The Practice of Sinning

There are any number of frightening verses in the Bible, especially when it comes to judgment and punishment.  You need only think of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) to get a chilling view of what happens on a person who focuses on this life and doesn’t think about what comes next.  But that verse can seem a bit distant, because it relates to something to come.  What about those things that deal with day-to-day life, and choices we make now?  This is what Hebrews 10:2-28 addresses:

*“For if we go on sinning deliberately, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. “*

At first glance, this verse should not be frightening because it relates to things only within our control.  No one has to sin deliberately.  But that is easier said than done.  Even Paul struggled with this.  He spoke of this in Romans 7:15-20:

**15***For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.****16****Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.****17****So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.****18****For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.****19****For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.****20****Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

Paul was not alone here.  In I Kings 11:9-13 we see another well-known figure struggling with the same thing; in this case even being called out by God.

**9***And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice****10****and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded.****11****Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.****12****Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son.****13****However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.”*

Two excerpts are particularly interesting.  In the first excerpt (v. 9) the Lord recounts that He had appeared to Solomon twice.  The first occasion is recorded in I Kings 3:1-15.  There,  God appears to Solomon in the well-known account of Solomon asking for wisdom, even though God had offered him anything at all.  (This event is also recorded in II Chronicles 7:11-22).

God appears to Solomon a second time in I Kings 9:1-9.  God promised Solomon that Solomon and his house would reign over Israel “forever” if he followed God. (v. 5).  If Solomon did not, then Israel would be cut off from the land God had promised them and would fade.

You would think that Solomon – especially blessed with the wisdom God gave him – would do nothing to jeopardize his and the nation’s standing before God.  He had literally seen a “sign” from God.  Doesn’t everyone want a sign?  But that is not what happened.

In the second underlined passage from I Kings 11 we see that Solomon had developed a “practice” of sinning.  The first part of chapter 11 shows how he had begun marrying foreign wives.  Solomon’s practice of sin had become so prevalent that God states he will carry through with the punishment he had prescribed in I Kings 9 – the kingdom would be torn away from Solomon (actually Solomon’s lineage [v. 12-13]).

The account of Solomon in I Kings 11 can be discouraging.  If the wisest person who had ever lived can develop a practice of sinning, what chance do we have?  Actually, that question is rather defeatist.  The fact that Solomon had a practice of sinning does not mean that we have to as well.  Going back to Paul, he spoke of “buffeting” his body so he could keep it under control (I Cor. 9:27).  So, while it was tough, Paul found a way to control his impulses.

For our discussion, think about what you can do to avoid developing a practice of sinning.  What habits can you develop to assist?  What things should you avoid to prevent developing a practice of sinning?  In other words – what lesson can you learn from Solomon so you don’t end of doing what he did?