

Jesus on Avoiding Sin

Jesus tells us very specifically how to avoid sin.

What's in your heart?

In the "Sermon on the Mount" in Chs. 5 & 6 of the Book of Matthew, Jesus teaches that murder starts with anger ([Mt 5:21](#)), that adultery is from the heart ([Mt 5:27](#)), and that that our hearts reflect what it is we truly treasure ([Mt 6:21](#)):

"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

In other words, our actions have motives, and our motives start with who we really are. If we look into our hearts, we can find -- and fix -- what is leading us to sin. From Matthew Ch. 15 ([Mt 15:19](#)):

"For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy."

The "occasion of sin"

The "occasion of sin" is the opportunity, place, or inducement of the moment of sin. By avoiding the occasion, we can avoid the sin. In the "[Sermon on the Mount](#)", Jesus advises that we avoid sin by distancing ourselves from it. In what in the literal sense seems harsh, in [Mt 5:29-30](#) he says,

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna."

Here Jesus tells us powerfully how to avoid sin: avoid its occasion.

Interpreting through the "Senses of Scripture"

Literal (textual)	gouge your eye, cut off your hand
Allegorical (metaphorical)	cut off your source/s of sin
Moral (right v. wrong)	we are too weak to resist temptation, so we must avoid the temptation itself
Anagogical (where does it lead us?)	by avoiding sin, we will avoid "Gehenna" (hell)

Look in the mirror

Jesus teaches us to worry about "the plank" in our own eyes before pointing to one in someone else's eyes. Indeed, we do readily see the faults of others. But instead of pointing to them, we should point the finger back at ourselves. From [Mt 5:7](#):

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?

How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye?

You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.

* see "A Woman Caught in Adultery" in [John 8:1-11](#),

"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her"

Prayer

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus tells the sleeping Peter, John and James, [Mk 14:38](#):

"Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Prayer pulls us closer to God. "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him," Jesus tells us ([Mt 6:8](#)), but we need to ask him for his help first ([Lk 11:9](#)):

"And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you"

Turn to Scripture

When Satan tempted him, Jesus answered every temptation with Scripture:

He said in reply, "It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. ([Mt 4:4](#))"

Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" ([Mt 4:7](#))

"Get away, Satan! It is written: 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.'" ([Mt 4:10](#))

Repentance and Humility

In the "Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector" ([Lk 18:11-14](#)), Jesus teaches us to pray in humility:

"The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'

But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'

I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

We can use the "Jesus prayer", which in the early Church was chanted like a Rosary:

Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner

The Holy Spirit

In the Last Supper Discourses, Jesus promised the Apostles that he would send a "helper" or "advocate" – the Holy Spirit -- ([Jn 14:15-17](#)) who will support us when we are in a state of Grace (outside of sin):

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you."