



Doctrine, Passions, and Practices **How have we responded to God?**

Doctrine

1. Some of us think that what's most important is feeling good about ourselves, and we are suspicious of anything that does not make us feel good about ourselves. But Jesus calls us to test everything by God's Word. So what does God's Word say about this?
2. God's Word says that Jesus Christ wants to make us feel really good. But this good feeling is not about ourselves; it's about Him. Feeling good about Him is infinitely more satisfying than feeling good about ourselves. And here's a paradox: to feel good about Him we first need to understand and feel bad about our sin.
3. But does God want us to focus on our sinfulness? If we have been saved, shouldn't we focus on who we are now in Christ? God does want us to focus on our sinfulness, not so we despair, but so we see more clearly the glory of Jesus in saving us.

That's why Paul urges us to remember our past sinfulness (Eph 2:1-3; Eph 5:8; Col 1:21). God never tells us to ignore our sinfulness. "Forgetting what lies behind" (Phil 3:13) does not mean forgetting our sinfulness; it means forgetting the things in which we used to boast (3:4-6). And it's true that we should rejoice in how Christ has saved, forgiven, and redeemed us; but the greatest joy in what Christ has done comes only as we clearly see our sinfulness.

Here's some of the benefits that come from pondering our sinfulness:

- We are more humbled before Jesus and rely on Him more (Rom 7:24).
- We experience the godly grief that leads further into salvation (2 Cor 7:10).
- We are humble before others and love them more (Titus 3:1-3).
- We love Jesus more (Luke 7:47).

4. To understand our sinfulness, we need to start with God's holiness and righteousness. God is holy -- His perfections set him infinitely apart from everything else that is. God is righteous -- He does everything to uphold and display His perfections. That's why He created: to display His perfections so all of us would have the joy of beholding a Being of infinite love, wisdom, power, and goodness -- who not only provides all we need, but who is in Himself our all-satisfying Treasure.
5. So how should we respond to our Creator-God who through Creation has displayed perfect love, wisdom, power, and goodness towards us? Doesn't it make sense that we should:

- Constantly celebrate His infinite goodness (worship) -- Gen 8:20; Exo 20:3-5
- Devote our lives to beholding and displaying His glory -- Exo 20:3
- Trust Him completely -- Gen 15:6; Pro 3:5-6
- Depend on Him for everything -- Gen 5:22; Gen 6:9; Gen 17:1
- Obey Him without question -- Gen 3:17 (no independent decisions); Exo 20:5

Does this feel too demanding? Why? Every command given by God comes from perfect love, wisdom, power, and goodness. All of God's commands are commands to pursue our greatest good in knowing Him – because He is our greatest good.

(Is it demanding to command someone: enjoy this ice cream with all your heart?)

6. So what happened? Adam sinned (Gen 3). We inherited Adam's sinful nature (Rom 5:12). As a result, all of us are sinners by nature and choice (Rom 5:12; Eph 2:3). How bad was our sin?

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12

How can Paul say that no one does good? It's because "good" (v.12) means seeking God (v.11). Even though we usually told the truth, and often were kind, we did not seek God – ever. We did things that looked good, not to seek God, but to impress others or feel good about ourselves. We created religions and pursued spirituality, not to seek God, but to stroke our pride or to find inner peace apart from God. But none of us ever sought God. So nothing we did was good. Everything we did was sin.



And in his teaching [Jesus] said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." Mark 12:38-40 (an example of pursuing religion without seeking God)

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ... I tell you ... everyone who exalts himself will be humbled ..." Luke 18:11-12,14 (an example of doing things that look good without seeking God)

It's not that we tried to seek God and weren't able. We didn't want God. We turned away from God.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Gen 6:5

This is true of every single human being – then and now. We didn't want God, we didn't seek God, and therefore every single thought and attitude and action was only evil continually.

Sin is not that we wanted to attain God's standards but were unable. Sin is that we wanted nothing to do with God and turned away from Him and His standards.

7. Is this because we didn't know enough about God? No. God's creation gives us everything we need to know about God so we would seek and trust Him completely. But instead, all of us turned from Him.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and ... exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.
Romans 1:18-22,25

8. Was it our environment or circumstances that made us sin? No. Jesus taught that sin comes from our own hearts:

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-24



9. What about free will? I believe God's Word teaches that we are free to do whatever we want. But we are so sinful that none of us wants God. So, left to ourselves, we never want to repent before God and trust Jesus as our Lord, Savior, and Supreme Treasure.

Jesus: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."
Mark 10:25-27

Jesus: "Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."
John 8:34

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Romans 8:7

All that the Father gives me will come to me ... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him ... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me ... no one can come to me unless it is granted him from the Father. John 6:37,44,45,65

Martin Luther: "Hence, it follows that 'free will' without God's grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondsman of evil." (The Bondage of the Will, p.104)

If God left us to ourselves, none of us would ever want to turn to Jesus and be saved. That's how sinful we all were.

10. How evil is sin? Far worse than we think. Each act of sin profanes the infinitely glorious God of the Universe.

"So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD. And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, Leviticus 22:31-32

11. How does sin profane God's holy name? Here's a list of some sins, and what we are openly saying when we commit these sins:

Selfishness – God lies when He promises to satisfy me as I serve others / God can't be trusted to satisfy me

Greed – God lies when He promises to satisfy and provide for me / God is not glorious enough to satisfy me

Worry – God is not in loving control / God can't be trusted to care for me

Jealousy – God is an idiot when it comes to what I need / God is not wise or loving

Impatience – God is stupid about timing / I know better than He does how my life should be scheduled

Lust – God's guidelines for sex are dumb / I know better than God / He can't be trusted

Pride – Why should God take all the credit? / I'm equally deserving of praise / people ought to pay less attention to God and more to me

Slander – God isn't wise enough to set things right; I've got to be the judge of this person / it's right for me to dishonor this person Jesus died for

Boredom – God and His purposes are mediocre / there is nothing infinitely glorious to capture my attention

Anger – God is nothing compared to the money (or reputation or convenience) that this person has cost me



12. We must never make light of sin. Yesterday's worry, gossip, or lust openly profaned the infinitely glorious God of the universe.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Jeremiah 2:12-13

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. Ezekiel 36:22-23

13. So how should God respond to people whose "every intention ... is only evil continually" (Gen 6:5)? God is holy – His perfections set Him infinitely apart from everything else in existence. And we saw that God is righteous – He is passionately devoted to upholding and displaying His glory. So how should He respond to people who profane and blaspheme His glory?

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
Romans 1:18

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:15-17

Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Revelation 14:9-11

How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:29-31

14. God's wrath is not natural consequences that happen when people disobey – it is God's righteous anger against those who belittle His glory. God's wrath is not Him losing His temper – it is His settled determination to punish those who have profaned His glory. God's wrath is not petty, or vindictive, or harsh – it is righteous and holy and good.

Here's some quotes that help me understand God's wrath:

"As God necessarily loves himself, so he must necessarily hate everything that is against himself; and as he loves himself for his own excellency and holiness, he must detest whatever is repugnant to his holiness, because of the evil of it. Since he is infinitely good, he cannot but love goodness, as it is a resemblance to himself, and cannot but abhor [hate] unrighteousness, as being contrary to him." (Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God, 2:118f).

"Hell is a dreadful reality. To speak of it lightly proves we do not grasp its horror. I know of no one who has overstated the horrors of hell. We can scarcely surpass the horrid images Jesus used. We are meant to shudder. Why? Because the infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of His glory which sinners have belittled." (John Piper, Let the Nations be Glad, pp.126f)

"Our obligation to love, honor, and obey any being is in direct proportion to its loveliness, honorableness, and authority. But God is a being infinitely lovely, because He has infinite excellency and beauty. So sin against God is a violation of infinite obligations. This means that sin is a crime infinitely wicked, and so deserving of infinite punishment." (Jonathan Edwards, Works, 1:669 paraphrased)

Passions and Practices

1. Understand that we stand under God's holy and eternal wrath. Understand that there is nothing we ourselves can do to stop sinning, make up for our sin, and avoid God's wrath. Let this destroy any pride, self-righteousness, or self-reliance. Let this deeply humble you before God.

Now we know that whatever the Law says it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the Law no human being will be justified in his sight. Romans 3:19-20

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' Luke 18:13

2. Be amazed at the love of God in sending Jesus to die and rise again so we can (1) receive new natures which trust Jesus, (2) have all our punishment poured out upon Jesus so we can be forgiven, (3) receive Jesus' perfect righteousness as a gift — all so that we can know Jesus as our all-satisfying Treasure.

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. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved. Eph 2:1-5

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. Isa 53:4-5



For our sake he [God the Father] made him [Jesus the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21

3. Repent of your sin and trust Jesus as your Lord, Savior, and all-satisfying Treasure.

Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Acts 16:30-31.

Jesus: I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger; and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. John 6:35

4. We who have been saved by Jesus will never stop being humbled for sin — because this will glorify Jesus' mercy, and because glorifying Jesus' mercy will fill us with joy.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." I Cor 1:27-31

For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. I Cor 15:9-10

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. I Timothy 1:15-16

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:12

5. Don't make light of sin. Every sin is horrifying blasphemy against the infinitely glorious God of the Universe. Every sin against God should bring us deep grief. The more we love God, the more we will hate and battle the sin that profanes His holy name.

And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. Matthew 26:75

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. James 4:9

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:3-4



6. If you are trusting Jesus as your Lord, Savior, and all-satisfying Treasure, then let His passionate love for you cause you to live for Him above all else.

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For further discussion

1. Read the story of the woman in Luke 7:41-50. How much do you recognize your need for forgiveness? Have you experienced the truth that the more we see our need for forgiveness, the more we will love Jesus? So why do we shy away from coming to grips with our sin?
2. Read Romans 3:10-12 (p.2). Do you agree that before God saved you, you did nothing good? Why or why not? Why is it so important to see this? What keeps us from seeing this?
3. Read Romans 1:18-25 (p.3). What difference would it have made if we could have pled ignorance? And what difference does it make that we all rebelled against God knowingly?
4. Read Mark 7:20-24 (p.3). Do you ever justify your sin based on factors outside you? What would Jesus say about that?
5. Read Leviticus 22:31-32 (p.4). Think of one of your recent sins. Can you see how that sin has profaned God's holy name? What difference does it make to see sin that way?
6. Read Revelation 14:9-11. How should the reality of God's wrath against sin impact you? Does it impact you? What can you do to be more impacted by this crucial biblical truth?
7. If you have not, repent of your sins and trust Jesus as your Savior, Lord, and all-satisfying Treasure. Have your home group pray with you about this.
8. Take time to thank Jesus for His death on the Cross — purchasing a new heart for you, paying for your sins, living perfect righteousness which has been given to you.

For further reading

Most important is to read Scripture thoughtfully and prayerfully — like Romans 1-3, Psalm 51; Ezekiel 36; Ephesians 1-2.

Here's some writing by authors who have thought deeply about the Scriptures:

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Chapter 24.

Kapic, Kelly, and Taylor, Justin, eds. *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works by John Owen*. (Below I list two works by John Owen. He wrote in the 17th century, and is not easy reading, so Kapic and Taylor have edited Owen to make him easier to understand.)

Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*. (Get the edition that has an Introduction by J. I.

Packer. That alone is worth the price of the book.)

Owen, John. *On Indwelling Sin in Believers*.

Owen, John. *On the Mortification of Sin*.

Venning, Ralph. *The Plague of Plagues*.