

Why do we still sin after salvation?

The Bible says that our old man has been crucified with Christ in order that our body of sin might be done away and that we should not be in bondage to sin. Why then do we still sin after we have been saved? Do we sin because

- 1) The old man may return?
- 2) If the old man has been terminated for good, the new man may still be influenced by the sin inside of us?

The eternal salvation that we have received from God through Jesus Christ, and our life (the way we live) after our salvation, have often confused and disappointed many Christians, and even caused some to doubt the genuineness of their salvation. When we are saved, we experience a joy and a freedom from sin and a love for God that we had never known before. Yet we find that as we live the Christian life, we will fail, we will sin and we may even fall back into habits or tendencies prior to our salvation. The following article may help to shed some light into the apparent dilemma that we, as Christians, face. Why do we still sin after we are saved? Does not Christ's salvation, once for all, solve all our problems to cause us to live a sin-free life?

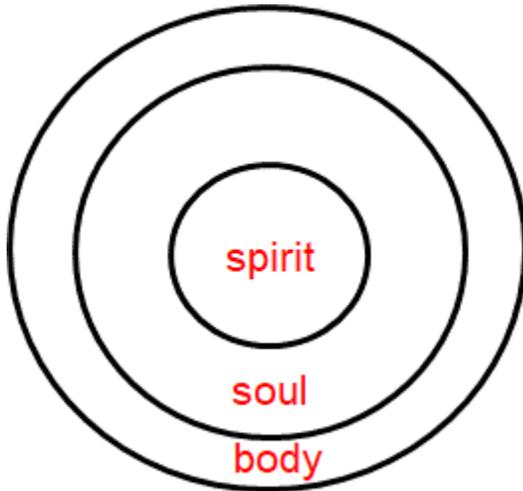
In order to address this question, it may be helpful to look at three broad truths that the Bible unveils:

- 1. The way in which God created man (us) and the way in which man fell.**
- 2. The objective, accomplished work of God in Christ.**
- 3. The subjective experience of the work of God in Christ as the Spirit in a Christian's daily life.**
- 4. Application**

- 1. The way in which God created man (us) and the way in which man fell.**

The Bible says that God created us with three parts: body, soul and spirit:

“1 Thessalonians 5:23: And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Please refer to the diagram below:



When God created Adam and put him in the garden of Eden, Adam (the totality of mankind) was without sin. His spirit (consisting of his conscience, intuition and fellowship) was transparent and in tune with God. His soul or personality (mind, emotion and will) were subject to his spirit and consequently subject to God. His body practically expressed his thoughts, emotions and decisions, and caused him to live according to God's desire.

However, through the subtle wiles of Satan (the serpent), Eve, Adam's wife was tempted to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, and gave her husband to eat also. Romans 5:12 says: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." Through the fall of man, God's creation was damaged.

First of all, sin entered into man, specifically into his body, which now became what the Bible calls the "flesh." Romans 7:18: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."

The flesh is the body transmuted. Once, it was a vehicle or instrument of God, but now it has become an instrument of Satan or sin.

Romans 6:6: "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." Man's body was now a body of sin.

Romans 7:24: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Man's body was now a body of death.

Secondly, man's soul, which once was subject to man's spirit and thus dependent on God, became independent. This was the result of the eating of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil:

Genesis 3:5: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Whereas once man was dependent on God for his sustenance and his covering, now man found himself independent of God, conscious of the need to fight for his own survival. Adam and Eve's first reaction after the fall was to cover his nakedness with fig leaves sown by him and his wife (Genesis 3:7). God was no longer their covering.

Thirdly, man's spirit became deadened because of sin. The couple's second reaction after the fall was to hide themselves from the presence of God (Genesis 3:8). The uninterrupted fellowship that they had enjoyed with God was now frustrated.

Fourthly, man's conscience (the leading part of his spirit) was now activated to enable him to know right and wrong. He knew he had sinned and could no longer walk in the presence of God.

Thus, all three parts of man were affected by the fall. The body became the body of sin and the body of death: the flesh. The soul became independent of God, no longer subject to the desires of the spirit, but rather those of the flesh. The spirit became deadened, insensitive to God and the things of God. Such was our condition before we were saved. Ephesians 2:1-3 gives us a concise summary of the fall affecting the spirit, soul and body of man:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

2. The objective, accomplished work of God in Christ.

Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins: 1 Corinthians 15:3:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.”

1 Peter 2:24: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

Romans 5:6: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Romans 5:8: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

These verses declare that Christ paid the price to die for our sins, to bear our sins upon His own body on the cross, to become a substitute for us, to bear the righteous judgment of God that we should have borne. He not only died for our sins, but also for us, in order that we may not have to suffer an eternal death, apart from God. We may say that this is the vicarious or substitutionary aspect of Christ’s death.

However, there is also the identificatory aspect of Christ’s death. We may refer to the following verses:

Romans 6:6-8: “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin. for he that hath died is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”

2 Corinthians 5:14: “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died.”

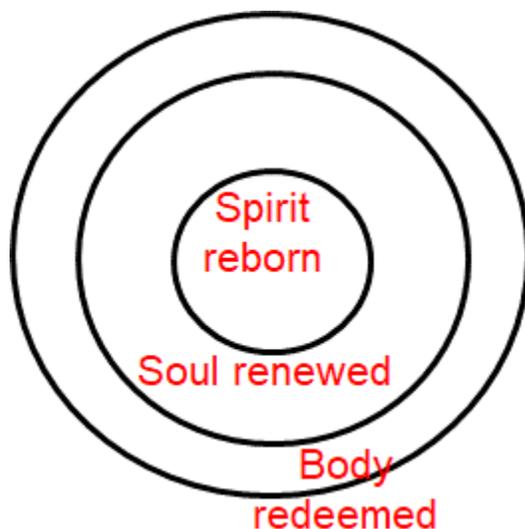
These verses declare that not only did Christ die for us, but we also died with Him, and that our old man was crucified with Him. As a

result, our body has become unemployed, that we may no longer serve sin as a slave. These are accomplished facts that never change. If we believe the Bible, we must believe these truths to be irrefragable and inviolable.

3. The subjective experience of the work of God in Christ as the Spirit in a Christian's daily life

This stage is entirely founded on the accomplished work of Christ. Without the objective fact of Christ's death and resurrection, we can never even begin to talk about our subjective experience. How do we experience the accomplished work of Christ?

First of all, by believing into Jesus Christ and receiving Him as our Savior through faith. What happens? We may view again the chart of the creation of man.



John 3:3: "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

John 3:5: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

John 1:12: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

These verses show us that when we believe in Jesus, our spirit (human spirit) is born of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit). Our spirit now is regenerated and contains the life of God. John 1:12 emphatically states that we have the right to become children of God. This can never change. Once we have been born again and become children of God with His life, we are eternally His children.

Why then do we still sin?

- a. Our spirit can never sin. Our spirit has been begotten of God. The new man can never sin.
- b. However, our soul is what many Christians call the neutral ground. God has regenerated our spirit but has given us the choice to exercise our mind, our emotion and our will to think about Him, to love Him, and to choose Him. Satan can never touch our spirit, but he can certainly touch and influence our soul. This is the one area that both God and Satan target during our whole life and remains a constant battleground.

Romans 8:6: "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

Romans 12:1-2: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

- c. Our flesh can never be transformed (both the good and the sinful flesh). Our flesh is only good for one thing, and that is to be crucified. The Bible never says that our flesh was crucified on the cross with Christ. However, Galatians 5:24 says:
"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

How can we live a life that expresses Christ? We need to actively crucify our flesh. How? By denying our soul life. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 16:24:

“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

The accomplished work of Christ on the cross is the foundation of our salvation. However, the work of the Spirit (Christ in resurrection) in our Spirit today requires our cooperation by the denying of our selves to live a crucified life, by setting our mind on our spirit. If we do not deny ourselves, we will sin. What is sin? To sin means to miss the mark. Anything that is not according to God and for God is sin. Sin need not necessarily be something evil or wicked. Anytime we live independently of God, we sin. Our old man has been crucified on the cross with Christ, once for all. However, we may still express our old man if we do not deny ourselves.

Colossians 3:9-10: “Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him.:

Ephesians 4:22-25: “that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.”

These verses demonstrate an active participation on our part in putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

Will we sin? Absolutely. 1 John 1:8: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” But every time we set our mind on our spirit, we deny ourselves and we crucify our flesh with its passions and lusts.

- d. Eventually, our body will be redeemed and glorified when Jesus Christ returns a second time.

Philippians 3:20-21: “For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself.”

1 Corinthians 15:54: “But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

4. Application

How can we practically set our mind on our spirit? How can we put off the old man and put on the new man? What does this mean?

- a. When the Lord speaks to us, and we respond to Him, we can exercise to write down our testimony. This exercise is primarily towards God and not for anyone else. This exercise also may help us to grow, to solidify the Lord’s speaking in our lives, and may be a point of reference later when our faith may weaken. We can look back at a written testimony and remember the words that the Lord had spoken to us, just as the apostle John may have remembered his experience of fishing all night and not catching anything earlier in Jesus’ ministry when he declared “It is the Lord” after again experiencing the same thing (John 21:7).
- b. How can we put off the old man and put on the new man? How can we be renewed in our mind? Participate in the corporate prayers and also in prayers with companions. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1). These are brothers and sisters who have gone before us, and also those who are with us today. Do we attach ourselves to brothers and sisters, and do we pray together (Acts 1:14)?
- c. Praise and thank the Lord, especially during the Lord’s day gatherings. The more we praise and thank the Lord, the more the enemy in us, with all his tactics, will be defeated:

2 Chronicles 20:21-22: “And when he [Jehoshaphat] had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever.’ And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.”

- d. Preach the gospel with burden. Go after the lost one on the mountain, as the Lord left the ninety-nine sheep to seek after the one lost sheep (Luke 15:4). Preach the gospel with companions.
- e. Participate in the financial grace offering. How to be free from greed and love of money (desires and passions of the flesh)? Offer to God what God has given to us. What a privilege to offer to God who has offered Himself for us.

2 Corinthians 9:7: “Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

Note: For a comprehensive examination of the creation of man (spirit, soul and body), please refer to brother CK’s writing on the “Body, Soul and Spirit,” as well as his article entitled “The Practice of Writing Spiritual Things Down.” Both articles can be found in the “Gleanings” section of the “English” section of the Fellowship in Montreal website.