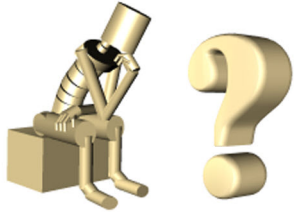


Questions & Answers



From
Living Springs Institute

Question #12 - *“Does a person have to stop sinning to receive Christ?”*

The pivotal words in this question are “stop sinning.” There are two ways which these two words could be taken. One is to say the technical definition of these two words boils down to one word, “perfection”; and the second is to apply the definition of sin given in James 4:17. Since this question could easily be taken either way, I want to cover both.

First, let’s look at the perfection definition. If you apply this one, your question is, do we have to become perfect before we can receive Christ? If we take just one scripture here or there, a person could make the argument the Bible is saying this. One such scripture is Matthew 5:48, where Jesus tells us, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” However, if you put with this one scripture just a couple of others, like Romans 3:10, where Paul reminds us, “...There is none righteous, no, not one:...” and Isaiah 64:6 which tells us, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” you can build on that doctrine. Taking just these scriptures and nothing else, one could make the Bible seem to be a book of hopelessness. If we have to be perfect to come to God and no one is righteous, much less perfect, then there is no hope for man!

However, no scripture is truly understood without taking the Bible as a whole. Paul said all scripture is profitable for doctrine. (II Tim. 3:16-17) In this, he was not saying any scripture you may find which seems to support your theory, he was saying “All” scripture! The Bible does not contradict itself. What we believe must be supported from Genesis to Revelation. If it’s not, then we are wrong in our belief or there is something about scripture we still do not understand properly. In either case, we need to seek God to find out! That point alone answers the question, but let’s talk further.

In the case of your question, it becomes clear as we look at other scriptures that the Bible is not telling us we must be perfect before we receive Christ. Paul tells us in Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” John tells us, in John 3:17, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” Probably the most convincing scripture should be II Peter 3:9, where we are told the will of God point-blank, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Repentance is not perfection, it is a turning; and that takes us to the second definition of your question.

James 4:17 instructs us about sin in the life of one who claims to follow Christ. It says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” This is where we must understand how time works. You see, the perfection issue is not just about what lies ahead, but what has gone before. We will never be perfect, because we have not been perfect. We can never make full reparations for the sin we have done. We can only do the best we can and pray daily that God will forgive us our sins as we forgive others for their sins against us. (Luke 11:1-4) Imperfection exists because sin has a way of taking on a life of its own. Our sin has a ripple effect - so to speak - which we just don’t comprehend. The most obvious example is Adam and Eve taking of the tree God told them not to. (Gen. 3) Their actions affected every human who has ever lived, right up to this day! To be perfect in all our ways, we would need to stop this ripple effect and repay the damage it has done. This is simply not in our capabilities. Time dictates that once the damage has been done there is no going back, and we certainly cannot afford the debt we have incurred. For our lives to be clean again, this corruptible life and all the damage our wrong actions have caused, must pass

away. This is the only way for sin's damage to become irrelevant, but if death is the only answer, then we somehow need a fresh start. A man named Nicodemus understood these facts, and this is why Jesus told Nicodemus that a man must be born again! (John 3:1-21) Nicodemus asked how a man could re-enter his mother's womb and be born again? You see, Nicodemus understood people must die. He had watched many men, both good and bad, die. However, what Nicodemus did not understand is that we not only must die, but this whole world has to pass away; and to have new life, we must literally be born again, through the power of Christ's work, into a whole new existence. The fresh start we so desperately need is one we can never fully know here on this earth. This is the cost of our imperfection! (Matt. 13)

In the here and now, we are all still sinners. Paul simply refers to this condition as corruptible. (I Cor. 15:51-58) However, that is the key, "corruptible," meaning able to be corrupted. When we talk about sin in light of James 4:17, we are not talking about what we have been. Unlike perfection, we are only talking about the future. This makes the question of, "Do we have to stop sinning to receive Christ?" a moot point because the question implies that we are somehow sinning at every moment. While the imperfection issue may rightfully be interpreted as "living in sin," we are not necessarily knowing to do good and doing it not at every moment. We need to read II Corinthians chapter 5, specifically the seventeenth verse which says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." What Paul is talking about here is a perspective that should go forward with us from the moment we receive Christ. The way we thought about things before we turned our lives over to God should not be the way we think after. Part of the decision to receive Christ is throwing out our old perspective and allowing God to give us a new one. Because God, through The Messiah, has provided ultimate salvation which we could never have provided for ourselves, (Gen. 22:6-8) it's no longer about the fact we have failed to be perfect, it's about the choices we make from there on! (Rom. 6:1-16)

Now, before we all start panicking about having to get every action right after receiving Christ, we must understand God will not put more on us than we can bear. (I Cor. 10:13) There are two laws on which hang everything God has asked of us. The first is to love God with everything you are, and the second is to love your

neighbor as yourself. (Matt. 22:35-40) You see, it's not really possible for us to stop sinning before we receive Christ. As I said earlier, the only way we really understand what scripture truly means is by asking God to guide us. The reason the greatest commandment is to love God with all that you are is because that is the only way to truly know how to do good and find the strength to do it! Without faith (a relationship with God) we are only taking our best guess, and that is not good enough. This is why the scriptures exist which tell us our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Make no mistake about it, without God's guidance we will never be able to stop sinning! The only way to stop sinning is to humble ourselves in the sight of The Lord and allow Him to teach us the way we should go in everything we do. (I Pet. 5:6-11) This is where the knowing to do good and doing it not rule comes into play. As we walk this path of humbly learning, we cannot stop living until we know everything; so God, in His grace, has only asked us to live at the level we have obtained.

This is why the second commandment tells us to love our neighbor as ourself. The damage we are capable of doing to our fellow man is truly why sin is such a problem, even among freewilled beings. God is not tempted by evil, and He does not tempt any man. (James 1:13-15) God cannot be pulled down by our evil, but the rest of His creation is. God can allow humans to have a free will, but we must be judged for our unrighteous choices because it's not possible for freewilled beings to live together if they do not consider each other. We have vastly proven that point! Now, Adam and Eve did not truly know how to consider each other, but that was because they were living in innocence; thus, God took full responsibility for what they may have done to each other. All they had to do was not reject God's guidance by taking the knowledge of good and evil for themselves. Because they did not refrain from this one action, today we have the knowledge of good and evil built right in, and we are responsible for it. Since being responsible for it does not automatically come with the knowledge of how to execute it properly, we must learn from God. As we attempt to learn, we find we can all be at different places on our path of understanding. Thus, God only asks us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and this is why James instructs us to do the good we know to do or it's sin. Once again, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, God has taken the burden of our unrighteousness, and only asks us to take responsibility for what we know. This means if we truly want what receiving Christ is all about, we must desire to put our best foot forward no

matter how good or bad that foot is. We must also have a desire to grow in our understanding of how to love so that foot gets better and better. (Col. 3:1-17) If we do not have these desires, we do not love God. (John 14:22-23) Because heaven is a place where we can always be with God, it only stands to reason that if we do not love God, there is no reason for us to go to heaven. If there is no reason for us to go to heaven, there is no reason to receive Christ, because receiving Christ is about receiving salvation, and receiving salvation is about getting to have an eternal life with God; but if we do not love God there is no point in spending eternity with Him. So, if we do not love God, there is no reason to go to heaven. You see the loop?

The bottom line is this, Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me." Luke 11:23 We cannot love sin and love God. (Matt. 6:24) Thanks be to God and His everlasting grace, we do not have to be perfect before we receive Christ. On top of that, there is the fact we do not completely know how to stop sinning before we receive Christ. So the issue is this: if you find you do not have a desire to stop sinning, then you have not truly received or you have lost Christ and the work He gave His life to accomplish in your life!

In closing, let me encourage you to read Philippians 4:6-9 which instructs us to put our focus on those things which are pure and just. Most of the time, when people ask this kind of question, they are doing so because they have a desire for Christ but feel overwhelmed by sin, or they are feeling the conviction of The Holy Ghost in their lives about the way they are living. These are all good things! However, the devil will attempt to keep your focus on the sin when your focus should be on God and His Word. So much of the time, sin is in our lives because we are trying to fill the void which exists because we lack a strong relationship with God. The longer we are distracted from building our relationship with God, the longer we will feel the need to hold on to the sin. Isaiah 55:6-7 tells us to call upon The Lord while He is near. Today is the day to quit wrestling with the sin and simply lay it aside. We need to put it down and walk away by putting our eyes on The One whose blood has cleansed all sin! (I Jn. 1:5-9) This will be a continuous process in our lives, and it's living in that place of repentance God desires us all to find. (II Pet. 3:9) So, don't let anything delay you. Receive Christ into your life today, and together you can overcome any and all sin in your life!

This question was asked as a follow up to the previous Q&A - "If I'm currently living with my girlfriend and we are fornicating and desiring to do what is right but not having the strength to stop, will I be able to receive Jesus as Saviour and receive the Holy Spirit to give me the strength to stop fornicating?"

I want everyone to be on the same page; and with that in mind, let me explain that I'm going to approach this question as an extension to your last question. In the hypothetical situation you have laid out, we could cover a considerable amount of specific teaching. However, I do not know if you're interested in the details of what I might tell someone in that situation if they came to me for counseling on the specifics, so I will not attempt to cover all those specifics in this answer. This means we are talking about the same basic subject as your last question but only with a specific scenario in mind.

Your first question was simply, does a person have to stop sinning before they receive Christ, and the bottom line answer to that question is that it's not really possible for a person to completely stop sinning before they come to Christ. However, we separated the issue into those sins which are the result of not being perfect and those sins which are a conscious choice. In your scenario about a male and female living together and having an inappropriate relationship, you are certainly talking about a conscious sin. This takes us back to a specific statement I made in the first answer about the fact we are not sinning at every moment. This may be most difficult to see when talking about a scenario like the one you have asked about, but it is still technically true. So, let's break it down.

What is the sin in this situation? Basically there are two: The first is that you are living together, and the second is that you have an inappropriate physical relationship. One of the things which makes a situation like this hard to understand for most people is, though these two sinful actions do have direct relationship, they are still two separate items. We must understand that it doesn't make a male and female fornicators just because they choose to live under the same roof, anymore than two males or two females living under one roof makes them homosexual. So, why would it be considered sinful for a male and female to live together? Well, the activity of a male and female living together has a couple of big problems. The first thing is the warning Jesus gave His disciples in the garden. Jesus told them to "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matthew 26:41 It was also part of Jesus'

model prayer that we should pray to God, "And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." Luke 11:4 If we are supposed to ask God for help out of the daily temptations which come upon us, it's certainly not The Lord's will for us to choose to live in a situation which includes constant temptation. This is also why Paul instructs in Romans 6:12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." and in II Timothy 2:22 he says, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

If the woman you're living with is not your wife or a close relative such as mother or sister, there is almost certainly going to be temptation to have an inappropriate relationship. The second thing which makes living together wrong is the point made in I Thessalonians 5:22 where we are told to, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." There is no doubt that in most societies there is an assumption that when an unrelated male and female live together there is a relationship which goes beyond just living together. This is why an official marriage usually includes a fairly public ceremony or, at the very least, a couple of outside witnesses. In many places there are also legal documents to be signed which are filed and become public record. All this is to make a declaration to society that you are committed to one another. That puts aside this appearance of evil issue.

Now, to really get this point, you have to look deeper into why the appearance of evil is wrong and putting yourself in a position of temptation is wrong. The shorthand is, as a person who is attempting to follow the ways of God, you have a responsibility to keep your life clean and help others do the same. When you, by choice, live in a situation which tempts you to do something sinful, it becomes sinful because you are not truly attempting to walk in the ways of God if you are doing this. Jesus pointed this out using a specific example which is directly related to our point here. He said, in Matthew 5:27-28, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Serving God is not about following a set of rules, it's about a desire. It's natural for your flesh to be tempted by a woman you find attractive, but there is a difference between being tempted and giving into that temptation. You may never commit the actual physical act of adultery; but if it's

something you allow to play out in your mind, then the fact you don't do the actual deed is only a formality. In your heart, you have made a choice to put aside the desire to be righteous in lieu of your desire to commit adultery. You see, the laws of men may have all kinds of loopholes for the one who wants to sidestep it, but God can see our hearts. (I Sam. 16:7) When we stand before God, the desires of our hearts will be judged as well as our physical actions.

This issue is further solidified by the fact God asks us to care, not just for ourselves, but for others as well. The greatest commandment is that we love God with all our being, and the second is like to the first, which is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. (Matt. 22:35-40) This is where the appearance of evil rule comes in. We may, through our actions be causing others to stumble, and that is not the will of God! Many people claiming to be Christians do not see why this is their problem, but it is. We need to be careful what we do and say, especially when others are watching. As believers in God, we have an obligation to share with this world the righteousness of God; and there is no better way to show the righteousness of God than to be seeking to follow it ourselves. Now, the key word in the previous sentence is "seeking." This takes us back to the point of imperfection. We are not righteous in all our actions; thus, we are all sinners saved by grace. However, seeking to know God and follow His righteousness is what gets counted unto us in place of the righteousness we actually lack! (Rom. 4:1-8) When we come to Christ, we take on the responsibility of showing the righteousness of God. This is part of what I meant when I said in the earlier answer that we are not necessarily sinning at every moment. Before we come to Christ, we may be doing any number of things which we may or may not understand are wrong for a variety of reasons. However, when we come to Christ, we have chosen to walk a path of growth in righteousness; and we do not make that choice unless The Holy Spirit is already convicting our hearts. This means there will already be things which are obvious evil and appearances of evil in our lives at the moment we receive Christ into our lives. These things are not just some of the first things to go, but walking away from them is all part of the choice to receive Christ in the first place!

This shows us there is a pivotal statement in your question which is not actually a fact no matter what we may want to believe. You said, "...desiring to do what is right but not having the strength to stop." Once again, we go back to information I gave in the earlier answer.

First, is the truth that we are saved by grace through faith, and that faith is not of ourselves it's the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8) Faith is not blind belief; faith is a relationship with God. The second point is that God will not put more on us than we can bear. (I Cor. 10:13) This makes the premise of your scenario wrong in one way or another. As I said before, the choice to live for God is a choice between having what this world can offer or giving up this life in order to seek the righteousness of God. (Matt. 10:38-39) There is no middle ground! A desire to do what is right is a desire to put away the sin in your life. Which means, in your scenario, if the statement about a desire to do what is right is true, then the statement about not having the strength is a lie. If the statement about not having the strength is true, then the statement about having a desire is a lie!

This is where the damage of not understanding the truth about salvation comes in. Far too many Christians believe that when they say a sinner's prayer, they are saved or born again, and that is simply not the case. We will not be saved until the day Christ returns and we are given a new and incorruptible body! (I Cor. 15:50-58) Receiving a new body is what being born again is all about. Now, there should be a moment when you truly make the choice to turn from your sin and receive the work Christ gave His life to do in your life; but that moment is a moment of decision. If you truly have a desire to make that decision, then The Holy Spirit has already been doing a work in your life. (I Cor. 12:3) Simply put, God is already attempting to have a relationship with you, and that is the gift of faith Ephesians 2:8 is talking about! That desire you feel to do the right thing is the conviction of The Holy Spirit; and if The Holy Spirit is convicting your heart, then the strength you need to put the sin aside is already right there with you. You are standing on the threshold of a door God has opened to you. The choice to walk away from the sin you already see in your life and do the right thing is all part and parcel of the choice to receive Christ! You have already been given a glimpse of what losing this life and following the path of righteousness will cost. The questions you must consider now are very simple. Do you believe that God is actually there to help you, and do you believe He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? (Heb. 11:6) Beyond that, there is only the simple question of what do you want? A) A life dedicated to the God who created you, or B) The pleasures of sin?

To sum it all up, I want to look at the words of Paul in Romans chapter 6. Paul states in verse 20, "For when

ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." If you haven't chosen to receive Christ in your life, then what you do or don't do beyond that has no eternal consequence; for all who do not choose to put their trust in God will be sent away on Judgment Day with the words, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:23 Before you receive Christ, you are free from the laws of righteousness; but once you truly make the choice, you become that new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5:17) which understands Paul's question in verse 21, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." In verse 22, Paul speaks to the fact you do have the strength to step over that threshold you are standing on and walk away from the sin which is so easily besetting you. He says, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." In verse 23, Paul makes your two options clear by stating, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Part of understanding the truth is asking the right questions. The right question is not, will I be able to receive Jesus as Saviour and The Holy Spirit to give me the strength to stop fornicating? The question is, when are you going to listen to the voice of The Holy Spirit you are already hearing and accept the strength God is offering you, through the shed blood of His Son Jesus Christ, to nail your sin to His cross and walk into newness of LIFE? (Rom. 6:4)

For further information related to this issue, please read [Q&A #5](#) which appeared in [Shaqah #19](#), [Q&A #6](#) which appeared in [Shaqah #21](#), and the article "[Happy Home Above](#)" which appeared in [Shaqah #28](#). You can also find these articles on our website at www.livingspringsinstitute.org. Click on the [Q&A](#) button to find those, and for the article click on the [Learning Center](#) button, then go to [Articles](#).

Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by Philip E. Busby.

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