

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## HOLY WHACK-A-MOLEY!

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I remember on holidays with the kids going to the arcade on the front at St Ives and playing the whack-a-mole machine. This was a large rectangle of plastic with holes in it, from which appeared moles as they popped their heads through in random sequences. The aim of the game was to whack the mole with a plastic hammer wielded by me or one of the kids as we gleefully hammered away in a quick-fire round of hand and eye co-ordination.

I hasten to add that the moles were just fashioned from cushioned pieces of foam and were not real animals- so don't go calling the RSPCA and getting me reported!

The game was always great fun and sometimes you were on it, almost being able to sense which hole the mole would appear in and be ready to bring the hammer down and then get ready for the next one. Other times if you missed one, you didn't have time to readjust and the next one would be missed, resulting in a frustrating round as you chased the moles without being able to hit one.

As a Christian, it can sometimes feel like I'm in a game of whack-a-mole when it comes to my behaviour and dealing with sin. Sometimes I'm on top of things and I'm able to stop sin taking hold, managing to act against it before it surfaces, other times it feels like I'm in a hopeless tailspin with one sin perpetuating another. It can be very distressing and infuriating, resulting in me losing my temper and control altogether (yet another sin!)

Now, before we get all pious and claim (as I have heard it done so) that to admit to sin means that I cannot have been truly accepted Jesus' sacrifice, then we will need to refer to a number of scriptures which helps us to see that, even when we have committed our lives to Jesus, we still in a battle of whack-a-mole!

1 John 1 v 8 says:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

John here, is writing to the believers in the early church, who were being misled by a group of people called Gnostics. They had interpreted some scriptures to say that once Jesus had died for sins, then all sin was vanquished and there was no capacity to sin. They were sinless as a result.

This would be like putting a £1 coin in the whack-a-mole machine and staring down at the holes with no moles ever appearing!

Now, I would love this to be what actually happens, but the Bible seems to be pretty clear that this is not going to be the case in this life. Yes, Jesus has paid the price for sin and we are expected to behave differently, and to help us the holy Spirit is invested in us to help us change and become more like Jesus, but let's not kid ourselves as the Gnostics were doing:

Until all things are made new, in a promised eternal kingdom, until then we struggle with our human natures (which are shaped in sin) and our hearts (which the Bible tells us in Jeremiah are desperately wicked) and our minds (which Paul tells Timothy required retraining!) - it is pretty clear that we are in a daily struggle to live lives that reflect well on our Saviour. Whack-a Moley daily!

The good news, and the truth of scripture, tells us that the consequence of sin is paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus. Now, let's just let that sink in for a second.

The consequence of sin is dealt with, conquered, overcome, removed from us. This means quite clearly that, although sin might still be encountered and sometimes overcomes us, the consequence of it, no longer has any bearing on us. Jesus bore the consequence of my sin, when he died on the cross. He died with my sin upon him, not only mine, but the worlds - from the first man to the last.

One of the most famously quoted verses from scripture is John 3:16

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to die, so that anyone who believes in him, shall not die but have eternal life.'

The consequence of sin is death. But anyone who believes in Jesus, receives eternal life, not death - meaning life and eternity in heaven, rather than death and eternity in hell.

It's a bit like playing Whack-a-mole and winning every time. You never lose!

But all this seems a little too easy doesn't it? Surely this cannot be all there is to it?

Well, in some senses it is all there is to it - believing in Jesus, does bring us from one eternal path onto another - simple as that - but, there must be proof of this new state that we have stepped into - our new position.

To try and put it simply, when Jesus died and then rose again (therefore conquering death and proving the eternal) – he promised followers the Holy Spirit, who would live within us as a guarantee or seal of our changed position – the Holy Spirit confirms our new identity:

Ephesians 1 v 13

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

Having the Holy Spirit also alerts us to wrong behaviour, in a way that previously we would have not had a conscience about – we now know when we do things that are against Gods will for our lives – and we learn to live by these prompts in our lives.

When I go on walks, I often see mole hills appearing in the grass verges of farmers fields. Moles are a real nuisance and yet the only evidence that they are there causing damage are the piles of dirt that they excavate to the surface. The real damage is the warren of runs under the soil, making the ground uneven and even liable to collapse, as well as stopping new shoots from establishing roots.

I suppose that sin works in the same way. It is part of us, and will be part of us until we change from this life into our eternal life, and until then sin remains with us. Sometimes it has the upper hand over us, other times we have it under control, never the less it remains part of us, and we have to continually be on our guard allowing the Holy Spirit to help us overcome.

I am always encouraged though that the consequences of sin have already been paid for. It is the foundation for my hope for the future and the basis for faith which helps me live a life worthy of Jesus' sacrifice today.

Before I finish, I do need to make the point that whilst sin might be something that sometimes, regrettably surfaces in our lives, we shouldn't just shrug our shoulders and accept it.

We battle against sin, we overcome sin, we maintain our vigil against sin, we whack-a-sin every time it tries to surface. God has given us every tool we need to overcome through the Holy Spirit. We don't go out of our way to deliberately sin over and over again.

Paul asks a question of the believers in his letter to the Roman church:

Should we keep sinning because we know that Gods grace covers us?

The answer is plainly NO! but the hope is maintained in the encouragement that if we do – God has already dealt with the consequences.

In light of this, let's take up our mallets and with every ounce of our being, whack-that-sin before it takes a hold.

I am of course paraphrasing...but I hope you get the gist?



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