

Blameless vs. Sinless

By Denver Cheddie

Many believers fall into deep condemnation whenever they sin. They read scriptures in the Bible which say that we should be faultless and blameless and they interpret that to mean that they should be sinless. And since they are not sinless, they fall into condemnation. In this article, we look at some scriptures which encourage believers to be blameless, and it will be seen that this does not mean the same thing as being sinless. It will be seen that we are never called to be sinless. Ideally we should not sin, but avoiding sin is not to be the focus of our Christian walk. We are called to be blameless - living above reproach and not creating stumbling blocks that turn others away from Christ. There is a subtle difference in perspective that makes the difference between living a victorious life in Christ and living a life of bondage to the law.

At this point I should reiterate my beliefs concerning eternal security:

- I do not believe in unconditional eternal security i.e. once saved, always saved.
- I do believe however that God preserves a believer, keeps him by His power, keeps him from falling as long as he continues in his faith.
- A believer can forfeit his salvation if he apostatizes i.e. stops believing the gospel and walks away from Christ.

I recently read an article by another writer who also does not believe in unconditional eternal security, but unlike me he believes that unbelief is not the only thing that can steal a believers salvation. He also believes that sin can cause someone to lose their salvation. His argument: "Sin is unbelief; it

is anti-faith”, implying that acts of sin are the opposite to saving faith. I asked him for his scriptural support for that statement. Needless to say he never wrote back.

Acts of sin do not cause a believer to lose his salvation. I must add that a habitually sinful lifestyle in open rebellion to God would most likely indicate that a person was never saved. Being saved does mean a changed life. However it does not mean a sinless life. Every believer is capable of committing acts of sin (as opposed to practicing sin). That does not affect his salvation. So does that give us a license to sin? Does that mean we could sin and get away with it? First of all we must ask what it means to get away with it. Is that the same as having their sins forgiven and forgotten? If it is, then all Christians believe you could sin and get away with it. Even the most cold-blooded Armenian believes that if you repent of your sin, God will forgive you and forget. For some sins though, even though God may have forgiven you, you may still have to face the consequences (as opposed to judgment) e.g. David (2 Sam 12:14).

Paul said in Romans 6:1,2 that we are dead to sin. Ideally we should not sin (1 John 2:1). But this condition is positional. It is still possible for believers to commit acts of sin – and still be forgiven. Jesus told us to forgive our brother 70x7 times in one day. Surely he didn't set a higher standard for us than he did for himself. Then he would even forgive us of habitual sin. So what is the difference between an unbeliever who lives in open rebellion to God and a believer who falls into sin, occasionally or regularly? Answer: the believer is saved and preserved by grace.

Relevant Scriptures

Here is a list of scriptures that discuss the issue of being blameless. You will see that they all point to the idea that we should be trying to live a life without offense toward God and man.

Phil. 1:10. *that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,*

Phil. 2:15. *that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*

In verse 1:9 Paul prays that believers' love may abound more and more. This implies continual growth. The reason for this is that they may be sincere and without offence. This simply means that their practical love may grow to such an extent that they don't become a stumbling block to others. That is what offence means. The rest of Philippians is written to teach them how to not live for themselves but to serve others. This is clear in 2:15 that being blameless is equivalent to being without rebuke in the midst of a crooked generation. We are the lights of the world and should live up to that. This is an appeal, not an or-else demand.

In Philippians 3:6 Paul claimed that he was blameless concerning the law. But Paul did have a problem with lust/covetousness (Romans 7:7-25), in violation of one of the 10 commandments. So blameless concerning the law could not possibly mean sinless. It means no man could point an accusing finger. Of course no one except Paul and God would have known about the lust problem.

The very same ideas are present in **1 Thessalonians 3:12,13** as in Philippians 1:10.

James 1:27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Pure religion is keeping oneself unspotted from the world. If failure to meet this condition meant a loss of salvation, then so is failing to visit the fatherless and the widows in their time of affliction. They all constitute pure religion. Keeping unspotted from the world refers back to verses 13-18. It is possible for a believer to draw back, but if that happens it is not God's failure to keep him. It is he who was enticed by what the world was offering and drew away. It is a gradual process whereby the influence of the world gradually moves you to abandon your faith. The death referred to in verse 15 is the end result of a process. This is not referring to a believer who is genuinely following Christ yet occasionally commits sin. It is referring to those who choose the ways of the world ahead of Christ.

Jude 24. *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,*

God presents us faultless before his presence. This is God's doing. He keeps us from falling and presents us to himself without fault. Obviously He does this via the blood of Jesus. The condition is that we keep ourselves in his love (vs. 21). But what does this mean? Verse 20 starts with the word "but", drawing a contrast between genuine believers and the false teachers and apostates of verses 4-16. We are to keep ourselves in God's love. This simply means that we should not draw back from Christ as the apostates

did. Once again it does not mean we have to be sinless in order to be faultless before God's throne. We just have to keep in the faith, and He will present us faultless by virtue of his finished work.

1 Corinthians 1:8. *Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Because Jesus confirms us to the end, we will be blameless on that day. It does not get clearer than this.

1 Timothy 6:14. *That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

This is referring to a specific commandment not to shipwreck our faith with the love of money. It doesn't say we need to keep all the commandments without spot until Christ appears. It would be nice if we could, but that is not how we will be judged.

Hebrews 4:14-16. *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Jesus is sinless, we are not. Because he is sinless, we go to him for grace. When? In our time of need when the temptations are strong. Verse 14 says we must hold fast to our profession. The only way to forfeit salvation is to let go of or renounce that profession. The profession is equivalent to faith in Christ.

Luke 1:6. *And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

Elisabeth and Zacharias were blameless concerning the law of God – I suppose in the same way Paul was blameless. If they were sinless, then Romans 3:23 would have been wrong.

Colossians 1:22,23. *In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel,*

It is Jesus' death that reconciled us to God and presents us holy and blameless. Unproveable as well. This means no charge can be laid against us. The only condition is that we continue in the faith (vs. 23) and not forsake it.

1 Thessalonians 2:10. *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:*

Salvation is not even in question in this verse. Paul is discussing his conduct while preaching among the heathen. Nothing he did brought reproach to the gospel. God wants us to be blameless in the same manner – creating no stumbling block to others.

1 Thessalonians 5:23. *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul prays that God will preserve us blameless unto his coming. Who will do it? God will. Verse 24 emphasizes that it is because God is faithful he will do it. According to these verses, the onus is entirely on God.

Verse 22 instructs us to abstain from every form of evil, which is definitely good advice. But this is not a prerequisite for God to fulfill his promise in verse 23. It is clear that Paul's moral instructions end in verse 22 and his prayer for perseverance (or benediction) begins in verse 23.

Hebrews 7:28. *For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.*

There were such rigid conditions that Old Testament priests had to meet, yet even they had weaknesses. Even they had to make atonement for themselves. They were to be blameless, but not even they were sinless.

Revelation 14:4, 5. *These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

This refers to the same 144,000 as in chapter 7, supposedly Jewish evangelists. They were without fault before God's throne. This means they were not "defiled with women" or had no guile in their mouths. Whoever they were, most would agree that they are not representative of the church. In any case, the word guile means deceit. Being faultless in this context means they were free from deceit. They did not lead anyone astray. Again this does not mean they were totally sinless. Besides, it never said that they being without fault were the reason they were in heaven. They were

redeemed from the earth. We all must be if we are to spend eternity with Christ.

Ephesians 1:4. *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

Unlike the previous verses, the immediate context of Eph 1:4 does not clearly point to its meaning. A brief synopsis of the entire book is in order to show that being blameless is the same thing as not creating offenses or stumbling blocks to others.

In chapter 1 Paul lists some of our spiritual blessings in Christ. We are predestinated for adoption, redeemed, forgiven and sealed by the Spirit. This is all God's doing. Note the terminology used. He did not say we accepted Christ, but rather we were predestinated for adoption. Both are correct, but Paul's choice of words is unmistakable. Paul then prayed that we would understand the richness of that inheritance. Chapter 2 continues that trend of thought. We are saved by grace – while we were dead in sin. Again this is totally God's doing. All we had to do was believe the gospel. We have absolutely no basis to boast. None whatsoever.

There was also much discussion concerning God's will. Now we have to be careful here. We have to know exactly what aspect of God's will is being discussed. We cannot superimpose our own meaning on the text. His will was to gather all things in Christ into one (1:10). God reconciled both Gentiles and Jews together unto him (2:11-22). This is the mystery that God revealed to Paul (3:3,6). This was the intent which was hid in God and which he purposed in himself (3:9-11).

From chapter 4 Paul gives practical instructions based on the theological foundation he laid in the first 3 chapters. God called us and placed us in his body for good works. Paul beseeches us to live worthy of that calling (4:1). Since we are saved, we should live in accordance with that, not "live this way or else I'll take away your salvation". We should walk in lowliness and meekness etc not to cling on to salvation by the skin of our teeth, but in order to keep the unity of the spirit (4:2,3). Note the word "therefore" in 4:17. The salvation Paul presented in the first 3 chapters is so emphatically God's doing, it is not the kind of salvation we must barely cling on to, as if we did anything to earn it in the first place.

Paul urges them not to walk as the unsaved gentiles do (4:17), but rather they should put on the new man. Now Paul is talking to Christians and telling them to put off the old man. Clearly this is not a once for all deal. There is a continual struggle to keep the old man off and the new man on. When we put on the new man we will live in true holiness and righteousness. However the fact that the old man is always there suggests that as long as we are on earth, living above sin will always be a necessary struggle. Only when God transforms our vile body (Phil 3:21) will we be totally free of sin. Right now we are dead to sin positionally (in Christ). There is always the possibility that we could give in to the flesh and sin. In 4:30 we grieve the Holy Spirit when we commit the sins mentioned in the following verses. But note what it does not say: "grieve not the Spirit, otherwise He will remove the seal". We are still sealed by God's Spirit.

In chapter 5 Paul tells us we should follow God and not walk in sin. Compare verse 3 with verse 5. Fornication etc should not be once named among us – indicating that it is possible for it to be named among us. This would however be unbecoming of saints, but note that we are called **saints**. As opposed to verse 5 where the unbelievers are called whoremongers and

idolators and the “children of disobedience”. The children of disobedience is a term synonymous with unbelievers (cf. 2:2), not Christians who occasionally disobey. They are judged according to their sin (5:6). We should not partake of their sin because WE ARE LIGHT (5:8). We need to prove what is acceptable (vs. 10) and reprove the darkness (vs. 11). If we live just like the world, it blunts our testimony. Losing salvation is simply not an issue here. We should be wise understanding what God’s will is (vs. 17). This of course is that Gentiles should be saved by grace without the Law. We should co-operate with God’s master plan and not make ourselves stumbling blocks to the gospel.

This is obviously what blameless means in 1:4. Also holiness does mean clean living. However we should strive for that not to maintain our salvation but to shine our lights to the darkness. Clearly Paul is arguing from a position of strength and security, not one of vulnerability. “Since we have been saved by God’s grace and called into his body, let us be holy and blameless”, as opposed to “Let us be holy and blameless so we can keep on being saved”.

Ephesians 5:27. *That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

Christ will present a glorious church. He is not waiting for it to become so. He does that by giving himself to sanctify it and cleanse it. By the word. He is portrayed as nourishing and cherishing – not judging from afar off. Here he talks about the universal church not individual believers. The glorious church is one that is mature in knowledge and functions as one unified body (cf. 4:7-16). Doctrine is what unites us and makes us mature. Sin is not an

issue here. It is the universal church that must be spotless in its function, not individual Christians who must be spotless in conduct.

2 Peter 3:14. *be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

Again a brief synopsis of the entire book is in order.

In chapter 1, Peter discusses how we should grow in Christ (vs. 3-7). Vs 8-11 seem to indicate the if we don't do these things we might fall or have our entrance to heaven closed. But we will come back to these verses. Vs 12-21 show the certainty of God's word – not cunningly devised fables but God's truth. The written scriptures are even surer than the eyewitness' account. This was to verify to the audience that the original message they heard was the truth. Why would he need to verify that? This obviously lays the foundation for what he is about to say.

In chapter 2 he said there would be false teachers who will teach otherwise even denying the Lord. This is why he wanted to remind them of the original gospel they heard. These people are apostates. The Lord bought them and they forsook that position. Peter is writing against their heresies. God will judge them. Interestingly he refers to Lot as a just and righteous man. If ever there was a slumbering "Christian", Lot was that man. So **2 Peter 1:8-11** cannot be referring to slumbering Christians. The false teachers are practicing sinners, as opposed to occasionally weak Christians or even sleeping Christians like Lot. 2 Peter 2:15 says that they forsook the right way as did Balaam. They were in Christ but something allured them to follow what the world had and to renounce their faith.

Chapter 3. Possibly they were disheartened by the delay in Christ's coming (3:4) and thus questioned whether he really was returning and began

deceiving others to that end. Peter reassures them that the Day of the Lord will come. It is only God's longsuffering that delays it. Vs 12 says we should be looking for his coming as opposed to following these false teachers. The context of vs. 14 is that we should not be found siding with the enemies of God (Phil. 3:18, 2 Pet 3:17). Instead we should hold on to the original message we heard and grow in Christ (vs 18).

Thus 2 Peter 1:8-11 in perspective, is not saying that if we sin or err we would be judged or lose our salvation. But there is a worldly pull away from the truth of the gospel. If we give in to it, there is a danger we could eventually deny Christ and apostatize. Apostasy doesn't happen overnight. It takes continual neglect to the point where we no longer believe the gospel. Possibly we will start off doubting a certain aspect of it (3:4), then gradually and eventually we could end up on the opposite side leading others astray. This is exactly the case with the false teachers mentioned. The cure is to grow in grace and knowledge. We don't have to fight to cling on to our salvation by a string, but to resist the temptation to draw back from Christ and to stop believing the gospel. This is what we need to be diligent for.

Conclusion

I have taken tremendous effort to show that we are called to be blameless not sinless. Does that mean it is OK to sin? No. If we could somehow become sinless that would be great. But trying to achieve sinlessness is a waste of time. It is not what we are called to do. And I do believe that the devil has distracted many people toward that end. Why else would Christians in the past have secluded themselves to living apart from society? Sure they may have appeared to have a form of righteousness, but they were of no use as far as the gospel was concerned. We live in a real world. What we are

called to do is to shine our lights in the midst of the crooked generation in which we live. We are called to be blameless.

The Bible wants us to be blameless. It is also clear from the above scriptures that many people (before Christ) were blameless, for example Paul, but we know that they were not sinless. Now that we are saved, there are some who would have us believe that being blameless means the same thing as being sinless. They say that only our past sins are forgiven and we were merely given a fresh start. According to them Christ wiped our slate clean and gave us a new beginning. But according to Ephesians 1 and 2, Christ did so much more than that. And Paul prayed that our eyes be opened so we can see the richness of what we have in Christ. In Him there is no fear (1 John 4:18) – no fear that we would lose our salvation. When we understand God's perfect love, that fear falls out the window.

Blameless simply means that we live above reproach (Acts 24:16) and the reason for this is so that we will not make ourselves a stumbling block to the gospel. As I stated before, someone who has never had a life changing experience probably was never saved. But Christians who sin do not temporarily backslide. They remain saved. Yes they grieve the Holy Spirit, but they still remain sealed (Eph 4:30). On judgment day, we will be presented sinless and spotless before the throne of God by virtue of the finished work of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, our focus should be on doing righteousness, living above reproach, and maintaining a clear conscience toward God and man.

(c) 2003 Denver Cheddie

All Rights Reserved