

“The Deceitfulness of Sin”

*“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through **the deceitfulness of sin,**”* Hebrews 3:12-13.

These verses contain a sober warning to “*brethren*” in the Lord, a fearful warning lest these “*brethren*” depart “*from the living God.*” Some in today’s world argue long and loud that it is impossible for a child of God to fall from grace, but the inspired writer to the Hebrew saints believed differently! God is “*the God of all grace,*” I Peter 5:10; hence, to depart “*from the living God*” is equivalent to falling from grace. And these “*brethren*” to whom the book of Hebrews was penned were exhorted to “*take heed, lest there be in any*” of them an “*evil heart of unbelief in **departing from the living God.***” And in order to prevent such a departure they were admonished to “*exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through **the deceitfulness of sin,***” Heb. 3:13. You will please note the last four words of that admonition — “**the deceitfulness of sin.**” These words constitute the title of this article

Before discussing “*the deceitfulness of sin,*” let us first consider the word “*sin.*” What is sin? “Sin,” the word is translated from the Greek *harmatia*, which is defined as “lit., a missing of the mark.” Hence, when one misses the mark which God has set he sins. Perhaps this definition is best illustrated in I John 3:4 wherein the inspired writer said “*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness*” (NKJV). The KJV renders it this way: “*Whoever committeh sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is **the transgression** of the law.*” Any person who transgresses, violates, or goes contrary to the law of God commits sin! One can sin by commission, or by violating God’s law. And one sins by omission, or by failing to obey the commands of God. For example, James 4:17 clearly states that “*to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is **sin.***” This fact is clearly illustrated in Matthew chapter 25 wherein we read the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the parable of the talents, and a description of the coming judgment. Each person condemned in that chapter was condemned — not for the evil things he did, but for the **good things** he neglected to do! And one can also sin by the words which come from his mouth, or even the thoughts of his heart! Hence, Jesus said “*by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned,*” Matt. 12:37, and the Psalmist petitioned God, saying, “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my **heart** be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer,*” Ps. 19:14.

In view of the many ways we can sin, it is *no wonder that the apostle Paul said that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* Rom. 3:23. All you need to do in order to find a sinner is to look into a mirror! All have sinned; that includes you and me, and everyone else! This is why every person — yea, even every child of God — must be made keenly aware of “*the deceitfulness of sin!*”

But before considering “*the **deceitfulness of sin,***” let us first observe that the writer of Hebrews urged the readers thereof to “*exhort one another daily, while it is*

called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” Heb. 3:13.

Did you catch that phrase — “*lest any of you be **hardened** through the deceitfulness of sin?*” One real danger of sin is the fact that it can tend to harden a person’s heart. Pharaoh was an Old Testament example of one whose heart was hardened. Moses and Aaron went to him and said “*Thus says the Lord God of Israel; Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness,*” but Pharaoh said “*Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go,*” Ex. 5:1-2. So God sent plagues upon the Egyptians in order to force Pharaoh’s hand, but “*Pharaoh hardened his heart...*” (Ex. 7:13-14, 22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,24,35). By refusing to do what God commanded him to do, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. The apostle Paul warned of a coming apostasy which, among other things, would involve people “*speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron,*” I Tim. 4:2. The same apostle also spoke of some who, because of sin, had reached the point of being “*past feeling,*” Eph. 4:19. Apart from repentance, no person can be saved (Luke 13:3,5), but one’s heart can become so hardened by doing what he knows is wrong that it becomes impossible for him to repent! After all, “*godly sorrow produces repentance,*” 2 Cor. 7:10, but one whose conscience is “*seared,*” or reaches the point of being “*past feeling,*” has rendered himself unable to experience “*godly sorrow,*” and therefore unable to repent. By so doing, he has figuratively signed his own spiritual death warrant!

Now back to our title — “**the deceitfulness of sin.**” “*Deceitfulness,*” is a noun translated from *apate* and is defined as meaning “to cheat, deceive, beguile, that which gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement, or influence,” (Vine). Sin is, and always has been, deceitful. It promises what it cannot deliver; it delivers what it would never promise; it leads a person further than he wanted to go; it keeps a person trapped longer than he wanted to stay, and it costs one more than he ever intended to pay!

Eve was “*deceived*” by Satan, Gen. 3:6; I Tim. 2:14, so she ate the forbidden fruit, even though she knew that God had said “*you shall not eat it,*” Gen. 3:3. Would she have eaten thereof if she had fully understood the consequences of doing what she knew God had forbidden?

Every true Bible student knows the Bible condemns lusting after others. Every Bible student knows fornication is sinful. Every Bible student knows that the Bible condemns drunkenness. Every Bible student knows that children should obey their parents. Every Bible student knows that lying is sinful, as well as lasciviousness, and stealing. Every true Bible student knows that laziness is sinful. Every genuine Bible student knows that one should never take God’s name in vain, etc., etc., ad. Inf. Yet all these sins are committed every day by people who know better. Why? Mainly, because of “*the deceitfulness of sin!*”

People reason (?) saying, “this one joint wont hurt me;” “It’s ok to have this drink;” “it’s ok to tell a little white lie;” “it’s ok to go to the prom and have a few dances with that beautiful girl;” “it’s ok to misrepresent a product if it means I can make extra money.” etc., etc., ad. Inf. They allow sin to deceive them; they fall for it “hook, line, and sinker,” and wind up in the muck and mire of sin, and often have no understanding of how to get out! It pains me to recall friends I have known who became caught up in adulterous relationships, addicted to drugs and alcohol, incarcerated for crimes they committed, and miserable wrecks because of the lives they have ruined, and families they have destroyed. Yet, deep down in their heart of hearts, they knew better, but they did not **do** better. Why? They allowed themselves to become “*hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,*” Heb. 3:13.

How do we avoid being deceived by sin? By obeying Heb. 3:12,13: “**Beware, brethren,**

lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” By spending much time **in prayer**, seeking God’s help, being fully mindful that Jesus as our High Priest who “*always lives to make intercession*” for those “*come to God through Him,*” Heb. 9:25. By **studying** and learning your Bible, remembering the words of David who said, “*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you,*” Ps. 119:11. By **regular worship**, John 4:24; Heb. 10:25, knowing that “*true*” worship makes us more like God (2 Cor. 3:18), thereby enabling us more and more to be able to love righteousness and to hate lawlessness, Heb. 1:9. By being careful with regards to those who become our close **friends**, knowing that “*Evil company corrupts good habits,*” I Cor. 15:33. By avoiding those **jobs** which force one to bid “*God speed*” to alcoholism, gambling, and immorality in general. And by saying “**no**” to temptation, forming genuine Bible convictions, and “having the guts” to stick with those convictions.

**** —B. Witherington

“To know what is right and not do it is cowardly

“No man has the right to do wrong.”