in chains. From then on, he spent his days walking in a circle, pushing a grinding wheel in a Philistine prison. Sometime later, after his hair grew again, he died. God's power helped him one last time. He pulled down the roof of a pagan temple on himself and thousands of Philistines as they celebrated (Jud 16).

Samson's story is one of great potential that was never realized, because he gave into temptation. He allowed one sin to grow into a habit. It was the habit of sin that destroyed his life.

This lesson is **important** because it reveals to us the habit-forming nature of temptation and sin. A person can push aside the voice of their conscience in order to seek the temporary reward of sin. Each time a person does this, it becomes easier for them to yield to the temptation.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that habitual sin leads to destruction. The apostle Paul wrote this: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What has God built into every person that can help them resist temptation? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said that God gave every person a conscience, you are correct.
2. What is it that all temptation offers a person? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you answered, "Every temptation offers some form of reward," you answered correctly.
3. What happens when a person gives into temptation over and over again? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said that repeated giving into temptation leads to a habit of sin, you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch this lesson at least two more times until you are familiar with the stories of Budi and Samson. Practice explaining the concept of temptation leading to sin, which then leads to a habit of sin. Find a close friend and have a conversation with them discussing the addictive nature of sin.