

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 8: SIN IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER THE ONGOING STRUGGLE, ITS REMEDY, AND ITS FINAL RESOLUTION

Lesson 21

Remaining Sin

Why Christians Still Struggle

Justified Yet Sinful — Simul Justus et Peccator

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” — 1 John 1:8

Key Texts: Romans 7:14–25; Galatians 5:16–17; 1 John 1:8–10; Philippians 3:12–14; Romans 6:12–14

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

1 John 1:8–10, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Unit 8 of the Hamartiology series turns from the consequences of sin in its temporal and eternal dimensions to sin as it operates in the life of the genuine, regenerate believer. This is, in many ways, the most immediately practical unit in the entire series, the unit that speaks most directly to the daily experience of every person in the congregation, because every genuine believer knows from the inside what it is to be justified and yet to continue sinning, to be indwelt by the Spirit and yet to find the flesh's pull still genuinely powerful, to love the law of God in the inner man and yet to find oneself doing the very thing one hates. The doctrine of remaining sin is not a theoretical construction for the classroom; it is the theological explanation of the Christian's daily experience, and the pastor who does not understand it cannot adequately shepherd the people entrusted to her care.

The governing paradox of this unit is Luther's compressed Latin formula: *simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously righteous and a sinner. The believer is righteous in Christ by the imputation of His perfect righteousness, and she stands before the divine tribunal in a condition of complete and permanent forensic righteousness that no subsequent sin can diminish. And yet the same person who stands righteously before the tribunal is also, in herself, a sinner, a person in whom the old nature's residual corruption continues to produce competing desires, compromising choices, and actual sins that grieve the Spirit and require the ongoing confession of 1 John 1:9. Both halves of the formula are simultaneously true, and neither diminishes the other. The righteousness is real; the remaining sin is also real. The justification is complete and permanent; the sanctification is genuine but not yet complete. The *simul justus et peccator* formula is the Reformation's most precise theological description of this specific, paradoxical, pastorally crucial reality.

This lesson examines remaining sin in six major sections. Section I establishes the doctrinal reality of remaining sin through the biblical testimony of 1 John 1:8–10, Romans 7:14–25, and Galatians 5:17, addressing the temptation to explain away or minimize what the Scripture teaches with unflinching clarity. Section II examines the nature of remaining sin with precision: what it is, what it is not, and why it persists in the regenerate believer despite the Spirit's indwelling presence. Section III draws the crucial distinction between the believer's experience of remaining sin and the unbeliever's experience of unrestricted sin under its full dominion. Section IV addresses the specific heresy of perfectionism, the claim that the believer can reach, in the present life, a state of freedom from sin, and examines why it is both exegetically indefensible and pastorally destructive. Section V provides the specific pastoral encouragement that the outline identifies as the central pastoral application of the doctrine. Section VI develops the theological and doxological implications of the entire teaching.

The pastoral stakes of this lesson are high in two specific and opposing directions. On one side is the danger of despair: the genuine believer who is struggling with persistent patterns of remaining sin and who, because she does not have the theological framework to understand why the struggle persists, concludes that the struggle is evidence that she is not genuinely regenerate. The doctrine of remaining sin is the specific theological medicine for this specific form of despair: the struggle is evidence of the Spirit's presence, not its absence; the grief over sin is evidence of regeneration, not its contradiction. On the other side is the danger of complacency: the nominal professor who uses the doctrine of remaining sin as an excuse for the absence of genuine engagement with sin's ongoing battle, who treats the reality of remaining sin as a comfortable explanation for moral failure rather than as the specific diagnosis that demands the Spirit-dependent, gospel-motivated, daily warfare that Lesson 22 will address. The right pastoral use of the doctrine holds both dangers at bay: offering genuine comfort to the genuinely struggling believer and refusing false comfort to the complacent professor.

I. The Biblical Testimony to Remaining Sin

What 1 John, Romans 7, and Galatians Teach About the Ongoing Reality

A. 1 John 1:8–10: Written to Believers

The most direct and the most frequently cited biblical testimony to the ongoing reality of sin in the regenerate believer is 1 John 1:8–10: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (NASB 1995). The passage is remarkable for both its clarity and its context. Its clarity is absolute: the person who claims to have no sin is not merely mistaken but is “deceiving herself” (verse 8), the self-deception of Jeremiah 17:9’s *aqov* heart applied specifically to the claim of sinless perfection, and is making God a liar (verse 10), since the God whose Word declares the universal reality of sin among His people would be a liar if the sinless perfection claim were true.

The context is equally decisive. The “we” of these verses is the community of those who walk in the light (verse 7), have fellowship with one another (verse 7), and have the blood of Jesus cleansing them (verse 7), not the community of the unconverted who have not yet acknowledged their sin, but the community of the regenerate who are walking in genuine fellowship with God and with each other. John is writing to believers, not to unbelievers; the claim that “if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves” is a claim about the ongoing condition of the regenerate, not a statement about the initial conviction of the unregenerate. The first epistle of John is written throughout to those who already believe (1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God”), and the “we” of 1:8–10 places the author squarely within the community of the regenerate who continues to have sin.

The provision of verse 9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”, is not the invitation of initial salvation but the ongoing grace provision for the ongoing reality of remaining sin in the justified believer’s life. The word “confess” (*homologomen*) is present tense, a present, habitual, ongoing activity, not a once-for-all act. The forgiveness is grounded in the faithfulness and righteousness of God rather than in the quality of the confession, establishing that the ongoing cleansing is as secure as the initial justification, because both rest on the same foundation: the blood of Jesus that verse 7 has already established as the basis of the community’s cleansing. The provision of 1 John 1:9 is therefore the grace-sustained, Spirit-prompted, ongoing confession of the genuinely justified person who lives with remaining sin and who regularly experiences its effects in her daily walk.

B. Romans 7:14–25 and Galatians 5:17

Romans 7:14–25’s account of the inner conflict between the new nature’s delight in God’s law and the old nature’s contrary pull has been examined in previous lessons. Here it requires specific attention as the biblical testimony to the ongoing, unresolved character of the remaining sin conflict in the regenerate believer’s present experience. Paul writes in the present tense throughout the passage: “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (verse 14); “for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (verse 15); “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (verse 18); “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good” (verse 21). The consistent present tense is the language of ongoing, current experience, not the retrospective description of a pre-conversion condition that the perfect tense would provide.

Galatians 5:17’s declaration that “the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (NASB 1995) adds the pneumatological dimension to the inner conflict that Romans 7 describes from the phenomenological angle. The conflict is not merely the inner psychological experience of cognitive dissonance; it is the conflict between two genuine spiritual forces, the divine Spirit who indwells the new nature and the flesh that is the principle of remaining corruption operating through the old nature’s unrenewed dimensions. Both forces are real; both are active; and their conflict is the specific, ongoing, daily reality of every genuine believer’s spiritual experience in the present age.

The consistent testimony of these passages, 1 John 1:8–10, Romans 7:14–25, and Galatians 5:17, converges on the same doctrine from three different angles. First John addresses the claim of no sin and corrects it with the reality of ongoing sin in the regenerate community. Romans 7 describes the phenomenology of the inner conflict from the perspective of the regenerate person who experiences it from the inside. Galatians 5 identifies the two combatants in the conflict and commands the Spirit-dependent engagement that enables the Spirit's side to prevail. Together, they constitute the most comprehensive biblical account of the ongoing reality of remaining sin in the life of the regenerate believer available in the New Testament.

“For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

Romans 7:19–20, NASB 1995

II. The Nature of Remaining Sin

What It Is, What It Is Not, and Why It Persists

A. What Remaining Sin Is

Remaining sin is the ongoing influence of the unrenewed dimensions of the old nature that persists in the regenerate believer despite, and alongside, the Spirit's regenerating, indwelling, and sanctifying work. It is the residual corruption of the nature that original sin corrupted, operating in the believer as the “old man” or the “old self” that is “being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (Ephesians 4:22, NASB 1995) and that Paul instructs the believer to “lay aside.” The new birth does not eliminate the old nature; it creates a new nature alongside it. The regenerate person is not simply the old person improved; she is the old person plus a genuinely new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). But the old creation has not yet been abolished, that abolition awaits the glorification that State 4 brings, and its residual corruption continues to exert influence through the believer's mortal body (Romans 6:12) and through the unrenewed affections and desires that have not yet been fully transformed by the Spirit's ongoing work.

The Reformed tradition has described remaining sin as specifically residual rather than dominant. The Confession's language is precise: the Westminster Confession of Faith (XIII.2) speaks of the continuing corruption of the “old man” alongside the strengthening of the “new man,” noting that the old man's corruption “is truly and properly sin” but that it does not “have the dominion” that it had in the unregenerate state. The remaining sin is genuinely sinful, it is not merely the natural limitation of a finite creature, not merely the inclination to lower goods rather than higher ones, not merely the residual memory of pre-conversion patterns. It is actual sin: genuine moral failure against the standard that God's law requires. But it is sin under conditions that have been fundamentally changed by the new birth: sin that is now being opposed by the indwelling Spirit, grieved over by the new nature, and progressively reduced by the ongoing work of sanctification.

B. What Remaining Sin Is Not and Why It Persists

Remaining sin must be carefully distinguished from several things it is sometimes confused with. It is not the continuation of sin's dominion: Romans 6:14's declaration that sin shall not be master over the believer establishes that the dominion has been genuinely broken. The believer who continues to sin after regeneration is not sinning under the same condition of absolute mastery that characterized her pre-conversion sinning; she is sinning as a free person in whose life sin retains residual influence but not constitutional dominance. This distinction is essential for the assurance of salvation: the presence of remaining sin is not evidence that the dominion is reasserting itself; it is evidence that State 3 is not State 4.

Remaining sin is also not evidence of incomplete or inadequate regeneration. The Spirit's work of new birth is complete at the moment of regeneration; the new nature is genuinely created, the old dominion is genuinely broken, and the full power of the Spirit's indwelling is genuinely operative from the moment of the new birth. The persistence of remaining sin is not a deficiency in the Spirit's work but the specific character of the work: the new

birth addresses the dominion of sin completely and immediately; the eradication of sin's presence is the ongoing, progressive work of sanctification that the Spirit pursues throughout the believer's earthly life. The difference between the regenerating act (complete at the new birth) and the sanctifying process (ongoing throughout life) is the specific reason why remaining sin persists: it persists not because the Spirit's power is insufficient but because the Spirit's purpose is progressive sanctification rather than instantaneous sinless perfection.

The persistence of remaining sin serves a specific, providential, Spirit-governed purpose in the believer's life that the Reformed tradition has consistently identified: it keeps the believer in a condition of ongoing, necessary dependence on the grace of God. The person who believed she had achieved sinless perfection would have no need for the ongoing confessing of 1 John 1:9, no need for the ongoing mortification of Lesson 22, no need for the ongoing intercessory work of Christ at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 7:25: "He always lives to make intercession for them"), and no need for the ongoing enabling of the Spirit that Philippians 2:13 promises. The remaining sin that keeps the believer perpetually dependent on grace, perpetually confessing to the faithful and righteous God, and perpetually receiving the cleansing that the blood of Jesus provides is the specific condition that sustains the humility, the gratitude, and the God-dependence that the Christian life requires.

"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."

Galatians 5:17, NASB 1995

III. The Believer and the Unbeliever

Three Crucial Distinctions in the Experience of Sin

The doctrine of remaining sin requires the specific theological distinction between the believer's experience of sin and the unbeliever's experience of sin, not to minimize the seriousness of the believer's sin (remaining sin is real sin, genuinely offensive to the holy God) but to prevent the pastoral error of treating the presence of remaining sin in the believer as evidence of unregenerate status. The outline identifies three specific distinctions that together characterize the fundamental difference between how a regenerate and an unregenerate person relates to sin.

A. Freely vs. Against Her Will; With Grief vs. Without Grief

The first distinction is volitional: the unbeliever sins freely, in the sense that no internal force opposes the sinful desire; the new nature does not exist to create resistance, and the will follows the flesh's direction without genuine internal conflict. The believer sins against her will in the specific sense that her will is now divided: the new nature's genuine desire is against the sin, and the sin occurs over and against the genuine resistance and opposition of the new nature. Romans 7:15's "for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" is the description of this divided will: the new nature's desire ("what I would like to do") is opposed to the sinful act ("the very thing I hate"), and the sin occurs despite the new nature's genuine resistance rather than with the whole-hearted participation of a nature that is constitutively aligned with the sin.

The second distinction is affective: the unbeliever sins without grief in the theological sense, without the Spirit-generated, new-nature-expressing godly sorrow that 2 Corinthians 7:10 describes. She may feel natural moral discomfort (the conscience's accusation), social embarrassment (the community's disapproval), or personal regret (the natural consequences of the sin). But she does not experience the specific, Christ-directed, God-dishonoring sorrow of the new nature that has genuinely come to love the God whom the sin has offended. The believer sins with grief, not merely with natural moral discomfort but with the specific grief of one whose new nature genuinely loves the God being offended and who experiences the sin as a violation of the most important relationship in her existence. This grief is itself evidence of the Spirit's work: it is the Spirit who produces the godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10's *kata theon lupe*, sorrow according to God), and the presence of this specific grief is therefore the presence of the Spirit's convicting and sanctifying work within the believer.

B. Under Broken Dominion vs. Under Full Dominion

The third and most theologically fundamental distinction is the condition under which the sinning occurs: the believer sins under the condition of sin's dominion having been broken (Romans 6:14), while the unbeliever sins under sin's full dominion (the non posse non peccare of Augustine's State 2). This is not a difference in the subjective experience of the sinning, the believer may experience the pull of the sin as intensely as any unregenerate person, but in the objective covenantal and spiritual condition under which the sinning occurs.

The broken dominion means that the believer's remaining sin occurs within a fundamentally different framework than the unbeliever's sin. The unbeliever's sin is the natural, unresisted expression of a nature that is constitutively directed toward sin and away from God; it encounters no genuine internal opposition; it proceeds from the full coordination of all faculties under sin's mastery. The believer's remaining sin occurs within a framework of genuine opposition: the Spirit who indwells the new nature is genuinely opposing the flesh (Galatians 5:17); the new nature is genuinely grieved by and resistant to the sin; the dominion that sin once had over the person has been genuinely and permanently broken. The sin still occurs, the remaining flesh still exerts genuine influence; the old nature's desires are still genuinely present. But it occurs over the genuine resistance of the indwelling Spirit and the genuine opposition of the new nature, in the condition of a person who is simultaneously righteous by imputation and sinful by remaining corruption, the simul justus et peccator condition of every genuine believer in the present age.

IV. Against Perfectionism

Why the Claim of Sinless Perfection Is Both Unbiblical and Pastorally Destructive

A. The Exegetical Case Against Perfectionism

Perfectionism in its various forms, from the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition's entire sanctification to the popular Higher Life language of complete surrender and Keswick theology's crisis experience, represents the most persistent and the most theologically significant error in the understanding of remaining sin within the evangelical tradition. The Reformed tradition's consistent and sustained opposition to perfectionism is not a sectarian distinctive; it is the specific doctrinal conclusion that the biblical evidence demands. Three specific texts provide the exegetical foundation for the anti-perfectionist position.

First, 1 John 1:8–10 directly and unambiguously contradicts the perfectionist claim. “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (verse 8), the claim of “no sin” in the present tense is the specific claim that perfectionism makes; and John's verdict on the claim is that it constitutes self-deception and makes God a liar (verse 10). The verb tenses of the passage are present tense throughout, establishing that the ongoing reality of sin in the regenerate community is not a pre-conversion condition that entire sanctification has addressed but the current condition of the believing community that John is addressing. No interpretive maneuver can rescue the perfectionist claim from this verdict without abandoning the plain meaning of the text.

Second, Philippians 3:12–14's testimony from the most spiritually mature apostle: “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on” (NASB 1995). The “already obtained” and “already become perfect” are precisely the claims that perfectionism makes on behalf of those who have experienced the second definitive work of grace; and Paul denies these claims for himself, in the present tense, after decades of apostolic ministry, martyrdom-proximity, and spiritual intensity that few if any within the perfectionist tradition would claim to exceed. If Paul had not yet obtained the goal and had not yet become perfect, the claim that any subsequent believer has obtained what Paul had not is exegetically implausible.

Third, the entire testimony of Romans 7:14–25 presupposes the ongoing reality of the inner conflict throughout the present life. The present tense verbs throughout the passage, the description of the principle of evil as currently present (“I find then the principle that evil is present in me,” verse 21, present tense), and the specific description of the conflict's unresolved character (“wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” verse 24, the question pointing to a future liberation, not a present attainment) all establish that

the conflict Paul describes is not a conflict that a second definitive experience has resolved but a conflict that characterizes the believer's entire present life until the glorification that verse 24's question anticipates.

B. The Pastoral Destruction That Perfectionism Produces

Beyond the exegetical evidence, the Reformed tradition has consistently observed that perfectionist claims are not merely theologically erroneous but pastorally destructive in specific and predictable ways. Two forms of pastoral destruction are particularly significant. The first is the production of spiritual pride in those who believe they have attained the state of sinless perfection or entire sanctification. The person who genuinely believes that a second crisis experience has eradicated her sinful nature is the person least likely to maintain the honest self-examination, the ongoing confession of 1 John 1:9, and the humble dependence on the Spirit that genuine sanctification requires. The belief that the corruption has been eradicated produces the specific danger of Jeremiah 17:9's self-deception: the heart that claims to have no sin is the heart whose deceitfulness is most successfully concealing its own condition from its possessor.

The second form of pastoral destruction is the production of spiritual despair in those who cannot achieve the state of sinless perfection that perfectionism has told them is available to all who fully surrender. The perfectionist framework creates a specific expectation: that the experience of remaining sin is a failure of full consecration that the right experience can resolve. For the person who has fully consecrated, fully surrendered, and sought the second blessing with genuine earnestness, and who still finds the struggle with remaining sin continuing in full force, the perfectionist framework offers no comfort except the implication that the consecration was not full enough, the surrender was not complete enough, or the seeking was not earnest enough. The resulting despair is the product of a theological error that the biblical doctrine of remaining sin could have prevented: the error of telling people to expect a state that Scripture explicitly denies is available in the present life.

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12, NASB 1995

V. The Pastoral Encouragement

The Grief That Is Evidence of Grace

The outline's most distinctively pastoral contribution to the doctrine of remaining sin is its identification of the grief over sin as a specific form of evidence of the Spirit's regenerating work. This is not a secondary observation; it is the pastoral key that unlocks the entire doctrine for the person who is most burdened by the struggle with remaining sin. The person who is devastated by her remaining sin, who grieves deeply, specifically, and persistently over the sinful patterns that persist in her life despite her genuine love for God and her genuine desire for holiness, is experiencing the very thing that 1 John 1:8–10's testimony prescribes and that the *simul justus et peccator* formula describes. And the grief itself, if it is the Spirit-generated, God-directed, new-nature-expressing grief that 2 Corinthians 7:10 calls godly sorrow, is the specific evidence that the Spirit is genuinely at work within her.

The theological basis of this observation is the specific difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate person's relationship to sin that Section III has established. The unregenerate person does not grieve over sin with godly sorrow. She may feel guilt, shame, regret, or social embarrassment; but she does not experience the specific, new-nature-generated, God-directed grief of the person who has genuinely come to love the God that her sin is offending. Only the regenerate person can experience this specific form of grief, because only the regenerate person has the new nature whose love for God is the precondition of the grief. The person who does not love God genuinely does not grieve genuinely when she sins against God; she may be troubled by the consequences of the sin, but not by the sin's specific character as an offense against the God she loves. Therefore, the presence of this specific grief is the presence of the love that generates it; and the presence of this specific love is the evidence of the Spirit's regenerating work that created it.

The pastoral application of this observation is specific and targeted. The believer who comes to the pastor overwhelmed by her remaining sin, who fears that her persistent struggle is evidence that she is not genuinely regenerate, needs to be directed to the precise character of her grief. If the grief is the godly sorrow of 2 Corinthians 7:10, if it is directed toward God as the One offended, if it produces genuine repentance and genuine reaching for grace rather than merely regret over consequences, if it is the expression of a love for God that the sin has violated, then the grief itself is the evidence the person is seeking. The very fact that she grieves over her sin in this specific, God-directed, repentance-producing way is the evidence that the Spirit is at work within her; and the very fact that she is troubled by the sin that remains is the specific evidence that distinguishes her condition from the condition of the unregenerate person who is not troubled by it. The grief is the good news.

Philippians 3:12–14’s posture of pressing on provides the complementary pastoral counsel for the person who has received this comfort. The apostle who has not yet obtained and has not yet become perfect is pressing on, the Greek *diokoein* is the language of pursuit, of actively chasing the goal, of the runner who has not reached the finish line but who is driving forward toward it with all available energy. The pressing on is the specific Spirit-empowered response to the ongoing reality of remaining sin: not the resignation of one who has given up on holiness because the struggle is real, not the despair of one who believes the struggle’s persistence disproves her regeneration, but the energetic, forward-focused, eschatologically motivated pursuit of the goal that the Spirit has guaranteed she will reach. The simul justus et peccator person is a pressing-on person: righteous in Christ, still sinful in herself, pressing on toward the day when the “still sinful” will be permanently replaced by the non posse peccare of the final glorification.

“Godly sorrow produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

2 Corinthians 7:10, NASB 1995

VI. Theological and Doxological Implications

What Remaining Sin Does for Humility, Dependence, and the Glory of Grace

A. The Humility That Remaining Sin Produces

The ongoing reality of remaining sin in the life of the genuine believer serves a specific theological and spiritual function that the Reformed tradition has consistently identified: it keeps the believer in the condition of perpetual, genuine humility before the God whose grace addresses the sin she continues to commit. The person who has genuinely understood the doctrine of remaining sin, who knows that the sin she is struggling with is real sin, genuinely offensive to the holy God, genuinely in need of the ongoing cleansing of 1 John 1:9, is the person least likely to slide into the spiritual pride that perfectionism cultivates. The simul justus et peccator person knows that she is simultaneously the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21) and the person who committed the specific sin she confessed this morning; and the knowledge of the second half of the formula keeps the first half from becoming a basis for self-congratulation rather than a basis for wonder and gratitude.

The specific humility that remaining sin produces is not the false humility of self-deprecation or the paralyzing humility of despair but the honest, gospel-grounded, grace-dependent humility of the person who knows the exact distance between where she is (simul peccator) and where she stands before God (simul justus) and who knows that the distance is bridged entirely by the grace that she did not earn and cannot maintain by her own effort. This is the humility of Romans 7:24–25’s movement: “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” The cry of wretchedness is genuine; the thanksgiving is equally genuine; and the two together produce the specific emotional register of the person who has understood what remaining sin is and who the God is who addresses it.

B. The Dependence on Grace That Remaining Sin Sustains

The doctrinal and practical significance of remaining sin's ongoing reality in the believer's life extends beyond the production of humility to the sustaining of the specific, ongoing, daily dependence on the grace of God that the Christian life requires at every moment. The person who genuinely believed she had achieved sinless perfection would have no practical need for the ongoing provision of the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16: "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"). The throne of grace would become a place of occasional devotional attendance rather than the specific, urgent, need-driven locus of the ongoing relationship between the believer and the God whose grace she genuinely requires at every moment of the ongoing battle with remaining sin.

The ongoing reality of remaining sin therefore sustains a specific form of the believer's relationship with God, the relationship of ongoing, genuine, need-driven dependence on the One who is "faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Every confession of remaining sin is an act of dependence on the faithfulness of God and on the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. Every engagement with the battle of Galatians 5:17 is an act of dependence on the Spirit's empowering presence. And every pressing-on of Philippians 3:12–14 is an act of dependence on the God who "will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6), the God who began the good work and will complete it, who laid hold of the believer and will not release the hold until the glorification brings her to the non posse peccare that the pressing-on is pursuing.

The doxological implication of remaining sin's ongoing reality is the ongoing, daily, specific celebration of the grace that is greater than the sin. Romans 5:20's declaration, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (NASB 1995), is not merely an abstract theological proposition; it is the specific description of the simul justus et peccator believer's ongoing experience: wherever the remaining sin is most evident, the grace that addresses it is most gloriously displayed. The believer who is most honest about her remaining sin, who confesses with the most specific, most honest, most grief-producing awareness of the sin that dwells in her, is the believer who has the most specific, most concrete, most personally experienced access to the wonder of the grace that abounds above the sin. The ongoing battle with remaining sin is the ongoing occasion for the ongoing experience of the gospel's superabundant grace, and the doxological response to both together is the "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" of Romans 7:25.

"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

Romans 7:24–25, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Simul Justus et Peccator	Latin: “simultaneously righteous and a sinner.” Martin Luther’s compressed formula for the believer’s paradoxical present condition before God: righteous in Christ by imputation (the forensic dimension, the perfect righteousness of Christ has been credited to the believer’s account and she stands before the divine tribunal as fully and permanently righteous), and yet sinful in herself by remaining corruption (the experiential dimension, the new nature bears the residual influence of the old nature, and the believer continues to commit actual sins until the final glorification removes every trace of remaining corruption). The formula captures precisely the already-and-not-yet tension of Augustine’s State 3: already justified, already regenerated, already freed from the dominion of sin, and not yet glorified, not yet freed from the presence of sin, not yet at the confirmed righteousness of State 4’s non posse peccare. Luther’s formula is the Reformation’s most compact theological description of why Christians still struggle with sin despite being genuinely redeemed.
Remaining Sin (Peccatum Manens)	The technical theological term for the residual corruption of the old nature that persists in the regenerate believer throughout the present life, sometimes also called “indwelling sin,” “residual corruption,” or “the flesh” in Paul’s usage. Remaining sin is not the continuation of the dominion of sin that characterizes the unregenerate (Romans 6:14 declares that sin shall not be master over the believer), but the ongoing influence of the unrenewed dimensions of the old nature that the Spirit’s sanctifying work progressively addresses and reduces but does not yet eliminate in the present life. The Westminster Confession of Faith (XIII.2) describes it as “the old man and the body of sin,” noting that it continues to struggle against the Spirit but that through the Spirit’s supplies of strength, the new nature grows and prevails. Remaining sin is the specific theological explanation for why genuine, regenerate, Spirit-indwelt believers continue to commit actual sins, the answer is not that the regeneration was incomplete or that the Spirit’s power is insufficient, but that the new birth addresses the dominion of sin while leaving its presence to be addressed by progressive sanctification.
The Inner Conflict of Romans 7	Paul’s description of the regenerate believer’s experience of remaining sin in Romans 7:14–25, one of the most theologically debated and pastorally significant passages in the entire New Testament. The inner conflict is the experience of the person who has a genuine new nature that delights in the law of God (“I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,” verse 22) and yet finds that the old nature’s residual influence produces patterns of behavior that the new nature neither desires nor approves (“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate,” verse 15). The conflict is distinctively the experience of the regenerate: the unregenerate person does not experience this specific tension between the new nature’s genuine delight in the law and the old nature’s contrary pull, because the unregenerate person has no new nature. The very grief and frustration of Romans 7:14–25 is itself evidence of regeneration: only those who have been born of God are troubled by the sin that remains in them; the unconverted do not mourn their sin.
The War Between Flesh and Spirit	Paul’s description of the ongoing conflict within the regenerate believer in Galatians 5:17: “for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” The flesh (the principle of remaining corruption operating through the unrenewed dimensions of the old nature) and the Spirit (the divine Person who indwells the believer and empowers the new nature) are in genuine, active, ongoing opposition. The conflict is real: the believer genuinely cannot do all the things she pleases in either direction, because the two forces within her are in genuine tension. But the conflict is asymmetric: the Spirit who is opposing the flesh is the omnipotent divine Person, and the outcome of the war is not in doubt. The specific instruction of verse 16, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh”, is not the promise of a conflict-free existence but the promise of a Spirit-enabled, Spirit-directed life in

Term	Definition
	which the new nature's desires prevail over the old nature's competing pull through the Spirit's empowering presence.
Perfectionism	The theological claim that the believer can reach, in the present life, a state of complete freedom from sin, whether understood as sinless perfection (freedom from all actual sin) or entire sanctification (the eradication of the sinful nature). Perfectionism appears in various forms across the history of Christian theology: in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition's doctrine of "entire sanctification" (a second definitive work of grace eliminating the sinful nature); in the Higher Life movement's "complete surrender" and "full consecration" language; and in more popular forms of Keswick theology. The Reformed tradition has consistently rejected all forms of perfectionism as both exegetically indefensible and pastorally destructive. Exegetically: 1 John 1:8–10 directly contradicts the claim ("If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us"); Philippians 3:12–14 places Paul in the position of one still pressing toward rather than having arrived at the goal; and the entire testimony of Romans 7:14–25 presupposes the ongoing reality of the inner conflict throughout the present life. Pastorally: perfectionist claims can produce either spiritual pride (in those who believe they have attained the state) or spiritual despair (in those who cannot achieve the state they have been told is available to them).
The Difference Between the Believer and the Unbeliever	The specific theological distinction between the regenerate believer's experience of sin and the unregenerate person's experience of sin that is essential for understanding why the reality of remaining sin in the believer is not evidence that the believer is unregenerate. The outline identifies three specific differences: (1) the believer sins against her will (with the new nature's genuine resistance), while the unbeliever sins freely (with no genuine internal resistance from a new nature); (2) the believer sins with grief (the new nature's genuine sorrow over the sin that violates its desires), while the unbeliever sins without grief (or with only the natural moral discomfort that the conscience produces, not the Spirit-generated grief of the new nature); and (3) the believer sins under the condition of sin's dominion having been broken (Romans 6:14: "sin shall not be master over you"), while the unbeliever sins under sin's full dominion (the non posse non peccare of Augustine's State 2). The grief over sin, the resistance to sin, and the freedom from sin's dominion are together the specific evidence that distinguishes the believer's experience of remaining sin from the unbeliever's experience of unrestricted sin.
Grief Over Sin as Evidence of Regeneration	The pastoral observation, central to the outline's encouragement section, that the genuine grief a believer experiences over her remaining sin is itself evidence of the Spirit's regenerating work within her. The unregenerate person does not grieve over sin with the specific, Spirit-generated, law-loving grief that Paul describes in Romans 7:22 ("I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man") and that 2 Corinthians 7:10 calls "godly sorrow" (kata theon lupē): "godly sorrow produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death." The world's sorrow over sin is the natural moral discomfort of a conscience that has been violated; godly sorrow is the new nature's genuine grief over the violation of the God whom the new nature genuinely loves. The person who genuinely grieves over her sin with this specific, Christ-honoring, God-directed sorrow is displaying precisely the evidence of regeneration that the Spirit's presence produces, and the pastor who recognizes this evidence can offer, to the person who is most burdened by remaining sin, the specific pastoral encouragement that the very grief is evidence of the Spirit at work.
The Press Toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12–14)	Paul's description of his own present spiritual condition and its orientation in Philippians 3:12–14: "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The passage is theologically significant for the perfectionism discussion because Paul, the most spiritually mature apostle, explicitly denies having "already obtained"

Term	Definition
	or “already become perfect,” establishing that the perfection he is pressing toward is not a present attainment but an eschatological goal. The pressing-on is the posture of Augustine’s State 3 person: not having arrived (State 4’s non posse peccare is not yet her condition), but pressing forward toward the destination that the Spirit who “laid hold of” her (the effectual calling) is guaranteeing she will reach.
Do Not Let Sin Reign (Romans 6:12)	Paul’s command in Romans 6:12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts” (NASB 1995), is the practical application of the “already” of Romans 6:14 (“sin shall not be master over you”) to the “not yet” of the ongoing battle with remaining sin. The command presupposes that sin could reign if the believer allows it to, not that sin’s dominion is irresistibly reasserting itself (Romans 6:14 declares it broken), but that the believer’s practical choices in the daily battle with remaining sin either cooperate with the Spirit’s work of keeping sin in its defeated position or provide sin’s residual influence with the foothold it exploits. The command is the imperative dimension of the believer’s responsibility in the battle with remaining sin: not a passive resignation to the Spirit’s work but an active, daily, Spirit-empowered refusal to give the defeated master the obedience that its claims on the mortal body’s lusts are still attempting to exact.
Godly Sorrow and the Confession of Sin	The 1 John 1:9 provision for the ongoing reality of remaining sin in the believer’s life: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (NASB 1995). The verse is addressed to believers (“we”, the community of those who walk in the light, verse 7), establishing that the ongoing confession of sin is not the activity of the unregenerate person seeking initial salvation but the Spirit-prompted, grace-enabled, new-nature-expressing activity of the regenerate person who lives with remaining sin and who regularly experiences its effects. The “faithful and righteous to forgive” grounds the forgiveness not in the quality of the confession but in the character of the God who promises to forgive on the basis of the blood of His Son (verse 7). The ongoing confession of 1 John 1:9 is therefore not a repeated work of initial justification (the believer’s justification is completed, Romans 8:1) but the regular exercise of the justified person’s access to the God whose faithfulness provides continuous cleansing for the continuous effects of remaining sin in the daily life of the person who is simultaneously righteous and a sinner.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that remaining sin is the genuinely ongoing, genuinely sinful, genuinely Spirit-opposed condition of every genuine believer throughout the present life, not the temporary inconvenience of an immature faith that deeper consecration will resolve, not the evidence of inadequate regeneration, not the product of a second-class Christian experience, but the specific, expected, theologically explained condition of every person who inhabits Augustine's State 3 between the new birth and the final glorification. The specific doctrinal precision of 1 John 1:8–10, Romans 7:14–25, and Galatians 5:17 on this point is not incidental or circumstantial; it is the deliberate, Spirit-guided, therapeutically essential biblical testimony that the church needs to prevent both the despair of those who struggle and the pride of those who claim not to.

We must also believe the specific pastoral logic of the grief-as-evidence observation: that the Spirit-generated, God-directed, new-nature-expressing grief over remaining sin is itself the evidence of the Spirit's work that the grieving person is seeking. This conviction equips the pastor and the counselor with the specific tool that the most pastorally urgent situation, the genuinely believing person who fears that her remaining sin disproves her regeneration, requires. The grief is not evidence against regeneration; it is its most personal and most Spirit-confirming fruit. Only the regenerate grieve over sin with godly sorrow; therefore the grief is the regeneration's evidence.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of remaining sin should produce in the believing heart the specific honest realism of Romans 7:14–25 combined with the specific Spirit-dependent hope of Romans 7:25. The realism is the honest, unvarnished acknowledgment of the remaining sin's specific forms in one's own life: not the general acknowledgment that "I am a sinner" as a theological proposition but the specific, personal, grief-producing identification of the specific patterns of remaining sin that are most active, most persistent, and most resistant to the Spirit's sanctifying work in one's own experience. And the hope is the specific, gospel-grounded, eschatologically oriented confidence that the God who began the good work will perfect it (Philippians 1:6), that the non posse peccare of State 4 is the certain destination toward which the Spirit is moving this specific, struggling, press-on person.

Desire, above all, the specific posture that Philippians 3:12–14 describes: the posture of the person who has not yet arrived and knows it, who has not yet become perfect and is honest about it, and who presses on, energetically, eschatologically, with the grace-dependence that the ongoing battle requires and the Spirit-confidence that the glorification guarantees. This is the posture of the simul justus et peccator person in her most spiritually healthy form: not despairing (she knows she is justified and that the battle's outcome is guaranteed), not complacent (she knows the battle is real and the remaining sin is real), and not deceived (she has not claimed a State 4 perfection that State 3's realities daily contradict). She is pressing on.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read 1 John 1:5–2:2 as a complete unit and trace the specific movement John makes from the declaration of God's character (verse 5: God is light), through the test of genuine fellowship (verses 6–7: walking in the light vs. claiming fellowship while walking in darkness), through the three specific self-deception claims (verse 6: "if we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness"; verse 8: "if we say we have no sin"; verse 10: "if we say we have not sinned"), and through the gospel's provisions (verse 7: the blood of Jesus cleanses; verse 9: God's faithfulness forgives and cleanses; 2:1–2: Jesus Christ the righteous is the advocate and propitiation). For each of the three self-deception claims, identify: (a) the specific claim being corrected; (b) the specific form of self-deception it involves; and (c) the specific gospel provision that addresses the condition the claim is denying.
- Apply the three distinctions between the believer and unbeliever (freely vs. against her will; with grief vs. without; under broken vs. full dominion) as a personal diagnostic. For a specific pattern of remaining sin in your own experience, ask: (a) Do I experience genuine internal resistance to this sin when it occurs, the new

nature's genuine opposition, or does it proceed with the free coordination of all my desires? (b) Do I experience genuine godly sorrow over this sin when it occurs, grief directed toward God as the One offended, or only the natural moral discomfort of conscience violation or social embarrassment? (c) Does this sin occur under the condition of a broken dominion, as a battle won against genuine Spirit-opposition, or does it feel more like the unrestricted expression of a nature that is constitutively directed toward it? The diagnostic will help you locate the specific pattern in the spectrum between the regenerate and unregenerate experience of sin.

- Develop a personal practice of 1 John 1:9 confession that reflects the specific understanding of remaining sin that this lesson provides. The confession should be: (a) specific rather than general, naming the specific sins rather than offering the generic "I am a sinner" that John Owen identified as the refuge of the person who is not genuinely confessing; (b) God-directed rather than merely self-focused, directed toward the God whose character is offended and whose faithfulness is invoked, not merely toward the alleviation of personal guilt; (c) regular rather than crisis-driven, the present tense "if we confess" of 1 John 1:9 implies ongoing practice, not occasional resort in moments of overwhelming conviction; and (d) faith-receiving rather than merely duty-discharging, receiving the specific, promised, grace-grounded forgiveness and cleansing that God's faithfulness provides, not merely going through the form of confession as a religious obligation.
- Read Philippians 3:4–14 as the apostolic autobiography of the pressing-on person. Note: (a) what Paul regarded as gain before his conversion (verses 4–6: circumcision, tribe, zeal, blamelessness by the law's standard) and how he now regards it (verse 8: "rubbish"); (b) what Paul is pressing toward (verse 11: "the resurrection from the dead"; verse 14: "the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"); and (c) the specific posture that the combination of not-having-attained and pressing-on produces (verses 12–14: the forward-looking, forgetting-what-lies-behind, reaching-toward-what-lies-ahead posture of one who is moving toward a destination she has not yet reached). Then apply Paul's posture to your own spiritual life: what specific things that "lie behind" (past spiritual failures, past patterns of sin, past times when remaining sin prevailed in a specific battle) would the pressing-on posture require forgetting in the sense of releasing for forward movement? And what specific prize lies ahead that the pressing-on is pursuing?
- Identify one person in your pastoral care who is most in need of the specific comfort that the grief-as-evidence observation provides: a person who is genuinely struggling with remaining sin and whose struggle is producing despair about her spiritual condition rather than the holy grief and renewed confession that the struggle is designed to produce. Prepare a specific pastoral conversation that: (a) takes the struggle seriously rather than minimizing it; (b) correctly identifies the specific character of the grief as evidence of the Spirit's work; (c) offers the specific gospel provision of 1 John 1:9's faithful and righteous forgiveness as the specific answer to the specific sin she has been confessing; and (d) redirects the posture from despair to the pressing-on of Philippians 3:12–14, grounded in the assurance of Philippians 1:6 that the God who began the good work will perfect it.

Key Texts: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Romans 7:14–25; Galatians 5:16–17; Philippians 3:12–14; Romans 6:12–14; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Ephesians 4:22–24; Philippians 1:6; Philippians 2:12–13

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, how did you understand the presence of ongoing sin in a genuine Christian's life? Did you tend to interpret your own persistent patterns of sin as evidence of inadequate consecration (which a deeper surrender could resolve), as evidence of genuine regeneration (the simul justus et peccator reality), or as evidence of something else? And has the doctrine of remaining sin been a source of genuine pastoral comfort in your own Christian experience, or has it been used as an excuse for the absence of genuine spiritual effort? How has the lesson's specific account of what remaining sin is and is not clarified or challenged your prior understanding?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read 1 John 1:5–2:2 carefully and identify the three “if we say” claims that John addresses in verses 6, 8, and 10. What is the specific claim of verse 8 (“we have no sin”), and how does it differ from the claim of verse 10 (“we have not sinned”)? What is the specific verdict John pronounces on the verse 8 claim (self-deception; the truth is not in us)? And what is the specific verdict on the verse 10 claim (making God a liar; His word is not in us)? How does the specific language of verse 9's provision (faithful, righteous, forgive, cleanse) ground the ongoing confession in the character of God and the work of Christ rather than in the quality of the confessor?
3. Read Romans 7:14–25 and identify all the present tense verbs Paul uses throughout the passage. What do the present tenses establish about whether Paul is describing a past experience (retrospective account of pre-conversion life) or a current experience (present description of regenerate life)? Identify the specific tensions Paul describes: between the inner man and the flesh (verse 22–23), between what he wants to do and what he does (verses 15–19), between the law of God in his mind and the law of sin in his members (verse 23). And what does the specific language of verse 24 (“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”) establish about the ongoing, unresolved character of the conflict, is the liberation he anticipates a present attainment or a future eschatological event?
4. Read Galatians 5:16–25 and identify the specific relationship between the command of verse 16 (“Walk by the Spirit”), the conflict of verse 17 (flesh against Spirit, Spirit against flesh), and the promise of verse 16b (“you will not carry out the desire of the flesh”). What does the conflict of verse 17 establish about the character of the regenerate believer's present experience of the flesh, is the flesh's desire merely a memory of the pre-conversion life, or is it a present, active, genuine force in the regenerate person's experience? And what does the Spirit's role in the conflict (the Spirit also sets its desire against the flesh) establish about the source of power for the Spirit's side, is it the believer's own willpower or the Spirit's own desire and power?
5. Read Philippians 3:12–14 carefully. What are the two things Paul explicitly denies having attained in verse 12 (“already obtained”; “already become perfect”)? What is the specific basis of his confidence in pressing on (the second half of verse 12: “that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”)? What is the specific posture of verse 13 (“forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead”), and how does it differ from both the despair of one who has given up (no pressing-on) and the perfectionism of one who claims to have arrived (no need for pressing-on)? And what does the phrase “was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” establish about the ground of the confidence, is it Paul's own perseverance or the sovereign claim that Christ has already made on him?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 7:8–11 and identify Paul's description of the two kinds of sorrow and their two different outcomes. What is “godly sorrow” (kata theon lupe) and what does it produce (verse 10: repentance without regret, leading to salvation)? What is “the sorrow of the world” and what does it produce (verse 10: death)? What does the specific list of spiritual evidence in verse 11 (earnestness, vindication of yourselves, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, avenging of wrong) suggest about the specific character of godly sorrow, is it primarily a feeling or primarily a disposition that produces specific actions? And how does the distinction

between godly sorrow and the world's sorrow map onto the distinction between the believer's grief over remaining sin and the natural moral discomfort of an unbeliever's violated conscience?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson presents Luther's simul justus et peccator formula as the most precise theological description of the believer's present condition. Evaluate the formula's adequacy. Does it successfully capture the both-and of the believer's condition (genuinely righteous and genuinely sinful, simultaneously and without contradiction)? Are there ways in which the formula might be misunderstood or misapplied, either in the direction of antinomianism (using the "sinner" half of the formula to justify complacency about remaining sin) or in the direction of despairing perfectionism (using the "sinner" half as evidence that the "justus" half is not genuine)? And is there a way to state the formula that guards against both misapplications while preserving its specific theological content?
8. The lesson argues that the ongoing reality of remaining sin serves a specific providential purpose in the believer's life: maintaining her in a condition of ongoing, necessary dependence on the grace of God. Evaluate this argument. Is it explicitly stated in Scripture that God permits remaining sin to persist for the purpose of sustaining the believer's dependence on grace, or is this a theological inference from the overall pattern of the biblical data? Are there biblical texts that could be cited to support this claim beyond the general observation that remaining sin requires the ongoing use of the means of grace?
9. The lesson identifies three specific distinctions between the believer's and the unbeliever's experience of sin (freely vs. against her will; with grief vs. without; under broken vs. full dominion). Evaluate whether these distinctions are clearly established by the biblical text or whether they are theological inferences. Are there unregenerate persons who exhibit some form of internal resistance to sin, some form of genuine grief over sin, or some experience of the weakening of sin's hold over their lives? If so, does this complicate the distinctions the lesson draws? And is there a way to maintain the distinctions while acknowledging the complexity introduced by common grace's effect on the moral experience of the unregenerate?
10. The lesson presents the grief over remaining sin as evidence of regeneration, grounding this claim in the specific character of godly sorrow as the product of the Spirit's work and the new nature's love. Evaluate this pastoral logic. Is the grief-as-evidence argument clearly derived from the biblical texts, or is it a pastoral inference that might not be universally applicable? Are there forms of grief over sin that look like godly sorrow but are actually the product of natural conscience, social pressure, or fear of consequences? If so, how does the pastor discern whether the specific grief in a specific counselee is the Spirit-generated, regeneration-evidencing godly sorrow or a natural facsimile of it?
11. The lesson argues that perfectionism is pastorally destructive in two specific ways: producing spiritual pride in those who claim to have attained sinless perfection, and producing spiritual despair in those who cannot achieve the state perfectionism has promised. Evaluate whether these are the only pastoral consequences perfectionism produces, and whether the Reformed anti-perfectionist position is immune to its own forms of pastoral harm. Can the doctrine of remaining sin be used in ways that produce complacency (the excuse for not pursuing holiness) or false comfort (the reassurance of persons whose lack of struggle is evidence of unregenerate indifference rather than Spirit-caused grief)? If so, what safeguards does the lesson provide against these misuses?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The outline's pastoral encouragement, "the very fact that you grieve over your sin is evidence that the Spirit is at work in you", is directed at the specific pastoral situation of the genuinely believing person who fears her remaining sin disproves her regeneration. Apply this encouragement to your own spiritual life. Is there a specific pattern of remaining sin in your experience over which you have been grieving specifically, consistently, and with the God-directed sorrow that 2 Corinthians 7:10 describes? If so, receive the specific pastoral encouragement this lesson provides: the grief is the evidence, not its contradiction. And then receive the specific pastoral counsel that the encouragement's flip side provides: the presence of godly

sorrow is the call to the ongoing confession of 1 John 1:9 and the pressing-on of Philippians 3:12–14, not to resignation or despair.

13. The lesson identifies the ongoing confession of 1 John 1:9 as the specific gospel provision for the ongoing reality of remaining sin. Evaluate your own practice of confession. Is it regular (the present tense “if we confess” implies ongoing practice, not crisis resort)? Is it specific (naming the specific sins rather than offering generic acknowledgment)? Is it God-directed (toward the God whose character is the ground of the forgiveness) rather than merely self-focused? And is it faith-receiving (actively receiving the specific forgiveness and cleansing that God’s faithfulness promises) rather than merely duty-discharging? What specific adjustments to your practice of confession would bring it into closer alignment with the character that 1 John 1:9’s provision implies?
14. The doctrine of *simul justus et peccator* captures the believer’s present condition in its two simultaneously true halves: righteous in Christ by imputation, and sinful in herself by remaining corruption. How fully does your experience of the Christian life reflect the genuine confidence of the “justus” half? Do you regularly and specifically receive the righteousness of Christ as your actual, complete, permanent standing before the divine tribunal, so that the “peccator” half does not undermine the assurance that the “justus” half grounds? And conversely, how fully does your experience reflect the honest realism of the “peccator” half? Do you acknowledge the specific remaining sin with the honesty that 1 John 1:8 requires, or do you engage in the self-deception of claiming a purity that the doctrine of remaining sin declares unavailable in the present life?
15. Philippians 3:12–14’s pressing-on posture is the specific pastoral posture that the doctrine of remaining sin calls for: not having arrived, not despairing of arriving, but pressing forward toward the goal with the energy that the Spirit’s empowerment and the gospel’s hope together provide. Apply this posture to the two specific patterns of remaining sin in your life that you identify as most persistent and most resistant to the Spirit’s sanctifying work. For each: (a) what does the pressing-on posture look like specifically in relation to this specific pattern? (b) what specific spiritual disciplines, specific accountability structures, or specific means of grace would most directly support the pressing-on in this specific area? and (c) how does the eschatological motivation of Philippians 3:14 (“the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”) provide the forward-looking hope that the battle requires?
16. The lesson concludes with the doxological observation that the ongoing reality of remaining sin is the ongoing occasion for the ongoing experience of the gospel’s superabundant grace, and that Romans 5:20’s “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” is the specific description of the *simul justus et peccator* believer’s ongoing experience. Does this doxological framework function in your own spiritual life as a live source of wonder and gratitude? When you encounter the most persistent and the most discouraging expressions of remaining sin in your own experience, is your response the groaning of Romans 8:23 that presses toward the coming liberation, the confession of 1 John 1:9 that receives the ongoing forgiveness, and the thanks of Romans 7:25 that acknowledges the God who provides the ongoing victory, or is it the despair of one who has not yet understood that the grace is always greater than the sin?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's time of prayer with a reading of Romans 7:14–25, not as a theological text to be analyzed but as a liturgy of honest confession that you are reading on behalf of yourself and every genuine believer you know. Read it in the first person, with the present tense verbs doing their specific work: "I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (verses 14–15). Let the specific forms of remaining sin in your own experience occupy the space that Paul's words create: the specific patterns you would like to do but do not, the specific things you hate but do. This is not self-flagellation; it is the honest realism that 1 John 1:8 requires of the person who walks in the light. And then read verses 22–25: "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The cry of wretchedness and the thanksgiving together constitute the complete emotional and theological register of the simul justus et peccator person at prayer: honest about the sin, honest about the grief, and honest about the God whose grace through Jesus Christ is the specific, sufficient, ongoing answer to both.

Pray in the structure of 1 John 1:5–2:2's movement from God's character through the confession of sin to the provision of grace. Begin with the declaration of God's character: "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (verse 5). Receive this declaration as the specific standard against which the remaining sin of your life is measured, and let the light of His character illuminate the specific forms of darkness that the remaining flesh is still producing in your experience. Then move to the confession of verse 9: specific, God-directed, faith-receiving confession of the specific sins that the light has illuminated, not the generic "I am a sinner" that acknowledges the category without engaging the content, but the specific, named, grief-producing confession of the specific sins that the honest self-examination has identified. And then receive the provision of verse 9 with the specific faith that the promise requires: "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The faithfulness is God's faithfulness, not yours. The righteousness is the righteousness of the God whose just character requires the forgiveness that the blood of His Son has provided. The forgiveness is real; the cleansing is real; and the God who promises it is the same God who provided the blood that makes it possible.

Pray together in three specific directions for the specific application of this lesson's content. First, for the members of your congregation who are most struggling with the despair that the persistent reality of remaining sin produces: the genuine believers whose ongoing struggle with specific patterns of sin has convinced them that the struggle is evidence of unregenerate status. Pray for the specific illumination of the Spirit that would enable them to see their grief over sin as evidence of the Spirit's presence rather than its absence, to hear 1 John 1:8's "if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves" as the pastoral word that normalizes their struggle rather than pathologizes their faith. Second, for the members of your congregation who are most in danger of the opposite error, of using the doctrine of remaining sin as a comfortable excuse for the absence of genuine engagement with the ongoing battle, treating the reality of remaining sin as a theological justification for complacency rather than as a diagnosis demanding the Spirit-dependent, gospel-motivated warfare that Lesson 22 will address. Pray for the specific conviction of the Spirit that would distinguish the godly grief over unavoidable remaining sin from the ungodly indifference of the person who has ceased to press on. Third, for yourself: that the simul justus et peccator reality would be the daily frame of your own spiritual life, not merely as a theological proposition but as the daily, experiential, prayer-shaping, confession-motivating, pressing-on-sustaining reality of a person who knows exactly where she stands before God (justified, righteous in Christ, no condemnation) and exactly where she stands in herself (sinful, struggling, not yet having attained), and who lives in the tension of both truths with the honesty, the gratitude, and the forward motion that together constitute the healthy spiritual life of the person who is simultaneously righteous and a sinner.

Close with Philippians 1:3–6 and 3:12–14 read together as the doxological frame for the entire doctrine of remaining sin. Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." The good work is not finished in this life; the perfecting continues; and the One who will perfect it is the same One who began it by the sovereign, effectual, unconditional grace that the simul justus et peccator doctrine's "justus" half describes. Philippians 3:14: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

The pressing-on is the believer's active, Spirit-empowered response to the remaining-sin reality of the "peccator" half: not resigned, not despairing, not claiming a perfection not yet attained, but energetically, eschatologically, grace-dependently pressing on toward the day when the "peccator" half will have been permanently replaced by the non posse peccare of the final glorification that completes what the simul justus has begun. To the God who justifies the ungodly, who sanctifies the struggling, and who will glorify the pressing-on, to Him be the glory forever. Soli Deo Gloria.

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 1:6; 3:14, NASB 1995

Key Texts: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Romans 7:14–25; Galatians 5:16–17; Philippians 3:12–14; Philippians 1:3–6; Philippians 2:12–13; Romans 6:12–14; 2 Corinthians 7:8–11; Ephesians 4:22–24; Romans 5:20

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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