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I John 1:9-2:2 “What to Do with Your Sins”

Intro. This morning I am going to answer the question, “What should you do with your sins?” This is an important, practical subject because we all sin. 2 Chron. 6:36 says, “There is no man that does not sin.” It is clear from chapter 2 v.1 that John acknowledges that Christians will also sin. So when you are convicted of your sins, you need to know what you should do. Now one thing you should *not* do is deny or conceal your sin. In vv.8 & 10 we read of those who deny that they commit sin, or that they have a sin nature. You may be able to hide your sin from others for a while, but you can’t hide your sin from God. Num. 32:23 says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Prov. 28:13 says, “He that covers his sins shall not prosper.” So don’t try to play tricks with God about sin and disobedience. Don’t try to hide your sins or make excuses.

So what should you do when you sin? Well, the answer to that is twofold. First of all, v.9 answers that question from *our* perspective. We must confess our sins. Secondly, vv.1-2 answers that question from *God’s* perspective. There is something that Jesus does when we sin and confess it to God. We have an advocate with the Father. We have someone to plead our case. Thus, we are forgiven, based on the finished work of Christ on the cross. That is a marvelous benefit of being a Christian.

But our main concern this morning is to consider what *we* are to do when we sin. So listen carefully as I share with you concerning this important subject. I want to begin by sharing with you:

I. THE INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING CONFESSION

There are five instructions concerning confession of sin that I can glean from our text:

A. Agree with God Concerning Your Sin - The word “confess” in Gk. (*homologeō*) literally means “to say the same thing.” So to confess your sins is the same as agreeing with God about your sin. You need to see your sin as God sees it. This is why people do not confess sin. They do not agree with God about it. They do not call it what God calls it! Some say they are having an affair, but God calls it lust and adultery. Some call what they do the “gay” lifestyle, but God calls it a perversion of His creative design (Rom. 1:26-27). Or they will call it a weakness or a slip-up rather than what it often is, a deliberate sin against God. Or sometimes we will act as though we do not know what our sins are. People pray, “If I have sinned.” Come on now! That is not true confession. Don’t you know that what you said or did was wrong? Oh, if we were only more honest about our sins.

Confession is the opposite of concealing our sin. One way people try to conceal their sin is by not accepting responsibility for their sin. But David said in Ps. 51:3, “For I acknowledge my transgressions....” In the next verse he said, “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight....” He didn’t blame anyone else for his sin; he blamed himself. This confession was made after he had committed adultery, and after he had Bathsheba’s husband killed in battle. But you know, he didn’t blame Bathsheba. He could have complained that she should not have been bathing where she was. But instead, David took full responsibility. In Joshua 7:19, Joshua says to a man named Achan, “My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make

confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” God is honored when we take responsibility and agree with Him that what we did was wrong.

B. Have Sorrow over Sin - When you truly look at sin from God’s perspective, and agree with God about it, you will have godly sorrow over your sin. Ps. 51:17 says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.” One’s sorrow over sin must not be superficial, but deep and genuine. And that leads to a second aspect of true confession:

C. Repent of Sin – 2 Cor. 7:10 says, “Godly sorrow works repentance.” Since the word “confess” literally refers to a change of mind or attitude about sin when you agree with God, then true confession involves repentance. You should confess your sin with the intention of not repeating that sin. But we usually do not have the right attitude toward the sins we have committed, for too often we plan to do the same sins again. If we were honest, we would admit that there are times when we want to hold on to our sins.

A little child had his hand caught in a vase, and they did everything they could to try to get that child’s hand out of the vase. As a last resort, at great risk to the hand of the little child, they broke the vase and when they did they discovered the little child had doubled up in its fist a nickel! No wonder his hand would not come out. The reason God cannot get sin out of your life is because you are holding on to it and you secretly love it. But, praise God, you can confess it and break free from it! (Vines p.67; Illus.#C-1484).

D. Be Detailed in Your Confession - Too often our confession goes something like this: “Lord, please forgive me of my sins. Amen.” But true confession extends to specific, definite acts, and not only to sin in general terms. When you get into the presence of God, tell Him all about it. Confess that bad temper; tell Him about that gossiping or lying tongue. Confess the lust of your heart. Be specific.

E. Confess Continually and Daily - “Confess” is in the present tense which in Greek refers to habitual action. I personally try to make confession as soon as the Spirit convicts me of a sin. That is the way it should be.

So I hope you have a clear understanding of how you should confess your sins.

II. THE BASIS OF CONFESSION

Confession of sin is our responsibility. But we see from our text the role of Jesus in making confession of sin beneficial to us.

Let me first address the great problem that God had to solve. In Ex. 34 God says that He will by no means clear the guilty. He does not just look the other way when He forgives our sin, like a grandparent may do. So how can God forgive our sin when we make our confession to Him? This is only possible because of two important works of Christ on our behalf:

A. He Satisfied God’s Wrath on the Cross – John says in v.2, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins....” The word translated “propitiation” was used in the Greek language of the appeasement of the wrath of a god. But John’s use of the Greek term is different from the pagan use, for the word does not refer to something *we* do to appease God, but to what *Christ* has done to

satisfy the justice of God. The Greek has it, "He Himself is a satisfaction." The point is that the Old Testament priest offered an animal sacrifice, but he did not offer himself as the sacrifice. But Christ is both priest and sacrifice.

Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...." The Bible is clear that God's justice and wrath must be satisfied. When we sin, the Holy Spirit of God is grieved. He has holy antagonism toward evil. However, Christ's death paid for our sins, and thus He satisfied God's wrath against sin. Our Lord provided a satisfaction for the demands of the broken law. What He did on the cross fully satisfied God's wrath. That is why Christ cried out from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Yet how do we know that God was satisfied with the atonement of Christ? Romans 4:24 says that Christ "was raised because of our justification." And Php. 2 says that after Christ died on the cross, God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name (v.9). Surely God was pleased with the work of Christ on the cross!

The second work of Christ that makes confession beneficial to us is this:

B. He Works as Our Advocate in Heaven – In the last of v.1 John says, "And if anyone¹ sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word translated "advocate" means "someone called alongside to help or plead a case." That's what a lawyer does. The only other place that word is used is in Jn. 14-16 (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), speaking of the Holy Spirit. Here on earth we have the Holy Spirit as our Advocate and Helper; in heaven we have Christ as our priestly Advocate and mediator. And He's an Advocate that doesn't charge for His services!

Now I want to share with you two truths about the work of Christ as our Advocate:

1. You Need an Advocate - Why is that? One reason is that Satan loves to accuse us whenever we sin. Rev. 12:10 says he accuses us before God day and night. The problem is that Satan's accusation is usually right! He can say, "God, you have said that the wages of sin is death. Therefore, I demand the death penalty." Christ cannot typically defend us on the grounds that we are innocent, or that our sin was caused by extenuating circumstances. But in the presence of that ill-intentioned prosecutor, we have an Advocate! He can defend us on the basis that He died for our sins in our place.

Now let me give you the picture here. This is glorious! The accuser of the brethren, the devil, rushes in. He prosecutes you. He demands the death penalty and he says, "Look at him, look at him." Then the Lord Jesus, who sits at the right hand of the throne of God, says, "Ah, yes, Father, but look at me!" He still appears in Heaven as a Lamb that has been slain (Rev. 5:6), and the marks in His hands and feet alone would be sufficient defense. But Christ could then say, "Father, that person's sin is taken care of. I bore it on My body; I took the penalty. I suffered all this for sinners, and shall it go for naught?" Rom. 8:33 says, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Then he says in the next verse, "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

2. Our Advocate Is Qualified - When you need a lawyer, you want a good, qualified lawyer. Three matters are mentioned which point up the fitness of Christ to be our Advocate: 1) Because of His Relationship to God. Note in v.1 that that He is "with the Father," literally face-to-face with the Father. And the use of the word "Father" rather than "God" calls attention to the Father-Son relationship Jesus has with God the Father. What better advocate could we ask for? It also points to the fact that He is our Father. Don't you think that our Father is sympathetic to the advocacy of Christ? 2) Because of His Sinlessness. He is called in the last of v.1 Jesus Christ "the

¹ In context, "anyone" has to be "anyone [of us]," that is, John or any of the believing community (Akin).

righteous” (there is emphasis on that word in the Gk.). As such He can enter the Presence of God from which all sin excludes. He needs no advocate Himself. Heb. 7:26 says, “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.” 3) Because of His Sacrificial Death - This has already been discussed, but this is what makes His advocacy possible.

Finally, to motivate you to confess your sins, consider with me last of all:

III. THE BLESSINGS OF CONFESSION

Why should you confess your sins? I can give you some good reasons from my text of Scripture.

A. God will Forgive You² - John says in v.9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins....” The word translated “forgive” literally means, “to send away.” It implies separation of us from our sins. Psa. 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” What a blessing it is to know that your sins have been forgiven. Psalm 32:1 says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.” That’s another picture of forgiveness. Your sins are covered up or blotted out (Acts 3:19). God sees them no more. When your sins are forgiven, you can experience the peace of God which passes understanding. Also, in light of v.7 another byproduct of God’s forgiveness is restoration of fellowship, for the sins that caused offense to God have been removed through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice.

1. The Certainty of Forgiveness - V.9 says that “He is faithful ... to forgive us....” He is not, as men are, fickle or arbitrary. He is faithful to do what He has promised. You can count on God to forgive, if you truly confess.

Application: Can people count on you to forgive them?

2. The Inclusiveness of Forgiveness - V.2 says of Christ, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” The idea must be that Christ is actually the propitiation for the sins of *believers*; He is potentially the propitiation for the whole world. In other words, the atonement is universal in provision but not in application. Too many do not confess their sins, repent of their sins, and place their faith in Jesus.

Perhaps I should warn you of a wrong attitude toward forgiveness. Just because an antidote to poison is available does not mean that you should go ahead and drink all the poison you want. And just because forgiveness is provided in Christ does not mean that we should feel free to sin. You will likely still suffer earthly consequences for your sin.

B. God Will Cleanse You - V.9 also says that “He is faithful and just... to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We not only need the cleansing of justification, but also the daily cleansing of sin (cf. John 13:9-10). In Psalm 51:2, David says, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.” Notice also in v.7 that the blood of Jesus “cleanses us from *all* sin.” The blood of Christ doesn’t just cleanse us of some sins; it cleanses us of *all* sins.

² MacArthur believes that all of our sins are forgiven in Christ, not just the ones we confess - I Jn. 2:12; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13. We don’t need to beg for God’s forgiveness because He has already forgiven us. When Jesus died on the cross, He bore all our sins in His body. I have no unforgiven sin in my life. If you have trusted Christ for salvation, you don’t have to worry about going to hell if you die before all of your sins are confessed. The forgiveness spoken of here has more to do with our fellowship with God rather than our eternal destiny.

Charles Finney was preaching in a great revival in Detroit. After the service one night a man said, "I want you to go home with me, Mr. Finney." Some who knew the man said to Finney, "Do not go." But he went. When they came to the man's house, the man walked in last, locked the door and pulled a revolver from his pocket. He said, "Do not be afraid, Mr. Finney, I am not going to shoot you. I heard you preach tonight about the Lord Jesus Christ. This revolver has killed four men. Is there any hope for a man like that?" Mr. Finney replied, quoting v.7, "The blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin."

The man answered, "Ah, but you do not understand, Mr. Finney. Down below this apartment where you are sitting there is a saloon. I have helped send men down the road to hell; I have helped men to rob their own little babies of food and milk. Is there any hope for a man who would run a saloon?" And Mr. Finney replied, "The blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin!"

The man continued, "But you do not understand. I have been a gambler all of my life. I have spent my life taking money from people illegally. Is there any hope for a man like that?" Mr. Finney said, "The blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin."

He persisted, "Across the street from this establishment there is a little home where there is a wife I have abused; a little girl who is disfigured. One night in a drunken stupor, I came home from gambling and drinking. She ran to put her arms around me and in my drunkenness I pushed her away from me, she hit the heater and is hopelessly disfigured. Is there any hope for a man like that?" Mr. Finney said, "The blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin!"

Mr. Finney soon thereafter left. The next morning the man stumbled across the street. He had not slept for he prayed all night. When he got into the house he stumbled up to his room. In a little while his wife said to the little girl, "Tell daddy it's time for breakfast." She went upstairs and said, "Mama says it is time for breakfast." The man said, "Maggie, darling, I do not want any breakfast this morning."

She ran back downstairs and said, "Mama, Daddy said he did not want any breakfast this morning and he called me darling!" The mother said, "You made a mistake, you heard him wrong. Go back up there and tell him it is time for breakfast." In a moment, however, the man came down, took that wife in his arms and his little girl upon his knee. "Oh wife" he wept, "I have sinned against you like few men have ever sinned against anyone, but last night I heard the preacher preach. I heard about Jesus and about the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus has cleansed me from *all* my sin. You have a new husband. Daughter, you have a new daddy."

Thank God for the blood! Have you been washed in the blood? Has the blood been applied to your heart? Dear sinner friend, Jesus wants to cleanse you from all sin. (Vines p.47-49).

In the context there is one more benefit of confessing your sins:

C. You Will Have Joy – Remember, John said in v.4, "these things we write to you that your joy may be full." A sinning believer forfeits his joy. When David finally confessed his sin of murder and adultery to God, he could pray in Ps. 51:12, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Once you have confessed your sins, and accepted the forgiveness and cleansing you have in Christ, you will experience the joy of the Lord once again. Don't let the devil defeat you by making you feel that there is still something between you and God. You are forgiven. Rejoice in that forgiveness!

Conclusion: What blessings we have as Christians! But if you are not yet a believer in Jesus, you have no advocate. You have no forgiveness. You have no cleansing. You have no true lasting joy.

Why not confess your sins to the Lord today, repent of them, and place your faith in Jesus who died for your sins? These blessings can be yours!

Sources: Daniel L. Akin, *New American Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001); H.A. Ironside, *Epistles of John & Jude* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1931); John MacArthur, Jr., *Confession of Sin: Study Notes on 1 John 1:1-2:2* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1983); Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: 1,2,3 John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Jerry Vines, *Family Fellowship: An Expository Experience in 1 John* (Dallas: Crescendo Publications, 1976); B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1883, 1966 edition); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, 1 John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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