

DON'T LET SIN FOOL YOU!

HEBREWS 3:13

Introduction:

Sin has its own personality. It is a force that each of us will deal with in the course of our lives. It is a powerful and deadly force. The thing that adds to the seriousness of all this is that this sin that deceives is in me. It is that sinful nature that I and you inherited from Adam. It is the nature of this fallen nature to seduce or deceive us into sin. It schemes to find ways to turn us away from trust in and obedience to the living God.

Last Lord's Day brought to me a very sad experience. It was preaching in a large church near Dallas, and a long time friend came to the service. I have known her family and her for more than forty years.

When I enquired about her family, she replied, "My husband left me in May." I thought I had misunderstood her. Her husband is professional man, an outstanding deacon in his church, a pastor's son. I said, "He did what?" She began to tear up as she explained, "He found someone he loves more than me—she is twenty years younger than he is. So he left me, and we are in the process of getting a divorce." This is after more than thirty years of marriage.

I thought about this tragedy for the rest of the weekend. As I prayed about it on Monday, this text came to my mind, and I was reminded of the deceitfulness of sin. The writer of Hebrews is warning us not to be fooled by sin!

Each of us needs this word. I am ready to confess that I have been deceived by sin on more than one occasion. The sin that is within me never tires in its attempts to turn me away from the true and living God.

I. DON'T BE FOOLED ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF SIN.

Sin always promises more than it delivers. It is a basic part of the deception of sin. Sin makes the deal appear much better than it is.

1. The pleasures of sin are temporary.

Satan made the fruit of the tree of knowledge look terribly inviting to Eve and Adam. He promised them that they would know as God. He left them with the impression that God was withholding something very important from them. Whatever pleasure the fruit brought to Adam and his wife was temporary. The taste was not out of their mouth before they began to suffer the consequences of their choice.

Will there be pleasures in the choice of my deacon friend? Absolutely! There will be an immediate excitement in having a young wife. But you know and I know that it will not last. The contribution of sin never lasts! It is always temporary.

2. The products of sin are unsatisfying.

What Israel wanted when they disobeyed the Lord at Kadesh was a long, happy, and safe life. What they got was an early death in the wilderness. The life they really wanted could be found only in the land of promise. The only way they could ever know it was to obey the Lord, to trust the Lord and risk everything in obedience to Him.

What my friend is looking for he could have found right at home with the wife of his youth. If he had obeyed the admonition of the Lord to love her like the Lord loves the church, he would have full satisfaction and joy in this relationship. If he had obeyed the admonition of the Lord to delight in her, he would have found the fullness of marital bliss.

Don't be fooled by the promises of sin. It will never, never contribute to your life what it promises. What you are looking for in your life will be found only in a life of obedience and faith before the Lord.

II. DON'T BE FOOLED ABOUT THE CAUSE OF SIN.

Sin is slick! It has the power to camouflage itself. It will so hide its true identity that you will think you are doing the right thing. My friend had what seemed to him to be a logical explanation for leaving his wife—he wasn't happy and he wanted to be happy. This new and younger woman made him happy. But underneath all of this is the sin of breaking covenant with the wife of his youth, and disobeying God. At the root of his act is unbelief and rebellion against God.

1. The cause of sin is a personal choice.

Behind this warning is an Old Testament example of the deceitfulness of sin. The writer of Hebrews uses that incident as the basis for his whole lesson. It is the experience of Israel at Kadesh Barnea in the book of Numbers. The people of Israel had come to the very border of the land that God had promised them. Moses had sent a team of spies into the land to check it out. They came back with a glowing report about the attractiveness of the land, but ten of the spy committee did not think Israel could take the land militarily. The giants that they saw in the land frightened them. Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, encouraged the people to act in faith and take the land.

The people of Israel chose to sin against the Lord. They refused to move forward to claim the land. Instead they turned on Moses with angry

accusations. It is the classic Biblical example of the sin of unbelief. The writer of Hebrews points to “The evil heart of unbelief,” as the real cause of their sin. Down deep inside they made a personal choice to disregard the promise of the Lord, and to depend upon their own understanding of things, rather than upon the word of the Lord. Hidden underneath their decision was a sinful choice. Sin always involves a sinful choice.

2. The cause of sin is unbelief.

The deceiving sin that the writer has in mind is this sin of unbelief. We need to understand the sin of unbelief. Unbelief is different from doubt. Doubt comes when a person does not understand the will of the Lord, or is uncertain of the ways of the Lord. Unbelief comes about when the person does understand, but chooses not to do what they know God wants them to do.

The sobering reality is that unbelief is the natural response of the human heart to God. It is so much easier to do our own thing than to trust God and to follow His will for our lives.

Israel knew the word of the Lord. They knew that God had spoken to them through Moses and that they were to possess the land. They chose

not to trust in the power of the Lord, and chose to do their will instead of the will of the Lord.

My deacon friend understands what he is doing. He knows the Bible, has even taught the Bible for years. He knows that it is sin to leave his wife, and to choose another woman. He knows that it is adultery. But he has allowed his sinful lust to blind his eyes to the real cause of his decision to leave his wife. He is convinced in his own mind that he is doing the right thing. He has believed the popular cultural lie that everyone has the right to be happy. Happiness is more important to our culture than knowing and doing the will of God.

Don't be fooled about the nature of the choice that you are making! You are choosing to disobey the living and only true God.

III. DON'T BE FOOLED ABOUT THE COST OF SIN.

This is the sad part of this whole thing—sin will hide the real costs. It will get you so fascinated with the pleasure you are supposed to receive from the sinful choice that you completely ignore the cost. How do you calculate the cost of sin?

1. What will your sin cost your family?

Do you dare ask yourself, “What impact will this choice have on my wife and my children and their children? Think about the impact of the

unbelieving choice at Kadesh—for the next forty years the whole family lived in a barren desert when they could have been living in the rich plains of the land of promise. The whole generation had the painful experience of burying their fathers in early graves out in the wilderness. It was a part of the cost.

What about my deacon friend? He has chosen because he wants to be happy, but does it bother him that he has broken the heart of a woman that loved him when he was a nobody, that bore his children, and has been faithful to him through the good times and the hard times? Has he calculated the cost of her pain?

Has he calculated what the cost will be in his relationship with his children? What about his grandchildren? He has modeled before them a pattern of disobedience. He has demonstrated to them that you put self above everything else. He has modeled for them what it means to put self above family and above duty. Is this what he really wanted to do?

2. What will your sin cost you personally?

What will the sin cost him personally? In this warning the writer refers to a “hardened” heart. This hardness of heart is a part of the price of sin. Something bad happens in a man when he sins. Hardness refers to

our capacity to hear and to respond to the word of the Lord. The relationship of that Kadesh generation with the Lord God was never the same. Through Moses God directed them around the wilderness for forty years, but they were generally unproductive years. About all we know from those years is that they died short of what God had in mind for them.

What about my friend? How will his spiritual life be affected? Will it be easier for him to hear and to do the will of the Lord with this new wife? Will his influence be less or be greater for the Lord? Will this cause the peace of the Lord to rule in his heart? Or will it bring to him shame and regret as the years go by?

3. What will your sin cost the work of God?

This may be the biggest burden of the writer of Hebrews. He was concerned about what the choice of the Kadesh-generation cost the work of the Lord. What God had planned to do through and with Israel was delayed by forty years by the sinful choice that they made. A whole generation missed out on the display of the faithfulness and power of God.

What about my deacon friend? I happen to know that his church is in desperate need of his leadership at this point in its history. They are

going through a difficult time and they need for their deacons to be completely trustworthy, to be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. They need the ministry that only a wise deacon can give. But his choice has positioned him where he is worse than useless. He has become a burden to his church rather than a blessing.

Each of you has a place in the work that God is seeking to do in this place. Don't be fooled by sin! Sin will make you worse than useless to the work of the Lord through His church.

I suppose that is one other note that needs to be sounded—God does forgive sin. No sinful choice has to be final. If you have been fooled by sin, you can come to God and ask for mercy. If you humble yourself, and make a fresh commitment of your life to walk in the ways of the Lord, He will forgive and restore.

Life will probably never be what it might have been if you had not chosen sin, but it can be restored.

And let me add a note about the deacon who was deceived by his sinful nature? The story does have a good ending. When he started down the path of disobedience to God, he discovered that it was not what he thought it would be. He found only misery and disappointment on that path. He began to feel the chastening of the Lord upon his life, so he

came to repentance. He turned around and got his heart right with God. He sought forgiveness from his wife, and reconciliation with his children. Hopefully he has learned well that sin is powerfully deceptive. And God is always ready to pardon and forgive.

Maybe I should add another word about the cost of the sin. Did you ever calculate how much the sin cost God? Surely God forgave his sin, but God was able to forgive his sin because He personally picked up the tab, He paid for the sin. It cost the living God the death of His only begotten Son on a Roman. On the Cross the love of God offered the Son of God for this sin, and all of our sins.

Has sin deceived you? Have you been seduced by this enemy that lives in you? O it is time to turn from the sin to the living God in repentance and to receive the costly mercy of God that will cover and cleanse away that sin. Do it right now!